

*Final Report*

# **Categories of Indigenous 'homeless' people and good practice responses to their needs**

authored by

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Research Subjects and Assumptions

This research is concerned with the phenomenon of Indigenous homelessness in Australia. A reading of the homelessness literature clearly demonstrates the difficulties of conceptualising both non-Indigenous 'homelessness' and Indigenous 'homelessness' (Memmott et al 2003). The most visible Indigenous 'homeless' people are small groups who live in public places, socialising, sheltering, drinking, arguing and fighting in public. This occurs despite the existence a range of Indigenous housing options and the advent of formal Town Camps in many regional centres throughout the late 20th century (especially post 1970). Although these people are often categorised as 'homeless', a number see themselves as being both 'placed' and 'homed', and prefer instead to refer to themselves with such labels as 'parkies', 'goomies', 'long grassers', 'ditchies' or 'river campers'. They are public place dwellers who identify with particular public or semi-public places as their 'home' environment, usually conforming to a 'beat' of such places where they camp and socialise. In certain contexts the current authors believe 'public place dwelling' should be the nomenclature preferred over such words as 'homeless' or 'itinerant', because the latter terms have specific, and sometimes narrowly construed, meanings that are not always helpful in analysis and strategic thinking.

The way Indigenous 'homelessness' is defined or categorised influences the types of response strategies that are implemented by Indigenous organisations, and government and non-government agencies to address this phenomenon (Memmott et al 2002). The types of services that 'parkies' or 'Long Grassers' may want or need are not necessarily concerned with housing or accommodation issues.

Most important to an understanding of homelessness in general, is the idea that it may not necessarily be defined as a lack of accommodation. A person may have a sense of 'home,' and a sense of belonging to a place (or set of places), and recognition and acceptance in such a place, but nevertheless may not have any conventional accommodation. Public spaces may come to be equated with 'home'. Homelessness can then be redefined as losing one's sense of control over, or legitimacy in the public spaces where one lives. (Coleman 2000B:40).

This definition of 'home' fits precisely the context of classical or pre-contact Aboriginal Australia where 'home' was country, cultural landscape and the repertoire of places in it. Residency could be at any one of a range of campsites and if shelter was required it could be constructed with minimal effort. Home was a place or set of places, not a building. In terms of contemporary Indigenous public place dwellers, the forging of strong connections to particular locations may be particularly marked and bound up with concepts of 'spiritual homelessness' and dispossession (Memmott et al 2003:18).

### *Research Aims*

This AHURI research project had several aims. The first aim was to examine the definitions and constructs of 'Indigenous homelessness' found in the literature and to develop a more useful set of categories based on the complex range of circumstances and needs of 'the homeless' and 'public place dwellers'.

Each category of Indigenous homelessness in fact generates a particular set of needs, such as accommodation, health, transport, security of identity, and alcohol counselling, which can in turn inform the design of service responses to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling.

One of the problems of categorisation is that when applying certain definitions of 'homelessness' the composition of Indigenous groups dwelling in public spaces may be oversimplified and thus their needs may be at best misunderstood and minimally serviced, or at worst, overlooked and not addressed. The categories used to define 'homeless' people may thus directly influence the perception of the needs of this group.

To overcome this problem, the second aim of the research project was to clarify further the relation between categories of Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling on the one hand, and categories of responses to the needs of such people on the other.

In the process of conducting this analysis, the third aim was to identify and profile a number of good practice response strategies, which were being used to address the needs of particular categories of homeless or public place dwelling Indigenous people.

Four service responses were assessed by the researchers as 'good practice' examples from preliminary investigation, and subsequently visited and profiled.

- Brisbane City Council's Public Space Liaison Officer (Qld),
- Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation's Homeless Person's Drop-In Centre (Qld),
- Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne University of Technology (TAFE) Outreach Worker Training Strategy (Vic),
- Port Hedland Sobering Up Centre and Homeless Support Service (W.A).

### *Categories of Indigenous Homelessness*

In this analysis three broad categories of Indigenous homelessness are defined. To generate the first two categories of 'homelessness' a distinction is made between those without a house and those with a house. This leads into the first category of public place dwelling (being without a house, however temporary that might be), as well as the second category which is a state of having a house (however temporary) but being 'at risk' of losing that house or its amenity. The third broad category is spiritual homelessness. The first two categories are broken down further, resulting in the following classification:

1. *Public place dwellers*. Living in a mix of public or semi-public places (as well as some private places, which are entered illegally at night to gain overnight shelter) eg parks, churches, verandahs, carparks, car sales yards (under cars), beaches, drains, riverbanks, vacant lots, dilapidated buildings.
  - 1.1 *Public place dwellers – voluntary, short-term intermittent*. These people are often staying in conventional accommodation (eg a relative's house) and may have their own residence in a rural or remote settlement. When they socialise in public urban places, they may or may not decide to camp out overnight, usually with others, despite the availability of their accommodation.
  - 1.2 *Public place dwellers – voluntary, medium-term*. Residing continually in public places (including overnight); acknowledge they have another place of residence in a home community but uncertain if and when they will return.
  - 1.3 *Public place-dwellers – voluntary, long-term (chronic homeless)*. Residing continually in public places (including overnight); it is unclear whether it is possible for such individuals to readily reconcile with their home community/family due to a range of emotional barriers; they have come to regard a beat of public places as their 'home'.
  - 1.4 *Public place-dwellers - Reluctant and by necessity*. Residing continually in public places, and who
    - (a) Wish to return home but need to remain in urban area due to a service need or to support a hospitalised relative or similar; or
    - (b) Wish to return home but no funds for travel and/or capacity to organise travel.
- 2.0 *Those at risk of homelessness*. At risk of losing one's house or of losing the amenity of one's house.
  - 2.1 *Insecurely housed people*. Residing in adequate housing but under threat of loss of such; lack of security of occupancy; possibly due to circumstances of poverty.

- 2.2 *People in sub-standard housing.* Persons whose housing is of a sub-standard architectural quality, possibly unsafe or unhealthy housing
- 2.3 *People experiencing crowded housing.* Persons whose housing is crowded, but crowding should be defined as involving considerable stress (and not assumed by density measures alone).
- 2.4 *Dysfunctionally mobile persons.* In a state of continual or intermittent residential mobility including temporary residence (eg crisis accommodation) that is a result of personal and/or social problems (eg violence, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of safety or security in a social sense, personality or 'identity crisis', lack of emotional support and security).
- 3.0 *Spiritually homeless people.* A state arising from either (a) separation from traditional land, (b) separation from family and kinship networks, or (c) a crisis of personal identity wherein one's understanding or knowledge of how one relates to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused

### *Categories of Responses*

In fulfilling the second aim, the terms 'response categories' and 'response types' are defined as referring to a broad range of initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of people who are homeless and/or residing in public places. These include philosophies, policies, programs, services, strategies, methodologies, legislations and other activities.

Fifteen response categories were documented and defined by the authors as part of a previous study (funded by FaCS) drawing on a list of 73 responses contained in the report "A National Analysis of Strategies Used to Respond to Indigenous Itinerants and Public Place Dwellers" (Memmott et al 2002:63-68).

1. Legislative approaches.
2. Patrols and Outreach services.
3. Diversionary Strategies.
4. Addressing Anti-Social Behaviours.
5. Philosophies and methods of interaction.
6. Alcohol strategies.
7. Regional strategies.
8. Accommodation options.
  - 8.1 Emergency or crisis accommodation.
  - 8.2 Medium-term transitional housing.
  - 8.3 Long-term housing with management support.
9. Dedicated service centres and gathering places.
10. The physical design of public spaces.
11. Education strategies.
12. Phone-in services.
13. Skills and training for field and outreach workers.
14. Partnerships.
15. Holistic approaches.

### *Relationships Between Categories*

The observations made about the relevance of particular response strategies to particular categories of homeless people allows for the tabulation of these two sets of variables, which allows the relationships to be examined. A number of specific conclusions can be made. Firstly there is one set of ten response strategies that pertain largely to public place dwellers, comprising:

Legislative and police approaches	(1)
Patrols and outreach services	(2)
Diversionsary strategies	(3)
Addressing anti-social behaviour	(4)
Alcohol strategies	(6)
Emergency or crisis accommodation	(8.1)
Service centres and gathering places	(9)
Physical design of public places	(10)
Public education strategies	(11)
Training outreach workers	(13)

To effectively plan and implement this divergent set of reactive and proactive strategies, it would seem to be essential that a peak body (preferably with majority Indigenous community control) take responsibility for co-ordination of the traditional police and local authority roles, and those of Indigenous service organisations, charitable bodies, traditional owner groups, urban design authorities and crisis accommodation agencies.

There are three service response strategies in Table 2 that pertain largely to the 'housed-but-at-risk' categories:

Emergency or crisis accommodation	(8.1)
Medium-term transitional housing	(8.2)
Long-term housing	(8.3)

These services have traditionally been provided by housing authorities and private sector housing, but it must be stressed that such housing needs to be culturally appropriate in relation to both its architectural design and its housing management aspects. With Indigenous consultation, a range of policies need to be devised and implemented, which cover household types, tenancy agreements, placements, arrears, and repairs and maintenance.

There is another set of three specific response strategies that can potentially create a bridge between all categories of homeless people:

Philosophies of client interaction	(2)
Regional strategies	(7)
Phone-in information services	(12)

One category of 'at risk' people, the dysfunctionally mobile, may move between both public place settings and housed-but-at-risk settings, and hence the response strategies that pertain to this group need to be drawn from almost all of the above categories. For example, public place patrols might be doubly effective if they are also on call and skilled to deal with tenancy conflicts in rental housing caused by extended family visitors.

The complexity and diversity of the above range and application of services explains why the last two service responses, partnerships (14) and holistic approaches (15) are desirable, if not essential.



Finally there are those who are spiritually homeless and require a differing set of response strategies again; these most likely being:

Philosophies of client interaction	(5)
Alcohol strategies	(6)
Regional strategies	(7)
Emergency or crisis accommodation	(8.1)
Public education strategies	(11)
Phone-in information services	(12)

It should be noted however, that this analysis should only be seen as a general guide. In the final analysis, which responses are relevant to a particular place or group will vary to some extent across the continent depending on the local environmental and socioeconomic context and the history of culture contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

An applied research aim of this paper is to disseminate these findings with assistance from AHURI, particularly to bring this framework of needs and responses to the attention of local authorities and politicians in regional centres who, due to lack of information about previous attempts and case studies, may persist in addressing the problem of public place dwelling with a futile law-and-order approach isolated from other necessary response strategies.

### *Research Gaps Identified*

Applied research gaps that have been identified in the course of this research in relation to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling people are as follows:

- The construct of spiritually homeless people.
- Indigenous crowding models.
- Residential mobility and household structure.
- Special needs of Indigenous mentally disturbed public place dwellers.
- Special needs of Indigenous youth who are homeless and/or public place dwellers (including the emerging problem of street gangs).
- The ongoing profiling and dissemination of good practice responses to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling.
- Evaluation studies of service responses, especially of the brave but rare attempts at dedicated service centres, gathering places and camping facilities in public places.
- Historico/legal/anthropological research into public place dwelling rights and native title camping rights.

### *Policy Implications*

An overview of the policy context relevant to Indigenous homelessness was provided in the Positioning Paper that was prepared in April 2003 as a part of this research project. This overview revealed that the complex nature of Indigenous homelessness was rarely enumerated in precise terms and that strategies were based on limited definitions of homelessness relating almost exclusively to housing and accommodation. It also showed that policy makers do however recognise that housing provision and management must be allied to other areas such as health, education, welfare and the criminal justice system in order to effectively address the needs of the homeless. What appears to be lacking is detail about how these links might be forged and maintained.

The findings of this Final Report have important implications for the development and reform of government policies—at local, state and national levels—which seek to address the diverse character of Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling, and the complex patterns of resulting need. Those findings related to the first category of Indigenous homelessness, that of public place dwellers, are vital to shedding light on the complex reality of Indigenous homelessness beyond the issue of housing and accommodation. Without this information, policy and the strategies that emerge from it will have little chance of long-term success in dealing with what is often one of the most controversial aspects of homelessness. The findings with regard to housing and accommodation highlight the importance of understanding cultural living patterns and practices as they relate to providing safe and secure residences and tenancies. This study has also made it clear that previously unrelated policy areas such as regional planning, urban planning, native title and cultural heritage are significant in addressing all the needs of homeless Indigenous Australians particularly those related to the concept of spiritual homelessness.

The categorisation of Indigenous homelessness and the profiling of responses to it, demonstrate the need for partnerships between Indigenous organizations and multiple levels and areas of governments in order to address all aspects of Indigenous homelessness. The analysis provides a basic model of what these interactions might entail, and provides valuable insights into what they might effectively achieve. By profiling the range of responses to Indigenous place dwelling and public homelessness as well as some good practice examples of same, it is expected that Indigenous and government agencies will have some useful models that might be adapted or used as benchmarks in the design of other local policies and programs.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with the phenomenon of Indigenous homelessness in Australia. A reading of the homelessness literature clearly demonstrates the difficulties of conceptualising both non-Indigenous 'homelessness' and Indigenous 'homelessness' (Memmott et al 2003). The most visible Indigenous 'homeless' people are small groups of Indigenous people who live in public places, socialising, sheltering, drinking, arguing and fighting in public. This is despite a range of Indigenous housing options and the advent of formal Town Camps in many regional centres throughout the late 20th century (especially post 1970). Although these people are often categorised as 'homeless', a number see themselves as being both 'placed' and 'homed', and prefer instead to refer to themselves with such labels as 'parkies', 'goomies', 'long grassers', 'ditchies' or 'river campers'. They are public place dwellers who identify with particular public or semi-public places as their 'home' environment, usually conforming to a 'beat' of such places where they camp and socialise. In certain contexts the current authors believe 'public place dwelling' should be the nomenclature preferred over such words as 'homeless' or 'itinerant', because the latter terms have specific, and sometimes narrowly construed, meanings that are not always helpful in analysis and strategic thinking.

The way Indigenous 'homelessness' is defined or categorised influences the types of response strategies that are implemented by Indigenous organisations, and government and non-government agencies to address this phenomenon (Memmott et al 2002). The types of services that 'parkies' or 'Long Grassers' may want or need are not necessarily concerned with housing or accommodation issues.

