

FIRST NATIONS
ADVOCATES AGAINST
FAMILY VIOLENCE

**Submission for
Consultation on the
Second Action Plan
(National Plan to End
Violence against
Women and Children
2022–2032)**

**Prepared by First Nations Advocates
Against Family Violence**

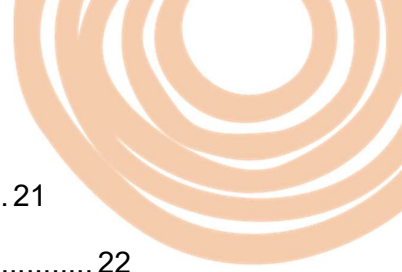
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First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV)

Who we are

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) is the national peak body for specialist Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) and the only Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) dedicated to representing this sector at a national level.

FVPLSs deliver specialist legal and non-legal responses to domestic, family and sexual violence through culturally safe and responsive, holistic service models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, predominantly women and their children.

FNAAFV provides national leadership across policy, planning and law reform; strengthens frontline sector capacity; supports innovation and best practice; and advocates for safety, justice and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children, their families, and their communities.

We work in partnership across the ACCO sector, government and non-government organisations, and mainstream services to advance culturally safe, community-controlled responses. Our work is informed by the principles of self-determination and aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoplesⁱ.

Our Members

FNAAFV represents 14 Member FVPLSs (from a broader network of 16 services nationally), operating across more than 30 locations in metropolitan, regional and remote communities across Australia.

FVPLSs provide culturally safe and responsive, specialist family and domestic violence services to more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These services are often the only accessible and trusted supports available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experiencing violence.

A full list of FNAAFV Members is provided at [Appendix A](#).



What we do

FNAAFV works with its Members, communities, governments and partners to prevent, disrupt and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We provide a unified national voice for the FVPLS sector, advocating for culturally safe and responsive, holistic legal and non-legal services and support, and drive reform across legal, policy, systems and service delivery.

FNAAFV contributes to national decision-making processes, including as a member of the Coalition of Peaks, and works to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family, domestic and sexual violence legal and non-legal expertise shape policy, strategy and implementation.

FNAAFVs work is informed by the lived expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, families and communities, alongside more than 25 years of specialist FVPLS sector expertise across family, domestic and sexual violence, child protection and legal systems.

We align our strategic and policy work with key national frameworks, including:

- the National Agreement on Closing the Gapⁱⁱ and its Priority Reforms
- the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032ⁱⁱⁱ
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025^{iv}
- the National Access to Justice Partnership Agreement 2025-2030^v
- the Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036^{vi}

Terminology

FNAAFV respectfully uses the terms “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”, “Aboriginal”, and “Indigenous” throughout this submission. These terms are used intentionally and contextually, including reflecting:

- the preference of communities and organisations,
- the language used within legislation, policy and national frameworks, and
- direct references to existing reports, agreements and source materials.



Submission to the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)

Executive Summary

Our position

FNAAFV makes three points before answering the consultation questions.

The First Action Plan (FAP) was a foundation. The Second Action Plan (SAP) is about concentrating national effort on the areas where the evidence shows progress has stalled or is not shared equally. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, outcomes are not improving at the same rate as the wider population, and on several measures the gap is widening. The plan must treat First Nations safety as a test of whether the Plan is working.

Second, the relationship between the Second Action Plan and Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices must be clear. With the launch in February 2026 of Our Ways, there are now two national plans operating in the same space. The Second Action Plan must not duplicate or talk past Our Ways. It must avoid mainstream commitments that cut across self-determined actions.

Finally, for our women and their children, the answer to every consultation question runs through the ACCO sector. Culturally safe, community-controlled, specialist services are part of what works. Prevention, safe service responses, and the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children all depend on a properly funded and sustained FVPLS sector.

Summary of recommendations

Prevention

1. Fund prevention and early intervention delivered by the ACCO and FVPLS sector recurrently and over the long term, for all age groups, rather than through short pilot grants, specifically:
 - a. Funding must recognise the complexity and additional advocacy required in FVPLS' work. As a minimum, 10% of all family violence funding should be quarantined for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific initiatives and specialist Aboriginal



- family violence organisations. Funding must include specific funding for workforce support and increase in line with inflation and SCHADS increases.
- b. There must be a dedicated funding stream from DSS to support FVPLS' non-legal and early intervention and prevention work. Early access to legal advice and representation must also be recognised as an early intervention and prevention strategy and must be invested in accordingly.
 - c. All FVPLS' must receive increased funding for their holistic service delivery in case management, counselling and early intervention prevention programs that build on women's resilience to reduce vulnerability to violence.
 - d. All FVPLS must receive funding through *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026– 2036* for their delivery of community-led specialist support services that help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families who are experiencing family, domestic, and sexual violence.
 - e. All FVPLS be appropriately resourced as a core part of their service function to gather and analyse internal data and feed that into accountability oversight for the Action Plan.
 - f. That FNAAFV is acknowledged as the peak specialist Aboriginal family violence prevention body and be funded appropriately.
2. Position prevention investment alongside sustained investment in the structural drivers of violence, including housing, and recognise Aboriginal-led healing as core prevention work.
 3. Place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership at the centre of the design of prevention and education programs intended for our women and their children, their families and their communities, and resource delivery through trusted local services in the settings where people gather.
 4. Recognise and remunerate cultural knowledge and lived experience within the prevention workforce, and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys through positive, culturally grounded approaches.
 5. Fund community legal education and prevention education for children and young people, delivered by FVPLSs and adapted to the age, cognitive ability and circumstances of the audience, including education on respectful relationships, alcohol and other drug use and mental health from the early secondary years.

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6. Begin prevention and early intervention in the early years, from birth to five, and sustain it across childhood and adolescence as part of a generational strategy for change, recognising that there are no quick fixes and that intervening only in the teenage years is often too late.

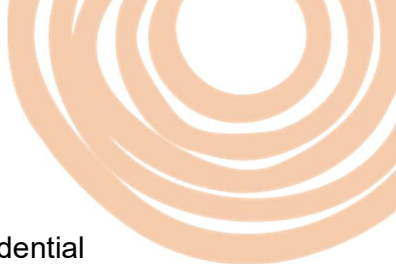
Services and support

7. Commit to a sustainable, long-term funding model for the FVPLS sector, as recommended by the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25^{vii}, and expand geographic coverage so that every Aboriginal woman can access culturally safe specialist support irrespective of postcode, consistent with Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
8. Adopt a minimum access standard so that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman can access culturally safe legal and non-legal support, from an FVPLS or another ACCO, within one hour or 100 kilometers of where she lives.
9. Develop a co-designed FVPLS workforce strategy, informed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander DFSV Sector Strengthening Plan, addressing pay parity, recruitment and retention, and training pathways.
10. Require ongoing cultural competency training and certification, not one-off induction, for mainstream and universal services that come into contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced violence, consistent with Priority Reform Three.
11. Require that government procurement and commissioning of DFSV services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities be undertaken in partnership with the FVPLS sector, so that new programs build on, rather than bypass, the existing specialist service system.
12. Adopt relational contracting as the default model for funding DFSV ACCOs, consistent with the Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and fund the full cost of service delivery, including transport in rural and remote areas and the infrastructure that allows ACCOs to operate.
13. That addressing misidentification is identified as a clear priority and that governments act to ensure that Aboriginal women are offered a warm referral to a FVPLS on first contact with police for a family violence incident.
14. Recognise the significant rates of non-Indigenous men using violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

