

## **DRAFT REPORT**

### **PILBARA ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S FORUM**

#### **NGURIN CULTURAL CENTRE**

#### **IERAMUGADU (ROEBOURNE)**

**WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2019**

## **Housing and Homelessness**

### **Issues**

Tenants can be put on national tenancy blacklists by landlords or real estate agents. Often the tenant is not told that they have been listed until they try to apply for another property.

Many tenants are added for reasons that are not compliant with the WA Residential Tenancies Act and it is very difficult for individuals to have themselves removed once they are listed. The ability to appeal a listing is usually only possible with legal assistance by applying to court.

Major compliance violations by agents and land lords occur in WA and many tenants are illegally listed for cases involving instances of family violence and damage to properties that are proven not to have been committed by the tenant.

### **Recommendations**

- Better education and understanding needed around blacklisting
- Information should be provided in language and in culturally appropriate ways
- There should be an easier appeals process that is more accessible for people in regional and remote areas

### **Issue**

Tenancy agreements are not collaboratively written so that many Aboriginal people in the Pilbara region cannot understand them due either to literacy, language or cultural barriers.

## **Recommendations**

- Agreements should be put in language so that tenants can understand what they are agreeing to.
- Pilbara Community Legal Service should have advice brochures and information in language
- Government funded Aboriginal liaison/support officer in each service provided by government organisations or agencies to provide advice and mediation if required

## **Issue**

Tenants at the risk of eviction have very little support or advice given. A lack of understanding and sensitivity by government departments of Aboriginal family structures and responsibilities leads to decisions made on a broad scale without taking into consideration individual situations.

## **Recommendations**

- An advocacy body or service for tenants at risk of eviction and to develop culturally appropriate/localised rules, driven by families and community
- Further education and training for department officials on Aboriginal cultural practices and dynamics
- Aboriginal-run organisations to be given first allocation of contracts for Aboriginal programs and property management.

## **Issue**

Many houses allocated are unsuitable to the tenants in terms of size or design of properties. Families are often squeezed into small houses and blocks and elders are given houses that are too big for them to maintain.

## **Recommendations**

- Through an Aboriginal community-led group, consult on the required size and design of houses before construction. This will lead to better outcomes in terms of tenancy compliance.

**Issue**

Elders and people with disabilities or ongoing illness sometimes have difficulty cleaning and doing maintenance on their houses and also have to wait the same amount of time for housing as everyone else.

**Recommendations**

- Provide a cleaning and support service for these tenants so that they don't become at risk of eviction.
- Provide more one and two bedroom houses for elders so that they are easier to keep clean and the blocks maintained.
- Have a different priority list for people over 55 and those with chronic health issues and disabilities.

**Issues**

Not enough separate, culturally appropriate and safe crisis accommodation available. Men often don't have access to crisis housing and children and women are put in unsafe environments.

**Recommendations**

- New, separate crisis accommodation is needed for men and women. Safe houses or hostels needed for children.

# Community, Culture and Language Discussion

## Issues raised:

The women in attendance of the First Nations Women's Forum found that in the absence of a state or federal Indigenous language policy, the hundreds of languages spoken by Aboriginal people are being lost. The group also concluded that the funding cycle perpetuated by changing governments has stalled the progress to establish long term policies and funding structures.

## Recommendations

- Establish state language policy that recognises the legitimacy of Indigenous languages and culture as well as seek guidance from Aboriginal elders and community leaders in writing it.
- Make long-term commitments with funding programs that will remain through changes in government

## Issues raised:

A common concern across the group was the small ways in which Indigenous languages and culture have not been considered in mainstream Australian culture.

## Recommendations

- Universities to integrate indigenous culture into tertiary teaching in all faculties
- Provide mandatory cultural inductions for all professionals entering a majority Aboriginal community (teachers, doctors, lawyers etc.)
- Record Aboriginal languages spoken by community members to archive and catalogue
- Name streets and public venues after significant Aboriginal elders and warriors as well as dual signage in Indigenous languages

## Issues raised:

Attendees raised the issue that Indigenous language classes are being removed in favour for international languages (Indonesian, French etc.).

## Recommendations

- Aboriginal languages should be taught in all schools particularly schools with a larger proportion of Indigenous students
- Adjust the current curriculum to include the whole history of Indigenous people in Australia including colonisation and life before it.
- Provide language lessons at a young age in early learning school with well-established curriculum

**Issues raised:**

The women determined that a lack of funding and lack of Indigenous teachers are barriers impacting the success of the language programs in schools.

**Recommendations**

- Participants noted that their elders and community leaders were best equipped to teach their languages and should be allowed into classrooms to lead lessons – a lack of reading and writing abilities in English shouldn't diminish their abilities to teach their own language
- More incentive to recruit Indigenous teachers into universities

**Issues raised:**

The women recognised the generational trauma associated with The Stolen Generation and fear of their own language and culture. The growing dependence on government funding to reclaim their own culture shows a lack of trust from authorities.

**Recommendations**

- Government agencies should better integrate the assistance from community leaders to make decisions on areas where funding is needed
- Language organisations and charities are co-opting jobs for non-Indigenous translators where the opportunities should be given to native language speakers

# Health and Wellbeing

## Issue raised:

There isn't currently a culturally appropriate approach to health care for Aboriginal patients. Health care professionals don't have an understanding of the local community, their needs or how to best communicate with Aboriginal patients. This in turn is affecting Aboriginal education on health and wellbeing which is causing long term problems in both physical and mental health, ranging from understanding how to access help to reading nutrition labels.

