# Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

## ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

### Homelessness in Australia

### Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

**Department/Agency:** National Indigenous Australians Agency
**Topic:** Homelessness and Severe Overcrowding in Urban and Regional Areas

**Senator:** Ramsey
**Question reference number:** 0002
**Type of question:** Hansard, page 12, 7 July 2020
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**Number of pages:** 4

**Question:**

**Mr RAMSEY: …** I am also the member representing all of the remote Indigenous communities in South Australia. The issues around Indigenous housing on Indigenous land concern me. I'm seeking clarification. Page 28 of the department's submission talks about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, saying they are half as likely to own their own home, five times as likely to be in social housing and 10 times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous Australians. Do you have a breakdown on the difference between remote Indigenous communities and urban Indigenous communities? I make the point that they can't own their own homes when they are on remote Indigenous lands, which I think is a tragedy in itself, but it's something that is going to take longer to fix. Does that then qualify the fact that they are in social housing, because they don't own their homes? Are your stats across that and can they give any more advice on the conditions of housing in those communities? I've now been the member for 12½ years, and the standard of housing stock and the numbers have increased quite substantially, but I would say there are still some real issues with overcrowding.

**Mr Bulman:** There's a bit in that. I'll start with your comments on homeownership in Aboriginal lands. In the remote areas, the Aboriginal lands of South Australia, it's communally owned tenure. That makes it very difficult for individuals to secure a parcel of land and get a mortgage like some other Australians on different tenure types can. Across some areas of Australia, such as Northern Territory and parts of Queensland, we're doing land reform which enables long-term leasing arrangements—99 years, for example—to enable homeownership on Indigenous lands, Aboriginal lands, throughout the country. Like you say, it's an important area of reform if we're going to do homeownership.

In South Australia I don't have the breakdown between, say, homelessness and severe overcrowding between urban areas and regional areas—say, Port Augusta and Adelaide. I can take that on notice and work with my colleagues in DSS. Based on the 2016 census for remote areas in South Australia, and making an estimation of the population growth in those remote areas of South Australia, we estimate there are around 115 additional houses required, predominantly across the APY Lands.

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The housing was returned in 2008 from small Indigenous community housing organisations to the state government, and they've been responsible for the maintenance and repairs and tenancy management of those houses for the last decade or so. We don't have a detailed breakdown of the condition of the housing, given it's a state responsibility, but we do know from our regional presence, our team out in the field, that there is still a large amount of overcrowding and disrepair in some of those houses. We work with the South Australian government as much as possible on that, noting that in the last financial year we provided $37½ million to the government of South Australia to take ongoing responsibility for remote housing. That was at the end of a 10-year partnership agreement with that state to provide housing infrastructure. Mr Ramsey, I hope I covered everything there, but let me know if there is anything else on that front.

**Mr RAMSEY:** I would be interested in any further information. I worry that incomplete views could lead to inconsistent or erroneous allocation of resources. I think it's fairly important that we understand the differences in these communities.

**Answer:**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from the 2016 Census shows nationally the majority of Indigenous Australians reside in urban and regional areas[1] and disproportionally experience homelessness across Australia. Severe overcrowding, as a form of homelessness, is greatest in remote regions[2]. In very remote areas of South Australia, as Table 1 below shows, severe overcrowding accounts for the vast majority of homelessness.

ABS data from the 2016 Census shows the type of accommodation also varies with remoteness. In major cities and regional areas of South Australia, as shown in Table 2 below, just over half (54 per cent) of Indigenous residents own a house outright, have a mortgage or reside in private rental accommodation. However, in very remote areas of South Australia, more than two-thirds (70 per cent) of Indigenous Australians reside in state housing authority or community housing accommodation. Overall across South Australia, just over a quarter (27 per cent) of Indigenous Australians reside in state housing, noting most Indigenous Australians (85 per cent) live in major cities and regional areas with 15 per cent in remote and very remote areas.

**Table 1: Number of Indigenous Australians experiencing homelessness\* in South Australia by Remoteness Areas\*\***

|  | **Major Cities** | **Inner Regional** | **Outer Regional** | **Remote** | **Very Remote** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All homelessness, includes severe overcrowding | 402 | 24 | 143 | 32 | 330 |
| Severe overcrowding | 35 | 0 | 37 | 0 | 309 |

\*See Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition at:
https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Appendix12016?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view=

\*\* See Figure 1.

The ABS has provided the following footnotes for Table 1:

[1] ABS, *2076.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,* 2016

[2] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness*, 2019

Data from Table Builder | 2016 Census - Counting Persons, Estimating Homelessness
OPGP Homelessness Operational Groups and RA by INGP Indigenous Status
Counting: Person Records
Note: Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. No reliance should be placed on small cells