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15. Ensure that the separation of sexual violence from family and domestic violence in the SAP does not fragment funding, referral pathways or service responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, where FVPLSs address both forms of violence together through one integrated service.
 16. Establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Notification and Referral Scheme, in line with Yoorrook Recommendation 12^{viii}, so mothers receive culturally safe, holistic supports at the earliest stage where family violence is a factor in potential child removal.
 17. Require government child protection workers to meet the same quality standards of practice as the non-government and community organisations they commission and work alongside, with independent oversight.
 18. Prioritise safe and stable housing and wraparound supports that keep mothers and children together, including appropriate emergency accommodation in regional and remote areas, transitional housing, and pathways from crisis accommodation into safe long-term housing.
 19. Fund a feasibility study into the resourcing of cross-jurisdictional coordination and real-time information sharing across police, ACCOs, DFSV services, legal services, child protection services, housing and emergency accommodation services and health, governed in line with data sovereignty principles, including identifying potential risks and unintended consequences.
 20. Develop a national framework for trauma-informed practice, co-designed with ACCOs, that defines what trauma-informed practice requires, who is accountable for delivering it, and how it is measured across DFSV, child protection, health and justice systems, and embed it within co-designed national standards for services that apply across jurisdictions.
 21. Strengthen communication and referral protocols between FVPLSs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Legal Aid Commissions, so clients with criminal and other out-of-scope matters are not left without support.

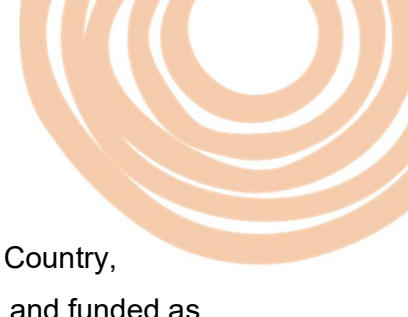
Supporting children and young people

22. Support children to remain with their mothers, and to ensure their mothers have access to safe housing, legal, safety, cultural and social and emotional wellbeing supports, as a stated goal of the Second Action Plan, with the aim of reducing child protection intervention and entry into out-of-home care.

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23. Deliver ACCO-led, child-centered and youth-centered responses that are connected to kinship and culture, and guard against the pathway from residential care into the justice system.
 24. Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in co-designing the services and information that affect them, and address emerging online harms through community-designed approaches.
 25. Require full implementation of all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection), and fund Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making so that families can identify kinship placements and safety supports before removal occurs.
 26. Commit the Commonwealth to using its levers, including the Closing the Gap architecture, the National Access to Justice Partnership and justice reinvestment, to hold jurisdictions accountable where child protection reforms weaken the Child Placement Principle or expand permanency and adoption pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

People who use violence

27. Fully fund, extend the duration and expand the scope of behaviour change programs to align with community needs, delivered by ACCOs and culturally competent mainstream services, including in regional, rural, remote and very remote areas.
28. Design men's behaviour change work to connect with alcohol and other drug treatment, mental health supports and with healing, rather than as a standalone intervention, and ensure behaviour change responses also reach non-Indigenous men who use violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
29. Resource safe reintegration, including prison in-reach and post-release programs delivered by ACCOs, and ensure victim-survivor safety is considered in bail and parole decisions.
30. End tough on crime responses as the primary answer to family violence.
31. Fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research relating to people using family violence against Aboriginal women to support reducing violence through earlier identification, more effective interventions and stronger system accountability. The research must be designed to capture data on serial perpetrators and be disaggregated so that the characteristics of perpetrators are recorded, including whether the perpetrator was non-Indigenous.



Recovery and healing

32. Invest in community-led healing that is grounded in connection to culture, Country, kinship and identity, available to the whole family and across generations, and funded as core long-term work.

Access to support

33. Improve access by funding and expanding Aboriginal community-controlled services, designing the system so that seeking safety does not trigger removal, resourcing outreach to communities that currently have none, and embedding warm referral and wraparound service models.

What is different in the Second Action Plan

Understanding the change in the Plan's direction matters for answering the consultation questions, because the change can create both opportunity and risk for our women and their children.

Targeted effort

The First Action Plan delivered hundreds of initiatives, expanded services and invested in developing a stronger evidence base. The Second Action Plan (SAP) is about concentrating national effort on the areas where the evidence shows limited, or uneven progress. The consultation paper acknowledges that national prevalence declines do not show how the First Action Plan is working for those at highest risk, and that national surveys do not adequately capture the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The 2025 Closing the Gap Annual Report also confirms that the most recent data for Target 13 (reducing family violence against Aboriginal women and children) remains the 2018–19 baseline data, and that no survey is currently being conducted or planned to collect updated data. Without current and reliable data, it is not possible to assess progress towards reducing family violence against Aboriginal women and children.

The [Consultation Paper](#) reiterates the alarming statistics that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are hospitalised for assault-related injuries at 32 times the rate of non-Indigenous women. Further, it records that they make up around 16 per cent of female homicide victims while being around 3 per cent of the adult female population. Police and court responses too often fail Aboriginal women through racism, victim misidentification, and genuine fear of child removal.



Children recognised as victim-survivors in their own right

The SAP recognises children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, rather than as secondary victims attached to a protective parent or as future perpetrators. FNAAFV supports this change. Often, the system's default response to a child's exposure to violence is removal. However, recognising children in their own right cannot become a pathway into out-of-home care.

This recognition should instead drive investment in Aboriginal-led programs, services and infrastructure that keeps Aboriginal children safe with their mothers, in their communities, and immersed in culture.

Sexual violence cannot be separated from family violence in our communities

The SAP treats domestic and family violence separately from sexual violence, on the basis that they have different prevalence, drivers and responses. FNAAFV understands the intent of this structural change, but it does not reflect how violence is experienced or responded to in our communities. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, sexual violence most often occurs within family and intimate partner relationships, and in the ACCO space the two are not treated separately. One goes with the other. FVPLSs respond to family violence and sexual violence together, through a single integrated, culturally safe and trauma-informed service, because that is how clients present and that is how support and healing work.

Sexual violence remains significantly under-reported by Aboriginal women, and the shame and fear, including the real likelihood of child removal suppresses reporting – which is compounded when a woman must approach a separate and unfamiliar service to disclose it. The separation of the two in the SAP must not fragment funding streams, referral pathways or service design on the ground, and must not silo sexual violence responses away from the culturally safe services our women already know and trust. ACCO-led design is essential to ensuring that both forms of violence are addressed safely, and the SAP should resource the integrated FVPLS response as the way both are addressed for our women and their children.

Emerging harms

SAP's focus on technology-facilitated abuse, coercive control and online harms is important. These harms land differently for Aboriginal women, their families and their communities with poor internet connectivity, language and accessibility barriers, frequent movement across jurisdictions, and existing mistrust of state systems. Responses must be designed with community rather than imported from mainstream settings.



The relationship with Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices

FNAAFV considers this the most important issue for the SAP to get right. Two national plans now operate in the same space. Strong alignment with each other will deliver coordinated progress.

