Poor housing, too many dogs a health hazard for communities

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Poor housing and overcrowding are the main health concerns of almost 70 per cent of the remote Aboriginal communities surveyed as part of a major new Government report.

The report, released yesterday, found substandard living conditions continued in many of the 232 remote WA communities surveyed over 2007 and 2008.

It revealed 80 per cent of the communities rely on bowls for their drinking water, while 77 per cent rely on generators for power.

Seventy-five per cent of the communities had experienced periods when their rubbish had not been collected and in some communities there were an estimated 200 car bodies.

The report found 29 per cent of communities had inadequate fencing around sewage lagoons.

The report raises concerns about the health risks for children living in communities with many dogs. It reveals that in one community with a population of 800, there were an estimated 400 dogs.

The East Pilbara region recorded the highest number of dogs, with an average of 42 in each of its six communities. But the 280-page report identifies a number of communities in other regions that had between 100 and 180 dogs. A number of communities did not have a dog management program.

The Environmental Health Needs Survey report, commissioned by service delivery agencies in all three tiers of government, found communities in the Beagle and Goldfields-Esperance regions had the highest level of residents reporting that their housing was substandard.

The report found 83 communities had a regular population of 50 or more residents, the other 149 surveyed were smaller. Thirty-five per cent of communities reported unsatisfactory water supplies, while 92 per cent raised diabetes as a serious concern. According to the report, 83 per cent of communities reported their sewerage systems did not meet their needs.

Health Minister Kim Haughton said he was pleased to see that efforts to improve living conditions in communities were having an effect, but acknowledged much more remained to be done.

"The programs put in place to improve services are being done but we need to continue and it is only through continued cooperation will we achieve the desired results," he said.