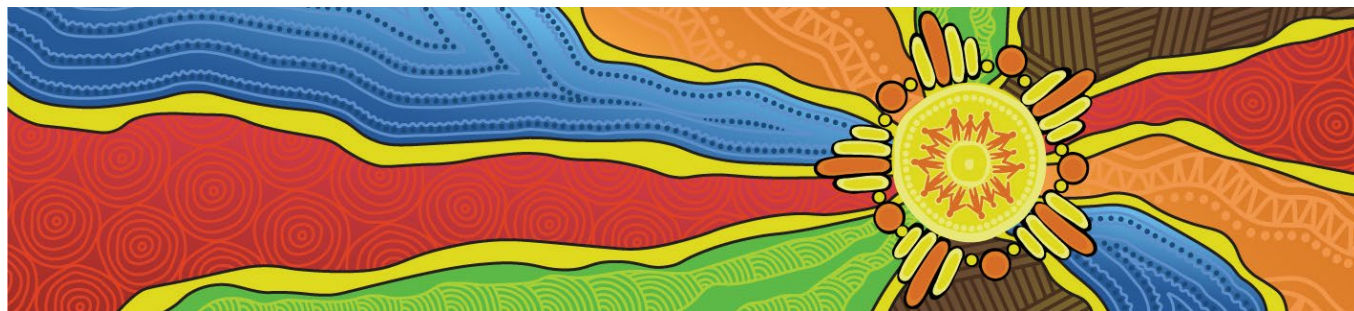




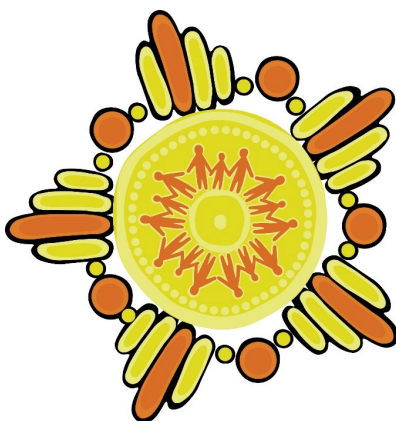
Discussion paper

Shaping Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031

under Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan to End
Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence

Draft for testing and validation



August 2026



Contents

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

1. About this discussion paper
2. Why testing and validation matter
3. Policy context and development settings
4. Proposed priorities for testing and validation
5. Discussion questions
6. How to engage and next steps
7. Reference and evidence sources informing development to date

Acknowledgements

Our Ways Strong Together acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters, skies, cultures and communities. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the strength, leadership and cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, children, families, communities, victim-survivors and people with lived and living experience.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations, specialist services, advocates, leaders, researchers and community members whose work, evidence and advocacy continue to inform the development of the Our Ways First Action Plan.

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ACCO	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation
DFSV SSP	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sector Strengthening Plan
FDSV	Family, domestic and sexual violence
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
National Plan	National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032
Our Ways plan	Our Ways Strong Ways Our Voices plan: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan to End Family Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036
Our Ways First Action Plan	Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031
OWST	Our Ways Strong Together
Safe and Supported	Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031
DFSV SSP	The Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Sector Strengthening Plan



1. About this discussion paper

This discussion paper is intended to test and validate priorities for the proposed Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 (Our Ways First Action Plan) by seeking stakeholder views on whether the identified priorities and approaches are appropriate, effective and responsive to community needs.

Feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence sector – the organisations, service providers, advocates, researchers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, representative bodies, national peaks, governments and others - will inform the development of the Our Ways First Action Plan.

Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036. The Our Ways First Action Plan will translate the 10-year vision into a focused and deliverable set of priority actions over the next five years.

This Discussion Paper summarises proposed priority areas for testing and validation with the sector. It explains how the priority areas connect to the five Threads and related national reform processes and provides focused questions to guide feedback.

Status of this paper

This is a discussion document, not the final endorsed Action Plan. The proposed priorities are options for testing and validation and will be refined through engagement, governance and shared decision-making.

