



Broken By Design

WE DESERVE HOMES THAT WORK:

Public Housing Maintenance in the Kimberley

KCLS acknowledges that we work on Aboriginal land and pays respect to elders past and present.



Artwork Credit: © Cox Family Dreaming, M. Cox, 2022

Contact us

KUNUNURRA

4 Papuana Street
PO Box 622
Kununurra WA 6743

Tel: (08) 9169 3100
Freecall: 1800 686 020
office@kcls.org.au

BROOME

3/41 Carnarvon Street
PO Box 2715
Broome WA 6725

Tel: (08) 9192 5177
Freecall: 1800 797 088
broomeoffice@kcls.org.au

WWW.KCLS.ORG.AU
@KIMBERLEYCLS
ABN: 63535078148



Contents

4	Executive Summary
6	Introduction
6	Where we are
7	Who we are
8	Why we did this report
8	Who we spoke to
9	Survey Demographics
11	Context: Social housing in the Kimberley
11	The Kimberley housing context
12	How maintenance is currently delivered
13	How the current maintenance process operates
14	A history of under-investment and ignored warnings
15	Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (WA) reforms
16	Chapter 1 : Housing is not fit for purpose and leads to widespread issues
19	Chapter 2: Long delays in repairs, including urgent maintenance
21	Chapter 3: Reactive maintenance model not suited to the Kimberley
24	Chapter 4: Poor quality and temporary fixes
26	Chapter 5: Maintenance reporting processes are not designed for Kimberley tenants
29	Chapter 6: The maintenance system responds to professional advocacy and legal pressures rather than tenant need
31	Key Recommendations
38	Conclusion

This report was prepared by KCLS Systemic Change Advocate, Akira Boardman with approval from CEO Matt Panayi.

KCLS would like to thank and acknowledge all tenants and service providers for their time and insights.
© 2026 Kimberley Community Legal Services. All rights reserved

Executive Summary

Across the Kimberley, public housing tenants are living in homes they describe as unsafe, unreliable and at times unliveable - the result of decades of underinvestment and a maintenance system that is not fit for purpose.

The findings in this report are based on evidence from 166 public housing tenants across the Kimberley, stakeholder interviews, Kimberley Community Legal Services' case studies, and inspections undertaken by a licensed builder. Tenants consistently described homes affected by plumbing failures, electrical faults, leaking roofs, mould, structural damage and pest infestations. Nearly 70 per cent were still waiting for repairs when surveyed, with many reporting repeated delays, poor communication, temporary fixes and repairs that quickly failed. Many also required legal assistance and advocacy before action was taken.



These experiences are consistent with the findings of the WA Auditor General and the Equal Opportunity Commission. The Auditor General found that approximately 85 per cent of housing maintenance is reactive, rather than planned, despite evidence that planned maintenance is more effective and cost-efficient, and that around \$250 million has been spent on travel and overhead costs associated with housing maintenance since 2019. Together, this evidence shows that the current model is delivering neither the outcomes tenants need nor the value for money that the government expects. Instead, it is a system that is reactive, centralised and poorly suited to the realities of the Kimberley region.

This report comes at a critical moment. The WA government is currently reviewing housing maintenance arrangements, including the Head Maintenance Contract model, and the Department of Treasury and Finance has completed a Housing Maintenance Service Delivery Options Analysis. At the same time, reforms to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* (WA), including minimum housing standards, are progressing. Together, these reform processes create a rare opportunity to redesign housing maintenance in the Kimberley around an approach that is planned, preventative and locally responsive.

Key Recommendations

Reform must occur at two levels: immediate reform of maintenance delivery and longer-term investment in housing quality, workforce capacity and housing supply.

Immediate Maintenance Reforms

— deliverable through the current maintenance review:

1. Replace the Head Maintenance Contract model with **community-led and locally delivered maintenance**, beginning with pilot communities and a staged transition towards place-based service delivery.
2. Introduce a **planned, preventative and accountable maintenance system**, including routine cyclical maintenance and a Survey-Fix approach based on the Housing for Health approach.
3. Create a **tenant-centred maintenance system** that is easier to access, culturally appropriate and provides clear communication about repairs.
4. Strengthen **accountability and quality assurance**, including local monitoring, increased inspections and greater transparency regarding maintenance outcomes.

Longer-Term Housing Reform

— required alongside maintenance reform:

5. Introduce **enforceable minimum housing standards** for all social housing.
6. Invest in **housing officers, community-based support** roles and **tenant support** services.
7. Invest in **climate-appropriate housing** to address overcrowding and ageing housing stock.

The current maintenance review presents a rare opportunity to replace a reactive, centrally managed system with one that is preventative, locally delivered and accountable to the communities it serves. Housing should be a place where people can live safely, look after their families, and not have to fight for basic repairs. Tenants in the Kimberley deserve homes that work.

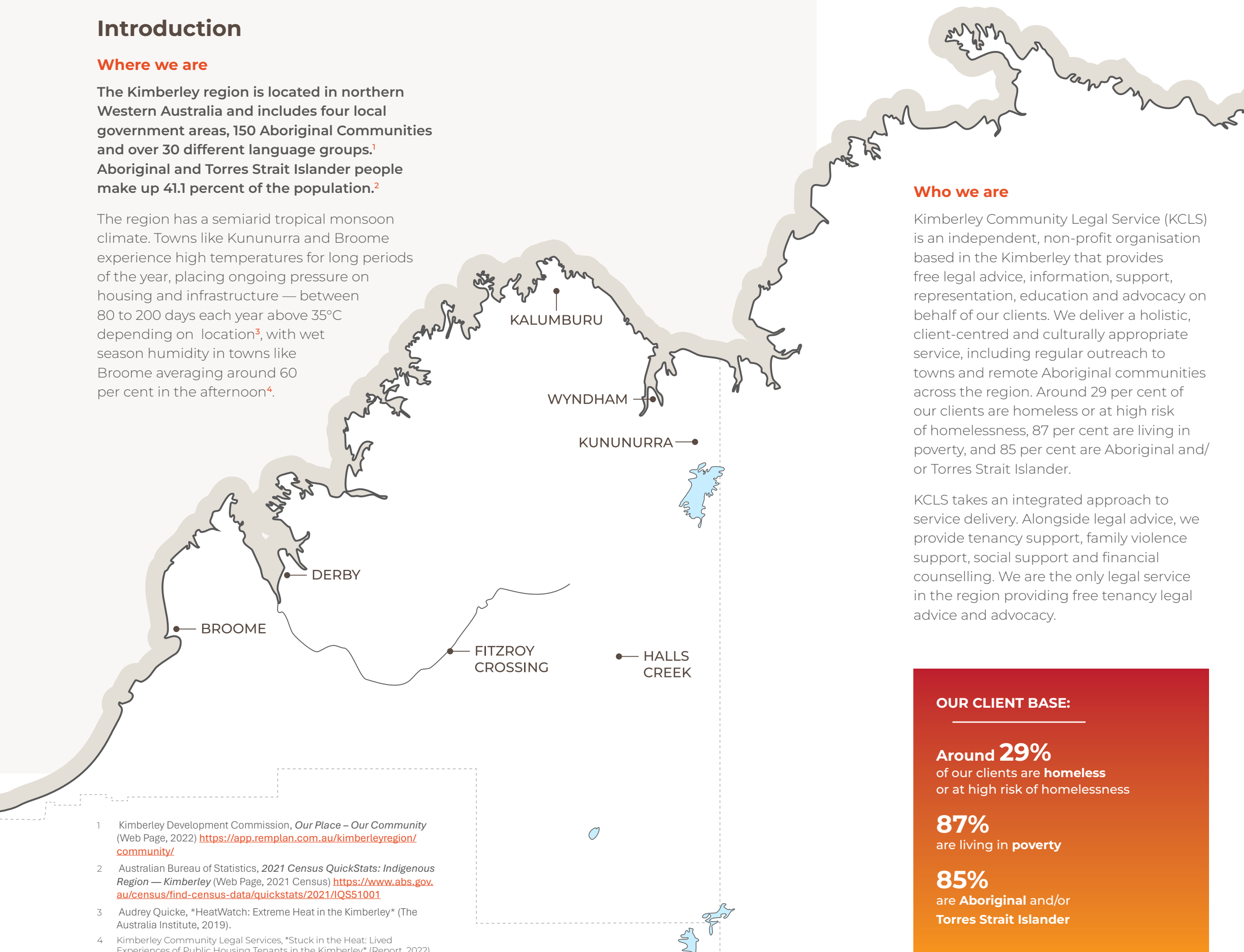
Introduction

Where we are

The Kimberley region is located in northern Western Australia and includes four local government areas, 150 Aboriginal Communities and over 30 different language groups.¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 41.1 per cent of the population.²

The region has a semiarid tropical monsoon climate. Towns like Kununurra and Broome experience high temperatures for long periods of the year, placing ongoing pressure on housing and infrastructure — between 80 to 200 days each year above 35°C depending on location³, with wet season humidity in towns like Broome averaging around 60 per cent in the afternoon⁴.



