

Geraldton Aboriginal Housing Action Plan

September 2012



Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health



Midwest Aboriginal Organisation Alliance



City of
Greater Geraldton
a vibrant future



A vision by and for the community
of Greater Geraldton City Region



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supported

“I think we are looked on as a problem a lot of the time but we are the solution as well.”

Female Aboriginal Research Participant No.1, Geraldton 2011

“The dialogue between the culture of our people and the culture of the government I think is very vital. The government has got to stand and then involve people in the consultant table, you know, rather than just make a decision... We should have someone in the machine room working with the government to try to bring in those changes that will affect our people on the ground, rather than just getting things thrown at us.”

Male Aboriginal Research Participant No.1, Geraldton 2011

Acknowledgements

This Action Plan is the final output of a collaborative research partnership between the Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance (MAOA) and the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health (CUCRH). MAOA is an alliance of 15 lead Aboriginal organisations working collectively to address priority issues of concern to Aboriginal people in the Midwest region of Western Australia. MAOA entered a research partnership with CUCRH to build the evidence base and strengthen their strategic planning and action in identified priority areas. The first priority area is housing supply and access for Aboriginal people in Geraldton.

The collaboration emerged from the City of Greater Geraldton's (CGG) '2029 and Beyond' Sustainable Future City world café deliberative democracy process. Funding for the research project has been provided by Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the CGG. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.

This Action Plan is the result of ideas generated during focus groups from the research process and from a two day MAOA Aboriginal Housing Action Planning Workshop held in Geraldton in July 2012 attended by a wide range of housing service providers and Aboriginal community members. Workshop attendees were provided with an overview of local, national and international housing research findings prior to participating in a range of planning exercises, the outcomes of which form part of this document. The MAOA Housing Project Reference Group - Gordon Gray, Ashley Taylor, Wayne McDonald, Kevin Merritt, and Jenny Kniveton – and the CUCRH Research team – Sarah Prout, Charmaine Green and Fiona Nichols – wish to express their sincere thanks to all who participated in these processes.



Plate 1

MAOA Aboriginal Housing Action Planning Workshop

Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHB	Aboriginal Housing Board
AHLN	Aboriginal Housing Leadership Network
ACAU	Aboriginal Communication and Awareness Unit
CGG	City of Greater Geraldton
CHL	Community Housing Ltd
CUCRH	Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health
DoH	Department of Housing
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
GAHAC	Geraldton Aboriginal Housing Advisory Committee
GRAMS	Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service
GRC	Geraldton Resource Centre
IBA	Indigenous Business Australia
JSA	Job Services Australia
LGA	Local Government Area
MAOA	Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance
MAEDIP	Midwest Aboriginal Economic Development Industry Partnership
MRAC	Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation
NACC	Northern Agriculture
PCR	Property Condition Report
SHAP	Supported Housing Accommodation Program

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the research that underpins this Action Plan was granted by the University of Western Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval for, access to, and analysis of data from the Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service (GRAMS), was granted by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC). The other components of the research project were not submitted to WAAHEC and were hence not supported by WAAHEC approval.

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Why a Housing Action Plan?

In 2010, the Midwest Aboriginal Organisation's Alliance (MAOA) named housing as the number one issue of concern for Aboriginal people in Geraldton. MAOA wanted to understand why there didn't seem to be enough affordable housing for Aboriginal people in Geraldton, and what could be done to fix the situation. With funding support from FaHCSIA and the City of Greater Geraldton (CGG), MAOA entered into a research partnership with the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health (CUCRH) to explore these issues and possible solutions. This Action Plan is the third and final output from that partnership. The 'Action Areas' in the Plan emerge from the Action Planning workshop and relate directly to the findings of the first two research reports (Prout, et al., 2012a; 2012b).

Housing for Aboriginal People In Geraldton: Key Research Findings

Aboriginal people lived in and around the area now known as Geraldton for many years before white settlers arrived. However, over the last 150 years Aboriginal people have generally been pushed, socially, economically and by law, to the edges of the town. And, until the early 1970s, most Aboriginal people were not allowed to be homeowners or rent public housing. Until recently Aboriginal people were also not offered a say on local planning and housing issues. At the same time, many Aboriginal people have fought for their rights to better housing. And, governments have slowly responded. Reserves were abolished, a public housing system was set up, and Aboriginal people were recognized as citizens with equal rights to all other Australians.

Aboriginal people now make up almost 10% of the population in Geraldton. Census data show that in 2011, there were 36 446 people living in the Geraldton-Greenough Local Government Area (LGA), 3392 of whom identified as Indigenous. There is also a bigger Aboriginal 'service population' (potentially almost 1/3 the size of the resident Aboriginal population) who come to Geraldton for shopping, ceremonies, medical appointments, school, carnivals, and visiting (Prout et al., 2012b). These people need short-, medium- or long-term housing while they are in town.

Many Aboriginal households in Geraldton (33%) own their own homes, and many (30%) live in public housing. In fact, even though the Aboriginal people make up only 9.3% of Geraldton's population, they make up at least 39% of public housing tenants in Geraldton. A smaller number of Aboriginal households (20%) rent from sources other than private real estate agents (e.g. community housing organisations, caravan parks, and directly from landlords). The smallest group of Aboriginal households is those who rent from private real estate agents (17%).

Figure 1 below shows the change in Aboriginal household tenure-types over time. The ‘Rental Other’ category is mostly social housing (subsidized rental housing, including public housing). Figure 1 shows that in the last five years, there has been a reduction in Aboriginal households renting from private real estate agents, and an increase in Aboriginal households in social housing. Department of Housing (DoH) data show that from 2006–2010, there was a probable increase in local demand for public housing, followed by a dip in 2011 (Figure 2 below).

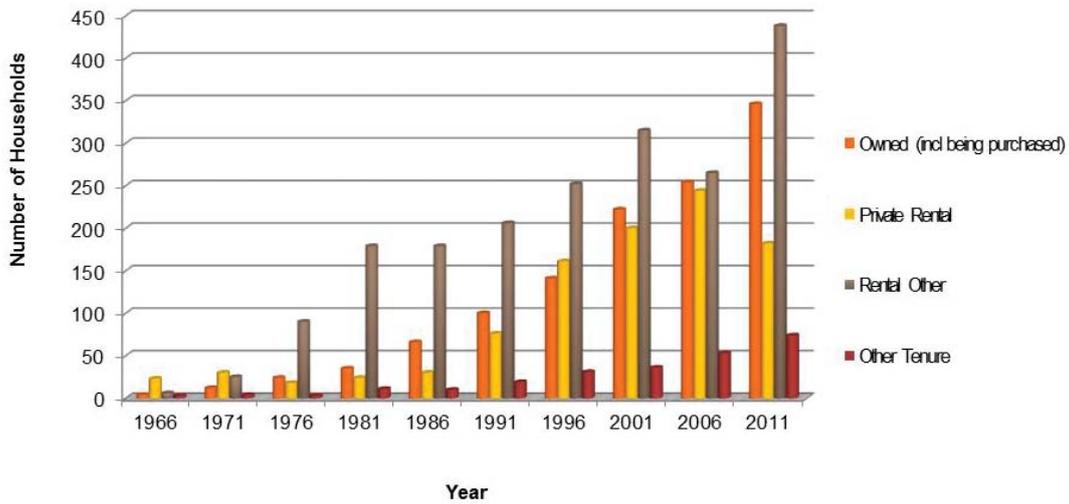


Figure 1 Change in Aboriginal Tenure-type over time for the Geraldton-Greenough LGA