## 1.1 Project Aims

This AHURI research project had several aims. The first aim was to examine the definitions and constructs of 'Indigenous homelessness' found in the literature and to develop a more useful set of categories based on the complex range of circumstances and needs of 'the homeless' and 'public place dwellers'.

Each category of Indigenous homelessness in fact generates a particular set of needs, such as accommodation, health, transport, security of identity, and alcohol counselling, which can in turn inform the design of service responses to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling. The second aim was to match particular sets of service responses with particular needs categories of homelessness.

In the process of conducting this analysis, the third aim was to identify and profile a number of good practice response strategies, which were being used to address the needs of particular categories of homeless or public place dwelling Indigenous people.

## 1.2 Methodology

The first aim was addressed by compiling the literature on Indigenous homelessness. A lengthy working bibliography is to be found in the AHURI Positioning Paper (Memmott et al 2003) however the authors have added more items since its completion and they are contained in this report. Then a model of categories of Indigenous homeless people had to be built. Here the authors drew on the models already contained in the literature, particularly those produced by Olive (1992), Keys Young (1998), and Berry et al (2001). Additionally, the authors drew on all of the empirical studies or empirically-based government strategies concerning homeless Indigenous people that were available, especially those involving interviews with public place dwellers. Introductory summaries of these empirical studies follow, being from Alice Springs, Halls Creek (W.A.), Redfern, Cairns, Mt Isa, Townsville, Darwin and Adelaide.

The second project aim necessitated developing a model of service response categories. The principal author had started this task in 2000 and 2001 in the 'Darwin Long Grasser Study' (Memmott & Fantin 2001), and addressed it more systematically in a research study funded by FaCS in 2002<sup>1</sup> (Memmott et al 2002). This model was based on a national overview of 79 response strategies to Indigenous homeless, which resulted in 15 broad response categories being defined. These are outlined in Section 3.0 of this report, which also includes some of the material collected to fulfil the third aim of profiling some good practice examples. The methodology for selecting these good practices produced four profiled services:

1. Port Hedland Sobering Up Centre Group and Homeless Support Service – a holistic approach.
2. Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne University of Technology TAFE Outreach Worker Training Strategy.
3. Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation's Homeless Person's Drop In Centre – a Service Centre or Gathering Place.
4. Brisbane City Council Public Space Liaison Officer – a type of outreach service.

The methodology for selecting these projects commenced by sorting the types of responses being used in different centres around Australia into preferred and non-preferred approaches; preferred approaches being those that impacted positively on the needs of Indigenous homeless people. The following criteria were then taken into consideration when selecting the good practice case studies:

1. The strategy is currently implemented and has operated for a considerable amount of time.
2. The strategy appears to have a positive impact on the needs of Indigenous homeless people.
3. The strategy addresses specific/identified needs of homeless people.
4. The strategy considers socio-cultural issues.
5. Strategy is implemented or staffed by Indigenous people
6. Strategy is operated by a number of organisations in collaboration or the strategy operates successfully in association with other strategies.
7. Knowledge of this strategy is likely to benefit other organisations and knowledge of this strategy would have a significant and positive impact on policy development.
8. The agency/organisation operating the strategy is likely to participate in this survey.
9. The strategy identifies and/or responds to different categories of homelessness.

Returning to the outcomes of the second aim, the matching of response categories with needs categories occurs in Section 4 of this report.

### **1.3 The Empirical Studies**

Locating studies for analysis that report empirical findings on the Indigenous homeless population, in particular public place dwellers, has been difficult. The two common elements linking the studies listed below are that fieldwork was conducted to quantify the numbers of Indigenous homeless people living in the relevant locality, and their findings are focused on a particular location or region. In a number of cases they present a range of other useful data collected from interviews with and observations of Indigenous public place dwellers.

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<sup>1</sup> The Minister for FaCS was not ready to release this research at the time of writing the current report, but FaCS have provided permission for the authors to draw on it for the purposes of the current study, for which we are very grateful.

### 1.3.1 *River Campers, Alice Springs*

Since the mid-1970s, about 19 formal Aboriginal Town Camps have been established in Alice Springs with their own leases, housing and infrastructure. In addition, various informal camps have been established in public places and surrounding bushland, especially in the sandy beds of the Todd River and Charles Creek. In March 1990, local observers judged there was a higher number of campers in the Todd River bed than in previous decades (1960s, 1970s). The Alice Springs River Campers Survey was then undertaken over two weeks, revealing that between Middle Park and The Gap there was in the vicinity of 120 to 180 people in overnight residence. The numbers were greatly swelled by diurnal visitors. Taking into account all of the public place dwelling groups around the town, the total estimated nocturnal population was 253 persons distributed in 20 camps. Usually each group had a distinct tribal or language group identity, however, a detailed analysis of group membership and descent found that some individuals had a range of ties to different Central Australian groups (Memmott 1990:3,4).

The primary motive for people leading this lifestyle seems to have been a social one. Visiting and socialising with kinsmen and friends was obviously the major form of recreation for river campers, and it was often accompanied by drinking. Whereas alcohol was consumed in all camps, some camps had a strong reputation amongst the camping population as heavy drinking camps. An obvious practical reason for river camping was the low cost, compared to the cost of paying rent, electricity and water bills in a house, although no camper actually gave this as a reason while being interviewed. A number extolled the positive attributes of their camp sites – peace and quiet, ample firewood, sleeping under the stars, lack of rent, and lack of trouble because they were all ‘relatives’ (Memmott 1990:19,48,50).

The survey concluded that the majority of the campers were content, indeed happy with their residential lifestyle and setting, and did not wish to shift. None were interested in seeking conventional accommodation. Most campers recorded that they had no problems, including those involving the police. Being apprehended when drunk and fighting were accepted as part of their lifestyle (Memmott 1990:53).

### 1.3.2 *Visitors at Yardgee, Halls Creek, W.A.*

In an analysis (Memmott 1992) of the causes of the physical destruction and social demise of a rental housing precinct (Yardgee) in Halls Creek in the 1980s, a key factor was found to be the impact of visiting groups of desert visitors who stayed for indeterminate periods and who were prone to alcohol abuse and violence. Western Desert people visiting Halls Creek was facilitated by the travel experience and hospitality links with various remote communities generated through mobile ritual cycles. These facets were coupled with the increased mobility and affluence of Aboriginal people generally during the 1970s and 80s, as well as the upgrading of the Central Australian and Western Desert roads.

### 1.3.3 *The Cope Street Drinkers, Redfern, Sydney*

A group of Aboriginal drinkers established themselves as squatters in the old Black Theatre building in Cope Street, Redfern in c1984. The drinking group had previously identified with the Catholic Presbytery and before that, with a site in Lewis Street, Chippendale. According to various estimates, during this period the maximum size of the group, which was made up of core regulars and visitors, was 60. The Theatre building was burnt down and then its remains demolished in 1991. The core drinking group were then housed in nearby accommodation and only frequented the Cope Street site during the day, but their diurnal lifestyle of drinking and occasional anti-social behaviour resulted in public criticism. A survey of the drinkers was carried out in 1994 when their site was again threatened by plans for sale and/or redevelopment (Memmott 1994:36, 62-64).

The drinkers were not all locals; most had been in Redfern for varying lengths of time. According to one stakeholder the drinkers included many outcasts from other community groups, including a criminal element. Visitors were identified from places such as Wilcannia, Condobolin, Moree, Wellington, Bourke, Kempsey, Tabulam, Lismore, Nowra and Western Australia. One worker from a local Aboriginal Health Unit provided the following perception of the drinkers' group: "They talk and laugh and keep one another's spirits going. They don't see or know any future in their lives. Their lives involve a whole unique set of circumstances—very tragic circumstances. The lives of ordinary people in Sydney would never touch on even a small part of the tragedy of even one of these street people at Redfern" (Memcott 1994:62,63).

The drinkers group maintained a distinct sub-culture and drinking style of their own. When they opened a new flagon, they filled the bottle cap with wine and sprinkled it on the ground in memory of their 'brothers' and 'sisters' whom they had 'lost' on the site. When transport could be arranged, members of the group visited the graves of their deceased colleagues at Botany Cemetery. One man was buried with soil from the site. The unity of the group was further reflected in their rules for cadging drinkers money from passers-by. They most commonly did so by splitting up and positioning themselves in ones or twos along Lawson Street outside the various entrances to Redfern Station. If it was learnt that any individual retained any donations for him or herself, and did not contribute to the central pool of funds, he or she was banned from the group. Each year the drinkers fielded a team in an Aboriginal Touch Football competition in Redfern, enjoying the pride and status of social achievement. One local Minister spoke of a 'spiritual drawing power' of the Black Theatre Site to the drinkers' group. There was a strong emotional connection between the drinkers and the site. (Memcott 1994:63).

#### 1.3.4 *Parkies, Cairns*

A 1994 survey of the Cairns parkie population found it fluctuated in size and composition according to circumstance and season. While not all parkies identified as having problems with alcohol, many did. The Cairns parkies could be identified as two major groupings: those people from communities in the East Cape York region and those from West Cape York. Each had a distinctly different beat of public and semi-public land. Both groups had a core of about 20 people, with both men and women aged between 20 and 40 (women comprised a quarter of the overall population). 70% stated their preferred place to live as Cairns, even though about half considered their birthplaces to be their home (Dillon & Savage 1994:4,6).

Some people had voluntarily chosen to come to Cairns for family reasons, to achieve a better life, escape problems at home, for a holiday, or to find work. Others came for semi-voluntary reasons: medical treatment, training courses, court appearances, meetings, or following gaol release. The reasons given for occupying the parks included: failure to meet accommodation requirements, lack of access to formal housing, inability to maintain income or budget, a desire to live in a larger group than catered for in suburban dwellings, a preference to be closer to certain facilities, and a preference for camping out (Dillon & Savage 1994:4,5).

Further data from 2002-03 further characterised the Cairns parkies nine years later. 74 people were living in nine camps from various Cape York communities, the largest number being from Lockhart River; another 60 people socialised in Munro Martin Park but were said not to be homeless. This group relocated their venue at the time of the survey due to police pressure (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:7,8,11)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The Queensland Government reports for Cairns, Mt Isa, and Townsville (Qld, DATSIP 2003B,C,D) are based on recent information from a range of local sources but contain no methodological details about how the data was collected.

### 1.3.5 *Riverbank Campers, Mt Isa*

Following a survey in 2001 (Durnan 2001), data on Mt Isa river campers was updated in early 2003. At that time, reasons given for people becoming homeless in Mt Isa were: experiencing dislocation from home community (eg due to death, community dispute or domestic violence); coming for legal or medical reasons and becoming stranded; eviction from accommodation; pursuing long-term transient lifestyle for variety of reasons; visiting friends or relatives and homeless for short periods; and spending social time with homeless people and living rough even after having obtained accommodation. During major social events in Mt Isa the homeless population increases; for example when the Mt Isa Show and Rodeo is on, during school holidays, at Christmas, and when funerals are held. Visitors often cannot afford to stay in motels and choose to stay with family or friends, some of whom reside in the riverbed (Qld, DATSIP 2003C: 4-5).

People gather in the afternoons in local parks under trees, and in other cool and shaded places in the City area. Some are homeless, but others are resident in Mt Isa. There are three to four favoured camping locations, all of which are in close proximity to the Leichhardt River. Each gathering location had the following characteristics: shade trees and grass under and upon which people could sit, eat, drink and talk; access to water; areas for meeting and sleeping; areas for privacy; access to essential services; access to hotels; and closeness to the CBD (Qld, DATSIP 2003C: 5).

### 1.3.6 *Parkies, Townsville*

Early studies of the Townsville parkies (eg Hale 1996) were updated in 2002-03 with new data by the Queensland Government. Major causes of homelessness in Townsville were identified as: alcohol abuse, overcrowded houses, breakdown of family life and values, lack of parental and individual responsibility, dysfunctional parenting, extended families unable to cope, erosion of Indigenous culture, lack of awareness of affordable accommodation and shelter, domestic violence, unemployment, health problems including mental illness, eviction, alcohol and drug problems, physical or developmental disability, and loss of social support networks (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:3,9).

Homeless groups ranged from couples and families to larger groups. At one point 12 different camping sites were identified as being in existence. The majority were from Palm Island, but others were from the Northern Territory, Mornington Island, Mt Isa, Doomadgee, the Gulf, the Cape, Cherbourg, Brisbane and the Torres Strait. (An increase in the number of people from Palm Island was attributed to recent crackdowns on alcohol consumption, housing problems and family feuds). The minority said they had never had a house or desired one, but the majority expressed preference to sleep in more formal accommodation or shelter and move out of their existing lifestyle (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:9,10,15).

### 1.3.7 *'Long Grassers', Darwin*

For some decades, the lifestyle of Aboriginal public-place dwellers or itinerants in Darwin and its surrounds, known locally as 'long grassers', has been a contentious and constantly recurring public issue. A survey was carried out between January and April 2001 during the wet season. It aimed at understanding who they were, why they were 'in the long grass' and whether they perceived themselves as having problems such as unmet health and accommodation needs, and difficulties with authorities and obtaining transport back to home communities. Of the 52 itinerants who were interviewed, 26 said they had been 'sleeping out' and leading their 'long-grass' lifestyle for five years or less, whilst 22 had been leading it for between 5 and 20+ years. Chronic or lifetime itinerancy and homelessness was obviously a reality for this latter group. The 52 interviewees gave details of the membership of their itinerant groups, suggesting a total of 227 people lived the 'long-grass' lifestyle. Note that this figure should not be seen as a census total, as the data were collected at three different time periods. A calculated impression was gained by the survey's authors of there being approximately 150 to 200

itinerants sleeping out overnight at any one time, but that this population underwent a degree of transformation from month to month as short-term itinerants came and went. Group structures were quite variable, ranging from individuals who preferred to remain on their own with limited social interaction, to couples and family groups, and larger groups. Most of the 227 'itinerants' had originated in communities from a diversity of places across the Northern Territory, whereas 16 had interstate origins (WA, Qld, NSW). The greatest numbers of people came from Maningrida (36), Wadeye (32), Milingimbi (24), and Galiwin'ku (20). In terms of the age of itinerants, most respondents were in their 30s or 40s. Seven were in their 50s and only one was in his 60s. Of the 52 respondents, 34 were male and 18 were female (Memcott & Fantin 2001).