Who we are

Kimberley Community Legal Service (KCLS) is an independent, non-profit organisation based in the Kimberley that provides free legal advice, information, support, representation, education and advocacy on behalf of our clients. We deliver a holistic, client-centred and culturally appropriate service, including regular outreach to towns and remote Aboriginal communities across the region. Around 29 per cent of our clients are homeless or at high risk of homelessness, 87 per cent are living in poverty, and 85 per cent are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

KCLS takes an integrated approach to service delivery. Alongside legal advice, we provide tenancy support, family violence support, social support and financial counselling. We are the only legal service in the region providing free tenancy legal advice and advocacy.

OUR CLIENT BASE:

Around 29%
of our clients are **homeless**
or at high risk of homelessness

87%
are living in **poverty**

85%
are **Aboriginal** and/or
Torres Strait Islander

- 1 Kimberley Development Commission, *Our Place – Our Community* (Web Page, 2022) <https://app.remplan.com.au/kimberleyregion/community/>
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2021 Census QuickStats: Indigenous Region — Kimberley* (Web Page, 2021 Census) <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IQS51001>
- 3 Audrey Quicke, **HeatWatch: Extreme Heat in the Kimberley** (The Australia Institute, 2019).
- 4 Kimberley Community Legal Services, **Stuck in the Heat: Lived Experiences of Public Housing Tenants in the Kimberley** (Report, 2022).

Why we did this report

As part of our place-based, community-led approach, KCLS works to identify and address systemic problems affecting our clients, amplifying local voices and highlighting the policies and system settings that disadvantage them and the wider community.

KCLS has a strong history of advocating on behalf of Kimberley tenants. For too long, successive governments have failed to adequately invest in public housing in the region, leading to severe overcrowding, blown-out waiting lists and deteriorating housing stock — conditions not only reflect inequity but actively drive ongoing social disadvantage.

In 2019, KCLS made a submission to the WA Public Accounts Committee's Inquiry into public sector contract management practices, raising concerns about the Head Contractor model.⁵ Over the six years since, we have observed an escalation of the issues raised in that submission, particularly the inflation and lack of transparency of maintenance charges, and excessive delays in repairs.

The WA Government's recent holistic review of housing maintenance contracts and the Department of Treasury and Finance's Housing Maintenance Service Delivery Options Analysis present an important opportunity to reform how maintenance is delivered in the Kimberley. This report brings the lived experience and voices of Kimberley public housing tenants to that process, so that reform is informed by what tenants actually need.

Who we spoke to

This report draws on the experiences of public housing tenants across the Kimberley, gathered through a dedicated community survey. While promoted online, most responses were collected face-to-face. KCLS staff and other stakeholders sat down with tenants and assisted them to complete paper surveys, building trust and facilitating strong, accessible participation.

The report also draws on interviews with key community stakeholders, contributing expert and place-based knowledge of how housing maintenance operates and its impacts, along with KCLS's own casework and advocacy, illustrated through case studies. All information has been de-identified to protect individuals' privacy .



⁵ Kimberley Community Legal Services Inc, *Submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Public Sector Contract Management Practices* (Submission, 22 February 2019).

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

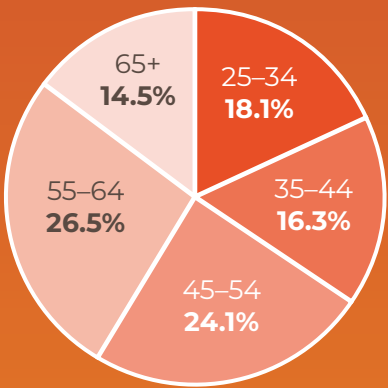
166 Respondents total

95% of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

54% from towns

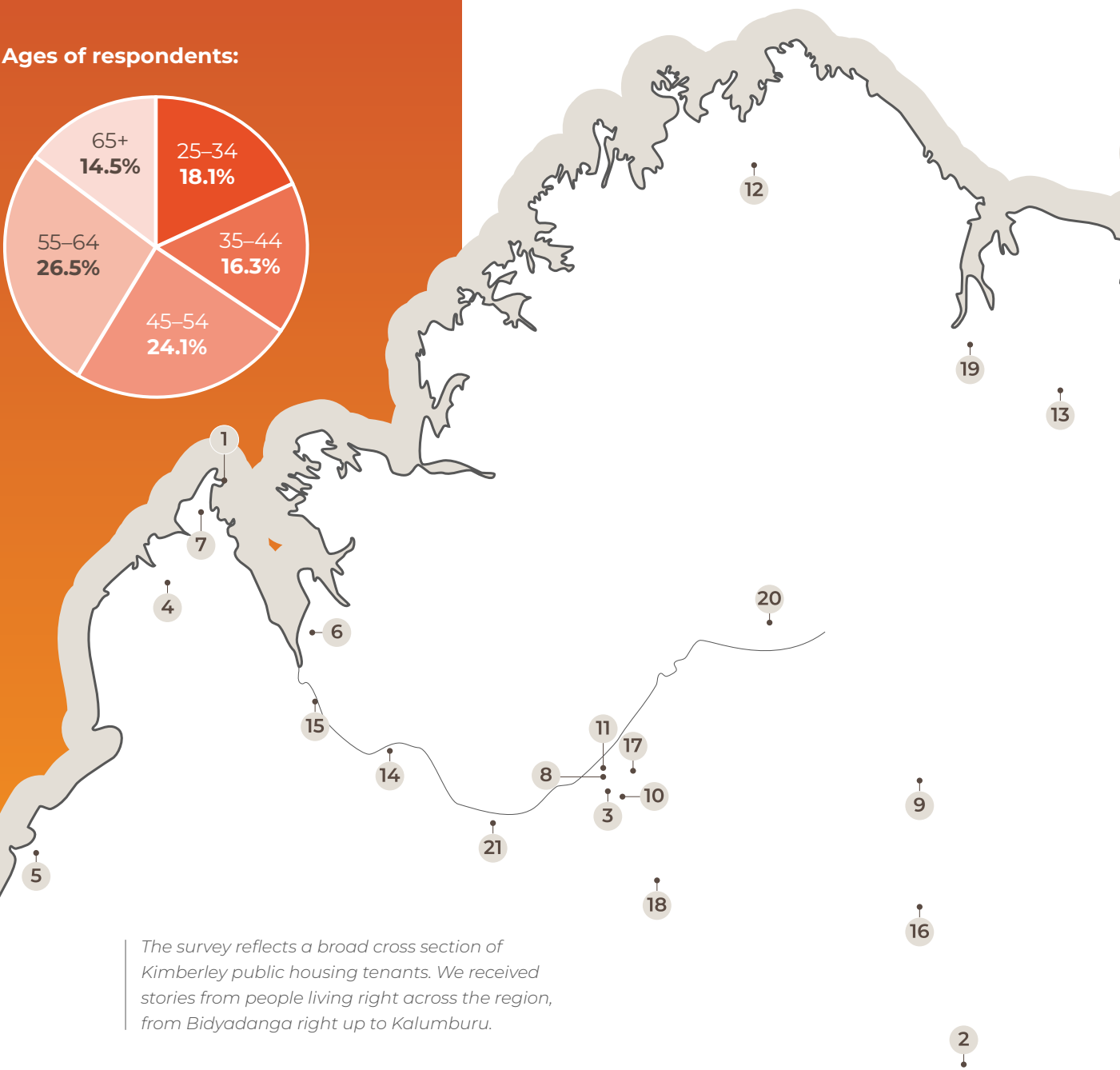
42% from remote Aboriginal communities

Ages of respondents:



Locations where we collected surveys:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) | 12. Junjuwa |
| 2. Balgo | 13. Kalumburu |
| 3. Bayulu | 14. Kununurra |
| 4. Beagle Bay | 15. Loanban |
| 5. Bidyadanga | 16. Looma |
| 6. Broome | 17. Mulan |
| 7. Derby | 18. Muludja |
| 8. Djarindjin | 19. Wangkatjungka |
| 9. Fitzroy Crossing | 20. Wyndham |
| 10. Halls Creek | 21. Yulmbu |
| 11. Joy Springs | 22. Yungngora (Noonkanbah) |



Mary's story

Mary is a 64-year-old Aboriginal woman living in public housing, where she has resided for over 12 years. She has been a stable and responsible tenant, taking pride in her home. Mary has mobility issues and relies on a walking aid, making it essential that her home environment is safe and accessible.

