

AHL Strategy 2026–2036

HONOURING LEGACY, TRANSFORMING OUR FUTURE



Acknowledgement of Country

Aboriginal Hostels Limited acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Cultural advice

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this document may contain images and references to people who have passed away.

Artwork and Design

This document was prepared by Nous Group. Artwork throughout this document is by Ngarrindjeri Artist, Jordan Lovegrove. It represents Aboriginal Hostels Limited and our commitment to providing safe, comfortable and affordable accommodation across Australia for First Nations People.

Terminology Statement

Throughout this document, the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (or person) is used as the primary term to recognise the First Peoples of Australia. In some instances, the terms First Nations and Indigenous are also used. This generally reflects the terminology used in the names of legislation, policies, programs, organisations, publications, or source material, or where quoted directly from external sources.

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HONOURING LEGACY, TRANSFORMING OUR FUTURE

OUR PURPOSE

To provide culturally safe and affordable accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need to be away from home to access services and economic opportunities.

OUR 2036 VISION

AHL is recognised nationally as Australia's leading Aboriginal accommodation and pathways company, empowering people, strengthening communities and creating opportunity and improved life outcomes for our residents through culturally safe, locally led services and meaningful partnerships.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



STRATEGY HORIZONS



Stabilise and enable:
Stabilise the company and establish the critical enablers for success.

Build and prove:
Deliver early reforms and pilot new approaches throughout the company.

Scale and transform:
Scale proven initiatives and embed new service models, operating approaches and revenue streams.

Sustain and lead:
Sustain high performance and position AHL as a national leader in culturally safe accommodation and pathways.

Foreword from the CEO

For more than five decades, Aboriginal Hostels Limited has been a place of safety, opportunity and hope for hundreds of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Since our establishment in 1973, AHL has quietly changed lives. Every hostel, every staff member and every act of care has contributed to a legacy that reaches far beyond accommodation. We have provided places where people could access education, healthcare, employment and reconnect with family, culture and community. That legacy belongs to everyone who has contributed to AHL over the past 53 years.

As Chief Executive Officer, I recognise that I am not the author of that legacy; I am its custodian. I acknowledge the many boards, chief executive officers, senior leaders, hostel managers, frontline staff, elders, residents, government partners and communities whose commitment and dedication have shaped the AHL we are privileged to lead today. Their vision, resilience and unwavering belief in the importance of supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have laid the foundations upon which this strategy has been built.

While we honour that remarkable history, we must also be honest about the challenges before us. Australia is changing.



The needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are changing. Technology, community expectations, demographics, service delivery and government policy continue to evolve.

To remain relevant, impactful and financially sustainable, AHL must also evolve. Standing still is not an option.

***“ This strategy is therefore not about changing who we are. It is about ensuring we continue to fulfil our purpose for the next 50 years and beyond.*”**

Apmere Mwerre Visitors Park Extension Opening, Alice Springs, 2025 — Minister Malarndirri McCarthy, Board Deputy Chair Shona Reid, CEO Shane Hamilton and community members celebrating the opening.



Over the past several months we have listened carefully. We have engaged with our staff, residents, communities, government, partner organisations and leaders from across the country. We have heard what matters most: our people, our culture, our hostels and our unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Those conversations have reinforced one powerful message. Our purpose remains as important today as it was in 1973. What must change is how we deliver that purpose.

The AHL of 2036 will be more locally empowered, digitally enabled, financially resilient and culturally strong. Decisions will increasingly be made closer to our hostels and communities. Our people will have greater capability and opportunity. Our services will be designed around the needs of those we serve. Our assets will be modern, sustainable and fit for future generations.

Transformation of this scale cannot be achieved by strategy alone. It will require courage. It will require partnership. It will require every member of the company to embrace new ways of thinking while remaining grounded in the values that have guided AHL for more than half a century. Importantly, this strategy is not the end of our journey; it is the beginning. It establishes our shared direction over the next decade and will be supported by a comprehensive transformation plan that translates vision into action, sets clear priorities and ensures accountability for delivery.

