

Cost of Living in the Northern Territory: A Ten-Year Comparison 2016-2026

An examination of price changes over the past decade in the key household expenditure areas of housing, utilities, transport and food.

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout the Northern Territory (NT) and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. This report was produced across the lands of the Larrakia and Arrernte people. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present. Aboriginal sovereignty has not been ceded.

NTCOSS is a peak body for the social and community service sector in the NT, and an advocate for social justice on behalf of the people and communities affected by poverty and disadvantage. The community sector in the NT is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. NTCOSS represents over 120 members, including peak bodies, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), large charities, small grassroots organisations and individual members.

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Executive Summary

The cost of living is a major challenge for many Territorians. While incomes have increased in real terms over the past decade, the cost of essentials has also risen. For many people, especially those on low incomes, these increases have made it harder to meet basic needs.

This report examines changes in the cost of living over the last decade in the NT, in the key expenditure areas of housing, utilities, transport and food. A brief examination of income changes, and concessions that can help households manage these costs, is also included.

Key Findings

Incomes

- Incomes have increased in real terms over the past decade, however there are still significant differences between those on the lowest incomes and median wages.
- Income support payments remain too low to enable people to meet their basic needs.

Housing

- Average weekly rent increased by 55% over the past decade in the NT. The NT has the highest average rents nationally.
- Mortgage affordability has significantly decreased with average loan payments more than doubling in the past decade.

Utilities

- Households across the NT have experienced increases of around 18% on their power costs over the past decade.
- Electricity disconnections are impacting households with prepayment meters more frequently, with 2284 more disconnections per month on average in 2024-25, than there was in 2019-20.

Transport

- Average weekly transport costs have increased by 50% in Darwin and 65% in Alice Springs over 9 years, and are now consuming up to 17% of a household's average budget.
- Fuel prices are consistently more expensive in regional and remote areas. Diesel prices have risen at a much sharper rate than unleaded 91. An 80L tank of diesel costs \$28 more in Darwin than it did in 2018, and \$88 more in Central Australia.

Food

- The average cost of a healthy food basket has increased by about 20% between 2016 and 2023.
- Prices for food in remote stores remain around 40% higher than the same basket of goods in major supermarkets.

Recommendations

There are a range of actions that both the Australian and NT Governments could take to ensure those on the lowest incomes and experiencing disadvantage are supported to meet their basic needs. However, the most effective way to immediately ease cost of living pressures for those on the lowest incomes is to:

- Raise the base rates of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and related income support payments.
- Substantially increase the Remote Area Allowance to properly account for the higher costs of living in remote areas.

Summary of all recommendations

Incomes	Raise the base rates of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and related income support payments to parity with pensions, at least \$618 per week on current rates (as at September 2026). ○ In addition, index payments to wages as well as prices.
	Immediately and substantially increase the Remote Area Allowance to properly account for the higher costs of living in remote areas. The minimum appropriate increase should be \$121.30 per week or \$17.30 per day.
Housing	Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance and benchmark it to actual rents paid.
	Set a national target for social housing development, supported by jurisdiction-specific targets developed through transparent needs assessments.
	Amend the <i>Residential Tenancies Act 1999</i> (NT) to ensure Territory renters have at least the same rights and protections as other jurisdictions, including: ○ Establish an independent Residential Tenancies Bond Board. ○ Implement minimum standards in rental housing. ○ Increase protections against rent increases.
	Introduce a rental affordability scheme to replace the now expired National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS).
	Apply inclusionary zoning mechanisms to embed affordable and social housing within new developments.
Utilities	Install solar energy on all social housing, ensuring cost savings are passed onto residents.
	Commit to reducing the number and duration of involuntary self-disconnections for prepayment meter customers, including through: ○ Adopting mandatory reporting of electricity self-disconnections for all networks. ○ Reducing the standard prepayment tariff. ○ Ensuring prepayment customers can access an equivalent level of hardship programs as post-payment customers across all retailers. ○ Increasing payment options for prepayment meter customers, including automated payment options.
	Implement minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes.
Transport	Lift the Motor Vehicle Registration concession to a minimum of \$240 per 12-month period and establish ongoing indexation.
	Remove the excessive administration fees on short-term motor vehicle registration.
	Require private transport companies receiving NT Government grants to have concession fare options that give a significant discount.
	Conduct a review into regional and remote public transport networks.
Food	Extend the 30 essential items subsidy to include more items over time, including: fresh and frozen meat, fruit and vegetables, and nutrient enriched baby and toddler food.
	Ensure housing in remote communities is fit for purpose and has adequate facilities to support safe food storage and preparation. This includes ensuring reliable power supply, safe drinking water and culturally responsive housing design.
	Invest in the sustainability of the community services sector to ensure they can provide important support to Territorians experiencing food insecurity, including by: ○ Removing the efficiency dividends from sector funding agreements. ○ Developing appropriate indexation measures to ensure funding reflects real cost of delivering services.
Concessions	Extend eligibility of the NT Concession Scheme to include all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.
	Streamline the NT Concession Scheme processes to make it easier for eligible people to stay in the scheme and to access the scheme's benefits. Including by: ○ Automating data-sharing with housing and energy providers so that concessions are automatically applied. ○ Simplifying reapplication processes for members who will not see a change to their situation.

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1. Introduction

This report is the latest in NTCOSS's Cost of Living report series, tracking changes in the cost of living in the NT since 2013. These reports are designed to analyse price changes in key household expenditure areas (such as housing, utilities, transport and food) and cost of living trends, particularly those affecting Territorians on low incomes and experiencing disadvantage¹. The series establishes an evidence base about cost of living issues in the NT, provides critical insight into experiences of financial hardship and disadvantage in the NT, and helps inform the policy and advocacy needed to ensure everyone can afford their essential living costs.

This report examines changes in the cost of living over the last decade in the NT, in the key expenditure areas of housing, utilities, transport and food. A brief examination of income changes over the past decade is also included.

The Territory is a large and diverse place. There are significant differences between Darwin, Alice Springs, other major centres and remote communities in terms of access to goods, services and facilities, and households' experiences of the cost of living. Examining the impacts of cost of living pressures must be seen in a broad context, as experiences differ vastly and data alone cannot tell the whole story.

In 2016, NTCOSS produced a report examining the cost of living trends in the NT over a decade from 2006 to 2016. This current report examines the decade following from 2016 – 2026. Throughout the report, data has been sought to cover the full decade, however due to data availability limitations not all sections will have the complete time period covered. Notes are included wherever different years of data are used.

For each topic area, a summary of key policy changes over the past decade is included. This is to provide context and insight into some of the policies and programs that may have impacted costs over this period. However, these summaries are not exhaustive, nor do they establish a causal relationship between specific policies and cost trends.

All costs are in non-equivalised figures, unless otherwise stated. This means that a cost in 2016 is given in 2016 dollars, and the cost in 2026 is given in 2026 dollars, without accounting for changes in inflation or the value of the dollar.

¹ In this report, the term disadvantage is used to refer to the broad concept of economic and social disadvantage. This includes having low income, but also more broadly considers that a lack of opportunities (including education and income), limited access to non-monetary resources and social exclusion all contribute to the experience of disadvantage. Disadvantage is also used in a relative sense, to direct focus to who is the most disadvantaged relative to others in a specific context. E.g. a household in a major centre would have access to a broader range of services and supports than a household in a remote area, so the remote household may be considered to be experiencing higher levels of disadvantage, even if both households have the same income.

See more: Whiteford, P. Gordon, J., and Wilkins, R. (2026) What does disadvantage look like in Australia? New research shows who's struggling most. The Conversation. Available [here](#). And; McLachan, R., Gilfillan, G., and Gordon, J. (2013) Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia: Staff working paper. Productivity Commission. Available [here](#).

2. Incomes

As the focus of these reports is on Territorians on low incomes or experiencing disadvantage, this section will primarily examine changes in minimum wage and social security and income support payments.

Over the past decade, there has been several key policy changes impacting the rates of income support payments. JobSeeker was increased in real terms² twice in the past decade – by \$25 a week in 2021 and by \$20 a week in 2023. Before that, the last real increase to base rates was in 1994 when JobSeeker was increased by \$2.95 a week.³ There was also a temporary Covid Supplement in place between April 2020 and March 2021, which effectively doubled the JobSeeker and Youth Allowance rate.

Working age payments such as JobSeeker, Parenting Payment and Youth Allowance are indexed twice per year, in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Pensions are benchmarked to wages (using Male Total Average Weekly Earnings) and so typically increase at a higher rate than JobSeeker and Youth Allowance.

The National Minimum Wage is set each year by the Fair Work Commission, following the annual wage review. This process is established under the *Fair Work Act 2009*, the Commission must consider submissions to the process and factors such as living standards, employment, productivity and economic conditions when setting wages.⁴

Table 2.1: Weekly minimum wage and key single social security and income support payments, 2016-2026

	30 June 2016 (2016\$)	30 June 2026 (2026\$)	Increase 2016 – 2026 (non- equivalised)	Increase 2016 – 2026 (equivalised 2026\$)
Minimum wage	\$656.90	\$948.00	44.3%	10.7%
Age pension, single	\$436.96	\$600.45	37.4%	14.8%
JobSeeker, single	\$268.20	\$408.75	52.4%	17.9%
Youth Allowance, single	\$220.10	\$342.10	55.4%	23.6%

Note: These figures represent the maximum base rate for social security and income support payments, not including family tax benefits or Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Over the past 10 years, the minimum wage and key single social security and income support payment rates have all seen significant increases of between 37% and 55%. However, much of the apparent increases simply reflect inflationary impacts. Once the impact of inflation is accounted for (Australia-wide CPI increased by 35.6% between June 2016 and June 2026), the *real* increase to minimum wage was 11%. The age pension, JobSeeker and Youth Allowance increased in real terms between 15-24%. This means that there have only been modest increases in what recipients of these payments can actually afford to purchase.

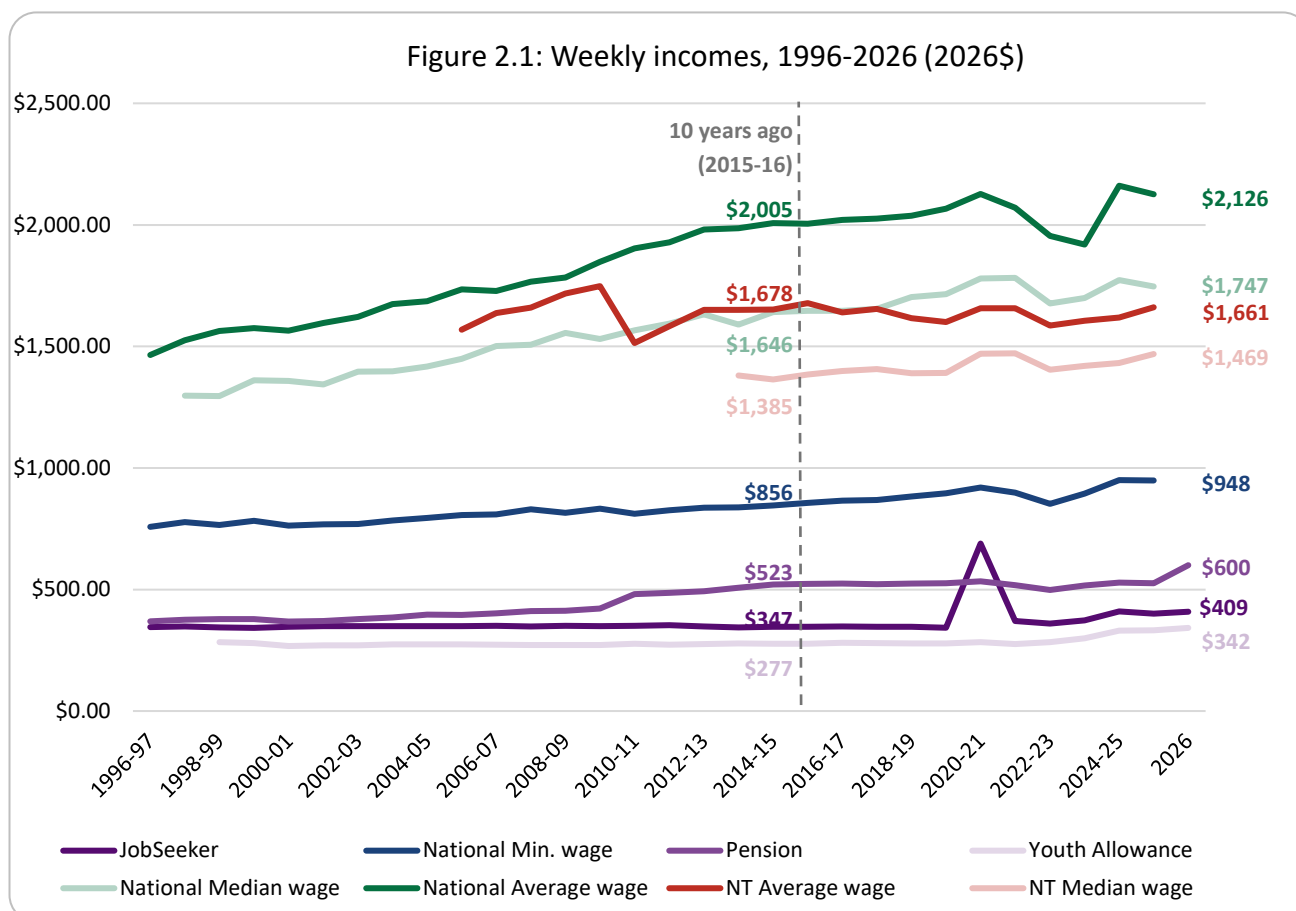
From 2016-2026, the national median wage has increased by \$121 a week, or 6% in real terms. The NT median wage, while lower overall, has increased at a similar rate of 6% or \$84 a week in real terms (see Figure 2.1 for more).

² An increase in real terms means an increase that has been adjusted for inflation.

³ Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). (2026). JobSeeker adequacy, wages and other incomes in the community: Briefing Paper. Available [here](#).

⁴ Fair Work Commission (2026) Annual wage reviews. Available [here](#).

Focusing on the increases to the JobSeeker and Youth Allowance payments risks masking their low starting points and overall rates in relation to pensions and wages. **As of June 2026, the weekly JobSeeker payment (\$408.75) and Youth Allowance payment (\$324.10) are both less than half of the weekly minimum wage.**



Note: Figure 2.1 uses incomes as at 30 June 2026. Social security and income support payments were indexed in March 2026 so these figures are used for the 2026 data point. However wages are based on financial year data, so the 2025-26 figures are accurate as at 30 June 2026. All figures are equivalised to 2026 dollars.

While the rest of this report focuses on the past decade, 30 years of income data (where available) is shown in Figure 2.1 to contextualise the changes over the past decade and demonstrate the growth of pensions and wages in comparison to JobSeeker and Youth Allowance.

Despite a dip between 2021-2024, wages nationally have maintained an overall upward trend over the past 30 years – increasing in real terms by up to \$661.30 a week or a 45% increase for the national median wage. Pensions have had the highest rate of real increase, at 62% since 1996-97. By contrast for those on low incomes, minimum wage has increased by 25% and Jobseeker by 18% in real terms over the past 30 years.

For much of the past 3 decades, JobSeeker has barely kept pace with inflation, staying largely flat in real terms, and in fact decreased in real value at times. Between 2011 to 2020, JobSeeker decreased in real terms by 2.7%. The overall upward trend (18% increase over 30 years) is largely a product of the recent increases in 2021 and 2023.

2.1 Conclusion and recommendations

While median wages (nationally and in the NT) have risen about 6% in real terms over the past decade, this is only marginally keeping above inflation so many Territorians' will likely be feeling cost of living increases keenly. However, households with higher incomes are more able to absorb cost increases and it is those on the lowest incomes that are impacted the most.

Income support payments have risen between 18-24% in real terms in the past decade, due to key policy decisions. However, these increases follow decades of payments barely keeping pace with inflation, and at times reducing in value in real terms. All working age income support payments are currently well under the poverty line; they are fundamentally inadequate and fail to ensure that people can meet their basic needs.⁵

The most effective way to ease cost of living pressures is to raise incomes.

NTCOSS recommends:

Australian Government:
• Raise the base rates of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and related income support payments to parity with pensions, at least \$618 per week on current rates (as at September 2026). ○ In addition, index payments to wages as well as prices.⁶ • Immediately and substantially increase the Remote Area Allowance to properly account for the higher costs of living in remote areas. The minimum appropriate increase should be \$121.30 per week or \$17.30 per day.⁷

⁵ Based on the 2022/23 poverty line of \$584. See: Davidson, P & Bradbury, B (2025) Poverty in Australia 2025: Overview ACOSS and UNSW Sydney. Available [here](#).

⁶ See further detail: ACOSS (2026) Raise the Rate Report 2026: Available [here](#); and ACOSS (2026) Media Release: income support needs real increase not just indexation. 18 September 2026. Available [here](#).

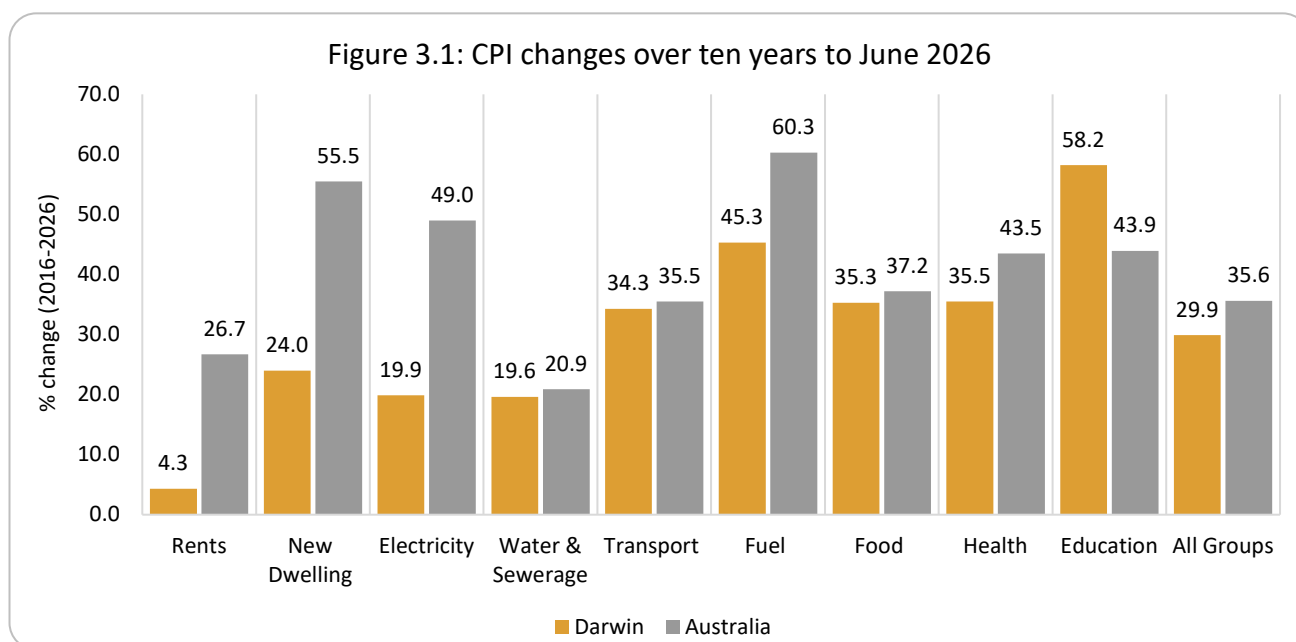
⁷ Based on analysis by the Central Land Council (unpublished).

