

More preventive maintenance recommended in remote community housing

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Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has made 32 recommendations to improve the NT Government's Healthy Homes Program (Healthy Homes) in a report released today.

The final report was produced following a 2-year monitoring and evaluation project. It analysed the effectiveness of the government's Healthy Homes program and was funded by the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

The recommendations focus on 5 key areas. These advise changes to support:

1. preventive maintenance
2. improved data collection and management
3. better governance
4. maintenance contracts that support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver housing services, and
5. longer funding to ensure greater stability and continuity of service.

Healthy Homes is the NT Government's preventive maintenance program for remote community housing designed to prioritise preventative repairs and maintenance to improve the condition of houses and support good health outcomes for householders.

Over the past 2 years, researchers from the Menzies team have worked alongside staff and contractors working on the ground in 73 remote communities across the Northern Territory.

The evaluation is the culmination of observations, document and statistical analysis, as well as interviews with staff, contractors, service providers, householders and other key stakeholders including an expert advisory group.

The expert advisory group included representatives from Aboriginal community housing organisations and land councils.

The research highlighted the fundamental importance of repairs and maintenance to the ongoing function of housing. For example, recommendations made in the report seek to ensure more efficient and effective use of the government's existing Condition Assessment Tool (CAT), a digital tool that supports assessments and inspections of homes in remote communities and town camps.

Overall, recommendations are designed to provide practical and tangible solutions for government to ensure improvements and the ongoing delivery of an effective remote housing maintenance and repairs program.

Additional information about this work, including a 2 page policy brief summarising its findings and key areas for policy development is available online, see:

[Healthy Homes Monitoring and Evaluation Project](#)

Quotes attributable to Menzies School of Health Research Senior Research Fellow, and Healthy Homes Monitoring and Evaluation Project Final Report lead author, [Dr Liam Grealy](#):

“The links between poor health outcomes, crowding and dysfunctional housing are well established. The challenge is to establish an attentive and effective maintenance program that interrupts the business-as-usual approach of reactive repairs for broken things.

“More work is needed to prioritise cyclical inspections that proactively assess housing hardware and generate preventive maintenance works. When we invest in preventive maintenance, we minimise the number of major breakdowns and improve the ongoing function of housing for residents.

“The limitations of the program showed that better collaboration is needed between Northern Territory Government departments. The NT Government must clarify its own program aims and governance mechanisms to effectively support an increased role played by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in remote housing management.”

Quotes attributable to Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT) CEO, Skye Thompson:

“The findings from this research show there is still a lot of work to do if we are to start making substantive and long-lasting impact on housing conditions for Aboriginal families.

“Establishing an effective and properly funded preventative maintenance program as part of broad-ranging reform is required across the entire NT housing continuum, including in communities, town camps, community living areas and homelands.

“Committing to the establishment of a preventative maintenance program, informed by evidence, will be a critical step forward.”

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is one of Australia’s leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.