

10 August 2026

Department of Social Services

Via email: SecondActionPlan@dss.gov.au

To the Department of Social Services

**Re: Second Action Plan consultations – National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children
2022-2032 Submission on Behalf of the Darwin Aboriginal Family Strengthening Collaboration**

Recommendations

1. Direct funding of ACCOs to develop and deliver services under Our Ways Strong Ways rather than funding via the NT government.
2. Sustainable government funding and partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in service design and delivery of programs
3. Expand Aboriginal-led programs for DFSV early intervention
4. Provide Aboriginal-led DFSV prevention programs in prisons for men, women, and young people
5. Raise awareness of DFSV for school-aged children through the national curriculum by embedding Aboriginal designed and led content
6. Expand the availability of ACCO led specialist DFSV services in the NT
7. Multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment for children with neurodevelopmental disabilities to reduce pressure on families and the risk of DFSV
8. Aboriginal-led parenting programs to incorporate education about positive, non-physical approaches to behaviour management – stop smacking/hitting children

Context

The Darwin Aboriginal Family Strengthening Collaboration is a network of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) across the Greater Darwin region working collaboratively to strengthen responses to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV). The Collaboration includes the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service, Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter, Northern Territory Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation, CAAPS Aboriginal Corporation and Nancy Jeffrey. The Group's purpose is to advocate for effective responses to *Closing the Gap* Targets 12 (child protection) and 13 (family safety). The collaboration of these Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations has a strong focus on prevention and healing.

DFSV rates in the Northern Territory (NT) are far higher than in other jurisdictions in Australia (Brown and Leung, 2023). In 2021, the rate of family violence related homicide in the NT was seven times the national average. The total number of assault deaths includes both intimate partner and non-partner

family violence assault deaths and shows that Indigenous women make up 53% of these assault deaths, followed by Indigenous men (33%), non-Indigenous men (8%) and non-Indigenous women (5%) (Brown and Leung, 2023).

This submission reflects the perspectives of the Darwin Aboriginal Family Strengthening Collaboration in the Northern Territory context and draws on its members' collective experience supporting Aboriginal children, families, and communities across the Greater Darwin region. In addition to these frontline insights, the submission incorporates evidence from research, policy, and practice initiatives to inform the development of the Second Action Plan. It also seeks to articulate the growing and increasingly complex need across the Northern Territory, including persistently high rates of family, domestic and sexual violence and victimisation, which disproportionately affect Aboriginal women and children, as well as people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Drawing on the experience of Darwin ACCOs, our insights demonstrate that Aboriginal-led models are more relevant, accessible, trusted and effective for Aboriginal people because they are grounded in local knowledge, culture and community relationships. While Action 7 of the First Action Plan commits governments to working in formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure policies and services are culturally competent, strengths-based and trauma-informed, there remains significant work to do to fully realise this commitment in practice.

Aboriginal communities know how to care for and support their people; however, the scale of need continues to outpace available investment. Greater and sustained investment is required to strengthen Aboriginal-led service responses through adequate resourcing, infrastructure, workforce development and organisational capability, enabling ACCOs to deliver culturally grounded healing responses that address trauma and its underlying drivers, promote accountability for violence, and strengthen culture, kinship, identity, relationships, and connection to community and Country. This investment is critical to meeting current and future demand and ensuring services are designed, delivered and governed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Sustainable government funding and partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in service design and delivery

Services for Aboriginal people must be designed and delivered by Aboriginal organisations and align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms 1, 2 and 3. Since 2024, the NT Government has rolled out significant reforms to laws and policies that will have significant negative impacts on Aboriginal people including Aboriginal children, young people and families. During this time, there has been no meaningful engagement or prior consultation with Aboriginal people and limited opportunities for ACCOs to lead the design and delivery of programs affecting their communities. The Collaboration is concerned that the intention to administer the new funding under *Our Ways Strong Ways* will exclude Aboriginal expertise in decisions regarding the distribution of funding and the design and delivering of services.

