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CUTTING REMOTE HOUSING FUNDING UNFAIR AND UNJUSTIFIED

Media [reports](#) and comments by the Western Australian Housing Minister Peter Tinley indicate that the Turnbull government is proposing massive cuts to the National Partnership on Remote Housing, which has replaced the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy (2008-2018).

The reports indicate that the financial commitment by the Commonwealth will be reduced from \$776 million to \$100 million and will only be available to remote communities in the Northern Territory.

The Turnbull government must immediately clarify these reports and, if true, reconsider this cruel and outrageous cut to housing and homelessness funding in remote and indigenous communities.

In recognition of the serious problems in indigenous housing, \$5.4 billion of funding has been invested since 2008 by Commonwealth governments in an attempt to close the gap in indigenous housing.

The Turnbull government's own [remote housing review](#) demonstrated that this long-term strategy had delivered over 11,500 more liveable homes in remote Australia, 4000 new houses, and 7500 refurbishments. This has resulted in a significant but necessary decrease in the proportion of overcrowded households.

The report also estimates that an additional 5500 homes are required by 2028 to reduce levels of overcrowding in remote areas to acceptable levels. The report shows that 1,100 properties are required in Queensland, 1,350 in Western Australia, and 300 in South Australia by 2028 to address overcrowding and meet population growth.

“If these reports are true, remote communities in Western Australia will continue to be overcrowded for the decade to come,” Senator Dodson said.

The report debunks the myth that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families cause the majority of damage to remote indigenous housing. The report shows that only nine percent of household damage is caused by tenants, with the majority of damage coming from lack of programmed maintenance and in 25 per cent of cases the cause is poor specifications or faulty workmanship in the original build.

Rather than cutting funding, the Turnbull government’s own report has concluded that capital plans should be set for a minimum five years. This is on the basis that government procurement practices would support small, emerging businesses, and provide greater opportunities for training and employment of local people.

Key recommendations to the government in the report include:

- That there be a recurrent program funded to maintain existing houses, preserve functionality and increase the life of housing assets.
- The costs of a remote Indigenous housing program to be shared 50:50 between the Commonwealth and the other jurisdictions.
- Investment for an additional 5500 houses by 2028 is needed to continue efforts on closing the gap on indigenous disadvantage.

Additional recommendations include improved governance structures, increased transparency, the development of the local workforce, and tenancy education programs.

The report also found overcrowding and poor quality housing leads to poor health outcomes and makes it harder to manage chronic disease. In addition, the report indicates that indigenous communities experience high rates of infectious diseases.

As such, any decision to cut funding by the Turnbull government will contribute to an increase in chronic disease, and inevitably lead to poorer health outcomes, more indigenous deaths and widening of the gap between the general community and indigenous communities.

Safe and healthy housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of all Australians and contributes to providing shelter, privacy, safety and security, supports health and education, and has a significant impact on workforce participation.

Malcolm Turnbull and Minister Nigel Scullion must take immediate steps to ensure the continuation of funding for remote and indigenous housing. Failure to do so will be another example of a government that is out of touch and only concerned with their internal disputes and dysfunction.

Rather than \$65 billion in tax cuts for big business and the banks, the Turnbull government should immediately commit to the recommendations in its own report and close the gap by continuing funding of the National Partnership on Remote Housing.

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