

Evaluation Snapshot

The Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program (IHSAP) is a collaboration of services and agencies co-located from a re-purposed accommodation facility in Darwin. The site is managed by Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation (Yilli) and referred to as YiSSA (Yilli Short Stay Accommodation). Funded by the Northern Territory Government, Mission Australia provides case management and coordinates complementary services to support people experiencing homelessness to connect to services, have enhanced wellbeing and transition to safe and secure housing.

This snapshot has been produced by Mission Australia and provides an overview of key findings of an independent evaluation undertaken by Insight Consulting Australia and Sand Palm Consulting.

The mixed methods process evaluation encompassed an 18-month period from November 2021 to May 2023 and explored the partnership approach, cultural safety in service design and delivery and the experiences of people who were engaged with the program.

Key Findings



Strong and committed partnerships take time to establish. The evaluation found consistent demonstrations of well-functioning partnerships, strong and committed leadership and cross-sector collaborations that effectively deliver an integrated service model; however this took time to establish and required ongoing commitment across the partnership approach.



IHSAP is delivering culturally appropriate and safe services. Cultural safety in service delivery is achieved through the intentional employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, the involvement of partners, the intake and triage process and person-centred flexible support. Most importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people who were engaged with IHSAP felt culturally safe.



People who accessed IHSAP received a range of complementary and integrated services to meet their needs. Partners working together to create a wide range of personalised support pathways and specialist services to meet the needs of people who are engaged with the program which for most, helped stabilise their mental health and wellbeing.



IHSAP provides a range of tenancy and housing support, and a quarter of people exited the program with a pathway to housing. However, the biggest barriers to positive housing outcomes were a lack of social, affordable and culturally appropriate housing and in turn, challenges with people residing in temporary accommodation for long periods of time.

Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program

A snapshot of findings from a process evaluation commissioned by Mission Australia of the Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Larrakia people, the custodians of the Garramilla (Darwin) region, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future, for they hold the memories, the culture and the dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land, sea and waterways and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

We also acknowledge the valued contribution of all the people who participated in the evaluation. In particular, the people who shared their stories and experiences of the Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program, staff, Alliance Partners and integrated service delivery partners.

Context Australia is experiencing a national housing and homelessness emergency and there is a growing need for culturally appropriate integrated housing and support models. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, at almost twelve times the national average, with an overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to ongoing systemic and structural racism.



In 2023, the IHSAP supported 586 people experiencing homelessness, including 430 (73%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 122 (21%) Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people. A range of support was provided such as practical and material assistance (for example food vouchers, assistance to complete Centrelink and Aged Care paperwork, and assistance to obtain furniture), case planning and review, community and service connections, health and wellbeing, therapeutic support, engagement and safety planning.

The aims of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the IHSAP processes and practice to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of people as they journey through the program.

The objectives were to:

- Assess the design and delivery of the service model, with particular attention to the partnership approach and cultural safety.
- Explore the experiences of people as they journey through the program to identify enablers and barriers.
- Explore culturally appropriate approaches to measuring program outcomes, including social and emotional wellbeing, for future embedding into the program.

Specific key evaluation questions addressed and presented in this snapshot were:

1. How do current practice and processes compare with best practice service models, specifically the partnership approach and cultural safety?
2. What were the experiences of people in the program, including triage, assessment and the coordination of support services?

Methodology

The mixed methods process evaluation encompassed an 18-month period from November 2021 to May 2023, with the evaluators retrospectively collecting and analysing data from July 2023.

Data collection methods included:

- Program operational data from January 2022 to June 2023. For the purposes of this evaluation snapshot, the complete data set for 2023 is presented.
- Review of program and partnerships documents.
- 39 semi-structured interviews; 19 people who were engaged with the program, 12 Mission Australia staff, 3 Yilli staff, 4 integrated partner agencies and The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.



About the Integrated Homelessness Supported Accommodation Program

IHSAP operates in the context of systemic challenges and an escalating national homeless and housing emergency. In the Northern Territory, homelessness rates are 12 times the national average, people sleeping rough rates are 14 times the national average and there is an overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to ongoing systemic and structural racism.

Funded by Northern Territory Government, IHSAP is an integrated model of housing and support co-located from a re-purposed accommodation facility, YISSA, in Darwin which is managed by Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation (Yilli). The integrated housing and support approach is governed through an Alliance Partnership:

- Mission Australia coordinates complementary services for people experiencing homelessness and who are willing to engage in case management support to address issues associated with, for example, mental ill health, alcohol and other drug use, family support and specialist homelessness services.
- Yilli provides tenancy and assets management support to all people, approximately 400, who reside at YISSA.