3. Consumer Price Index (CPI)

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is the main statistical measure used to track inflation (i.e. increases to the cost of living due to rising prices for goods and services) in Australia. It does so by measuring how the prices of everyday goods and services change over time. For each category, a basket of goods and services typically purchased by Australian households is measured. The price of the items in this basket is measured at regular intervals, and as the price of those items changes, so does the total price of the basket. The CPI is the measure of how much the price of that basket has changed over time.⁸

Regional data is not included in the CPI, only capital cities, so in the NT the data is only representative of Darwin. When national or Australia-wide CPI is mentioned, this is the weighted average of the eight capital cities. This report includes data on key areas of household expenditure and does not include all CPI categories.⁹ CPI data related to Housing, Utilities, Transport and Food is covered in more detail in the respective chapters. All groups CPI is the combination of all these categories – this is what is often referred to as overall inflation.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects and publishes CPI data regularly¹⁰, and has been since the early 1990s, so it can be used to track changes in price over long periods of time. **It is important to note that CPI alone is not a good measure of affordability, as it does not show current prices, only the change in prices over time.**



Darwin has seen a higher rate of price increase than elsewhere for Education, where prices have risen by 58.2% in Darwin and 43.9% nationally. In all other categories shown in Figure 3.1, CPI in Darwin has risen less than the national average. This shows the rate of increase has been slower in Darwin for most categories, it does not show whether prices themselves are higher or lower in Darwin than elsewhere in the country.

⁸ ABS (2025) Consumer Price Index: Concepts, Sources and Methods. Available [here](#).

⁹ Categories not included here include alcohol and tobacco; clothing and footwear; recreation and culture; insurance; and furnishings, household equipment and services.

¹⁰ CPI data is now released monthly. Prior to October 2025, the ABS produced the CPI on a quarterly basis. See notes in the references section of this report for more detail on how this change was accounted for when using this data.

4. Housing

Housing is often one of the biggest costs in a household's budget.

Access to affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental for all Territorians. Adequate housing has a significant impact on health, social and economic outcomes.

While there have been several national plans to increase housing supply and a seven-fold increase in investment into homelessness funding in recent years, there is still significant work to be done.

The NT has the highest homelessness rate in the country, with more than 13,000 Territorians experiencing homelessness on any given night.¹¹ Overcrowding accounts for 76% of homelessness in the NT.¹²

With social housing wait times averaging 8-10 years or more across most of the Territory and almost half of Territorians renting, Territorians' experience of the cost of housing is heavily impacted by the trends of the private rental market.

¹¹ NT Shelter (2025) Homelessness Fact Sheet. Available [here](#).

¹² NT Shelter (2025) Pre-Budget Submission Northern Territory Government Budget 2026-27. Available [here](#).

Table 4.1: Key housing policy changes 2016-2026

	Australian Government	Northern Territory Government
2016	The final round of National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) dwellings entered the scheme. As of December 2016, the NT had 1,068 dwellings in the scheme. A dwelling can only be a part of the NRAS for 10 years.	
2017	The First Home Super Saver Scheme is introduced – allowing first home buyers to use some of their eligible voluntary super contributions to help purchase a first home.	Under ‘Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes’, \$1.1 billion over 10 years is committed to improving housing in remote communities (2016-17 to 2026-27).
2018		Changes are announced to public housing rents – with new tenants entering the public housing system paying 25% of their household income, and existing residents paying 23%. Before this, tenants had paid between 10% and 23% of their income. A \$69 million stimulus package is announced for repairs and maintenance to urban public housing.
2019	A new National Housing Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory (2018-23) is agreed by the Australian and NT Governments – the Australian Government commits to \$550 million in funding over 5 years to improve housing outcomes in remote communities.	
2020	The Homebuilder scheme is launched amid the COVID-19 crisis – providing \$35,000 to eligible owner-occupiers to build a new home or substantially renovate an existing home. Home Guarantee Scheme began – allowing first home buyers to purchase with a minimum 5% deposit. (Known as the Australian Government 5% Deposit Scheme since 2025.)	The Northern Territory Housing Strategy 2020-2025 is released. This includes further commitments to the previously announced remote housing investment package, \$40.44 million for town camps, \$169 million to improve existing public housing stock, \$25 million to homelessness support services, and the NT Home Owner incentive package.
2021		
2022	In partnership with states and territories, the National Housing Accord is agreed to– aiming to build one million new homes in the next 5 years to support the delivery of 40,000 social and affordable homes nationally. Under the Accord, the NT agreed to build 96 affordable homes.	
2023	The Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) and the Social Housing Accelerator Payment were set up to support the commitments under the National Housing Accord.	The Remote Rent Framework is introduced – charging a weekly fee of \$70 per bedroom for remote public housing tenants, instead of the standard income test applied to tenants in urban areas.

	The HAFF is a \$10 billion investment in partnership with all levels of governments, community and private sector housing, delivering loans and grants for projects that address housing needs across Australia. The Social Housing Accelerator Payment is \$2 billion to fund states and territories to deliver new and refurbished social housing dwellings. \$50 million is given to the Northern Territory Government to construct 100 new social homes. National Cabinet agreed to 'A Better Deal for Renters' to standardise and strengthen renters' rights across Australia. Implementation in the Northern Territory has been limited.	
2024		The Australian and Northern Territory Governments jointly committed \$4 billion to improve housing in remote communities and deliver up to 2,700 houses over ten years – called the Remote Housing Package. The NT Government introduced new grants for purchasing houses. The HomeGrown Territory Grant provides \$50,000 for first home buyers building or buying a new home, a \$10,000 grant was available for those purchasing an established home between 2024 and 2025. The FreshStart grant provides \$30,000 to purchase or build a new home for non-first home owners.
2025	As of 30 September 2025, HAFF rounds 1 and 2 had resulted in a total of 156 new dwellings in the NT. As of 31 December 2025, 22 dwellings had been completed under the Social Housing Accelerator Program (out of 100 committed).	The Northern Territory Homelessness Strategy 2025-2030 is released. This includes a \$223 million joint investment from the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. After a series of legal challengers, the High Court found the Remote Rent Framework to be unlawful. Changes to the <i>Housing Act 1982</i> kept rent set at the same level as under the previous framework, with work underway to develop a new model for remote rent by the end of 2026.
2026	The final 50 dwellings remaining in the NRAS scheme in the NT expired in June 2026. Significant housing related tax reforms, to capital gains tax, negative gearing and the taxation of trusts, are passed in June 2026.	The NT Housing Strategy 2026-2030 launched in August. The Strategy estimates that to keep up with population growth to 2029-30, an additional 5,637 dwellings are required. There are no new funding commitments.

4.1 Public and social housing

A lot of the readily available housing data only provides information on new private rentals or purchases. With 28.4% of renters or 13.5% of the total population in the NT in social housing¹³, examining available social housing data is important to provide deeper insight into the housing experience of low-income Territorians. The cost of urban public housing rent is capped at 25% of income, meaning it is considered affordable. However, limited availability and long wait lists make hard for people to access secure housing.

Without adequate social housing, people on low incomes have no other option but to rent in the private market, where prices are often unaffordable and there are limited protections, or face potential homelessness.

4.1.1 Number of dwellings

Table 4.2: Number of social housing dwellings, 2017 vs 2025

	June 2017	June 2025
Urban social housing dwellings	5,385	5,035
Remote social housing dwellings	5,032	5,789
Total	10,417	10,824

Note: This includes community housing dwellings owned by the NT Government and managed by community housing organisations.

The number of remote social housing dwellings has increased by 757 dwellings in the 8 years between 2017 and 2025. Urban dwellings have decreased by 350. **This represents a 3.9% overall increase in the number of dwellings (407 more dwellings).**

4.1.2 Number of applications

There was a total of 3,960 applications for social housing across the NT as of 30 June 2017 (2,130 on the remote housing list, and 1,830 on the public housing list).¹⁴ As of 30 December 2025, there was a total of 5,413 applications for social housing across the NT (3,149 general applications and 2,264 priority applications).¹⁵

That equates to 1,453 more applications in 2025, than 2017. That is a 36.7% increase over 8 years, indicating a growing number of Territorians in need of housing, while the number of dwellings has increased by only 3.9%.

4.1.3 Remote rent model

The Remote Rent Framework was introduced in 2023. This framework meant that remote public housing tenants began to be charged a weekly fee of \$70 per bedroom, instead of the standard income test fee applied to tenants in urban areas.¹⁶ As a part of the Remote Rent Framework, there is a maximum weekly rent of \$280 per dwelling, and the option to apply for a 'safety net' if rent is more than 25% of the total assessable household income.

For example, this would mean a sole parent with 2 children, living in a 3-bedroom house, could be charged \$280 a week in rent. The rate of JobSeeker (without rent assistance) is \$770.32 a week (as at 30 June 2026). That means the rent would equate to 36% of this family's weekly income, putting them in housing stress.

¹³ This includes those renting with state or territory housing authority and community housing provider. From ABS (2022) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, General Community Profile Northern Territory. Table G37.

¹⁴ NTCOSS (2018) Cost of Living Report June 2018 Issue 20 – Part 2: Housing, p.35. Available [here](#).

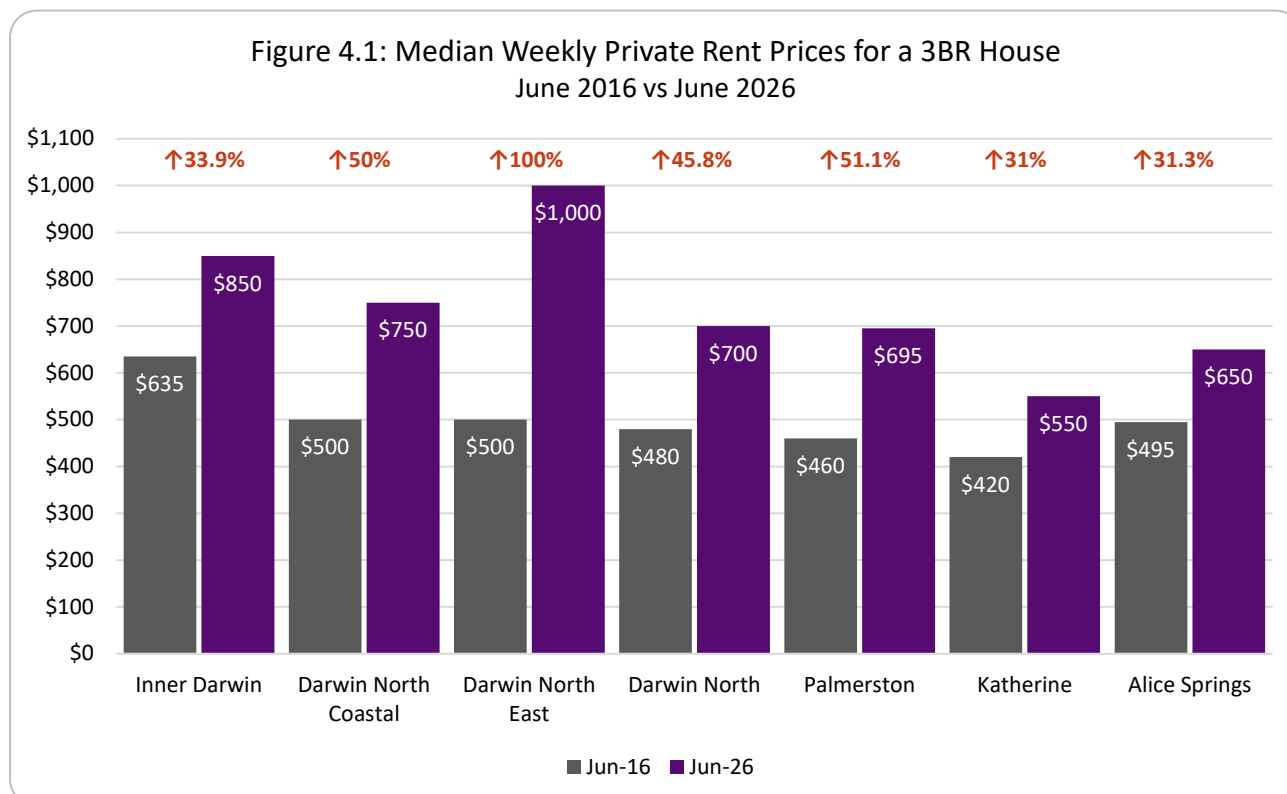
¹⁵ NT Government (2026) Social housing wait times. Accessed 9 July 2026. Available [here](#).

¹⁶ This Framework was found to be unlawful by the High Court in 2025, however changes to the *Housing Act 1982* have kept rent set at the same level as under the previous framework, with work underway to develop a new model for remote rent by the end of 2026. See more [here](#).

The Safety Net policy means that tenants at risk of rental stress may be eligible for a lower rate of rent, which may apply to the scenario above. However, the lower rent rate is only applied initially for 6 months, then the tenants' circumstances will be assessed, and they may be approved for longer period with reviews every 12 months. It is not designed to be an ongoing reduction.¹⁷

4.2 Private rental prices

With almost half of the Territory's population renting (47.6%)¹⁸, rental costs are an important component of many Territory households' budget. **Between 2016 and 2026, private rental prices for 3-bedroom houses across the NT increased by between 31% and 100%.**



Note: This data only includes cost of new rental listings in the time period and does not reflect the experience of those in existing rentals.

The smallest increase was in Katherine, where median rent increased by \$130 (31%), from \$420 to \$550 per week. Darwin North East had the largest increase of \$500 a week (a 100% increase).¹⁹ Palmerston had the second highest increase proportionately of 51.1%, going from \$460 in 2016 to \$695 in 2026. Darwin's North Coastal area (suburbs like Alawa, Moil and Nightcliff) saw similar increases of 50%.

Even with income increases over the past decade considered, rent increases are putting huge pressure on household budgets. The maximum JobSeeker rate for a sole parent with 2 children (including family tax benefits and Commonwealth Rent Assistance) has increased \$269 a week since 2016. In all areas of Darwin, the rental increases would absorb almost this entire increase in income or more. In Katherine, the increase in median weekly rent (\$130) would have absorbed half the income increase that the household had received over the past decade.

¹⁷ Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (2023) Remote Safety Net Policy. Available [here](#).

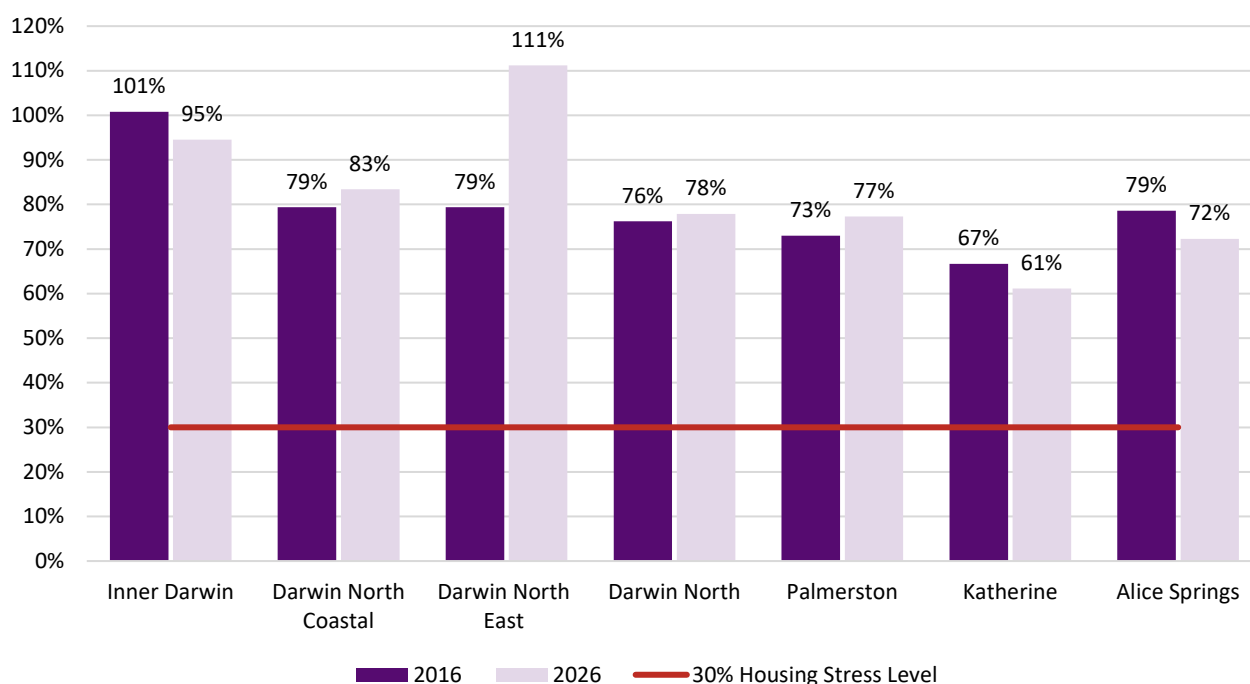
¹⁸ ABS, Census 2021: Northern Territory Population and Housing Characteristics. Available [here](#).

¹⁹ Note: Darwin North East includes suburbs such as Berrimah, Marrara and Winnellie which have large industrial areas and limited residential housing so smaller samples may mean more volatile numbers.

For a low-income parent with two children, renting a three-bedroom place would put them in rental stress in all major regional centres in the NT.

The proportion of income required for private rent for a 3-bedroom house has increased over the past ten years in most areas of the Top End (Darwin North Coastal, Darwin North East, Darwin North and Palmerston) and reduced slightly in Alice Springs, Katherine and Inner Darwin (See Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

**Figure 4.2: Proportion of Income required for Private Rent for a 3BR House for a sole parent on JobSeeker
June 2016 vs June 2026**



Note: incomes used in Figure 4.2 and 4.3 include Family Tax Benefit A & B for two children and maximum rent assistance payments.