2. Why testing and validation matter

The Our Ways First Action Plan is intended to move national commitments from words to delivery. The final Action Plan will identify priority actions that can be implemented well, with clear responsibilities, timeframes, funding pathways, measures to identify evidence of change and public accountability.

The central proposition is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not be made safer by systems that continue to fail, harm, ignore or displace them. Safety must be built through self-determination, culture, community control, healing, housing, justice, accountability and sustained investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions.

Testing and validation are therefore needed to determine which proposed priorities are most urgent, which will make the greatest impact, what is missing, and what should be included in the First Action Plan. This process will also identify where actions should be aligned with, or delivered through, related national action plans and sector-strengthening work.

Relevant unfinished or under-delivered commitments from *the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025* will be reviewed during drafting and incorporated where they remain necessary. This review will occur as part of developing the First Action Plan rather than through a separate post-endorsement carry-over process.

A focused delivery plan

The First Action Plan should contain a realistic and prioritised set of actions that can be funded, implemented and measured well, rather than attempting to implement every proposed package at once.

3. Policy context and development settings

The Our Ways First Action Plan is evolving within a complex policy landscape. Its development is influenced by the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, related national action plans, existing commitments, prior engagement processes, recommendations from previous reports and public submissions. The final Action Plan will identify where Our Ways should lead, where shared action is required and where alignment can reduce duplication and close gaps.

3.1 The five Threads

The five Threads identified in the *Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036* are the organising framework for the Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031. The five Threads reflect the interconnected foundations of safety and ensure the Our Ways



First Action Plan is not limited to crisis responses. Every action in the final Action Plan will be aligned to a primary Thread, while recognising that many actions will contribute to more than one Thread. The five Threads are:

Thread	Focus	Why it matters for the Action Plan
Thread 1	Voice, self-determination and agency	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities lead decisions about priorities, funding, implementation and accountability.
Thread 2	First Nations-led preventive and healing solutions	Community-controlled, strengths-based, preventive, early intervention, response, recovery and healing solutions are sustained and expanded.
Thread 3	Reforming institutions and systems	Governments and mainstream systems change policies, practices and accountability arrangements that contribute to harm or unsafe responses.
Thread 4	Evidence, research and data	Indigenous Data Sovereignty, ICIP, ethical evidence, community-defined outcomes and useful data support decision-making and learning.
Thread 5	Housing and financial security	Housing, financial safety and economic security are treated as essential safety infrastructure and foundations for long-term wellbeing.

3.2 Connected reform processes

The Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 is being designed to work with, but remain distinct from, related national child and family safety action plans and sector reform processes. These include consultations and/or development processes currently in progress in relation to:

- the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (National Plan);
- the Second Action Plan under *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported);
- the Second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under Safe and Supported;
- the Second Action Plan under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030; and
- the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sector Strengthening Plan (DFS SV SSP).

The National Plan Second Action Plan focuses on five key themes:

- victim-survivors of violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence;
- prevention and early intervention;
- children and young people in their own right;
- people who use violence; and
- system integration and workforce.

These themes will be woven throughout the Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 and create opportunities for coordinated action. Important intersections include children and young people; family safety and wellbeing; prevention and early intervention; cultural safety and connection; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led responses; service-system integration; workforce capability; accountability and outcomes; and support for families experiencing violence, disadvantage or system involvement.

The Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 will complement these reforms and weave these themes through its priorities to enhance coordination and effective services across the sector. The Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 will integrate the DFS SV SSP and the Action Plan to create a continuum of reform across the sector: strengthening workforce, organizational capacity and service delivery. The integration of the DFS SV SSP with the Our Ways First Action Plan will deliver focused actions to strengthen the community-controlled sector, support sustained reform efforts and deliver effective services for stronger, safer communities and lasting change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.