Our Ways was developed through First Nations leadership and community voice, with the FVPLS sector central to its design. It is the authoritative statement of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities have said works. The SAP should position itself as enabling Our Ways on all matters affecting Aboriginal women, their children, families and their communities, rather than as a parallel or competing source of First Nations priorities. FNAAFV recommends the Second Action Plan give effect to this relationship through the following commitments:

1. Where the SAP touches Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, it should defer to Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices and adopt aligned actions, timeframes and language, rather than creating separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commitments which risk duplication or inconsistency.
2. The two plans should report against compatible measures, so that progress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is visible in both, and is tied to Target 13 of Closing the Gap Agreement ^{ix} and the associated Priority Reforms. Target 13 must include appropriate measures to ensure that progress can be robustly assessed and monitored.
3. Our Ways itself acknowledges that without building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence sector, its actions cannot be implemented. The SAP should commit to investment in the ACCO and FVPLS sector, rather than directing resources through mainstream services.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, including FNAAFV, should have a formal role in the governance and review of SAP wherever its actions affect our women and their children. This is consistent with shared decision-making under Priority Reform One.
5. The SAP must avoid mainstream commitments, particularly in child protection, policing and justice, that cut across the self-determined approach of the dedicated plan or increase the risk of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removal and criminalisation.



Responses to the consultation questions

Prevention

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

Prevention should be funded as core and recurrent work

Prevention and early intervention delivered by FVPLS sector should be funded recurrently and over the long term, for all age groups. Short pilot grants cannot build the trust or the continuity that prevention requires. A program that arrives, runs for a couple of years and disappears does not change the conditions that drive violence. It also breaks the relationships that community-controlled services rely on, because community sees programs come and go and learns not to invest in them. Recurrent funding allows services to properly plan, build trusted relationships in the communities they serve, to attract and retain skilled workers, and to stay long enough to enact real change.

Funding must include specific funding for workforce support and increase in line with inflation and SCHADS increases. There must be a dedicated funding stream from DSS to support FVPLS' non-legal and early intervention and prevention work. Early access to legal advice and representation must also be recognised as an early intervention and prevention strategy, and must be invested in accordingly.

Prevention and early intervention are most effective when they sit within the FVPLS service model rather than as a separate program stream. FVPLSs deliver early intervention and prevention alongside culturally safe wraparound supports, within an integrated system of legal and non-legal services. A woman may first come to an FVPLS for emergency housing or a child protection matter, with family violence sitting at the centre of those intersecting needs. Funding prevention through this model means prevention reaches Aboriginal women and children through a service they already trust, at the moment they are already engaged.

Prevention cannot be separated from the structural drivers of violence against Aboriginal women. The ongoing impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, poverty, housing insecurity and racism all shape the conditions in which violence is perpetrated against our women. There is a limit to the effectiveness of any intervention while a woman's basic needs are unmet. Prevention



investment must sit alongside sustained investment to lift living standards and improve the health, economic and wellbeing status of our women, rather than being treated as a standalone program that can succeed in isolation from those conditions.

Prevention should be designed and delivered by community

First Nations leadership and lived experience must sit at the centre of the design of every prevention and education program intended for our women and their communities. Programs that are designed by Aboriginal women and FVPLS and ACCOs are the ones that are culturally safe, locally relevant, and are trusted and taken up by Aboriginal women. Where prevention messaging is developed elsewhere and delivered into community without that leadership, it can miss its audience or, in the case of some programs, produce backlash. Self-determined solutions help change attitudes and behaviour.

Violence against our women is a gendered issue, and the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women must remain clear and centered in the design of prevention effort. At the same time, members want more men to stand up, call out violence and talk about it within their own families and communities, so that the message that violence is not how men behave comes from men themselves, rather than men remaining bystanders. Positive, culturally grounded engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys, alongside honest community conversation about the harm of violence whoever commits it, builds the conditions in which violence is no longer accepted.

Prevention should be resourced in the settings where people live, work, learn and gather. That includes schools, FVPLS', community events, sport, prisons, and online spaces. The most effective way to reach those settings is through trusted local services that already hold the relationships, rather than through new and unfamiliar providers. FVPLS organisations already deliver education and early intervention in many of these settings and are positioned to do more if funded accordingly.

The FVPLS sector has multiple examples of prevention and education programs that were designed with community and that are proven to work including Djirra's **YoungLuv** program for young Aboriginal women, aged 13 to 18. This is a half day activity facilitated by Aboriginal women to engage Aboriginal teenagers in a culturally safe space where they can talk about, reflect on, and better understand important issues affecting their lives. The workshop aims to equip young women with information and skills to challenge unhealthy relationships, and to practice positive and safe behaviours.



Another example of an effective prevention and education program is the NPY Womens Council's Youth Service. The **Youth Service** supports young Anangu people aged 10-25 living across 11 remote communities within the NPY lands. This includes regular after-hours recreation and diversion activities 5 days a week, one-on-one youth support to provide case management for young people and their families and regular targeted activities including on country bush trips and educational workshops.

The youth service also operates a number of additional projects to further support young people, including the Iwara employment readiness program, the Indigenous Youth Connection to Culture program (based in Pukatja) and Kulintja Palyaringkuntjaku, an initiative designed to improve knowledge around mental health, wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs and healthy relationships. The youth service works to help keep young people connected, build confidence, and create positive change in their lives. Through mentoring, activities, camps, workshops, and community engagement, the program helps young people strengthen identity, make healthy choices, understand respectful relationships and consent and work toward their goals.

Education for children and young people should be a particular focus of prevention effort. FVPLSs deliver community legal education in schools and other settings, and adapt that education to the age, cognitive ability and circumstances of the audience so that every young person can understand and use it. **Love Bites** (adapted program) is a school-based program delivered by many FVPLS, tailored to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 11–17 to promote healthy relationships, consent, and violence prevention.

This work should extend to the pressures young people themselves identify. Members report escalating alcohol and other drug use, alongside significant unmet mental health need, and education on these subjects should begin in the early secondary years. Prevention also reaches young people through the settings they already trust. Member services run Homework Centres and similar programs where young people build practical skills, including recording and producing music, and those settings hold the relationships through which prevention messages land. Cultural knowledge and lived experience are forms of expertise and should be recognised and remunerated as such within the workforce.

Prevention must also begin early enough to change the trajectory. Members are clear that there are no quick fixes, and that intergenerational change requires a generational strategy that starts with very young children, in the years from birth to five, and is sustained across childhood. Waiting until the teenage years to intervene is too late, because by then the harm of exposure to violence



is already established, and members observe that many people who use violence were themselves children who experienced it. Prevention in its most durable form also means growing strong girls and young women through education and employment, so that choice is built into their lives from the beginning.

Services and support

How can services and supports work better for people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family, domestic or sexual violence, including specialist FDSV services and general services such as health, education and housing?

Fund and sustain culturally safe, community-led services and workforce

A sustainable, long-term funding model for the FVPLS sector is the single most important service-system reform for our people. The Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership proposed exactly this, recommending expansion of the geographic coverage of FVPLS organisations so that women in every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community can access culturally safe, specialist support as soon as it is needed, irrespective of postcode. Presently the sector operates with significantly less investment than its mainstream counterparts, while carrying some of the most complex and highest-risk work in the country. Equitable, ongoing funding would allow services to reach the Aboriginal women who currently have no or only limited access to their services, and to plan beyond the next funding cycle.

