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**Reporter: Sarah Everingham**

**Questions are being raised about the success of the Howard Government's pledge to build new homes and repair older ones in the Northern Territory.**

## Transcript

CHRIS UHLMANN: Welcome to the program, coming from Alice Springs.

The Opposition leader, Tony Abbott, has been looking at the results of four years into intervention in the Northern Territory. We'll speak with him shortly.

First to one of the promises that came with the intervention, better housing for Indigenous community. The Government pledged millions to build new homes, but have they been delivered?

Sara Everingham reports.

ROBBIE CONWAY, SANTA TERESA HEALTH BOARD: About 600 people at the moment. There's a lots of kids around there.

It is a good place here and a lot of people, this is where their heart is.

SARA EVERINGHAM: 80km south east of Alice Springs the former mission of Santa Teresa is one of the 73 communities targeted by the Federal Intervention. Residents were wary, but welcomed the promise of better services, especially housing.

ROBBIE CONWAY: When it happened, they thought that everything was going to change, but it didn't.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Along with the intervention, the Territory and Federal Governments launched the strategic Indigenous housing and infrastructure program, or SIHIP. It's the most extensive Indigenous housing program the Government has ever run.

JENNY MACKLIN, INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS MINISTER: We're going to see 750 new homes built, 230 new houses to replace other houses which would be demolished, very importantly 2,500 housing upgrades.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Even though Santa Teresa is overcrowded, it did not qualify for new housing, but it did get upgrades to 65 homes.

CHRIS WALLACE: Just basically fixed up the beverage, fixed up the bench, painted the walls, fixed up the taps, doorknobs and windows, that's about it.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Chris Wallace is pleased with parts of the work, but since his house has been renovated, he says the NT Government is now charging more rent and in some ways he feels worse off.

CHRIS WALLACE: Took out from my toilet and haven't put it back, it's really hard to clean, mop the floors and keep it clean. So \$75,000 down the drain.

SARA EVERINGHAM: When SIHIP began, the Federal and Territory Governments were spending an average of \$150,000 per house on refurbishments. But after the budget blew out they halved that amount to \$75,000. The focus now is on making houses safe and liveable. But there are questions about whether the refurbished houses even meet these minimum standards.

PAUL PHOLEROS, ARCHITECT, HEALTHABITAT: The houses that I inspected I would say definitely wasn't well served, as the houses that I looked at simply don't function.

SARA EVERINGHAM: With three decades experience in the Indigenous housing sector, Paul Pholeros helped write the health and safety guidelines for Indigenous housing now being used in SIHIP.

During a brief visit to Santa Teresa, he checked some of the homes for residents.

PAUL PHOLEROS: The two houses we looked at in seven of the 10 critical categories, those houses failed the tests.

SARA EVERINGHAM: The cost of the work that was done inside the houses varied between \$20,000 and \$100,000. Clearly, the focus there was to make the houses, many of which were in very poor condition, functional and safe.

SARA EVERINGHAM: But even the contractors who delivered the refurbishments are worried the program failed to meet the community's needs.

SCOTT MCCONNELL, INGKERREKE OUTSTATIONS RESOURCE SERVICES: The renovations in Santa Teresa almost look like they're only halfway done.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Scott McConnell from the Indigenous owned construction company Ingkerreke in Alice Springs says Santa Teresa is better off than before the work began but believes poor planning has sold the community short.

SCOTT MCCONNELL: It doesn't seem fair to me, it doesn't seem like it's closing the gap and doesn't seem like it's mainstreaming these communities.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Ingkerreke was contracted to work at Santa Teresa by a building alliance, a consortium of big construction companies delivering the program for the Government.

SCOTT MCCONNELL: In my view, it didn't work and hasn't worked particularly well for what have ended up being fairly minor renovations in remote communities.

SARA EVERINGHAM: But '7.30' understands one of the alliances working in SIHIP is concerned the \$75,000 cap isn't enough to achieve the Government's expectations.

GERRY WOOD, NT INDEPENDENT MLA: The overall policy was to make a healthy home. Well, you know, I think they've gone part of the way, but they haven't gone all the way.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Santa Teresa's residents want to know how much money was spent in each house in their community. Even a parliamentary committee that's monitoring SIHIP is having trouble getting those answers.

GERRY WOOD: Even though when all this started there was supposed to be an open book policy, I haven't found it an open book policy at all when it comes to the dollars.

KEN DAVIES , NT HOUSING DEPARTMENT: I can reassure you \$5.2 million was spent in that community bringing 65 houses into a public housing model and bringing them to a safe standard for families.

SARA EVERINGHAM: The NT Government says SIHIP is on track to deliver 600 new homes by the end of the year and that overall people are happy.

KEN DAVIES: People are very, very pleased with what has happened. Is it enough? The answer is no, and are we going to go forward and do more? The answer is yes.

SARA EVERINGHAM: The people of Santa Teresa plan to keep tally of the benefits to make sure they get what they were promised.

ROBBIE CONWAY: People are not too sure what happened to the money, so if it's been spent the right way or the wrong way. It's hard to say.

CHRIS UHLMANN: Sarah Everingham.

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