



Australian
Institute of
Architects

HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION



NORTHERN TERRITORY CHAPTER

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia. It is an independent, national member organisation with around 13,500 members across Australia and overseas.

The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

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- + At the time of this submission the National President is Adam Haddow FRAIA.
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 - + The NT Chapter President is Miriam Wallace, RAIA
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The Royal Australian Institute of Architects recognises the unceded sovereign lands and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of these lands and waters.

This recognition generates acknowledgement and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Countries, Cultures and Communities, and their ways of being, knowing and doing.

Caring for Country practices including architecture and place shaping have existed on this continent since time immemorial.

The Institute recognises a professional commitment to engage and act meaningfully through reciprocal partnership and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Together we will support and develop the emergence of new possibilities for our shared future.

NORTHERN TERRITORY HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

1. Introduction

The Northern Territory Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Northern Territory Housing Strategy.

The Chapter supports the development of a Territory-wide strategy that responds to the realities of housing need, delivery and long-term community wellbeing across the Northern Territory. We note that the consultation is intended to inform a strategy focused on housing supply, the construction and development system, regional and remote housing needs and aspirations, affordability and access to housing, and social housing and asset performance.

The Institute brings a distinct built environment perspective to this process. Housing policy is not only about the number of homes delivered. It is also about whether homes are fit for climate, place, community need and long-term performance. In the Northern Territory, these questions are particularly significant. The Territory's housing challenges are shaped by geography, climate, remoteness, infrastructure constraints, construction costs, workforce pressures and diverse community contexts. The strategy should therefore focus not only on increasing supply, but on ensuring the housing delivered is liveable, durable, climate-responsive, culturally appropriate and realistic to build and maintain.

The Chapter supports a practical and place-based strategy that recognises the Northern Territory is not one single housing market. Greater Darwin, Alice Springs, regional towns and remote communities each face different conditions, opportunities and constraints. A successful Territory-wide strategy should provide a shared policy framework while allowing for different delivery models and housing responses across urban, regional and remote contexts. The NT Government has indicated that local experience, regional priorities and the real challenges people face across the Territory are central to the consultation, and that approach is strongly supported.

2. Housing supply must be increased, but supply alone is not enough

The Chapter supports action to increase housing supply across private, social, affordable and remote housing. The consultation materials make clear that these are core pillars of the proposed strategy.

However, increased supply alone will not be sufficient if the housing delivered is poorly located, thermally inefficient, difficult to maintain, culturally mismatched or disconnected from services, employment and infrastructure. The Northern Territory needs more housing, but it also needs better housing. This means housing that reflects local climate conditions, supports lower running costs, contributes positively to community wellbeing and can perform over time in demanding environments.

The strategy should therefore promote a broader understanding of housing outcomes. Good housing policy should measure success not only by volume, but also by suitability, durability, energy performance, affordability over time and the ability of housing to support stable and connected communities.

3. The strategy should adopt a place-based approach

A single Territory-wide strategy is important, but it must be flexible enough to respond to the Territory's varied geographies and settlement patterns.

The housing conditions, delivery challenges and market realities of Darwin differ from those in Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy and remote communities. The dynamics of land availability, infrastructure, workforce access, transport costs, climate response, cultural needs and asset management vary significantly across the Territory. A strategy that is too generic risks being too broad to be useful.

The Chapter recommends that the strategy explicitly adopt a place-based structure, with separate implementation pathways or regional lenses for:

- Greater Darwin and Palmerston
- Alice Springs
- regional centres and towns
- remote and very remote communities

This would allow the strategy to remain Territory-wide in ambition while being practical in application.

4. Design quality is essential to affordability, liveability and long-term value

The Chapter strongly supports the inclusion of affordability and access as key themes in the strategy. However, affordability should not be understood only as upfront purchase price or rent.

In the Northern Territory, the long-term cost of housing is heavily affected by thermal performance, shading, ventilation, resilience, maintenance requirements, transport dependency and access to services. A dwelling that is cheaper to enter but costly to cool, maintain or travel from can entrench disadvantage over time. Conversely, well-designed housing can reduce household running costs, improve comfort and health, and provide better long-term value to residents and government alike.

For this reason, design quality should be treated as a core element of housing affordability. In the Territory context, this includes:

- climate-responsive design
- natural ventilation and shading
- durable and appropriate material selection
- resilience to weather and environmental conditions

- safe and functional outdoor space
- layouts that respond to local household structures and community life
- housing that supports dignity, privacy and adaptability over time

These are not optional extras. They are essential to achieving housing outcomes that are sustainable, affordable and fit for the Territory.

5. The strategy should support greater housing diversity

The Territory needs a more diverse housing mix. In many locations, housing options are too narrow, leaving households with limited choices across different life stages, household types and income levels.

The Chapter supports a strategy that encourages a broader range of housing typologies, including well-designed medium-density and missing-middle housing where appropriate. In urban and serviced areas, this can include townhouses, duplexes, small apartment buildings, courtyard housing and other forms that provide greater choice while using land and infrastructure more efficiently.

A more diverse housing mix can help:

- improve affordability and choice
- support older Territorians to downsize within their communities
- support younger households and key workers to access well-located housing
- reduce pressure on detached housing supply
- create more flexible responses to changing household needs

Housing diversity should be accompanied by strong design standards and planning pathways that support good outcomes rather than lowest-common-denominator delivery.

