



Aboriginal Housing Victoria

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STRATEGIC PLAN

2014-2025



Boardroom table artwork commissioned by the former CEO of Aboriginal Housing Victoria Bev Murray, design and artwork prepared by Lyn Thorpe.

Lyn Thorpe - The design and symbolic meanings

The central circle represents the heart of the AHV and workforce and the sun is symbolic of the strength and sustainability that is needed to enable the ongoing provision of quality housing for Aboriginal people in Victoria.

The concentric circles that radiate from the central hub symbolises multiple layers of culturally appropriate and respectful ways of working with Aboriginal families in AHV homes across the State.

The 3 suns, trees and rivers that flow throughout the design and protect the houses are symbolic of our ongoing connection to Country and Ancestors and our past, present and future generations.

Definitions

Term

Aboriginal people

Aboriginal Victorians

ABS

AHV

AIHW

Definition

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people residing in Victoria

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Aboriginal Housing Victoria

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

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Chairman and Chief Executive Officer's message

We are pleased to introduce Aboriginal Housing Victoria's Strategic Plan 2014-2025 (the Plan), which charts Aboriginal Housing Victoria's (AHV's) course into the future.

As a proud Aboriginal community organisation, this Plan has been developed in recognition of, and respect of Aboriginal cultural values and our history. Our Plan sets out how we will achieve the original ambition of AHV's founding Elders to achieve self-determination and provide culturally responsive housing services which improve the lives of Aboriginal people in Victoria.

We believe that the provision of effective housing services can contribute to real improvements in the lives of tenants and to broader community outcomes. Our strategic plan places our clients and tenants at the centre of all that we do and we are committed to continuously improving our services and support around them. We will continue to improve the sustainability of tenancies so that tenants have secure, affordable and appropriate housing.

Currently there are many vulnerable Aboriginal people and families that we cannot assist. Unmet demand from the Aboriginal community for affordable and appropriate housing is significant.

Our Plan highlights our commitment to grow the supply of affordable housing to meet this demand. It also acknowledges that we must build and extend our capability to effectively develop and manage our housing assets and actively strengthen our governance and management capability as we anticipate future growth in the size and complexity of our services.

Our Plan also acknowledges that to make a difference to the lives of the most vulnerable requires strong partnerships. Our fundamental partnership is with our clients and tenants, with the Aboriginal community, and with other Aboriginal organisations. We are dedicated to improving these relationships and acknowledge that maintaining strong connections with community is central to knowing and understanding the needs and circumstances of our clients and tenants.

Our partnerships with government, the community housing sector, other community sector agencies and Aboriginal community organisations are also essential and vital to achievement of our vision.

We believe that stable housing is fundamental to closing the gap. Stable housing is the platform for the successful delivery of services which address needs and build resilience and capability. However, we are limited in what we can achieve as a housing provider alone.

With our partners, together, we can deliver more integrated and holistic support to Aboriginal tenants that not only meet tenant's needs but advance the circumstances of tenants and families.

As we move forward and deliver on this strategic plan we look forward to working together with our partners as we seek to deliver on and advocate for better housing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Tim Chatfield
Chairperson

Jenny Samms
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

This strategic plan sets a course for Aboriginal Housing Victoria to provide diverse, high quality and economically sustainable housing services to Aboriginal Victorians, over the coming decade. The strategic plan articulates the values that imbue our organisation's decisions and the way we serve our clients. It articulates our vision for the future and our objectives. It reflects our joint agreement to a set of priorities that set out how we will respond to and meet the challenges that confront us and how we will advance our long term aspirations. These aspirations include growing our portfolio of affordable housing for Aboriginal clients, and the transfer of title to 1449 properties currently owned by the Director of Housing and managed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

Our culture and history

The genesis of Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) lies in the failure of the private market and social housing system to deliver adequate housing outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal people.

Victorian Aboriginal people have a proud history of articulating their rights and seeking justice and redress for the wrongs committed on them including the devastating impact of loss of land, degradation of culture and removal of children. This Aboriginal activism translated into calls for restoration of rights and freedoms taken from Aboriginal people. Swept along by the rising civil rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, momentum was gained for broader support to the calls for self determination. Equally significant to calls for restoration of land rights was Aboriginal advocacy for the provision of basic services and the restoration of dignity and respect for Aboriginal people in the delivery of services.

No longer was it acceptable for Aboriginal people to be denied service or receive second class services. Aboriginal organisations emerged from the abject failure of government and community service delivery and any meaningful plan to improve service delivery. As Aboriginal people sought direct control of the services they would receive, the principle of self management arose.