In order to ensure investment will deliver positive outcomes and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the Northern Territory, the *Our Ways Strong Ways* grant funding must be administered directly by and through the Federal Government rather than the NT Government. The National Agreement explicitly states that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are "better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services" (Coalition of Peaks, 2020). It is also essential that the Federal Government

changes the way it works by shifting from transactional grants to relational partnerships to provide sustainable funding for programs. The recent Outcomes and Evidence Fund provided money for great projects with no pathway to sustainability.

Prevention

(Q1. What actions can governments, workplaces, industries, schools, families and individuals take to stop violence before it starts?)

In the Northern Territory, there is a well-documented correlation between domestic, family and sexual violence (DHSV), child protection system involvement, and youth offending (He et al., 2025). It is within this context that the following responses have been developed. Our responses also acknowledge the complex interplay of social determinants of health and wellbeing for families including housing, economic disadvantage, intergenerational trauma, ongoing impacts of the stolen generations and the prevalence of substance abuse.

ACCO-led and designed family strengthening and early intervention programs

The second action plan must include a significant and sustained investment in early intervention and prevention services to support Aboriginal families experiencing early concerns around parenting, HSV and interrelated adversity. Community-led solutions are more accessible and effective and should be supported alongside a public health approach to preventing HSV, with investment in strengthening the ACCO sector to deliver prevention and early intervention programs (Respect Victoria, 2023). There are limited ACCO designed and led early intervention services in Darwin and Palmerston. Those that are available are frequently funded only short term or do not have adequate funding.

An example of a successful early intervention initiative in the Northern Territory is the Early Steps Together Program. Co-designed in 2024 by the Darwin Aboriginal Family Strengthening Collaboration and funded by the Department of Social Services Outcomes and Evidence Fund, the program was established to create a culturally safe, community-led early intervention model. It provides coordinated support for families experiencing challenges, building on family strengths to enhance safety, wellbeing and connection, while working alongside families to prevent exposure to HSV and reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Rather than waiting for children and families to accumulate risk factors that lead to statutory intervention, Early Steps Together adopts a prevention-focused, culturally responsive approach that strengthens families and communities (He et al., 2025).

A further ACCO led example is Darrindirra, a Child and Family Centre operated by CAAPS in Darwin. Darrindirra provides a safe and welcoming space for Aboriginal families to connect with supports and services they need. It also provides case management support for families that are navigating complex situations. Importantly is also a place where families can meet and talk with other families and professionals in a culturally safe and client centred way.

For Aboriginal men in Darwin, the Darwin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Shelter Service Indigenous Men's Service delivers two programs focused on preventing violence against women and children: the Indigenous Men's Healing Program and the Respectful Relationships Program. Evaluations indicate that the programs helped build stronger cultural identity and self-worth. Participants valued the opportunity to speak about their thoughts and feelings with the majority of participants finding the process of talking about their thoughts and feelings therapeutic.

The Mooditj Program is a resilience, relationships and sexual health education program designed for young Aboriginal people aged 10-15 years and can be adapted for older groups. It has been developed by Sexual Health Quarter in WA in collaboration with Aboriginal people from across WA over the past 20 years [Mooditj Leader Training - Sexual Health Quarters](#). The program is being adopted by ACCOs in Darwin and Palmerston with positive results. Danila Dilba has incorporated Mooditj programs into social and emotional wellbeing services for young people.

There are also early intervention programs delivered by the Stars Foundation and Clontarf Foundation for Aboriginal school-aged children, which aim to improve education, health, and employment outcomes while strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors that can negatively impact children's wellbeing and development.

The success of initiatives such as Early Steps Together, Darrindirra and the DAIWS mens' programs highlight the importance of collaborative, partnership-based approaches to system reform. This aligns with the Western Australian *Family and Domestic Violence System Reform Plan 2024–2029*, which emphasises that meaningful and sustainable reform must be achieved through partnerships across government, non-government organisations, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and people with lived experience. The Plan recognises that working in partnership enables reform efforts to build on existing strengths, services and community expertise, while ensuring responses are informed by the realities, challenges and strengths of those working directly with families and communities. Adopting a similar approach under the second action plan would support a more coordinated and culturally responsive DFSV service system that is grounded in community leadership and prevention. In addition, the second action plan must address sustainable funding. The success of the EST service described here is at risk due to the absence of a sustainable funding stream to sustain the service.