3.3 Evidence and policy context

The development of proposed priorities builds on existing evidence, including prior engagement processes, recommendations from previous reports, implementation experience and public submissions. It also reflects the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, by strengthening shared decision-making, building the community-controlled sector, transforming government institutions and improving access to data and information. The evidence reveals consistency in the principles which must inform the sector's priorities for action. Genuine change across the sector demands:

- sustained, flexible and full-cost funding;
- ACCO-first commissioning and community-led local solutions;
- stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and shared decision-making;
- culturally safe mainstream system reform and accountability;
- adequate resources for the full range of services across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing;
- the recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right;
- safe housing, financial security and practical support;
- culturally safe men's accountability, healing and behaviour change;
- better access to specialist sexual violence responses;
- disability inclusion and intersectional responses;
- stronger legal, policing, court, health, housing and child protection accountability;
- recognition of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, ICIP and community access to useful data;
- recognition of the unique needs of remote, regional, island, Torres Strait and cross-border delivery; and
- clear accountability by government for implementation.

See Attachment A which offers a synthesis of a recent review of the sector – and the impact of family and domestic violence on health and well-being. A reference list of evidence and policy sources is included at section 7.

3.4 Delivery settings

For the purposes of testing and validation, the working approach to delivery proposes two five-year action plans under the 10-year Our Ways framework: the First Action Plan for 2027-2031; and a second action plan for 2032-2036. Annual implementation workplans would provide flexibility to sequence delivery, respond to emerging needs and confirm detailed milestones.

The Outcomes Framework and Theory of Change for the overarching Our Ways plan are being developed in parallel to the First Action Plan engagements. Proposed outcomes, indicators and measures for the First Action Plan 2027-2031 will be developed following the Action Plan engagements; and will be subject to validation. They will be refined to reflect the final endorsed priority Actions.

Governance mechanisms are under discussion between Our Ways Strong Together and DSS. These include a proposal to develop two formal bodies: the National Council, a high-level shared decision-making and oversight body; and the Partnership Group, an implementation-focused group representing government and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) from each jurisdiction. Detailed membership, authority and accountability arrangements will be tested through engagement and confirmed through formal governance processes.

4. Proposed priorities for testing and validation

Sixteen proposed Priority Action Packages have been identified for consideration in the Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 from the evidence and work completed to date. They are presented as options for testing and validation, not as a commitment to include every package in the First Action Plan.

The discussion questions ask participants to identify which packages are most urgent, which will make the greatest impact and should be included in the final version of the First Action Plan 2027-2031, which will then be subject to endorsement – and negotiations for resources – across the Australian and state and territory governments. The packages are grouped below under the Thread to which they most directly relate, while recognising that several packages cut across multiple Threads.



Primary Thread	Proposed Priority Action Package	Proposed focus
Thread 1 Voice Self Determination and Agency	1. National implementation, governance and public accountability	Establish shared governance and implementation arrangements, clarify roles, support jurisdictional delivery and provide proportionate public reporting.
	15. Communications, transparency and community feedback	Provide clear, accessible information and feedback loops, including plain-language materials, community reporting and “You said, we did” updates.
	2. ACCO-first investment and sector strengthening	Shift power, funding and delivery to ACCOs; strengthen workforce, governance and infrastructure; and support genuine partnership and transition pathways.
Thread 2 First Nations-led Preventive and Healing Solutions	3. ACCO-led Community Safety and Healing Hubs	Support community-controlled, no-wrong-door models that connect FDSV, legal, housing, health, child, disability, financial and healing supports.
	4. Immediate safety and early intervention	Provide earlier practical assistance, safety brokerage, advocacy, culturally safe risk assessment and family-strengthening pathways.
	5. Children and young people’s safety, healing and voice	Recognise children and young people as victim-survivors and rights-holders, with dedicated healing, advocacy, safe spaces and meaningful participation.
	6. Culturally safe sexual violence responses	Strengthen specialist health, forensic, legal, counselling, healing and justice pathways for sexual violence.
	7. Men’s accountability, healing and behaviour change	Expand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led accountability, behaviour change, healing and support, with the safety of individuals, children, families and communities central.
	14. Remote, regional and Torres Strait delivery	Fund place-based outreach, transport, interpreters, workforce housing, local delivery, island-specific models and cross-border protocols.
Thread 3 Reforming Institutions and Systems	8. Binding system reform and accountability	Drive reform across police, courts, justice, child protection, health, housing, disability, education and family support systems, with clear responsibilities and reporting.
	9. Missing and Murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children	Advance truth, justice, data, family advocacy, coronial and policing reform, healing and public accountability.
	10. Disability-inclusive safety responses	Ensure accessible, culturally safe and disability-inclusive responses for people with disability, cognitive impairment, developmental needs and FASD.
	13. Digital safety and technology-facilitated abuse	Address online stalking, image-based abuse, coercive control, digital exclusion, safety technology and culturally safe referral pathways.
Thread 4 Evidence Research and Data	12. Indigenous Data Sovereignty, outcomes and evaluation	Strengthen Indigenous Data Governance, community data return, ACCO evaluation capability, baselines, indicators and community-defined outcomes.