People had come to live this way for a variety of reasons. Some migrated to a regional or capital city from their home communities looking for work. Others desired some kind of change and to see the city's 'bright lights'. Still more came from dry communities to 'chase grog' or 'action', or to escape a range of problems in their home communities, such as violence and racial discrimination. Some came to support sick or disabled relatives undergoing treatment. Certain people wished to return to their communities of origin but did not have the resources to do so (Memcott & Fantin 2001:72).

### *1.3.8 Indigenous Youth, Adelaide*

A study of Aboriginal youth homelessness in metropolitan Adelaide during c2001 was based on 19 interviews with homeless youth, as well as nine developed case studies. Mostly, young people came from families in which patterns of alcohol and substance abuse were prevalent. For about half of them, substance abuse behaviours were also major issues for them. Usage of alcohol and drugs was influenced by 'being uptown' and the street lifestyle, and was connected to peer influence, availability and boredom. It was identified that family, particularly 'cousins', formed the basis of peer networks (Allwood & Rogers 2001:58,59,67).

The survey found that the families of those young people were highly disadvantaged and faced extremely complex and chronic issues, and had minimal capacity to provide care and support to children. The young people had complex and multi-dimensional needs ranging from health through housing, support and education. Of particular concern were their difficulties in accessing adequate food; high levels of alcohol and substance abuse; rough sleeping; emotional distress; difficult behaviour; and (for females) sexual health and parenting issues. All were early school leavers, lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. Other problems were drug-related prostitution, health problems related to substance abuse, chronic health problems and mental illness. Commonly the boys were clients of the statutory welfare sector either because of prior offending or care and protection issues (Allwood & Rogers 2001:3,4).

The following section revisits these empirical studies to reveal how they contribute to the definition and/or categorization of Indigenous homeless or public place dwelling persons.



## 2. CATEGORIES OF INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

In this part of the analysis three different 'states' of Indigenous homelessness are examined in a broad manner. To practically achieve this in a relatively short paper, the causes or pathways into homelessness or public place dwelling—which nevertheless are an important and legitimate subject of research in their own right—need to be excluded from the analysis. In this analysis the authors are in the first instance, guided by previous attempts in the literature to define categories of Indigenous homelessness. They are also mindful that the effort to generate categories should lead to a meaningful consideration of response strategies in relation to the needs of such people.

To generate the first two broad categories of 'homelessness' a distinction is made between those without a house and those with a house. The first broad category of public place dwelling is therefore defined as being without a house; however temporary this situation might be. The second category is the state of having a house (however temporary the tenure) but being 'at risk' of losing that house or the amenity of the house.<sup>3</sup> The third broad category is spiritual homelessness.

(Note that a summary description of these categories is to be found in Table 1 (following) and that there is a correspondence between the subsection references in this part of the text and the category numbers in the Table.)

### 2.1 Public Place Dwellers

Public place dwellers live in a mix of public or semi-public places (as well as some private places which are entered illegally at night to gain overnight shelter) such as: parks, churches, verandahs, car parks, car sales yards, beaches, drains, river banks, vacant lots, dilapidated buildings, and those on the edges of small towns. These people can be divided into four sub-categories; the first three being voluntary states and the fourth being involuntary. They will be described in turn.

#### 2.1.1 *Public place-dwellers: short-term, intermittent and voluntary*

Short-term public place-dwellers are often staying in conventional accommodation—for example, a relative's house—and may have their own residence in a rural or remote settlement or an outer suburb of a large city. When they socialise in public urban places, they may decide to camp out overnight, usually with other more permanent public place dwellers, despite the availability of their conventional accommodation. Such individuals often come to town to have a good time socialising and drinking, but intend to eventually return home (either within the same city or in regional communities). They do not necessarily have any strong sense of attachment to the public places in which they reside (Memmott et al 2003:27).

Many people in this sub-category may simply be diurnal visitors. For example, when the survey of public place dwellers was carried out at Cope Street in Redfern during 1994, all of the group had overnight accommodation and only gathered there during the day (although core members had formerly squatted on the site). There was a daily pattern of site usage wherein there may have been no persons there in the early mornings but by the middle of the day a sizeable group had congregated on the site, of whom only about six were 'hard-core' local drinkers. Their numbers swelled to a maximum of 30 when visitors joined them, for example by train from Mt Druitt and Campbelltown when using the nearby Aboriginal Medical Service. "We like to look after our visitors; make them feel good; let them mix in with us; have a drink with us". The busiest day was Pension Day when a large drinking session was followed by card games. From time to time there were itinerants from all over Australia; "national visitors to Redfern" as one person put it (Memmott 1994:62,63).

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<sup>3</sup> Also refer to the Positioning Paper (Memmott et al 2003:13-14) for a summary discussion of the history of homelessness in Australia, and research and policy relating to it.

The Alice Springs river camps experienced an influx of Aboriginal visitors from town camps, rented town houses, hostels and from bush communities; both day trippers and those staying for a week or more. During the day, the riverbed became a thriving social venue. Kinsmen from all social niches were to be found mixing together. The researcher met some publicly respected Aboriginal leaders and citizens in the riverbed and many of their relatives<sup>4</sup>. A by-product of this pattern of daytime movement and visitation was that the discrete domiciliary social structure and camp territoriality prevalent in the early morning become relatively invisible as the day went on. Various individuals would attend drinking parties, become intoxicated, and end up sleeping under bushes. Thus the social pattern was even more complex and confused. What the public may have seen from the riverbank were not the campers per se, but an aggregate of people who may have come from all quarters of town, and from various walks of life. In some cases the long-term river campers were being visited by their relatives who came either from bush communities or other parts of town where they resided in conventional housing. The survey identified various sub-groups who had come from dry bush communities for a 'drinking holiday' planned to last a few months. These visits were also sometimes intended to include attendance at the Easter football carnival, at a medical facility for treatment of a child or other relative, or at a meeting (eg an education meeting). (Memmott 1990:41).

Also in Darwin, a category of 'Long Grassers' was identified who resided for an indeterminate period of time but who intended to return to their home communities. Such visitors were found to reside in or attach themselves to Town Camps, rental house residents, hostels and public place dwelling groups as well as moving between all of these. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:60-62).

In Cairns there was a component of the 'part-time' parkie population who had homes in the suburbs but spent some of their time in the parks and sometimes even camped out overnight. They had often been 'full-time' parkies in the past. (Dillon & Savage 1994:6, Qld, DATSIP 2003B:5). According to recent data on Mt Isa riverbank dwellers, only 20% were there because they had no other accommodation options; and the remaining 80% had residential addresses either in Mt Isa or a neighbouring community (Qld, DATSIP 2003C:4). In Brisbane short-term public place dwellers include people who occupy boarding houses or hostels overnight and join large social groups during the day.

Public place dwelling groups are thus likely to comprise a core of permanent public place dwellers and some of these short-term visitors who become temporarily attached.

### *2.1.2 Public place-dwellers: medium-term, voluntary*

This category of public place dwellers reside continually in public places (including overnight), acknowledge that they have another place of residence in a home community or outer suburb, but are uncertain if and when they will return.

For example, most 'Long Grassers' surveyed in Darwin were merely visitors at some time, but for a significant proportion their intentions of returning to their home community had eventually changed and they became semi-permanent dwellers in Darwin's public places (Memmott & Fantin 2001:49,61-62).

### *2.1.3 Public place-dwellers: long-term (chronically homeless), voluntary*

This sub-category comprises those who live a permanent public place dwelling lifestyle, have cut off their ties with home communities long ago, and who accept that their lifestyle will remain consistent. They have a sense of belonging to a local place and to the shifting community of public place dwellers with whom they socialise. They have

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<sup>4</sup> "On one day, the Centralian Advocate carried a story about a Central Australian Aborigine who had college qualifications and who worked as a lecturer for NT tertiary institutions. He was pictured in his graduation robes. On the same day, the researcher found him with a group of countrymen consuming cans of beer that were refrigerated with ice in a five gallon drum. He wrote statements in the author's field book on the local Dreaming sites. The point is that for many town Aborigines, the river [was] not a social barrier, but an attractive social venue to mix up with people, relax and drink and catch up on news." (Memmott 1990:41.)

come to regard a beat of public places as their 'home'. The people in this sub-category are equivalent to the chronically homeless as defined in the mainstream literature (Coleman 2000B:4,56,169) who are defined not just by the application of a fixed time criterion but also by evidence that acceptance of, or adaptation to homelessness has occurred. Long-term or chronic homelessness becomes established when homelessness ceases to be a crisis event, and becomes an accepted way of life. This group may see recognition of their rights to public space and access to storage and ablution facilities as higher priorities than conventional accommodation. Their failed attempts in the public housing sector will have been left many years behind them. It is unclear whether it is possible for such individuals to readily reconcile with their home community and/or family due to a range of emotional barriers (Memmott et al 2003:18,27).

In a similar vein, Chamberlain and Johnson consider the notion of the 'homeless career' (2000B). Such a term "draws attention to the fact that people go through various stages before they develop a self-identity as a homeless person" (Snow and Anderson 1993:273 cited in Chamberlain and Johnson 2000B:1-2). The paper further states that it is often "difficult to help people who have made the transition to chronic homelessness, because they no longer express a strong disposition to change their lifestyle..." (Chamberlain and Johnson 2000B:3). Approaches, which fail to recognise that these public place dwellers do not want to be readily reintegrated into the mainstream, or even into their original home communities, can have little real success in improving their quality of life (Memmott et al 2003:18,26).

Thus, in 1990, the Alice Springs River camper groups ranged in size from 2 to 30 and were typically composed of a core set of relatively permanent campers (perhaps only a few individuals) who were identified with the campsite, together with a range of relatives or extended kin, some of whom were short-term (perhaps only diurnal) visitors. It was found that one camp leader had experienced 50 years of intermittent camping in various parts of Charles Creek; and one particular camp had been in regular intermittent use for 30 years by several generations of campers.

Again 'Long Grass' groups in Darwin were found to often comprise a core of permanent public place dwellers and a number of visitors who were temporarily attached. The core group of permanent public place dwellers might number only two, three or four people whilst the attached visitors could swell the group to ten, fifteen or twenty on occasions (Memmott et al 2003:22).

In Townsville the view was put forward that the community had to accept that some homeless people were happy with their outdoor lifestyle, especially those with more traditional backgrounds who chose to sleep rough, and that certain patterns of mobility represent a way of life not necessarily an expression of a problem (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:11).

#### *2.1.4 Public place-dwellers: reluctant, necessitated by circumstances*

Two main sub-groups in this category are: (a) those who wish to return home but need to remain in an urban area to access service or support for a hospitalised relative or friend; and (b) those who wish to return home but who have no immediate transport option, no funds for travel and/or the capacity to organise their travel. In the latter case these individuals may be waiting until their next welfare payment can be arranged. They may well have recently been discharged from hospital or released from prison. They may not even be drinkers but nevertheless find security with their kinspeople in public places<sup>5</sup>. Keys Young (1998:iv) defined this category as involving a "Lack of access to any stable shelter, accommodation or housing - literally having 'nowhere to go' - which is regarded as the worst form of homelessness."

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<sup>5</sup> People of this sub-category are also to be found in Adelaide's parks ... (p.c. E. Grant, University of South Australia, 21/7/03). "One of the deaths on West Terrace [was] where the gentleman was released from hospital and was killed trying to cross the six lane terrace to get to the urban camp in the parklands."

Thus in Alice Springs many of the campers came into town for a variety of reasons (hospital, shopping, etc) with every intention of returning, but got involved in river campers' drinking, missed their return lift and became stranded (the longest delays of this type that were recorded were one couple waiting a month and another for four months for a lift back to their home communities (Memmott1990:50).

A report on the Cairns parkies states that care needs to be exercised in assuming people are "satisfied with their lifestyle and/or are making an informed choice". With little money and many complex problems (eg substance abuse) people have few choices available to them. "Research has shown that after a period of time those who are homeless will come to accept their situation as the norm and often justify it as being one of choice." (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:6,7).

In Adelaide, Allwood and Rogers established that Indigenous street youth slept rough in the relatively short-term, but this behaviour was clearly within the repertoire of most study participants from necessity rather than choice. All youth had connections with people sleeping rough. Those young people who had slept rough or in squats usually did so with peers (friends or cousins) though a small number had slept in parklands with homeless parents (Allwood & Rogers 2001:27-28,67).

## **2.2 The At-Risk-of-Homelessness Category**

Under this second broad category are grouped four sub-categories of people who, although housed in some manner, are at risk of losing their accommodation, or at least of losing the amenity or functionality of their accommodation.

### **2.2.1 *Insecurely Housed***

In this sub-category are people who, although residing in some sort of housing, nevertheless live under the threat of losing this accommodation because they lack security of tenure. Such insecurity may arise from tenants having inadequate income to pay rent, their violation of or inability to conform with tenancy agreements, the impact of family violence, and the effect of other public place dwellers who may visit and behave in an unruly manner unacceptable to the neighbourhood. Keys Young (1998:iv) defined this sub-category as "Individuals escaping an unsafe or unstable home for their own safety or survival" noting that this form of homelessness affects large numbers of Indigenous people, especially women and young people.

Insecurity within Town Camp environments was a theme of the Alice Springs study described earlier. A number of interviewees had accommodation options in Town Camps and in fact many indicated they withdrew to the Town Camps during the brief periods of wet weather. In addition they used the Town Camps for showering and clothes washing when they wished. Some even rented a tin shed on one of these camps. In a number of cases people had moved away from the Town Camp due to excessive fighting and arguments, but it proved difficult to assess the extent to which these interviewees were involved in the conflict, perhaps even having a causal role. A few admitted to being evicted. However for those who were genuine, it can be concluded that in certain Town Camps at times people experienced a lack of relative safety in a social sense, due to an absence of strong leadership and internal social control. Nine interviewees in different groups said they left a Town Camp (and also one from a remote bush community) because of excessive fighting, disputes, harassment, jealousy or takeovers by foreign tribal groups. Another reason given for withdrawing from a Town Camp was to avoid relatives humbugging for money all the time (Memmott 1990:50,51).