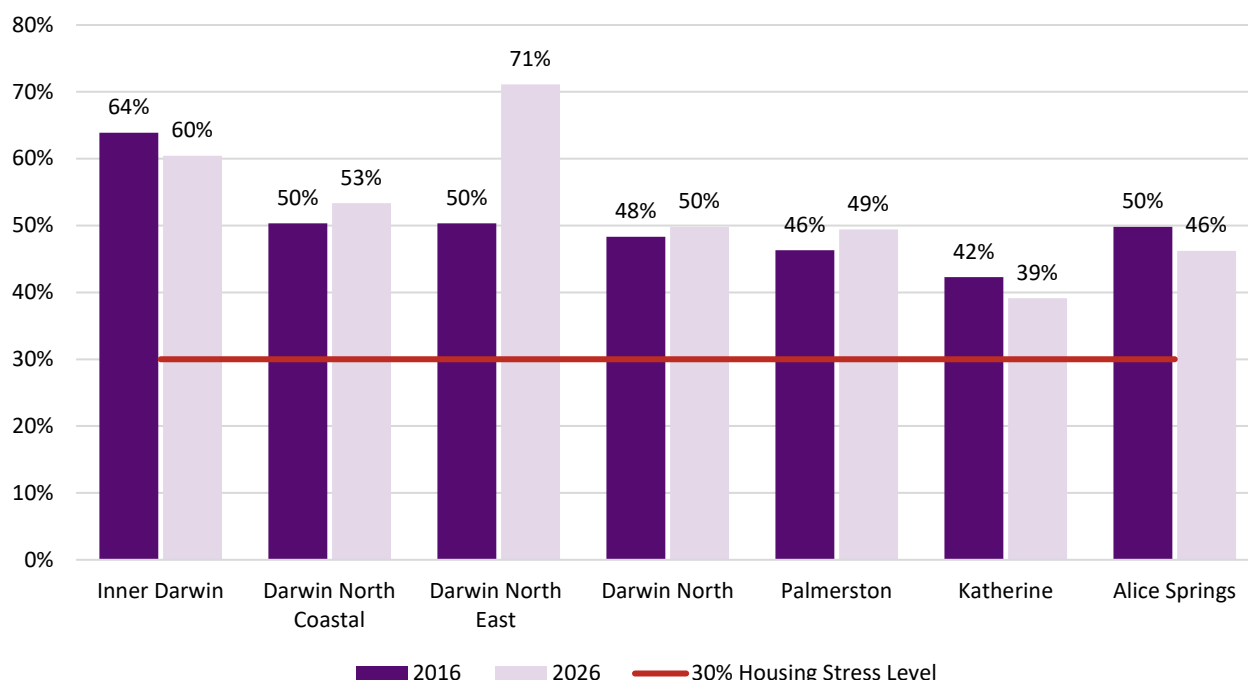
In Inner Darwin²⁰, the proportion of income required for private rent for a 3-bedroom house for a sole parent on Jobseeker has decreased 6%, from 101% in 2016 to 95% in 2026. As at June 2026, the maximum Jobseeker rate, including Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) and family tax benefits was \$899.26 per week. Average private rent for a 3-bedroom house in Inner Darwin was \$850. **While the slight decrease looks to be a positive, this is still deeply unaffordable – this would mean the family is left with just \$49 a week after paying rent.**

Katherine is the most affordable region. Average rent for a 3-bedroom house was \$420 in 2016 and \$550 in 2026. For a sole parent with two children on JobSeeker, in 2016 rent would have required 67% of their weekly incomes. In 2026, rent would take 61% of the household's weekly income – leaving \$349 a week to cover all other expenses. **While this an improvement in relative affordability, it is still more than double what would be considered affordable and leaves insufficient income to meet other essential living costs.**

²⁰ The Inner Darwin area includes from Darwin's CBD, through Stuart Park, the Narrows, Parap, Fannie Bay, to Woolner and the RAAF Base Darwin.

For families earning minimum wage, rents are still unaffordable in all areas of the Territory.

**Figure 4.3: Proportion of Income required for Private Rent for a 3BR House for a sole parent on Minimum Wage
June 2016 vs June 2026**



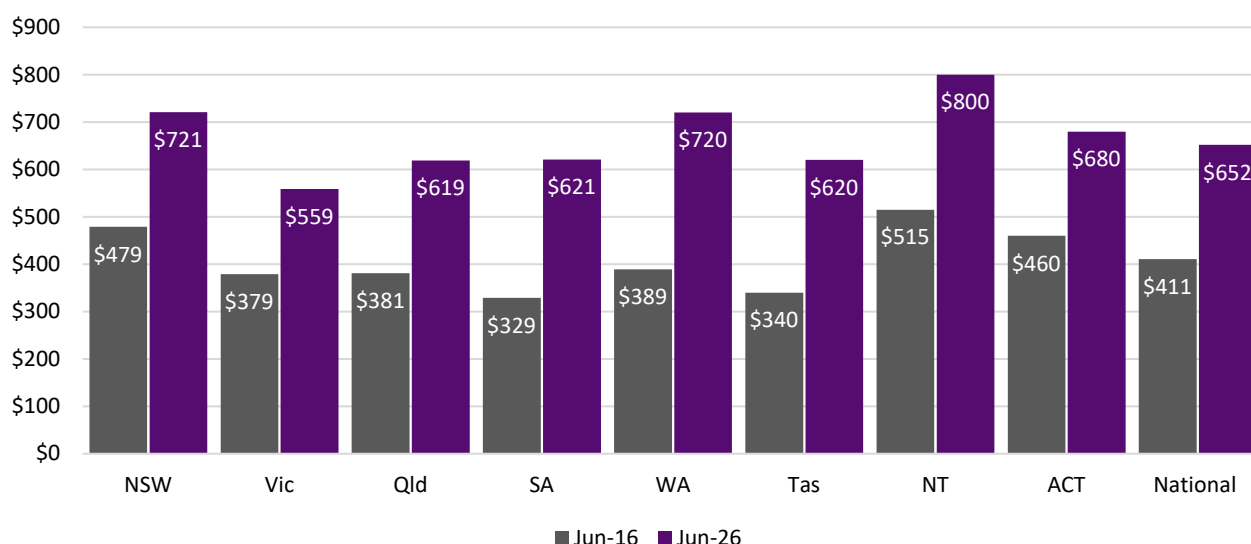
If a parent in Katherine is working full time on minimum wage, earning \$1,406 per week (at 2026 rates) the median rent for a 3-bedroom property (\$550 per week) is **still 9% over the affordability threshold** (39% of total income). Proportionately, this is a slight improvement on the experience in 2016, where the family would have been paying 42% of their income on rent.

In Inner Darwin, weekly private rent prices for a 3-bedroom house have increased from \$635 in 2016 to \$850 in 2026. In 2016, for a sole parent working full time on minimum wage rent this represented 64% of their income. In 2026, that proportion dropped slightly to 61% - **however that is still more than double what is considered affordable and would leave just \$556 a week for all other expenses after rent.**

3.2.1 Private rental prices nationally

Average weekly rent paid across the NT has increased by 55% over the past decade (from \$515 in 2016, to \$800 in 2026). This is well above the rate of inflation (29.9% for Darwin). **For both time points, the NT had the highest average weekly rent in the country.** In 2016, the NT rent costs were \$104 above the national average, while by 2026 that gap had increased to \$148 above the national average.

Figure 4.4: Average weekly private rent paid for a 3BR house
June 2016 vs June 2026



The proportion of median weekly income needed to pay average rent in the NT was 25.1% in 2016. In 2026, that proportion increased to 28.8%. This is considered affordable relative to the median weekly income of \$2,051 in 2016, and \$2,777 in 2026.²¹ However, this data does not reflect the higher proportion of income that would be needed for lower income households and their experiences of rental affordability.

Anglicare's Rental Affordability Report

Each year, Anglicare NT takes a snapshot of properties across the NT listed for rent on realestate.com.au on one weekend in March. They then assess whether each property is affordable (no more than 30% of a household's income) and suitable for 14 types of households on low incomes.

Over the past 10 years, availability and affordability of private rentals for those on low incomes has reduced. **The number of advertised rentals has dropped dramatically, from 1,354 available on the snapshot weekend in 2016, to just 257 in 2026.**

Table 4.3: Anglicare's Rental Affordability Report, 2016 - 2026

	2016	2026
Private rentals advertised	1354	257
Rentals suitable for at least one household type living on income support payments	3	4
Rentals suitable for at least one household type living on minimum wage	53	13
Rentals affordable for JobSeeker, Parenting Payment Single, Disability Support Pension, Youth Allowance	0	0

²¹ Median weekly family income is calculated using wage earner's incomes; income support recipients are not included.

4.3 House sales and mortgage costs

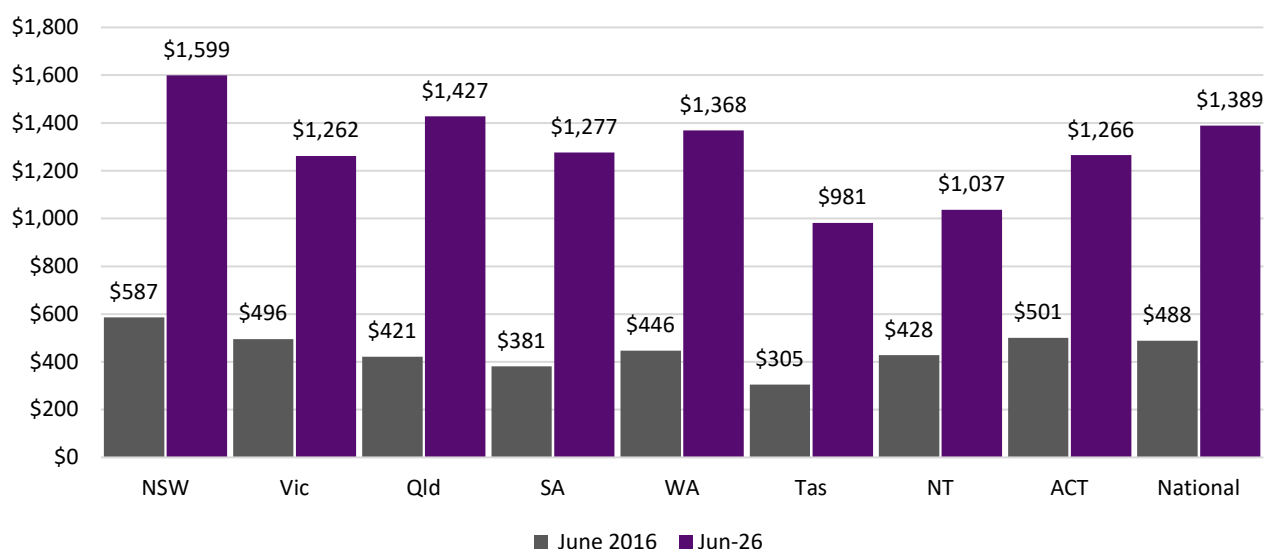
Median sold prices for all household sizes across the NT has varied over the past decade. Areas like Darwin and Palmerston have seen increases of over 20% (24.1% and 28.8% respectively), while in Tennant Creek there has been a decrease of 23.2%. Katherine and Alice Springs have had much smaller changes – Katherine had a small increase of 4%, and Alice Springs had a decrease of 0.3%. The number of sales in each quarter measured (June 2016 and June 2026) has varied significantly, so caution should be used in interpreting these figures as the mix and number of properties sold can significantly impact median sold prices.

Table 4.4: Residential house sales in the NT, June 2016 vs June 2026

	June 2016		June 2026		Change in median price
	Median sold price	Number of Sales (QTR)	Median sold price	Number of sales (QTR)	
Overall Darwin	\$576,000	182	\$715,000	527	↑24.1%
Palmerston	\$530,000	64	\$682,500	236	↑28.8%
Katherine	\$399,000	7	\$415,000	30	↑4.0%
Tennant Creek	\$377,500	4	\$290,000	9	↓23.2%
Alice Springs	\$467,500	48	\$466,000	93	↓0.3%

Mortgage costs have increased dramatically for all states and territories over the past decade, more than doubling in all jurisdictions. **Average weekly loan payments increased by 142% in the NT over the past decade (from \$428 in 2016, to \$1,037 in 2026).** This is below the national increase of 184% (from \$488 in 2016 to \$1,389 in 2026). The NT had the lowest increase amongst all states and territories. In 2016, the average weekly loan repayment represented 20.9% of the median weekly family income in the NT – this had increased to 37.3% of median income in 2026.²² This is a 78% increase in the proportion of income required, higher than the national increase of 73%.

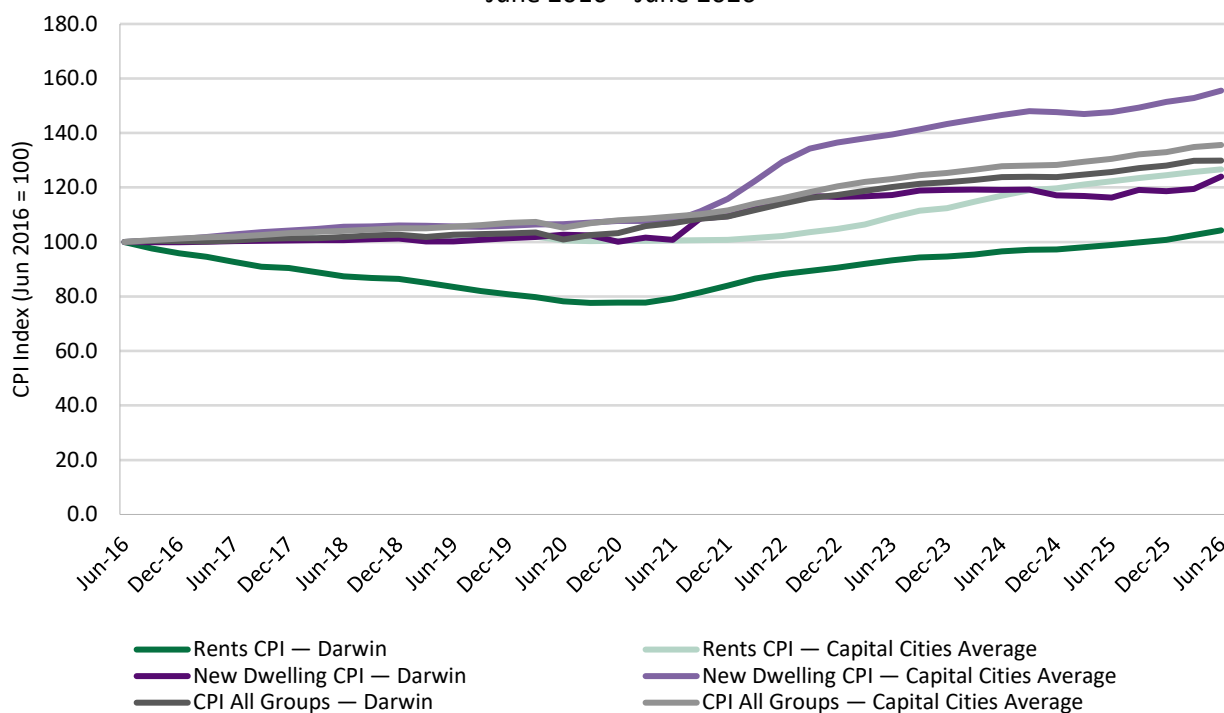
Figure 4.5: Average weekly loan payments
June 2016 vs June 2026



²² This is based on a median weekly income of \$2,051 in 2016, and \$2,777 in 2026.

4.4 Housing CPI

Figure 4.6: New Dwelling and Rents CPI: Darwin and Capital Cities Average with CPI All Groups comparison
June 2016 – June 2026



In Darwin between 2016 and 2026, the cost of new dwellings and rents grew at a slower rate than inflation and Darwin's general CPI.

By CPI measurements, rent prices in Darwin have increased by only 4.3% between 2016 and 2026, compared to a 26.7% increase nationally. However, this masks significant movement within in Darwin's rental prices over this time period. Darwin rents fell by 22.4% from June 2016 to September 2020. From September 2020 to June 2026, rents in Darwin increased by 34.3%, rising more than Darwin's general CPI (26.6%) and national rents (26.2%) over the same time period.

The decline in rent prices from 2016 to 2020 partially coincides with winding up of Inpex's gas project construction and reduced numbers of temporary employees looking for accommodation in Darwin.²³ However, causal impact can't be inferred from this alone. Furthermore, in the decade before (2006-2016) rent for CPI in Darwin had increased 66.3%, nearly 28% above the national average increase.²⁴ So the decrease from 2016-2020 was also in the context of huge historical increases, and historically high rent prices. It is important to note that CPI alone is not a good measure of affordability, as it does not show current prices, only the change in prices over time.

The Rents CPI measures actual rents paid rather than advertised prices, by all types of households that rent including new and existing renters who are renting privately or through social or public housing.²⁵ Importantly, CPI differs from other commonly used data sources which focus on advertised rents or newly listed properties. As such, comparisons between these measures should be done with caution.

²³ Dias, Avani (2016) Inpex LNG gas project construction to wind down in Darwin, ABC. Available [here](#).

²⁴ NTCOSS (2016) Cost of living report Issue No.12 June 2026, p.26. Available [here](#).

²⁵ ABS (2025) Monthly Consumer Price Index Indicator – Articles: Measuring rents in the CPI. Available [here](#).

The prices for new dwellings have increased 24% in Darwin, compared to 55.5% nationally. The New Dwelling CPI measures the change in the cost of construction for new dwellings, including building materials and labour costs.²⁶

4.5 Conclusion and recommendations

Over the past 10 years, private rental prices have increased, with the NT continuing to have the highest average rents nationally. Due to income changes, the proportion of income required to pay rent has fluctuated over the decade, however overall rental affordability is low. Median rent prices in the private market are out of reach for low-income families in all regions of the NT.

House sale prices have fluctuated across the Territory with some regions seeing small decreases; however overall mortgage affordability has significantly decreased with average loan payments more than doubling in the past decade.

Limited availability of social and affordable housing leaves Territorians, particularly those living on a low and fixed income, with no other option but to rent in the private market – where prices tend to be unaffordable and there are limited protections – or face potential homelessness. To alleviate pressure of the cost of housing on NT households, governments need to increase social housing, improve protections for renters and target affordability schemes to those most in need.