The federal government should ensure that more funding is invested in social housing and affordable housing

Family and domestic violence is a major driver of homelessness, accounting for more than 40 per cent of those who access specialist services according to the latest statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Ferrier, 2026). Housing provision for women escaping domestic and family violence has become a salient aspect of government policy in Australia and globally (Barham et al., 2026). This has occurred against a backdrop of continued inadequate policy responses to housing affordability and supply, contributing to instability in housing markets. Barham et al., (2026) argue that the gap between symbolic policy commitments and practical steps to address housing shortages needs to be narrowed to sharpen the focus on the varied housing needs of women fleeing DFSV.

There is a dire need in the Northern Territory for more social housing and more affordable housing. As of 2025, only 4 per cent of the 5413 applications for public and community housing resulted in a Territory family being given access to a home with the NT recording a homelessness rate 12 times the national average (Averill, 2026). The estimated general wait times for a house in Darwin/Casuarina is 6 – 10+ years depending on how many bedrooms there are, while the priority wait times are 4-8 years in the same region (NT Government, 2026). Despite these statistics, the NT Housing Strategy 2026-2030 released on 4 August 2026 demonstrates limited focus on social housing, with key outcomes including effective asset management, tenancy stability and accountability (NT Government 2026). The increased delivery of mid-density public housing is not due to commence until 2030 and beyond.

The housing crisis for Aboriginal people seeking shelter has become much worse in July 2026 with the NT Government announcing the closure of YiSSA Housing (Fitzgerald, 2026). YiSSA provides safe accommodation for approximately 400 Aboriginal people including women and children escaping domestic violence and people coming to Darwin from remote locations to access healthcare such as dialysis treatment.

This goal of increasing access to housing is consistent with Action 10, First Action Plan 2023-2027: Improve access to short-term, medium and long-term housing for women and children experiencing violence, including those living in institutional settings and supporting women to stay in their own homes when they choose to do so. Not enough progress has been made during the First Action Plan.

Consider the concept of a nation-wide disclosure scheme

South Australia is the only state that operates The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) (Women's Safety Services SA, 2024). It provides an avenue for a person who may be at risk of domestic violence to obtain information about their partner or former partner, to help make decisions about their safety and the future of the relationship. Further investigation of the value of such a scheme for other states and territories could be beneficial. In the NT, consultation should occur with Aboriginal specialist DFSV services regarding suitability of a similar scheme in the Northern Territory.

Schools

While the Collaboration supports the inclusion of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV), consent and respectful relationships education within school curricula, caution should be exercised in relying on generic, mainstream programs delivered uniformly across all Northern Territory schools. The NT has a unique demographic, cultural and geographic context, with a large proportion of Aboriginal children and young people living in remote and very remote communities. Educational content is most effective when it is culturally relevant, locally grounded and responsive to the lived realities of its audience. As an example, the approach taken by the NSW Department of Education demonstrates Aboriginal specific content for DFSV prevention initiatives in schools [Collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#). It recognises the importance of a culturally safe, strengths-based approach that upholds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and knowledge.

Incorporate raising awareness of DFSV for boys into the school curriculum

The 'Consent and Respectful Relationships Education' (CRRE) measure supports the wellbeing of Australian primary and secondary school students and school communities through supporting investment in expert-developed, high-quality, evidence-based and age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education (Australian Government, 2026). This measure contributes to the Government's *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 -2032*. It also aligns with the NT Coroner's recommendation of culturally appropriate prevention and education programs in schools, so that young people have the opportunity to learn about domestic, family and sexual violence, intimate partner violence, consent and respectful relationships (The Northern Territory Coroner's Report, 2024, Recommendation 30). The CRRE measure supports the revised Australian Curriculum (Version 9.0) which aims to ensure that students from Foundation to Year 10 receive more explicit education on positive, respectful relationships and consent in age-appropriate ways that reflect the needs of their school communities. (Australian Government, 2026). Consideration should be given to include information about DFSV, emotional regulation, healthy relationships, case studies, legal responses to violence, and the evolving social understanding of violence against women and

children. Content could also explore concepts of masculinity across cultures, the impacts of harmful gender stereotypes and rigid gender norms, and how positive, respectful and accountable forms of masculinity can contribute to safer families and communities.