Research by Jordan (1995) in Adelaide found that, the most common reason for Aboriginal youth leaving home was arguments with parents or other family members, followed by: parental alcohol problems; sexual, physical and verbal abuse; other problems in relation to parents; desire for freedom; and being evicted from home. These reasons matched those of non-indigenous youth but Jordan distinguished a

distinctive sense of powerlessness and despair. Jordan also noted that Indigenous youth were more likely to come from stressed or difficult home backgrounds, have lower levels of educational achievement and be worse off on other indicators of disadvantage (Cited in Allwood & Rogers 2001:15,16).

Memcott and Fantin's 2001 study of Darwin's Indigenous itinerant population revealed that those mobile persons who temporarily left the long-grass lifestyle and stayed in rental houses with members of their family could have a significant impact on the viability of such tenancies. The factors negatively influencing tenancy stability upon the arrival of such itinerant persons in the household included: the increased strain placed on a residence's water and waste facilities and the potential for health hazards, the perceptions of landlords and management agencies (not necessarily accurate) about crowding, and the increased risk of alcohol-related violence and its impact on the neighbourhood's quality of life and on a property's physical condition (2001:11, 67).

Those Indigenous people who use boarding house accommodation may also fall within this category. Boarding houses are rapidly closing across Australia due to more stringent application of building regulations and the rapid development of areas such as New Farm and South Brisbane (in Brisbane), which traditionally supported many boarding houses. It has been estimated that boarding houses were closing at the rate of two per month in Brisbane at the time of writing. (p.c. Luke Bell, Brisbane City Council, 3/7/03; Michael Hutchinson, ATSI Housing, Qld Department of Housing, 1/8/03).

### *2.2.2 Housed in Substandard Conditions*

Those persons whose housing is of a sub-standard architectural quality are also at risk of homelessness because of possibly unsafe or unhealthy facilities. The difficulty with this category is whether a definition of 'sub-standard' can be applied cross-culturally in Indigenous Australia or whether such a definition needs to be shaped by local cultural standards. What one cultural group defines as unhealthy may be totally acceptable to another. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s many Aboriginal town camps across Australia were dismantled by local councils who deemed them unhealthy, yet these town camps provided a freedom of cultural expression and cultural maintenance that newly constructed and supposedly 'healthy' government housing failed to deliver (see Memcott 1996, Long 2002). A further consideration is the impact of housing on the psychological as well as the physiological health of the occupants. Although a person, or people, may occupy a house that has no negative impacts on physiological health, the same housing circumstances may contribute to psychological health issues. For example, a house that makes it difficult, or impossible, for occupants to enact customary avoidance behaviour, may contribute to the occupants experiencing stress and trauma. (See Reser 1979, Fantin 2003).

In a few cases in Alice Springs it was observed that during mid-winter, some families were prepared to leave a Town Camp house if they could not afford electricity (and hence electric heaters), and camp in the riverbed because of the plentiful supply of firewood there (Memcott 1990:51).

### *2.2.3 Housed in Crowded Conditions*

In this sub-category are persons whose housing is crowded. However, crowding must be defined not by density measures alone but using methods of measuring stress levels. As early as 1987-88, the National Youth Coalition for Housing identified the potential of crowding to contribute to a sense of homelessness, and Olive in her study at Rockhampton identified how this was particularly relevant to Indigenous people (1992:2,3). By the late 1990s, Keys Young had identified crowding as a distinct type of Indigenous homelessness (1998:iv).

In 1991 Memcott published a cross-cultural model of crowding, which pertained to North American, European and east Asian groups and which was drawn from an analysis of the environmental psychology literature (Memcott 1991:255-258). This model holds that states of crowding involve high-density settings displaying various

stimuli, some of which induce stress amongst the setting participants according to their values regarding acceptable environmental stimuli. The presence of unacceptable stimuli may be perceived as a loss of control. Alternatively a coping mechanism may be used to alleviate such stress, if one is available. It was found that the values employed to evaluate the state of any particular setting, to determine which stimuli are present, and to select an appropriate coping mechanism, vary across cultures. This model was accompanied by a review of the limited research published on 'crowding' among Indigenous Australians. Memmott found that the degree to which cultural change in communities with differing contact histories had influenced norms of crowding and privacy, was not known. He asserted that "it certainly cannot be assumed that high household densities regarded as 'crowded' by non-Aboriginal standards are necessarily perceived as being stressful by Aboriginal groups" (Memmott 1991:262).

Further research has occurred during the 1990s on the spatial behaviour of Indigenous households, particularly relating to household composition. Among Indigenous Australian groups, the occupants of houses do not necessarily belong to one family unit. Contrasting with the national trend toward an increased proportion of households being made up of single persons and childless couples, Indigenous households still tend to be larger and more complex, often made up of a number of family units or sub-groups. In these large households, one is likely to find each bedroom occupied by a family unit, possibly including a couple with infants, a single parent with a child, a group of single men or single women, or a grandparent with several infants or teenagers, as well as conventional nuclear families. These larger households are explained partly by the fact that many Indigenous people today maintain certain practices from their traditional cultures, where households were often comprised of a number of sub-units based on kinship norms. Such a sub-unit would translate into a 'family unit' in the mainstream Australian society. When several customary family units occupy a single house, with each residing in a bedroom or other room in the house, these individual room situations may not necessarily constitute a state of crowding in themselves as they may each involve a normal family unit whose members prefer to be close to one another for company. However the presence of these individual family units in a small house may well be perceived as crowding, partly because of the kinship relations involved. In some cases multiple Indigenous families are residing together because of a shortage of housing and are experiencing crowding. Yet in other cases they may choose to reside in large household groupings, in keeping with their traditions and are not necessarily under stress.

Thus Indigenous household sizes of 6 to 12 people are common, and much larger households can be regularly encountered (up to 20 members). A single Indigenous house may be doing the job of three or more houses as we might conceive their use in mainstream society. This situation exacerbates the instability of tenancy arrangements, thereby increasing the occupants' risk of becoming 'roofless'. In fact, according to the most commonly used mainstream definitions they are already homeless. The 'cultural definitions' which Chamberlain (1999) and the ABS espouse, are founded on the principle that homelessness must be delineated in relation to distance from meeting a commonly held community standard. It should be recognised however that the needs of many Indigenous Australians will not be met by the standards applicable to the broader community. In the case of crowding, definitive models for Indigenous groups have yet to be researched and tested.

Nevertheless, the links between crowding and homelessness are clearly embedded in the Indigenous literature. For example in Townsville it was reported that Indigenous homelessness was related to overcrowding and associated social problems, and was in large measure, due to a shortage of affordable housing (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:14).

## 2.2.4 *Dysfunctionally Mobile Persons*

Dysfunctionally mobile persons are in a state of continual or intermittent residential mobility, which includes temporary residence (eg crisis accommodation), that is the result of personal and/or social problems (eg violence, alcohol and substance abuse), lack of safety or security in a social sense, personality or 'identity crisis', and lack of emotional support and security. Such people may be moving either continually or intermittently between both public places and private residences, whether the latter are temporary or crisis accommodation, or the homes of relatives or friends.

In the 1996 and 2001 Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics employed a 'cultural definition' of homelessness which included the category of 'Secondary Homelessness' comprised of those "who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another" (Memmott et al 2003:14,15). Olive (1992, drawing on the NYCH definition) also identified "very high mobility between places of abode" as a circumstance contributing to Indigenous homelessness. Keys Young (1998:iv) defined "Relocation and transient homelessness, which results in temporary, intermittent and often cyclical patterns of homelessness due to transient and mobile lifestyles, but also to the necessity of a larger proportion of the Indigenous population (relative to the non-Indigenous population) having to travel to obtain services." Aboriginal societies and communities are characterised by high frequencies of residential mobility both between and within settlements (Memmott and Moran 2001). However, despite this technique of mainstream categorisation, the current authors would argue that it does not necessarily follow that such mobile individuals should be construed as being homeless in the Indigenous context, but rather that there is a need to introduce an additional dimension of dysfunctionality.

Recent researchers of Indigenous youth have identified two general categories of mobility: firstly that which is an "expression of individual autonomy" and reflects enduring social and cultural practices and values, and secondly that which is problematic and expressive of instability and lack of support (Henry and Daly 2001, Victoria 2002:49-51).

Victoria cites a number of authors who attest to the vital part such movement through extended family networks plays in Indigenous social and economic arrangements (Young & Doohan 1989, Henry & Daly 2001, Musharbash 2001). Such mobility represents the fulfilment of their kinship obligations as well as their connection to country or particular places. She reveals that young people, single men and, to a lesser extent, women, are often the most mobile groups. Young people were found to value "the opportunities offered by mobility between kin" (Victoria 2002:121).

Victoria goes on to identify the second category of problematic mobile young people and warns of the dangers of only providing housing to such highly mobile Indigenous youth without additional complementary support:

Differentiating 'normal' youth mobility from those 'doing the rounds' reveals hidden homelessness and vulnerability in young people. These young people are considered to be in need a [sic] much support. For many the provision of housing to this group may even exacerbate the dire situation the young person is experiencing, because without significant housing and non-housing support the tenancy will inevitably fail (Victoria 2002: 121).

It is essential to grasp the nature of these opposing concepts of mobility, particularly in terms of certain categories of homelessness. While it is true that social obligations accommodating high rates of mobility can serve to mask the numbers of people in the Indigenous population who are without accommodation, such a phenomenon is not necessarily injurious to the health or safety of all such persons. High residential mobility rates in themselves are not necessarily expressions of negative circumstances. Victoria goes on to emphasise the role of senior carers in Aboriginal households who provide vital support for younger kin.

In the Alice Springs riverbed in 1990 some very mobile individuals were identified who constantly moved between a range of river camps; they were said to 'follow the cask'. In Central Australia where there are many dry communities men commonly use cars to travel to liquor outlets. One Town Camp leader attributed the Warlpiri population influx to royalties from the prosperous gold mines in the Tanami Desert. The new wealth had provided the community with more vehicles and increased its population's travelling capacity. It was said that Yuendumu had been "reduced to cripples"; such was the new state of mobility that nobody wanted to stay (Memmott 1990:38). Similarly, in Halls Creek (W.A.) it was found that a causal factor underlying increased mobility from the remote communities (Billiluna, Mulan, Balgo, Yuendumu, Nyirripi, etc.) had involved the royalties garnered by a proportion of people in all of these communities, particularly Warlpiri and Ngardi tribespeople, who were traditional owners for the Tanami Desert. Much of this money was spent on new Toyotas for families, as well as for surplus spending (Memmott 1992:33).

In Adelaide it was found that young people's homelessness was preceded by lengthy histories of high mobility, multiple caregivers and abusive relationships (Allwood & Rogers 2001:3-4). Interviews with young people established that they used different types of accommodation: with parents and extended family, foster care, secure care (detention), SAAP shelter, sleeping rough with friends, and independent living. With all of these there was a degree to which arrangements were insecure; ten young people were highly mobile at the time of the survey. It was apparent that while extended family members fulfilled a cultural obligation of providing shelter, they were not always able to provide the necessary structure, supervision, or practical and emotional support, and at times could also inflict harm (Allwood & Rogers 2001:25,68).

### **2.3 Spiritually Homeless**

What are the spiritual and psychological dimensions of Indigenous homelessness? To answer this question we must first briefly turn to the question of what is 'home'.

In the traditionally oriented Aboriginal context, it can be argued that 'home' is 'country' (Strehlow 1947, Wallace 1979:144), or more specifically one's traditional estate that is part of a wider cultural landscape (Memmott & Long 2002), and that contains a range of sacred sites and other places of cultural and emotional significance to which oneself and various other kinspeople have attachments. Within this country there are various campsites, each with their particular resources, and to which are attached memories of past habitation and events. Traditional shelter, humpies, sheds, outstations, and even conventional housing may be regarded as mere artefacts for interim shelter in this more emotionally and culturally charged landscape containing Dreamings and sacred energies, spirits and powers. The Dreamings in turn provide identity and contribute to a sense of human self.

To be homeless in this context then, means to be without country; to have no such set of intimate connections, to have an incomplete identity and only a set of unanswered questions about who one's ancestors were and what the meaning of their country was. This is a form of spiritual and psychological homelessness. Unfortunately it is the fate of many individuals and families who were removed from their traditional countries and wider circle of kin by government agencies (through dispossession, removalism and stolen children) throughout the better part of the last century (and for many coastal or near coastal groups during parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well). The more temporally distant is the connection to country in terms of generations, the more inaccessible seem to be the answers about self-identity and 'home' (country), which in turn may have a stressful impact on an individual's sense of spiritual health.

Keys Young (1998) introduced this Indigenous-specific concept to the discussion of homelessness, and related it directly to post-contact dispossession. Berry et al (2001:34-43) elaborated on the concept with the further related notions of separation



from traditional lands, and from family and kinship networks, as well as an erosion of Aboriginal identity. The existence of forms of 'spiritual homelessness' was widely endorsed at a recent National Indigenous Homelessness Forum in Melbourne (March 2003). Government policies that in the long-term aim to maintain, protect and/or help restore traditional connection to country eg through Land Rights, Native Title or Cultural Heritage legislations, will contribute in part to countering spiritual homelessness, albeit not necessarily for those who are already deeply entrenched in such crisis.

In summary, spiritual forms of homelessness may derive from: (a) separation from traditional land, (b) separation from family and kinship networks, or (c) a crisis of personal identity wherein one's understanding or knowledge of how one relates to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused or lost.

## **2.4 Summary of Categories of Indigenous Homelessness**

This categorization of Indigenous homelessness has resulted in three broad non-exclusive categories of (i) public place dwellers, (ii) at-risk-of-homelessness persons, and (iii) spiritually homeless persons. 'Public place dwellers' can be analysed down into four sub-categories based on the properties of (a) the duration of such public place dwelling, and (b) the extent of motivation (voluntary versus involuntary) for such a lifestyle. The at-risk-of-homelessness category can be analysed down into four sub-categories, three of which stem from the circumstances of the tenants' lifestyle, either insecure socio-economic aspects of lifestyle, household crowding, or dysfunctional residential mobility; and the fourth from the architectural circumstances of the housing – such substandard housing potentially impacting on the health and safety of the householders.

