



Queensland
**Mental Health
Commission**

Our Place: A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2024–2027

Queensland Mental Health Commission submission

July 2023

PO Box 13027 George Street Brisbane QLD 4003

Phone **1300 855 945** | Fax (07) 3405 9780

Email info@qmhc.qld.gov.au

[f](#) [t](#) | www.qmhc.qld.gov.au



Queensland
Government

Acknowledgements

First Nations people

The Queensland Mental Health Commission (the Commission) respectfully acknowledges the First Nations Traditional Owners and Elders of the lands and seas on which we meet, live, learn and work. We acknowledge those of the past, who have passed on their wisdom and whose strength has nurtured this land. We acknowledge those of the present for their leadership and ongoing efforts to protect and promote First Nations people and cultures.

We recognise that it is our collective effort and responsibility as individuals, communities and governments to ensure equality, recognition and advancement of First Nations Queenslanders across all aspects of society and everyday life. We walk together in our shared journey of reconciliation.

Recognition of lived experience

The Commission acknowledges the individual and collective contributions of Queenslanders with lived experiences of mental ill-health, problematic alcohol and other drug use, and people, groups and communities impacted by suicidal distress or suicide. We acknowledge families, carers and support people who play a fundamental role in supporting people with lived experience. Each person's journey is unique and collectively provides a valuable contribution to reforming the mental health, alcohol and other drugs and suicide prevention system and related systems in Queensland.

This report is licensed by the State of Queensland (Queensland Mental Health Commission) under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence.

To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

In essence, you are free to copy, communicate and adapt this annual report as long as you attribute the work to the Queensland Mental Health Commission.

© Queensland Mental Health Commission 2023

Published by the Queensland Mental Health Commission, July 2023

An electronic copy of this document is available at www.qmhc.qld.gov.au.



Submission

Introduction

The Commission is pleased to make a brief submission to the Department of Housing to support the development of the *Our Place: A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2024–2027 (Our Place Action Plan)*.

The Commission is committed to working in genuine and meaningful partnership with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations to close the gap in achieving equality in health status and life expectancy outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by the year 2030.

The Commission acknowledges that access to housing is a human right and believes that ending homelessness is possible. Having a place to call home is important to everyone. Safe, secure, affordable housing and connection to community is foundational to good mental wellbeing and achieving other life aspirations. As a key social determinant of mental health, the Commission supports the continued focus on and investment in a broad range of housing and support options for people in need.

The *Our Place Action Plan* provides an opportunity to enhance housing outcomes for First Nations people and the Commission welcomes the opportunity to support the development of the plan.

About the Queensland Mental Health Commission

The Commission is an independent statutory agency established under the *Queensland Mental Health Commission Act 2013* (the Act).

The Commission was established to drive ongoing reform towards a more integrated, evidence-based and recovery-oriented mental health and alcohol and other drug system. Under the Act, the Commission must focus on systemic mental health and alcohol and other drug issues.

The Commission has four main functions:

- Developing a whole-of-government strategic plan for improving mental health and limiting the harm associated with problematic alcohol and other drug use
- Undertaking reviews and research to inform decision-making, build the evidence base, support innovation and identify good practice
- Facilitating and promoting mental health awareness, prevention, and early intervention
- Establishing and supporting statewide mechanisms that are collaborative, representative, transparent and accountable.

The Commission promotes policies and practices that are aligned with the vision of:

- *Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018–2023 (Shifting minds)*
- *Achieving balance: The Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan 2022–2027 (Achieving balance)*
- *Every life: The Queensland Suicide Prevention Plan 2019–2029 (Every life)*.

The Commission's work is supported by the independent Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council (Advisory Council), which acts as a champion for people living with mental ill-health or problematic alcohol or other drug use, or impacted by suicide or suicidal distress. The Advisory Council's functions are to:

- provide advice to the Commission on mental health or problematic use of alcohol or other drugs issues either on its own initiative or at the Commission's request; and

• make recommendations to the Commission regarding the Commission's functions.

Phone 1300 855 945 | Fax (07) 3405 9780

Email info@qmhc.qld.gov.au

[f](#) [t](#) | www.qmhc.qld.gov.au

Strategic context and alignment

Shifting minds sets the overarching strategic direction for mental health, alcohol and other drugs and suicide prevention in Queensland and is supported by two sub-plans, *Achieving balance and Every life*.

Shifting minds identifies housing as a strategic priority noting the importance of safe, secure and affordable housing as a key factor impacting mental health and wellbeing. A priority action for consideration included:

- build on inter-agency initiatives to support Queenslanders with mental illness and problematic alcohol and other drug use to obtain and sustain safe, secure and affordable housing and pathways out of homelessness.