When future generations look back on this period, I hope they will say that we honoured our past by having the courage to prepare for the future. That we respected the extraordinary legacy entrusted to us. That we strengthened AHL for those who would follow, and that because of the decisions we made today, Aboriginal Hostels Limited continued to change lives for another 50 years.

I invite every member of the AHL family, our partners and our communities to join us on this journey.

**“ Together we honour our legacy.
Together we transform our future.**

Shane Hamilton PSM

Chief Executive Officer
Aboriginal Hostels Limited

(Below) AHL Founding Board, 1974 – The inaugural Board that helped establish AHL's foundations.

(Right) Charlie Perkins – Foundational visionary and AHL's inaugural Chairman of the Board, 1973–1982.





Who We Are

About AHL

AHL is a not-for-profit Commonwealth company, with an independent non-executive Board of Directors. The Australian Government, through the responsible Minister, is the sole member of the company.

Since 1973, AHL has provided accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through a national network of accommodation facilities (our hostels). We are proud to have provided this service for more than 50 years.

Our tariff is set at an affordable rate for individuals and families who may receive Australian Government income support.

Our Purpose

To provide culturally safe and affordable accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need to be away from home to access services and economic opportunities.

People First Always

AHL has a network of hostels throughout Australia that provide accommodation and meals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

Our hostels may be the places where our work happens, but our residents are the reason it matters.

Every strategy, every investment, every partnership and every innovation over the next ten years is designed to create better experiences and better opportunities for the people who entrust us with their care.

We will measure our success not by the number of beds we operate, but by the opportunities we help create the dignity we uphold, the connections we strengthen and the futures we help make possible.

Our 2036 Vision

AHL is recognised nationally as Australia's leading Aboriginal accommodation and pathways company, empowering people, strengthening communities and creating opportunity and improved life outcomes for our residents through culturally safe, locally led services and meaningful partnerships.



Our Strategic Context

AHL was established in 1973 in the aftermath of the referendum, housing policies of the era, and the absence of culturally safe accommodation options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people moving between communities, regions, and cities. Over more than 50 years, AHL has provided culturally safe accommodation through a national hostel network. Since then, we have built a strong legacy of delivering services to our residents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that help improve economic opportunities and life outcomes.

However, the context in which AHL operates has fundamentally changed since we were established and the current model, largely developed in the 1970s, must adapt to keep pace with evolving demand, service expectations and policy settings.

There are a number of key trends shaping demand for AHL's services and the way those services must be delivered, including:

- Increasing demand for AHL's services alongside changing and more complex resident needs, driven by increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility, urbanisation and a broader range of reasons for travel.
- Increasing demand for connected and integrated service delivery, with accommodation needing to link more effectively to health, housing, employment, justice and community services.
- Housing affordability pressures and constrained accommodation options, limiting access to appropriate alternatives and increasing reliance on AHL.
- Rising expectations of service quality, including culturally safe, trauma-informed, place-based and co-designed services that respond to local community needs.
- Health system reforms, driving demand for specialised and supported accommodation, particularly for people accessing treatment and ongoing care.
- Justice system reform, increasing the need for culturally safe accommodation that supports reintegration and transition back into the community.
- Workforce shortages and capability challenges, particularly in attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
- Increasing digitalisation of service delivery, creating a need for more integrated systems, data and real-time visibility across operations.
- Climate, regulatory and policy pressures, increasing the cost of operations and raising expectations for compliance, sustainability and performance.
- A growing shift towards outcomes-based funding and performance expectations, requiring greater clarity on impact and stronger evidence of outcomes of AHL's services.

To continue delivering on our purpose over the next 50 years, we must evolve how we deliver our services and operate as a company in response to these changes. This will require transforming the way we work, the services we provide and the infrastructure that supports them, ensuring we continue to meet the needs of our residents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which is our ultimate reason for being.