NTCOSS recommends:

Australian Government:
• Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance and benchmark it to actual rents paid.
• Set a national target for social housing development, supported by jurisdiction-specific targets developed through transparent needs assessments.²⁷
NT Government:
• Amend the <i>Residential Tenancies Act 1999 (NT)</i> to ensure Territory renters have at least the same rights and protections as other jurisdictions, including: ○ Establish an independent Residential Tenancies Bond Board. ○ Implement minimum standards in rental housing. ○ Increase protections against rent increases. • Introduce a rental affordability scheme to replace the now expired National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). • Apply inclusionary zoning mechanisms to embed affordable and social housing within new developments.

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) Measuring owner-occupied housing in the Consumer Price Index. Available [here](#).

²⁷ NT Shelter (2026) Submission to Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry Into Social Housing, Submission 18. Available [here](#).

5. Utilities

Access to reliable, affordable and accessible energy is a basic need for everyone.

Regulated utilities tariffs and government subsidies keep power prices lower than they would be otherwise, and mean Territorians are not subject to the same market fluctuations as other Australians may be. However, energy consumption per household in the NT is relatively high.

Extreme temperatures, poor-thermal efficiency in much of the Territory's housing and the effects of climate change are pushing Territorians to use more energy. Many low income households cannot afford the energy they need, resulting in unaffordable power bills and frequent disconnections.

Solar uptake on private houses is growing faster than any in other Australian state (currently at 22%), with government subsidies improving uptake.²⁸ However, this is largely among owner occupiers. Renters and those in social housing don't experience the same benefits and cost reductions that solar can pass on.

²⁸ Energy Plans (2026) Northern Territory Electricity Report 20216. Available [here](#).

Table 5.1: Key utilities policy changes 2016-2026

	Australian Government	Northern Territory Government
2016	The Australian Government's Small Scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES) provides incentives to households and businesses to install small-scale renewable energy systems. It began 2011 and is due to end in 2030.	
2017		Smart Energy grants provided up to \$1,000 to households on a co-contribution basis to undertake energy efficiency improvements.
2018		
2019		
2020		As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NT Government froze all government fees and charges, including electricity, water and car registration until 1 July 2021. Electricity tariffs were frozen at the 1 July 2019 rates. The Northern Territory Government introduced the Home and Business Battery Scheme, providing \$6,000 grants to encourage the take up of renewable energy.
2021		
2022	The National Construction Code is updated to require 7-stars under the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) for new homes – improving energy efficiency standards.	In the NT, houses must achieve at least a 5-star energy rating – as opposed to the national 7-star standard.
2023	The Australian Government introduced the Energy Bill Relief Fund in 2023. In 2023-24, certain eligible households received \$350 off their power bills.	The NT Government capped utility price increases at 2.7% for 2023-24, keeping it at the same rate of increase as 2022-23 and below CPI.
2024	From July 2024 to December 2025 the Energy Bill Relief Fund was extended, providing \$300 (\$75 a quarter) to all households.	A Solar for Multi-Dwellings Scheme launched – providing up to \$7,500 per dwelling to cover up to 50% of the total installation costs of a solar system for multi-dwelling complexes.
2025	The Energy Bill Relief Fund extends again to provide \$150 to all household from July to December 2025. As part of an extension of the SRES, the Cheaper Home Batteries program began in July 2025, providing a 30% discount on the cost of installing a solar battery.	The NT Government announced electricity pricing reforms that meant the domestic electricity tariff was applied only to a household's first 55 kWh of consumption each day, then it would be charged at the standard commercial tariff (a higher rate).
2026		From 1 July 2026, the NT Government amended the previous reforms, raising the threshold at which households begin to be charged commercial rates, from the originally proposed 55 kWh to 164 kWh per day. The residential tariffs for power, water and sewerage were increased by 5.3% from 1 July 2026.

5.1 Electricity tariffs and power bills

The NT has regulated electricity tariffs. This means that the price customers can be charged for electricity and related services is set by the NT Government through a pricing order made by the Treasurer under the *Electricity Reform Act 2000*. New rates come into effect 1 July each year.²⁹ To enable like for like comparison between 2016 and 2026, this report uses the tariffs from 30 June in both years.

Table 5.2: NT Electricity Tariffs

	30 June 2016	30 June 2026
Fixed daily charge for electricity (cents/day)	50.35	59.31
Domestic (standard tariff) customer (cents/kWh)	25.5399	30.0843
Prepayment charge (cents/kWh)	28.0800	33.0754

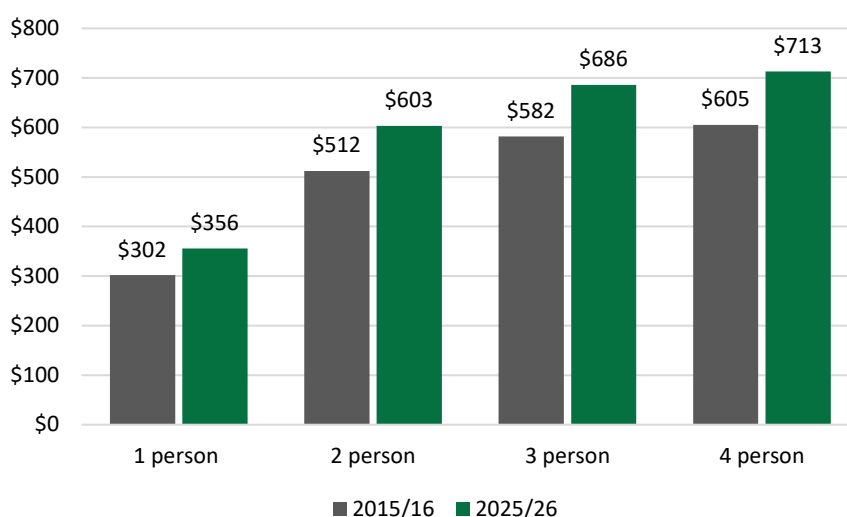
In 2016, the per kilowatt hour (kWh) rate was 25.5 cents, this increased by 4.55 cents/kWh to 30.1 cents in 2026. The fixed daily charge increased by 9 cents, from 50 cents in 2016 to 59 cents in 2026.

Post-payment customers pay the fixed daily charge per day, and then the standard tariff depending on their usage. Households on prepayment meters pay a higher prepayment rate, per kWh used, as they do not pay a fixed daily charge. The prepayment rate increased by 4.99 cents per kWh between 2016 and 2026.

To illustrate the impact of these tariff changes, estimated power bills for post-payment customers are examined below using the average power usage per household size³⁰ by the relevant tariff.

Households across the NT have experienced increases of around 18% for their power over the past decade. The increase ranged from \$54 more per quarter for a 1-person household using an average of 11 kWh a day (increase of 17.8%); to \$108 more per quarter for a 4-person household who uses an average of 24 kWh a day (increase of 17.8%).

Figure 5.1: Average quarterly electricity costs in the NT by household size 2015/16 vs 2025/26

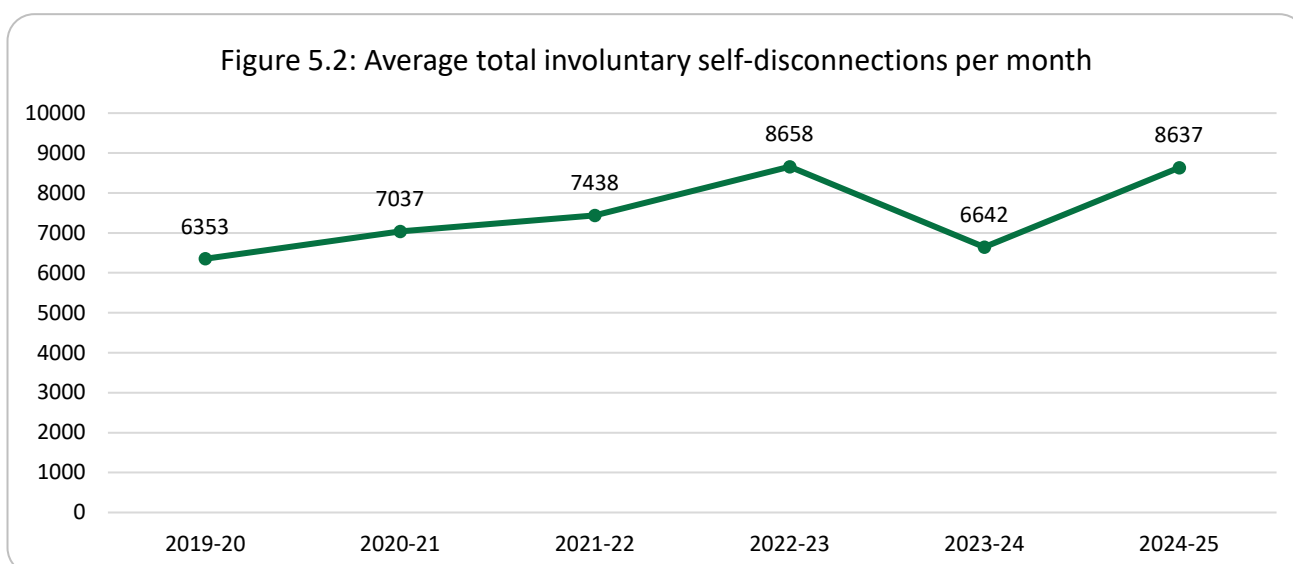


²⁹ Utilities Commission of the Northern Territory (2025). Electricity Retail Pricing. Available [here](#).

³⁰Note: These figures are calculated using the average daily household consumption as at June 2026, as reported on a Jacana household bill. The same consumption figures have been used for both time periods, to reflect the change in cost for consumers.

5.2 Prepayment meters and involuntary self-disconnections

Most households in remote Aboriginal communities, and some urban public households, use prepayment meters for electricity. When sufficient funds are not paid into these meters, power to the house is disconnected. While these are reported as ‘self-disconnections’ by energy retailers, NTCOSS uses the term ‘involuntary self-disconnections’ to emphasise that households generally do not voluntarily stop their electricity supply. Affordability challenges are a key driver of such disconnections.³¹ Being without power for extended amounts of time can have a significant impact on people’s health and wellbeing.

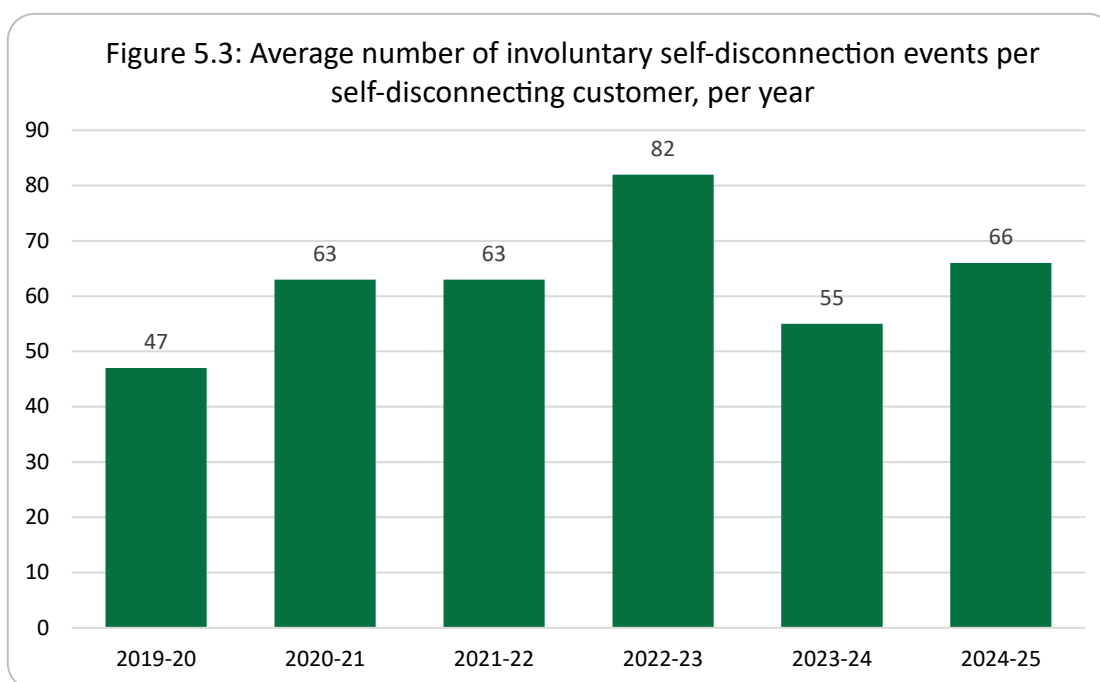


Note: This is out of around 2000 prepayment meters in the NT that are capable of reporting involuntary self-disconnection events. In 2019-20, only 11 months of data was available, as such the average total involuntary self-disconnections per month is reported here to enable comparison over the years, instead of the total number per year.

Average involuntary self-disconnections per month dipped in 2023-24, this coincided with the introduction of the Australian Government’s Energy Bill Relief Fund (EBRF) and capped tariff increases in the NT. However, increased again in 2024-25, despite the EBRF being extended until the end of 2025. This may be influenced by NT tariffs increasing on July 1 2024 (an increase of 9.7% for the FDC, and 7% for the kWh charge), after the 2023-24 increase freeze.³² Overall, average disconnections are trending up in the reported period, **with 2,284 more involuntary self-disconnections per month on average in 2024-25, than in 2019-20.**

³¹ Original Power and the Prepay Research Team (2025) The Right to Power: Keeping First Nations communities on prepayment connected, p.11. Available [here](#).

³² Note: the tariff itself was not frozen, just the rate of increase, so it increased by 2.7% in both 2022-23, and 2023-24). See [Budget and Regional Overview 2023-24](#) p.5; p.10



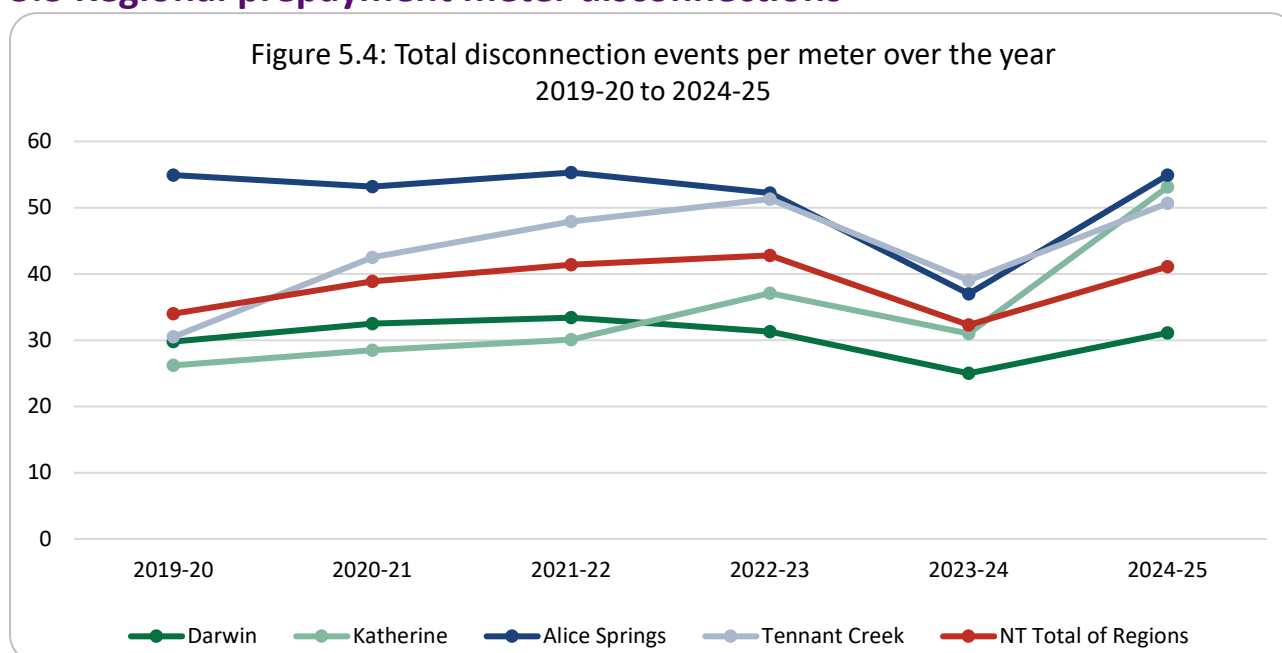
In 2019-20, customers with a prepayment meter who report at least one involuntary self-disconnection event per year (for each year this was between 51% and 71% of customers) experienced an average of 47 involuntary self-disconnection events per year or almost one per week. In 2024-25, they were experiencing an average of 66 involuntary self-disconnection events per year, or about one every 5 days.

Table 5.3: Average duration of involuntary self-disconnection events	
2019-20	380 minutes
2020-21	504 minutes
2021-22	408 minutes
2022-23	355 minutes
2023-24	504 minutes
2024-25	236 minutes

Average duration of involuntary self-disconnection events has fluctuated over the 6 years of data reported, from a low of 236 minutes in 2024-25, to a high of 504 minutes in both 2020-21 and 2023-24.

This means in 2024-25, on average a household would be without power for just under 4 hours (236 minutes), about every 5 days.

5.3 Regional prepayment meter disconnections



Note: This graph (Figure 5.4) uses disconnection events per meter, Figure 5.3 on the previous page uses number of disconnection events by self-disconnecting customer. Data by self-disconnecting customer was not available for each region, so per meter rates are reported here to enable regional comparison. This means the average includes customers who have no disconnections at all through the year, making it less representative of the experience of those in energy hardship.

The region with the highest average number of involuntary self-disconnections was generally Alice Springs, ranging from 37 involuntary self-disconnections per meter in 2023-24, to 55 in 2019-20, 2021-22, and 2024-25. 2023-24 was the only year where Alice Springs was not the highest, with Tennant Creek averaging 39 involuntary self-disconnections per month per meter. For the past 3 years reported on, Darwin has had the lowest number of involuntary self-disconnections. Katherine has had the steepest increase recently, going from 31 in 2023-24, to 53 in 2024-25.

All regions experienced a drop in average numbers of involuntary self-disconnections in 2023-24, as per Figure 5.4.

It is important to note that public reporting of involuntary self-disconnections is only required in the major centres of Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. There are no equivalent reporting requirements for licensed operators outside of these major networks. This means that data is not generally available for remote Aboriginal communities (where most households are using prepayment meters).

However, figures from Indigenous Essential Services (IES – the provider in remote areas) were available to NTCOSS for the first time through Original Power’s 2025 Right to Power report. This showed that in 2024–25, remote communities recorded an average of 59.3 involuntary self-disconnection events per household per year. This is 18.2 involuntary self-disconnection events, per year, higher than the 41.1 average across the four regional centres (44% higher). **This highlights that involuntary self-disconnection rates in remote communities are substantially higher than regional-centre averages.**³³

³³ Original Power and the Prepay Research Team (2025) The Right to Power: Keeping First Nations communities on prepayment connected. Available [here](#).