Primary Thread	Proposed Priority Action Package	Proposed focus
	16. ICIP, research ethics and culturally safe evidence governance	Embed consent, cultural authority, benefit-sharing, ethical research and protections for stories, images, knowledge and cultural material.
Thread 5 Housing and Financial Security	11. Housing and financial security as safety infrastructure	Expand emergency, transitional and long-term housing, flexible brokerage, financial counselling and economic security supports.

Key issues for testing

Which proposed packages should be included in the First Action Plan? Which proposed packages should be sequenced through annual workplans? Which proposed packages should be progressed through connected action plans or other reform processes?

5. Discussion questions

The following questions are designed to focus discussion on the most important choices for the First Action Plan. Facilitators may adapt the prompts to the time available and the experience of participants.

1. What is the most important priority for safer and stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

- What emerging issues are having the greatest impact on First Nations communities today, and what action is needed to respond to these issues effectively?
- What is strong in the proposed priorities and should be retained?
- What is missing, unclear or not strong enough?
- What has changed since earlier engagement and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025*?
- What needs to happen first to make the greatest difference?

2. Which proposed Priority Action Packages should be included in the First Action Plan?

- Which packages are most urgent and would make the greatest impact?
- Which foundations must be established before other actions can succeed?
- Which packages can be combined, sequenced through annual workplans or progressed through another connected plan?
- Which previous commitments should be continued, scaled, redesigned or incorporated into these priorities?

3. How should the priorities align with the five Threads and connected national reform processes?

- Do the proposed packages give sufficient effect to each of the five Threads?
- Where should Our Ways lead, and where is joint or complementary action required?
- How should the Our Ways First Action Plan connect with the National Plan Second Action Plan, Safe and Supported Second Action Plans, the Second Action Plan under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse and the DFSV SSP?
- Where are there risks of duplication, gaps or unclear responsibility?



4. What governance, shared decision-making, investment and system reform settings are needed?

- We've heard in earlier consultations that centering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in solutions and accountability mechanisms is essential to developing effective, strengths-based prevention and healing approaches. What actions are critical to establishing these systems in the implementation of the Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031?
- Who must be represented in national, jurisdictional, regional and community governance?
- What authority and responsibilities should the tiered governance arrangements hold?
- What ACCO-first, long-term, flexible and full-cost funding principles should apply?
- Which systems require the most urgent reform, and what information should governments and institutions report publicly?
- You told us that we need to reform the FDSV sector and related systems (such as justice, housing and health) to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the next five years, what is the most important step we can take to improve the cultural capability and safety of non-Indigenous organisations?

5. What outcomes, measures, evidence and data arrangements should support the Action Plan?

- What would meaningful progress and success look like by 2031?
- Which community-defined measures of safety, healing, trust and system accountability should be included?
- What local and disaggregated data should be available to communities and ACCOs?
- How should Indigenous Data Sovereignty, ICIP, consent, ethics, benefit-sharing and community data return be embedded without creating unnecessary reporting burden?

6. What must be different for diverse communities, cohorts and places?

- What is needed for remote, regional, island, discrete, Torres Strait and cross-border communities?
- How should disability, age, gender, sexuality, language, digital access, housing, financial insecurity and other intersecting needs be addressed?
- What culturally safe responses are required for sexual violence, missing and murdered women and children, children and young people, and people who use violence?
- How can local community authority and place-based solutions be protected within a national framework?