Continuing frustration with the quality of housing and treatment of Aboriginal tenants led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria in 1981 as a small community organisation representing Victorian Aboriginal communities. Board members formed a partnership with the Victorian Government and sought to influence housing policies and processes while advocating for the allocation of accessible and appropriate housing for Aboriginal Victorians and for the better treatment of Aboriginal tenants.

AHV is the first Aboriginal housing agency to be registered as a Housing Provider in Victoria and it is also the largest. Our tenants are assured of access to an Aboriginal landlord and personalised and culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal people.

Today AHV provides housing to approximately 4,000 low income Aboriginal Victorians in 1,522 properties, representing 8% of the Victorian Aboriginal population.¹ AHV manages tenancies across metropolitan and regional Victoria with the largest number in the Loddon Mallee (302), Gippsland (219), Hume (198) and the Northern (187) and Southern (167) Melbourne metropolitan areas.

AHV is a proud agency: proud of the history and culture of the Aboriginal peoples of Victoria, proud of the Aboriginal people of Victoria who we serve and proud of our heritage.

While pride in our past orients us, it also reminds us that we are yet to achieve the vision set by the original founding Aboriginal community members. AHV is yet to achieve the aspiration of self-determination through ownership of the properties that we manage. Neither have we fully met the ever growing need for quality and affordable housing for low income Aboriginal people in Victoria. The original imprimatur is ever present as AHV negotiates our contemporary challenges to become a registered Housing Association, to negotiate transfer of ownership of the properties managed for the Victorian Government and to grow our investment portfolio to achieve long term economic sustainability. It drives our continuing quest to improve the quality and diversity of the housing services we deliver, and to support more Aboriginal Victorians to improve their housing circumstances.

To set AHV on its path to the future, AHV has reviewed its strategic framework and developed a new vision, values and strategic directions.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026*, cat. no. 3238.0.55.001, ABS, Canberra.

Vision

Our vision is:

That Aboriginal Victorians secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives and stronger communities.

Values

Aboriginal cultural values underpin AHV's values. Our values provide an ethical framework within which all decisions are made and our services are delivered. Our values guide how we relate to our clients, each other and to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.

Respect and support for Aboriginal identity and culture and for our tenants and stakeholders

Striving for excellence through leadership in Aboriginal housing and best practice service delivery

Integrity, trust and honesty in all our business activities

Collaborative relationships with our community, tenants, government and stakeholders

Kindness, compassion, courtesy and dignity in our relationships with our clients, our stakeholders and with each other

Aim

To dynamically pursue economically sustainable growth to realise the potential of our assets and to deliver improved housing services to the Aboriginal community.

Objectives

That AHV will:

- be independent and financially viable
- provide efficient and effective housing services for Aboriginal people
- manage housing stock to ensure quality and affordability
- leverage housing assets to maximise affordable housing opportunities for Aboriginal people
- invest in a culturally and socially responsible manner
- develop constructive and mutually beneficial partnerships and relationships within the housing, community and corporate sectors
- develop best practice community and tenancy engagement
- advocate for, influence and deliver improvements in Aboriginal housing and other outcomes
- maintain high standards of accountability, probity and transparency to tenants, clients, the Aboriginal community, Government and the public.

Strategic overview

The right to housing and the benefits of secure housing

The right to housing is recognised in a number of international human rights statutes because it is integral to achieving an adequate standard of living. Appropriate, secure and affordable housing is fundamental to people's ability to better their lives and strengthen their communities.

Without stable, secure and appropriate housing it is difficult for children to participate in education, for people to find and retain work, to live a healthy life and to avoid negative contact with the criminal justice system. Serious social issues such as child neglect and abuse and family violence are almost impossible to address in the absence of adequate housing. Family reunification, particularly where children are in out of home care is dependent on secure, appropriate housing.

Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

In 2014 Victoria's Aboriginal population had reached almost 50,000², slightly less than 1 percent of the State's total population. It is a young and fast growing population. Between the 2006 and 2011 censuses, the Victorian Aboriginal population grew by 26 percent with an average annual growth rate of 4.7 percent compared to only 1.7 percent for the general community. Only in the Australian Capital Territory did the Aboriginal population grow at a faster rate. The median age is 21 years compared to 38 years for the general population, a third of the population is under 15 years of age and only 4.3 percent is over 65 years of age.

Three factors drive this population growth:

- a far higher than average birth rate;
- interstate immigration, and
- more people identifying as Aboriginal.