Members have given that coverage a concrete benchmark. A woman should be able to access culturally safe legal and non-legal support within one hour or 100 kilometres of where she lives. Members describe this as the bare minimum rather than an aspiration, because the distance between a woman and a culturally safe service is often the difference between disclosure and silence, and because early access to advocates, for legal and non-legal support alike, is what allows matters to be addressed before they escalate. The SAP should adopt this standard and fund the sector to meet it.

This investment is also how the SAP gives effect to Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which commits governments to building the community-controlled sector. Expanding the capacity, reach and ability of FVPLSs to provide services is Priority Reform Two in practice, and sector investment under the SAP should be designed and reported against it.

Government procurement and commissioning practices are working against this investment. Members report that governments have funded new domestic and family violence programs for



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including through mixed Commonwealth and state funding, without consulting the FVPLS sector or the specialist services already holding the relationships in those communities. Commissioning that bypasses the existing specialist sector duplicates infrastructure, fragments the service system and weakens the organisations that community trusts. Procurement of DFSV services for our women and children should be undertaken in partnership with the FVPLS sector, consistent with the partnership commitments of the National Agreement, so that new investment builds on the system that exists rather than around it.

The value of the FVPLS model lies in its integration. Family violence is the cornerstone of the intersecting and complex needs our clients bring, and a client may first present for emergency housing, a child protection matter or a criminal matter. FVPLSs respond with legal and non-legal services under one roof, so that the person is supported across those needs rather than referred from service to service. Our FVPLS Members do not turn people away. Where a matter falls outside the funded scope, or where a criminal matter is not picked up by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal service or a Legal Aid Commission, Members either take the matter on where the client has nowhere else to go, or prepare a dossier of the client's circumstances for the receiving service so the client does not have to start again. This work fills gaps left by other parts of the legal assistance system and it is unfunded. Strengthen communication and referral protocols between FVPLSs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Legal Aid Commissions, so clients with criminal and other out-of-scope matters are not left without support.

It is often said that the service system is fragmented. Our sector is not fragmented. The FVPLS model is integrated by design, with legal and non-legal support delivered together under one roof and no one turned away. What is fragmented is the architecture around the sector: siloed program streams, multiple short-term contracts each carrying its own reporting, and funded scopes drawn so narrowly that gaps open between them. Clients experience fragmentation because the systems that fund and commission services create it. Reform effort should be directed at those systems, through the contracting and procurement changes described in this submission, rather than at restructuring the services that already hold the integrated model together.

A workforce strategy for the FVPLS sector, co-designed with the sector and informed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander DFSV Sector Strengthening Plan, is needed to address the workforce pressures our members report. These include pay that sits below comparable legal and community services and legal aid commissions, which makes recruitment and retention difficult, and a resulting loss of senior and specialist staff that leaves services more junior and less able to



grow. They also include the particular challenges of regional, rural, remote and very remote work, such as housing shortages, high costs of living, lack of childcare services, and limited access to training and professional development. A workforce strategy should address pay parity, training pathways, and support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in particular.

Mainstream and universal services that come into contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who're escaping DFSV, including health, education, housing and justice, should be required to complete ongoing cultural competency training and certification that is local to the communities they serve. A one-off induction is not enough. Cultural safety is built and maintained over time, and the services that our clients must navigate alongside specialist support should be held to a consistent and continuing high standard.

This requirement gives effect to Priority Reform Three of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, under which governments have committed to transforming mainstream organisations into culturally safe providers. The SAP should treat cultural safety in mainstream services as a Priority Reform Three obligation with reporting attached, rather than as an aspiration.

The specialist response also depends on the services that surround it. Members report serious shortages of alcohol and other drug treatment and mental health services in the communities they serve, to the point where people stop trying to access help at all, and describe regions with only a handful of fit-for-purpose detoxification beds and almost no transitional accommodation. A woman cannot be supported to safety, and a man cannot be supported to change, where the services that each of them needs do not exist. The SAP should treat alcohol and other drug, mental health and housing capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of the DFSV service system rather than as separate portfolios, noting that these intersectional issues are not unique to Aboriginal communities.

Fund the sector through relational contracting

How governments contract with the sector shapes everything described above. Governments typically fund ACCOs through classical provider contracting, an exchange of defined outputs for money that is short term, transparent and explicit, in defined areas such as health and education (Lavoie et al., 2010; Dwyer et al., 2009). That model is poorly matched to work that depends on trust, continuity and relationships. ACCOs have sought more control over their contracts in recent



times, with the aim of improving access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and of being more responsive to emerging challenges on the ground (Lavoie et al., 2010).

Relational contracting emerged in Australia in the early 1990s but has only ever been partially implemented. The research on its benefits is clear. A relational contract articulates and defines the relationship between the funder and the provider. It can accommodate complexity, it is based on trust, and it is flexible and cooperative, which is a far better match for self-determination and for responsiveness to local need (Lavoie et al., 2010). Its development and implementation extend beyond the life of a single project, providing a wider framework that builds sustainability and recognises social value and capital, connectedness and competitiveness, with risks managed together by funder and provider to reach shared goals on cost and time (Colledge, 2005). Relational contracting is likely to be more appropriate than classical provider contracting for DFSV ACCOs (Sullivan, 2010).

The adjustment is also overdue to run in the other direction. Over time ACCOs have built government requirements into their governance and have worked to fit in with government far more than government has worked to fit in with ACCOs (Curchin and Rowse, 2020). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations remain the most appropriate to deliver self-determined models of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Poirier et al., 2022), and the contracting model should be built around that fact.

The Productivity Commission, in its review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, recommended that governments adopt a relational approach to contracting to deliver greater collaboration between providers, government and service users (Productivity Commission, 2024). Relational contracting provides an avenue to achieve mutual goals, to assess outcomes and to identify opportunities to improve, and it aligns with shared decision making under Priority Reform One. The review also found that current funding falls short of the full cost of service provision, including transport costs in rural and remote areas and the investment in infrastructure that allows ACCOs to operate (Productivity Commission, 2024). The SAP should commit to relational contracting as the default model for funding DFSV ACCOs, and to funding the full cost of service delivery.



Trauma-informed practice needs a national framework

Trauma-informed practice is invoked across DFSV, child protection, health and justice systems, but there is no overarching Commonwealth framework that defines what it requires, how it is governed or how it is measured. In practice the term can describe anything from a genuine model of care to a line in a position description, and our members and their clients experience the difference. The SAP should commit to a national framework for trauma-informed practice, co-designed with ACCOs and informed by the practice expertise of the FVPLS sector. The framework should set out what trauma-informed practice looks like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who is accountable for delivering it, and how services are assessed against it.

That framework should sit within national standards for services. Every service that a woman or child encounters across the DFSV, child protection, health, justice and family law systems should be assessed against consistent national standards of culturally safe and trauma-informed practice, co-designed with ACCOs. National standards give the framework teeth, make quality visible and comparable across jurisdictions, and mean that the standard of practice a family receives does not depend on which service, or which state or territory, they happen to walk into.