In the Northern Territory, the compulsory Stage 1 subject Exploring Identities and Futures (EIF), which must be successfully completed to achieve the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET), presents an ideal opportunity to also embed Aboriginal specific content. Importantly, education initiatives aimed at Aboriginal boys should not rely solely on standardised curriculum content. Programs that explore masculinity, gender norms, emotional regulation and respectful relationships are likely to have greater impact when designed and delivered by Aboriginal educators, men, Elders and people with lived experience. Aboriginal-led approaches can support young men to engage with these conversations in culturally meaningful ways, drawing on strengths-based understandings of identity, kinship, responsibility and respect. This approach aligns with evidence that prevention initiatives are most effective when they are tailored to local communities and delivered by trusted voices.

Incorporate raising awareness of DFSV for girls into the school curriculum

Girls need to be separately educated in the school setting about DFSV to allow for open discussion, build their understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours, and strengthen their ability to recognise and respond to early warning signs of abuse (McLindon et al., 2025). Research exploring the timelines of abuse in relationships found that the earliest indicators of violence are often psychological and emotional in nature, including controlling and isolating behaviours by the perpetrator. By increasing girls' awareness of these early warning signs and providing opportunities to discuss them in a safe and supportive environment, schools can play an important role in equipping young women with the knowledge and confidence to identify unhealthy relationship dynamics, seek support, and make informed decisions about their safety and wellbeing (McLindon et al., 2025).

Similarly, education for girls should be culturally informed and delivered in ways that create safe spaces for discussion, reflection and learning. Aboriginal girls and young women may face distinct cultural, social and geographic barriers when seeking support, particularly in remote communities. Programs co-designed and facilitated by Aboriginal women, community leaders and lived-experience educators can strengthen engagement, increase relevance and support young women to recognise unhealthy relationship behaviours, understand their rights, and access support when needed. Such approaches recognise the strengths, knowledge and resilience that already exist within Aboriginal communities while providing young women with practical information to support their safety and wellbeing.

Community Wide Approaches

DFSV community engagement and primary prevention efforts should be expanded across the Aboriginal community. There are examples of good practice by ACCOs that could be expanded and enhanced. Tangentyerre in their Community Safety directorate includes [Family Violence Prevention Programs](#); [Men's Behaviour Change Programs](#); [Men's Outreach, Assessment and Referral Services](#) [Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group](#) [Men's Family Safety Group](#) [Domestic Violence Specialist Children's Service](#) [Integrated Support Program](#) [Night and Youth Patrol](#). These are examples of community initiatives that are designed and led by Aboriginal community, informed by the experts and evidence and holistic/integrated to meet intersecting needs.

In the greater Darwin region there is DAIWS Indigenous Men's Healing developed by local Aboriginal men and run by Michael Torres. We note, that like many ACCO led services, this program does not have secure and sustainable funding. DAIWS forms part of the Northern Australian Aboriginal Men's Alliance ([NAAMA | Creating a songline of connection for men](#)). NAAMA connects Aboriginal men and organisations across WA, NT and QLD to strengthen healing, prevent DFSV, improve service coordination and drive systemic change that addresses the root causes of intergenerational harm.

Another program being run by a Northern Territory ACCO is the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency's Kunga Stopping Violence Program. This Program should also be further resourced and enhanced to meet growing need- specialised and gendered service for Aboriginal women [Kunga stopping violence program - NAAJA](#)

While we have noted some community-based culturally appropriate programs in the Northern Territory for men, there is limited academic evidence of their long-term effectiveness. There is a need for paired approach with researchers and ACCOs so that the content of programs, the outcomes and their long-term effectiveness can be measured and documented. The Government should increase funding for ACCOs to build their capacity to deliver culturally grounded healing responses that both promote accountability for violence and address trauma and its underlying drivers, while strengthening culture, kinship, identity, relationships, and connections to community and Country. In the NT, investment should prioritise Aboriginal-led healing models and build an independent, long-term evidence base for what works in Aboriginal communities.