Forty-six percent of Aboriginal Victorians reside in Melbourne and 54 percent in regional areas. Most parts of Victoria have very small numbers of Aboriginal people while a small number of localities such as Shepparton, Mildura, Geelong and Bendigo have relatively high numbers.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, *Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2001 to 2026, cat. No. 3238.0, ABS, Canberra.

AHV's role and features

AHV is the largest Aboriginal housing organisation in Victoria and manages a portfolio of 1522 properties, 73 of which we own. The remainder are leased from the Victorian Government through the Director of Housing.

Unlike many Victorian community housing agencies, AHV provides housing services throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria to a discrete client group.

AHV's mix of tenants encompasses all age groups and family types, including young singles, older people and families with children. AHV predominantly provides larger family accommodation units due to the kinship nature of the Aboriginal community resulting in larger households. However, there is an increasing demand for smaller accommodation and singles accommodation. While AHV has actively targeted smaller accommodation for the past five years to meet the increasing demand, we must carefully manage the program to ensure that our housing portfolio reflects client needs while supporting the organisation's continued financial sustainability.

AHV's housing services are targeted to those in need of support. AHV's tenants typically have low incomes relative to the general population and most are wholly or partly dependent on income security payments from Centrelink or relatively low incomes from employment.



Strategic Challenges

Policy context

The social housing policy environment is characterised by funding uncertainty at the state and federal government levels. This uncertainty is creating concern about the ongoing viability of existing public and social housing schemes across Australia. In Victoria, demand for social housing continues to rise. At the same time, concerns have been raised in two reports by the Victorian Auditor-General that operational losses are escalating with insufficient account of the size of the unfunded maintenance liabilities. In these times of austerity, limited capital funds are available from government to grow the social housing stock and AHV must investigate alternative and innovative ways to grow its asset portfolio. The recently elected Andrews Labor Government in Victoria has committed to reviewing the status of state owned properties currently managed by AHV, with a view to transferring ownership from Government to AHV. AHV will work with the Government to realise this commitment.

Meeting growing demand for Aboriginal social housing

Given the young and fast growing Aboriginal population in Victoria, demand for social housing is likely to continue to increase. Disadvantage is also a significant demand factor. Proportionally, Aboriginal people have less formal education than the broader population, with higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of economic participation. A greater proportion of Aboriginal people are homeless, rates of home ownership are far lower, and Aboriginal people are far more likely to rent and to be housed in social housing. Twenty-two percent of Victorian Aboriginal households³ are in social or public housing, compared to a population share of 0.9 percent and Aboriginal households are twice as likely to receive Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

As young people enter into early adulthood they need housing as an early step towards being independent of family. Also, Aboriginal mothers tend to have babies earlier, have more of them and often raise them alone. These factors drive demand.

The extreme levels of disadvantage experienced in some parts of the Aboriginal community further impact on demand. Greater rates of family violence, drug and alcohol dependency, mental illness and family breakdown are some of the factors that create a need for more public and social housing. The disproportionately high rates of incarceration experienced within the Aboriginal community also have a direct, adverse effect on housing stability, both for those serving prison sentences, and their families.

The rise in demand for social housing is reflected in AHV's waiting list which continues to grow.

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014, *Housing assistance for Indigenous Australians* Cat. no. IHW 131. Canberra: AIHW.

The mismatch between demand and supply creates service delivery challenges

While the overall number of properties managed by AHV is large compared to other housing providers, the relatively small scale (compared to public housing) and geographical distribution of properties owned and managed by AHV creates a challenge to efficient service delivery.

The social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal Victorians and overwhelming disadvantage also presents a challenge to the efficient delivery of housing services both in terms of rental revenue and ability to maintain high standards of housing.

To improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, AHV must grow the number of available affordable housing options and to find pathways for Aboriginal people to achieve home ownership.

Maintenance of our housing stock

AHV faces challenges in meeting rising community expectations with regard to housing standards. Given the age of much of our housing portfolio, significant maintenance and upgrading costs will be required to achieve current housing standards. The 2012 Victorian Auditor General's report on public housing⁴ found that "an increasing, unfunded maintenance liability" has resulted in a deterioration of the asset base, much of which consists of ageing housing stock.

The problem is exacerbated by the normal wear and tear that large families may create and the general disadvantage experienced by most of our tenants. In a small number of properties there is very severe damage caused by tenants, residents or friends and family experiencing mental illness and/or drug dependency.