Address misidentification of victim-survivors and of people using violence

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing violence are often wrongly identified by police and systems as the person using violence. Our members see this firsthand.

Misidentification has serious consequences. It can draw a survivor of DFSV into the criminal justice system, expose her to the risk of losing her children and family violence, erode her trust in services, and deter her and others from seeking help again. The Second Action Plan should commit to addressing victim misidentification directly, including through the system and policing reforms identified in the evidence. In response to the scale and consequences of this issue, FVPLS Djirra has commissioned the Centre for Innovative Justice to undertake research into preventing and addressing misidentification.

Misidentification is one of the system failures driving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women into prison. Members report that the number of Aboriginal women incarcerated has doubled since the adoption of tough on crime policies in their jurisdiction. In Victoria, the number of Aboriginal women in custody increased from 48 (in March 2025 - when Bail reforms were introduced) to 82 (as at June 2026)^x. Many of these women are victim-survivors who were not believed, who were misidentified as the primary aggressor, or who were criminalised by the systems that should have



protected them. Imprisonment then compounds the harm through the removal of their children, the trauma of custody, the health impacts of custody and women being disconnected from their supports, culture and community. Members also report systems abuse, where coercive control and threat are exercised through legal and administrative processes themselves, and responses to misidentification must recognise that full pattern.

Addressing misidentification must be identified as a clear priority and that governments act to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are offered a referral to an Aboriginal Community Controlled family violence legal service on first contact with police for a family violence incident. Culturally safe DFSV specialists are well placed to make sure that a woman's account is understood in its full context rather than judged on a single incident. Embedding those referral pathways across police, health and other services would improve both identification and the support that follows.

System responses must also recognise that a large proportion of non-Indigenous men use violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. Responses that assume otherwise misread the pattern of harm and can leave those who've experienced or who are at risk of violence unprotected. Members report that in some jurisdictions domestic and family violence continues to be framed as an Aboriginal issue. That framing is inaccurate, it obscures the violence of non-Indigenous men against our women, and it shapes police and service responses in ways that fail victim-survivors.

In Victoria, Djirra's data indicates a majority of the Aboriginal women they support experience violence from non-Aboriginal men. Behaviour change and accountability systems must be resourced to respond to non-Indigenous men who use violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and prevention directed at the wider community must take an intersectional approach that addresses racism alongside the gendered drivers of violence.

Keep mothers and children safe and together

This is, for our sector, the most urgent reform. Family violence is the primary driver of children entering the child protection system. At the same time, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers have a well-founded fear that disclosing violence will lead to their children being removed. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are far more likely to be in out-of-home care and receive child protection services at around eight times the rate of non-Indigenous children. That fear is rational, and it deters help-seeking at exactly the moment when support could make a



family safe. Services must be designed so that women seeking safety does not trigger the removal of their child/ren.

FNAAFV recommends the urgent implementation of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Notification and Referral Scheme, in line with Yoorrook Recommendation 12. The Yoorrook Justice Commission recommends that child protection automatically notify an Aboriginal legal service when a pre-birth report is made concerning an Aboriginal woman, or when a report about an Aboriginal child is substantiated. This would give mothers access to culturally safe legal and non-legal support at the earliest possible stage, when it is most likely to keep a family together. An effective scheme of this kind depends on there being resourced, quality, culturally appropriate services to refer families to, which returns to the need for a sustainable FVPLS funding model.

The intersection between family violence and child protection dominates our Members' work. Family violence is a key driver in the removal of children by child protection agencies across the country. Child protection matters make up around 37 per cent of member client matters, and they are among the longest running, with defended matters commonly exceeding two years. Members report that despite many positive statutory obligations and constructive policies, child protection departments regularly fail to adhere with these obligations and policies. Families are frequently not informed of their rights, child protection officers attend homes and remove children before Aboriginal mother's have received independent legal advice. Early notification and early legal assistance change those outcomes, which is why the referral scheme recommended above must operate at the earliest point of contact.

Accountability of government and the child protection workforces must be strengthened. Non-government and community organisations must meet accreditation and quality standards of practice in order to hold their funding, yet the government child protection workforce, which exercises the most coercive powers available over families, is held to no equivalent requirement. Government child protection workers should be required to meet the same quality standards of practice as the non-government providers they commission and work alongside, with independent oversight. The failures members report, including families not being informed of their rights and homes being attended without families having access to independent legal advice, are practice failures of exactly the kind that standards and oversight exist to prevent.

FNAAFV also draws attention to concerning policy and legal reforms in the states and territories towards permanency and adoption. In the Northern Territory, amendments to the Care and



Protection of Children Act were introduced with urgency and without meaningful consultation with ACCOs, Aboriginal communities or key stakeholders. Members advised that the amendments weaken the operation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle across the child protection framework, remove reunification priorities, and carry no implementation funding, in a system where around 90 per cent of children in care are Aboriginal. In Queensland, the Commission of Inquiry into the Child Safety System delivered its final report, *From Pressure to Purpose*^{xi}, in May 2026, with 52 recommendations.^{xii} Members welcome the recommendations on early legal intervention and on ending residential care for children under five, but hold serious concerns about recommendations that expand permanent placement and adoption pathways, and about the Commissioner's decision not to make a finding of systemic racism despite the substantial evidence before the Inquiry. Almost 6,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in out-of-home care in Queensland, many in residential care rather than kinship care, and foster carers are paid while kinship carers are not. Survivors of the Stolen Generations describe these reforms as retraumatising, and communities describe them as the beginning of another Stolen Generation.

The SAP cannot direct state and territory child protection legislation, but the Commonwealth holds levers and should commit to using them. The Closing the Gap architecture provides an accountability mechanism where jurisdictions move backwards against their commitments, including Targets 12 and 13, and justice reinvestment provides a funded pathway for prevention and early intervention. The SAP should commit the Commonwealth to full implementation of all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection), and to funding Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making so that families can identify kinship placements and safety supports before removal occurs, not after. In Victoria, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles and Statement of Recognition principle are enshrined in legislation s.7E, 13 and s.14 of the Children Youth & Families Act 2005.

Case Studies

* Any identifying client details have been changed to protect privacy.

North Australia Aboriginal Family Legal Service (NAAFLS) - Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making (AFLDM) Program

This program is culturally safe, run by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, and empowers families to make decisions regarding at-risk children, keeping them connected to culture and preventing out-of-home care. Rather than intervening after a child is removed,



NAAFLS offers an AFLDM service in the Big Rivers Regions. This allows families to lead decision making as a group, allowing them to find kinship support and address safety issues early. This model both empowers families to understand their rights and obligations in the child protection legal system and assists Departmental decision making through supporting families to gather and provide current, relevant child safety information. Dedicated Aboriginal convenors work with families to draft plans that meet the safety and wellbeing needs of the child. The AFLDM sits as a separate program to NAAFLS core legal services, however there is the ability to refer the family into the legal service where further advice is needed.

In one matter, a young mother experiencing family violence was supported through Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making. Her extended family identified protective supports, including a grandfather whose protective behaviour had initially been misread as aggression, and the child remained safely within family care. The child protection file was closed within four weeks. Without the program, the child would likely have been removed. The AFLDM program allowed a critical opportunity for families to lead decisions and for important information about how the family provided safety to be properly considered.

