

**Measuring outcomes for  
Community Managed Indigenous  
Housing (CMIH) assistance:  
Report on the 1998-99 national data collection**

WELFARE DIVISION  
WORKING PAPER NO. 28

# **Measuring outcomes for Community Managed Indigenous Housing (CMIH) assistance:**

## **Report on the 1998-99 national data collection**

A report prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
for the National Indigenous Housing Information Implementation  
Committee

April 2000

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
Canberra

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### **Suggested citation**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2000. Measuring outcomes for Community Managed Indigenous Housing (CMIH) assistance: Report on the 1998-99 national data collection. Canberra: AIHW.

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# Conclusions and recommendations

## Conclusions

1. Although the problems associated with this kind of collection are better recognised this time than for the previous collection, the 1998-99 data are still not sufficiently developed to provide any meaningful national numerical data. Timeliness of returns and the extent of the responses was improved from 1997-98.
2. Existing differences in how data items are defined and collected across jurisdictions contribute greatly to the lack of validity of the data. The diversity of programs, the changing mix of method of providing assistance over time, the discontinuity of funding, the overlap of responsibilities within State/Territories and the plethora of funding sources result in a web of accountability which is often unclear and obscure, with unknown or non-existent reporting requirements.
3. For the 1998-99 collection, the reporting was structured around the four key aspects: tenancy management, property management, financial management and asset management. Tenancy and property manager functions may be performed by one organisation and therefore difficult to separate. While future reporting should concentrate on the outcomes data underlying the performance indicators, an appropriate reporting structure suited to the functioning of the sector is still to be clarified.
4. A further barrier to improving the collection is that a significant proportion of the sector is ill-equipped in the skills, knowledge, resources and support necessary to collect and report nationally relevant data.
5. A number of major issues was identified from the 1997-98 collection. Table 1 identifies progress in relation to those issues at the time of the 1998-99 collection.

**Table 1: Update on the major issues identified in the 1997-98 report**

1997-98	1998-99
The need to be realistic in terms of what data can be provided, within what timeframe, and recognise the need to improve data to meet current and future accountability and outcome requirements	Better recognition at the policy level of the factors that influence the ability and preparedness of providers to deliver household level data.
The lack of coordination both within and across political boundaries	Addressed by the signing of the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information and the National housing Data Agreement, but no effect on data yet.
Reconciling overlap between ATSIC provision, other Indigenous provision and mainstream/CSHA	Some jurisdictions have entered into arrangements to coordinate housing assistance with the State/Territory, but this is not national and not yet fully effective.
The need to establish and implement national data standards	The intent has been signalled with the signing of the two agreements, but implementation is at an early stage.
The complexity of some of the measurement issues	Better understood but still there.
The need to safe-guard against potential misuse of the information supplied	The concerns of the providers over household level data are understood but not yet addressed.
The need to further understand and investigate data	Still applies.

## **Recommendations**

1. To identify and provide the rationale for reporting requirements at the national, State/Territory and local levels, with particular attention to coordination of requirements within States/Territories.
2. To build on the information gained from the 1997-98 and 1998-99 collections and other data collections (eg. CHINS) to identify what is and is not currently collected.
3. To develop a work plan to address:
  - (i) gaps, deficiencies and overlaps in current data collection and reporting
  - (ii) inconsistent national data standards and reporting methods
  - (iii) the capacity of the sector to report nationally comparable, consistent data
  - (iv) addressing the concerns of communities and Indigenous community housing organisations about the potential misuse of information supplied and educating communities about the necessity for and especially the benefits of collecting such information.

## Section 1: Introduction

This report summarises the collection of a range of outcome measures for community managed Indigenous housing assistance in 1998-99. The main objective of this activity was to develop national program management information based on outcomes focused reporting. The approach to collection for 1998-99 built on the experience gained from compiling the 1997-98 collection. The data collection issues outlined in this report provide a basis for further examination of the many policy and information issues facing this work.

### Background

In April 1997, at their Indigenous housing specific conference, Housing Ministers spelled out resolutions aimed at significantly improving outcomes in the provision of housing assistance to Indigenous communities. As part of this, the Commonwealth/State Working Group on Indigenous Housing was established to address impediments to achieving better outcomes and a Data Working Party formed to examine a range of data and information issues.

During 1997-98, the Data Working Party undertook initial data development work for performance measures for Indigenous community managed housing and an initial data collection.

The 1998-99 data collection aimed at building on the information gained from the 1997-98 collection. While some progress has been made in understanding the difficulties facing data collectors, these are by no means resolved and should be addressed within the implementation of the Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information (ANIHI), now (January 2000) signed by all jurisdictions. Implementation of the Agreement includes specification of a national minimum data set and associated data definitions, standards and classifications.