Source data: Specialised calculations by the ABS, and ABS (2012)

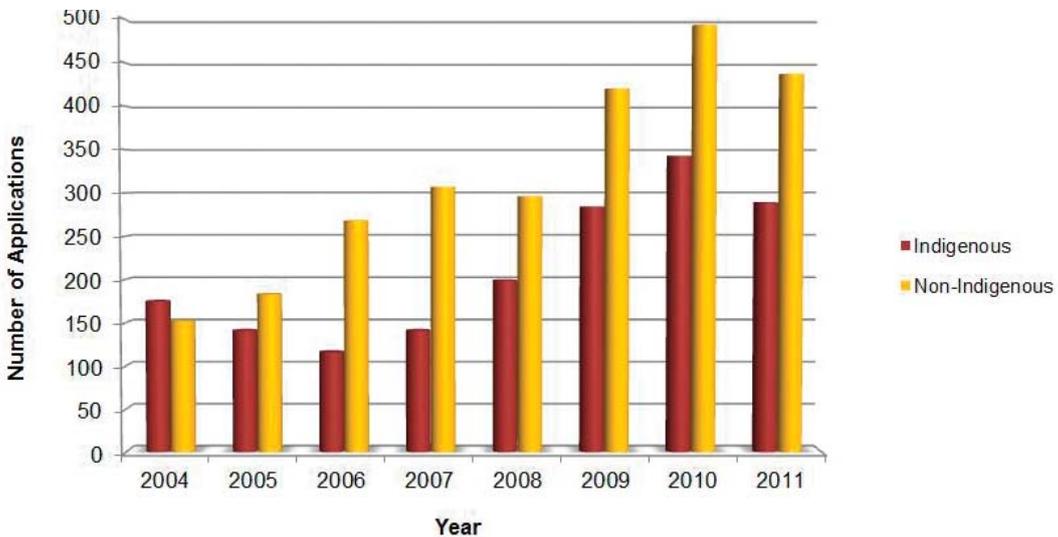


Figure 2 Public Housing Demand in Geraldton, 2004-2011

Source data: DoH, 2011

Affordability is likely one of the key reasons for this change. While median (i.e. midpoint) private rental payments for Aboriginal households have gone up by \$80/week since 2006, individual income has only increased by \$57/week (ABS 2007; 2012a). This is very different from the picture of the non-Aboriginal population in Geraldton where median private rental payments have gone up by \$105/week, but median individual income has gone up by almost twice that amount (\$193/week) since 2006 (ABS 2007; 2012a). Financial pressures are building for local Aboriginal households and seem to be forcing people out of the private rental market. Summary statistics from the 2011 Census (Table 1) also show that Aboriginal households are, on average, probably larger and more crowded than non-Aboriginal households in Geraldton.

Table 1 Summary Census Statistics of Geraldton Households, 2011

	Indigenous Households	Non-Indigenous Households	Total
Median total personal income (\$/weekly)	368	624	603
Median total household income (\$/weekly)	908	1,253	1,225
Median mortgage repayment (\$/monthly)	1,409	1,694	1,647
Median rent (\$/weekly)	200	240	230
Average number of persons per bedroom	1.3	1.1	1.1
Average household size	3.4	2.5	2.6
Proportion of dwellings that need 1 or more extra bedrooms (%)	12.2	1.7	2.5

Source Data: ABS (2012a; 2012b)

Local Aboriginal people who participated in focus groups for the research shared stories that matched up with this statistical picture, but also spoke of levels of overcrowding that may not have been captured statistically. They spoke of living ‘squashed up’ and ‘squeezed in’ lives. They pointed to six reasons for this:

1. **Public Supply** - There wasn't enough affordable housing in Geraldton. Participants talked a lot about the length of public housing waitlists and wait-times for affordable housing.
2. **Barriers for Youth** - Young Aboriginal people, often starting their own families, have a hard time finding housing of their own. Most of these young people end up staying with older relatives and friends, and that often leads to stressful, crowded home environments.
3. **Housing Market ‘Lock Out’** - Many Aboriginal people become ‘locked out’ of the housing system and stay with other relatives who have secure housing. Participants

gave a number of reasons why this can happen:

- being blacklisted in the rental market for damaging a property or not paying rent;
 - discrimination of real estate agents and nepotism amongst social housing providers;
 - being a middle-income earner (earning too much to be eligible for public housing, but not earning enough to be able to afford private rent rates);
 - conflict or confusion about housing providers policy and practice (especially DoH)
 - Aboriginal tenants' unhelpful mindsets and behaviours (e.g. not looking after a property because it's not theirs, spending money on entertainment rather than paying rent etc);
 - Having too much debt to be eligible for a home loan.
4. **Mobility** - A lot of Aboriginal people from elsewhere come to Geraldton regularly for various reasons and either prefer, or have no other option but to stay with family members.
 5. **Affordability** - One of the ways some local Aboriginal people manage rising rents is by having more family members living under one roof so that resources can be pooled.
 6. **Culture** - Most Aboriginal people feel culturally obligated to provide for their family members when they need help – they will not turn people away if they need a place to stay. While most participants saw this as a strong part of culture, they also explained that it can be very mentally and physically draining.

These reasons make up the six branches of the overcrowding tree:



Figure 2 The Overcrowding Tree

Building on Strengths

Many Aboriginal people in Geraldton – past and present – have suffered with poor housing, and action is needed to fix things. However, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have also worked together in important ways in the past to make progress.

The Past

In 1978, the Western Australian government set up the Aboriginal Housing Board (AHB) to ‘involve Aborigines in their own housing matters’. The AHB advised the Minister for Housing directly on Aboriginal housing issues. There were Aboriginal representatives from each major region in WA on the AHB. Each of these representatives was supported by a locally-elected Aboriginal Housing Committee. The Committees met with their regional DoH manager to talk about local housing issues and advise on housing allocations to Aboriginal tenants. Even though the AHB was abolished in 1995, local Aboriginal leaders today still point to the AHB structure as a solid model of Aboriginal leadership on housing that produced good results for Aboriginal people.

DoH have also made some important changes to the way they operate in recent years to better suit Aboriginal clients. Across the State since 2004, DoH has been making more effort to contact wait-list applicants on the anniversary of their application to find out if they still need housing, before they are taken off the list. Locally, DoH also changed the way they signed people up for rental properties to help incoming tenants better understand their Property Condition Report (PCR). The PCR is the document that DoH uses at the end of the tenancy to work out whether the out-going tenant owes any money for property repair and maintenance. They also moved several years ago to outsource its tenancy support service - Supported Housing Accommodation Program (SHAP) - to the Geraldton Resource Centre (GRC). When SHAP was offered through DoH, complaints were made that SHAP workers couldn't be independent in looking out for tenants because they worked for DoH. Once outsourced, SHAP worker were seen as more independent.