Workplaces

Include DFSV awareness as a mandatory component of employee orientation and induction. This should provide all staff with information about the organisation's commitment to preventing and responding to DFSV, including available workplace supports, DFSV-related leave entitlements, confidentiality and safety considerations, referral pathways, and access to specialist support services. Information provided should extend beyond the Employee Assistance Program to include a broad range of local DFSV support services, ensuring employees are aware of the different forms of assistance available to people who have experienced violence, people using violence, and those supporting family members or colleagues affected by DFSV. DSS could collaborate with Fair Work to identify mechanisms to achieve this change.

Families and Individuals

- **Violence should not be considered an acceptable form of discipline for children** - Stop hitting/smacking children (The Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, South Australia, 2025, Recommendations 89, 90 and 91)

The South Australian *Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence* (2025) recommended prohibiting corporal punishment, including smacking children, as a form of discipline. The Commission highlighted evidence from children and young people who described a perceived "double standard", noting that while adults are taught that violence is unacceptable, physical punishment of children remains lawful in some circumstances. The report found that presenting corporal punishment as acceptable discipline can make it more difficult for children to distinguish between discipline and abuse.

This recommendation is also relevant in the Northern Territory context. Moore et al. (2022) found significantly higher rates of assault-related hospitalisation among Aboriginal children compared with non-Aboriginal children and identified particularly high levels of physical and sexual violence experienced by Aboriginal adolescent girls. The authors called for culturally informed policies and services focused on the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal girls. Consistent with Recommendations 90 and 91 of the Royal Commission, consideration could be given to incorporating education about positive, non-physical parenting approaches into Aboriginal-designed and Aboriginal-led parenting programs.

Services and support

(Q2. How can services and supports work better for people who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing FDSV?)

Services and supports must be designed around the needs, choices and safety of the person experiencing violence, rather than requiring them to navigate a siloed service system or fit within predetermined service responses. At present, the Darwin and Palmerston area has a significant shortage of ACCO led specialist FDSV services leading to challenges for victim survivors who require support.

Services should work together so that a person can access legal assistance, housing, financial support, health care, counselling, family support, disability and AOD services without repeatedly retelling traumatic experiences or navigating disconnected referral pathways. Where appropriate, a trusted service should play a leading role in ongoing case management and care team planning, and be able to remain alongside the person and coordinate supports according to the persons identified priorities. For Aboriginal victim/survivors ACCOs should be resourced to provide this role.

For Aboriginal women and families in the NT, safety cannot be understood only through a mainstream crisis-response model focused on separation from the person using violence. Responses must recognise that a person's safety, culture, family, kinship, community, housing, financial security and connection to Country may be deeply interconnected. Services should support people to determine what safety and healing mean for them, without imposing particular identities, pathways or outcomes.

Safety should not require cultural and relational disconnection. Where safe and wanted by the person experiencing violence, services should be capable of working relationally with family, kinship and community and alongside culturally grounded responses for the person using violence. Supporting accountability and healing for people who use violence is part of creating longer-term safety and should not mean that responsibility for their behaviour is transferred to the person experiencing it.

Aboriginal-led responses are critical and this is why our Collaboration seeks to have the Our Ways Strong Ways and any other Aboriginal specific funding administered by the Commonwealth with direct funding to ACCOs. ACCOs are better placed to provide culturally safe and trusted responses that understand local communities, kinship structures and the broader circumstances affecting a person's safety. Consistent with the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, governments should shift decision-making and sustainable investment towards ACCOs rather than continuing to build government and mainstream service responses around Aboriginal families. Despite the best practice involvement of ACCOs in assisting Aboriginal women and children who have experienced DFSV, the NT Government has recently opened a DFSV Hub that is not Aboriginal-controlled, representing a missed opportunity to embed Aboriginal-led design, decision-making and service delivery at the centre of the response.

This approach risks further investing in mainstream service models rather than strengthening the capability, sustainability and leadership of ACCOs that are already trusted by, and accountable to, Aboriginal communities and already providing the service that the DFSV Hub is designed to deliver.

