

# MORE THAN A LANDLORD HOUSEHOLD PILOT STUDY

## SUMMARY REPORT

First 1000 Days Australia and  
Aboriginal Housing Victoria  
June 2018

**The More than a Landlord (MTAL) project was initially developed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) and funded as a nutritional intervention through the Victorian Government's Koolin Balit initiatives. The impetus for the project was the transfer of title of public housing stock from the Victorian Government to AHV. This transition facilitated an opportunity for new forms of engagement between AHV, its tenants and other service providers.**

A key aim of the MTAL project was to pilot a cross-sectional, household-level survey (the Survey) undertaken with AHV tenants living in social housing in the City of Whittlesea, Victoria. To achieve this aim, AHV undertook a research partnership with First 1000 Days Australia, based at the Indigenous Health Equity Unit at the University of Melbourne, to provide proof-of-concept through a Household Pilot Study (the Study). The Study became part of the national implementation of First 1000 Days Australia, which includes multiple Indigenous-led and developed programs across Australia that focus on pre-conception, pregnancy and the early years of childhood.

The focus of this report is on the methods, results and recommendations emanating from the Study, the overarching aims of which were:

- » to understand the needs of Aboriginal families living in social housing
- » to assist in the formulation of AHV service delivery strategies to engage Aboriginal people experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage
- » to provide proof-of-concept for the baseline data collection for the First 1000 Days Australia Cohort Study.

The Study tested a method of engaging families in social housing by using peer researchers to assist in finding out about the ambitions of families and capturing the context in which they were living. This initiative meant the Study simultaneously built the capacity of people living with AHV tenancies, supported them to participate in the research and informed them of the extent and reach of AHV services. A full report detailing the Study, Survey, methodology and results is available from AHV and First 1000 Days Australia.

## Methods

### Participatory research

Peer researchers were the primary conduit for recruitment into the Survey and played a key role in supporting the community to access, and engage with, the pilot project. The peer researchers were all current AHV tenants who had either been unemployed, under-employed, never employed or looking to re/enter the workforce. They were hired by AHV and trained by First 1000 Days Australia researchers in survey methods, the Study protocol, informed consent processes and techniques for visiting households safely. They also completed a Peer Researcher Training Short Course run by First 1000 Days Australia at the University of Melbourne.

### The Survey tool

The Study consisted of a Survey with two connected parts.

**Part A:** The Household and Future Needs Survey (Household Survey) asked questions of the lead tenant about the household as a unit and its future needs. **Part B:** The Individual Aspirations Survey (Individual Survey) asked individuals in the household about their aspirations. The Household Survey was completed by the tenant and included items about the tenancy history; size of the house or residence; household composition, housing needs now and into the future; and household finances. The Individual Survey collected information across several domains including health and wellbeing; aspirations; future plans for children; educational attainment; employment status; Aboriginal identity; connection to culture and community; sexual health; and experiences of violence and discrimination.



Peer researchers (L-R): Alisha Warden, Lucinda Jackson, Ketia Ahwang and Sharyn Lovett

### Pilot location

The pilot Survey was conducted among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AHV tenants in the City of Whittlesea, an outer northern urban region in Melbourne, Victoria. Whittlesea was selected as a trial site because it has an increasing number of Aboriginal residents, a trend that is likely to continue.

### Survey participants and fieldwork

All household members over the age of 14 were invited to participate. Fieldwork was undertaken over an eight-week period during which peer researchers set up appointments and undertook both parts of the Survey. Ethics for this project was obtained from, and approved by, the University of Melbourne Human Ethics Sub-committee (1647695).

## Results

### Peer researchers

A 50 per cent retention rate of peer researcher engagement was experienced from the initiation of training to the completion of fieldwork. Those peer researchers who did continue working on the project reported a marked improvement in their overall wellbeing and confidence. Their identities transformed from being AHV clients receiving services to decision makers and employees who were partly accountable for the research process and responses from AHV to the community. Being involved in the research was a capacity building exercise that reconnected them with their local community.

### Household engagement

Having peer researchers as the primary conduit of research activities meant that engagement with the Survey was high; 51 per cent of households from 80 AHV tenancies in the area chose to participate in the Survey. On average, the entire Survey took 1.5 hours to complete, with Part A taking 30 minutes and Part B taking one hour. More than a third (35.9%) of participating households were made up of single families with children, while those with Elders were also present in 33.3 per cent. Almost half of the Survey participants were aged between 24 and 55 years.

### Household future needs

One-third of households reported overcrowding with five plus occupants in three- or four-bedroom houses. Fifty per cent of households required more space as they had growing families, whereas 30 per cent wished to downsize but still live within the same area. Nearly two-thirds (62.2%) reported that no maintenance had been performed in the last 12 months, and 77.8 per cent that they required maintenance to be completed. Out of these households, only 11 expanded on what they required, mostly (54.5%) minor repairs including to kitchen appliances, drains and fences.