6. Planning, approvals and delivery systems should enable good housing outcomes

The consultation identifies the construction and development system as a major focus area, and this is well founded.

The Chapter encourages the Territory Government to ensure that the housing strategy addresses the practical barriers that impede housing delivery, including:

- delays and complexity in planning and approvals
- infrastructure sequencing and coordination challenges
- construction cost pressures
- workforce and skills shortages
- procurement settings that prioritise lowest upfront cost over long-term performance
- limited support for innovation in housing delivery

Reform should aim to improve certainty, timeliness and quality. Streamlining should not mean lowering standards. Rather, the strategy should seek to make it easier to deliver

good housing outcomes through clear pathways, better coordination and more effective assessment settings.

There is also an opportunity for the Territory Government to support modern methods of construction, including prefabrication and other approaches that may help address workforce shortages, program constraints and delivery challenges in regional and remote settings where appropriate.

7. Social and affordable housing should be integrated, dignified and durable

The Chapter supports continued attention to social housing and asset performance as part of the strategy.

Social and affordable housing should be well located, well designed and integrated into communities. It should not be treated as a separate or lesser category of housing. Good housing outcomes for vulnerable Territorians require quality, dignity, safety and access to services, transport, education, health care and community infrastructure.

Asset performance is also critical. In the Northern Territory, government investment in housing must deliver long-term value, and this depends heavily on appropriate design, durable construction, ease of maintenance and suitability to local conditions. Housing that fails prematurely or is expensive to maintain does not represent good social or economic policy.

The strategy should therefore link social and affordable housing policy with long-term asset planning, community need and design quality.

8. Regional and remote housing must be shaped with communities

The Chapter particularly supports the strategy's focus on regional and remote housing needs and aspirations.

Housing in regional and remote contexts must be developed with communities, not simply delivered to them. The most effective housing responses are grounded in local knowledge, cultural understanding, community priorities and realistic approaches to maintenance, servicing and long-term use.

The Chapter encourages the Territory Government to ensure that remote housing policy is guided by:

- **Equal access** to Climate Secure Housing – Comply with the current Environmental Standards of the National Construction Code.
- **Equal access** to Quality Housing, including compliance with the National Construction Code – including removing the out of areas classification from the NT Certification System.
- **Equal access** to Affordable Housing – Support urban infill and diversification of housing sizes and types being developed by both public and private developers.

- **Equal access** to Safe Housing – Support denser development with well-planned active and safe urban spaces and community facilities that prioritise green, walkable communities based on CEPTED design principals and well-planned public transport.
- **Equal access** to Healthy Housing – aligning with the ‘Closing the Gap’ initiatives and a program for permanent and consistent preventive maintenance through the NT Housing.

Along with:

- meaningful engagement and co-design
- culturally responsive planning and housing design
- housing layouts and spaces that reflect local ways of living
- durability and maintainability in remote conditions
- alignment with local infrastructure and service capacity
- recognition that housing supports health, education, safety and community wellbeing

The opportunity here is not only to increase housing quantity, but to improve the quality and appropriateness of housing outcomes over time.

9. Recommendations

The Northern Territory Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects recommends that the Northern Territory Housing Strategy:

Recommendation 1: Adopt a place-based framework that recognises the differing needs of Darwin, Alice Springs, regional towns and remote communities.

Recommendation 2: Treat design quality as a core housing outcome, recognising its role in affordability, liveability, durability, resilience and long-term asset performance.

Recommendation 3: Define affordability in whole-of-life terms, including energy use, maintenance, transport and long-term household costs.

Recommendation 4: Support greater housing diversity, including well-designed medium-density and missing-middle housing where appropriate to context and infrastructure.

Recommendation 5: Improve planning, approvals and delivery pathways to support housing supply while maintaining design quality and community outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Support innovation in housing delivery, including prefabrication and modern methods of construction where they can improve feasibility and delivery.

Recommendation 7: Ensure social and affordable housing is integrated, dignified and well located, with strong attention to long-term asset performance.

Recommendation 8: Embed community-led and culturally responsive approaches in regional and remote housing, with design and delivery shaped through local knowledge and partnership.

Recommendation 9: Align housing strategy with infrastructure, workforce and economic development planning, so that housing delivery is practical and coordinated.

10. Conclusion

The Northern Territory has an opportunity to develop a housing strategy that is practical, place-based and suited to the realities of delivery across urban, regional and remote settings.

The Chapter encourages the Northern Territory Government to ensure the strategy links housing supply with design quality, climate responsiveness, infrastructure, community need and whole-of-life value. The success of the strategy should not be measured only by the number of homes delivered, but by whether those homes are liveable, durable, affordable to run, culturally appropriate where needed, and capable of supporting strong and connected communities across the Territory.

The Northern Territory Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects would welcome the opportunity to further contribute to the development of the strategy.

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Attachments and links

1. RAIA National Housing Policy
2. RAIA Enabling Architecture Policy
3. RAIA submission on Intergenerational Housing Inequity to senate committee
4. [Papunya residents living in extreme heat sue NT government over unsafe housing - ABC News](#)