Over several years, Mary raised concerns about the deteriorating condition of her home with the Department of Housing and Works, but received little to no response. The property has become increasingly unsafe, with lifting floor tiles creating a trip hazard, flaking paint falling from the walls, and a severely deteriorated kitchen with damaged cupboards and no pantry for food storage. There are also concerns about pest infestation, with rats entering the home due to a lack of maintenance and pest control. These conditions have significantly impacted Mary's safety, hygiene, and quality of life.

Mary was referred to KCLS for advocacy support after her concerns continued to be ignored. A KCLS advocate formally raised the issues with the Department; however, no action was taken for several months. Following continued advocacy, the Department eventually responded and committed to addressing the maintenance concerns within a 28-day period. While some minor repairs to the kitchen have since been completed, many of the critical issues remain outstanding.

Mary's story demonstrates how tenants can become stuck in a cycle of poor maintenance, where problems are left to worsen, repairs are delayed or incomplete, and safe housing remains out of reach.

Context: Social housing in the Kimberley

The Kimberley housing context

Public housing is a vital part of the housing mix in the Kimberley, with over half of Kimberley renters living in social housing. It provides a critical safety net against homelessness, enables economic participation, and provides access to safe, secure homes. Aboriginal people make up the majority of public housing tenants in the region.

The importance of public housing here must be understood in the context of the homelands movement, which gained momentum from the 1970s and represented a strong commitment by Aboriginal people to return to and live on their traditional Country, maintaining connection to land, language and cultural practices. Today, people in remote Aboriginal communities rely almost entirely on public housing, because the private rental market simply does not exist.

"Since the 1970s the Fitzroy Valley's Aboriginal people have made very clear that their priorities are to remain on country and to live in small settlements which are quiet, and that enable them to maintain connection to country and to pass on cultural knowledge to future generations."

Janet Hunt

'Normalising' Aboriginal Housing in the Kimberley⁶

REGION



4 Local Government Areas
150 Aboriginal Communities - 30+ different language groups in the region.



41%
of the Kimberley population identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



Semi-arid
Tropical monsoonal climate, increasing temperatures due to climate change.



12.8% +
Cost of living in the Kimberley compared to Perth.⁷

HOUSING



>50%
of Kimberley residents rent in social housing.



25% vs 3%
Social housing stock in Kimberley vs metro WA



9 x
higher overcrowding than the rest of WA



#1
the Kimberley has the highest homelessness rate in WA — 2021 Census

⁶ Janet Hunt, 'Normalising' Aboriginal Housing in the Kimberley: Challenges at the Interface of New Public Management Approaches (CAEPR Working Paper No 123/2018, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, 2018).

⁷ Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA), *Regional Price Index 2025* (Report, State of Western Australia, April 2026) https://library.dpir.wa.gov.au/rd_statistics/11/

Housing is a human right. Both the Federal Government and the Government of Western Australia have committed to Closing the Gap, including Outcome 9, which seeks to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing that aligns with their priorities and needs.⁸ Safe and adequate housing is a fundamental social determinant of health, wellbeing, education and economic participation, and is essential to achieving equitable outcomes for First Nations peoples.

How maintenance is currently delivered

Social housing encompasses three main tenancy types: public housing managed directly by the Housing Authority; community housing managed by registered Community Housing Organisations; and remote Aboriginal housing, managed either by Regional Service Providers under agreement with the Housing Authority, or directly by the Housing Authority. All three fall within the remit of the Department of Housing and Works.



⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Closing the Gap Targets: Key Findings and Implications – Housing (Report, 6 March 2025) <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/closing-the-gap-targets-key-findings-implications/contents/housing>.



This report focuses on public housing and remote Aboriginal housing. While remote Aboriginal housing is not classified as a social housing tenancy agreement under s 71A of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* (WA), due to regulation 12C(a) of the *Residential Tenancies Regulations 1989* (WA), maintenance for these properties is nonetheless carried out by head maintenance contractors, and costs may be charged to tenants by the Department of Housing and Works.

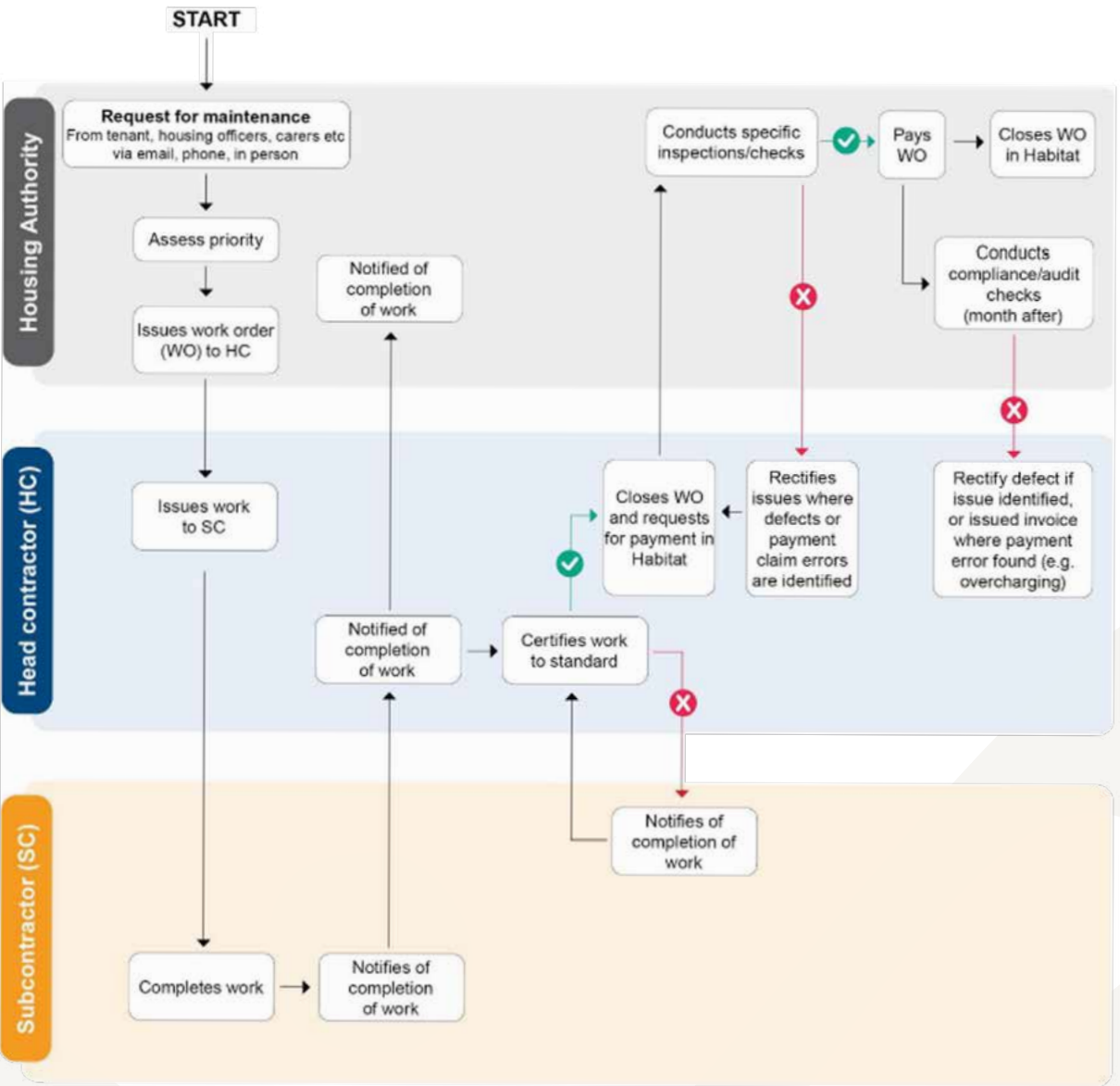
Maintenance is delivered through a Head Maintenance Contract model, under which a small number of large companies are contracted to manage maintenance across geographic regions. In the Kimberley, this work is managed by a for-profit, privately owned facilities maintenance company headquartered in the Eastern States of Australia. Head contractors coordinate and oversee local subcontractors to complete repair work. In some locations, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other organisations act as a local housing manager, administering tenancy agreements, rent collection, tenant liability charges and property inspections. However, responsibility for organising and approving maintenance work ultimately sits with the head contractor and the Department.