Unmet demand is compounded by a mismatch between supply and demand

As families change over time, housing needs also change. We cannot meet the demand for one and two bedroom houses which in turn means that lone tenants cannot move out of three or four bedroom homes and make them available for larger families. Suitable housing for elders who still wish to live independently is a growing need. Our housing stock needs redeveloping to better accommodate the diverse housing needs of our current and future tenants.

There is a lack of integrated support for struggling tenants

Aboriginal Victorians are the most disadvantaged in our society and those struggling most are likely to be living in public and social housing. Access to integrated support services is often fundamental to the achievement of successful, ongoing tenancies. Unfortunately, all too often these services are unavailable, piecemeal or do not offer the cultural safety required by Aboriginal people.

AHV relies on other housing agencies for the provision of transition and crisis housing. Supply rarely meets demand and housing that may be available is often culturally unsafe for many Aboriginal people. There is also a lack of secure housing options for people in contact with the justice system. Neither bail nor parole is usually granted in the absence of housing and people in public and social housing generally give up their tenancies when faced with lengthy prison terms.

⁴ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2012, *Access to public housing*, Victorian Auditor-General's Report March 2012, 2011-12:24, Melbourne.

Priorities

In order for AHV to navigate through current uncertainties, meet strategic challenges and make progress toward achieving our aims and objectives, the AHV Board has developed the following priorities to guide AHV over the next five to ten years:

Priority 1:

Growing our housing supply through acquisitions, disposals and development of our asset base to ensure AHV has a viable, growing social housing portfolio that increases in value and quantity

If we increase our housing portfolio, we will be able to house more low income Aboriginal people in affordable housing. More houses means reduced waiting times and less time living in inappropriate or unaffordable conditions and dealing with the anxiety of living with uncertainty and insecurity. Providing increased diversity of housing types will assist AHV to meet the many and varied needs of Aboriginal people and their families across Victoria. Growing our housing portfolio will also enable AHV to more effectively exploit its economic assets, and to leverage assets to attract finance for further growth in housing supply.

We will improve and grow our housing supply by:

- developing an asset management strategy and integrating asset and maintenance planning into business planning and budget processes;
- developing innovative projects to develop, redevelop and acquire properties to assist us to meet growing and changing patterns of demand;
- considering expansion of our rental portfolio to include affordable rental properties for Aboriginal clients who may not meet public housing income eligibility. In this way, rental revenue can be increased to support AHV's provision of housing to those most in need;
- actively engaging with government and community sectors and pursuing opportunities to advocate for improved housing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, including increasing our housing portfolio.



Priority 2:

Strengthening governance, probity and viability to manage the more complex business of a Housing Association and property owner

AHV's opportunities to grow its housing portfolio and meet the housing needs of more Aboriginal Victorians will improve significantly if we become a registered Housing Association rather than retain our current Housing Provider status. To achieve a successful transition to Housing Association, we will place a priority on ensuring that we have sophisticated policies and procedures, as they relate to:

- systems and financial risk,
- project and operational management,
- high standards of governance, and
- probity and accountability.

During the transition period and beyond, as AHV continues to increase the range and complexity of its activities and services, we will regularly communicate with our internal and external stakeholders. Ongoing consultation with our clients and other stakeholders will inform our progress.

We will demonstrate to our stakeholders that we:

- have the capacity to achieve a successful transition, and
- will continue to grow and diversify our business and services, as a best practice housing association.

Priority 3:

Improving organisational capability to manage and maintain a viable growing social housing portfolio

To achieve AHV's aim of economically sustainable growth and improved housing services to the Aboriginal community, we require the organisational capability to effectively manage a larger social housing portfolio.

To achieve this organisational capability, we will:

- ensure our organisational planning is aligned to the identified capabilities required to manage our increasingly complex business;
- undertake ongoing reviews of our policies, processes and systems relating to recruitment, training, employee performance and development and risk management, to ensure their continued alignment with the organisational plan. Improved employee cultural awareness and community engagement competence will be particularly important, as AHV seeks to embed a strong organisational culture of client focused outcomes and service delivery;
- develop and implement a due diligence plan that will identify financial liabilities associated with the social housing business, and strategies for managing these liabilities;
- work to improve our economic modelling and reporting capabilities so that we are in a strong position to identify, anticipate and manage our strategic and operational risks;
- communicate regularly with our clients to ensure that we have an understanding of their current and emerging needs, and that these are reflected in our policy reviews and service improvements;
- continue to work in partnership with the social housing sector, Aboriginal organisations and other welfare groups to achieve ongoing improvement in service delivery capability.