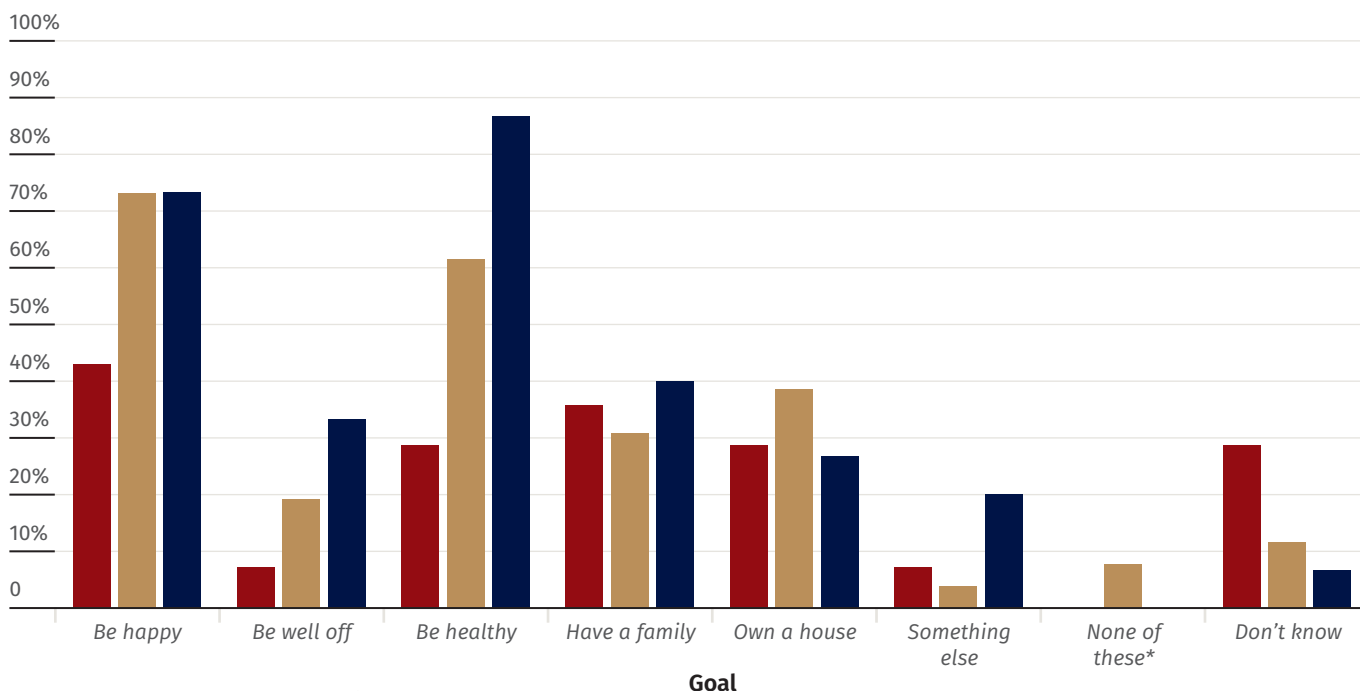
### Aspirations and wellbeing

Two-thirds of participants reported having many aspirations and generally had a positive attitude towards life. Sixty per cent stated that their main ambition was to be happy and healthy,

**Figure 1: Individual participants' main ambition in life (responses by age group)**

● 24 years and less | ● Between 25 and 54 years | ● 55 years and greater

**Proportion (%) selected**



\*None of these' was not expanded upon in the survey.

with health being most important for people aged over 55 years, and happiness a particularly high priority among those aged 24+. The highest proportion of people unsure of their main ambition were those aged under 24 years. Short-term goals included gaining employment and addressing health and wellbeing issues, while longer term goals included building assets and going on a family holiday. The main ambition of one-third of the participants was to have a family, with more than 60 per cent within childbearing age. Owning a home was identified in all short, mid and longer term aspirations.

The notably biggest influencer of participants' goals were family members, with 45.6 per cent reporting parents as their largest influencer and 42.1 per cent their children. Overall health (including mobility, loneliness and chronic disease) was of greater concern among householders aged 55 and over, whereas anxiety was identified as a significant issue of concern to householders aged between 24 and 55.

## Discussion

Local community leaders and Elders identified anecdotal examples of the inter-generational impacts of the MTAL research process within their community, and at community reporting meetings noted the increase in pride and resilience among the children of families involved.