IHSAP objectives are to support and empower people who are experiencing homelessness to:

- Achieve stability in their circumstances and have their priority needs met.
- Connect to services that are responsive to their needs.
- Find appropriate housing pathways to reduce the number of people sleeping rough.
- Enhance their wellbeing and feelings of safety.

The program is also committed to strengthening the local service system by ensuring that:

- The Alliance Partnership is accountable and transparent.
- Services are integrated, agile and responsive to people's needs.
- Quality services are delivered in a timely manner.

Summary

Overall, the evaluation found consistent demonstration of good practice in IHSAP including a strong partnership approach and culturally safe service design and delivery. Partnerships were characterised by strong leadership, collaboration, respect, trust and a commitment to support people experiencing homelessness. Leaders have fostered a positive team culture across the partnerships and are delivering a range of person-centred, strengths-based and culturally safe support. However, despite the effective service design and delivery, IHSAP is finding it increasingly challenging to help people to find pathways to safe, long-term and culturally appropriate homes because the housing stock simply isn't there. This can only be remedied through increased investment in social and affordable housing in the Northern Territory and the development of a national housing and homelessness plan led by First Nations people and community-controlled organisations.

How do current practice and processes compare with best practice service models, specifically the partnership approach and cultural safety?

Partnership Approach

The evaluation found consistent demonstrations of well-functioning partnerships, strong and committed leadership and cross-sector collaborations that effectively deliver an integrated service model.

IHSAP service coordination is achieved through the Alliance Partnership involving Yilli, Mission Australia, Specialist Homelessness Services, allied services and referral partners, with a governance group providing strategic oversight and accountability. These partnerships provide complementary and co-located specialist services to support people experiencing homelessness who live with issues associated with mental ill health, alcohol and other drug use, family support and specialist homelessness services.

The evaluation found that it took time and ongoing commitment to establish strong coordination and collaboration across the Alliance partners. Key partnership enablers were:

- Relationships based on respect, openness and a shared commitment and motivation to work together to support people who are experiencing homelessness.
- Strong leadership and a deliberate focus on building relationships and collaborative problem solving which recognises the strengths each partner brings to the alliance.
- Fostering a positive team culture where all partners feel supported and valued and an inclusive environment based on open communication, mutual respect and the sharing of skills and expertise. This in turn contributed to staff demonstrating a high level of commitment to practice and people engaged in the program.

“There is a lot of respect in the partnership because of the common need to address homelessness” - Partner

“It’s an open partnership. I think everyone knows what each partner can contribute. There is a great amount of respect within the team for the shared skills the partnership brings.”- Partner

“The partnership works better than I’ve seen it in many other places. To have so many different organisations - you have security, housing, Mission, people have different agendas and different ways of working. This is the best I’ve seen with a site with such a diverse range of organisations working together. I find there is a lot of respect for the people who live here. That this is their home and everyone else is just here to support and provide services.” - Partner



Figure 1. The Alliance Partnership Approach

The collaborative partnership approach has led to program adaptations, for example creating a triage team to assess the needs of people who are referred into IHSAP. It has also enabled a person-centred and strengths-based case management approach with partners working together to create a wide range of support pathways and specialist services to meet the needs of people who are engaged with the program.

Barriers to the partnership approach included:

- Partners working across multiple organisations with different policies, procedures, practice guidelines and information technology systems.
- Lack of procedures and mechanisms to hold partners accountable and to resolve issues as quickly as possible.

Suggestions for partnership improvements included cultural representation and improved attendance at the governance group, ongoing communication, streamlining process and systems across partner organisations, the development of shared case management guidelines and ongoing support for staff to prevent and respond to vicarious trauma.



How do current practice and processes compare with best practice service models, specifically the partnership approach and cultural safety?

Cultural Safety

IHSAP is delivering culturally appropriate and safe services.

Cultural safety in service design and delivery is critical to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Cultural safety seeks to challenge power imbalances by making sure staff understand how political, social, economic and historical conditions influence and shape outcomes for Aboriginal people. It needs to be embedded within governance, leadership, planning, service design, training, practice and partnerships.