This layered and opaque system makes it difficult for tenants, advocates, lawyers and other stakeholders to understand when and how maintenance is reported, who is responsible for repairs, how decisions are made, and why delays occur.

How the current maintenance process operates

When a maintenance issue is identified, tenants must contact Housing and Works through the Housing Direct call centre or report the issue to a local housing officer. Staff record the request, assign a priority level and issue a work order to the head contractor. Priority ratings determine expected timeframes for completing the work. The head contractor then arranges subcontractors to undertake the repairs.

Maintenance work can involve a wide range of licensed and unlicensed trades including plumbing, electrical, carpentry, cleaning, fencing, painting and pest control with up to 30 different trades operating under the contract. While this process appears straightforward on paper, tenants' experiences show that in practice it is often slow, fragmented and difficult to navigate, particularly in remote communities.



Summary of process of maintenance from request to completion

⁹ Office of the Auditor General (WA), Management of Housing Maintenance Information (Report No 1: 2025–26, Performance Audit, 6 August 2025) 8.

A history of under-investment and ignored warnings

Public housing in the Kimberley has been shaped by decades of under-investment, resulting in ageing housing stock that has not been maintained or updated to meet the needs of growing communities. This has contributed to severe overcrowding, long waiting lists, and homes that are not fit for purpose.

This poor condition is well known and documented. The 2017 *Remote Housing Review* found that in Western Australia, construction quality was “consistently reported to be poor”,¹⁰ highlighting longstanding concerns regarding the durability and quality of housing delivered in remote WA communities. Evidence from the Kimberley confirms this remains an ongoing problem: planned maintenance has frequently not been completed, and housing service delivery has reportedly “deteriorated significantly” following changes to maintenance contracting arrangements.¹¹ More recent research in the Kimberley identified continuing “homelessness, overcrowding, and substandard dwellings”, demonstrating that housing quality remains a significant challenge across the region today.¹²

“Many Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote Australia suffer from unacceptable levels of substandard housing, overcrowding and homelessness.”

Australian Government

Remote Indigenous Housing Reform Announcement, 2007.

“Housing need in remote Indigenous communities was considered to be at critical levels, with many houses overcrowded and in very poor condition.”

Australian National Audit Office

Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing in the Northern Territory, 2011).

“More needs to be done to meet future demand and to protect the existing housing stock.”

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Remote Housing Review, 2017



¹⁰ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Remote Housing Review: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy (2008–2018) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017) 5.

¹¹ Janet Hunt, ‘Normalising’ Aboriginal Housing in the Kimberley: Challenges at the Interface of New Public Management Approaches (CAEPR Working Paper No 123/2018, Australian National University, 2018) 7-8.

¹² Kristian Rodd et al, ‘Aboriginal Community Co-Design and Co-Build—Far More than a House’ (2022) 14(9) *Sustainability* 5294, 1.

“There is urgent need for a new model to address the housing crisis in remote Australian Indigenous communities” and remote communities continue to experience “homelessness, overcrowding, substandard dwellings”.

Rodd et al.

Aboriginal Community Co-Design and Co-Build—Far More than a House, 2022).

“Poor housing in Aboriginal communities continues to be linked to the compromised health status of Aboriginal Australians.”

Standen et al.

Prioritising Housing Maintenance to Improve Health in Aboriginal Communities, 2020).

Both the Federal and WA Governments have committed to Closing the Gap, including improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.¹³ The Priority Reforms call for shared decision-making, stronger Aboriginal community-controlled sectors, culturally safe services, and greater accountability — commitments further articulated through the WA Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.¹⁴

¹³ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Australian Governments and Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, entered into force 27 July 2020.

¹⁴ Western Australia, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2026–2028 (Web Page, 2026) <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/closing-the-gap>

However, the current Head Maintenance Contract model in the Kimberley is not delivering on these commitments. Decision-making remains centralised, local Aboriginal organisations are largely excluded from service delivery, and tenants experience systems that are difficult to access, unresponsive, and lacking accountability.¹⁵ This presents a clear opportunity for reform — one that embeds local decision-making, supports Aboriginal-led delivery, and strengthens transparency, in line with the intent of Closing the Gap.

Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (WA) reforms

At the same time, the WA Government is undertaking broader reforms to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* (WA), including the introduction of minimum housing standards for rental properties. The proposed reforms would establish baseline standards relating to matters such as safety, ventilation, protection from damp and mould, plumbing, water supply, privacy and security. These reforms recognise that all tenants should be entitled to a safe, healthy and functional home. While much of the current discussion has focused on the private rental market, the issues identified throughout this report demonstrate that minimum housing standards are equally important for social housing tenants in the Kimberley. As the WA Government considers both maintenance reform and legislative reform, there is a significant opportunity to ensure that all social housing homes meet a clear and enforceable standard of habitability and safety.

¹⁵ Australian Government, National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Priority Reforms (Web Page, 2026) <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/priority-reforms>.

Chapter 1

Housing is not fit for purpose and leads to widespread issues

Public housing stock in the Kimberley is ageing and not built for the climate

The Kimberley region has a tropical monsoonal climate defined by two distinct seasons — wet and dry — with extreme heat exacerbated by high humidity during the wet season. These conditions place significant pressure on housing infrastructure and should shape how houses are designed, constructed and maintained. Yet evidence consistently shows that housing in the Kimberley has not been designed for these conditions.



STUCK IN THE HEAT

The Stuck in the Heat report, published by Kimberley Community Legal Services in 2022, documented the experiences of public housing tenants living through extreme heat in the Kimberley. The report found that poor housing quality, ageing housing stock, overcrowding and delayed maintenance left many tenants living in homes that were not designed for Kimberley conditions. The report also highlighted significant inequity between public housing and

Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH). While public housing tenants are generally required to purchase their own air conditioners and pay the associated running costs, GROH tenants are provided with split-system or ducted air conditioning and are eligible for subsidies to assist with electricity costs. The report concluded that these policies reinforce disadvantage and leave many public housing tenants exposed to extreme heat, financial stress and poorer health outcomes.



Maintenance issues in the Kimberley are widespread

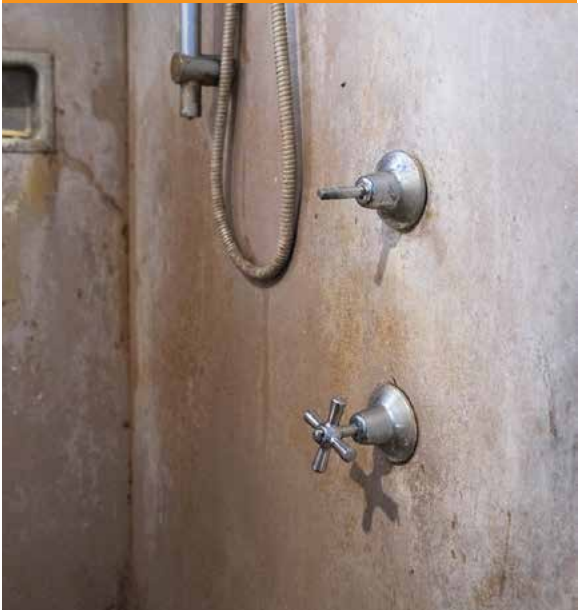
Our survey data shows that maintenance issues are widespread across the Kimberley, with tenants consistently reporting multiple, ongoing problems rather than isolated or “one off” issues. Only a very small proportion of tenants considered their homes safe and in good condition, and respondents overwhelmingly described their homes as needing repair. Nearly three-quarters of tenants reported plumbing problems, around two-thirds experienced electrical faults, and more than half reported leaking roofs or structural damage.

SURVEY RESULTS:

Only a very small proportion of tenants considered their homes safe and in good condition. Respondents overwhelmingly described their homes as needing repair.

96% of respondents did not see their home as safe and in good condition.

81% of respondents reported their homes need repairs.



TYPES OF MAINTENANCE ISSUES

Over 70% of respondents reported plumbing issues - the most common maintenance issue category.

Most tenants (majority) reported multiple types of maintenance problems at the same time, often 3-5 issues per home.

Two-thirds of respondents reported electrical and structural issues, often posing safety risks.

More than half of respondents experienced pest infestations including rats, cockroaches and termites.