The Present: Local Assets

This Action Plan builds on the legacies of Aboriginal leadership on housing issues, and governments listening and responding to Aboriginal-identified concerns. It also comes at a time of great possibility in Geraldton: when strong local networks and partnerships have been established. For example, Action Planning workshop participants pointed out that:

- The City of Greater Geraldton used to have a poor relationship with the Aboriginal community but that has really changed in recent years. Now, the City have strong leadership that links in with the local community, is forward thinking and planning, and is genuinely working towards building strong links with the Aboriginal community.

- MAOA is a unique, grassroots, leading Aboriginal partnership model which focuses on having a united Aboriginal voice on key local issues. It is a strong framework with good leadership and includes a number of vibrant local Aboriginal organisations.
- The Midwest Aboriginal Economic Development Industry Partnership (MAEDIP) is another local alliance that is proactively seeking to generate business and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people through partnerships with the community, industry and government in the region.
- There are a number of strong Non-Government Organisations in Geraldton that provide important housing support and linking services. These organisations do important advocacy, advising and education work that governments do not do.
- Geraldton is large enough that all important government agencies have local offices, but small enough that most of these staff know each other well. There are good people in these roles who work well together, can coordinate local service delivery better, can influence local policy and practice, and can advise each other and the community on funding opportunities.

The Present: The Local Housing Network

Leading Aboriginal housing researchers have recommended that local housing plans should map out three key types of housing, and the connections between them (Memcott et. al, 2003). Once this mapping has been done, it is possible to identify strengths, weaknesses, and service gaps. It is also possible to work out who is well served, and not-well served by these housing services (Memcott et. al, 2003). These housing types – crisis, short-term, and permanent – are presented for Geraldton in the diagram below.

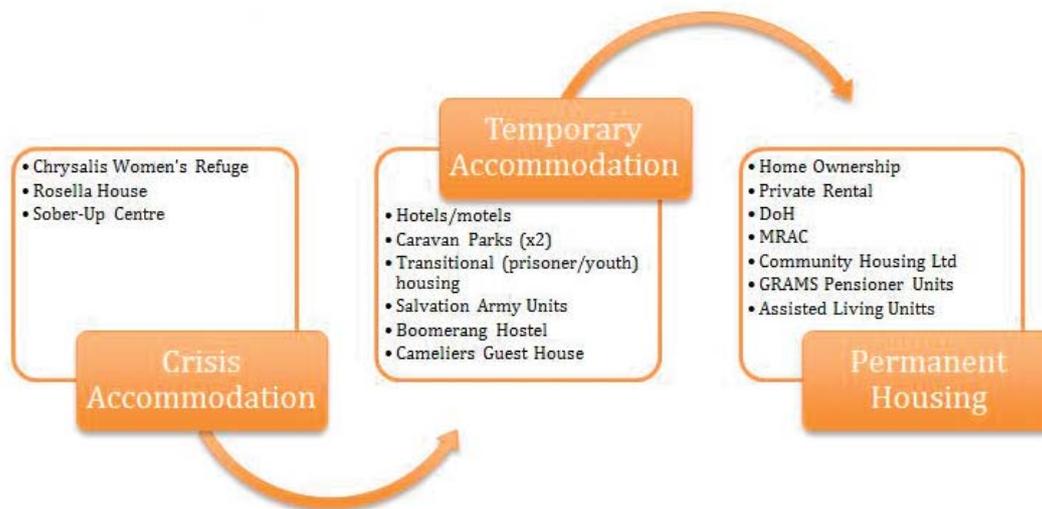


Figure 3 Geraldton Accommodation Options (The Housing Continuum)

One of the strengths that this Action Plan builds on is that, as Figure 3 shows, all three housing types exist in Geraldton. There are also agencies, like the GRC and Centrecare, that connect each of these 'types'. They provide emergency assistance packages such as food hampers or vouchers for rent/bills to families in need. They also run education programs and do one-on-one case management to help people find suitable housing and stay in it successfully. As two research participants pointed out, GRC are an important, independent housing 'connection service' that can help individuals work out how to move along the 'housing continuum' into more secure housing in a non-threatening way:

“A lot of time we are the only port of call where someone will actually listen, too ... they will have someone listen and try to find a solution to it. We do help. We might not be able to help right there and then, but we can come up with a strategy for them to budget or whatever. With the amount of programs that we do have here, we do have someone that can help them on their way...”

(Non-Aboriginal Male Research Participant No. 3, Geraldton 2011).

“There will be somebody who knows something or we never send people away without trying to give them some help or some direction. So, it is more because we have got a more holistic approach to problems, I suppose.”

(Non-Aboriginal Male Research Participant No. 2, Geraldton 2011).

As in any town, there are certain people who are disadvantaged in the housing network. In Geraldton, for example, several local service providers have pointed out that men (both young and old) in crisis don't have many options for accommodation support. The research also found that the existing short-term accommodation services are mostly full of long-term residents who can't find housing elsewhere. So visitors aren't very well catered for. However, the fact that there are services of each type, and services that connect these, mean that there is a strong framework in place for supporting progress against this Plan.

'SHIP' Action

To prune the overcrowding tree, action must be:

STRATEGIC Partnerships with government and industry must make good financial sense to all parties. Actions must also empower Aboriginal people. For example, the private real estate industry is driven by market forces and is therefore highly discriminating. Some local Aboriginal people need support to become confident in navigating this system effectively.

HOLISTIC The barriers to finding and keeping good housing for many Aboriginal people in Geraldton are complex. Building more houses is one important strategy for pruning the overcrowding tree. But other actions are also needed to prune most of the leaves and branches. If these actions aren't taken, increasing housing supply will just make the tree grow.

INCLUSIVE The overcrowding tree is too big for any one organization, agency or government department to prune on its own. For example, DoH will never be able to meet all local need for affordable housing. Government, industry, and the not-for-profit sector all have roles to play and MAOA welcomes their partnership.

PROACTIVE It costs less to invest up front than to try and fix things once they're broken. Aboriginal housing in Geraldton is not at the same level of crisis as it is in some other parts of the State. Huge amounts of money are now being poured in to fix problems elsewhere. Investing in the Midwest now means saving later.

Action Themes

There are 38 Recommended Actions in this plan organised under 12 Action Themes:

1. Aboriginal Leadership
2. Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing
3. Home Ownership
4. Private Rental
5. Short-Term Accommodation
6. Social Housing
7. Better Data
8. Community Yarns
9. Housing Expo
10. Industry Partnerships
11. Education Programs
12. Further Research

All recommended actions come from local participants and are supported by best practice knowledge. Each recommended action works to prune one or more of the branches on the overcrowding tree. None of the recommended actions relate directly to building more houses or accommodation facilities because the plan focuses specifically on actions that are immediately implementable in the absence of significant funding. However, an increase in both the volume and diversity of affordable accommodation options in Geraldton is seen as a vital long-term strategy to ensure that local Aboriginal housing outcomes improve. Because the approach in the plan is **Holistic and Inclusive**, no single recommended action is prioritised. Rather, each is presented as an important component in an interrelated system of actions: any of which can be taken up at any stage to advance Aboriginal housing outcomes in Geraldton. Within this broad mandate, however, action against the first theme is seen as a vital first step.