Our Contribution to Closing the Gap

The National agreement on Closing the Gap is the Government's commitment to supporting better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Whilst AHL is not a lead agency responsible for delivering the closing the gap targets, our work provides critical enabling infrastructure that allows people to access health care, education, employment, justice services and economic opportunities.

Our 10- year strategy positions AHL as a key enabling partner in achieving Closing the Gap by embedding Aboriginal Leadership, Local decision making and culturally responsive service delivery into every aspect of our company.

Priority Reform One **Strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision making**

AHL Contribution

Our Strategy embeds Local decision making through stronger partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Traditional owners, governments and local communities, ensuring decisions are increasingly informed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Priority Reform Two **Build the Community controlled sector**

AHL Contribution

We will increase procurement, partnerships and capability building with Aboriginal organisations while expanding employment and leadership pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout AHL.

How AHL contributes to Closing the Gap

Priority Reform Three **Transform government organisations**

AHL Contribution

AHL's transformation agenda will modernise the organisation into a culturally responsive, community focused national provider that places cultural safety, accountability, lived experience and continuous improvement at the centre of service delivery.

Priority Reform Four **Shared access to data and information**

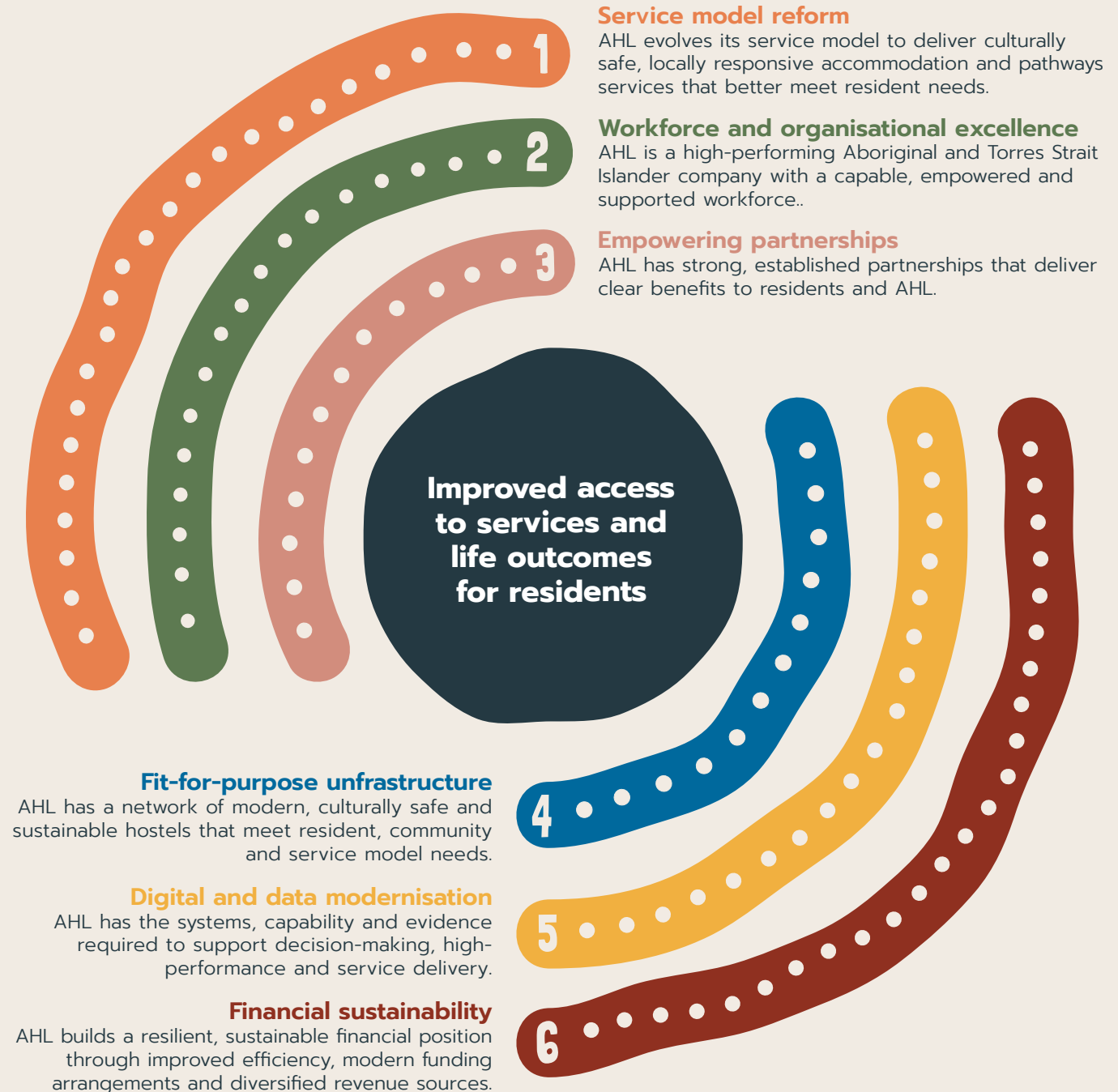
AHL Contribution

Through our Digital Transformation Strategy we will improve the collection, use and sharing of meaningful data to better understand demand, measure outcomes, support evidence-based decision making and improve services for residents and government partners.





Our Strategic Priorities



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:**Service Model Reform****What we want to achieve**

AHL evolves its service model to deliver culturally safe, locally responsive accommodation and pathways services that better meet resident needs.

What we will do

1A Strengthen and formalise AHL's role providing pathways to services, support and opportunities for residents.

AHL already plays a critical role connecting residents to services, often informally and without recognition. There is an opportunity to strengthen and better support this work. We will:

- Develop service models that provide clear pathways that enable access to services, education, employment and community.
- Formalise the existing informal support work provided by hostel staff to residents to improve service delivery and align funding.

1B Develop and implement purpose-specific accommodation streams.

AHL already has purpose-specific accommodation streams which generally provide better resident experiences and outcomes than multipurpose hostels. There is an opportunity to expand this offering to further areas to improve service delivery and alignment with resident needs and funding opportunities. We will:

- Define and pursue priority streams including health, renal, education and training, employment, justice reintegration, crisis and safety transitions (homelessness), aging and disability support.
- Prioritise expansion of purpose-specific models while retaining multipurpose accommodation where aligned to local demand.

1C Embed local flexibility in service delivery within a national framework.

Frontline staff bring deep knowledge of their communities and regularly adapt services to respond to local needs but centralised processes limit their ability to do so, reducing efficiency and service effectiveness. We will:

- Establish a national service model framework that enables local adaptation and decision-making.
- Empower frontline staff to tailor service delivery to local community context and resident needs.

1D Develop and document key operating procedures and practice standards at a national and hostel level.

AHL's service delivery is underpinned by the experience, commitment and local knowledge of our workforce, but minimal documentation for service delivery creates inconsistency, reliance on individual staff and risks to service quality and continuity. We will:

- Establish clear national operating procedures and minimum standards for service delivery and support hostels to adapt these into locally relevant practices.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:**Workforce and Organisational Excellence****What we want to achieve**

AHL is a high-performing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander company with a capable, empowered and supported workforce.

What we will do**2A Address workforce shortages and stabilise the workforce.**

AHL's people are one of our greatest strengths, but pressures on our workforce are the most immediate constraint on our performance and financial sustainability and must be addressed to enable delivery of other strategic initiatives. We will:

- Fill vacancies and reduce reliance on overtime and casual staff.
- Improve workforce planning and rostering to better align staffing with demand.

2B Develop and implement a workforce strategy.