“We had two cyclones come through the community which caused leaks in one of the bedrooms. We had electricians and plumbers come out to fix the problem, but now more leaks are currently in the same bedroom and has caused mould build-up inside the walls. I have sent photos of this problem to our local housing officer and we are still waiting. I have a daughter with several health issues with her lungs and sinuses”

“Been here since 2014. My floor is cracking, it’s a very old house. In my kitchen, underneath the sink it’s been leaking for years and everything gone rotten. I think my husband got sick from the mould. House not suitable -

A fragmented approach to maintenance requests through “work orders” is failing to meet the reality of housing maintenance in the Kimberley

Repairs are often managed through individual work orders that address one issue at a time, rather than resolving all related problems together — leaving the system unable to respond to the reality of Kimberley housing, where multiple issues often exist at once and are closely connected.

For example, when a job requires multiple tradespeople, such as a plumber and a plasterer, the plumber may complete their part of the work but tenants can then wait months for the plasterer to return. This fragmented approach leaves homes unfinished or unsafe for extended periods, while the underlying problem gets worse. What is needed is a coordinated approach that resolves the full problem — something the current work order system does not support.

“Housing have been around again and I showed them what needs to be done but then no one turns up. When they do come, they only do 1 job when there are more. They say they only have a work order for one and can’t fix the others even though they have been reported.”

“They change the taps and leave a big hole there... they say it’s someone else’s job and just leave everything open. Then you’re waiting forever and a day for a plasterer to come there and fix it up.”

Chairperson of a remote community.



Chapter 2: Long delays in repairs, including urgent maintenance

Tenants are waiting a long time for repairs

An overwhelming trend from our survey was that tenants are waiting long periods for repairs. Very few reported quick resolution, and most were still waiting for repairs at the time they completed the survey.

SURVEY RESULTS:

-  **115 respondents (69%)**
Still waiting for repairs
-  **40 respondents (24%)**
Fixed after a long time
-  **8 respondents (5%)**
Fixed quickly
-  **3 respondents**
Other

Repairs are not being completed in prescribed timeframes

The WA Auditor General found that repairs are not consistently completed within prescribed timeframes. Only 74% of urgent repairs, 77% of priority repairs and 72% of routine repairs were completed within target timeframes.¹⁶ The Auditor General also found that 35% of work orders remained overdue in March 2025 and that only 51% of vacant-property maintenance work orders were completed within the Department’s 14-day target, demonstrating persistent delays across the public housing maintenance system.¹⁷



Under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987, Housing and Works: must maintain the premises in a reasonable state of repair having regard to its age and character and must conduct any repairs within a reasonable period after the need for the repair arises.

The most common unresolved problems involved urgent health and safety issues, including plumbing (74%), electrical faults (64%), and leaking roofs or structural damage (58%).

Even in towns, where services are assumed to be easier to access, around 95 per cent of people experienced delays in maintenance work — either ongoing or prolonged, with very few experiencing timely repairs. People in remote communities are even more likely to still be waiting than those in towns, with more than seven in ten tenants reporting unresolved maintenance issues despite having reported them.

¹⁶ Western Australia, Office of the Auditor General, Management of Housing Maintenance Information (Report No 1 of 2025–26, 6 August 2025) 18

¹⁷ Western Australia, Office of the Auditor General, Management of Housing Maintenance Information (Report No 1 of 2025–26, 6 August 2025) 10

Laura’s story:

Laura is a single mother of four children living in a remote Aboriginal community in the East Kimberley. Laura told KCLS staff that her stove has been smoking and sparking and is currently not working. KCLS staff assisted with reporting this maintenance issue with the Department of Housing.

Under the Housing Authority Maintenance Policy Manual, both issues are classified as emergency repairs. The policy states that emergency electrical faults (such as sparking or electrical shocks) and a stove that is completely non-functional must be responded to urgently, with repairs required to be completed within eight hours of the work order being issued to a contractor.

Despite the clear safety risks and the policy requirements, Laura’s repairs were not completed until 17 days after the issue was first reported.

During this time, Laura was unable to use her stove to cook meals for her children. The delay placed additional stress on an already vulnerable family and exposed them to ongoing safety risks in their home.

Laura’s experience highlights the significant gap between the Housing Authority’s maintenance standards and the reality faced by tenants in remote Aboriginal communities.

These delays also represent a missed opportunity for early intervention. When repairs are not completed promptly, minor issues escalate into major faults that are more complex and costly to fix. A responsive, preventative maintenance system could address issues early, reduce long-term costs, and improve outcomes for tenants. The current model, however, appears reactive and slow, allowing problems to persist until they reach crisis point.

Chapter 3: Reactive maintenance model not suited to the Kimberley

Housing maintenance in the Kimberley is largely reactive and not fit for purpose in the context of an ageing housing stock with complex, ongoing repair needs

The 2025 Auditor General’s report found that approximately 85 per cent of maintenance is reactive,¹⁸ driven by tenant requests or inspections rather than being planned or preventative. This model relies on problems emerging before they are addressed, rather than identifying and fixing issues early, and the Auditor General’s report is clear that this approach is more expensive, slower, and leads to poorer outcomes than planned maintenance.

These findings echo concerns identified over 15 years earlier, in the 2011 *Finding a Place* report by the Equal Opportunity Commission, which found a system heavily dependent on tenants reporting problems, with requests often not acted on or delayed until issues became worse.¹⁹

“When I assist people in remote communities to report their maintenance issues, all non-urgent works get added to a list and put off until there have been enough reports for the department to warrant sending a tradesperson out to that location. People really don’t feel listened to and it means that, in the time between reporting an issue and the work order being actioned, the maintenance needs have changed and the original work orders are now redundant which further contributes to maintenance not being done properly”

KCLS Social Worker
explaining the challenges when helping clients in remote communities with maintenance issues

18 Auditor General Report
19 *Finding a Place*





Reactive maintenance model is expensive, especially in the Kimberley, where travel costs have blown out

The WA Auditor General found that around \$250 million has been spent on travel and overhead costs for housing maintenance since 2019,²⁰ driven in part by the current reactive approach which increases the number of contractor trips and leads to repeated travel to the same communities. These findings challenge the effectiveness of the current Head Maintenance Contract model. One of the key opportunities the Auditor General identified was coordinating routine and planned maintenance to reduce travel and overhead spend, and improve both value for money and response times.

The case study below, from AHURI's paper *Sustainable Indigenous Housing in Regional and Remote Australia*, illustrates an alternative, more responsive approach to maintenance in remote locations.

²⁰ Auditor General Report

Case Study: South Australia

"Housing SA managers typically make monthly trips to APY Lands communities to assess housing stock, scope required capital upgrades, attend council meetings, consult with tenants, contractors and the Housing SA capital works and maintenance coordinators who work on the APY Lands. Nganampa Health Council supplement these visits with a comprehensive environmental health program that also takes in the yard and householder appliances.

The planned maintenance schedule has allowed Housing SA to maintain relatively low spending on travel costs, especially for one-off visits to address responsive work orders." – *"Sustainable Indigenous housing in regional and remote Australia"* by AHURI.²¹

²¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, **Sustainable Indigenous Housing in Regional and Remote Australia** (AHURI, 2017).

The Department, or the contractor, should work meaningfully with communities to regularly assess and address housing maintenance needs in remote communities. While proactive maintenance models generate cost savings for government, they can also increase local employment and improve health outcomes for people living in the communities.

One well-established alternative model that demonstrates these benefits is the Housing for Health (HfH) approach, adopted by the NSW Government for over 30 years.

Housing for Health (HfH)

Housing for Health (HfH) is an alternate approach to maintaining community housing. The underlying theme is that a cyclical approach to building maintenance, maximising local resources and skills, leads to increased sustainability and improved health outcomes.

HfH is a world-recognised respected system for establishing the health and safety status of community housing. The process involves a comprehensive "survey-fix" approach where critical health and safety deficiencies are rectified immediately during the assessment phase. The HfH process commences on-site with a comprehensive systematic assessment audit of the condition of each home. A comprehensive list of essential household fittings and services deemed necessary to ensure houses are safe and healthy is used as an assessment checklist.

Local people are trained to carry out assessments and minor repairs, building community ownership of the process and preparing residents for ongoing housing management roles. Community trust and buy-in is achieved because

critical health and safety deficiencies are immediately rectified wherever possible. Community members are actively involved in assessing the condition of the houses and informing and performing action to address deficiencies. These are critical capacity-building community development components of HfH.