Recommendations Summary

Action Theme	Recommendations				
	1	2	3	4	5
Aboriginal Leadership	Aboriginal Housing Leadership Network (AHLN) established	AHLN meets twice annually to plan and problem solve	Proposed solutions circulated to relevant agencies for action		
Increasing Supply	MAOA facilitates community engagement with CGG planning processes	MAOA develops social housing sign-up campaign	Roll out of social housing sign-up messages	MAOA develops social housing waitlist	
Home Ownership	MAOA develops simple home ownership information messages for local community	Roll out of home ownership messages	MRAC assist community members with home ownership inquiries	Social housing providers identify tenants suitable for home ownership	
Private Rental	Applicant advocate agency identified	MAOA supports GRC's tenant support services	MAOA/GRC/ real estate agents jointly develop strategies to assist Aboriginal applicants	Media features stories of struggle to obtain private rental and advise on support services	Employers advocate for Aboriginal employees in finding private rentals
Short-Term Accommodation	Proposed hostel should cater primarily to patients	Careful policy developed to manage hostel client needs	Support provided to hostel clients who need to work out longer-term housing arrangements		
Social Housing (General)	All providers agree to a set of minimum design and fitting standards				
Social Housing (MRAC)	Develops strategy to communicate policies widely within the community	MAOA supports MRACs registration	Lead agency in taking MAOA's housing agenda forward	Partners with external agencies for tenancy support	

Action Theme	Recommendations				
	1	2	3	4	5
Social Housing (CHL)	Seek input from MAOA re: how to best serve needs of local Aboriginal community	MAOA supports CHL to grow it's stock in the region			
Social Housing (DoH)	Seek advice from MAOA on local staff induction/ cultural awareness program	MAOA supports DoH to reach Aboriginal employment targets locally	Seek advice from MAOA about information dissemination locally	ACAU meets twice annually with MAOA and liaises regularly with regional office to problem solve	Adopts CHL model of tenancy support for new Aboriginal tenants
Better Data	ABS works with MAOA in lead up to 2016 Census to develop 'stand up and be counted' campaign	Local housing providers report key information to twice-yearly AHLN meeting.			
Community Yarns	MAOA hosts community meetings to yarn about unhelpful housing attitudes and good strategies				
Housing Expo	Bundiyarra hosts a Geraldton Aboriginal Housing Expo				
Industry Partnership	Through MAEDIP, MAOA builds relationship with businesses to begin conversation about housing partnership				
Further Research	Aboriginal Household Survey	Cultural Security Mapping of Local Housing Services	Mapping Aboriginal Presence in Geraldton	Good Housing Stories Project	

1. Aboriginal Leadership

We do need to be involved in controlling our own destiny.

(Male Aboriginal Research Participant No. 4, Geraldton 2011).

I think there should be an advisory group, an Aboriginal advisory group that could sit and inform about the issues and things in the area, so to have more of a voice, I think, with the prime housing provider, I guess, for Aboriginal people.

(Aboriginal Female Research Participant No. 4, Geraldton 2011).

As the quotes above show, research participants felt that Aboriginal people must have a lead role in improving housing for Aboriginal people. Researchers who work on Aboriginal housing issues in Australia and overseas agree (e.g. Walker, 2008; Milligan et al, 2010; Habbibis et al, 2010). So does the United Nations. In 2009, the Australian Government signed on to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 23 of the Declaration says:

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

We have also seen (e.g. the Aboriginal Housing Board), that when Aboriginal people do have leadership over their housing issues, things improve.

MAOA Goal:

1.1 Local Aboriginal people are key advocates, advisors, and deliverers of housing services in Geraldton.

Recommended Actions:

1.1 An Aboriginal Housing Leadership Network is established in Geraldton.
This network should include:

- A Geraldton Aboriginal Housing Advisory Committee (GAHAC). The GAHAC, like the Aboriginal Housing Committee of the 1980s, would be locally-appointed. It would hold community forums to hear about local success and worries to advise the regional DoH office, MRAC, and Community Housing Ltd about local Aboriginal housing issues. The GAHAC would also provide mentoring support to DoH Aboriginal employees.
 - MRAC CEO.
 - DoH Aboriginal Customer Support Officers at the Geraldton office. This is a new role being developed by DoH (discussed later in the Plan).
 - GRC Aboriginal case-workers in housing and housing-related programs.
 - Tenancy Support Service Officers (TBC).
 - Department of Health and CGG Aboriginal Environmental Health Workers.
- 1.2 The Aboriginal Housing Leadership Network meets together twice a year to review local Aboriginal housing data (described later) and:**
- a. Identify trends/changes (good and/or bad) and possible reasons for them
 - b. Celebrate any progress identified
 - c. Come up with solutions to any problems identified
 - d. Talk about any issues that have come up in the community and how they should be dealt with.
- 1.3 Proposed solutions to identified problems are circulated to relevant agencies for their consideration and action.**

2. Increased Supply of Affordable Housing

There are two parts to this Action Theme. The first part is making housing on the private market more affordable generally. The first step in this process is getting more land released for housing development. When supply increases, renting and home owning become more affordable (Moran and Novak, 2009). All levels of government are working towards this in Geraldton.

The second part is getting more social housing built in Geraldton. This will only happen if and when social housing providers (e.g. DoH, MRAC, and Community Housing Ltd) can show that there is a strong demand for it. The way these social housing providers show demand is by their waitlist. Research and workshop participants explained that many Aboriginal people don't get on waitlists for social housing for a number of reasons. If people don't get on the waitlists, these providers cannot show need in the Midwest and other regions get more funding to build more houses while the Midwest is overlooked. Wait times then get longer.

MAOA Goals:

2.1 Mortgages and private rentals become more affordable in Geraldton.

2.2 More social housing properties are introduced in Geraldton.

Actions Underway:

- In 2012 CGG in conjunction with DoH obtained \$9 million from FaHCSIA's Building Better Regional Cities program and is seeking \$14 million from the MWDC Midwest Investment Plan for a project that will deliver key infrastructure to support the development over 400 affordable housing lots in Karloo-Wandina. Lots will be available in June 2016
- In 2011 CGG approved 400 new dwellings for construction and 50 more for DoH.
- In 2011, the Federal Government gave funding to construct 182 more affordable rental properties in Geraldton.
- In 2010 preparation of 115 DoH lots began in Beachlands. 100 will be available for open market sale (subsidised) and 15 will be kept for social housing.
- Fusion Australia is in talks with DoH and CGG to construct 42 affordable independent living units and short-term accommodation in Geraldton

Recommended Actions:

2.1 MAOA continues to build a strong relationship with the CGG and engages the Aboriginal community in City planning activities.

2.2 MAOA, with leadership from MRAC, develops a simple advertising message about the importance of signing up for social housing if local Aboriginal people are in need but not on a housing waitlist. This message should explain that more houses will not be built unless social housing providers can show (from their waiting lists) that there is high demand.

2.3 This 'sign-up campaign' message should be rolled out across MAOA agencies ahead of the Aboriginal Housing Expo (see Theme 9 below). Radio MAMA broadcasts the message and works with Western Indigenous Media to establish a Facebook page to house the message. GRAMS runs a visual version on their waiting room screens in the Geraldton clinic. Mulga Mail prints the advertisement.