5.3.1 Prepayment tariffs and the tipping point

The prepayment per kWh supply rate is higher to account for prepayment customers not paying a fixed daily charge. While this is an attempt to equivalise rates for pre- and postpayment households, once a prepayment household is using more than 19.8 kWh per day, they are paying more than a post-payment household would. The average daily usage of a 2-person household is 20 kWh in June, this goes up to 27 kWh in December when the weather is hotter.³⁴ Many households would be over the tipping point of 19.8 kWh, meaning they are paying more than other customers, and in effect experiencing a cost penalty for having a prepayment meter. A prepayment household using the same amount of power as a postpayment household (27kWh) would pay an extra 21 cents per day – adding up to \$78.29 extra per year.

However, in households using a prepayment meter overcrowding is common and the energy and thermal efficiency of buildings is often poor which causes very high energy usage. Energy usage can be 2-3 times more than the average post payment household – compounding the impact of higher energy consumption and prepayment meter tariffs and resulting in very high power costs.

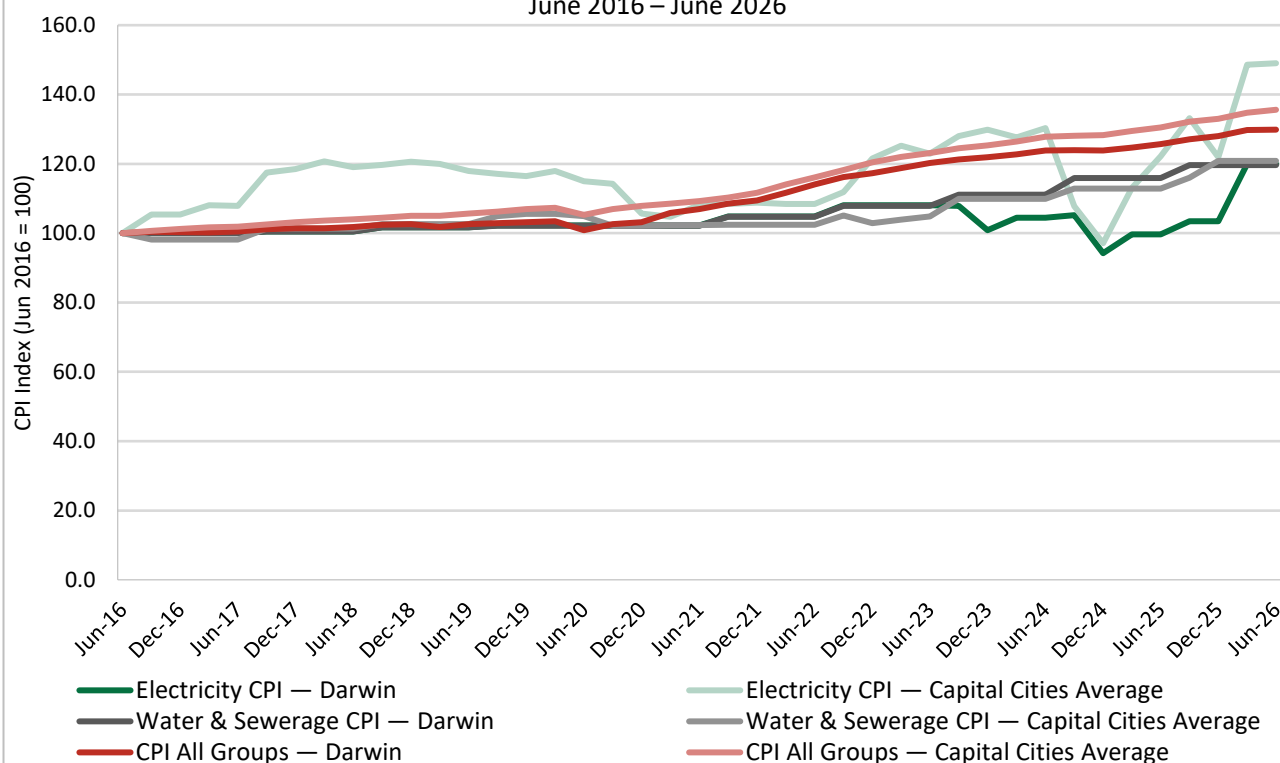
Further, most households with prepayment meters are in town camps or remote Aboriginal communities, where people do not have a choice whether to use a prepayment meter.

For households using prepayment meters, the tariff system creates a ‘poverty premium’ causing extra electricity costs which accrue to people on a low income precisely because they are on those low incomes.

³⁴ Based on post-payment households, sourced from a household Jacana bill April-June 2026; and September-December 2025.

5.4 Utilities CPI

Figure 5.5: Electricity, Water & Sewerage CPI: Darwin and Capital Cities Average with CPI All Groups comparison
June 2016 – June 2026



Based on CPI data, over the past decade price rises for electricity have been significantly different in Darwin than nationally, with an increase in the cost of electricity of 19.9% for Darwin. The cost of electricity rose at a slower rate than general CPI in Darwin (29.9%) and at less than half the rate than that of other capital cities (49%). Water and Sewerage price increases have remained slightly lower than general CPI, at 19.6% for Darwin and 20.9% nationally between 2016 and 2026.

This is markedly different when compared to the previous decade. From 2006 to 2016, Darwin's electricity prices rose 86.9%, nearly 3 times the rate of Darwin All groups CPI (30.4%) and the fourth largest increase in the country.³⁵ Also in this period, Darwin's Water and Sewerage prices had the largest increase in the country at 154.6%, nearly 5 times the rate of Darwin's general CPI.

This CPI data indicates a slowing of price increases. This is some good news for the NT and may be due to the regulated energy market in the NT and the NT Government's subsidising of household energy costs through the Community Service Obligation. Given the NT's regulated utility rates, this data can be seen as broadly relevant across the NT.

³⁵ NTCOSS (2016) Cost of living report Issue No.12 June 2026, p.6. Available [here](#).

5.5 Conclusion and recommendations

Regulated tariffs moderate electricity price increases the NT, with average power bills rising 18% over the past 10 years, less than overall inflation (29.9% for Darwin in the same period). However, these prices alone don't show the full experience of energy costs for households in the NT. Households who are on prepayment meters and living remotely experience concerning rates of involuntary self-disconnections – the average disconnections across the NT have increased by more than 2,000 disconnections per month between 2019-20 and 2024-25. Disconnection rates in remote areas are 44% higher than in major centres. Prepayment meter users also pay a higher tariff rate, which disproportionality impacts the cost for high usage households.

Extreme weather and poor energy efficiency of buildings increases Territorians' power usage and makes households particularly vulnerable to health impacts resulting from being unable to sufficiently cool or heat houses.

Reform should focus on reducing energy hardship and improving the experience of households using prepayment meters as a priority, while supporting overall energy efficiency and uptake of renewables, particularly for low income and disadvantaged households who have traditionally not been able to access incentives on offer for renewables.

NTCOSS recommends:

NT Government:
• Install solar energy on all social housing, ensuring cost savings are passed onto residents.
• Commit to reducing the number and duration of involuntary self-disconnections for prepayment meter customers, including through: ○ Adopting mandatory reporting of electricity self-disconnections for all networks. ○ Reducing the standard prepayment tariff. ○ Ensuring prepayment customers can access an equivalent level of hardship programs as post-payment customers across all retailers. ○ Increasing payment options for prepayment meter customers, including automated payment options.
• Implement minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes.

6. Transport

There are many components that factor into the cost of transport. The cost of fuel, car maintenance, public transport, insurance, taxis or other private paid transport options all impact the experience of households across the Territory.

Fuel pricing has received significant attention in recent years, with international events impacting oil prices globally. In 2022 and 2026, the Australian Government reduced fuel excise duties to help curb the sharply rising costs customers were paying at the bowser. Looking at fuel price trends is one way we can get an insight into transport costs faced by Territorians. However, it is important to note that with one in three remote households not owning a private vehicle,³⁶ the lack of availability of public transport and the cost of other private transport options such as taxis and minibus services are a significant factor in remote Territorians' experience of the cost of living, and something for which limited measurable data is available.

For Territorians living in remote areas, their transport needs can look different to those in urban areas. Travel from remote communities to town centres is often necessary to access basic goods and services including medical, financial and other essential services. The intersecting nature of these costs should not be underestimated, though single data points struggle to represent the relationship. For example, to access more affordable food in supermarkets in major centres, people must pay additional transport costs to get into those areas.

In NTCOSS's last 10-year cost of living report, published in 2016, the lack of publicly available data showing fuel prices in regional and remote areas around the NT was identified as a major data gap.³⁷ With the introduction of My Fuel NT in 2017, legislating the requirement to have up to date fuel pricing reported live around the NT, this has been a key positive development in the last decade to improve data transparency and enable a more fulsome picture of the cost of living across the NT.

³⁶NTCOSS analysis using Census 2021 data

³⁷ NTCOSS (2016) Cost of living report Issue No.12 June 2026, p.20. Available [here](#).

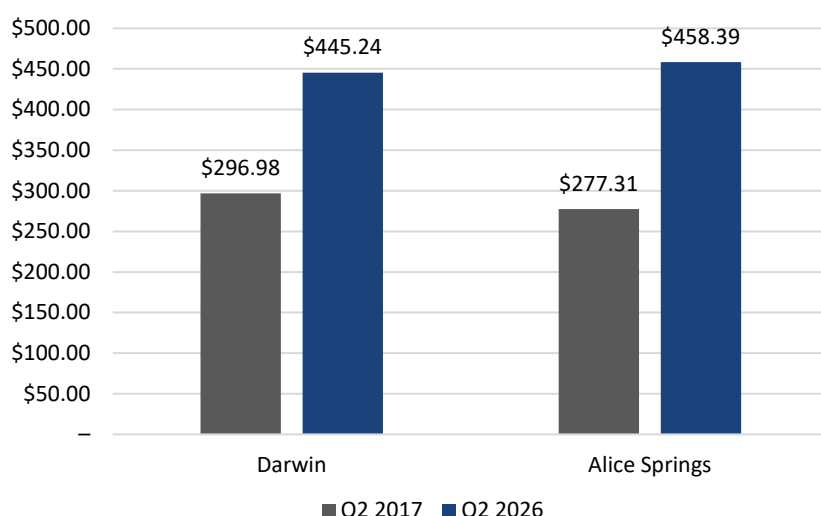
Table 6.1: Key transport policy changes 2016-2026

	Australian Government	Northern Territory Government
2016		
2017		A mandatory fuel price reporting scheme came into effect in the Northern Territory on 1 November 2017 – this established the MyFuel web app that provides increased transparency to Territorians regarding fuel pricing.
2018		
2019		The NT Government released the 10-Year Infrastructure Plan (2019-2028), aimed at improving freight and logistics connections, and reducing long-term transport costs.
2020		As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NT Government froze all government fees and charges, including electricity, water and car registration until 1 July 2021.
2021		
2022	Fuel excise duty was reduced from March to September 2022 in response to global oil prices and cost of living pressures.	
2023		
2024		Free public transport in Alice Springs and Greater Darwin began in mid-2024 due to problems with the ticketing system. It was announced in July 2026 that tickets will be reintroduced from January 2027. From November 2024, the NT Government froze registration rates for light vehicles at 2024 rates, until 1 July 2026, and provided free 1-year licence renewals until June 2025.
2025		
2026	Fuel excise rates were again reduced in from April to August 2026 in response to the war in the Middle East and its impact on fuel prices.	Motor vehicle registration fees for light vehicles increased for the first time since 2024.

6.1 Transport Affordability Index

The Australian Automobile Association has been producing the Transport Affordability Index since 2016, providing a snapshot of transport costs for a hypothetical two-car household in each state and territory. It uses economic modelling to illustrate changes over time to transport costs relative to household incomes. As regional locations were only added in 2017, Quarter 2 2017 is used as the first data point in this report.

Figure 6.1: Change in Average Weekly Transport Costs
Q2 2017 vs Q2 2026



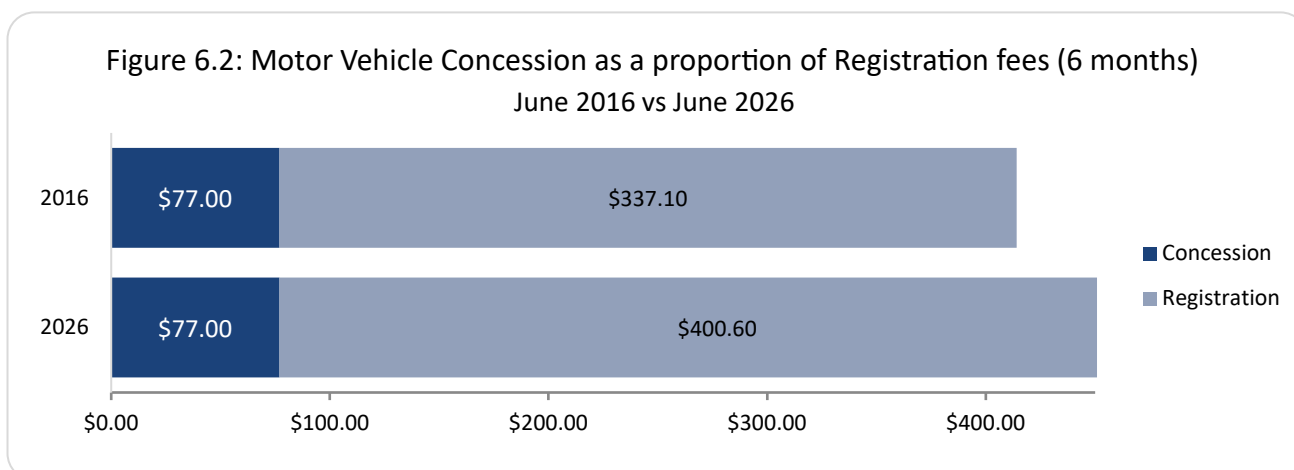
In the 9 years from June 2017 to June 2026, the average weekly transport cost in Darwin rose from \$296.98 to \$445.24, **an increase of \$148.26 per week (49.9%)**. The proportion of household income spent on transport rose from 12.2% to 16.1%.

Alice Springs' average weekly transport cost rose from \$277.31 to \$458.39, **an increase of \$181.08 per week (65.3%)**. Transport costs represented 17.6% of household income in 2026, up from 13.6% in 2017.

The main contributor to Alice Springs' costs being higher than Darwin's in 2026 was a \$20/week reduction in public transport costs in Darwin (due to free public transport introduced in 2024). Car loan payments were the component with the biggest increase in both locations (\$93.19 increase per week for both), followed by fuel price increases (Darwin \$35.57 increase per week, Alice Springs \$42.50), and comprehensive insurance (increase of approximately \$32 per week for both locations).

6.2 Motor Vehicle Registration costs

Registration is a significant cost of owning a car. In the past ten years, the cost of registering a small car has increased by \$63.50 for six months (\$127 yearly). The motor vehicle registration (MVR) concession under the NT Concession Scheme hasn't changed since 2009 and is a set amount of \$77 per 6 month period (or \$154 yearly). Even with registration costs frozen from 2024-2026, the value of this concession has diminished significantly. **As a percentage of registration costs, the concession was 22.8% in 2016, and 19.2% in 2026.**



Note: This is based on the cost of registering a car with a 1001-1500ml engine size.

Car registration can be paid for 1, 3, 6 or 12 months at a time. Paying for shorter time periods ends of costing more in the long run, this is another example of a poverty premium – if someone cannot afford to pay upfront for 12 months, they end up paying more. This is due to the administration fees which are a set amount for every payment made (this was \$10 in 2016 and \$15 in June 2026)³⁸. For example, paying to register a small car for 12 months in June 2026, would have cost \$786.25, including one \$15 administration fee. To pay for 1 month of registration cost \$79.25, including a \$15 administration fee; over 12 months this would cost \$951, including \$180 worth of administration fees.³⁹ **Overall, that is a poverty premium of \$164.75 per year – a 21% loading compared with paying annually.**

³⁸ As of 1 July 2026, this has increased to \$16, June 2026 costings are used here for consistency with Figure 6.2. NT Government (2015) Motor Vehicle Registry: Light Vehicle Fees and Charges from 1 July 2015, Department of Transport.