Djirra - Melinda's Story

Melinda*, an Aboriginal woman with three children, endured a series of violent assaults by her former partner over five years.

During one incident, Police attended and questioned Melinda and her former partner separately. Based on this very short assessment, Melinda was arrested, denied bail and remanded to Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. Melinda's children remained in the care of Melinda's former partner, their father.

Djirra's Prison Support Program met with Melinda at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and quickly ascertained that she had been misidentified by Police as the person using violence. The Prison Support Lawyer provided Melinda with initial legal advice and the Prison Support Paralegal Support Worker assisted with making warm referrals for other supports. Melinda was released from prison shortly afterwards.

Melinda was traumatised by the violence and her interactions with police, and so the Prison Support Lawyer linked Melinda in with Djirra's Case Management team and the Koori Women's Place (KWP). A counselling appointment was immediately made available for Melinda, and KWP staff provided wraparound cultural contact that is crucial to the safety and wellbeing of our women.

The Prison Support Lawyer assisted Melinda to urgently file proceedings for the return of her children, to apply for a family violence intervention order (FVIO) to protect herself and her children from her former partner, and to apply for victims compensation.

Over the next few months, the Prison Support Lawyer represented Melinda in the Family Court, Magistrates' Court and Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal, and Melinda's children were returned to her care, a long-term FVIO was granted, and victims compensation was awarded.



Melinda is still engaged with Djirra's services and is feeling safe, supported, strong in culture and positive about her future.

Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit (CAAFLU) - Family group conferencing

During the 1990s, Family Group Conferencing (FGC) emerged across the Northern Territory as a grassroots and policy initiative to keep Aboriginal children connected to their families. The FGC model aimed to honour traditional kinship networks and the [Aboriginal Child Placement Principle](#) by shifting decision-making power from Western courts back to Indigenous communities. The model recognized that Aboriginal child-rearing is a shared, collective responsibility. Conferences brought immediate family, extended kin, elders and lawyers together with child protection workers to collectively build safety plans. Instead of using conferences as an afterthought post-removal, the 1990s advocates pushed for FGC to occur at the very first sign of state intervention to divert kids from out-of-home care.

When an Aboriginal person visits from their remote community and wishes to have contact with their child who is in care, they approach CAAFLU, who they trust, to make the request of the NT Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF see CAAFLU as only a legal service and refer us to direct our request to their lawyers, which only makes the process longer, usually by a few days to a week or more. It is quicker for the clients to approach DCF directly, or the family do not get to see their child/ren. Often our Aboriginal peoples do not feel safe approaching DCF as there's an absence of cultural safety, language barriers and significant mistrust in government agencies.

The NT Governments Community Welfare Act 1983 and Aboriginal Child in Need of Care 2000 Act provided explicit directions that ensured that, where a child in need of care was Aboriginal, every effort was to be made to arrange appropriate custody within the child's extended family and this included an emphasis on consultation with Aboriginal welfare organizations. This is clearly not being undertaken presently and the process is at risk of worsening with the proposed changes to the Every Child Matters Bill. We need to learn from what has worked well in the past, including through legislative processes and build on this rather than repeating past injustices that led to the Stolen Generations. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, such as CAAFLU and their communities have the solutions – it is time that they are authentically listened to, backed, trusted and resourced by all Governments at the State and Territory and Commonwealth levels.

Member service - Interagency communication

An early childhood service raised concerns about a very young child and notified the child protection department, which contacted police. While inquiries were made, the parents were prevented from contacting their child, were given no clear information about the process, their rights or where they stood, and were not referred to legal advice. No police report or charges resulted, and the family was kept in the dark throughout. The matter fell outside the FVPLS's funded scope, but the service did not turn the family away and worked to connect them with the



right supports. The example shows how interagency processes can exclude the very families they concern, and why early notification, clear communication and referral to culturally safe legal assistance must be built into child protection responses.

Keeping mothers and children safe also requires safe and stable housing, and wraparound support that allows them to stay together. Supporting the safety of the Aboriginal mothers is the most effective way to keep children safe, connected to kinship and culture, and out of the care and youth justice systems. Crisis accommodation and longer-term housing options that do not separate a mother from her children (irrespective of their ages and gender) should be a priority of the SAP.

The housing shortage is where safety planning most often fails. Members report an acute lack of appropriate emergency accommodation in regional areas, public housing waiting lists of a decade or more in some jurisdictions, and very limited transitional accommodation, which leaves women with nowhere to go when a period in crisis accommodation ends. For many women, the only housing options on offer require leaving Country, and a choice between physical safety and cultural identity is itself a harm. Housing investment under the SAP should reach regional, rural, remote and very remote communities, provide pathways from shelter into long-term housing, and be designed so that safety does not require women and children to be removed from Country, kin and culture.

Supporting children and young people

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

FNAAFV supports the SAP's recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the safest and most effective way to give effect to that recognition is to support and resource their mothers and families, and to ensure that the system's response to a child's exposure to violence is support rather than removal.

Supporting mothers to remain with their children, and to access safe housing and legal services, and other safety, cultural and social and emotional wellbeing supports when they report family violence, should be a stated goal of the SAP, with the explicit aim of reducing child protection intervention and entry into out-of-home care. The risk of removal must be designed out. A child is safest when their mother is safe, supported, and able to keep them.



The SAP should guard against the pathway by which children removed into residential care are then drawn into the justice system. Our members see children with no prior contact with police acquire a criminal record after being placed in residential care. The child protection and youth justice systems are interwoven for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the connection between them requires coordinated attention, if the SAP's recognition of children in their own right is to be meaningful.

The scale of that connection is stark. Members report that between 55 and 60 per cent of children in youth detention have experienced family violence^{xiii}. National reform effort on youth justice cannot succeed while family violence, child protection and detention are treated as separate systems.

Children and young people with lived experience should be involved in co-designing the services, practice standards and information that affect them. They have distinct experiences, rights and insights, and responses are more effective when they reflect those voices. This is consistent with the SAP's own direction on engaging children and young people and should be delivered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through ACCO-led processes.

Emerging harms affecting young people, including technology-facilitated abuse and harmful online content, should be addressed through approaches designed with community rather than mainstream programs transplanted into community settings. Young people in our communities navigate these harms in their own context, and the responses that reach them will be the ones that come from people and services they trust.

People who use violence

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

Accountability cannot rest on incarceration alone. The justice system already imprisons our people at extraordinary rates without making communities safer, and an approach that relies on policing and prison as the primary response to violence will deepen the harms set out elsewhere in this submission, including the removal of children and the criminalisation of young people. Accountability that changes behaviour, supported by healing and delivered through community, is what reduces violence over time.

Members are direct about what their communities want. Communities want the violence to stop, whoever is committing it, and they want it to stop without families being separated. If children



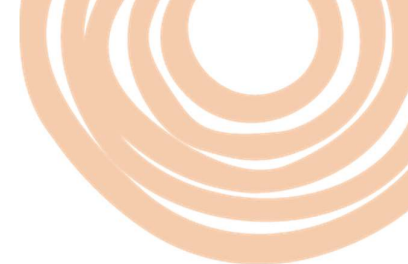
matter, violence must stop. Accountability and healing are not alternatives to each other. People who use violence must own the consequences of their actions while being supported to heal and change, and many of them were themselves children who experienced violence, which is why accountability must be paired with the generational prevention and healing work described throughout this submission.