### Learning from the 1997-98 collection

The 1997-98 collection was the first attempt to compile a national data collection for community managed Indigenous housing. The 1997-98 collection aimed to test the existing capacity to provide consistent, good quality data on the effectiveness of Indigenous community managed housing assistance in meeting the needs of Indigenous households. The collection sought to identify at the national and jurisdiction level which data currently exist for performance reporting, how the data fit together to form a framework to examine outcomes, and the issues that needed to be addressed.

The major issues identified during the conduct of the 1997-98 data collection were:

- The need to be realistic in terms of what data can be provided, within what timeframe, and recognise the need to improve data to meet current and future accountability and outcome requirements;
- The lack of coordination both within and across political boundaries;
- Reconciling overlap between ATSI provision, other Indigenous community provision; mainstream/CSHA and other government managed Indigenous housing;
- The need to establish and implement national data standards;
- The complexity of some of the measurement issues;

- The need to safe-guard against potential misuse of the information supplied; and
- The need to further understand and investigate data.

The 1997-98 collection showed that:

- In several jurisdictions useful data collections exist which could form the basis for the further development of national management data on outcomes – this is balanced by concerns in other jurisdictions about data systems and their inability to provide useful data. The underlying lack of comparability of data between jurisdictions, however, made it impossible to outline a national picture. Data could rarely be aggregated meaningfully.
- Current changes in programs in several jurisdictions and the increased emphasis on data in the new CSHA emphasise the need for future data collection to be consistent with jurisdiction level reporting requirements or legislative provision, in order to minimise duplication and overlap and maximise consistency in the data.
- The focus on performance indicators initially tended to obscure the need to develop national data on outcomes on which to base indicators. A more effective approach is to identify and develop basic uniform national and jurisdiction level management information, based on measuring outcomes and employing a minimum data set and its associated data dictionary. Relevant performance indicators could then be derived from the data.

## **Changes to the data collection for 1998-99 based on the 1997-98 experience**

### **Changes to reporting structure**

Based on the recommendations of the 1997-98 report, there was more focus in 1998-99 on the outcomes data underlying the performance indicators. This year's report is therefore structured according to the four key aspects of housing management: Tenancy management, Property management, Financial management and Asset management.

The geographical breakdown of dwellings used in the 1997-98 collection was deferred for the 1998-99 collection pending technical work on classification of the location of dwellings.

### **Changes to data items**

Some definitions and data items were further refined as a result of the 1997-98 experience to improve understanding of what is being measured, and included or excluded.

Results of the 1997-98 collection demonstrated that data needed to calculate performance indicators required further development. This also largely applied to the 1998-99 data collection. Consequently such items were not collected in 1998-99 and several of the performance indicators could not be calculated. These are detailed below:

#### **P1 Level of provision**

Number of dwellings with water and power connected at 30 June for previous financial year not collected in 1998-99. Therefore P1 not able to be calculated.

**P2 Needs Status**

Not collected in 1997-98 or 1998-99.

Exclusion is based on concerns that the concept of need cannot not be collected at the level of detail required. Awaiting development of an accepted definition and reliable measure of need and outcomes from needs analysis and resource allocation in progress.

**P4 Customer Satisfaction**

Not collected in 1997-98 or 1998-99.

**P5 Cost of Stock production**

Not collected in 1998-99.

Awaiting data development by jurisdictions.



## **Section 2: 1998-99 data collection issues**

### **Outcomes reporting**

#### **Reporting issues**

##### **Reporting structure**

This year's report was structured according to the four key housing management areas: Tenancy management, Property management, Financial management and Asset management. Although this structure provided a useful framework in which to identify data areas, it was not clear where information should be reported in cases where the community/provider has responsibility for tenancy management as well as property management in some circumstances and where the government administrator has responsibility for property management, in others. Tenancy and property manager functions may therefore be split or performed by one organisation and therefore difficult to separate. While future reporting should concentrate on the outcomes data underlying the performance indicators, further work on clarifying an appropriate reporting structure that is suited to the functioning of the sector should be investigated.

##### **Completion of returns**

Timeliness of data returns was much improved on last year's collection. Response was also much improved from 1997-98, with all jurisdictions supplying some data and or footnotes.

#### **Collection issues**

##### **Data availability**

Most jurisdictions were only able to report on activity that was funded for the present financial year. This means that if an organisation does not receive any of its funding in the 1998-99 financial year they may not be required to report in that year but may receive funds and report in the following year. This may lead to some undercounting of total dwellings and high variability in the data.

##### **Coverage and quality:**

Many organisations/communities may receive funding from more than one source. This introduces a problem of overlap and gaps in reporting. For instance, organisations may report all new dwellings constructed to all funders, or the proportion of all new dwellings that each funder provided funds for.