³⁹ NT Government (2025) Motor Vehicle Registry Light Vehicle Registration Fees from 1 July 2025, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics

6.3 NT regional fuel prices

Fuel prices vary significantly across the NT. Regional and remote areas are consistently higher than urban centres and have seen larger increases over the past 8 years.⁴⁰ **Across all areas, diesel prices have risen more than unleaded 91 prices; diesel has increased between 22.3%-58%, unleaded 91 increases range from 8%-39.8%.**

Figure 6.3: Unleaded 91 Prices - Regions of the NT
June 2018 vs June 2026

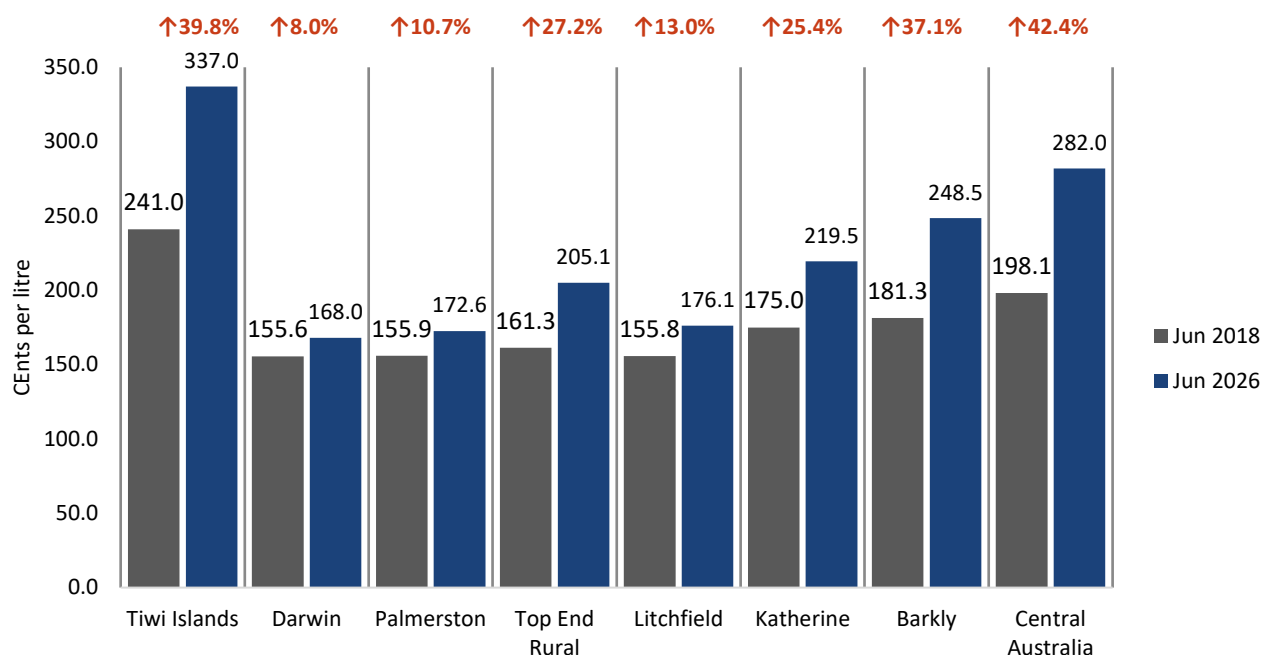
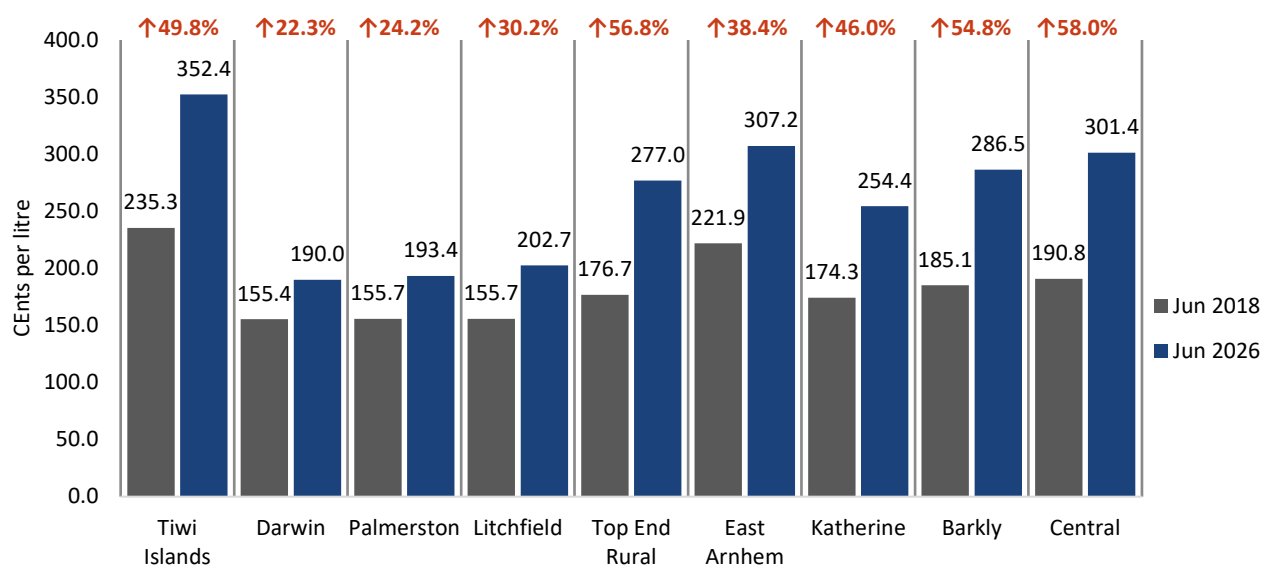


Figure 6.4: Diesel Prices - Regions of the NT
June 2018 vs June 2026



⁴⁰ My Fuel NT began publishing fuel price data in November 2017. June 2018 is used here to enable like-for-like comparison with June 2026. Unleaded 91 data is unavailable for East Arnhem as low aromatic fuel is used.

In regional and remote areas, public transport options are limited, distances can be vast and reliance on private cars is high. As distances travelled increases, so does fuel consumption. As represented in Figure 6.3 and 6.4, prices are often significantly higher further away from major centres. To better illustrate the difference in cost and the experience of those living remotely, estimated fuel tank costs are given in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Estimated costs for a tank of fuel for select NT regions, 2018 vs 2026

Region	Diesel (80L tank)			Unleaded 91 (50L tank)		
	2018	2026	Change	2018	2026	Change
Darwin	\$124	\$152	↑\$28	\$78	\$84	↑\$6
Barkly	\$148	\$229	↑\$81	\$91	\$124	↑\$42
Central	\$153	\$241	↑\$88	\$99	\$141	↑\$42

Note: an 80L tank is used for diesel, as vehicles that use diesel are more likely to be 4wd or larger vehicles, rather than the average tank size of 50L seen in smaller cars and used here to illustrate pricing for Unleaded 91. The data for Central Australia includes the region around Alice Springs, not just the town itself.

In Darwin, over the past 8 years, the price paid to fill a 50L tank with Unleaded 91 has not changed significantly, rising by only \$6. However, in both Barkly and Central Australian regions, the price has jumped significantly more with an increase of \$41 per tank.

Diesel has had larger increases across the NT, however the increase in Darwin (\$28) is still markedly lower than that seen in the Barkly and Central Australian regions (\$81 and \$88 respectively).

It is important to recognise that the data used in this report provides a snapshot of prices at two points in time; June 2018 and June 2026, meaning it does not capture the impact of the fuel crisis caused by the war in the Middle East in late 2025-early 2026. The data also does not show the latest increase in prices that has begun since September 2026. As reported in NTCOSS's June 2026 Cost of Living report though, the price spikes from December 2025 to April 2026 were significant, with increases of between 17-23% for Unleaded 91 and 27-59% for Diesel.⁴¹

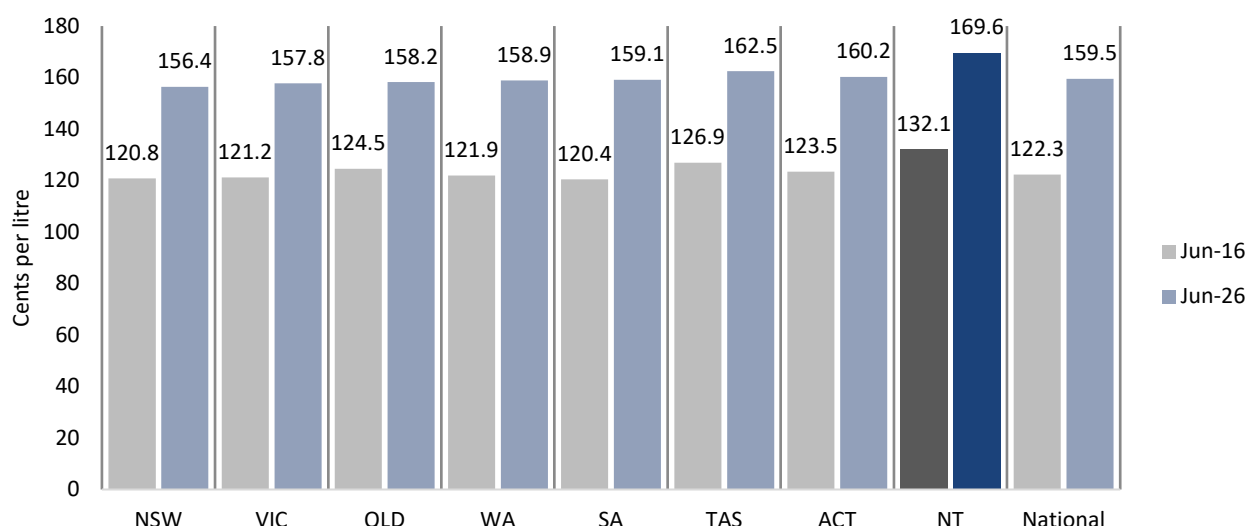
However, this shows us that even when prices stabilise after global price spikes, fuel prices in remote areas are significantly higher than in urban areas and are rising at a faster rate.

⁴¹ NTCOSS (2026) Cost of Living in the Northern Territory: June 2026, p.4. Available [here](#).

6.4 National fuel prices

Nationally, prices for Unleaded 91 fuel rose by 37.2 cents per litre, from 122.3 cpl to 159.5 cpl (30.4% increase), over the past decade. The NT increased similarly, by 37.5 cpl (28.4%), this is about on par with inflation (29.9% in Darwin) for the same period. In both 2016 and 2026, the NT's average price was approximately 10 cpl more than the national average.

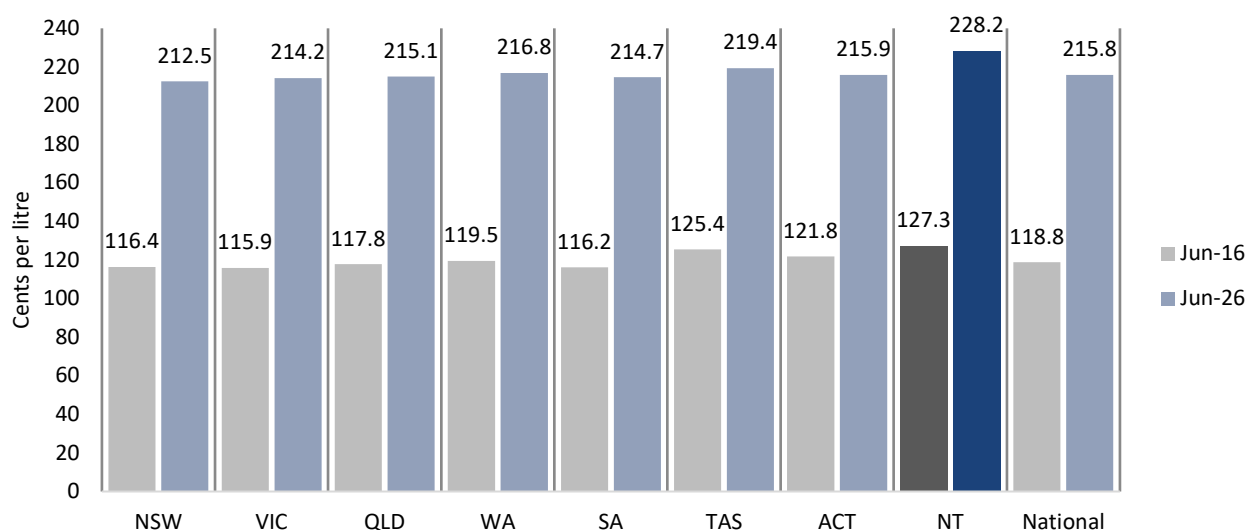
Figure 6.5: Unleaded 91 - National prices
June 2016 vs June 2026



Diesel prices increased much more sharply. The national average increased by 97.0 cpl (81.6%), from 118.8 cpl in June 2016 to 215.8 cpl in June 2026. The NT recorded the largest increase by cpl, up 100.9 cpl (79.3%), and had the highest June 2026 diesel price at 228.2 cpl. Diesel prices in the NT increased at more than double the rate of inflation (29.9% in Darwin).

In June 2016, national diesel was 3.5 cpl cheaper than unleaded. By June 2026, diesel was 56.3 cpl more expensive than unleaded.

Figure 6.6: Diesel - National prices
June 2016 vs June 2026

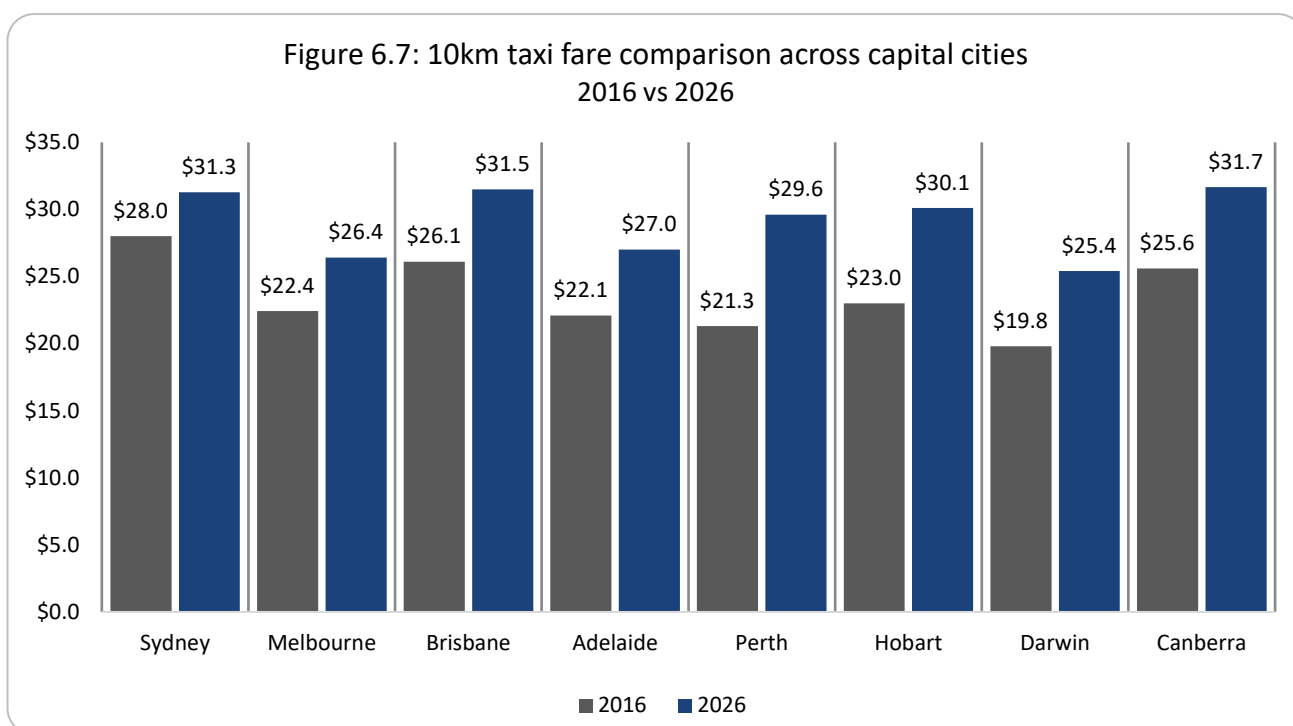


6.5 Taxi prices

With low private car ownership rates, and limited public transport options, many low-income households rely on taxis or other costly private transport options.

Based on standard tariffs, **Darwin is the cheapest capital city for a 10km taxi fare in 2026 (\$25.40)**. Over the past decade this has increased by 28.3% (on par with overall inflation for Darwin of 29.9%).

While Darwin has remained the lowest priced capital based on ordinary distance tariffs, it has the highest waiting time fees and second highest flagfall – meaning taxi fares in Darwin are especially sensitive to any delays



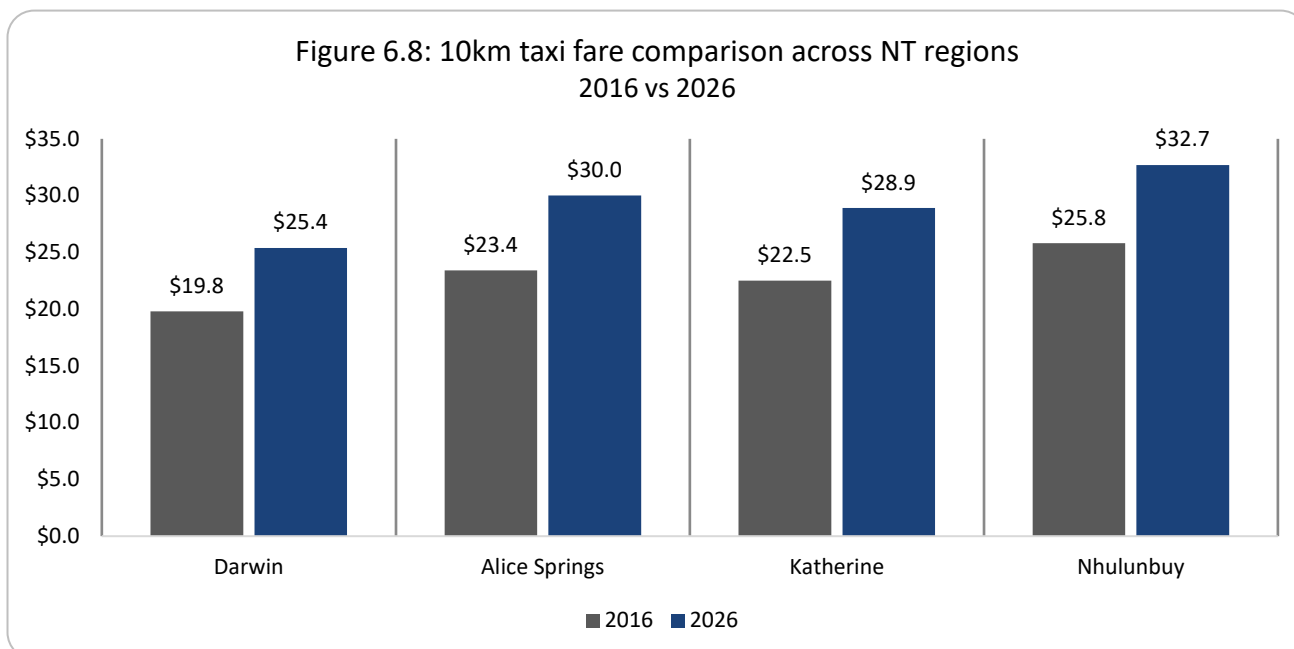
Note: This is including start or flagfall fee, booking fee where relevant and distance rates for 10km. It is based on the regulated maximums for taxi services and does not necessarily represent the actual prices charged on every fare.

The NT Transport Subsidy Scheme provides discounts of 50% on taxi fares up to a maximum cap of \$2,056 per financial year. This Scheme is only available for eligible Territorians with a permanent or long-term disability that affects their ability to safely use public transport.⁴²

⁴² Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (2024) Commercial Passenger Vehicles Information Bulletin – CPV21 Northern Territory Transport Subsidy Scheme and Lift Incentive Scheme. Available [here](#).

6.5.1 Regional fares

Outside of Darwin, taxi fares can cost considerably more, and in some cases are higher than the most expensive capital city nationally (see Figure 6.7). **Nhulunbuy was the most expensive regional centre, at \$33 for a 10km trip in 2026** – \$1 more than an equivalent distance fare in Canberra in 2026, and an increase of 26.7% from what it was in 2016.



Note: Due to the difference in fare structure, comparative data was unavailable for Tennant Creek for this time period.

Travel between remote communities and major centres is often necessary to access services that are only available in town. Many taxi services won't travel such long distances, and would be exorbitantly expensive to use, so private bus services are often the only option for people travelling between communities and towns in remote areas.