## Recommendations:

- Locals who already have established links with the community should be trained into the healthcare system, or implemented as a liaison officer where this may not be possible.
- Healthcare professionals need to undergo training to ensure they're using suitable language and have the cultural knowledge to treat Aboriginal patients.
- A Health literacy program, culturally appropriate, locally set up and delivered, to ensure Aboriginal people of all ages understand healthy living.

## Issue raised:

There is still racism and stigma surrounding Aboriginal patients coming from doctors and healthcare workers when seeking treatment, for example, assuming everything is alcohol related. Not only is this incorrect and discrimination, it's humiliating and creates a barrier that stops people from getting help.

## Recommendations:

- Make a commitment to eradicate stigma in the health system and break the cycle.

## Issue raised:

There needs to be more health facilities/healthcare workers in the communities, in many cases there isn't adequate health facilities to service their needs. Following on from this, if an Aboriginal patient is required to travel to Perth for health reasons, there isn't enough support or cultural sensitivity for the patient who is often left alone.

## Recommendations:

- Increasing funding to build/staff health facilities in rural communities and invest in training. Where this isn't possible, expand Telehealth services to minimise unnecessary travel.
- Implement metropolitan support systems for Aboriginal patients who are required to travel to Perth.

**Issue raised:**

Mental health and wellbeing is paramount, especially for children and youth. There is not enough support or access for young people suffering from mental health issues which leads to further problems such as drug and alcohol abuse. More broadly, people are being detained by the Mental Health Act which is perpetuating a cycle of incarceration over rehabilitation. There is a lack of mental health beds in hospitals, so Aboriginal people are being sent to prison instead of hospitals.

**Recommendations:**

- Mental health education needs to start at a young age and schools need to provide support services to kids.
- On country mental health facilities need more funding to provide adequate support to First Nations people and expand services to prevent incarceration.

## Education and Youth

### Issue raised:

Attendance in schools needs to be accountable to the school and not just the family. For many families the issue of getting kids to and from school is due to a lack of viable transport. On top of this, the process of enrolling an Aboriginal child in school is tough as proof of identity can be hard to find, filling out the form is difficult and uniform rules can be difficult to adhere to.

### Recommendations:

- Implement a school bus, accountable to the school, to pick kids up and drop them home.
- Have a community member as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer to check attendance of students and communicate with the families. Also use this Liaison Officer to help carers navigate enrolment forms and make the process of enrolment easier, as well as negotiate uniform agreements to stop kids being kicked out of class over and over again.

### Issue raised:

For many Aboriginal kids, Standard English is a second language. If this is never acknowledged, children aren't given the extra attention they need to bring their Standard English skills up to the curriculum standard and will consistently fall behind in their education.

### Recommendations:

- Reinforce to both students and schools that Standard English is more often than not a second language and encourage them to tick the box that acknowledges that.
- Place adequate funding and resources on the volume of students that have English as a second language.

### Issue raised:

Aboriginal culture needs to be taught in schools from a young age. There is still a gap in cultural education for all Australians in regards to language and traditions. A lack of education is perpetuating a lot of prejudices against Aboriginal Australians.

Similarly, First Nations kids need to be taught how to live and operate in coexistence with a Western society while still being proud of their culture. How do we balance learning western culture on top of our own?



**Recommendations:**

- Ensure the Western Australian Curriculum has a comprehensive and appropriate cultural learning program, which is led by people from the community. This will break stigma and bring forward a greater cultural understanding.
- Schools need to adopt a process of Two-Way Learning that teaches Aboriginal kids how to operate in Western society while still maintaining a strong sense of pride in their heritage.

**Issue raised:**

Children who aren't stimulated or engaged are the ones who end up on the street or in prison, which leads to further complications with mental health and substance abuse. This occurs when kids are either not in school or is left alone outside of school hours.

For reasons outside of their control, kids are left without a home that is safe for them to go to, this also leads them to the streets and to prison with long term effects on their health.

**Recommendation:**

- We need to allocate funding into after school programs for kids that encompasses not just school work but life skill building and creativity as well. It needs to be accessible to everyone and stimulate children until they can be taken home by a carer.
- There needs to be a youth safe space or a community hub with adequate resources for young people to go to when a situation prevents them from going home. The safety and wellbeing of our youth is paramount and money must be channelled into getting them off the streets and out of prisons.

**Issue raised:**

Many Aboriginal kids are suffering from mental health issues and are unaware that this is the case or are unable to get help due to a lack of facilities. This lack of facilities for treating or housing kids is causing an influx of children being taken out of the Pilbara and to Perth which should be avoided at all costs.

**Recommendations:**

- Implement a mental health program in schools to educate kids on how to take care of their mental health and spot the signs of mental illnesses.
- Increase the number of mental health facilities able to treat young people in the community.

- Reinforce that removing children from their home and taking them to Perth for help is always the last resort.

**Issue raised:**

There are a lot of social and economic barriers for Aboriginal people in seeking adult education and training. If we want people to be trained and enter the workforce we need to make it accessible.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase the number of courses that can be delivered on country.
- Lower the cost for TAFE courses.