Availability varies from year to year as not all data are collected every year – some data were the result of a one-off or 2-3 year audit or survey.

##### **Scope**

There were several areas in which the scope of the data collection needed refining:

### *Communities and organisations*

The concept of community, and therefore the scope of the collection, requires further definition. Several jurisdictions noted that they were unable to report on the number of communities providing housing in an urban setting as the concept of **discrete communities** was considered to be more applicable in rural and remote areas. The collection manual does not indicate whether the term community refers to only discrete communities and there is some debate over the definition of a discrete community. The CHINS definition is as follows:

*A discrete Indigenous community refers to a geographic location, bounded by physical or cadastral (legal) boundaries, and inhabited or intended to be inhabited by predominantly Indigenous people, with housing or infrastructure that is either owned or managed on a community basis. Discrete communities include:*

- *communities in urban areas where the title to a parcel of land has been transferred to an Indigenous organisation, for example, communities on former mission or reserve land in New South Wales and Queensland;*
- *well established communities and outstations in remote areas;*
- *Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) communities and their outstations in Queensland as well as the two shires of Aurukun and Mornington Island; and*
- *communities on Indigenous pastoral properties/leases.*

Further discussion is required to determine if such a definition is acceptable and applicable to the current collection. If the scope of the collection was restricted to discrete communities according to the above definition, consideration needs to be given to any housing/organisations that such a definition would exclude.

There is also room for confusion between the terms 'community' and 'organisation' as these are sometimes used interchangeably. Further refinement of 'community' should help in distinguishing communities from organisations.

### *Crisis accommodation*

There is some overlap with CAP data if the crisis accommodation is Indigenous community managed. A decision on whether to report under the CAP collection or the CMIH collection is needed.

### **Data issues:**

In addition to the general problems with reporting and collection of data there were also some problems with specific types of data:

- Very few household level data were collected and even fewer were reported due mainly to privacy concerns of communities and providers. The household level data that were collected were mainly point in time data collected at the time a new lease was signed. Throughput data was not generally collected or considered necessary;
- Very few data on rent were collected due mainly to poor systems capability at the provider level. Again, what little data that were collected were mainly point in time data collected at the beginning of the lease. Data that were collected are also not comparable due to a lack of a standard accounting framework for the sector;
- Very few data on individual dwellings (eg. Stock condition/amenities) were collected. Most stock condition data were obtained from two to three yearly audits/surveys and are therefore not updated annually;

- Very few vacancy data were collected. It was mostly assumed that very few dwellings are ever vacant at any point in time; and
- Financial data in general is difficult to apportion. For example, separating housing and infrastructure costs is difficult for housing providers with broader infrastructure functions. Most financial data reported was not comparable due to a lack of a common accounting framework for the sector (eg. varying definitions of what to include as capital and recurrent expenditure).

### **Data definitions and standards:**

The 1998-99 collection demonstrated that there is a need for a standard accounting framework for the sector. Currently, varying methods are used to calculate such things as capital and recurrent expenditure.

Standards and procedures for assessing stock condition etc., are also required. There was considerable variability in the classification of dwellings needing minor to major repairs with some jurisdictions using the classification outlined in the data manual while others used their own classifications (eg. \$0-\$3000 as minor repairs). There were no procedures specified for estimating repair costs. Given that estimates could be obtained from a variety of sources (eg. tenants, providers etc.) and via a variety of methods, some standard procedures are required.

Definitions for the basic items such as dwelling, Indigenous household, vacant dwelling, tenantable dwelling etc. are required. For example, a dwelling requiring major repairs may be considered tenantable in one jurisdiction and untenable in another. This inconsistency of definitions may lead to a picture of how many dwellings are available for assistance that is not comparable across jurisdictions.

### **Performance Indicators**

P1 Level of provision, P2 Needs Status P4 Customer Satisfaction, P5 Cost of Stock production were not collected.

#### **P3 Housing Stock Amenity/Condition**

While being an area where several jurisdictions reported data, it was not of the quality required to be comparable. Meaningful performance indicators could not be calculated.

#### **P6 Property administration and stock upgrade**

Data was supplied by several jurisdictions. However, due to lack of consistency in the definitions used, data was not comparable or of a standard to produce reliable and meaningful performance indicators



## Section 3: Issues for the further development of outcomes data

The collection identified several issues that need to be examined in the long term. Progress on developing management information for the sector depends on the ability to address the current issues and potential barriers identified by jurisdictions.