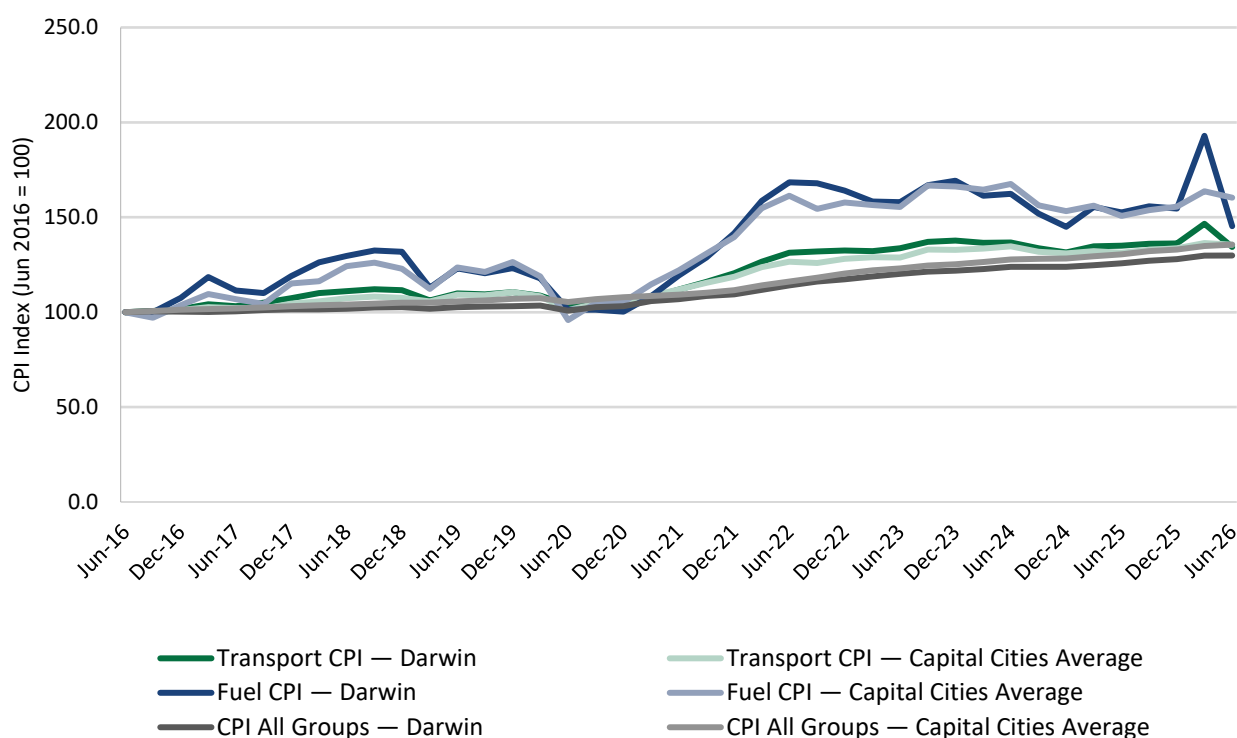
For example, travel via Centre Bush Bus which services the Central Australian region. To travel between Kaltukatjara (Dockers River) and Alice Springs on this service, would cost a family of four \$805 one way.⁴³ While there are children's prices available for this service, there is no concession price for those on a low income or holding concession cards (as would be available on other public transport options in urban areas). The cost of driving a private vehicle (considering fuel, maintenance, registration and insurance costs) would be approximately \$280-581 one way.⁴⁴ **This is an example of both the extra costs experience by those living remotely, and a poverty premium (of up to \$520 or 186%);** where if a household is unable to afford the costs for owning and maintaining a private car, they end up spending more in the long run on transport.

⁴³ This is based on a family of two adults (\$241.50 each) and two children (\$161 each). See [here](#) for more information.

⁴⁴ Depending on the age of the vehicle. Calculation based on Australian Automobile Association (2026) Transport Affordability Index: June Quarter 2026. Available [here](#); and Transport Affordability Dashboard. Available [here](#).

6.6 Fuel and Transport CPI

Figure 6.9: Fuel and Transport CPI: Darwin and Capital Cities Average with CPI
All Groups comparison
June 2016 - June 2026



In the past 10 years to June 2026 based on CPI data, fuel prices have risen 45.3% in Darwin, less than the capital cities average of 60.3%. Overall transport CPI has also risen at a slightly slower rate in Darwin than nationally, at 34.3% (Darwin) compared to 35.5% (national). This is relatively close to general CPI, which increased by 29.9% in Darwin and 35.6% nationally over the same time period. Fuel is the fastest growing expense in relation to transport. The transport index for CPI measurement includes expenditure on fuel, as well as maintenance and repair, new vehicle purchases, and urban transport fares (motor vehicle insurance is included as part of the Insurance and Financial services CPI group, not the Transport group).

As shown by the trend lines above, and discussed in the previous sections, fuel prices are subject to significant fluctuations and heavily impacted by global events.

Large fluctuations in fuel prices were also seen in the previous decade (2006-2016). However, after tracking closely with Darwin's overall CPI from late-2011 to mid-2014, the price of fuel had dropped until 2016, resulting in an overall decrease of 5.6% for Darwin fuel prices from 2006 to 2016. The national decrease was slightly less at -4.2%.⁴⁵ Overall Transport CPI increased by 14.7% in Darwin from 2006 to 2016, a much lower increase than the 30.4% for All groups CPI in Darwin, and more than the national Transport CPI increase of 8.9%.

This means that over the last decade (2016-2026), while Territorian's have not experienced fuel and transport price rises as high as the rest of the country, it is a much steeper rate of increase than the previous decade.

⁴⁵NTCOSS (2016) Cost of living report Issue No.12 June 2026, p. 18. Available [here](#).

6.7 Conclusion and recommendations

Through this snapshot of key transport data over the past decade, we can see transport costs overall have risen. For a typical two-car Darwin and Alice Springs household, the Transport Affordability Index shows an increase of more than 50% for transport costs over the past 9 years, that is well above the rate of inflation for Darwin (29.2% over the same time period). These costs are now consuming up to 17% of an average household's budget.

For households across the NT, fuel prices have experienced significant fluctuation but overall maintained an upward trajectory over the decade. Diesel costs have risen more than unleaded fuel, and remote areas experience significantly higher costs. A tank of diesel can cost more than \$80 extra in the Barkly region than in Darwin, and there are no public transport networks outside of Darwin and Alice Springs, so people have limited transport options and must rely heavily on private cars or taxis and minibuses.

Policy reform and targeted support that is directed at those living remotely and on low incomes would be the most efficient mechanism to relief the impacts of high transport costs where they are felt the most.

NTCOSS recommends:

NT Government
Lift the Motor Vehicle Registration concession to a minimum of \$240 per 12-month period and establish ongoing indexation.⁴⁶
Remove the excessive administration fees on short-term motor vehicle registration.
Require private transport companies receiving NT Government grants to have concession fare options that give a significant discount.
Conduct a review into regional and remote public transport networks.

⁴⁶ Note: a \$240 increase is calculated to lift the concession back to 2009 levels; in real terms accounting for inflation since then and in terms of the proportionate value the concession used to hold in relation to registration costs.

7. Food

Access to affordable, healthy food is vital for Territorians' health and wellbeing. Food security is explicitly linked to not only our health, but future outcomes, and we know cost is a significant barrier to people accessing the nutrition they need.

Foodbank estimates that across the NT, **46% of households were food insecure in 2025**. This is compared to a national average of 33%.⁴⁷ This includes households who were both 'moderately' food insecure (households are reducing the quality and variety of food and rely on cheaper less nutritious foods. Intake may be maintained but nutrition suffers), or 'severely' food insecure (household's intake is reduced, they may skip meals, cut portions or go whole days without eating due to lack of money or resources).

The Territory is heavily reliant on the road network and interstate freight for food deliveries. Even in major centres such as Darwin, it is not uncommon to have significant disruptions to stock levels in major supermarkets due to seasonal flooding and resulting road closures. Remote areas are even more susceptible to disrupted freight, high transport costs, limited options in stores and higher overall pricing.

Examining the difference in pricing across urban and remote areas is critical to understanding the experience of food affordability and security for Territorians. There is limited data available to accurately reflect this experience, as such the following analysis is based on the latest available data, as close to the full ten years (2016-2026) where possible and supplemented by reporting from other sources.

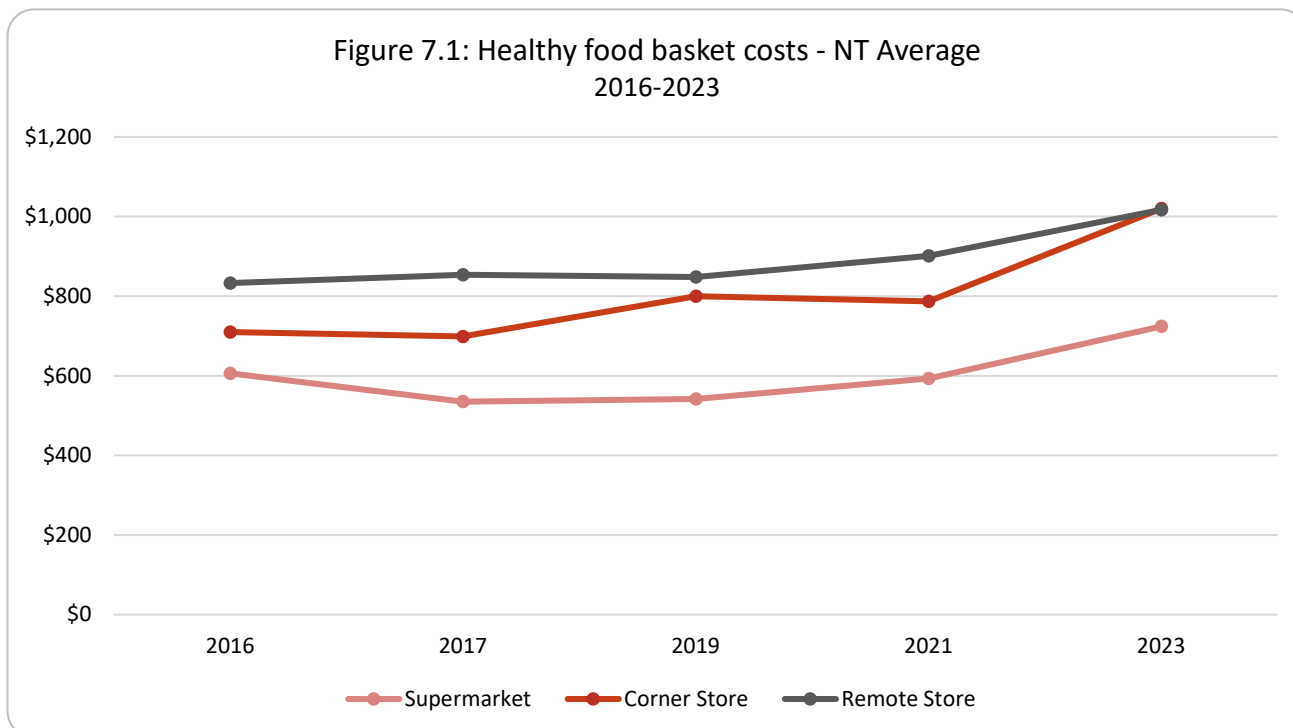
⁴⁷ Foodbank (2025) Foodbank Hunger Report 2025. Available [here](#). (Note: NT data provided separately, not published due to small sample sizes)

Table 7.1: Key food policy changes 2016-2026

	Australian Government	Northern Territory Government
2016		The NT Market Basket Survey was expanded to include the comparison of a Healthy Food Basket and a Current Food Basket. This is the first major methodological change since the first Territory-wide survey was run in 2000.
2017		
2018		
2019		
2020	A national Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote indigenous communities was held.	
2021	The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031, developed to align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, includes improving food security as a key objective.	Over 2020-21, the NT Department of Health collaborated with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT), NTCOSS and NPY Women's Council, to work with community to identify and develop policy and programs to help address issues of food insecurity in Aboriginal Communities. A Food Summit was held in June 2021.
2022		
2023		
2024	The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is directed to conduct an inquiry into Australia's supermarket sector and its pricing practices. A \$9.6 million Store Efficiency and Resilience Package is introduced – funding upgrades that improve food storage facilities in remote areas and resilience in times of high-risk weather.	The NT Remote Stores Program Standards took effect in November 2025, requiring remote stores to stock a minimum range of goods, promote good nutrition and be managed responsibly.
2025	The National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities is released. The Low-cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme is introduced in remote communities. The scheme aims to ensure the cost of a select 30 items remain comparable to supermarket prices in urban areas.	
2026		

7.1 Market Basket Survey

The Market Basket Survey, run by NT Health, has been measuring the cost of a basket of food since 2000. The healthy food basket is based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines and feeds a family of six for a fortnight.



Note: The frequency of collection has changed therefore caution should be exercised in interpreting data with different time periods. NT average is used as regional data collection varied. At the time of writing the 2025 data collection was not yet published, so only 8 years of data (2016-2023) is reported on here.

Between 2016 and 2023, the average cost of a healthy food basket has increased by 19% in supermarkets across the NT, and 22% in in remote stores.

In the decade before (2006-2016) the increase in the average cost of a healthy food basket had been similar for supermarkets across the NT (21%), but much higher for remote stores (40%). This indicates while remote store pricing is still increasing, and remains significantly higher than supermarkets, it has increased at a slower rate than it had previously.

Since 2016, corner stores have shown the largest increase of 44% in the average cost of a healthy food basket, putting corner store prices now closer to remote store prices. In 2016, corner store prices were \$104 (17%) more than a supermarket, and \$123 (14%) less than a remote store for the same healthy food basket. However, in 2023, corner store prices were \$296 (41%) more than a supermarket, and only \$3 (less than 1%) less than a remote store.

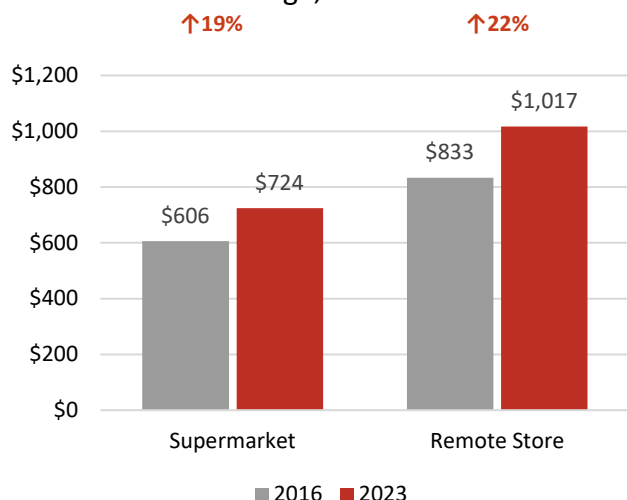
In AMSANT's 2021 Food Summit consultation, the importance of corner stores, and therefore the impact of their pricing on the experience of cost of living, even for those living within a town, was commented on:

"Corner stores are super expensive so if you live in an area away from the centre of town and you don't have access to transport and you rely on the corner store then you're paying remote community prices anyway even though you're technically close to a Woolworths."

*Policy Officer, Northern Territory wide*⁴⁸

⁴⁸ AMSANT (2021) Food Security in the Northern Territory: Consultation analysis and discussion paper, p.21 Available [here](#).

Figure 7.2: Healthy food basket costs - NT Average, 2016 vs 2023



The difference between how much food costs in remote stores compared to supermarkets in major centres is key for our analysis, as we know remote areas often experience significantly higher costs:

In 2016, the average cost of a healthy food basket was **38%** more in remote stores than in supermarkets.

In 2023, the average cost of a healthy food basket was **40%** more in remote stores than in supermarkets.

While this indicates the difference in remote vs major centre costs has remained relatively stable between 2016 and 2023, it's important to note that

this gap has fluctuated in the past 8 years. It ranged from 52% in 2021, with a maximum difference between remote store and supermarket prices recorded in 2017 at 60%.

The Low-cost 30 Essentials Subsidy Scheme was introduced in 2025, so the impact of this policy and whether it has been effective at lowering costs in remote areas cannot yet be examined in the data available. Comparative analysis of the items covered in the Scheme and the itemised Healthy Food Basket, shows us that 11 of the 30 subsidised items are also present in the Healthy Food Basket. If the remote store prices on these 11 items match 2023 supermarket prices, our analysis estimates households could save \$87 on average on the cost of a Healthy Food Basket in remote stores.⁴⁹

Regional snapshot – East Arnhem

While the Market Basket Survey collects data Territory wide, not all regions have been collected consistently across the reported timeframe (e.g. the Barkly regional data was not collected in 2017 nor 2019 and was combined with Central Australia in 2021, Katherine was not collected in 2017). For this reason, we have chosen to report on just one region separately to the NT wide figures, to provide insight into the regional variation in food costs.

Table 7.2: Healthy food basket costs in East Arnhem region, 2016 vs 2023

	2016	2023
Remote stores	\$823	\$1105
Supermarket	\$657	\$682

In supermarkets in East Arnhem (Nhulunbuy), prices have remained relatively stable, increasing only 4% from 2016 to 2023, however across that same time period in remote East Arnhem stores, prices have increased 34%. This indicates that the gap between costs in remote areas and major centres has been widening. **In 2023, a healthy food basket was 62% more in a remote store in East Arnhem than the same goods in a supermarket.**

⁴⁹Department of Health (2024) Northern Territory Market Basket Survey 2023 data set. Available [here](#).; NIAA (2025) Subsidy Scheme Subsidised Products. Available [here](#).

7.1.1 Current food basket

Since 2017, the NT Market Basket Survey has collected data on a Current Food Basket (CFB) as well as the Healthy Food Basket (HFB) reported on above. A CFB also feeds a family of six for a fortnight but includes less vegetables, more items considered 'discretionary' such as biscuits, and more takeaway items than the HFB. It is based on information from the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on the average diet Aboriginal people in Australia consumed in 2012-13.⁵⁰

Table 7.3: Current food basket costs compared to healthy food basket costs in the NT

	Current food basket		Healthy food basket	
	2016	2023	2016	2023
Remote stores	\$898	\$1,108	\$833	\$1,017
Supermarket	\$694	\$880	\$606	\$724

Ensuring healthy food is affordable can be an important public health strategy. When healthy food is cheaper than other less healthy options, it can enable and incentivise healthy eating. In 2016 and 2023, a HFB was cheaper than a CFB in both store types. In 2016, a HFB was cheaper than a CFB in supermarkets by 13%, compared to only 7% less in remote stores. The difference between HFB and CFB has increased slightly in 2023; a HFB was significantly cheaper than a CFB in supermarkets (18% less), compared to only 8% less in remote stores. **This means the incentive to purchase healthy food is less in remote stores, and that effect has increased in the past 8 years.**

Anglicare Emergency Relief

Anglicare NT provides Emergency Relief (ER) to clients in the form of food vouchers, either for supermarkets or other food services including charities.