Priority 4:

Improving the quality of services delivered by Aboriginal Housing Victoria and operational responsiveness to strategic issues

AHV is committed to ongoing improvement in the quality of our existing services, while maximising our capacity to develop and deliver additional innovative, efficient and client-focused services. In particular, Victorian Aboriginal households have much lower rates of home ownership than those enjoyed by the general population and AHV will investigate ways in which this gap may be reduced.

We will:

- continue to improve our quality management processes and systems by exploring the feasibility of introducing an accredited quality assurance system and improved internal auditing. AHV's service delivery policies and processes will be assessed for compliance with all relevant regulatory standards;
- develop and implement a comprehensive asset management strategy, and align our asset-related policies to this strategy;
- review our housing and recruitment policies and procedures with a focus on strengthening our capacity to support clients with complex needs, including improved early intervention and referral to appropriate support services;
- work with relevant agencies, including financial institutions, to explore opportunities for partnership programs which may facilitate the transition of Aboriginal social housing clients to home ownership, in circumstances where household incomes can support mortgage repayments;
- continue to explore strategies to reduce rental arrears and property damage by tenants both of which have a direct impact on AHV's ongoing financial viability and our capacity to deliver quality housing services to the majority of our tenants who meet their rent payment obligations and maintain their homes in good order.

Priority 5:

Building better relationships with our Aboriginal clients and Victorian Aboriginal communities

AHV recognises that we will not achieve our aims unless we can meaningfully and respectfully engage with our clients and with Victorian Aboriginal communities more broadly. We will listen to the views of our clients and their communities on ways in which we can strengthen our relationships. Consultation with our Aboriginal clients and communities will inform our strategies for improving service delivery and achieving positive housing outcomes for more Aboriginal Victorians.

We will:

- continue to strengthen our engagement with our tenants and the Victorian Aboriginal community through community capacity building initiatives such as the Elders project and the Low Maintenance Gardens project;
- continue to consult with Aboriginal people and communities to achieve strong partnerships that will underpin the achievement of our vision;
- investigate ways in which AHV can continue to improve the timeliness and responsiveness of our complaints system. Advice received through community consultation will inform these improvements;
- enhance our reporting functions so that we are able to provide timely and meaningful information to Aboriginal communities on our organisational performance;
- undertake new tenant satisfaction surveys on a biennial basis and ensure survey results are available to Aboriginal communities and clients;
- ensure our staff are equipped to deliver culturally safe and appropriate services;
- continue to strengthen Aboriginal membership of our organisation at the Board level and within our staffing profile;
- prioritise the recruitment and professional development of Aboriginal employees to provide career planning and skills development opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians, and contribute to our goals of self determination.

Priority 6:

Strengthening partnerships with government the housing and community sector and corporate bodies

AHV recognises that our ability to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians will be enhanced by the development of strong partnerships with other housing and community sector agencies.

We will:

- develop formal partnerships with government and community sector agencies to deliver AHV's Aboriginal community renewal projects and to explore options to expand our social housing portfolio;
- investigate the feasibility of culturally appropriate design and construction, in partnership with other social housing agencies and design professionals;
- explore opportunities to improve the economic participation of Aboriginal Victorians as part of any future partnership projects to deliver new housing and community renewal outcomes;
- investigate ways in which Aboriginal Victorians will have improved access to culturally appropriate mainstream housing and related services. The development of a cultural safety audit tool and training program for social housing agencies will assist these agencies to more effectively deliver their services within a context of recognition and respect for Aboriginal cultural values
- implement and refine our Communications Strategy to maximise opportunities for public promotion of AHV's culture, values and objectives.

Delivering on our commitments

AHV's Strategic Plan is complemented by our business planning and annual reporting processes.

The Strategic Plan is actioned through AHV's business planning processes, including the identification of 5-year goals and deliverables, consistent with the strategic priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan also provides the basis for the development of individual work-plans for AHV staff. In this way, staff members understand how their work contributes to the achievement of our immediate, medium and long term goals and priorities.

The production of the AHV annual report also provides us with an opportunity to inform our stakeholders of AHV's activities and achievements during the financial year, particularly as they relate to our organisational goals and priorities.

AHV staff and Directors share a strong commitment to the achievement of our strategic objectives. Our performance in progressing priorities, goals and deliverables as articulated in the Strategic Plan and our business planning processes, is regularly monitored by AHV management and the AHV Board. Our performance will also be the subject of ongoing communication with, and scrutiny by our tenants and the Victorian Aboriginal community.



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