### Co-ordination of the sector

One of the major issues that impacts on collecting management information in this sector as opposed to areas such as public housing is the diversity of programs it covers. In several jurisdictions the mix of provision of housing assistance over time has resulted in a web of accountability which is often unclear and obscure, with a variety of reporting requirements. This is due largely to a plethora of funding sources under which assistance may be obtained and for which data are not coordinated. This environment, to date, has not readily supported good information.

Compounding this complexity is the issue of communication and co-operation between and within agencies. Nationally, and within most States/Territories, co-operation and consistency between and within the various resource agencies, (eg. between ATSIC national and regional offices and between ATSIC and State Housing Authorities in each State) varies considerably. This lack of co-operation has been indicated as a cause of large gaps and overlaps in reporting. While some jurisdictions have moved towards inter-agency coordination and liaison, this has not yet developed enough or widespread enough to clarify funding and reporting mechanisms. However, even full cooperation between all funding agencies will not ensure that all gaps are filled.

### Resourcing

Several jurisdictions noted a concern about the capacity of the sector to provide the type of management data required. In several areas the sector was ill-equipped in terms of the necessary skills, knowledge, resources and support required to collect and report on this sort of information. These issues were noted as applying to the government agencies as well as community providers.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information Plan<sup>1</sup> notes several limitations affecting Australia's capacity to produce good quality information and report on Indigenous health and this almost certainly applies to Indigenous housing. These include:

- Little evidence of an 'information culture';
- Little appreciation amongst communities and services of the potential power that information has;
- Little attention to the information needs of Indigenous communities;
- Inconsistent use of classification standards and collection protocols; and
- The need to develop appropriate information management skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council/Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1997. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information Plan. Canberra:AGPS

The process of improved reporting relies on jurisdictions seeking community organisations to commit to collect an agreed set of data and in doing this must be willing to work out how to resource agencies to do so. This resourcing may come from existing funds and each jurisdiction may need to develop plans to develop data reporting capacity in community organisations.

## **Community providers and availability of data**

Several jurisdictions noted that some of the data required could not be provided due to it either not being considered essential at the provider level or not being collected on an annual basis. There is a need to be realistic in terms of what data can be provided, within what timeframes, and to recognise the need to improve data to meet current and future accountability and outcome requirements. Further consultation with communities or organisations regarding what they currently record for management and reporting purposes is required. Each data item collected needs to be rationalised in terms of availability, cost of collection, and usefulness at the provider and other levels.

There was a marked concern across several jurisdictions about releasing household level data. It was noted that the practice of collecting household level information is regarded with suspicion and as an invasion of privacy. These concerns may stem from long standing distrust of government authorities and a perception that reporting will have negative implications for funding. There is a need to develop a strategy to discuss and address the concerns of communities and Indigenous community housing organisations. Such a strategy may involve implementing safeguards against the potential misuse of information supplied and educating communities about the necessity for and especially the benefits of collecting such data.

## **Data development**

The 1998-99 and 1997-98 data collections both indicated that there are many differences across jurisdictions in how data items are defined and collected. Much of the data collected is not comparable due to differing definitions and standards. Data definitions need to be developed for even the most basic items such as dwelling and household and standards for collecting the data need to be developed and implemented.

This technical work should be placed on the work program of the National Indigenous Housing Information Implementation Committee and progressed before any further data collection takes place. The first two data collections have clarified which data are available and what work needs to be done to develop them. Another data collection at this stage, with no national standards in place, would add very little information to that already gathered.

## **Options and priorities for progress**

The 1998-99 data collection further clarified the existing problems with the outcomes data. It is clear that there is a need to establish and implement national data standards and classifications. In terms of improving this data the recommendations of the Indigenous housing Technical Working Groups should be considered. Two technical working groups were established by the interim National Indigenous Housing Data Management Group in June 1999 to address definitions for dwelling related items (including adequacy, location etc) and household related items (including Indigenous household, Indigenous status etc.). At a joint meeting in September 1999 the two groups developed recommendations on priorities

for progressing a National Minimum Data Set. The technical working groups made the following recommendations to the interim Data Management Group (DMG):

- That the DMG
  - accept that while throughput measures for households assisted are the appropriate measures in the short-term it is not feasible to collect them and in the meantime, point in time measures should be used;
  - consider the development of adequacy measures as a priority and investigate the National Framework for Indigenous occupancy standards as the basis for assessing compliance
- That the first workplan should cover:
  - How many dwellings adequate for occupation are on the books? (adequate here means compliant with some agreed set of standards).
    - Subsidiary information – how many occupied/vacant
  - What number of non-compliant dwellings on the books can be made compliant and for what cost?
  - How many households that need assistance aren't getting it?
    - Subsidiary information – how many households and people are getting assistance

A combined workshop of the two working groups recommended that the first steps involve finding the answers to the above questions by working out the data elements still to be defined and field testing the collectables.