In the following section of the paper we shall identify particular types of agency or service responses to each of these categories of Indigenous homelessness, and at the end of the paper we shall then summarize various patterns of homeless-person and homeless-response relationships.

**Table 1: Categories of Indigenous ‘Homeless’ People**

Note:

- These are not mutually exclusive categories
- The numerical referencing of these categories corresponds with the sub-section referencing in the text from pages 7 to 14.

1. Public place dwellers.	Living in a mix of public or semi-public places (as well as some private places, which are entered illegally at night to gain overnight shelter) eg parks, churches, verandahs, carparks, car sales yards (under cars), beaches, drains, riverbanks, vacant lots, dilapidated buildings.
1.1 Public place dwellers – voluntary, short-term intermittent.	These people are often staying in conventional accommodation (eg a relative’s house) and may have their own residence in a rural or remote settlement. When they socialise in public urban places, they may or may not decide to camp out overnight, usually with others, despite the availability of their accommodation.
1.2 Public place dwellers – voluntary, medium-term.	Residing continually in public places (including overnight); acknowledge they have another place of residence in a home community but uncertain if and when they will return.
1.3 Public place-dwellers – voluntary, long-term (chronic homeless).	Residing continually in public places (including overnight); it is unclear whether it is possible for such individuals to readily reconcile with their home community/family due to a range of emotional barriers; they have come to regard a beat of public places as their ‘home’.
1.4 Public place-dwellers - Reluctant and by necessity.	Residing continually in public places, and who (a) Wish to return home but need to remain in urban area due to a service need or to support a hospitalized relative or similar; or (b) Wish to return home but no funds for travel and/or capacity to organize travel.
2.0 Those at risk of homelessness	At risk of losing one’s house or of losing the amenity of one’s house.
2.1 Insecurely housed people. [Olive 1992, ABS 1999A.]	Residing in adequate housing but under threat of loss of such; lack of security of occupancy; possibly due to circumstances of poverty.
2.2 People in sub-standard housing. [Olive 1992.]	Persons whose housing is of a sub-standard architectural quality, possibly unsafe or unhealthy housing [ <u>but</u> the standards need to be defined – the issue of cultural standards.]
2.3 People experiencing crowded housing. [Olive 1992: 2,3, Keys Young 1998:iv, Memmott 1991:258-261.]	Persons whose housing is crowded, but crowding should be defined as involving considerable stress (and not assumed by density measures alone).
2.4 Dysfunctionally mobile persons. [Olive 1992, Keys Young 1998, ABS 1999A, Berry et al 2001.]	In a state of continual or intermittent residential mobility including temporary residence (eg crisis accommodation) that is a result of personal and/or social problems (eg violence, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of safety or security in a social sense, personality or ‘identity crisis’, lack of emotional support and security).
3.0 Spiritually homeless people. [Berry et al 2001:34-43, Keys Young 1998.]	A state arising from either (a) separation from traditional land, (b) separation from family and kinship networks, or (c) a crisis of personal identity wherein one’s understanding or knowledge of how one relates to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused

### 3. CATEGORIES OF RESPONSE TO INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

The terms 'response categories' or 'response types' refer to a broad range of initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of people who are homeless and/or residing in public places; they include philosophies, policies, programs, services, strategies, methodologies, legislations and other activities. This summary of the findings on various responses to Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness has been adapted from a national survey of 73 such responses conducted by Memmott et al (2002:63-68). In general, the responses selected for inclusion in this analysis were targeted specifically at Indigenous people. No attempt was made in the 2002 study to survey all mainstream service responses for homeless people. Nevertheless a number of programmes, although having been established for all homeless people, served predominantly Indigenous clients in their day-to-day operations. Also, a small number of mainstream services for homeless people were included in the analysis that, while only impacting on a small (or perhaps negligible) number of Indigenous homeless people, were brought to the authors' attention because of their interesting potential for application to Indigenous groups<sup>6</sup>. The converse of the previous category of examples are a number of programmes that, although run by Indigenous organisations to target Indigenous homeless people, have also been made accessible to non-Indigenous people<sup>7</sup>.

This part of the project also incorporates four service responses to the needs of particular categories of homeless Indigenous people, which were assessed by the researchers as 'good practice' examples from preliminary investigation, and subsequently visited and profiled. These were:

- Brisbane City Council's Public Space Liaison Officer (Qld),
- Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation's Homeless Person's Drop-In Centre (Qld),
- Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne University of Technology (TAFE) Outreach Worker Training Strategy (Vic),
- Port Hedland Sobering Up Centre and Homeless Support Service (W.A).

These four Good Practice case studies are summarized in the Text Boxes that follow. The various responses identified from the 2002 analysis can be described under the following 15 categories<sup>8</sup>.

#### 3.1 The 15 Service Response Categories

##### 3.1.1 *Legislative Approaches*

The law-and-order approach using reactive policing and supported by various forms of legislation, may be only partly successful and even totally unsuccessful, in eliminating Indigenous public place dwelling. It is likely to only result in temporary and/or local displacement, whilst overall cycles of incarceration, alcohol treatment and public place dwelling continue. In preparing legislation that is motivated by a need to move Indigenous public place dwellers, authorities may also run the risk of breaching anti-discrimination legislation. Forced physical removal to distant remote settlements is also equally repugnant and a violation of civil liberties. As a general principle any movement of Indigenous people from their occupied public spaces due to conflicting public needs, should be carried out through a process of negotiation, no matter how protracted, and

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<sup>6</sup> Programmes of this sort included the Independent Community Living Association's (ICLA) Street Outreach Service in inner Sydney, and the NSW Homeless Persons Information Centre.

<sup>7</sup> Eg Bairnsdale Koorie Women's Shelter, Hope Street, Brisbane.

<sup>8</sup> Sections 3.1.1 to 3.1.15 have been adapted from similar discussions contained in Memmott et al (2002:63-68) and Memmott, Long & Chambers (2003:34-38).

accompanied by a planned set of alternate accommodation and servicing options acceptable to all parties.

It is recommended that legislative approaches to public place dwellers only be used as a complementary or back-up strategy to other response strategies as outlined below.

For example, these principles have recently been recognised in Cairns where the Queensland Government has moved away from jailing Indigenous alcoholic fine defaulters who not only cannot afford to pay their fines, but who follow jail with a drinking binge and then recycle into the correctional system (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:11).

### *3.1.2 Patrols and Outreach Services*

A variety of services are provided by either individuals, pairs or small groups of field workers who seek out Indigenous public place dwellers in the locations they are known to frequent. Within this broad category come Aboriginal Night Patrols, Wardens and Outreach Workers, although the precise nature of their services varies. The functions of night patrols and warden schemes include: intervention in situations of substance abuse (especially alcohol) and violence, mediation and dispute resolution between people in conflict, and the removal of disruptive or potentially violent persons from public or private social environments. Outreach workers tend to take a stronger 'case file' approach, attempting over a period of time to assess clients' needs and establish linkages to relevant wider service agencies in response to those needs (eg accommodation, health, employment, transport).

The importance of Indigenous outreach workers as case managers was highlighted in an Adelaide-based study in which it was found that Indigenous youth were less likely to voluntarily approach services, more likely to fall out of a system of referrals, and far more likely to be in contact with a service only because they were legally required to (S.A., DHS 1998:16).

As an example we can consider a recent proposal for a 'community patrol' in Cairns, which aims to arrange transport for alcohol-affected people to safe places, monitor public spaces, link homeless people with relevant service networks, and diffuse tense situations (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:19-20). Another type of outreach worker, known as a Public Space Liaison Officer is profiled in the Box below, and involves a brokering role between the Brisbane parkies, the Brisbane City Council, the Police and other service providers.

Indigenous patrols and outreach workers are an essential component of any strategic response to public place dwelling, but they can also potentially assist with rental housing problems when the former category of people visit relatives and create disturbances that threaten the stability of their tenancies.

### ***Good Practice Example 1 – An Outreach Worker***

#### **Brisbane City Council Public Space Liaison Officer (Qld)<sup>9</sup>**

The Brisbane City Council (BCC) employs a Public Space Liaison Officer (PSLO) as part of its homelessness strategy. The Indigenous PSLO responds to issues, problems and complaints from the public and BCC Parks staff regarding users of public spaces. The liaison officer proactively responds to these situations to avoid the involvement of the police and to avoid tensions between BCC parks staff and public space users. The PSLO explains local laws to public space users, for example laws that prohibit the construction of structures by the public. Once people have had the laws explained they have complied 90% of the time. When the PSLO enforces local laws he or she takes into consideration the physical and mental condition of those involved, for example the PSLO can give people permission to stay in a public space for 24 hours. The PSLO also responds to situations by offering to connect people with professional services. When working with public space users it is often difficult to distinguish between criminal activity and legal use of public space and consequently the PSLO takes care not to invade people's public space. The PSLO makes regular patrols of parks during which he or she monitors the homeless population, and the PSLO conducts Park User Meetings at which current issues concerning particular parks are raised and actions discussed with homeless services and the police and meetings with van services.

It is not the regular public place users that have been found to be problematic, but the short-term or transient users and the 'weekend warriors'. Transient Murriss using public space increase during NAIDOC week, during the Royal Exhibition fortnight and during summer. Only a fraction of public place users sleep out at night.

#### ***3.1.3 Diversionary Strategies***

This approach normally involves taking people who are intoxicated, and possibly aggressive or otherwise at-risk from their own actions or those of others, and placing them in managed accommodation until they can become sober, sleep and have a meal. The approach can be regarded as a short-term, reactive strategy. It is diversionary because it aims to keep at-risk, intoxicated individuals out of the watch-house in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). Collection of such people is usually performed either by the Police, an Aboriginal Patrol, or both. The 'managed accommodation' to which they are taken may be the house of a relative, a Sobering-Up Shelter, a refuge or other such facility. The utilisation of the diversionary approach is now widespread in many parts of Australia.

A variety of additional strategies can be incorporated into the basic diversionary model in an effort to expand its short-term and reactive qualities into the medium or long-term. Examples of these include: follow-up 'shaming' and 'square-up' sessions between offenders and aggrieved members of the community; the presence of a 'detox' centre in proximity to the Sobering-Up Shelter; the opportunity to move directly to a residential facility in an alcohol treatment centre; and the presence of a Day Centre adjacent to the Sobering-Up Shelter for recreational or entertainment facilities.

A diversionary strategy is an essential component in responding to an Indigenous public place dwelling situation that involves alcohol abuse.

#### ***3.1.4 Addressing anti-social behaviour***

A response to Indigenous homelessness often commences politically with complaints by local business people about the impact of anti-social behaviour on their customers and business profits. Anti-social behaviour is usually regarded as a problem by all sections of the community, including Indigenous people.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on interviews with Cindy Sinclair and Luke Bell. Luke Bell is the Public Space Liaison Officer for the Brisbane City Council. Cindy Sinclair is also an Officer with the Brisbane City Council. Both Luke and Cindy participated in meetings and interviews for this project on 1 and 3 July 2003.

Only in a few of the case studies reviewed by Memmott et al (2002) was there any emphasis given to the role of Traditional Owners in dealing with public place dwellers. Responses that did involve these community figures were found in Alice Springs and Darwin. They both involved Traditional Owners taking exception to the anti-social behaviour of certain public place dwellers, particularly those involved in intoxication, begging, alcohol violence, and enacting sexual and excretory functions in public places. Traditional Owners saw this behaviour as 'shaming' their own people and their law and custom, and they were adamant about asserting their authority in an effort to prevent it.

One reason for including local Traditional Owners in a public place dwellers' response strategy, particularly in more traditionally oriented areas, is that such people may be more inclined to respect Aboriginal Law than non-Aboriginal Law. Therefore a more effective approach may emerge and one that is more clearly Aboriginal-directed. The role of local Traditional Law Holders has primarily involved the establishment of models of appropriate behaviours versus anti-social behaviours (in terms of Aboriginal value systems) of public place dwellers, as well as territorial rules concerning where particular individuals or groups should dwell.

Although such a strategy may seem overly difficult or challenging to non-Aboriginal stakeholders, its ultimate long-term value should not be underestimated<sup>10</sup>. It is all the more relevant given that action on Indigenous homelessness often begins politically following complaints by local business people on the impact of anti-social behaviour on their customers. Anti-social behaviour is usually regarded as a problem by all sections of the community, including Indigenous people.

In Cairns it was recently reported that the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour were a small group of repeat-offenders who were chronic alcoholics targeting tourists, and that the occasional instances of serious violence tended to be between homeless people rather than members of the wider public. Cairns City Council has been involved in developing a protocol document as an educational tool to be displayed in public places (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:10,22).

Many approaches to anti-social behaviour seek to make the problem 'less visible' or provide alternatives that will reduce the problem. It is often the case that little attention is paid to the cause of such behaviour and preventative approaches (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:10).