The evaluation found that IHSAP is delivering culturally appropriate and safe services. This was evidenced by:

- Core service principles that focus on cultural appropriateness and cultural safety.
- Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who make up approximately 50 per cent of the workforce.
- Matching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged with IHSAP with First Nations staff.
- Tailoring service engagement to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for example having flexible service interactions which support people to visit their community and re-engage with the program on their return.
- Incorporating the voices of people engaged with IHSAP in the service design, for example co-designing case management processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Partnering with Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations.

The evaluation found that people engaged with IHSAP felt culturally safe.

Cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities. Interviews with people engaged with IHSAP demonstrate that both First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people felt culturally safe. Feeling that staff were genuinely respectful, caring, culturally responsive and flexible contributed to feeling of safety.

“It’s culturally safe here because they let our relative come and stay and we have people from our community living here.” – Person engaged in IHSAP

“They [staff] are kind to black people. All of them are good.” – Person engaged in IHSAP

“All workers are cultural, especially my worker.” – Person engaged in IHSAP

Partners and staff are strongly and consistently committed to providing culturally safe and appropriate services.

Staff were committed to growing their understanding of cultural safety, trauma-informed practice and culturally appropriate service delivery. Key enablers were the provision of cultural training (online), creating environments so staff feel safe to challenge each other on cultural sensitivity and appropriateness and fostering a culture where staff want to continuously improve their cultural understanding and awareness.

Staff acknowledge areas for growth and want to continuously improve their cultural knowledge and skills.

Several staff suggested a need for more practice guidance to strengthen what already happens through peer conversations, team meetings, collaborative problem solving, partner meetings, joint work with participants and supervision. They also suggested that face-to-face cultural training conducted by a local Aboriginal person would improve their cultural awareness and knowledge.

A challenge in delivering culturally safe services was the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and limited cultural activities for people living at YISSA.

There were examples in the interviews of staff adapting language at intake to be more culturally responsive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who speak a diversity of languages. Some staff suggested incorporating visual designs and/or translating program information into Aboriginal languages. Staff felt that this would support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a better understanding of the program.

Another gap identified in the evaluation was limited cultural activities available through IHSAP, to foster connection and support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; noting that cultural activities are not part of the current funding contract.





What were the experiences of people engaged in the program, including triage, assessment and coordination of support services?

Triage and Assessment Processes

The triage system is effective and critical to support people to access IHSAP.

Each person starts IHSAP with their individual strengths and aspirations. The people interviewed reported a variety of reasons for why they became homeless including community violence, chronic health issues, overcrowding, mental ill health, domestic and family violence, loss of employment, use of alcohol and other drugs and prison. Some people had complex support needs and some had experienced persistent cycles of homelessness.

“When I got to Darwin I stayed with family. Then I stayed in the long grass. There was nowhere else for me to go. I went to a service, but they were full and they sent me to YiSSA.”

- Person engaged in IHSAP

“I’ve been in and out of jail. The last time I pretty much got dumped on the streets.”

- Person engaged in IHSAP

“You know I’ve taken a lot of drugs – all different types. I lost my job. I ended up evicted because I couldn’t pay the rent. I stayed with one friend, then another, then another... I didn’t know what to do. I slept in my car. I came here and they gave me a home.”

- Person engaged in IHSAP

The evaluation found that the triage system was critical in identifying and prioritising people’s strengths and needs. People reported positive first contact experiences, which indicates an effective initial engagement process.

“(They) actually seemed like they wanted to help me. They really listened. They were kind. It made me feel like I was in the right place.”

- Person engaged in IHSAP

“Some of the clients need urgent intake and assessment. I communicate this to my Team Leader and we prioritise them straight away. If a client has mobility issues, we make sure they are placed close to reception. Likewise, if I can see there are AOD or mental health issues I’ll put in my recommendation that they be case managed by CAAPS (alcohol and other drugs) or Team Health (mental health).”

- IHSAP Staff

Staff ensured that assessment processes are person-centred and culturally sensitive, however the development of tailored assessment tools would strengthen the engagement process.