The HfH approach demonstrates that viable alternative systems exist for maintaining community housing; ones that deliver significantly better outcomes for both tenants and government. Evidence shows that improving the condition of housing directly improves health outcomes: "those who received the Housing for Health intervention had a significantly reduced rate of hospital separations for infectious diseases – 40 per cent less than the hospital separation rate for the rest of the rural NSW Aboriginal population who did not receive the Housing for Health intervention."²² This highlights that effective maintenance is not simply an operational issue, but a critical investment in prevention, community wellbeing, and reducing long-term demand on health and other government services.

²² New South Wales, **Closing the Gap: 10 Years of Housing for Health in NSW — An Evaluation of a Healthy Housing Intervention** (NSW Health, 2010).

Chapter 4: Poor quality and temporary fixes

Maintenance issues are being resolved with temporary fixes instead of addressing the underlying issues, leading to a cycle of constant maintenance needs

Rather than addressing underlying design failures, the current maintenance system often sees the same issues reported again and again — a cycle where problems are repeatedly addressed but never resolved.

On an outreach trip to remote community, which will be referred to as remote community A, KCLS staff heard from multiple tenants that during each wet season their septic systems overflows, causing toilets to block and bathrooms to flood. Despite repeated reporting and attendance by maintenance contractors, the problem continues year after year, because the underlying design issue has not been addressed.

“When it rains, the septic system fills up and blocks the toilet and shower - the bathroom floods, and this keeps happening even after we’ve reported it many times.”

Tenant,
Remote community A

“Every wet season the septic tank fails - toilets block, bathrooms flood, and despite repeated reports, the problem keeps coming back.”

Tenant,
Remote community A

A similar pattern emerged in another remote community nearly 500 kilometres away, which will be referred to as remote community B. A tenant described her bathroom water basin being replaced, only for it to deteriorate completely as soon as the wet season started and the rain arrived. The chipboard is now wet and soft to touch, and the whole unit is becoming detached from the wall. It is unusable, dangerous, at risk of collapsing, and posing a risk of mould.

These defects are not isolated incidents, but part of a broader pattern of construction and maintenance practice. When houses aren’t built and maintained for their environment, tenants bear the brunt of ongoing deterioration that is only ever met with temporary fixes.

Collapsing sink basin in Remote community B



Works are not being done properly

“I’ve looked at so many of these houses and bathrooms – repairs have been made and just not done to standards”

Kimberley Licensed Builder.

In multiple stories collected through the survey, tenants told KCLS that completed works had failed soon after due to incorrect materials being used, poor craftsmanship, or a failure to address the underlying issue.

To verify what we were hearing, KCLS engaged a licensed builder from them Kimberley to conduct a visual inspection of six properties in a remote community in the West Kimberley which will be referred to as remote community C. All six were assessed as high risk, with two deemed not habitable. The inspection found widespread defects, including water ingress, failed waterproofing, mould, structural corrosion and slab failure. In many cases, prior repairs were found to be non-compliant and ineffective, failing to address the underlying issue. Examples include patching with inappropriate materials and incomplete renovations — a pattern of reactive maintenance that never resolves root causes.

This inspection demonstrates that poor construction and ineffective repairs are not isolated issues, but part of a broader systemic problem driving ongoing deterioration and unsafe living conditions. The builder attributed the condition of the houses to poor craftsmanship by attending tradespeople, described it as “a systemic issue with maintenance contractors and the way they are managed”.

A tenant can do everything right — report issues promptly and take every step to minimise further damage — but if the repairs keep failing soon after, the cycle continues regardless.



“The last house we went to, his entire shower floor was literally collapsing and falling away, and as soon as I ran the shower the water was pouring out underneath the slab - there’s a massive hole underneath that slab where all the water just keeps washing out.”

“In four years of doing this work in the Kimberley, I’ve seen standards of repair that simply wouldn’t be accepted anywhere else in the building industry”

Kimberley Licensed Builder.

Chapter 5: Maintenance reporting processes are not designed for Kimberley tenants

Communication barriers lead to inaccurate work orders and delays

The Auditor General found that most work orders are changed after they are issued, with the key driver being the difficulty of accurately capturing maintenance requests at the outset. The current system relies on tenants communicating complex maintenance issues by phone or online form, often without visual prompts or culturally appropriate communication supports. The Auditor General noted that tenants often struggle to understand and clearly explain the issue, while staff rely on scripted questioning that may not reflect how tenants actually describe problems in their own words.

As a result, work orders are frequently inaccurate when first issued and are only corrected after a contractor attends the property and physically assesses the issue. This means delays are compounded and repeated visits to remote areas become necessary.

In the Kimberley context, these communication barriers are amplified by language differences, cultural communication styles, and limited access to technology. What looks like a technical issue in the system is, in reality, a communication failure — one that places the burden on tenants to navigate a process that was never designed for them.

“I have been billed \$2000 for a toilet overflowing. All the units here are infested with rats. I cant sleep at night cause of the rats at night. I report the rats and they tell me I have to clean my front yard. My front yard is clean. I have had to buy 3 washing machines and 3 fridges from the rats. They are very horrible, they don’t listen. There is a lot of mould in the house. When I have a shower my eyes get sore and red, there is also no fan in the bathroom. But it just falls on deaf ears, its inhumane.”

Quote from survey participant



Issues with the Housing Direct line

Tenants must report damage through the Housing Direct hotline or a Housing Services Officer. On the second round of survey collections, a question was added to understand how the hotline is actually used.

SURVEY RESULTS:

Question:
Did you call the Housing Direct hotline to report the maintenance issue?

 **59%**
of tenants did not use the Housing Direct hotline

 **Only 41%**
reported calling the hotline

A follow up question was asked, “If no, why haven’t you used the Housing Direct hotline?”

- “Didn’t know about it”
- “Didn’t know the number”
- “you talk to people in Perth who don’t understand what we going through.”
- “Tried calling, waited too long”
- “When I called they didn’t pick up”
- “I tried multiple times to contact them but the call didn’t get through.”

The results show that the Housing Direct hotline is not tenants’ preferred method of reporting maintenance issues, with most relying instead on local housing officers. There was a strong preference for fac- to-face, relationship-based communication. When tenants did call the hotline, they encountered long wait times, unanswered calls and a lack of understanding from call centre staff who are located outside the Kimberley. Several tenants were also unaware that the hotline exists.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the centralised hotline model is not suitable as the default reporting method: it is neither accessible nor effective for many Kimberley tenants, and does not align with how people in remote communities engage with services. The Equal Opportunity Commission’s 2011 Implementation Report similarly found that Aboriginal tenants regarded calling “an anonymous person on a 1300 number” as culturally alien and too indirect.²³ KCLS’s own experience reinforces this: face-to-face services are essential in the Kimberley, particularly for Aboriginal tenants in remote communities navigating cultural, language and technological barriers. Effective services cannot be delivered by requiring people to adapt to a system that was not designed for them.

The survey also revealed a clear trend of people feeling unheard — a pattern that risks disenfranchising them from the reporting process altogether. Where tenants have been repeatedly let down by delayed or incorrect repairs, they describe feeling hopeless about trying to get issues fixed at all.

²³ Equal Opportunity Commission (WA), *Finding a Place: An Inquiry into the Existence of Discriminatory Practices in Relation to the Provision of Public Housing and Related Services to Aboriginal People in Western Australia — Implementation Report* (Report, 2011)



QUOTES FROM SURVEY PARTICIPANTS:

- “They don’t care. Don’t listen.”
- “I cant keep asking them they aren’t listening.”
- “noone really listen’s from Dept of Housing , they allways make excuses.”
- “I was calling but no one seemed to listen to me.”
- “I have called and emailed about my situation and yet still no response.”
- “They don’t answer the phones.”
- “The promises were made... still waiting.”
- “They always make excuses that it will be done.”
- “Housing mob sometimes come they take photos then leave. They never help me or get things fixed.”

“Working with housing is very slow and they always seem to find ways around certain conversations. No cultural awareness training for their new staff it’s like they have been thrown in the deep end because it’s a surprise when you start explaining your frustration and having to always repeat my story.”

Chapter 6: The maintenance system responds to professional advocacy and legal pressures rather than tenant need

When legal advocacy gets involved, issues are resolved

Evidence from KCLS casework shows that housing maintenance issues are often only resolved once legal or tenancy advocacy becomes involved. Tenants frequently report raising concerns multiple times over extended periods without meaningful response—in some cases, repairs remaining outstanding for months or years. Yet once KCLS contacts the Department or maintenance contractor on a tenant’s behalf, these issues are often addressed quickly, despite no new information being provided.