## Table 2: Housing tenure and landlord type for Indigenous Australians in South Australia by Remoteness Areas

| Housing tenure and landlord type | Major Cities | Inner Regional | Outer Regional | Remote | Very Remote | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Owned outright | 1,286 | 390 | 666 | 111 | 125 | **2,578** |
| Owned with a mortgage | 4,496 | 1,187 | 1,636 | 258 | 167 | **7,744** |
| Rented: Real estate agent | 3,979 | 823 | 1,284 | 208 | 140 | **6,434** |
| Rented: State or territory housing authority | 4,197 | 571 | 1,995 | 324 | 2,004 | **9,091** |
| Rented: Community housing, co-operative or church group | 474 | 69 | 249 | 71 | 645 | **1,508** |
| Rented: Other (e.g. person not in same household; caravan park or employer provided accommodation; and where landlord not stated) | 1,899 | 391 | 832 | 234 | 221 | **3,577** |
| Other tenure type (e.g. occupied rent free or life tenure scheme) | 121 | 19 | 48 | 8 | 30 | **226** |
| Tenure type not stated | 658 | 120 | 352 | 41 | 258 | **1,429** |
| Tenure type not applicable (e.g. non-private dwellings, including hospitals and hostels) | 820 | 108 | 386 | 107 | 169 | **1,590** |
| **Total** | **17,926** | **3,673** | **7,446** | **1,355** | **3,759** | **34,159** |

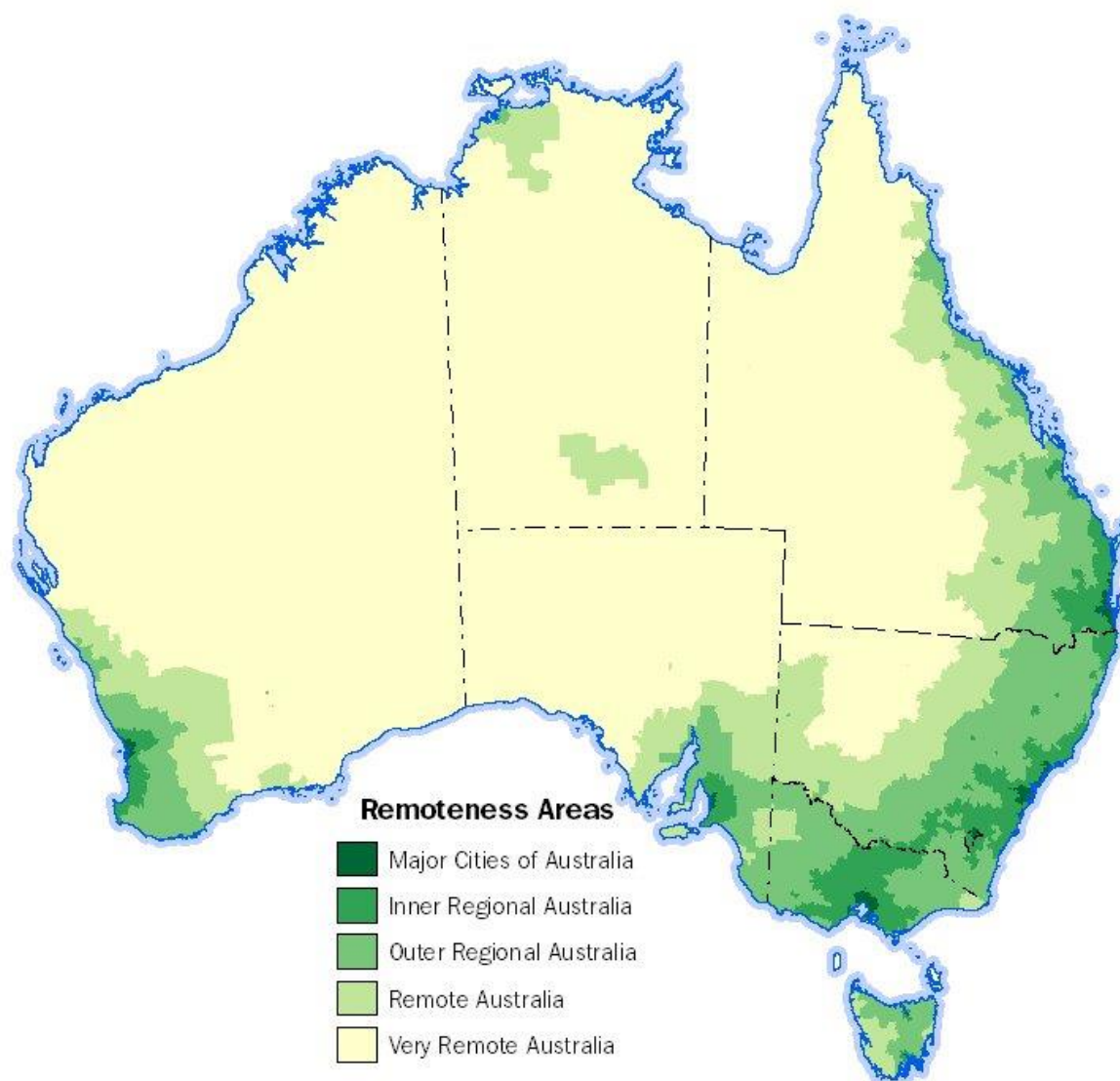The ABS has provided the following footnotes for Table 2:

Data from Table Builder | 2016 Census - Counting Persons, Estimating Homelessness
TENLLD Tenure and Landlord Type by INGP Indigenous Status and RA
Counting: Person Records
Note: Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. No reliance should be placed on small cells

**Figure 1: Remoteness Areas in Australia**



The ABS uses 'Remoteness Areas' to divide Australia into five classes of remoteness on the basis of a measure of relative access to services. Access to services are measured using the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), produced by the Hugo Centre for Population and Housing. This objective process for classifying Remoteness Areas creates consistency between different editions of Remoteness Areas despite changes to the boundaries. This allows users to make comparisons and undertake statistical analysis on data published on Remoteness Areas over time.