

**Release of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Information Paper
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Perspectives on Homelessness**

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia. Shelter SA has a vision for all South Australians to have an affordable, safe, secure and appropriate place to call home. Shelter SA conducts systems and policy advocacy and research. Policy work often requires written submissions to the review of legislation, strategy documents, discussion papers and other consultations. Shelter SA submissions are based on research and consultation with our members and stakeholders. It is sometimes difficult to highlight achievements and successes in policy work and this document describes the process Shelter SA undertook to formulate a submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) related to the definition of homelessness to be used in the Census from the perspective of Aboriginal people, highlighting where the points made in our submission were taken up in their response.

The "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Perspectives on Homelessness" [Information Paper](#) (cat. no. 4736.0) was informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and service providers across several jurisdictions. The ABS' National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (NCATSIS) sought advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to determine suitable methodological approaches and question wording to translate complex homelessness concepts into meaningful and understandable questions that were culturally appropriate.¹

On 11 February 2014 Shelter SA attended the ABS teleconference about their discussion paper and provided a range of recommendations for consideration based on earlier consultation with our members. The discussion paper was also circulated to the Shelter SA Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Support Branch and discussed at the meeting held on 12 March with Shelter SA providing an opportunity for participants to make further comment. As a result, Shelter SA made a submission to the ABS drawing upon the consultation with Branch members and contemporary research. A number of observations made by Shelter SA during the teleconference on 11 February and in the written submission have been included within the final ABS discussion paper. Shelter SA's contributions which appear in the final version along with ABS responses are described below.

Shelter SA Observation	ABS Inclusion/Response
<p>There are tensions between determining homelessness according to the subjective experiences of Aboriginal people who are homeless and objective statistical measurements utilised in the Census which are often required to inform policy development.</p>	<p>Understanding Homelessness Within a Cultural Context</p> <p>It was widely reported that some people classified as homeless under the ABS statistical definition may in fact report being satisfied with their housing circumstances. Conversely, some people who have adequate shelter, secure tenure and control of, and access to space may feel homeless if living 'off country' due to being disconnected from family and/or their community.</p>

¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au> – Appendix Consultation Process – Overview of Consultation Process

<p>The importance of understanding family and kinship responsibilities within the ATSI context when distinguishing identification between 'usual residents' and 'visitors', and then determining reasons for 'staying' versus 'living' in a dwelling and the ability of households to accommodate visitors.</p>	<p>Family and Kinship Responsibilities Refusing visitors was considered culturally inappropriate due to cultural expectations to provide shelter for family members needing a place to stay, irrespective of the ability to accommodate visitors, with some stakeholders acknowledging the pressures that accommodating 'visitors' can place on some households. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people travelling for cultural or family reasons between communities or across states and territories can contribute to people living in conditions where there is limited access to space, which under the ABS definition, may be considered homeless in instances where people had no accommodation alternatives.</p>
<p>Perspectives associated with the definition of homelessness are different depending on whether or not Aboriginal people are from regional areas or from urban centres.</p> <p>In terms of the definition associated with Security of tenure in the dwelling, there was agreement with Shelter SA's view that self-reporting homelessness is problematic in a Census when an Aboriginal person was staying temporarily with family.</p>	<p>Security of Tenure in the Dwelling [Aboriginal people] ... would not be considered homeless due to cultural norms and responsibilities to provide accommodation for family ie they would not see themselves as being homeless (and identify as such in statistical reports) if they were staying with family.</p>
<p>Concepts of Homelessness Outside the ABS Statistical Definition and Connection to Country Shelter SA observed when considering the concepts of homelessness outside of the ABS definition, one of the guiding points supported by ABS was:</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have a dwelling that may be located off country or away from community, for example people who are 'stuck in transit' having travelled to a major centre for medical or other reasons, which may result in people feeling homeless.</p> <p>On this aspect it was interesting to read that the ABS also acknowledged there are Aboriginal people who may be sleeping rough and have no other suitable housing options while living in <i>their</i> country, and so may not perceive (and therefore report) themselves as being homeless as they are home on their land.</p>	

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