Specifically in relation to First Nations people, *Shifting minds* includes a strategic priority to renew, strengthen and integrate cross-sector social and emotional wellbeing approaches. Priority actions for consideration included:

- develop a collaborative approach to drive cross-sector reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, and responses to mental illness, problematic alcohol and other drug use and other drug use, and suicide
- implement the *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration* and align reform approaches with the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023*, and
- adopt healing-informed approaches by service providers in their communication, policies and practices.

The Commission is currently renewing *Shifting minds* and developing Phase Two of *Every life*. This process has included broad-reaching consultations with Queensland communities and targeted consultations with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations, and tiers of government.

The renewed plan will continue to recognise housing as a key social determinant for mental health and wellbeing, commit to enhancing access to housing with appropriate support, and prevent and reduce the impacts of homelessness.

The renewed *Shifting minds* will also continue Queensland's cross-sector commitments under state and national strategies that support the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations Queenslanders. This includes prioritising the implementation and embedding of the *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration*, the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023*, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (pending).

The Commission supports the Queensland Government's vision (outlined in the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*) that every Queenslander has access to a safe, secure and affordable home that meets their needs and enables participation in the social and economic life of our prosperous state.

In particular, the Commission is identified as a partner agency in the *Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–2025* and the *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022–2027* plan to improve cross-agency responses to housing need, and deliver integrated health, housing and human services through strong referral processes and integrated service responses.

The Commission attended the Queensland Housing Summit in October 2022 and was pleased to see additional funding allocated for housing supply and housing support. Additionally, the Commission was invited to the Housing Minister's Advisory Council to contribute to discussions and provide advice about how to address current and future housing and homelessness challenges. The Council had its first meeting in April 2023.

The Commission looks forward to working with the Department of Housing to support implementation of the housing support initiatives in line with commitments in the *Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–2025*, the *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022–2027* plan and will continue to advocate for the needs for people experiencing mental ill-health, problematic alcohol and other drugs use, and suicidality.

Enhancing housing outcomes for First Nations Queenslanders

The relationship between housing, homelessness, mental ill-health and problematic alcohol and other drug use is complex and bi-directional. Safe, secure, affordable housing and connection to community is foundational to good mental health and wellbeing and achieving other life aspirations. It facilitates social inclusion, treatment and recovery, and access to support services—which is key to people remaining well and recovering from mental ill-health and problematic alcohol and other drug use. Unstable, unsafe, unaffordable housing or homelessness exacerbates mental ill-health and makes it harder to function in other areas of life.

For First Nations people there are additional and compounding barriers due to historical and ongoing disadvantage and trauma caused by colonisation and government practices. Historically, there has been little acknowledgement throughout Australia of the negative effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how that has accumulated across generations, including ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma, racism and discrimination.

To improve housing outcomes for First Nations people, particularly those experiencing mental ill-health, problematic alcohol and other drug use, and suicidality, the Commission suggests three areas for consideration:

- increased housing supply across the spectrum of need
- culturally appropriate support services, and
- evolving ways of working to support self-determination and the principles of Path to Treaty.

Housing supply

The consultation guide makes the case for the need for increased housing supply for First Nations people. The Commission notes and supports efforts under the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* and associated action plans to increase housing supply across the spectrum of need. The recent boosts to housing supply commitments as an outcome of the Queensland Housing Summit are welcome. At present housing supply is focused on people in acute need. In addition to providing housing assistance to those in acute need, the Commission suggests a greater focus on assisting people earlier in need—thereby preventing housing distress and other associated negative impacts wherever possible. This may be through access to housing or other housing products and services.

The Commission suggests including a specific commitment to social procurement in the *Our Way Action Plan* to amplify the benefits of increasing housing supply. Whilst relevant to the *Our Place Action Plan*, increasing social procurement efforts is relevant to implementation of the entire *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* and associated action plans. Social procurement uses the government's purchasing power to generate social benefits, particularly employment. Including a commitment to support jobs-focused social enterprises and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses across the supply chain will build the capacity of this sector. It will also result in more employment opportunities for First Nations people and other people traditionally disadvantaged in the labour market.

Housing supports

The Commission welcomes increased funding for housing supports as an outcome of the Queensland Housing Summit.