2.4 MAOA, with leadership from MRAC, develops it's own Aboriginal social housing waiting list in Geraldton. A 'sign-up' blitz could take place at the Aboriginal Housing Expo. It is important that MAOA coordinate this sign-up process since some local Aboriginal people who need social housing won't apply directly to a

provider because of fear, dislike, or previous debt/conflict with the provider. It is also essential that MAOA works with DoH to establish an agreed set of data fields for applications to the waitlist (e.g. applicant household income, number of household members, etc). That way, each social housing provider can work out from the list who would be eligible for their housing, and what kind of housing they would need, and can use this information to lobby for more funds to build/purchase more houses.

3. Home Ownership

Encourage our people to own the place and you will see a lot of change in attitude in families. People who come to stay there, you will see a change in their thinking when they come to the house because they know it is your house compared to a rental property. Sometimes people get drunk and say, 'Oh it's a government building' you know, and they smash it up, you know, do anything that comes into their mind. But when it is ownership by your own people the attitude changes and it will change to, 'Oh no, we can't do that. This is our people, our home; this is mum and dad's home, grandpa's home.

(Male Aboriginal Research Participant No.1, Geraldton 2011).

As Figure 1 shows, the Geraldton Aboriginal home ownership rate has been growing steadily since 1966. The 2011 rate of 33% is below the national Aboriginal average of 36%, but just above the State Aboriginal average of 32%. Although homeowners are one of the largest groups of Aboriginal households in Geraldton, not many research participants talked about home ownership. Those that did, spoke about it very positively. They explained that home owners:

- often take better care of their houses and have more pride in their home
- feel more freedom because they don't have property managers constantly 'looking over their shoulders' and making rules about how they act in their house
- sometimes pay less on a mortgage than they would on a rental
- feel a sense of security because they will never be kicked out of their house – no matter how much money they earn, regardless of whether the housing market becomes less affordable, and no matter how they behave in their home.

Some research participants also said that homeownership can be hard for some families and individuals because they:

- don't earn enough money to be able to afford a mortgage
- have too many existing loans for other things they need like cars and white goods
- don't know how/where to get information on becoming a homeowner
- have never been encouraged to think about it as an option.

Some also didn't trust mortgage lenders and felt they wouldn't be able to continue to afford paying their mortgage in the long run. And some participants said they just didn't want to be tied down by a house.

MAOA Goals:

3.1 All Aboriginal residents who are well suited to becoming homeowners find good houses and affordable mortgages.

3.2 Aboriginal homeownership rate (including homes owned outright and households paying mortgages) in Geraldton is above the national average by 2016.

Recommended Actions:

- 3.1 MAOA, with leadership from MRAC, collects information on homeownership options from Keystart and Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) as well as local mortgage brokers and banks, and distills this information into simple messages about the benefits of and pathways to Aboriginal homeownership in Geraldton.**
- 3.2 Homeownership pathway messages are rolled out in the same way as the social housing 'sign-up' campaign message described in Recommended Action 2.3 above.**
- 3.3 MRAC housing officer is the local contact person to assist people who respond to these messages and connect them with the right homeownership program contacts (e.g. banks, mortgage lenders, Keystart, IBA etc).**
- 3.4 DoH, MRAC, and Community Housing Ltd locally commit to identify current tenants and applicants who have stable jobs and are long-term Geraldton residents and provide them with this information on local homeownership pathways.**

4. Private Rental

Many local Aboriginal people find it hard to 'get into' and stay in the private rental system through real estate agencies. There are two reasons for this. One is affordability. Overcoming this barrier will require non-housing related initiatives relating to education and employment. The second reason is discrimination. Research participants talked about racism and the other forms of discrimination that are a normal part of the private rental market: landlords always prefer applicants who have small families, stable

households, and earn high incomes. Census data tell us that, on average, Aboriginal families in Geraldton are larger and earn lower incomes than non-Aboriginal families.

MAOA Goals:

- 4.1 Reduced racial discrimination in the Geraldton private rental market.
- 4.2 More Aboriginal applicants are successful in getting private rentals.
- 4.3 Fewer Aboriginal blacklistings in the private rental market.

Recommended Actions:

- 4.1 MAOA appoints a representative agency to serve as a referral service for Aboriginal community members struggling to access private rentals. This agency would advise individuals looking for private rental about:
 - a. the necessity of having a job to be able to sustain a private rental. Centrelink are an important first contact point for potential tenants. They can connect individuals with a Job Services Australia (JSA) caseworker and help them work out what rebates they might be entitled to (e.g. childcare assistance for working parents).
 - b. the Commonwealth Rent Assistance scheme.
 - c. support services and programs available (e.g. GRC's private rental assistance program).
 - d. other housing options that may be suitable for them (e.g. home ownership).
- 4.2 MAOA supports GRC to grow its tenant support programs (e.g. financial literacy course; private rental assistance program etc) and refers individuals to GRCs programs.
- 4.3 MAOA representatives and GRC case workers hold a workshop with private real estate agencies in Geraldton to jointly develop strategies to assist more Aboriginal tenants to be successful in applying for private rentals.
- 4.4 Mulga Mail and Radio MAMA feature stories of individuals who have struggled to get private rentals for what they feel can only be because of racism, and provide information to readers/listeners about their legal options if they wish to take their case further.
- 4.5 Employers (e.g. resource sector companies) of Aboriginal people who are struggling to secure a private rental consider supporting their employee to take the appropriate legal action and/or arrange a corporate tenancy on their behalf.

5. Temporary Accommodation

The research (Prout et al. 2012) showed that there are many Aboriginal people coming to Geraldton from elsewhere in Yamaji country for short and longer periods. They come to access services (particularly health service) and attend events and ceremonies. These visitors place pressure on Aboriginal households in Geraldton and several participants

in the research talked about the need for better housing options for these visitors. Some people suggested fixing up existing abandoned buildings in Geraldton to serve this purpose. Others talked about constructing a purpose-built Aboriginal hostel.

MAOA Goals:

5.1 Aboriginal people coming to Geraldton for short periods of time to access health, education, and training services stay at a low-cost, short-stay hostel rather than ‘squashed up and squeezed in’ with family.