### 3.1.5 *Philosophies of client interaction*

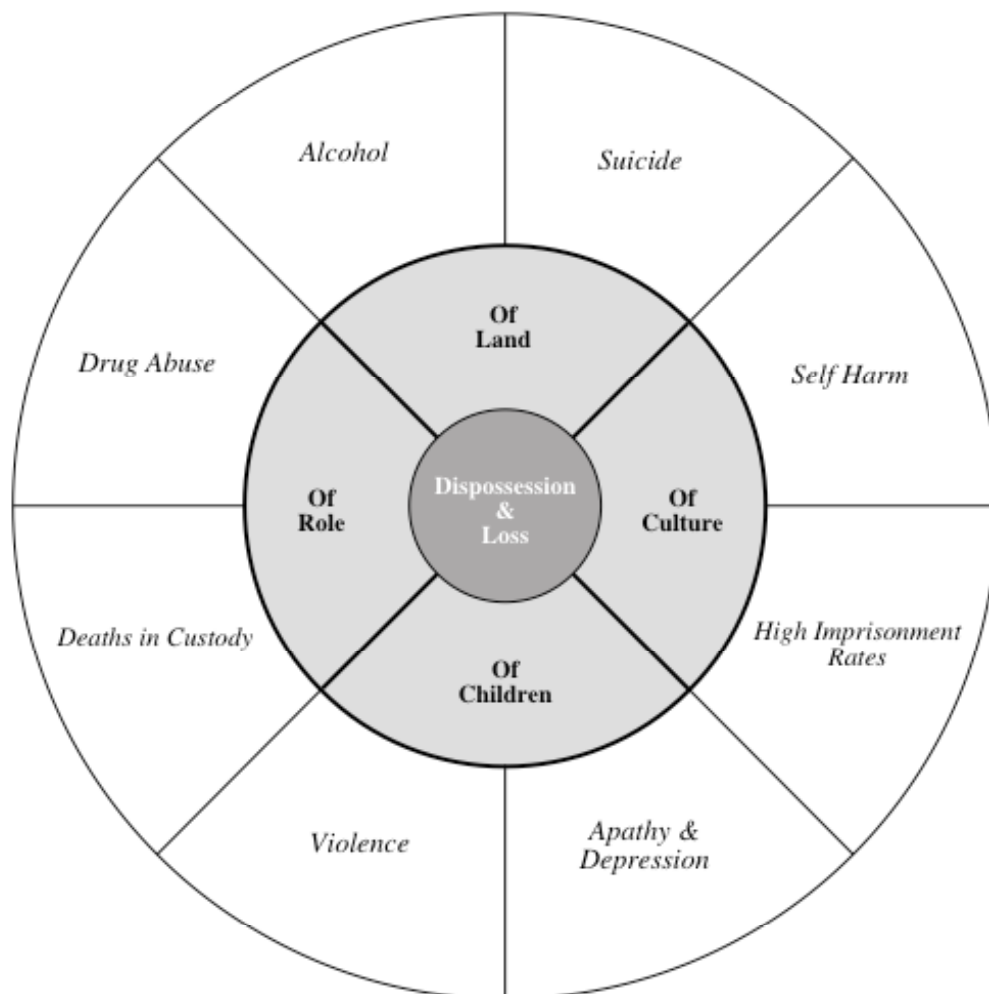
In addition to respecting and working through customary principles of Aboriginal law and custom, other positive professional philosophies have been adopted by various service providers (Memmott et al 2002:22,23). Rather than impose solutions, the Perth Centrecare approach has emphasised the need to guide and empower families and individuals to find their own solutions. They have achieved this through a long-term personal and amiable relationship with clients and by using a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff (Durkay et al 2001:13-15). Coleman (2000A) extends this to include a healing therapy that encourages self-exploration of the many issues and causal factors underlying the circumstances of public place dwellers. (See Figure 1).

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of writing, a trial had occurred in Darwin of engaging a group of regional Elders with the public place dwellers, with a reported degree of success of return of some of the latter to their home community. ['NT Elders meet to discuss long-grassers' in *The Koori Mail*, Edition 301, 21 May.]

A number of researchers emphasise the community development philosophy in working with Indigenous public place dwellers. Through participation in the process of addressing their problems, qualities of group cohesion, leadership, problem-solving capacity and self-esteem are fostered. There is a need for public place dwellers to have sufficient ownership of the process in order to be prepared to participate in it in a meaningful way; one that results in real lifestyle changes and does not further entrench welfare dependency. A common and parallel acceptance of this approach is required by all local stakeholders (government departments, local councils, charitable organisations) (Memmott et al 2002:23-24).

As in the previous strategy, developing and implementing a philosophy of client interaction is challenging and demanding, but should be seen as an essential component for any long-term approach to public place dwelling.



**Figure 1: The beginning of a healing framework for Indigenous homeless women in Brisbane adapted and developed by Coleman (2000:20).**

### 3.1.6 *Alcohol strategies*

In addressing the needs of public place dwellers, whether it be their health, the impact of alcohol violence on other group members, or the impact of intermittent anti-social intoxicated behaviour on the general public, there is clearly a need to formulate a strategic response to the prevalent heavy-drinking lifestyle, which is a common characteristic of many of these groups. There are numerous strategies that respond to the alcohol abuse of public place dwellers and involve multiple strategies. These include: patrols or outreach services; meal provision; sobering-up shelters; women's refuges; detox centres; legislative supports (including licensing restrictions and restricted public zones of consumption); approved gathering and camping places; rehabilitation programs (including counselling, education, group therapy, co-dependants support, excursions and activities); residential options; and health services (Memcott et al 2002:26-29).

### 3.1.7 *Regional strategies*

An in-depth understanding of Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness in metropolitan and regional urban centres necessitates a regional approach that examines Indigenous migration and residential mobility patterns. In order to reduce the numbers of Indigenous public place dwellers and discourage their populations from growing in urban regional centres, it is necessary to examine the nature and dynamics of regional migration to understand why people leave their home communities, or what prevents them from returning (Memcott et al 2002:30).

A widespread practical need is some method of facilitating and financing the travel of such people back to their home communities when they wish to return, but have difficulties doing so because they are entrenched in cycles of obligatory shouting of drinking sprees with fellow parkies using their welfare cheques. Such a service can involve an agreement with a community council who will reimburse the fare once the individual has returned to employment with a local CDEP scheme. For example, the Cairns parkie problem has been viewed by researchers as a regional one. The cause and solution to the parkie situation began with socio-economic and alcohol-related problems in home communities. Part of the solution had to include a strategy of returning people to their home communities. Assistance is usually required with accommodation and transport to the airport (Dillon & Savage 1994:6-8; Qld, DATSIP 2003B:13).

A regional strategy dealing with Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness must include a shared set of values and a communication system between the regional centre's service providers and the communities in the outer parts of the region. This facilitates shared decision-making in addressing the needs of individual clients, which in turn may be accompanied by a regional education programme concerning urban lifestyles and values, and what might be expected of Indigenous people when visiting large cities, both in terms of mainstream and Aboriginal laws, and behavioural values. A converse requirement is education materials for non-Aboriginal Australians and tourists on Aboriginal values and lifestyles and the need for mutual cross-cultural accommodation of such values. Finally the migration of Indigenous people to urban centres generates serious questions for public servants and politicians in Aboriginal Affairs, and Community leaders and Councillors concerning the quality of lifestyle in remote and rural Aboriginal communities, as well as the distribution and licensing of alcohol outlets throughout such a region (Memcott et al 2002:31,32).

Any superficial response to local social problems (eg restricting or stopping alcohol sales in remote communities) is likely to inadvertently displace those problems to other parts of the region.



### 3.1.8 Accommodation options

A standard accommodation approach involves a threefold progression. First, emergency or crisis accommodation for use over one or a few nights must be established. This may comprise of a Women's Refuge, Safe House and/or Sobering-Up Shelter. Second, a medium-term accommodation option, sometimes referred to as transitional housing, must be provided for use until the third option, conventional rental housing, becomes available. Finally a range of miscellaneous management services may be required to assist people into all of these categories of accommodation and provide ongoing support. The types of accommodation can include: housing units, safe houses, town camps, temporary visitors' camps, hostels, flats, boarding houses, and large and extended family houses and hostels attached to hospitals (Memmott et al 2002:33-41).

When planning a sequence of supported accommodation—from crisis facilities to medium-term and longer-term solutions, and eventually to mainstream public housing—an onus is placed on housing authorities and agencies to ensure that there are effective connections between each stage of this sequence. If such strategies for moving people successfully through the system are not in place, clients may return to residing in the earlier stages of supported accommodation (crisis and medium-term) and possibly back to public places (Memmott et al 2002:41).

More challenging accommodation responses in terms of public policy and governance involve recognising the right of public place dwellers to their outdoor lifestyle and providing forms of managed and serviced camps. A knowledge of the social structure, cultural identity and lifestyle of Indigenous public place dwelling groups is required to understand their needs and social dynamics when providing separate accommodation areas in accordance with traditional sociospatial structures<sup>11</sup>.

There is also an increasing call for targeted accommodation services for Indigenous women (with or without children), youth, single men, and elderly people experiencing homelessness and living in public places, but little research is available to understand these different categories of specialised need (although see Allwood & Rogers (2001) and Victoria (2002) for youth needs).

Providing targeted accommodation facilities for Aboriginal public place dwellers usually brings with it a formidable range of local political problems. These can include fear and discrimination on the part of local residents and conservative reactions by local politicians who are concerned with the potentially negative political impact. Obtaining suitable land is the first obstacle; there is a need to counter this problem through a more proactive approach to urban planning to ensure suitable land is set aside when development opportunities arise. Despite the range of associated problems with accommodation strategies, this response category is the most commonplace to perceived public place dwelling problems. Too frequently the response to the issue of 'homelessness' is to provide housing without combining it with sufficient additional support strategies. However houses alone do not change lifestyles and can only serve as a partial support where there is a will and a capacity to change (Memmott et al 2002:41).

Cairns housing providers have commented that few conventional tenancies would survive for people who have had a long record of homelessness due to a range of reasons: difficulty of changing spending patterns to sustain tenancy, lack of budgeting or other living skills, and relatives visiting and breaking conditions of tenancy or causing damage. Another regular problem is that people may be banned from accommodation services because of past debts or bad behaviour (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:14). Here two

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<sup>11</sup> An example is at Happy Valley (the largest and oldest site for homeless people in Townsville), which is an area zoned suitable for alcohol consumption and where in September 2002, the Queensland Government announced it would provide over \$400K toward infrastructure development. (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:3.)

broad strategies are being tried: (a) increasing housing type options, and (b) improving people's ability to maintain tenancies by identifying 'at risk' tenants early and allowing them to pay debts over time. Formerly homeless people are being sought to act as informal mentors and provide support for the newly housed. In Queensland consideration is also being given to implementing a home living and financial skills programs appropriate to Indigenous homeless people (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:12,21-24, 2003D:13).

### 3.1.9 *Dedicated service centres and gathering places*

Indigenous people in metropolitan centres have always had regular meeting or gathering places where those arriving from remote communities can find support while they orientate themselves to city life. Providing meals to homeless people at such gathering places in parks and other public places has been carried out in the past largely by charitable organisations such as St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. There is a potential in situations where such food is distributed to promote 'capacity building'. A service provider can take advantage of such a concentrated gathering of clients to establish a regular working relationship with them and provide more proactive outreach services aimed at improving their quality of life (Memmott et al 2002:42-47).

A more ambitious approach involves the provision of a dedicated building, at which a range of services can be offered whilst public place dwellers gather and socialise nearby. The most notable of these has been the Toonooba Day Activity Centre on the bank of the Fitzroy River in Rockhampton and the 'Designated Space' in the New Farm Park near the banks of the Brisbane River. The latter facility is one of the very few services reported in the Memmott et al (2002:45,46) study for which there was a formal evaluation study. 'Hope Street' in South Brisbane was the longest running service centre (over 20 years) and it was located centrally in the urban locale of parks, sidewalks and vacant lots where its clients dwelt. This case study is highlighted as a good practice example in the Box below. The proposed location of such a planned service centre requires careful consideration in terms of the territorial and other constraints imposed by both public place dwelling and local stakeholder groups.

In 1994, a proposal for a Gathering Place was put to the Cope Street drinkers group who expressed an overwhelming assertion of their territorial rights and a commitment to continue using their site. Many stakeholders supported the idea of the drinkers having a gathering place for themselves. A petition by the drinkers requested that a park be developed on 'our land', meaning the Cope Street site. They requested a shelter for wet weather, a water source, toilets (especially for women to urinate in), showers, a bar-b-cue and a firewood supply. They emphasised the centrality of the site to other services, which they required in the area (take-away liquor shop and food outlets, Redfern railway station as a cadging venue, Rev Bill Bird's morning breakfast, shower and toilet service, Aboriginal Medical Service and a good view of Aboriginal passers-by on Regent and Redfern Streets who may be engaged for gossip or cadging). They also said they needed to be off the street to provide them with a degree of protection from the Police (Memmott 1994:64).

## ***Good Practice Example 2 – A Service Centre and Gathering Place***

### **Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation's Homeless Person's Drop-In Centre (Qld)<sup>12</sup>**

For 20 years Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation (MPAC) operated a Drop-In Centre for Aboriginal homeless people in South Brisbane, a suburb on the edge of Brisbane's CBD, which includes Musgrave and Kurilpa Point Parks. The service was locally known by the name of the street on which it was located, Hope Street, and was run by an Aboriginal board and staffed by Aboriginal people. The service was open to anyone who needed help and there were no rules concerning who could walk through the door (the numbers of non-Aboriginal people who used Hope St doubled or tripled in the last two years of operation). Commencing in 1984, MPAC supplied free breakfast and lunch for Indigenous public place dwellers, five days a week, as well as shower and clothes washing facilities. The Hope Street facility provided these people with a space they felt comfortable using where they could access other services, which they would not usually visit. During 2000-2002, the Indigenous Community Health Service operated a clinic out of Hope Street for one day a week, and St Luke's Nursing Service operated a clinic for a half day a week. The health services came to Hope Street because the clients would not go to them. Centrelink also visited Hope Street once a week. In 2002, the Mater Hospital seconded an Aboriginal Health worker to follow-up on patient care at Hope Street. It was also serviced by a mental health group and a substance abuse group. In 2002, two buses were used to transport clients to appointments with other services; maintaining a record of client appointments ensured this pick-up routine was successful.

Major improvements to Hope St would have included the provision of a seven-day clinic or health service and a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service, however, the organisation was forced to close in February 2003 after its funding was withdrawn due to internal management problems. The closure of Hope Street as well as many of Brisbane's boarding houses has resulted in significant increases in the homeless population using public places.

### ***3.1.10 The physical design of public spaces***

Recognising that Indigenous people either have a right to dwell in public places, or at least should be provided with modest comforts until such time as they are able to attain a more conventional type of accommodation, a few local authorities have provided physical improvements to public places. Examples include groves of casuarinas in parklands to provide a soft under-bed of pine needles on which Aboriginal and other homeless people can sleep, storage shelves for public place dwellers, and a park bench design that can allow it to transform into a nocturnal shelter (Memmott et al 2002:48).