Although the Study was observational in nature, the direct feedback of the de-identified results to AHV meant that families were directly and positively involved in the strategies required to strengthen and change their own lives. Initially, this was achieved through a dedicated and direct response to maintenance requests from tenants, which led to a snowballing of participation in the Study and in Survey completion.

The Survey results showed that household overcrowding, the impacts of chronic disease, and mental health and anxiety issues were all concerns for families. A high proportion of parents and children over the age of 14 years reported feelings of loneliness and anxiety, and social and emotional wellbeing health-related issues. However, by using an aspirations-based Survey, the needs of tenants could be addressed in a holistic manner that would, therefore, address the wellbeing needs identified in the Survey. With a majority of tenants reporting that their main ambition is to be happy and healthy, AHV's response needs to include the coordination, design and delivery of a suite of client wellbeing services addressing these ambitions.

For AHV to maintain momentum, there must be a commitment to provide continuing support to peer researchers and to communicate the results of the program to all families residing in the City of Whittlesea. This is particularly pertinent, as the peer researchers themselves are personally accountable to the community for the Survey and the way in which AHV chooses to respond. To ensure the success of the MTAL project, and to maintain engagement with its tenants, AHV must respond promptly to maintenance requests.

### Key recommendations for future Surveys

The ambitions of household members, as collected by the peer researchers, broadly involved health, happiness and financial goals and, for the most part, were realistic and attainable. Using a strengths-based approach to data collection and survey question framing led to a higher than expected participation rate by households within Whittlesea.

However, the following issues in the Survey design were observed:

- » Open-ended questions should be recorded on the iPad rather than written due to literacy challenges observed in both the peer researchers and the householders.
- » Peer researchers should undertake the Survey in pairs to better deal with difficult questions and missing answers.
- » Training of peer researchers should include the further development of soft skills, such as how to prepare for the week of work.
- » The survey needed to be shortened.

## Conclusion

This Study showed that using peer researchers resulted in a higher than expected engagement with householders. It also showed that, to maintain the Study momentum, an appropriate service response from AHV to address the ambitions of families was necessary and possible.

The following summarises AHV's responses and recommendations following the Survey:

- 1 THAT AHV coordinates the design and delivery of the suite of existing Wellbeing Client Support programs (Life Skills, More than a Landlord and Koori Alcohol and Other Drugs Awareness) to provide better support for AHV tenants and residents to maintain independent and successful tenancies.

- 2 THAT AHV ensures wellbeing programs are developed, implemented and delivered in collaboration with both its Tenancy Management and Wellbeing teams.
- 3 THAT AHV uses the evidence provided by the Survey on the support needs of AHV tenants and occupants to advocate for greater access to culturally safe programs and support services by Aboriginal households.
- 4 THAT AHV and the University of Melbourne commit to maintaining communications and support to the peer researchers, and manage these relationships to ensure we provide them with further learnings and employment opportunities.
- 5 THAT AHV establishes a communication strategy to report the outcomes and findings of the Survey to AHV staff, tenants and other stakeholders.

A key challenge to improving outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal people is ensuring effective service delivery response based on evidence. The Survey results described in this report provide the evidence for AHV to offer a service response in the form of a low-intensity life-coaching service that directly addresses the future needs and ambitions of household members and their children living under AHV tenancies. The role of a life coach would be to assist tenants to develop the skills required to achieve their aspirations, maintain motivation and sustain focus on steering towards the successful attainment of their goals.

## About the Artwork



This logo represents a family and their journey to getting a house to live in, and the elements required for a healthy and happy home life. You have a Mum and Daughter on one side and a Father and Son on the other. *Sharyn Lovett, Artist*

## Authors

Rebecca Ritte, Kerry Arabena, Georgina Sutherland, Elle McLachlan and Madelyne Hudson-Buhagiar (The University of Melbourne); Darren Smith, Jo Thitchener, Alex Splitt, Samantha French, Alexandra Byrne and Deb Connell (AHV); and Lucinda Jackson, Alisha Warden and Sharyn Lovett (peer researchers, AHV)

## Terminology

Unless noted otherwise, throughout this document the term 'Aboriginal' should be considered inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Christine Kardum and Ketia Ahwang (Aboriginal Housing Victoria); Josie Atkinson (The University of Melbourne); the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service; the City of Whittlesea; and Bubup Wilam for Early Learning; Aboriginal Child and Family Centre.

We would like to acknowledge all the families who participated in the focus groups to develop the Survey, and everyone who undertook the Survey. Without your support and participation there would not be a More than a Landlord program.

We also gratefully acknowledge the generous funding received from the Australian Government Department of Social Services and the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services.

## For more information

- e [rebecca.ritte@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:rebecca.ritte@unimelb.edu.au)  
[samantha.french@ahvic.org.au](mailto:samantha.french@ahvic.org.au)
- w [www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au](http://www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au)