Over the past decade, the number of individual clients receiving ER has more than doubled (250%) – 656 more unique people access ER. Attendances more than tripled (350%) – with 1,220 more instances of ER provided.

Table 7.4: Anglicare NT Emergency Relief Provision, 2016 vs 2026

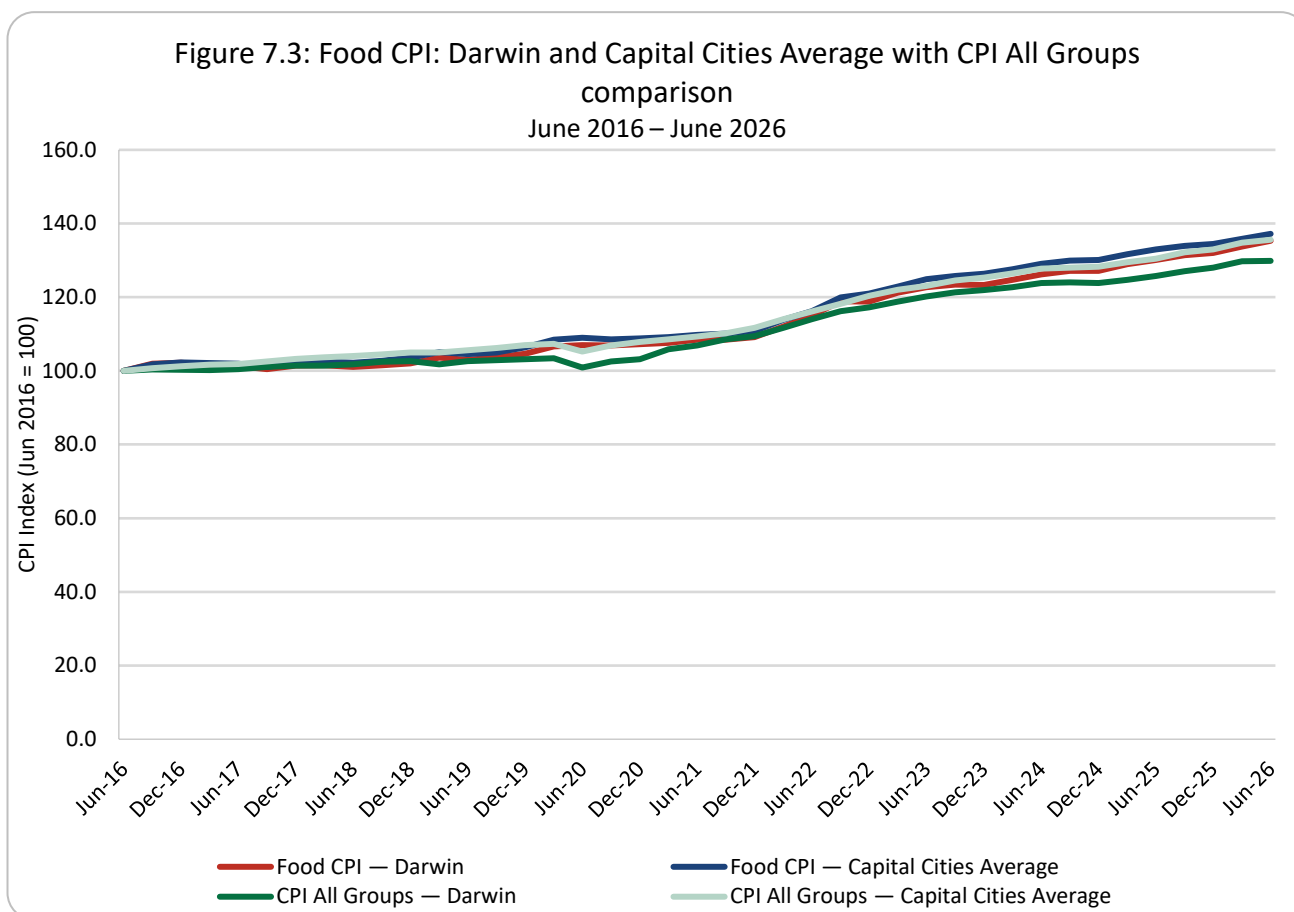
	2015-16	2025-26
Individual clients	259	915
Attendances	348	1568
Average attendance per client	1.3	1.7

The numbers of clients and attendances can be impacted by service changes including funding, staffing and programs running. Looking at the average attendance per client, that increased from 1.3 instances of ER provided to an individual client in 2015-16, to 1.7 in 2025-26. **What this tells us, is clients are needing more support and needing it more frequently now, than they were a decade ago.**

Note: In 2015-16, ER was only provided through Anglicare's youth programs in the Darwin (Ludmilla), Palmerston and Nhulunbuy offices. By 2025-26, this has extended to include adult ER and is also provided from their Katherine and Winnellie, Darwin offices. For the purposes of comparison, only figures from Ludmilla, Palmerston and Nhulunbuy are included here.

⁵⁰ Department of Health (2017) Northern Territory Market Basket Survey 2017, p. 4. Available [here](#).

7.2 Food CPI



Food prices in Darwin (as measured by the CPI) rose 35.3% in Darwin over the past decade, slightly less than 37.2% nationally. Food prices have risen at a slightly higher rate than overall CPI increases for both Darwin (29.9%) and nationally (35.6%). While this indicates Darwin has fared slightly better in terms of food price increases than elsewhere around the country, it is still a sustained increase in real terms.

This is also a higher increase than was seen in the previous decade. In 2006 to 2016, CPI showed similar trends of sustained increase, however lower overall with a 25.6% increase for food in Darwin, compared to 26.7% nationally.⁵¹

This shows that households in Darwin, and around the country, are facing ever increasing food costs, with very little fluctuation.

⁵¹ NTCOSS (2016) Cost of living report Issue No.12 June 2026. Available [here](#).

7.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The data sources examined in this section show us that over the past decade food prices have continued to rise. National data sources such as CPI show that Darwin is not experiencing as steep increases as elsewhere in the country. However, we know that the experience in Darwin can be very different to elsewhere in the Territory.

While the NT Market Basket Survey data shows that both urban and remote areas have seen prices rise about 20% over the past eight years (lower than overall inflation for Darwin), remote areas continue to experience significantly higher costs than urban supermarkets (around 40% higher). Based on this evidence, our recommendations focus largely on improving food security in remote areas.

Food security has many intersecting components in addition to simply the cost of food. This includes the ability to safely store and prepare food. As with all topics in this report, they cannot be considered in isolation. The recommendations regarding access to affordable and secure power are just as relevant to supporting food security as they are to ensuring people can stay healthy in extreme temperatures.

NTCOSS recommends:

Australian Government:
Extend the 30 essential items subsidy to include more items over time, including: fresh and frozen meat, fruit and vegetables, and nutrient enriched baby and toddler food.
NT Government:
- Ensure housing in remote communities is fit for purpose and has adequate facilities to support safe food storage and preparation. This includes ensuring reliable power supply, safe drinking water and culturally responsive housing design. - Invest in the sustainability of the community services sector to ensure they can provide important support to Territorians experiencing food insecurity, including by: - Removing the efficiency dividends from sector funding agreements. - Developing appropriate indexation measures to ensure funding reflects real cost of delivering services.

8. Concessions

Concessions are an important mechanism to provide targeted cost of living relief to those in need.

The NT has had a concession scheme in place since 1979. Following extensive advocacy by NTCOSS and other organisations, the NT Government announced a comprehensive review of the scheme in 2017. In July 2018, an amended scheme came into effect. Key changes included splitting the scheme into two components (the NT Seniors Recognition Scheme (NTSRS) and the NT Concession Scheme (NTCS)) and placing a cap on electricity and water concessions.

Table 8.1: Differences between the NT Seniors Recognition Scheme and the NT Concession Scheme

The NTSRS is intended to recognise the contribution that seniors make to the NT. It provides all NT residents aged 65 or over \$500 a year. This scheme is not means tested. In 2024, the amount of the NTSRS was increased to \$550.	The NTCS provides eligible members with concessions on essential goods and services, including council rates and garbage services, electricity, water and sewerage, drivers licence and vehicle registration, and spectacles. Eligible members include those receiving Age or Disability Pension, Carer Payment, Parenting Payment (Single) or certain Veteran's benefits.
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As of 31 May 2026, there were 16,591 members of the NTCS.⁵² In 2026, it was estimated that 61% of eligible Territorians were accessing the scheme.⁵³

Access to the concession scheme is lower in very remote areas (outside of Darwin, Palmerston, Darwin Rural Area, Katherine and Alice Springs). Of the 16,591 members, only 1,976 were in remote areas. That is only about 12% of the members.⁵⁴ Given population estimates that 19.2% of Territorians live in very remote areas, this indicates disproportionately low uptake amongst remote Territorians.⁵⁵

Table 8.2: Current concession scheme amounts

	Max per year	Detail
Electricity	\$1,200 (8000kW)	For Jacana bills: the concession is calculated on a fixed daily rate of \$1.158 per day plus \$0.082 per kilowatt used. For prepayment meters: Payments of \$600 are credited and tokens distributed in late January and July each year.
Water	\$800 (471kL)	Houses: Calculated on a fixed daily rate of \$0.96 per day plus \$0.955 per kilolitre used Units/shared bill: Calculated on a fixed daily rate of \$0.96. The maximum water and sewerage concession you can claim is \$800 and \$486.12 per household, per financial year.
Sewerage	\$486.12	Based on fixed daily concession of \$1.332
Council rates	\$200	Recipients can receive 62.5% of the annual property rate charges.
Garbage	\$150	Available depending on recipient location.
Vehicle Registration	\$154	Drivers licence free. Additional MVR discount through COTA Senior's Discount Card
Spectacles	\$502.20 *every 2 years	For eligible recipients and their dependents. Value of concession depends on the spectacle.

⁵² Estimates Committee (2026) Question on Notice 4.8: NT Concession Scheme Membership Breakdown by electorate. Available [here](#).

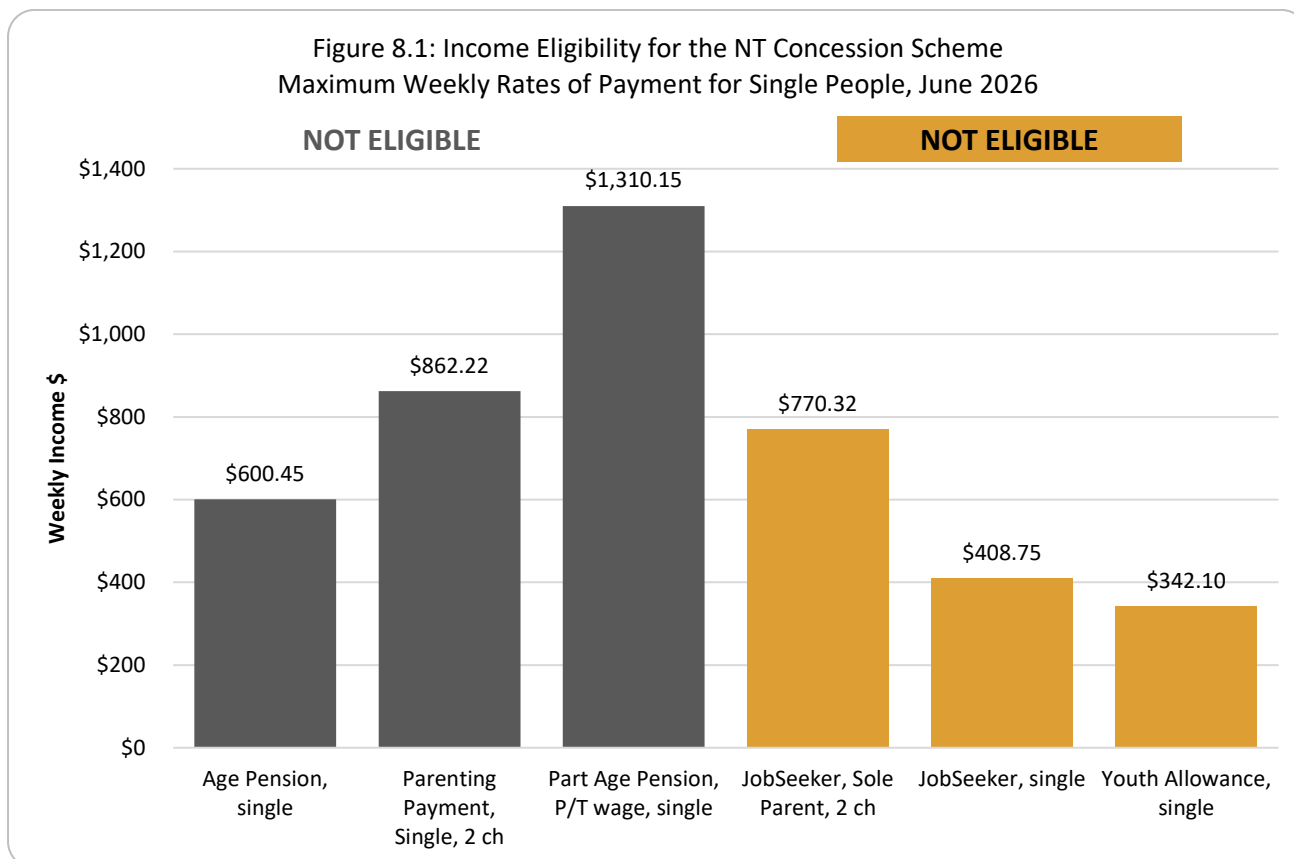
⁵³ NT Government (2026) Budget 2026-27: Budget Paper 3 Agency Budget Statements, p.249. Available [here](#).

⁵⁴ Estimates Committee (2026) Question on Notice 4.8: NT Concession Scheme Membership Breakdown by electorate. Available [here](#).

⁵⁵ Department of Treasury and Finance (2026) Northern Territory Economy: Population. Available [here](#).

8.1 Concession eligibility

The current eligibility criteria of the NTCS excludes people who are on some of the lowest incomes. For example, **currently a single pensioner who is on an income of \$600 a week could receive concessions up to a total possible value of \$3200 a year. However, someone earning only \$409 on JobSeeker would receive no concessions.**



8.2 Conclusion and recommendations

The current concessions do not reach many low-income households and some concession payments have eroded in value over time. Administrative complexity also excludes some eligible people from accessing the scheme. Improvements to the concessions scheme would enable targeted cost of living relief to more effectively reach those in need.

NTCOSS recommends:

NT Government:
Extend eligibility of the NT Concession Scheme to include all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.
- Streamline the NT Concession Scheme processes to make it easier for eligible people to stay in the scheme and to access the scheme's benefits. Including by: - Automating data-sharing with housing and energy providers so that concessions are automatically applied. - Simplifying reapplication processes for members who will not see a change to their situation.

9. Conclusion

Examining the price changes in key expenditure areas provides a clear picture of Territorians' experience of the cost of living over the past decade.

Housing is a major pressure point. Limited social and affordable housing means many Territorians have no choice but to use the private rental market – where the NT has the highest average rent prices in the country. For those who own their home, mortgage repayments are consuming a steeply increasing proportion of their income.

Utilities price increases are kept in check with regulated pricing. However, high levels of energy hardship, particularly among remote households, becomes apparent when looking at involuntary self-disconnection rates for households on prepayment meters. Going without power regularly has significant impacts – it means people can't safely store food or medication, can't cool or heat the home in extreme temperatures, and can't charge the devices that are increasingly relied on to access essential services like banking, government systems, education and employment.

Transport costs are a significant part of households' budgets and have increased above inflation rates. But it's those without access to public transport in regional and remote areas that have no other choice but to rely on private cars or costly private transport like taxis, where the impact is most apparent. It means they're increasingly vulnerable to fluctuations in fuel prices, and low-income households have less capacity to absorb these price shocks. Fuel in remote areas is vastly more expensive. Remote households experience the compounding effect of longer distances to travel to access vital services that Territorians in major centres have close by.

Food prices have increased across Territory, but remote areas continue to face prices 40% higher on average.

The cost pressures in each of these key areas are not experienced in isolation, and it is important to understand the experience of the cost of living as deeply interconnected. For example, if a household cannot afford the fuel to fill up their car, they cannot get to the shop to top up their power card, their food spoils in the fridge while the power is off and they have to rely on daily trips to the more expensive corner store to keep food on the table, instead of being able to do a big shop in the nearest town at significantly cheaper prices. The costs add up and exacerbate each other. This can be understood through the concept of a 'poverty premium': extra costs which accrue to people on a low income precisely because they are on those low incomes.

Price increases and cost of living pressures impact everyone, but it is those on the lowest incomes who are hit the hardest. Broad measures can reduce costs for everyone; however, targeted responses are needed to narrow the gap for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Actions will have the most impact if they target those most in need - income support recipients and those living in remote areas.

Addressing the cost of living pressures experienced by low income and disadvantaged Territorians requires a coordinated response between governments, the social service sector and communities. This report draws on a decade of data, and 50 years of NTCOSS's work and the expertise of the sector, to provide actionable and achievable measures to improve the lives of Territorians.

All people and communities should be able to afford their essential living costs.

10. References

Figures

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- **Figure 4.5:** REIA (2016) Housing Affordability Report: June Quarter 2016. pp.1, 3, 5–14; Tables 1 and 5–13; REIA (2026) Housing Affordability Report: June Quarter 2026. pp.6 and 10-17 (state/territory tables)
- **Figure 4.6:** As per figure 3.1.
- **Figure 5.1:** Jacana Website - Electricity Pricing Tariff Data 1 July 2025, 1 Jan 2016. Available [here](#).
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- **Figure 6.2:** NT Government (2015) Motor Vehicle Registry Light Vehicle Registration Fees (2015), Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Darwin.; NT Government (2025) Motor Vehicle Registry Light Vehicle Registration Fees (2025), Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Darwin; NT Government (2026) NT Concession Scheme: Concessions. Available [here](#).
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⁵⁶ *Source notes:* The ABS moved to monthly CPI after the September 2025 quarter. For the existing quarterly workbook structure, values for Dec 2025, Mar 2026 and Jun 2026 were calculated as percentage changes between published Darwin month-end index values for the relevant quarter ends. The post-Sep 2025 category movements are calculated from published monthly index values and are not a directly published quarterly Darwin category series. All Groups CPI continues to be available directly in current ABS quarterly Table 17, but this workbook retains a consistent calculated approach across the individual expenditure categories after the transition.

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Tables

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See footnotes for all other in-text references.