### ***3.1.11 Educational strategies for non-Aboriginal people***

The customary practices of camping without any shelters, in mild tropical climates, contributes to the ease with which Indigenous people can readily 'fall' into the itinerant lifestyle in northern regional centres. Although such a lifestyle may be acceptable to more tolerant citizens, such tolerance may be quickly eroded by regular alcohol consumption, subsequent intoxication and other anti-social behaviour enacted by public place dwellers. Externally-oriented living is but one of a number of cross-cultural differences that can lead to misconceptions amongst non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal public behaviour. To offset such value differences, cross-cultural awareness programs are recommended for the non-Indigenous community, to inform people about culturally-specific lifestyle choices and define appropriate urban behaviour guidelines. Another potential role of a public educational campaign is to reduce the level of unrealistic fear through better information on the circumstances, history and background of Aboriginal campers and itinerants (Memmott et al 2002:49,50). Note that this strategy compliments 3.1.7, which includes education programmes for Indigenous people.

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<sup>12</sup> P.c Dulcie Bronsch 26/11/02, 2/7/03; Cindy Sinclair 3/7/03, Luke Bell 3/7/03. Dulcie Bronsch is a former board member of Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation, and has been involved in a number of Aboriginal organisations in South Brisbane. Also based on Memmott et al (2002:43,44).

### 3.1.12 *Phone-in services*

No phone-in services were identified in the National Survey conducted by Memmott et al (2002:51), which were specifically for Indigenous homeless persons, although some State Housing Departments have a free-call number for Indigenous housing clients. In NSW there is a phone-in service for homeless persons, 6% of the callers to which are Indigenous. Although many Indigenous public place dwellers may not be initially inclined to avail themselves of such a service, an outreach worker equipped with a mobile phone may well be able to facilitate such a service on behalf of a person 'on the street'. A phone-in service is thus potentially helpful for both public place dwellers and for those in at-risk categories of homelessness.

### 3.1.13 *Skills and training for field and outreach workers*

Despite the potentially demanding behavioural and communication difficulties of working with Indigenous public place dwellers who may be suffering from substance abuse problems, identity crises and poor physical health, there appears to be few available training options for professional or para-professional field and outreach workers who work with such people. An exception is the Ngwala Willumbong/Swinburne Drug and Alcohol Worker training courses in Victoria, which are highlighted as a good practice case study in the Box below. Equally lacking are educational texts, information kits or videos relevant to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling; exceptions being the Homeless Handbook Medical Guide (Daly et al 1996) and the Queensland female prisoners 'Release Kits' (Memmott et al 2002:52-54).

Given the barriers intimidating Indigenous homeless people from accessing services, the training of Outreach Workers needs to be given high priority. (For example, Jordan (1995) found that few street youths find services themselves; they are more likely to be first encountered when staff went out into the community seeking clients. Also young people were reluctant to use services because it was seen as 'shameful' for them to be seen by their families to be doing so (Cited in Allwood & Rogers 2001:17).

Most reported service usage was non-voluntary, particularly for males, and there was under-usage of services relative to need. Voluntary access was strongly influenced by 'word of mouth', especially reports from peers and relatives. There were also gaps in knowledge about where to get help. Boys were influenced by the need to be seen as independent and strong, and by peer pressure. Girls were more likely to feel hesitant, anxious or unsafe in seeking help. For both genders relationships with workers were crucial and could serve as both a mediating point and necessary ongoing support when accommodation was finally taken up (Allwood & Rogers 2001:17,68-69).

The feeling of shame about needing help and asking for it was also considered a barrier for Indigenous homeless people in Townsville (Qld, DATSIP 2003D:4).

### **Good Practice Example 3 – Skills and Training for Outreach Workers**

#### Ngwala Willumbong & Swinburne University of Technology TAFE, Outreach Worker Training Strategy<sup>13</sup>

Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative Ltd, as part of its wider programme of culturally appropriate drug and alcohol services to the Victorian Koori Community, has established a partnership with Swinburne University of Technology to provide training programmes for Koori drug and alcohol workers across Victoria. Since the mid 1970s this Koori organisation has focused on what the Outreach Workers called bottom end homeless people such as the parkies. It focused particularly on those occupying Glebe Gardens in St Kilda, Melbourne<sup>14</sup> where it operates both a men's and women's Recovery Centre (24 hour residential rehabilitation with activities and programs to assist clients to abstain from alcohol and drugs). The organisation also provides outreach Support Services, as well as operating the Koori Community Alcohol and Drug and Resource Centre which provides an alternative to prison and police lock-ups for those Kooris taken into custody under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Ngwala Willumbong, whilst encouraging ongoing training for its workers, recognised that the material presented at many training sessions/courses was not appropriate to Aboriginal people. The Victorian Department of Human Services provided support for Ngwala's efforts to define its own training needs. The organisation discovered that a number of Aboriginal student places were not being filled at tertiary institutions and it approached various institutions with proposals. Finally in 2000 they reached an agreement with the Swinburne University of Technology TAFE to implement a training program.

Ranging from Certificate to Diploma level work, the training gained by Ngwala staff began with a pilot program on information technology and first aid, then moved into Drug and Alcohol training. It now incorporates case management and various train-the-trainer components. The development of the latter program involved the customisation of curriculum workplace models. Senior Aboriginal staff were trained to become workplace trainers and assessors. The programs were then delivered in the workplace by non-Indigenous trainers and Ngwala staff who acted as co-trainers. Initially some staff members were sceptical about the value of training and held the attitude that the only way to learn how to work with people misusing drugs and alcohol was 'on the street'. Such attitudes regarding training quickly changed and some staff members undertook additional training outside of work hours. The skills gained have allowed Ngwala staff to more effectively deal with the drug and alcohol problems being experienced by parkies and to deal with them in a holistic way. Skills that move homeless clients through the service maze and facilitate collaboration between relevant agencies are essential to improving the situation of Indigenous public space dwellers.

In 2001 Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne University of Technology won a tender to provide a statewide Drug and Alcohol training program for the Victorian Department of Human Services. In addition to set assignments, participants could have their existing workplace skills and knowledge recognised through competency assessments, with a narrative method of interviewing used to assess those with no written work records. Factors that contributed to the success of the statewide training program included: the involvement of Ngwala Willumbong staff as co-trainers; the status of University level training, having the qualifications by Indigenous workers recognised by their mainstream counterparts; recognition of the workers' existing skills and work methods; running the course on the participants' 'territory' (in the workplace or at regional Aboriginal Cooperatives) and the use of appropriate training methods such as use of language and narrative and visual teaching materials<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Based on interviews with Greg Smith and Glen Howard on 6 March 2003. At that time, Greg was the course coordinator at the Community and Further Education Department of Swinburne University of Technology TAFE, and had been a trainer and coordinator for the Ngwala Willumbong Swinburne drug and alcohol training program. Glen Howard was the Program Co-ordinator at Ngwala Willumbong. Also drawn from Memmott et al (2002:52,53).

<sup>14</sup> The gentrification of this suburb during the mid 1990s resulted in conflict between residents, local businesses, government and parkies. These homeless Kooris were shifted from the Gardens, however this only resulted in clashes with other public space dwellers occupying the territory they had been moved to, as well as other local businesses. The Melbourne Grand Prix has also created difficulties for the city's homeless, Kooris among them.

<sup>15</sup> A problem with training drug and alcohol workers in regional and urban areas is that most of the existing drug and alcohol training material is concerned with Indigenous people in remote communities. A further problem is that staff at Ngwala Willumbong and other organisations deal with a diversity of social issues, not just drug and alcohol issues, and therefore require formal training in a number of areas. The staff needs to be multi-skilled in order to work with complex or

### 3.1.14 *Partnerships*

Given the complex needs of Indigenous public place dwellers, it is desirable to develop partnerships wherever possible to deliver inter-related services to such people, whether these involve Indigenous community agencies, government departments, private sector groups or combinations of these entities. In reviewing such partnerships, an important quality was found to involve a sense of ownership of and responsibility for such partnerships. This should desirably remain primarily with local Indigenous groups or agencies. The available literature contains little detailed information on the advantages of such partnerships in general, although there are profiles of Homelessness Partnerships within particular State Governments (Memmott et al 2002:55).

For example, the Queensland Government's Cairns strategy recognises the need to respond effectively to people with high needs using a streamlined assessment and referral system. Referral processes were seen to depend on the extent to which service providers understood the operation of all other service providers, although many lacked this knowledge (Qld, DATSIP 2003B:13).

In Mt Isa the establishment of a Central Government Coordination Centre to enhance access to the wide range of essential services has been proposed. The Centre would include 24hr monitoring and community patrol and office accommodation (Qld, DATSIP 2003C:2,10).

Factors that work against coordinated and consistent service delivery and case management include: (i) problems in the exchange of information, (ii) lack of systems and processes for case coordination and conferencing, (iii) models of case management which cannot respond adequately to client mobility, (iv) providing only partial responses with services, and (v) significant gaps in services (Allwood & Rogers 2001:3-4).

### 3.1.15 *Holistic Approaches*

The existence of partnerships between those agencies providing services for Indigenous homeless people or public place-dwellers, is critical to developing holistic approaches that address the needs of these people. The benefits of such partnerships can be improved through information exchange, protocols for cooperation between organisations, and culturally appropriate staff training. A holistic approach to Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness addresses both the immediate problems, as well as other underlying issues and causal factors, which may not be necessarily identified by the clients themselves. It involves reactive and proactive components that, according to the nature of the problem, must be both short-term and long-term in their duration (Memmott et al 2002:58-62).

Important design principles for a holistic strategy are: (a) the need for Indigenous public place dwellers to be involved with the design and the development of any proposed service response in a community development approach; (b) recognition and respect of the strong ties which Indigenous public place dwellers have with inner city public places; (c) the need for Indigenous ownership (empowerment) or shared ownership in the case of a partnership, over the strategy; and (d) the need to design capacity-building goals for the public place dwellers into the strategy (Berry et al 2001:61,72, Memmott et al 2002:58).

An example of an Aboriginal controlled agency gradually increasing its services with the aim of providing an increasingly holistic service is outlined in the Good Practice box below that describes the Port Hedland/South Hedland area in the Pilbara. The Port Hedland Breakfast Service cleverly combines the attributes of the mobile food van with the in-situ service centre, together with crisis accommodation.

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multi-dimensional social issues. However there is no single funding source to facilitates training, which cuts across areas such as drug and alcohol, juvenile justice, and child support.

Holistic approaches optimally require funding pooled from a number of agencies and the employment of a coordinator to ensure the integration of several parallel strategies or program components. Such components ideally incorporate intervention in anti-social behaviour and crisis situations, short and long-term ways of addressing alcohol addiction and accommodation related problems, transport to home communities, and public education to establish or maintain tolerant values and cross-cultural respect in local communities and across regions. Both partnerships and holistic strategies are equally applicable to public place dwellers and those at risk of homelessness. The most progressive example of this approach at the time of writing was the Darwin Itinerant Project.

#### ***Good Practice Example 4 – A Holistic Approach<sup>16</sup>***

##### **Port Hedland Sobering Up Centre Group and Homeless Support Service (W.A.)**

The Port Hedland Sobering Up Centre Group Inc. was formed in April 1991, and now provides services for homelessness, as well as in response to family violence, and alcohol-affected people in need. In February 2003 the organisation had 24 employees of whom 23 were Indigenous. At this time estimates of the Indigenous homeless population in the Hedland area varied between a core group of 100 people up to 300, most of whom come from outlying communities within the Pilbara, albeit with a minority from the Kimberley.

The Hedland Homeless Support Service provides practical support and assistance to clients who attend the Sobering-Up Centre on a regular basis. The service is mandated to be culturally appropriate to Indigenous clients, and funded to provide crisis accommodation, outreach and a meals program. However the service also aims to take a holistic approach to providing for a wide range of needs including basic hygiene, advocacy and mediation, case management, and access to other services. Although Outreach Workers view each client as an individual and work in collaboration with them to identify areas of greatest need and prepare a client support plan, the client is ultimately responsible for outcomes through working with the assigned Outreach Worker. Nevertheless, many clients are desolate without immediate support and require a nurturing environment. In most cases the Outreach Worker and Coordinator spend time outside normal working hours supporting and offering practical assistance.

The crisis accommodation aims to provide the client with safe and secure accommodation facilities, support and assistance, as well as any necessary supervision. Clients are then assisted with obtaining longer-term accommodation. The breakfast program is accompanied by a period of service delivery, which incorporates educational events, assistance with shopping skills and budgeting alternatives, hygiene information for food preparation and personal care, minor medical assistance, and referral to further appropriate services and community resources. This enables the service provider to work with the client in a non-threatening environment, listen to their problems, and assist them with difficulties. Information sessions are regularly provided by a sexual support unit and a public health unit. The number of children attending this program appears to have been increasing and the focus on the family has been encouraging parents to spend more time interacting with the children. This also reduces the time spent out drinking (often intoxicated) when the children are without proper care. However the support required for accompanying children is often more extensive and time consuming.

The 'transient service' assists with basic needs (food, clothing) and provides support to clients to access government services (eg Centrelink). The service arranged transport back to home communities, which often involves contacting Community Council personnel to access transport availability. The service also offers to make appropriate accommodation arrangements for both individuals (single men) and families until transport can be arranged. However, many will not access the crisis accommodation and prefer the outdoor lifestyle in public places.

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<sup>16</sup> Based on interviews with Roweena Raats (Manager) and Ray Fischer (staff) on 11 February 2003 and subsequently. Also drawn from Memmott et al (2002:42,59-60).

## **3.2 Conclusion on Response Categories**

The foregoing represents a summary of 15 categories of responses to Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness, based on the Memmott et al (2002) analysis, which in turn described in detail some 73 response types (programs, activities, philosophies, etc). These 15 response categories can be further subdivided into reactive (Nos 3.1.1-3), proactive (Nos 3.1.4-9) and holistic approaches (Nos 3.1.14-15). Collectively these responses address a wide range of needs that reflect the complex circumstances of Indigenous public place dwellers and homeless people.



## 4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CATEGORIES OF HOMELESSNESS AND RESPONSE STRATEGIES

One of the problems of categorisation is that when applying certain definitions of 'homelessness' the composition of Indigenous groups dwelling in public spaces may be oversimplified and thus their needs may be at best misunderstood and minimally serviced, or at worst, overlooked and not addressed. The categories used to define 'homeless' people may thus directly influence the perception of the needs of this group. To overcome this problem, this research project has attempted to clarify further the relation between categories of Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling on the one hand, and categories of responses to the needs of such people on the other.