Behaviour change programs delivered by ACCOs should be funded and expanded. At present these programs are scarce, particularly in regional, rural, remote and very remote areas, and many men who could be reached are never reached. Most men who use violence never enter a behaviour change program at all. Funding should support community-controlled programs where they exist and build them where they do not, so that accountability is available close to where people live rather than only in metropolitan centres or only through the courts.

Another consideration is establishing available safe places for men to access and stay at when they are at risk of using violence. This could be delivered in a similar manner to the Koori Night Patrols however a key difference would be the safe removal of the person using violence and relocating them to a safe place to rest and recover (away from home) and to be connected to healing programs and services. This would support family healing as not all women who are at risk of violence wish to leave their partners and homes. Some of our members have told us that the women in their communities just want some help for their men and help to heal their family together.

Programs that address violence in isolation from its drivers will achieve less than programs that address them together. Alcohol and other drug use, untreated trauma, mental ill-health and the ongoing effects of colonisation frequently sit alongside the use of violence. Men's behaviour change work should be designed to connect with alcohol and other drug treatment and with healing, rather than operating as a standalone intervention. Extending and integrating these programs, and resourcing them to work together, would make each of them more effective.

The evidence from members' communities is that punitive approaches are not reducing violence. Jurisdictions have toughened penalties for breaches of family violence orders, yet members see men cycling in and out of prison for those breaches without change in behaviour. In one regional prison, members report that 60 to 70 per cent of the men inside are there for family violence related offending. Prison is not operating as a deterrent, particularly for men who have been in and out of detention since childhood, and members observe that for some repeat offenders time in



prison carries status rather than consequence. Prison provides no healing and increases risk at the point of release.

The SAP should discourage tough on crime responses as the primary answer to family violence and should instead fund the community-led accountability, behaviour change and reintegration approaches that the evidence supports.

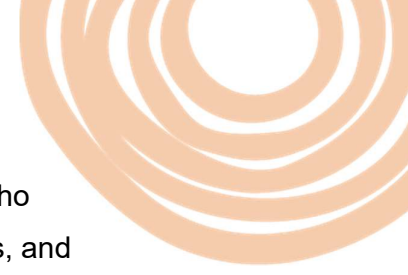
Case Study

Member service feedback - Stronger deterrents needed for repeat DFV offenders

In our community, an Aboriginal man has been incarcerated at least five times for DFV. When he is in prison, he has a stable and relatively good life and is elected as a team leader. He has a status when he is in jail and is well regarded by his fellow inmates and regarded as a 'hero'. There appears to be a lack of consequences for repeat offenders of DFV and whatever programs he has undertaken whilst incarcerated have not changed his behaviour and if anything, returning to prison life is a motivating factor for him to continue to use violence. We suggest that Courts should mandate that offenders must attend behaviour change programs rather than these being offered on a non-mandatory basis; and DFV offenders should not be elevated to leadership roles with the jail system. We also need strong mentors (of all genders) to visit the jails and call-out the effects of DFV on families and communities - this could be included as part of a mandatory suite of behaviour change education.

There is also a need for more research, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, into the drivers of violence against Aboriginal women and into which consequences reduce violence and which increase harm. Members ask a direct question: if the consequences are so severe, why is the violence not reducing? That research should examine the harm done when people are denied positive experiences of culture, family and opportunity, including where safety has required removal from Country, and it should involve the people closest to the system, including people in prison and those who work with them. A generational evidence base of this kind should guide where the SAP invests.

The points at which a man is on bail or parole are points of heightened risk for the women and children around him, and they are also points at which the system has a clear opportunity to intervene. Decisions about bail and parole are too often made without a full understanding of family violence risk, and without the supports in place that would reduce that risk on release. At the community level, this means resourcing services to support safe reintegration, including prison in-reach and post-release programs delivered by ACCOs, so that a man leaving custody is connected to behaviour change, healing and practical support rather than returning to the same



conditions with the same risks. It also means ensuring that the safety of those who have experienced or at risk of violence is considered in bail and parole decisions, and that women are informed and supported when a person who has used violence against them is released. FVPLS organisations, as specialist services that understand both the legal system and the safety needs of victim-survivors, are well placed to inform this work.

Recovery and healing

What would make the biggest difference in helping people and families to recover and heal after being affected by family, domestic and sexual violence?

For our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, recovery and healing are cultural processes. The biggest difference would be sustained investment in healing that is designed and led by community, grounded in connection to culture, Country, kinship and identity, and available for as long as it is needed rather than for the life of a short program. Healing approaches that draw on cultural strength work because they address the whole person and the collective experience of harm, including the intergenerational trauma that shapes how violence is experienced and carried.

Healing must be available to the whole family and across generations. Violence harms children, mothers, extended family and community, and recovery for one depends on recovery for the others. This is particularly important for children, whose recovery is bound up with the safety and healing of their mothers and carers. Funding healing as a wraparound, family-centred process, rather than as a service delivered to individuals in isolation, reflects how harm is actually experienced in our communities and how recovery actually happens.

Healing must also be understood as a whole-of-community undertaking. Violence and its drivers touch every part of a community, including young boys at risk of growing into the use of violence, older family members whose pressure or control within the family can itself be coercive, and women escaping violence. Members describe coercive control operating within extended families as well as within intimate relationships, and a generational healing strategy looks at all of these people together, because intergenerational harm stemming from colonisation, disenfranchisement and poor government policy sits across whole communities rather than within individuals. Australia has focused heavily on inquiry and apology. The investment must now move into genuine ACCO-led healing. Healing services led by FVPLS' and ACCOs should be open to every member of a community who needs them, and Commonwealth funding must flow to the FVPLS' and ACCOs



delivering that healing on the ground, with clear accountability for how much reaches community-controlled organisations rather than being absorbed by state and territory systems.

Healing depends on stability in the conditions of life. A woman cannot recover while they are unsafe, without secure housing, or in fear of losing their children. The foundations described elsewhere in this submission, safe housing, keeping mothers and children together, and freedom from the threat of removal and criminalisation, are also the foundations of recovery. Healing programs should be connected to those supports rather than expected to succeed without them.

Recovery and healing should be recognised and resourced as core work, not as an optional addition that is funded only after crisis response has been paid for. The FVPLS sector already delivers healing and recovery alongside legal and crisis support, and is positioned to do more if healing is funded as the long-term, central work that it is.

Case study

Thiyama-li Family Violence Service Indigenous Corporation – Supporting families with compounding issues to access integrated recovery and healing services

B is a 49 year old Gomeroi woman. She has been in a relationship with her partner, L, for approximately 30 years. She has 5 adult children. L has been using crystal methamphetamine, also known as ice. His drug use had changed his behaviour, and he had become aggressive and angry. During an argument, L punched B in the face and knocked her unconscious.

The Police and ambulance attended the property and B was taken to hospital. She received stitches to the inside and outside of her mouth. L was subsequently charged and incarcerated. B attended an appointment with a solicitor. An application was lodged with Victims Services for a recognition payment, financial assistance for immediate needs and counselling.