Support must be available before, during and long after crisis. A person should not need to reach a particular threshold of violence, leave a relationship or engage with police or child protection before meaningful assistance becomes available. Investment is needed across prevention, early intervention, crisis response, recovery and long-term healing, including practical supports that address housing, financial insecurity and other circumstances that can constrain a person's choices.

Where the victim/survivor is also a mother, services must recognise the need to support and assist both the parent and child in safety planning and service delivery. Responses should support the parent experiencing violence to strengthen safety and stability for their children, while directing responsibility for violence towards the person using it. It is important to acknowledge the historical and ongoing fear among Aboriginal women victim/survivors of potential child removal through help seeking.

Funding models must allow services to stay with people for as long as support is needed. Multiple small and short-term grants for service provision create service instability, workforce turnover and arbitrary program boundaries that do not reflect how people experience violence and recovery. Governments should provide sustained, flexible funding focused on long-term safety and wellbeing rather than short-term outputs and government funding cycles.

Supporting children and young people

(Q3. How can communities and services best support children and young people to stay safe from violence?)

Children and young people are safest when the families and communities around them are safe, supported and able to heal. For Aboriginal children, safety must be understood in the context of family, kinship, culture, community and connection to Country. Responses that focus primarily on individual risk can overlook these relationships and may perpetuate harm through surveillance, separation and statutory intervention, rather than strengthening family and community capacity to keep children safe. Investment should therefore prioritise Aboriginal-led, culturally grounded Child and Family Centres (CFC), Family Support Services (FSS), and community-based therapeutic interventions and healing programs that support children within the relationships that sustain them.

Early support should be available before families reach crisis or become involved with child protection or justice systems (eg. Early Steps Together Program, Darrindirra Child and Family Centre). This includes access to practical, therapeutic and culturally safe supports such as housing, mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment, disability services, family support and financial assistance. Children who experience violence need trauma-informed and culturally safe healing responses that recognise recovery occurs through safe relationships with parents, family and kin. Similarly, young people who use violence require therapeutic, relational responses that address trauma, development, disability, culture and their own experiences of violence, while promoting accountability and behaviour change. The Department of Social Services' KIND Program is an early intervention program working with adolescents who use violence in family and intimate partner relationships. It takes a therapeutic, relationship-based approach and works with young people and their support networks to reduce violence and strengthen relationships. Addressing the underlying drivers of family stress, including poverty, overcrowding, housing insecurity, harmful substance use and intergenerational trauma, is

critical to achieving lasting safety for children and families. KIND can be adapted to and delivered by an ACCO to meet the unique and complex needs of Aboriginal children and young people living in the Territory.

Multidisciplinary assessment and treatment for children and young people

Failure to identify, assess and provide appropriate support for children and young people with neurodevelopmental disabilities can place significant pressure on families and increase the risk of involvement with child protection systems. Children with disability are overrepresented in out-of-home care and are more likely to experience pathways into youth justice and adult justice systems when their needs are not recognised or adequately supported. Research on neurodevelopmental disabilities, including FASD, ADHD and cognitive impairment, demonstrates links between unmet support needs, family stress, trauma, school disengagement, offending and subsequent justice involvement. Culturally safe, early assessment, diagnosis and family-centred support are therefore important protective factors that may reduce later offending and family violence risk (Australian Government, 2023).

In Darwin, there is a lack of multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment for neurodevelopmental disabilities, which places significant pressure on families and can contribute to pathways leading to child removal, youth justice involvement and adult justice system contact. The lack of timely assessment, diagnosis and support can increase vulnerability and is often part of a broader trajectory associated with adverse outcomes, including offending behaviour and, in some circumstances, the use of domestic and family violence.

People who use violence

(Q4. What more can be done across the community to promote healthy, safe relationships and strengthen accountability for people who use violence?)

Action 5 in the First Action Plan aimed to strengthen systems and services to better provide opportunities to support people who have used or are at risk of using violence, to change their behaviour and hold them to account, with the aim of protecting the safety and wellbeing of current and future victim-survivors. There is a pressing need to continue this work.

Initiatives to Prevent Men's Use of Violence

In the Northern Territory, there are limited ACCO-designed and delivered programs for Aboriginal men whilst imprisoned (NT Government, 2025) and more generally a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of men's behaviour change initiatives/programs. This service gap exists despite a reported underspend of \$20.9 million across correctional and youth justice programs in 2024–25 (NT Government, 2025).