The observations made in the previous sections on the relevance of particular response strategies to particular categories of homeless people allows for the tabulation of these two sets of variables, examination of which allows the relationships to be examined (see Table 2). A number of specific conclusions can be made. Firstly there is one set of ten response strategies that pertain largely to public place dwellers, comprising:

Legislative and police approaches	(Response strategy 1)
Patrols and outreach services	(Response strategy 2)
Diversionsary strategies	(Response strategy 3)
Addressing anti-social behaviour	(Response strategy 4)
Alcohol strategies	(Response strategy 6)
Emergency or crisis accommodation	(Response strategy 8.1)
Service centres and gathering places	(Response strategy 9)
Physical design of public places	(Response strategy 10)
Public education strategies	(Response strategy 11)
Training outreach workers	(Response strategy 13)

To effectively plan and implement this divergent set of reactive and proactive strategies, it would seem to be essential that a peak body (preferably with majority Indigenous community control) take responsibility for co-ordination of the traditional police and local authority roles, and those of Indigenous service organisations, charitable bodies, traditional owner groups, urban design authorities and crisis accommodation agencies.

There are three service response strategies in Table 2 that pertain largely to the 'housed-but-at-risk' categories:

Emergency or crisis accommodation	(Response strategy 8.1)
Medium-term transitional housing	(Response strategy 8.2)
Long-term housing	(Response strategy 8.3)

These services have traditionally been provided by housing authorities and private sector housing, but it must be stressed that such housing needs to be culturally appropriate in relation to both its architectural design and its housing management aspects. With Indigenous consultation, a range of policies need to be devised and implemented that cover household types, tenancy agreements, placements, arrears, and repairs and maintenance.

There is another set of three specific response strategies that can potentially create a bridge between all categories of homeless people:

Philosophies of client interaction	(Response strategy 2)
Regional strategies	(Response strategy 7)
Phone-in information services	(Response strategy 12)

**Table 2: Analysis of the Response Strategies in relation to the different categories of Indigenous Homeless and Public Place Dwelling People**

Response Strategies	Homeless and Public Place Dwelling Categories								
	1.0 Public Place Dwellers				2.0 At Risk Categories				3.0
	1.1 Public Place dwellers- Short term	1.2 Public place dwellers- Medium term	1.3 Public place dwellers- Long term	1.4 Reluctant public place dwellers	2.1 Insecurely housed	2.2 Substandard housed	2.3 Crowded housed	2.4 Dysfunctional Mobile	3.0 Spiritually homeless
<b>1. Legislative and Police Approaches</b> [Only in conjunction with other strategies]	√	√	√	√					
<b>2. Patrols &amp; Outreach Services</b> (Night Patrols, Aboriginal Wardens)	√	√	√	√			√	√	
<b>3. Diversionary Strategies</b> (Detox Centres, Sobering Up Shelters)	√	√	√	√				√	
<b>4. Addressing Anti-Social Behaviour</b>	√	√	√	√					
<b>5. Philosophies of Client Interaction</b> (Community Development Approach, Healing Framework)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>6. Alcohol Strategies</b>	√	√	√	√				√	√
<b>7. Regional Strategies</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>8. Accommodation Options</b>									
8.1 Emergency or crisis accommodation (1-3 nights) (Women's refuges, safe houses, sobering up shelters or hostels plus management support)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
8.2 Medium-term transitional housing (1-6 months) (hostels, boarding houses, large extended family housing, hospital hostel, managed town camp, plus management support)					√	√	√		
8.3 Long-term housing with management support (houses, extended family houses, managed and serviced camps, flats and units, special housing for aged, men & women)					√	√	√		
<b>9. Service Centres &amp; Gathering Places</b> (Food Provision, Day Centre, Dedicated Space)	√	√	√	√					
<b>10. The Physical Design of Public Spaces</b> (Storage Shelves, Park Shelter, etc)	√	√	√	√					
<b>11. Public Education Strategies</b>	√	√	√	√					√
<b>12. Phone in Information Services</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>13. Skills &amp; Training for Outreach Workers</b> (Effective Use of Field Staff, Staff Training & Development, Information Sharing and Exchange)	√	√	√	√				√	
<b>14. Partnerships</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>15. Holistic Approaches</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

One category of 'at risk' people, the dysfunctionally mobile, may move between both public place settings, and housed-but-at-risk settings; hence the response strategies that pertain to this group need to be drawn from almost all of the above categories. For example, public place patrols might be doubly effective if they are also on call and trained to deal with tenancy conflicts in rental housing that is caused by extended family visitors.

The complexity and diversity of the above range and application of services explains why the last two service responses, partnerships (14) and holistic approaches (15) are desirable, if not essential.

Finally there are those who are spiritually homeless and require a differing set of response strategies again; these most likely being:

Philosophies of client interaction	(Response strategy 5)
Alcohol strategies	(Response strategy 6)
Regional strategies	(Response strategy 7)
Emergency or crisis accommodation	(Response strategy 8.1)
Public education strategies	(Response strategy 11)
Phone-in information services	(Response strategy 12)

However this is a tentative list as there is negligible focused research on this category of homelessness, neither in an empirical sense or a literature review sense. It is a knowledge gap that urgently needs to be addressed.

It should be noted however, that this table should only be seen as a general guide. In the final analysis, which responses are relevant to a particular place or group will vary to some extent across the continent depending on the local environmental and socioeconomic context and the history of culture contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The above might seem like a grandiose wish list of services that has little chance of political attention. But as the problem of Indigenous homelessness persists and grows at a national scale, impacting negatively on many quarters of public and private life, and burdening Indigenous stakeholders, government, private enterprise and the wider taxpaying public, the prospects of recognising the need for a holistic and adequately funded approach become more and more politically realistic (At the time of writing, the Long Grasser Strategy in Darwin appeared to be leading the way nationally in this respect).

An applied research aim of this paper is to disseminate these findings with assistance from AHURI, particularly to bring this framework of needs and responses to the attention of local authorities and politicians in regional centres who, due to lack of information about previous attempts and case studies, may persist in addressing the problem of public place dwelling with a futile law-and-order approach isolated from other necessary response strategies.

## 4.1 The Need for Ongoing Research

Applied research gaps that have been identified during the course of this research in relation to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling people are as follows:

- The construct of spiritually homeless people.
- Indigenous crowding models<sup>17</sup>.
- Residential mobility and household structure.
- Special needs of Indigenous mentally disturbed public place dwellers.
- Special needs of Indigenous youth who are homeless and/or public place dwellers (including the emerging problem of street gangs).
- The ongoing profiling and dissemination of good practice responses to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling.
- Evaluation studies of service responses, especially of the challenging but rare attempts at dedicated service centres, gathering places and camping facilities in public places.
- Historico/legal/anthropological research into public place dwelling rights and native title camping rights.

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<sup>17</sup> “Any identification or analysis of homelessness that encompasses notions of community standards for housing, residential mobility, household stress or insecurity needs to be founded on a reliable model of Indigenous crowding. However the derivation of such a model is a complex issue and one that has been hardly advanced by social science research. This in turn impacts on the definition and measurement of Indigenous homelessness, particularly as it is conceived within the ABS category of secondary homelessness. It therefore comprises a significant knowledge gap and a serious deficiency in implementing related public policy.” (Memmott et al 2003:24-25.)

## 5. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR POLICY

The findings of this Final Report have important implications for the development and reform of government policies—at local, state and national levels—which seek to address the diverse character of Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling, and the complex patterns of resulting need. An overview of the policy context relevant to Indigenous homelessness was provided in the AHURI Positioning Paper, prepared in April 2003 as a part of this research project. The aims of the overview were to position our research in relation to current Australian government policies<sup>18</sup> regarding homelessness (at federal and state levels), identify the constructs of homelessness embedded in these policies, and highlight the potential shortcomings of policy based on inadequate definitions of Indigenous homelessness.

What the overview found was that policy documents and statements frequently recognise in general terms the complex and multi-dimensional nature of homelessness and the many structural factors that can cause, perpetuate and prevent it. However the large majority go on to adopt a limited or narrow definition of homelessness related to housing and accommodation when outlining response strategies. What is often not emphasised is that housing crises and chronic public place dwelling are the end result of a complex of social and emotional upheavals that can begin in childhood. Policy makers also recognise that homelessness for Indigenous Australians is an experience that is culturally distinct from mainstream homelessness without delineating those differences in precise, empirically supported terms. There is an increasing understanding that housing provision and management has to be strongly allied with other policy areas such as health, education, welfare and the criminal justice system in order for government strategies to adequately respond to all the factors affecting the lives of the homeless; but what the current study has made clear in addition, is that previously unrelated policy areas such as regional planning, urban planning, native title and cultural heritage are also significant in addressing the full spectrum of need present for homeless Indigenous Australians.

One primary aim of this study has been to advance understanding of the range of definitional issues pertinent to Indigenous homelessness. This goal has been achieved through a careful delineation of three primary categories and various sub-categories, the breadth of which is embedded among current scholarship on the subject, but albeit not in a systematic manner that is based on available empirical research findings. A key achievement has also been to create a matrix wherein these categories are cross-referenced against the response strategies available and which evidence suggests will impact positively on the situation of homeless Indigenous people.

The first group categorised in this report are public place dwellers. It is revealed that a significant component of the Indigenous homeless population have no desire to change their lifestyles of dwelling in public and semi-public spaces which they have come to regard as home. They maintain an attachment to a 'beat' of places in cities and towns, and are significant for the role they play with respect to other people less habituated to 'living rough'. It has been demonstrated that others will gather around core groups of these 'long-term or chronic public space dwellers' despite having conventional accommodation available to them. They choose to spend varying amounts of time in

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<sup>18</sup> The federal policies and policy making bodies reviewed in the Positioning Paper included: the Housing Minister's Advisory Committee; the National Homelessness Strategy and the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH); and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP IV)—which is carried out in association with all States and Territories. The state policies and policy making bodies reviewed included: the Victorian Homelessness Strategy; the New South Wales Partnership Against Homelessness Strategy; the Queensland Government's Homelessness Strategies for Cairns, Mt Isa and Townsville; the Northern Territory Homelessness Action Plan, the Western Australian Homelessness Strategy; and South Australia's Alcohol Strategy and Social Inclusion Initiative (its State Housing Plan as it relates to Homelessness was reviewed for this current report). Numerous local government strategies relevant to Indigenous homelessness have also been reviewed both during preparation of this report and earlier work out of which it has grown (Memmott & Fantin 2001, Memmott et al 2002). They frequently formed a large component of the analysis required to produce the categorisation of response strategies.

public settings for a variety of reasons such as social alcohol consumption and companionship. There is also a range of Indigenous people who may attach themselves to groups occupying public spaces for the medium-term because they have no other option in the short-term. These findings regarding public space dwellers are vital to shedding light on the complex issue of Indigenous homelessness being defined exclusively through the lens of housing and accommodation. Without this information, policy and the strategies that emerge from it will have little chance of long-term success in dealing with what is often one of the most visible aspects of homelessness, and one which causes serious conflict between the wider public, commerce, government agencies and public place dwellers.

The second category of homeless persons defined by this study involves the more commonly understood connection between homelessness and a lack of housing or accommodation. But the current analysis extends this understanding by eliciting additional reasons as to why Indigenous people's lives in certain housing or accommodation types can become untenable; including issues of crowding and mobility, which can be manifestations of either cultural preferences particular to this segment of the population, or family stress and poverty. It raises concerns about the efficacy with which public standards of housing, and norms concerning safe and secure housing, can be applied to groups of people with distinct cultural living patterns and practices. The discussion of this category also covers the interaction between those Indigenous people with rental housing and those public place dwellers to which they have cultural obligations; how the latter can undermine security of tenure and how the former can be drawn into a public place dwelling lifestyle.

The third category outlined here is spiritual homelessness. Home for Indigenous Australians is defined as traditional country or a landscape made up of various locations to which both sacred and profane memories and associations adhere. Therefore, to be homeless means to be without country and intimate filial connections, and thus to have an incomplete identity. These concepts are vital in revealing the significance of policy areas like native title and cultural heritage to the issue of Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling. Not only can people be housed without having their desire for home adequately satisfied, but the risk that they may be drawn into public place dwelling is heightened. This may occur under the influence of such factors as the social and psychological problems arising from a crisis of identity both among individuals and entire communities. People may also be influenced to adopt a public place dwelling lifestyle that satisfies this more elusive concept of home as it connects them to the natural rather than the built environment.

On a national level the results of this research project could readily impact on the forthcoming national evaluation of SAAP IV, and contribute to its future policy direction. These findings are also pertinent to two goals of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH) and its national strategy: the first of which is to "develop a better understanding of indigenous homelessness and a range of localised responses to it ..."; and the second of which is to "increase and improve awareness and understanding of how the legacy of history continues to affect the emotional and social well-being of indigenous people" (Aust, CACH 2001:46). Also, in March 2003 The HMAAC Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing held a National Forum on Indigenous Homelessness (attended by Memmott, Long and Spring) in an effort to identify appropriate responses that would address the "alarming levels of Indigenous homelessness" identified in its 10 year policy outline (Aust, HMAAC 2001:2). The findings of this research will assist these efforts, in particular the Committee's desire to implement a 'whole of government' approach to linking housing services with improved health and well-being outcomes (Aust, HMAAC 2001:5).

What this exercise in categorising Indigenous homelessness and service responses has demonstrated most clearly with regards to policy is the need for partnerships between Indigenous organizations and multiple levels and areas of government. It reiterates that housing and accommodation strategies must be tied to other social services. Relating homelessness categories and responses has produced a basic model of what these interactions may entail, and provided valuable insight into what these partnerships must achieve to be considered effective. Federal government is obviously the agency most capable of driving such an approach, along with the assistance of the states and territories. All parties have realised the importance of this endeavour. The response models outlined herein, can be adapted or used as a benchmark in the design of other local policies and programs, reflecting the particular circumstances of differing locations. Despite these varying circumstances the research demonstrates that good response practices already exist and can be useful for consideration in designing local and regional strategies. This research project has also demonstrated the role that empirical data about the history and current needs of the Indigenous population can play in the formation of effective policy and the design of realistic strategies. The model of how categories and responses relate to one another in the area of Indigenous homelessness will also be an essential tool for those attempting to evaluate the success of any strategy or approach.

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