Sometime later, B started caring for 4 grandchildren. B's daughter had breached an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order and had been sent to gaol. B had three of her children in her care: Grandchild 1 (aged 8), Grandchild 2 (aged 5) Grandchild 3 (aged 3). B was also caring for another daughter's child, Grandchild 4 (aged 9). B has resided at her current property for approximately two years. The property is small and has only one exit, being the front door. It has no back door, no carpet, no heating, no furniture and no cooking equipment. B and the grandchildren were sleeping on one mattress.

Our Client Support Officer (CSO) identified urgent welfare and housing needs. B was transported to Centrelink and financial support for care of the children was applied for. Our CSO assisted the client with the preparation of this paperwork. B did not have adequate nappies, blankets, clothes, shoes, pyjamas, heaters, furniture, bedding or food. Our CSO transported B to Salvos, Lifehouse and Vinnies to obtain these items and helped the client receive these items



into her home. A housing reference was prepared and sent to B's landlord requesting that B be transferred to a larger property. Applications were sent to other housing providers in the area.

Our client's legal, welfare and housing situation has been stabilised for the time being, however, our client will require ongoing legal and non-legal assistance.

Access to support

What makes it easier for people to access support or services related to family, domestic or sexual violence?

What makes it easier for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to seek help is the knowledge that the service is culturally safe, that it will not judge them, and that reaching out will not be used against them. Cultural safety is the single most important factor in access. Where a service is community-controlled, staffed by people who understand the community, and trusted not to set in motion the removal of children or contact with police that a person does not want, people come forward. Where it is not, they stay away, even when they are in danger. Funding and expanding community-controlled services is therefore not only a question of capacity, it is a question of access.

Fear of child removal is one of the largest barriers to access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and it must be addressed directly. As set out above, a woman who believes that disclosing violence will cost her children will not disclose. Designing the service system so that seeking safety does not trigger removal, including through the early referral scheme proposed in this submission, would do more to improve access than any awareness campaign.

Access also depends on services being physically reachable. In regional, rural, remote and very remote communities, support is often simply not available, or requires travel that is not possible. Outreach, including mobile and visiting services, and investment in the resources that make outreach possible, extends access to communities that currently have none. The funding and workforce measures described earlier in this submission are what make this reach achievable. Members also report that where services do exist in regional, rural, remote and very remote areas, they often operate without coordination, and women are left to navigate the gaps between them. Resourcing coordination across services in these areas is part of access, not an addition to it.



The way a person first comes into contact with the system shapes whether they ever come back. Warm, supported referral, where one trusted service connects a person directly to another rather than handing them a number to call, keeps people engaged at the moment they are most likely to disengage. Embedding warm referral pathways between mainstream services and FVPLS and other ACCOs, so that a person who presents to a hospital, a school or a police station is connected to culturally safe specialist support, would make access far easier and more reliable. Wraparound service models, where a person does not have to retell their story and renavigate the system at every step, hold people in support rather than losing them between services.

Conclusion

The Second Action Plan's move from breadth to targeted effort is the right one, but only if it follows the evidence to where outcomes are worst, and only if it works through the community-controlled sector rather than around it. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, that means three things. It means a clear and resourced relationship with Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices. It means prevention and services that are funded over the long term and led by our FVPLSs and other ACCOs. And it means a system that keeps mothers and children safe and together, rather than one that drives removal and criminalisation.

We have the answers, but our services are stretched. Investment must match the scale and urgency of the challenge, and our communities cannot wait another decade for change. FNAAFV welcomes the opportunity to work with the Department of Social Services to ensure the Second Action Plan delivers measurable progress towards Target 13 of Closing the Gap, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further.

End notes

For any further information, please contact FNAAFV on ceo@fnaafv.org.au.

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Appendix A: FNAAFV Member List



QIFVLS

Queensland Indigenous
Family Violence Legal Service



Ngaanyatjarra
Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council



Binaal Billa
Family Violence Prevention Legal Service



NAAFLS

NORTH AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL FAMILY
LEGAL SERVICE



Family Violence Legal Service
Aboriginal Corporation (SA)

Aboriginal
Family Violence
Legal Service

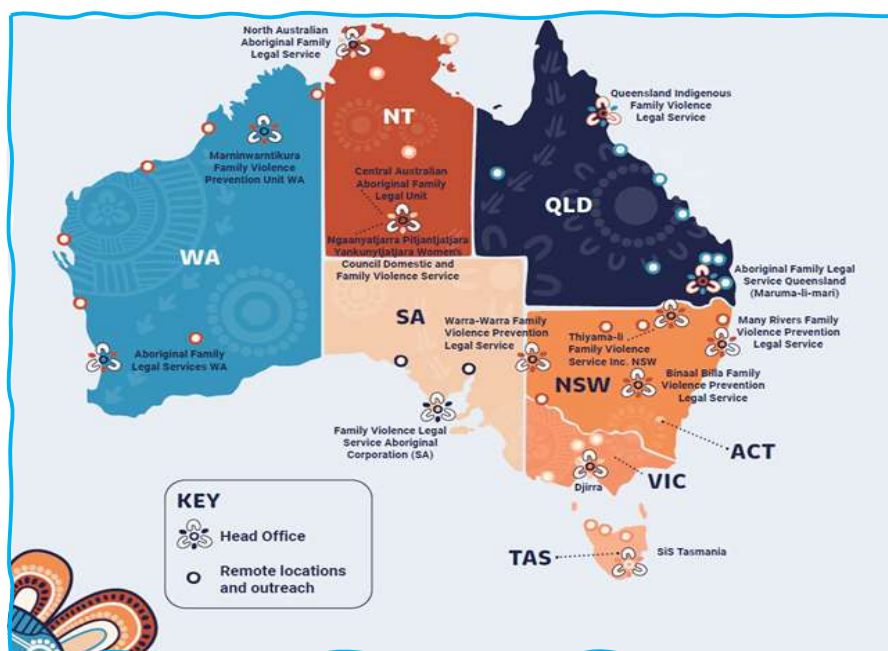


**Aboriginal
Family** LEGAL
SERVICES



MANY RIVERS
FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION
LEGAL SERVICE

- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Western Australia (Perth Head Office, Broome, Derby, Carnarvon, Kununurra, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Port Hedland)
- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Queensland (Toowoomba Head Office, Roma, Murgon and Gympie)
- Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Forbes)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation (Alice Springs Head Office, Tennant Creek)
- Djirra (statewide service with head office in Melbourne and 8 regional offices in Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Echuca, Shepparton, Morwell, Melton and Mildura)
- Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (Port Augusta Head Office, Ceduna, Pt Lincoln)
- Many Rivers Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Kempsey Head Office, Grafton)
- Marninwarnitkura Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Fitzroy Crossing)
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Domestic and Family Violence Service (Alice Springs, NPY Tri-state Region)
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (Cairns Head Office, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Bamaga, Thursday Island and Brisbane)
- Thiyama-li Family Violence Service Inc. NSW (Moree Head Office, Bourke, Walgett)
- Warra-Warra Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Broken Hill)
- North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (Darwin, Katherine and Nhulunbuy)
- SIS Tasmania (Hobart Head Office, Tasmania)



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- ^{iv} <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-action-plan-2023-2025>
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