Actions Underway:

- Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation have developed a plan to construct and manage a 138 bed hostel for Aboriginal visitors to Geraldton. This would be a multi-purpose/function facility for patients, students and job-trainees and ongoing management costs would be met by payment of room rates by the clients’ sponsoring government or industry partner (e.g. Department of Health, Department of Education, mining companies etc). The Department of Transport have agreed to offer a subsidized bus service from the facility into town for hostel clients.
- Fusion Australia is in talks with DoH and CGG to construct 42 affordable independent living units and short-term accommodation in Geraldton

Recommended Actions:

- 5.1 The proposed facility should cater primarily to patients (i.e. Aboriginal people coming to Geraldton for health services) because these people are currently the most ‘under-served’ Aboriginal visitors to Geraldton and need a restful and properly equipped and supported place to stay while in Geraldton.**
- 5.2 While the facility will cater to a mixture of clients (e.g ages, gender etc) and their various family needs (e.g. singles quarters and family rooms) a careful policy must be developed to ensure that appropriate numbers of family members accompany the client. While not having any family present can be unsettling for clients, having too many can also be disruptive to their health and/or academic/training progress.**
- 5.3 Support must be available on-site (a full-time social-worker) to help individuals who are almost at their 3-month limit, to find other accommodation in Geraldton if they plan to stay longer.**

6. Social Housing

There are three main providers of social housing in Geraldton. They each have different eligibility criteria, allocations policies, and rent-setting processes. The research showed that these policies and procedures are not well understood by many local Aboriginal people. Each of these providers is also on a different path in terms of future growth. DoH no longer sets aside specific housing

for Aboriginal people, and is moving to hand over more responsibility for managing affordable rental housing to non-government providers. Community Housing Ltd will become a bigger player in Geraldton social housing because DoH appointed it as the regional growth provider. And the Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation (MRAC) is working to become registered as a government-approved housing provider. This will enable MRAC to expand its stock and operations in the future. It will also mean that some of MRACs' policies change. Growth for both MRAC and CHL will be accelerated if DoH approve further asset transfers to them.

MAOA Goals:

6.1 A strong and diverse social housing network in Geraldton.

6.2 Reduction in wait-lists and wait-times for social housing in Geraldton.

6.1 Design Standards

Many social housing properties in Geraldton are old and were not well designed or maintained over their life cycle. Some research participants also explained that some new public houses are also not being well designed and fitted. They are easily damaged and this exposes their tenants to large liability bills at the end of their tenancy. However, when houses are well designed and of good quality, tenants are more likely to take good care of them:

And I guarantee you that they will look after the house and nothing will happen to the house, but when it is an old rundown house that has been there for generations and generations, as you explained, we are not closing the gap.

(Male Aboriginal Research Participant No. 8, Geraldton 2011).

Recommended Actions:

6.1.1 All social housing providers agree to at least the following standards for all new housing including:

- Double-brick walls
- Thick, double coat, easy wash paint on all walls
- Sturdy plumbing in all wet areas
- No carpet – just thick, well laid linoleum

6.2 Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation (MRAC)

MRAC is one of only five Urban Indigenous Community Housing Organisations left in Western Australia and manages 52 properties in Geraldton. MRAC also has no income limits for applicants but still charges below-market rent. It is an important housing

option for Aboriginal people who earn too much money to be eligible for public housing but can't afford private rental or a mortgage.

Recommended Actions:

- 6.2.1 MRAC communicates (widely) information to help MAOA and the wider Aboriginal community understand its policies and what changes are likely to happen once it is registered.
- 6.2.2 MAOA supports MRAC's registration and efforts to grow its stock.
- 6.2.3 MRAC is the lead agency in taking MAOA's housing work forward.
- 6.2.4 MRAC partners with external agencies (e.g. Bundiyarra, CGG Environmental Health Officers, or GRC) who serve as advocates for new Aboriginal tenants. The advocate can help Aboriginal tenants if they have any questions or concerns about the sign-up process, or other issues that might come up throughout their tenancy. Community Housing Ltd has adopted this model with a number of their tenancies.

6.3 Community Housing Ltd (CHL)

Community Housing Ltd is an affordable housing provider with operations in Australia and overseas. Though they currently only have 33 properties in Geraldton, they have funding for 43 more, and will continue to grow their stock locally into the future. Like MRAC, they offer rental housing at below-market value, and their income limits are much higher than DoH public housing. This means CHL is an important potential landlord for local middle-income earners.

Recommended Actions:

- 6.3.1 Community Housing Ltd seeks input and advice from MAOA regarding how to best meet the social housing needs of local Aboriginal people. Key areas for input include:
 - o Housing design
 - o Housing allocations
- 6.3.2 MAOA supports CHL in its efforts to grow its stock in the Midwest.

6.4 Department of Housing (DoH)

Though the market is changing, DoH is still the largest provider of social housing in Geraldton with 1015 properties. As well as the positives described earlier, research participants also identified a number of concerns local Aboriginal people have with the way DoH manages their public housing tenancies. Three of these are long-standing criticisms of the Department within the local Aboriginal community:

1. There are not enough houses to meet local need. This criticism is addressed in Theme 2 above.
2. More Aboriginal staff should be employed at the Geraldton office. Participants said there should be at least 3 Aboriginal housing officers employed so they have each other as support within the office:

And don't have one person working in that organisation; you need two people or three. You need a team of them because they need to support each other, and that organisation needs to really seriously look in the mirror at themselves and say, 'We have got to support these black people.'

(Female Aboriginal Research Participant No. 8, Geraldton, 2011).

They also said these staff need to have flexible roles so they can help Aboriginal clients in a number of ways:

... it has got to be a position that is created specifically to go out and try and educate people and talk to them in the right way, in the way that they will understand and that they will let you. Someone that can go and help and liaise with the other officers, not someone that is going to go and collect rental arrears and giving termination notices, because I'll tell you now, no blackfella is going to want to be in that position. I tried it and it is like, 'No, I'm not going to try and evict people that I know, my family' and things like that ... People are grateful when you can help, but then when you can't, that is when you are the one that cops the flack. And it is not just there; you have got to take it home with you and deal with it outside in the community.

(Female Aboriginal Research Participant No. 9, Geraldton 2011).

3. Most non-Aboriginal staff at the Geraldton office need better cross-cultural training (while some staff work well with Aboriginal clients, others talk down to them, or don't have a good understanding of their situations so can't help them).

Both DoH staff and community members who took part in the research talked about how

valuable Aboriginal staff are in the Department: they often have personal understandings of what Aboriginal clients face in their lives. They are also usually much better than non-Aboriginal staff at finding people, understanding their needs, and helping them find solutions. At the same time, Aboriginal staff don't often stay long at the DoH office in Geraldton. Sometimes that's because Aboriginal staff get promoted to new jobs in other area. Sometimes it's because they get burnt out because of pressure they get from family and friends in the community, and lack of support within the office.

One participant described some of the challenges involved in being a local Aboriginal housing provider:

Oh, look, there have been a number of pressures and it is an ongoing thing—it is a daily thing—first and foremost, expectations from applicants, expectations from tenants, expectations from family members particularly ... So, those sorts of pressures also of trying to communicate to those people at various different levels of understanding, different types of personalities that we are dealing with, there are pressures every day. Like I say, you have someone come in here who really is generally - - They are all good people generally. They just get frustrated and it is not what they say. It is how they say it. And, I suppose, the other from an Aboriginal point of view, is ... the Aboriginal grapevine is, you know, you can't fart down town without someone knowing it and having it sent to Mullewa and Meekatharra, you know, what is going on. And the other thing that is a pain in the arse is that if someone doesn't know the truth they will make something up. Then you have to try and justify what the issue is or put it into context or deal with it somehow to alleviate those concerns or prejudices and accusations that are out there ... That is another problem, or not a problem but a difficulty at times, is the confidentiality, for people to understand we have got to be confidential with each and every individual tenant.

(Male Aboriginal Research Participant No. 11, Geraldton 2011)

This participant said Aboriginal housing employees needed to have several qualities to

be able to survive in the business:

- a thick skin
- the ability to work out what is within your control and to not become ‘worked up’ about things that aren’t
- the ability to set boundaries and not try and solve other people’s problems for them
- the ability to diffuse volatile situations through gentle but firm talking and good negotiation skills.