As noted above, the Commission is identified as a partner agency in the *Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025* and the *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027* plan to improve cross-agency responses to housing need and to deliver integrated health, housing and human services through strong referral processes and integrated service responses. The Commission has sought advice from the Department on when this work will commence and been advised that internal scoping work is underway. The Commission looks forward to working with the Department of Housing and other partner agencies to implement these actions.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission's 2020 Inquiry into Mental Health reported that approximately 30 per cent of admitted patients in psychiatric wards could be discharged if appropriate housing and community services were available. Given the over-representation of First Nations people in institutional settings, the Commission suggests inclusion of an action in the *Our Place Action Plan* to prevent people exiting government services into homelessness, similar to those in the *Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–2025* and *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022–2027* plan. The Commission would be pleased to partner with the Department of Housing on this action in line with its commitments outlined in the other plans.

The Commission supports a housing first approach that prioritises safe and permanent housing with person-led and person-centred supports as needed. The Commission would welcome consideration of a supported housing plan to ensure people experiencing mental ill-health and/or problematic alcohol or other drug use have access to appropriate housing along with supports tailored to their needs. Housing supports for First Nations people must be delivered in a culturally safe manner, acknowledging the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

The Commission supports growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing sector as the primary mechanism for delivering culturally safe services. The Commission notes the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland as a significant achievement of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019–2023*, and their key role in advising and advocating for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector.

Building the capacity of non-Indigenous housing service providers to provide services in a culturally safe manner is also important, and the Commission encourages the Department of Housing to consider how this can be reflected in the new *Our Place Action Plan*. Recognising the impact of colonisation and ongoing intergenerational trauma and practicing in a trauma aware, healing informed way is key.

The Commission is leading the development and initial implementation of a whole of government trauma strategy, a recommendation of the Mental Health Select Committee from the Queensland Parliamentary *Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders*. The trauma strategy will identify how trauma-informed practice can be improved and embedded in service provision across the wide range of health and human services delivered by the Queensland Government agencies, including housing. The trauma strategy will be relevant for the Department of Housing's work and its funded service providers. The Commission would welcome further discussion about this work.

Evolving ways of working

The Path to Treaty sets the foundations of a shared future in which all Queenslanders are equal in shaping and informing future decisions that impact their lives, families and communities. It publicly recognises the custodianship of Australia's lands, waters and airs as belonging to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the history of Australia long before colonisation. The Path to Treaty will reframe the relationship between the Queensland Government and First Nations Queenslanders through a shared pathway of respect, recognition and truth-telling and healing.

The Department of Housing may be aware of the recently released *Leading healing our way: Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Strategy 2020–2040 (Healing Strategy)*. The *Healing Strategy* and its companion Research Report were commissioned by (the then) Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs and co-designed in partnership with the Commission and the Healing Foundation to address the intergenerational impacts of trauma experienced by First Nations peoples as a result of violence, abuse, neglect, grief and loss, loss of culture, and dislocation from country, family and community.

The *Healing Strategy* encompasses five interconnected themes or 'pillars' that emerged through co-design and consultations and are consistent with national research and knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing, trauma and healing:

- Tell the truth: all Queenslanders have a shared understanding of history and wrongs are righted
- Stop the trauma: systems and services are trauma aware and healing informed
- Heal through culture: elements of culture which keep us safe and well are restored
- Communities decide: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are in charge of their own healing
- Walk alongside: shared responsibility and accountability for healing actions and outcomes defined by community.

The Commission encourages consideration of the *Healing Strategy* and Research Report in the development of the *Our Place Action Plan* and more broadly across the Department of Housing's work.

Working with First Nations people in a manner that reflects the principles of the Path to Treaty and the *Healing Strategy* will result in co-designed solutions with communities that reflect community need, and aspirations and are respectful of place and cultural significance. Investment in building the capability of organisational systems is required, along with building workforce capability to work in a trauma aware, healing informed way. This way of working will assist in building positive mental health and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Safe, secure, affordable housing and connection to community is foundational to good mental wellbeing and achieving other life aspirations. The time is right for refreshing the Queensland Government's commitment to improving housing outcomes for First Nations people through the *Our Place Action Plan*. The Commission looks forward to further involvement in the development of the plan and welcomes the opportunity to discuss this submission further.

Contact

Meagan Killer

A/Executive Director

Queensland Mental Health Commission

phone 07 3244 9210

email commissioner@qmhc.qld.gov.au

PO Box 13027 George Street Brisbane QLD 4003

PO Box 13027 George Street Brisbane QLD 4003

Phone **1300 855 945** | Fax (07) 3405 9780

Email info@qmhc.qld.gov.au

  | www.qmhc.qld.gov.au