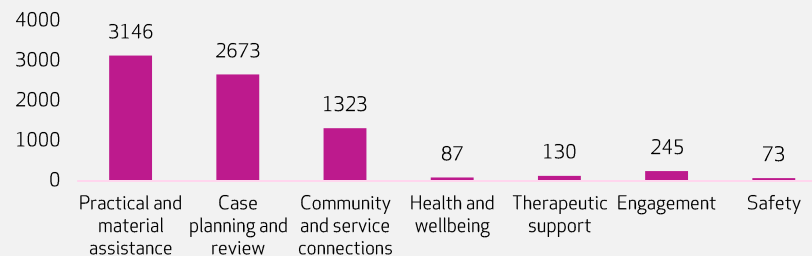
The evaluation found that the intake and assessment process was person-centred and culturally sensitive, with staff adapting questions to suit the person’s background and communication preferences. However, staff reported that some assessment questions were not entirely relevant to the program’s context and suggested the development of tailored assessment tools and guidelines as an area for improvement.

Coordination of Integrated Support Services

People who accessed IHSAP received a range of complementary and integrated services to meet their needs.

In 2023, IHSAP supported 586 people experiencing homelessness, including 430 (73%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 122 (21%) Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people. Administrative data collected in 2023 provides evidence that a range of support was provided such as practical and material assistance, case planning and review, community and service connections, health and wellbeing, therapeutic, engagement and safety planning (Graph 1).

Graph 1. IHSAP instances of support in 2023



In the evaluation interviews, people engaged with IHSAP spoke about receiving emotional, informational and tangible support. People thought the emotional support made it safe to be themselves, made them feel like they were heard and that someone cared about them, which made them feel hopeful for the future.

“She listens to me. She really understands me. That’s the best thing about the program is being understood.”

- Person engaged in IHSAP

“I’m not the sort of person that finds it easy to ask for support when I need it. They are just lovely people. They are really suited to the job. I’ve had negative experiences with other services... .Here (IHSAP program) I can really let it out and actually cry. What I feel is real compassion. The humanity is really nice.”

- Person engaged in IHSAP

Expanded partnerships and tailored practice guidance are need to support people with complex support needs. Staff and partner organisations reported that they worked with a range of people with complex support needs. In the interviews, they suggested that expanded partnerships, for example culturally appropriate primary health services, transportation, counselling and domestic and family violence support, and tailored practice guides, as areas for improvement.



What were the experiences of people engaged in the program, including triage, assessment and coordination of support services?

Support for Mental Health and Wellbeing

IHSAP support made people feel stable, especially in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

In the evaluation interviews, people engaged in IHSAP reported that the program was committed to providing personalised support, which for most people, helped stabilise their mental health and overall wellbeing. Some people thought their health had improved because of program support and a few people had started to address their mental health for the first time.

“Definitely in the past, I wouldn’t have been able to talk about mental health issues. This time I’m ready to ask. I feel like I’m in a better place starting here. I’m off the drugs. I want to sort out my mental health.” - Person engaged in IHSAP

Pathways to Safe and Secure housing

People engaged in IHSAP received tenancy and housing support, however housing outcomes were significantly impacted by a lack of social and affordable housing.

In the evaluation interviews, people engaged with IHSAP spoke about receiving tangible housing and tenancy support for example, setting up Centrepay to pay guest fees, support to get bond for a private rental, help when in rental arrears, obtaining documentation (ie Medicare card) for housing applications, budgeting skills and learning how to manage their tenancies and homes.

People reported that the most important support IHSAP can provide is pathways to safe and secure housing. IHSAP administrative data indicates that 26% of people exited from the program with a pathway to housing, which is consistent with Northern Territory data reported to the Australia Institute of Health and Welfare by other Specialist Homelessness Services.

Supporting people to transition to housing



One of my clients moved into a house – which is a big deal. We really celebrate that because it doesn’t happen often. This client came from one of the communities – there has been a lot of fighting violence. She came with her children, and she got a place here. We didn’t just help support her to get a house though – She got a bit more confident. Talked more confident. The kids opened up a bit more now. I think she is more likely to work with other services now because she had a success here.

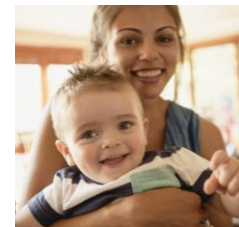
Despite these positive housing examples, a lack of social and affordable housing means that it is increasingly challenging for IHSAP to transition people to safe, long-term and culturally appropriate homes. This means, despite having positive program experiences, people can start to feel disengaged and frustrated as the temporary accommodation site is not specifically designed for long stays or people experiencing homelessness. This is especially magnified by families who have children living at YiSSA.

Considering these external challenges outside the control of IHSAP, it is important to recognise that in practice, IHSAP’s design and delivery works including in terms of cultural safety. The fact that people participating in IHSAP report that they experience cultural safety is a testament to the service design elements and the service delivery of all partners.

