The North Coast Accommodation Project
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*It is possible to tackle Aboriginal homelessness through a client centred approach, innovative practices and culturally appropriate service delivery.*

A NSW Homelessness Action Plan response to ‘breaking down the barriers’ to private rental for Aboriginal people living on the North Coast of NSW.

Overview of the Project

NSW has a significant over-representation of Aboriginal people in the homelessness service system. Issues such as over-crowding, discrimination in the private rental market and affordability contribute to the over-representation.

The North Coast Accommodation Project (NCAP) is a Housing NSW led partnership project under the NSW Homelessness Action Plan. The project assists individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to secure accommodation in the private rental market on the North Coast of NSW. While the NCAP is a mainstream project Aboriginal people are a priority client group for the project.

The Partnership includes:

- Housing NSW, Family and Community Services
- On Track Community Programs – Non-Government Service Provider
- New Horizons Community Services – Non-Government Service Provider
- Legal Aid.

In addition to the formal partnerships, the project works in partnership with private real estate agents and other government and non-government support services to assist vulnerable people secure and maintain housing in the private rental market.

The demand for social housing on the North Coast is high with waiting times amongst the highest in New South Wales. The NCAP provides a positive response to this demand by facilitating the establishment of tenancies in the private rental market and providing appropriate support.

The NCAP service providers, *On Track* and *New Horizons*, have a strong focus on developing their client’s capacities to sustain their tenancies by building budget skills and working with financial counsellors to reduce debts. Clients are linked with support agencies such as domestic violence and drug and alcohol support services where the need is identified.

Employment of 50 per cent Aboriginal staff was built into the contract and this has enabled NCAP to have strong partnerships with the Aboriginal Community and culturally appropriate support services.
NCAP has developed significant partnerships with real estate agents and there are an increasing number of direct referrals from these agents. These referrals are an important aspect of preventing tenancies from failing. People who are referred directly through a real estate agent often have no connection with other support services.

During the 11/12 financial year, 600 private rental tenancies were secured for individuals and families on the North Coast and 200 were Aboriginal households. Aboriginal clients were supported for 6 to 12 months and provided with skills that enhanced their capacity to independently sustain a long term tenancy.

### NCAP Assisted Clients by gender/ Culture

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Australian born</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<td>Born Overseas</td>
<td>3%</td>
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The key elements of delivering a successful homelessness service to Aboriginal people.

- The right people – strategies for recruitment and retainments of high performing Aboriginal staff
- The right partners – Using business-oriented strategies to establish relationships with Real Estate agents based on shared goals to keep people in their tenancies
- Service to clients – providing culturally appropriate support to Aboriginal people.

**A client story from project**

An Aboriginal couple with one child were referred to the NCAP Project during 2011. The couple had been living on Aboriginal land in a make shift shelter with no running water, electricity or bathroom facilities for the past nine years. The couple had a general fear of all services, particularly Government agencies which contributed to their long term homelessness.

An Aboriginal NCAP worker assisted the family to obtain the necessary identification to engage with State and Federal Government agencies for support and income and advocated on their behalf to secure housing. NCAP worked intensively with the clients and a local real estate agent and successfully secured private rental accommodation. The clients have maintained this property for over 12 months and applied to the project’s brokerage fund for a lawn mower to maintain their lawns and grounds. The family now has supplementary income from a small lawn mowing business.