

Delivering Essential Services into Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

Affordable housing in remote indigenous communities is inextricably linked to affordable essential services infrastructure and its successful management and maintenance. The supply of essential services infrastructure, repairs and maintenance to large indigenous desert settlements is provided through different arrangements across the various States and Territories delineated on whether the Commonwealth funding is pooled in the jurisdiction.

Ove Arup (1999) estimated that some \$66m per annum is required to adequately operate and maintain the essential services of water, sewerage and power currently installed in discrete indigenous communities. They identified \$42.5m of known funding leaving a gap of \$23.5m per year to be met for water, sewerage and power. This does not include housing maintenance. Whilst there are many traps in working with averages, even allowing for large error, the scenario is one that begs closer analysis. This means that over and above all existing funding commitments Governments have to find another \$50 million per year for every year that the infrastructure is to remain in service.

In WA pooled funding into the Remote Area Essential Services Program (RAESP) allows supply of capital and emergency repairs to be extended to some smaller settlements (outstations, homelands, emerging communities less than 50 people) by one of 3 Regional Service Providers, which are an indigenous community organisation or a community-private partnership. In some cases, indigenous community councils or local government authorities in larger settlements (indigenous and non-indigenous) provide maintenance services to the smaller settlements. However, in these settlements, technical services (minor repairs and maintenance for power, water, sewerage, solid waste) are most often provided by regional indigenous resource agencies, particularly in WA, NT and SA. The Commonwealth Community Development & Employment Program (CDEP) provides basic wages for indigenous community members to participate in these activities. While these agencies are the preferred medium of service delivery, with their community development¹ focus, their asset management capacities vary considerably. The principal source of funding for these various arrangements is the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP).

The overall aim of this Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DKCRC) scoping study is to identify knowledge gaps and opportunities for improving the maintenance of essential services in small desert settlements by looking at 12 case studies. An integrated technical services¹ model is investigated.

Outcomes of the Project to date to be discussed in the paper:

- 1) Scoping for improved health and quality of life in remote indigenous communities constrained by maintenance costs of infrastructure.
- 2) Directions for more efficient, sustainable, and culturally appropriate infrastructure maintenance in remote indigenous communities.
- 3) Identified opportunities for cost-effective and participatory infrastructure maintenance programs.

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