The strongest Aboriginal-led literature increasingly treats trauma as fundamental rather than secondary.

Multiple internal North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency literature reviews note that family violence in Aboriginal communities is shaped by:

- colonisation;
- dispossession;

- intergenerational trauma;
- systemic racism;
- poverty;
- housing insecurity;
- cultural disruption.

The ANROWS research on Aboriginal healing programs explicitly argues that programs must address colonial violence, racism and trauma as causes of family violence rather than treating family violence as a standalone behaviour issue. [ANROWS - What works ATSI healing programs for men who use DFSV](#) emphasises that people who experience violence and people who use violence are not mutually exclusive categories.

Similarly, Aboriginal-led healing literature repeatedly emphasises:

- cultural connection;
- healing from trauma;
- social and emotional wellbeing;
- family strengthening;
- community responsibility;
- restoration of cultural authority.

These are fundamentally different priorities to most mainstream DFSV frameworks.

Other recent research on Aboriginal masculinities also highlights the importance of culturally grounded, strengths-based approaches for working with Aboriginal men. Newcastle's (2025) research, alongside recent scholarship on Indigenising Masculinities, emphasises that Aboriginal masculinities are rooted in kinship, cultural law/lore, responsibility to family and Country, storytelling, care, and relational accountability, rather than dominance or control. The research introduced the **Three Hierarchies of Indigenous Masculinities** and **Three Circles of Indigenous Masculinities**, while complementary work by Prehn and colleagues (2025) developed the **GROW framework**—Grounded, Relational, Open and Whole—which positions masculinity as connected to healing, cultural identity, emotional expression, mentoring and community responsibility. These frameworks demonstrate how culturally informed programs can support men to strengthen identity, address grief and trauma, foster healthy relationships, and prevent violence, while reinforcing the role of Aboriginal men as carers, leaders and cultural knowledge holders. It is hoped that the findings will inform initiatives focused on violence prevention, healing, and responding to men's experiences of abuse, highlighting the value of investing in Indigenous-led approaches within correctional and community rehabilitation settings.

Recovery and healing

(Q5. What would make the biggest difference in helping people and families to recover and heal after being affected by FDSV?)

ACCO services supporting both the person who has experienced violence and the person using violence

The biggest difference would be access to culturally safe, trauma-informed and holistic supports that help both those who have experienced violence and those who use violence to make lasting change. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) services are uniquely placed to provide this

support because they understand the cultural, community and family contexts of Aboriginal people. Recovery and healing are strengthened when services work with the whole family, supporting victim survivors to achieve safety, healing and stability, while also providing accountable, culturally appropriate interventions for people using violence to address harmful behaviours and reduce the risk of further harm. Long-term investment in ACCO-led healing, family support, counselling and behaviour change programs is critical to breaking cycles of violence and supporting stronger, safer families and communities.

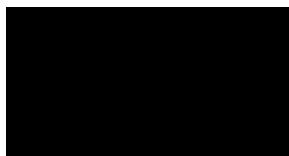
Access to support

(Q6. What makes it easier for people to access support or services related to FDSV?)

People are more likely to access support and services related to FDSV when those services are culturally responsive, place-based, safe and delivered in a way that recognises the diverse experiences of Aboriginal people and communities. The language and terminology used by services is important, as jargon or deficit-based language can create barriers to engagement, while clear, respectful and culturally appropriate communication can help people feel understood and supported. A strong Aboriginal workforce across the sector also plays a critical role in building trust, cultural safety and connection, making it easier for individuals and families to seek help. Increased investment in ACCO-led support and services is essential, as ACCOs are best placed to deliver holistic, community-led responses that meet local needs and provide accessible, culturally informed pathways to support, healing and recovery.

The Darwin Aboriginal Family Strengthening Collaboration welcomes the opportunity for further genuine engagement on this matter and is happy to appear at a public hearing. If you require more information in relation to the content of this letter, please contact Joy.McLaughlin@ddhs.org.au

Yours sincerely



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