As AHL evolves, a single coordinated workforce approach will help stabilise our workforce, build capability and align workforce planning with our strategic direction: We will:

- Develop a comprehensive workforce strategy aligned to AHL's service model and long-term priorities that includes a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention strategy.
- Identify current and future workforce requirements.
- Align workforce planning with key initiatives.

2C Strengthen AHL's employee value proposition to improve attraction and retention.

AHL offers meaningful and rewarding employment but our employee value proposition (EVP) does not currently align to the demands, expectations and conditions of certain roles, limiting our ability to attract, retain and sustainably support our workforce. We will:

- Review role classifications and pay grades to better align to current operating realities.
- Review work patterns and operational planning to ensure hostels have adequate staff to meet needs and support employee wellbeing
- Review shift-model and better design shifts to meet contemporary staff needs.
- Create clear pathways to career progression, skill development and qualifications to improve retention.

2D Improve integration and coordination across the company.

AHL's staff all share a strong commitment to achieving outcomes for residents, but disconnects across AHL, particularly between hostels and central functions, limit effectiveness and create inefficiencies. We will:

- Improve communication and coordination across teams.
- Create greater visibility and understanding of roles and responsibilities across the company.
- Ensure corporate functions are better aligned to support frontline delivery.

2E Empower local decision-making within a clear governance framework.

Frontline staff have valuable insight into local resident and community needs but are currently constrained by centralised decision-making, creating inefficiencies, limiting responsiveness to local needs and reducing service effectiveness. We will:

- Empower local decision-making through revised governance arrangements.

2F Build workforce capability through structured training and development.

AHL's workforce brings a broad range of skills, experience and knowledge but capability varies significantly across the company with staff often increasingly required to support complex resident needs without consistent training or support. We will:

- Develop structured training programs (e.g. cultural capability, trauma-informed practice, case management) to equip staff with the capability to deliver their role effectively.
- Deliver training in formats that meet the needs of frontline staff (e.g. in-person training where staff have low digital literacy).



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Empowering Partnerships

What we want to achieve

AHL has strong, established partnerships that deliver clear benefits to residents and AHL.

What we will do

3A Establish a dedicated stakeholder and partnerships function.

AHL has relationships with communities, government and services across the country, but stakeholder engagement and partnership development is inconsistent and often depends on individual relationships rather than a coordinated approach, limiting our ability to build sustainable partnerships and deliver outcomes. We will:

- Establish a dedicated function focused on stakeholder engagement and partnership development and management at a national level.
- Support local teams with the tools and resources needed to build and maintain relationships.
- Build capability and accountability for partnership development across AHL.

3B Broaden and deepen stakeholder relationships, formalising them where appropriate.

AHL does not have as many effective stakeholder relationships as it should, and existing relationships are often informal and inconsistent, limiting their effectiveness. We will:

- Strengthen relationships across key sectors including health, housing, justice and community.
- Formalise partnerships where this supports clarity, consistency and improved outcomes.
- Ensure partnerships deliver tangible value to both residents and AHL.

3C Strengthen AHL's profile as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander accommodation and pathways provider.

AHL has a strong reputation with those who know its work and the impact it delivers but awareness and understanding of our role is inconsistent and there is an opportunity to build greater awareness and understanding of AHL's unique role across the country.. We will:

- Improve visibility of AHL's role in supporting residents beyond accommodation.
- Clearly articulate AHL's value as a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander company delivering culturally safe services.
- Strengthen engagement with government, communities and sector partners.

3D Leverage partnerships in service delivery, training and infrastructure.

Partnerships provide opportunities to enhance service delivery, build workforce capability and support infrastructure development. We will:

- Use partnerships to deliver wraparound services and pathways for residents.
- Facilitate training and workforce development opportunities through partners.
- Explore models for delivering or supporting infrastructure through partnerships.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:**Fit-for-purpose Infrastructure****What we want to achieve**

AHL has a network of modern, culturally safe and sustainable hostels that meet resident, community and service model needs.

