



Wakwakurna Kanyini – SA Peak Body for Aboriginal Children and Families

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Wakwakurna Kanyini appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Second Action Plan Under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

This submission aims to support the development of a robust child-centred approach within the Second Action Plan by strengthening recognition of children and young people as victim survivors of domestic and family violence in their own right. Particular attention is given to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including those living in regional and remote communities, and the need for culturally responsive, community controlled and trauma informed responses that address the intersecting impacts of violence, colonisation and systemic disadvantage.

We welcome the State and Commonwealth commitment to ending violence against women and children and invite any further opportunity for dialogue towards implementation.

Yours sincerely

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Wakwakurna Kanyini, for Aboriginal Children and Families



Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children as Victims in Their Own Right

The Second Action Plan presents an important opportunity to strengthen Australia's response to family, domestic and sexual violence by explicitly recognising children as victim survivors in their own right. Too often, children's experiences of violence are viewed only through the lens of a maternal guardian's victimisation, resulting in service responses, policy frameworks and funding models that focus primarily on adult victim survivors while overlooking the distinct impacts on children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience family violence within a broader context of intergenerational trauma, colonisation, forced removals, systemic racism and ongoing inequity. Effective responses must recognise that violence against children is not only witnessed violence. Children directly experience fear, coercive control, displacement, disrupted cultural connections, educational disadvantage and long-term impacts on social and emotional wellbeing. They require dedicated recognition, culturally safe support services and opportunities to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them.

A key principle of the Second Action Plan should be that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are experts in their own experiences and active participants in their healing journeys. Child centred approaches must be embedded across policy, service design, funding and evaluation. Governments should invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's) to design and deliver culturally grounded programs that support children's safety, healing, connection to culture and self-determination.



Many Aboriginal families face significant barriers when navigating systems intended to support them. These barriers can inadvertently increase risk and distress for children. Common examples include:

- **Fragmented service systems**, where families must repeatedly tell traumatic stories to multiple agencies including police, child protection, courts, housing providers, schools and health services.
- **Limited coordination between systems**, resulting in children receiving inconsistent supports or falling through gaps between family violence, child protection, mental health and education services.
- **Child protection responses that focus on maternal responsibility**, placing pressure on mothers to manage risk while failing to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour and violence.
- **Cultural unsafety and mistrust of government systems**, particularly for children and families with experiences of historical and contemporary child removal.
- **Geographic disadvantage in regional and remote communities**, where specialist child trauma services are scarce or unavailable and families must travel significant distances to access support.



Child-Centred Policy Recommendations

To ensure the Second Action Plan delivers meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected by family, domestic and sexual violence, a child centred framework that recognises children victim survivors and participants in decision making processes needs to be adopted.

1. Recognise Children as Victims and Survivors in Their Own Right

Policy, legislation and funding frameworks should explicitly recognise children as direct victims of family violence, including where they experience coercive control, psychological abuse, exposure to violence, instability, displacement or threats against family members. Children's experiences should not be recorded solely through the victimisation of a maternal guardian or caregiver.

This recognition should be reflected in national outcome measures, service eligibility criteria and data collection processes, ensuring children's needs and outcomes are visible and measurable.

2. Embed Children's Voices in Service Design and Decision Making

Children and young people require safe, culturally appropriate opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their safety, wellbeing and recovery. This includes:

- Child inclusive risk assessment and safety planning.
- Mechanisms for children and young people to inform policy development and service design.
- Trauma informed engagement practices that enable children to express their experiences in age appropriate ways.
- Investment in Aboriginal led child participation frameworks that recognise the importance of family, kinship, community and culture.

Aboriginal children's views should be actively sought, rather than assumed through the perspectives of adults.



3. Establish Integrated Child-Focused Service Responses

Children frequently move between multiple systems including family violence, child protection, policing, education, housing, disability and health services. Governments should develop integrated pathways that reduce the burden on families and caregivers and improve continuity of support.

This could include:

- Single entry referral pathways.
- Information sharing arrangements that prioritise children's safety while reducing the need for repeated disclosure of trauma.

Children should not be required to navigate fragmented systems to access support.

4. Increase Perpetrator Accountability and Reduce System Burden on Mothers

Current responses often place responsibility on maternal guardians to protect children, while insufficient attention is given to the behaviour of perpetrators. Child centred responses should:

- Assess perpetrators as the source of risk.
- Improve information sharing regarding perpetrator behaviour.
- Expand programs that address men's use of violence.
- Reduce practices that inadvertently penalise mothers for the actions of perpetrators.

Children's safety is strengthened when accountability is placed where it belongs.



5. Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Across All Systems

Responses to violence should actively preserve children's connection to family, community, language, culture and Country. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle can guide interventions beyond statutory child protection and be embedded within family violence, housing, justice and health systems.

Conclusion

To achieve lasting change, the Second Action Plan should strengthen accountability across systems to listen to children's voices, increase Aboriginal-led service delivery, and measure outcomes for children separately from those of adult victim survivors. Success should not only be measured by reductions in violence, but also by improved wellbeing, cultural connection, healing and participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Ending violence against women and children requires recognition that Aboriginal children are not merely witnesses to harm or extensions of their caregivers. They are victims, survivors and future leaders whose voices, rights and cultural identities must be centred in every aspect of Australia's response.