For tenants, this reinforces a strong perception that their concerns are only taken seriously once they are escalated through legal channels:

“I kept telling them, but nothing happened. When the lawyer rang, it was fixed straight away.”

Survey participant.

This finding is not evidence that legal advocacy is the solution; rather, it highlights a systemic failure in the housing maintenance system. Access to safe, habitable housing should not depend on a tenant’s ability to access a tenant advocate or legal representative.

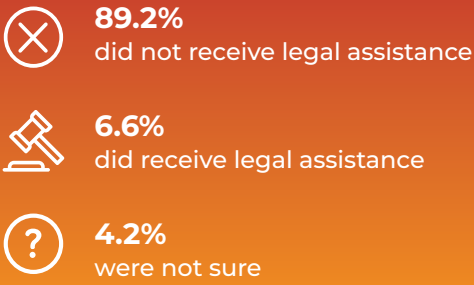
This reliance on professional advocacy or legal intervention creates an inherently unequal system: tenants who can access legal support are more likely to achieve outcomes, while those without this support—or those unwilling to escalate—are often left living in unresolved or unsafe conditions. In the Kimberley context, tenants may face significant barriers to accessing legal services, including language barriers, remoteness, lack of transport, and fear of repercussions. Some tenants expressed reluctance to escalate issues or involve lawyers due to concerns that doing so might put their tenancy at risk:

“It’s like we can’t open our mouths or it puts our house in jeopardy.”

Survey participant.

This is reflected in the survey data: the vast majority of tenants reporting never receiving legal support for their housing maintenance issues. This indicates that while legal advocacy can be effective in prompting action, it remains inaccessible to most tenants.

SURVEY RESULTS:



KCLS advocacy interventions and casework also show that many matters resolved through legal intervention involve basic maintenance obligations, not complex disputes. In some cases, legal intervention was required simply to have a repair request acknowledged, logged, or followed up. This places an unreasonable burden on both tenants and legal services: community legal services like KCLS are not designed, or funded, to function as a routine escalation mechanism for basic housing maintenance.

This reinforces the report's broader conclusion: the current maintenance system is not responsive to tenant need. Instead, it responds to professional and legal advocacy, functioning effectively only when a lawyer or tenant advocate becomes involved. This is neither equitable, fair, effective, nor sustainable. Tenants should not have to fight for basic repairs, and legal advocacy should be the exception, not the trigger for action.



Bill's story:

Bill lives in a community near Wyndham. He reported severe and ongoing maintenance issues, including groundwater flooding inside the home and water leaking from ceiling fixtures during the wet season. The issue had persisted for over a year despite repeated reports to the housing provider, with no action taken. Bill feared structural collapse during the upcoming wet season.

Following intervention by a KCLS case worker, a formal report was made to the housing maintenance line. This resulted in inspections being conducted, and the housing provider committed to completing repairs before the next wet season. Bill indicated that prior attempts to seek assistance were ineffective until advocacy support was provided.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The WA Government is at a critical decision point. Its review of housing maintenance arrangements offers an opportunity to address longstanding concerns about the effectiveness, cost and accountability of the current model, and the evidence in this report suggests that incremental improvements will not be enough.

The recommendations below set out a practical pathway for reform. The first section focuses on changes that can be delivered through the current maintenance review; the second identifies longer-term investments required to address the broader housing challenges facing the Kimberley.

Immediate Maintenance Reform

The following recommendations focus on reforms achievable through future maintenance contracting arrangements and related service delivery changes. Together, they aim to create a maintenance system that is more responsive, preventative, accountable and locally informed.



RECOMMENDATION 1:**Replace the Head Maintenance Contract model with a staged transition to community-led and locally delivered maintenance**

The current Head Maintenance Contract model is not suited to the Kimberley. It is centralised, opaque and heavily reliant on drive-in, drive-out service delivery, contributing to delays, increased costs, poor accountability and limited opportunities for local employment and capacity building. The current maintenance review presents an opportunity to redesign how maintenance services are delivered and to trial models that build local workforce capacity and strengthen community control.

We recommend that the WA Government transition away from region-wide Head Maintenance Contracts towards place-based maintenance delivery models that operate at the level of individual towns and remote communities.

Future maintenance arrangements should:

- ▶ Require maintenance providers to maintain a permanent local presence in the communities they service.
- ▶ Prioritise local businesses, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) and community-based enterprises through procurement processes.

- ▶ Support local employment, skills development and community capacity building through maintenance delivery.
- ▶ Create opportunities for local community members to gain qualifications and employment in housing maintenance and associated trades.

IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY

The WA Government should commence this transition through pilot communities that demonstrate how locally delivered maintenance can operate in different Kimberley contexts. These pilots would provide an opportunity to build local workforce capacity, strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and generate evidence to inform a region-wide transition to community-led maintenance. Pilots should be developed in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, local governments and community organisations, and evaluated against tenant satisfaction, maintenance responsiveness, local employment outcomes and value for money.

RECOMMENDATION 2:**Reform maintenance delivery by introducing a planned, preventative and accountable maintenance system**

The current maintenance system is overwhelmingly reactive, responding to problems only after they arise. This contributes to repeated failures, higher long-term costs and poorer outcomes for tenants. A planned and preventative approach would better reflect the realities of the Kimberley, where ageing housing stock, extreme weather conditions and the remoteness of many communities make reactive maintenance both inefficient and costly.

We recommend that the WA Government require future maintenance arrangements to:**Introduce planned and preventative maintenance**

- ▶ Establish a routine, cyclical maintenance program for all public housing properties in the Kimberley.
- ▶ Prioritise preventative maintenance of critical household infrastructure, including plumbing, electrical systems, roofing, air conditioning and hot water systems.
- ▶ Link maintenance planning to property condition assessments and asset management data.

Implement a Survey-Fix approach

- ▶ Introduce a Survey-Fix model based on the Housing for Health approach.
- ▶ Conduct routine inspections that identify maintenance issues before they become major failures.
- ▶ Ensure urgent health and safety issues are addressed immediately wherever possible during inspections.
- ▶ Use inspection findings to inform ongoing maintenance planning and investment decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 3:**Create a tenant-centred maintenance system that is accessible, transparent and easy to use**

The current maintenance reporting system places an unreasonable burden on tenants and is not designed around how people in the Kimberley communicate, access services or seek support. A maintenance system should be designed around tenant needs rather than administrative processes.

We recommend that the WA Government require future maintenance arrangements to:

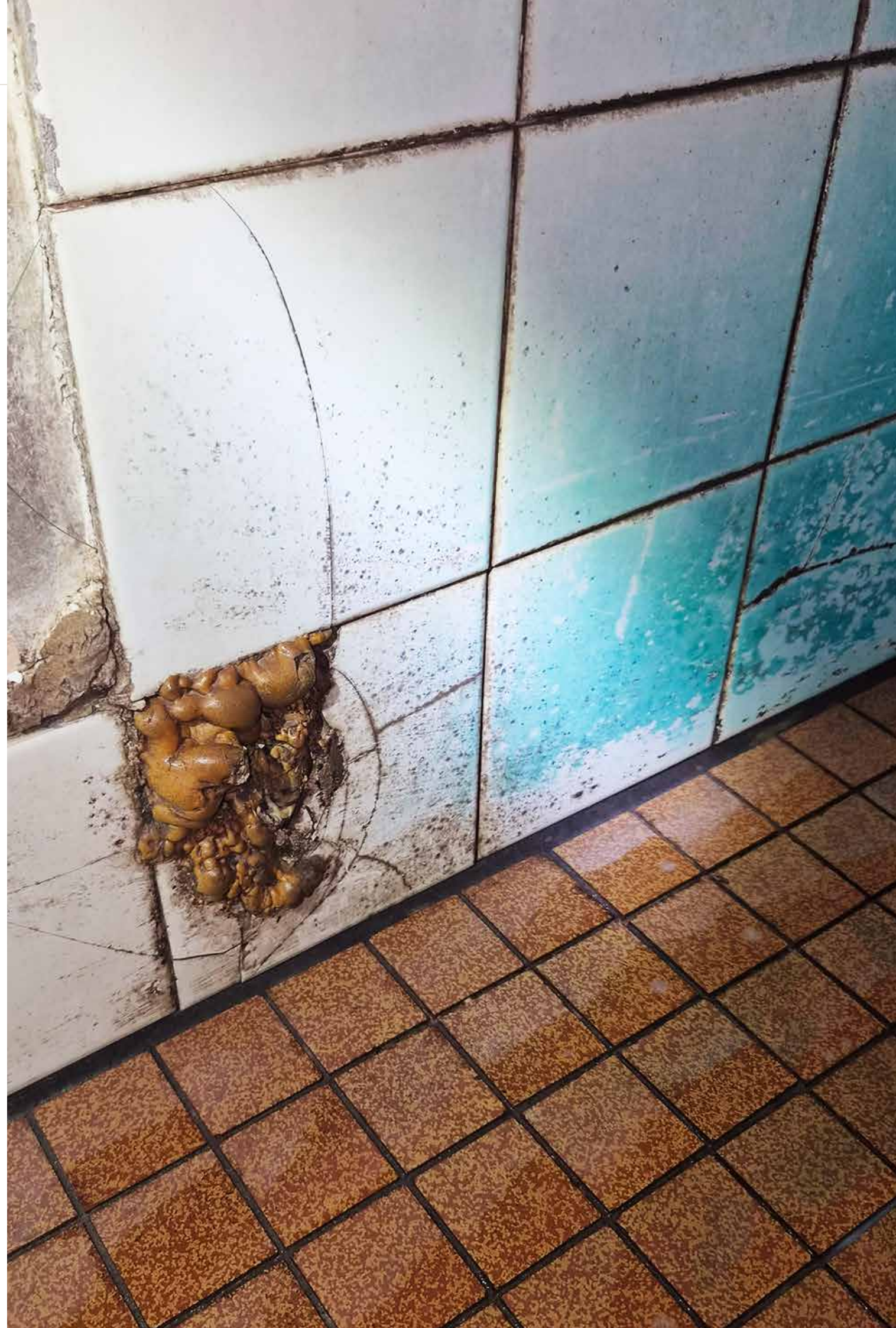
- ▶ Improve work order systems so that multiple maintenance issues can be recorded and addressed together, rather than one issue at a time.
- ▶ Provide tenants with confirmation when maintenance requests are lodged, including a reference number, anticipated timeframes and regular progress updates.
- ▶ Redesign maintenance reporting processes to be simple, flexible and culturally appropriate.
- ▶ Ensure communication processes are accessible through Plain English, interpreters and local language supports where required.
- ▶ Reduce reliance on centralised reporting systems and increase face-to-face maintenance reporting options.

RECOMMENDATION 4: **Strengthen local accountability** **and quality assurance**

Current oversight mechanisms are not effectively capturing the quality of maintenance work being completed, particularly in remote communities. Stronger accountability measures are required to ensure maintenance work is completed to an acceptable standard and represents value for public investment.

We recommend that the WA Government:

- ▶ Increase the proportion of in-person inspections as part of audit and compliance processes.
- ▶ Require contractors to provide before-and-after photographic evidence of completed works prior to invoice approval.
- ▶ Introduce place-based monitoring frameworks involving local stakeholders and community representatives.
- ▶ Enable tenant feedback mechanisms so residents can report dissatisfaction with completed works.
- ▶ Publicly report contractor performance against key indicators including response times, completion rates and tenant satisfaction.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Long-Term Housing Reform

While maintenance reform is essential, maintenance alone cannot resolve the broader housing challenges facing the Kimberley. Overcrowding, ageing housing stock and the complex needs of many tenants require sustained investment in housing quality, support services and housing supply.

RECOMMENDATION 5:**Introduce enforceable minimum housing standards for all social housing**

Many of the issues raised by tenants relate not only to maintenance delays, but also to the underlying condition and suitability of the housing itself. As the WA Government progresses reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act, equivalent protections should apply to social housing tenants.

We recommend that the WA Government:

- ▶ Develop and implement enforceable minimum housing standards for all social housing properties across Western Australia, including remote Aboriginal communities.
- ▶ Ensure all social housing meets minimum standards relating to:
 - Structural safety and weatherproofing.
 - Electrical, plumbing and sanitation systems.
 - Functional kitchens, bathrooms and laundry facilities.
 - Ventilation and protection from damp, mould and water ingress.
 - Privacy and security.
 - Safe and reliable cooling systems appropriate for the Kimberley climate.
- ▶ Establish clear timeframes for rectifying properties that do not meet minimum standards.
- ▶ Prioritise funding to bring non-compliant properties up to standard.

RECOMMENDATION 6:**Invest in the workforce and support systems required to sustain reform**

Maintenance reform will only succeed if it is supported by a workforce with the capacity to engage tenants, coordinate maintenance, provide education and support vulnerable households.

We recommend that the WA Government:**Increase frontline housing staff**

- ▶ Increase funding for housing officer positions in Kimberley town centres to improve maintenance coordination and better respond to complex tenant needs.
- ▶ Increase funding for Aboriginal housing officer positions in remote communities, prioritising employment through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Fund community-based coordination roles in remote communities

Remote communities face additional barriers due to distance from service centres, resulting in underreporting of maintenance issues and poor communication between tenants, housing officers and contractors.

- ▶ Provide funding for locally based administrative support roles within remote Aboriginal communities.
- ▶ Ensure funding is provided directly to ACCOs and community-based organisations to employ and manage these positions.

- ▶ Enable these roles to act as a connector between tenants and housing officers, improving:
 - Maintenance reporting accuracy.
 - Understanding of property conditions.
 - Communication flow between tenants, housing officers and maintenance contractors.
 - Follow-up on outstanding maintenance requests.
- ▶ Ensure these roles are embedded within community-controlled structures, strengthening local governance, local decision-making and community accountability.

Expand tenant support and education

- ▶ Fund ACCOs and community-based organisations to deliver intensive tenant support and case management programs focused on prevention and early intervention.
- ▶ Ensure these programs complement, rather than duplicate, existing initiatives such as THRIVE.
- ▶ Support programs that provide:
 - Sustained casework support.
 - Early intervention for at-risk tenancies.
 - Community education on tenant rights and responsibilities.
 - Education on how to report maintenance issues and navigate the maintenance system.

RECOMMENDATION 7:**Invest in climate-appropriate housing to address overcrowding and ageing housing stock**

Housing in the Kimberley is ageing, overcrowded and often not designed for local environmental conditions. Maintenance reform alone cannot resolve these structural challenges.

We recommend that the WA Government:

- ▶ Invest in new public housing supply, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities.
- ▶ Undertake major upgrades or replacement programs for housing that is no longer fit for purpose.
- ▶ Ensure all new and upgraded housing is designed for Kimberley conditions, including:
 - Heat-resistant materials.
 - Effective ventilation and cooling.
 - Durable fixtures suited to high humidity and extreme weather.
- ▶ Incorporate culturally appropriate housing design that reflects local family structures, household sizes and patterns of living.

Together, these recommendations provide a practical pathway towards a maintenance system that is preventative rather than reactive, locally informed rather than centrally administered, and accountable to the tenants and communities it serves.

Conclusion

The stories in this report reveal a **housing maintenance system that is failing to meet the needs of public housing tenants across the Kimberley. Tenants consistently described living with unresolved maintenance issues, long delays, poor-quality repairs, communication barriers and a sense that their concerns are not heard until external advocates become involved. These experiences were reported across towns and remote communities alike and point to systemic rather than isolated failures.**

The evidence presented in this report shows that the current Head Maintenance Contract model is not delivering the outcomes that Kimberley tenants need or deserve. A reactive system that waits for problems to worsen before responding is particularly unsuited to a region characterised by extreme climatic conditions, ageing housing stock, geographical remoteness and high levels of overcrowding. The result is an expensive cycle of repeated repairs and ongoing deterioration.

The WA Government now has an opportunity to fundamentally reshape how housing maintenance is delivered in the Kimberley. Reform should be guided by local knowledge, informed by tenant experiences and aligned with Closing the Gap commitments that prioritise shared decision-making, Aboriginal community control and accountability.

The recommendations in this report provide a practical pathway towards a maintenance system that is preventative rather than reactive, locally delivered rather than centrally managed, and accountable to the communities it serves. Improving housing maintenance is not simply about fixing houses — it is about supporting health, reducing disadvantage, strengthening communities and ensuring people can live safely and with dignity in their homes.

For too long, tenants in the Kimberley have been telling government that the current system is not working. The time for incremental change has passed and what is needed now is bold and meaningful system reform.

Kimberley tenants deserve homes that work.



WWW.KCLS.ORG.AU



[@KIMBERLEYCLS](https://www.facebook.com/KIMBERLEYCLS)