The Aboriginal Communication and Awareness Unit (ACAU) within DoH has been travelling the State and hears many of these same concerns in the communities they visit. They have begun to address these staffing concerns, as well as other concerns about DoH practice.

Actions Underway:

- The ACAU is coming up with:
 - A proper induction process for all new staff (including State- and local-level cultural awareness training)
 - An ‘Aboriginal customer support officer’ role in regional offices – a more flexible position for Aboriginal staff
 - Minimum Aboriginal employment targets for the regional office (10% of staff in the Midwest)
 - A mentoring program for Aboriginal staff (better support).
- DoH has just developed a Reconciliation Action Plan.
- DoH have committed to an Aboriginal Employment Strategy (2012-2017) which says that by 2017, 50% of its non-service staff should be Aboriginal.
- DoH will now case-manage any tenant who is no longer eligible for public housing to help them find a new place to live – if tenants will work with them, they will not simply evict people who become income-ineligible.
- DoH are starting to run high school education programs to educate kids about some of the other housing options they have (other than just Homeswest).
- A new Tenancy Support Service will be rolled in Geraldton.

Recommended Actions:

- 6.4.1 DoH seeks advice from MAOA on content for a Midwest induction/cultural awareness program for all DoH staff at the Geraldton regional office.
- 6.4.2 MAOA will support DoH to reach the local and State-level Aboriginal employment targets it committed to in its Aboriginal Employment Strategy (2012-1017) by:
 - a. Encouraging suitable applicants to apply

- b. Serving on interview panels
 - c. Informally supporting and mentoring Aboriginal staff once they are appointed.
- 6.4.3 DoH seeks advice from MAOA about the best way to get information about policy and policy changes to the local Aboriginal community.
- 6.4.4 The DoH ACAU will meet at least twice a year with MAOA for discussions about policy, and issues in the region effecting Aboriginal tenants and will liaise regularly with MAOA and the Regional Office to problem solve.
- 6.4.5 DoH adopts the CHL model of tenancy support (see recommendation 5.4 above) for new Aboriginal tenancies, in addition to the Tenancy Support Service they will roll out.

7. Better Data

Information about people and their houses, gathered from the census every five years, helps government work out how much funding and resources to allocate in Geraldton. It is therefore important that local Aboriginal people fill out these forms and identify as Aboriginal on them. Another way services get funding is from their own administrative data. The research found that some important local Aboriginal population and housing data either isn't made public, or doesn't exist (i.e. it isn't collected). This data is needed to show how the local Aboriginal housing situation is changing: whether certain things are getting better or worse, and what might be causing these changes.

MAOA Goals:

- 7.1 The true number and characteristics of local Aboriginal people are captured by the Census and by local services so that enough funding and resources come to Geraldton for Aboriginal people.
- 7.2 The right data is collected over time so that the Aboriginal community can show what programs and funding works, and what doesn't work.

Recommended Actions:

- 7.1 ABS works with MAOA in the lead up to 2016 Census to develop a local 'stand up and be counted' campaign and to plan the best ways to help people fill in their form on census night.
- 7.2 At the six-monthly Aboriginal Housing Leadership Network meeting, each local accommodation provider reports on key, de-identified statistics:
- o New and housed applicants (by Indigenous status)
 - o Home loans offered to, and accepted by, Aboriginal households

- Termination notices issues (by Indigenous status) and reasons for terminations
- Evictions (by Indigenous status)
- Properties constructed/purchased/refurbished/demolished/sold
- Successful assisted applications for private rental compared to total number of applications (GRC)
- People turned away from short-term accommodation services because of lack of vacancies (by Indigenous status)
- Rental arrears (total amounts)
- Total spending on repairs and maintenance

8. Community Yarns

Aboriginal research participants explained that while some attitudes and behaviours in the local Aboriginal community were very positive and strong, other attitudes and behaviours led to bad housing outcomes. They believed that helpful and strong behaviours should be celebrated and shared while self-defeating behaviours need to be talked about and addressed so that everyone has better housing.

One of the positive and strong behaviours people talked about was putting conditions on family or friends who wanted to stay with them. For example, if young relatives wanted to stay with them, they would have to be doing something during the day: studying, working, or doing an apprenticeship. This meant that no-one was ever 'turned away' and people could fulfill their obligations to their family without having their generosity abused.

The three main self-defeating attitudes participants described were:

1. Not looking after a house because it belongs to someone else (e.g. DoH).
2. Spending money on non-essentials (e.g. entertainment) rather than paying rent.
3. Family/visitors not contributing to household costs and/or causing damage.

MAOA Goal:

8.1 Fewer Aboriginal tenancies fail because of tenant behaviours/attitudes.

Recommended Actions:

- 8.1 MAOA hosts community meetings to talk about unhelpful attitudes and behaviours and discuss good strategies for:
1. Managing family who visit and stay
 2. Budgeting (referring people to GRC programs etc)

3. Looking after houses
4. Dealing with cultural expectations when it comes to housing.

9. Housing Expo

One of the common themes of the research was that many local Aboriginal people don't have very good information about what housing options are available to them or how to be successful as renters or homeowners. One of the most popular ideas suggested at the MAOA Aboriginal Housing Action Planning Workshop was an Aboriginal Housing Expo in Geraldton where a whole range of real estate agents, mortgage brokers, and social housing providers could be on hand to speak with people about their housing options. The Expo could also be the event at which MAOA holds its 'Sign Up for Social Housing' event (see Theme 2).

MAOA Goal:

- 9.1 All Aboriginal people in Geraldton are informed about the best housing option(s) for them in Geraldton and how they can move toward their housing goal.

Recommended Actions:

- 9.1 Bundiyarra hosts a Geraldton Aboriginal Housing Expo with funding support from DoH and FaHCSIA. The Expo would be advertised in advance by Radio Mama and Mulga Mail, and other MAOA organisations would promote it through their networks. It would be one-stop shop event for local Aboriginal families who want to find out, or have questions answered about:
- a. Applying for social housing, private rental or home ownership.
 - b. What kind of crisis or short-term accommodation was available in Geraldton.
 - c. How to move from one kind of housing to another (e.g. social housing to private rental)
 - d. What kind of tenancy support services are available in Geraldton.

Agencies with information stalls and personnel on hand for individual consultations at the Expo would include (but not be limited to):

- DoH
- Local Private Real Estate Agents
- REIWA (to explain tenant rights and responsibilities)
- MRAC
- Community Housing Ltd

- KeyStart
- Indigenous Business Australia (homeloan information)
- Local Banks
- MAOA
- Crisis and short-term accommodation providers in Geraldton (e.g. Rosella House, Chrysalis, Salvation Army, Fusion, Baptist Care, SunCity Church, STAY, Boomerang Hostel, Communicare)
- Geraldton Resource Centre

10. Industry Partnerships

A number of research participants talked about what they felt was a negative impact of mining in the region: the benefits only seemed to flow to those who were employed in the industry (and a lot of Aboriginal people view such jobs as undesirable for a number of reasons), or to Aboriginal groups with whom agreements had been worked out. A number also felt that while companies were taking big profits from the region, they didn't give enough back:

It's no cup of tea for me. I didn't like seeing the earth destroyed and pulled up and torn up. I worked in cleaning all the offices. We would get all the shredded paper and put it in a plastic bag and then we would go and throw it in the ground. It was like it will take 100 years to break down. Just all these different, the way they are tearing the land up and everything, but they are not really giving anything back to the area, because these mining companies come in from everywhere, all around the world, get what they want, and then leave. There is then nothing left behind

(Male Aboriginal Research Participant No. 9, Geraldton 2011)

Many research participants wanted to see more concrete, transparent and equitable investment into local Aboriginal housing by all local industries who profit from the region's resources (e.g. mining, transport, fisheries etc).