What we will do**4A Develop a single integrated 10-year infrastructure plan.**

AHL's hostel network is a critical enabler of our purpose and service delivery. A long-term infrastructure plan will help ensure our assets are managed in alignment with future demand, resident needs and strategic priorities. We will:

- Develop an evidence-based infrastructure plan aligned to demand and service models.
- Identify priorities for investment, upgrade, consolidation and divestment.
- Support more coordinated, long-term planning across the network.

4B Rationalise the existing portfolio by consolidating, repurposing or divesting assets that no longer fit future needs.

Purpose-specific accommodation services require facilities that are aligned to the needs of the particular cohorts they service. We will:

- Upgrade existing infrastructure to support targeted service delivery.
- Develop or acquire facilities where needed to deliver specific service streams.
- Ensure infrastructure is aligned with evolving service models.

4C Use flexible approaches to expand the hostel network aligned to demand.

Traditional ownership models may limit AHL's ability to deliver expanded services in a financially restrained environment. We will:

- Explore partnerships, leasing and other flexible delivery models.
- Reduce reliance on capital-intensive approaches to growth.

4D Ensure assets are culturally safe, environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient.

AHL's infrastructure must reflect the cultural needs of residents and respond to increasing environmental and climate-related risks across regions. We will:

- Ensure infrastructure design and upgrades are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of communities.
- Incorporate environmental sustainability and climate resilience into asset planning and development.
- Align infrastructure decisions with long-term sustainability and operating cost considerations.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5:**Digital and Data Modernisation****What we want to achieve**

AHL has the systems, capability and evidence required to support decision-making, high-performance and service delivery.

What we will do**5A Develop and implement a digital and data transformation strategy**

Digital investment at AHL has been fragmented, limiting its effectiveness and alignment with organisational needs. A more coordinated and strategic approach will help ensure future investment delivers greater value for residents, staff and the company. We will:

- Establish a clear roadmap for digital and data investment.
- Align technology decisions with service delivery and operational requirements.
- Ensure investment supports future service model and workforce changes.
- Implement Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles in our processes aligned to the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.

5B Invest in foundational ICT infrastructure and integrated systems

AHL's existing ICT systems are often fragmented, not integrated and do not fully support staff or operations requirements. We will:

- Upgrade and integrate core ICT systems, invest in new fit-for-purpose systems with clear business cases.
- Ensure systems meet operational needs and are practical and reliable for frontline staff.

5C Build a robust evidence base on demand, utilisation and outcomes

AHL collects valuable data across the network but requires a strengthened data capability and improved evidence base on demand, utilisation and outcomes to effectively support planning, decision-making, service improvement and funding advocacy. We will:

- Develop a demand model to inform planning and investment decisions.
- Improve data collection, storage and analysis across the company.
- Support evidence-based decision-making and funding advocacy.

5D Develop and implement a company-wide occupancy and client management system.

AHL lacks a consistent, company-wide system to manage and track occupancy, demand and resident outcomes, relying on manual, ad hoc processes across different hostels. A consistent company-wide system would improve visibility, coordination and decision-making across the network. We will:

- Develop an internal-facing occupancy and client management system to support case management and improve visibility across AHL.
- Support better coordination and referral between hostels through digital systems.

5E Lift workforce digital and data confidence and capability.

Digital confidence and capability varies significantly across AHL, limiting the effectiveness of the systems and tools we have. We will:

- Build staff capability to effectively use digital systems and data.
- Provide training suited to frontline working environments and varying digital literacy.
- Actively support adoption of new tools across the company.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6:**Financial Sustainability****What we want to achieve**

AHL builds a resilient, sustainable financial position through improved efficiency, modern funding arrangements and diversified revenue sources.