“We are still on the housing list. Nothing has changed since we got here. Nothing, it’s hard. We have been here too long.” – Person engaged in IHSAP

“Some clients can’t cope with the stress. They are looking for private rentals and getting rejected... The list is 5-6 years long for government housing. This is confronting for clients who are homeless and trying to address multiple things. On top of that some of them are in with partners and kids and they can’t cook a meal. YiSSA is not designed for long waits – especially for families in those small rooms.” – IHSAP staff

Preparing people to access housing



One of my clients is moving into a house. She is a single mother, and her child has a disability. She had worked with *54 Reasons* to get her child into school. It took time but the child is more engaged with school now and the parent feels more confident dealing with the school. She’s doing the tenancy support program, so she is ready for a good transition. I’ve also worked with other external organisations to make sure she is well set up (with furniture) and support once she moves.

Why are these findings important?

There is a growing need for increased investment in social, affordable and culturally appropriate housing delivered along-side integrated housing and support models.

Australia is experiencing a national housing and homelessness emergency. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, at almost twelve times the national average, with an over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to ongoing systemic and structural racism.

The evaluation found that the biggest barrier for IHSAP was a lack of housing options and challenges with people residing in temporary accommodation for long periods of time. It highlights that Mission Australia's homelessness and housing support services, and others like ours, are finding it increasingly challenging to find appropriate, safe and long-term homes to quickly transition people out of temporary accommodation because the housing stock simply isn't there. This can only be remedied through:

 **Increased investment in social, affordable and culturally appropriate housing stock**

 **A national housing and homelessness plan developed by and for First Nations people**

 **Shift to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention**

 **Culturally appropriate and safe homelessness and housing support services**

Cultural safety in service design is critical to improve the experience and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Despite the external housing and site barriers, the evaluation found that IHSAP is a culturally appropriate and safe service model. Cultural safety in service design and delivery was evidenced by well-functioning partnerships, strong leadership, cross-sector collaborations and integrated service delivery, employment of a diverse workforce and person-centred, strengths-based support. Most importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people who were engaged with IHSAP felt culturally safe.

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian organisation, with more than 160 years' experience in standing together with Australians in need on their journey to independence. We are a large and diverse organisation with over 450 services across Australia, serving around 150,000 people annually. Our strategic goal is to end homelessness and ensure people and communities in need can thrive.

Key learnings to establish culturally safe services are the need for:

- ✓ Time to establish relationships and partnerships based on respect, openness, and shared commitment, as well as shared processes and practices across different partner organisations.
- ✓ Strong leadership to build trust, a commitment to work together and a sense of shared responsibility.
- ✓ A collaborative and integrated service model to ensure people have access to a coordinated and streamlined service system.
- ✓ Employment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.
- ✓ Tailoring service engagement to meet people's cultural needs.
- ✓ Incorporating the voices of people in the service design and delivery.
- ✓ Culturally appropriate assessment and outcomes tools.
- ✓ Delivery of cultural activities to support social and emotional wellbeing.
- ✓ Ongoing cultural training opportunities, creating environments so staff feel safe to challenge each other on cultural sensitivity and appropriateness and fostering a culture where staff want to continuously improve their cultural understanding and awareness.
- ✓ Ongoing strategies to prevent and respond to vicarious trauma for people working in homelessness services.
- ✓ Engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluators to independently assess the cultural safety of services and evaluation processes and to undertake qualitative data collection and analysis.

How are we using these findings to strengthen the program?

Mission Australia is committed to using evidence and insights to find out what is working well and where our services may need to improve. Ultimately, we want to ensure we are delivering the best possible services to the people and communities we serve.

These evaluation findings provide an opportunity to build upon and strengthen the cultural safety and impact of IHSAP. The following priority actions have been identified:

- Implement Mission Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework 2024-2029.
- Increase attendance at the governance group, ongoing communication and streaming of processes and systems across partner organisations.
- Continue to provide ongoing cultural development opportunities, such as online and face to face training, peer learning, partner meetings and joint case management.
- Develop culturally appropriate assessment tools and resources, including an outcomes tool to measure social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Deliver cultural activities to foster connection, support, wellbeing and belonging.
- Expand partnerships for example with primary health, transportation, counselling and domestic and family violence specialist services.
- Continue to provide and strengthen support for staff to prevent vicarious trauma.