MAOA Goal:

10.1 Major companies operating in the Midwest actively partner with MAOA to improve local Aboriginal housing outcomes.

Recommended Actions:

- 10.1 Through MAEDIP, MAOA builds relationships with businesses that work in, and profit from, the region's resources so that if and when those businesses are able, they can talk with MAOA about how they can partner together to improve local Aboriginal housing. Community ideas about what kind of partnerships are possible were:
- a. Establishing an Aboriginal home ownership fund into which industry partners contribute. Aboriginal people can then apply to the fund to seek assistance with a deposit for a home loan.
 - b. Joint ventures with MRAC to build housing for below-market sales to Aboriginal residents OR for affordable rental.

11. Housing Education Programs

... I was in my own house the other day and I was cleaning the stove and my niece comes up there and she was looking at me, astounded that you can lift up this and lift up that to clean ... Maybe we can get some kind of community thing going on where we can teach our people ... how to maintain a house. Because I don't think a lot of them know how to do that, and when they have pride in themselves and pride in their house.

(Female Aboriginal Participant No. 7, Geraldton 2011).

The most common idea research participants came up with for how to improve local Aboriginal housing was to offer an education program that supports Aboriginal people to learn about their rights and responsibilities as home owners or tenants. Participants felt many Aboriginal people did not understand how to do some things that were important in getting and looking after a house. These included:

- Developing a good track record
- Choosing the right property at an affordable price
- How to approach a property viewing
- Connecting gas and power
- Reporting/attending to structural/electrical/plumbing faults as soon as they appear
- How, and how often, to clean and maintain indoor and outdoor areas
- Environmental health hazards and how to avoid them

- Budgeting (e.g. saving a bond or home loan deposit) and bill/rate paying.
- Managing cultural and family expectations with landlord requirements

Participants explained that a program like this used to run in the smaller towns and remote communities with excellent results, but was also needed in Geraldton. They suggested that to be successful, the program:

- has to be mostly delivered face-to-face (i.e. it couldn't simply be an information pack)
- must be requested by the local community and NOT imposed from the 'outside' by government
- be run by highly skilled and well-suited staff in a culturally appropriate way.

Most participants felt that this program should not be run by DoH because they have the power to evict tenants: there is too big a conflict of interest in being a property manager and a tenant support/advocate service. They also agreed that this program should help tenants and/or home owners before they move in and support them through their tenancy – not just if/when they get in trouble.

MAOA Goal:

11.1 Aboriginal people in Geraldton have access to a service that can offer them advice, skills, and information to get and keep secure housing.

Recommended Actions:

- 11.1** GRC works with MAOA to come up with the best way to run ongoing housing education programs and support service for local Aboriginal people (as described above). This may be through seeking funds to expand one or more of GRC's existing programs, or through setting up a whole new program.
- 11.2** GRC develops an evaluation plan for the program to assess its impact over time.

12. Further Research

There are a number of areas in which further research could help local stakeholders understand what does and could work well, and what doesn't work well, when it comes to improving Aboriginal housing in Geraldton. Research can also help to 'tell the story' of Aboriginal presence in Geraldton – what it is like and what it has been like for Aboriginal people to live in Geraldton. Four possible future research projects are described below.

It is important to note, though, that any future research should have a clear purpose and clear endorsement from the community. At the outset, it should be clear to both participants and researchers what kind of information the research will produce, and how that will be useful locally.

12.1 Aboriginal Household Survey

A survey of Geraldton Aboriginal households could generate very useful baseline information for MAOA and local housing providers about:

- The size of the resident Geraldton Aboriginal population
- The size of the Aboriginal population who are regularly in Geraldton but mostly live elsewhere (and where it is that they usually live)
- Amount, and extent, of overcrowding
- Reliable statistics on tenure type of Aboriginal households (e.g. do people own, or rent etc). This was an area where the census statistics were very poor.
- What Aboriginal people think of various housing services in town (e.g. if they are DoH tenants, are they happy with DoH and why or why not).

This survey would be an excellent tool for gathering reliable and complete baseline information on local Aboriginal housing issues and could also be a good means of circulating important housing information (e.g. support services, social housing sign-up etc) to Aboriginal people. However, these kinds of surveys are costly and require that at least 20 local Aboriginal people are employed and trained to carry out the survey.

For example, in 2011 the Yawuru of Broome ran a household survey of all Aboriginal households in Geraldton. They got significant funding from Federal and State Government departments to employ expert researchers from the Australian National University to help them design the survey and the collection process, and 25 local Aboriginal people whom they recruited to run the survey. An Aboriginal household survey in Geraldton would need a similar amount of funding and local research assistants.

12.2 Cultural Security Mapping of Local Housing Services

Dr Juli Coffin, a Geraldton-based Aboriginal researcher working for GRAMS, is currently working on a research project that maps how well health services in Geraldton serve Aboriginal consumers. It looks at the health services' policies and interviews health service providers and Aboriginal consumers to work out what things these health services do really well, and what areas they could improve in. It will then help these health services work out how they will improve. This same research process could be applied to the three main social housing services in Geraldton (DoH, MRAC and CHL) with leadership from Dr Coffin. Such a project is highly valuable because it does not just produce information but also helps service providers to act on the findings in positive ways.

12.3 Mapping Aboriginal Presence in Geraldton

During the first phase of the research for this Action Plan, the CUCRH research team gathered a lot of historical information, photographs and maps about Aboriginal housing history in Geraldton. At the same time, the Geraldton Northern Agriculture Catchments Council office, with support from an independent consultant were talking to older people in the community about where they used to live in Geraldton.

Further research could be undertaken to record these stories and histories and have them presented in (potentially) several different ways. One might be a book. Another might be an exhibition at the public library or the Museum. Both of these organisations have expressed interest in such a project – they would like to see local Aboriginal histories become more visible in Geraldton. Another option might also be some signage or walking trails in Geraldton that show some of the important Aboriginal places and tell some of the stories.

12.4 Good Housing Stories

The research focused on some of hard things about local Aboriginal housing. But there are many Aboriginal households in Geraldton that manage renting or owning their homes really well and are happy with their housing. One way of learning about how Aboriginal housing can be better for local Aboriginal people generally, is by learning from local Aboriginal people who have good housing experiences already. Research could be undertaken to interview local Aboriginal renters and homeowner who are happy in their homes to find out what makes their housing story a successful one. The learnings from these stories could be shared with the community to highlight 'what works'.

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