What we will do**6A Review and update pricing approaches aligned to service streams and partner funding models.**

Current pricing does not consistently reflect the cost of service delivery or the diversity of funding arrangements available. We will:

- Develop pricing approaches aligned to different service streams.
- Align pricing with partner funding models and capacity to pay.
- Maintain the existing pricing model for self-paying residents.

6B Diversify revenue through partnerships, service delivery and commercial opportunities.

AHL currently relies heavily on core government funding. Diversifying revenue sources will strengthen AHL's financial resilience and support our future operations and strategic ambitions. We will:

- Explore new funding sources through partnerships, programs and service delivery opportunities.
- Leverage existing facilities and assets to generate additional revenue through commercial operations.
- Develop new models for accessing state, territory and other funding streams.

6C Advocate for funding arrangements that reflect the full scope of AHL's services.

AHL provides a broader range of services than is currently recognised in existing funding arrangements, resulting in the delivery of unfunded services that are not sustainable in the long term. We will:

- Advocate for funding that reflects AHL's broader role supporting residents and is aligned to AHL's service complexity, costs and demand.
- Use improved data and evidence to support funding discussions.

6D Improve operational efficiency, strengthen financial discipline, and reduce avoidable waste.

There are opportunities to support financial sustainability by improving efficiency, better utilising resources across the company and strengthening financial discipline and oversight throughout AHL. We will:

- Identify and address key sources of avoidable waste and inefficiency across operations.
- Simplify processes and reduce duplication across hostels and corporate functions.
- Strengthen financial discipline by improving cost awareness, oversight and management of key cost drivers.





Timeline for Implementation

Transformation of the scale contemplated by this strategy cannot happen all at once. AHL will deliver this strategy through a structured, phased approach over the next 10 years, balancing immediate priorities with long-term change. The timeline below sets out how we will deliver the strategy and achieve our 2036 vision over 4 distinct horizons.

STABILISE AND ENABLE (YEAR 0)

Stabilise the company and establish the critical enablers for success.

- Address workforce shortages and stabilise the workforce.
- Establish key functions including a transformation office and partnerships function.
- Define AHL's customer-base and purpose-specific accommodation schemes.
- Develop core enabling strategies (workforce, digital/data and infrastructure).
- Begin early enabling operational shifts.
- Advocate for funding to deliver key strategic initiatives and service-delivery pilots

BUILD AND PROVE (YEARS 1-3)

Deliver early reforms and pilot new approaches throughout the company.

- Pilot purpose-specific accommodation streams and pathway-based service models in priority locations.
- Implement workforce strategy including EVP reform, career pathways and structured training programs.
- Operationalise partnerships, stakeholder engagement reforms and local decision-making.
- Pilot alternative revenue arrangements including pricing structures and commercial operations.
- Deliver early digital initiatives including improved data capture, system uplift and national occupancy and CRM.
- Commence priority infrastructure upgrades and planning aligned to service model pilots.

SCALE AND TRANSFORM (YEARS 4-6)

Scale proven initiatives and embed new service models, operating approaches and revenue streams.

- Scale successful purpose-specific streams.
- Expand partnerships to deliver integrated pathways and wraparound services at scale.
- Embed new revenue streams and funding arrangements.
- Roll out integrated digital systems and embed data-driven decision making across the company.
- Achieve sustained improvements in workforce capability, retention and organisational performance.
- Commence priority infrastructure upgrades and planning aligned to service model pilots.

SUSTAIN AND LEAD (YEARS 7-10)

Sustain high performance and position AHL as a national leader in culturally safe accommodation and pathways.

- Sustain high-performing, culturally strong and locally empowered operating model.
- Deliver major infrastructure renewal, consolidation or expansion aligned to demand and service streams.
- Position AHL as a national leader in culturally safe accommodation and pathways delivery.
- Operate a resilient, diversified and sustainable financial model.
- Leverage advanced data, systems and insights to continuously improve services and influence policy/funding.





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