6. How to engage and next steps

The engagement on the Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 is focused on testing and validating priorities with the sector.

Your feedback will be sought through four key ways:

- 1) By joining an person or hybrid targeted consultation session, led by Our Ways Strong Together and DSS
- 2) Through a virtual consultation targeted to specific themes, led by Our Ways Strong Together and DSS
- 3) Through one-on-one virtual discussion with Our Ways Strong Together team
- 4) Through written submissions, to the DSS Engage or Our Ways Strong Together websites

Engagement will be accessible, trauma-informed, consent-based and respectful of your intellectual property and your rights to sovereignty over your data.

For more information on the targeted consultation process or to provide a submission visit the DSS Engage website at [engage.dss.gov.au/\[update link\]](https://engage.dss.gov.au/[update link]).

If you have questions about the consultation process please email Zac Matysek at Zachariah.Matysek@ourways.org.au or Dr Suzanne O'Neill at suzanne.oneill@ourways.org.au



6.1 How your feedback will be used

- Your feedback will be analysed against the five Threads, the proposed Priority Action Packages and the engagement findings from the connected national reform processes (identified in section 3.2).
- The analysis will identify the most urgent priorities, areas of greatest likely impact, gaps, overlaps and actions that should be included in the final version of the Our Ways First Action Plan 2027-2031 for endorsement by the interim Cross-Plan Working Group prior to circulation through the Partnership Group for endorsement by Australian, state and territory governments.
- The Our Ways feedback will be included in a “You said, we did, we still need to do” summary, which will explain how feedback shaped revisions and identify matters that remain unresolved.
- Following endorsement by Australian, state and territory governments, and subject to resourcing, the Our Ways First Action Plan will guide implementation from 2027-2031, supported by annual implementation workplans and monitoring and evaluation systems, including public reporting.

6.2 Engagement Options

We encourage your engagement: please contact us to confirm your participation by clicking one of the options below:

Item	Details
Testing and validation period with the FDSV sector	18 th August – 25 th September 2026
Written submissions (online)	Through DSS Engage FirstNationsNationalPlan@dss.gov.au , or Through Our Ways Strong Together by email (see our website for more details)
Facilitated sessions (Place-based, hybrid and virtual)	Brisbane – 26 th August 2026 Sydney – 28 th August 2026 Canberra – 2 nd September 2026 Perth – 4 th September 2026 Torres Strait Islands – 21-25 September Virtual engagements be confirmed: - Systems & Policy Reform and Evidence - Remote Areas
Targeted conversations (one-on-one)	Contact Zac Matysek or Dr Suzanne O’Neill or Dr Jess Fox at Our Ways for details Zachariah.Matysek@ourways.org.au suzanne.oneill@ourways.org.au Jessica.Fox@ourways.org.au
Alternative formats and accessibility	
General enquiries	biljana.catanzariti@ourways.org.au

What success will look like

Success will mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, children, families and communities are safer earlier; ACCOs are funded to lead; children and young people are recognised as victim-survivors and rights-holders; sexual violence is named and responded to safely; people who use violence are held accountable and supported to change; housing and financial security are treated as safety responses; communities control and use their data; and governments and institutions are held to clear, proportionate and public commitments.



7. Reference and evidence sources

The proposed priorities in this discussion paper have been informed by the following policy, evidence and engagement sources. A complete reference list will be confirmed as the First Action Plan is finalised.

[Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan](#) to end Family Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036, February 2026

[Outcomes Report](#): Our Ways-Strong Ways – Our Voices, February 2026

[Public Submissions](#): Our Ways, Strong Ways- Our Voices February 2026

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025](#) including [Implementation updates](#)

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan](#) 2023-2025, DSS

[National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#), and development of its Second Action Plan.

[Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031](#) and associated action plans and development of its Second Action Plan.

[First Nations Women's Safety Policy Forum](#), Wiyi Yani U Thangani Initiative, Review outcomes, November 2022

[Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children Report](#), August 2024

[Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches](#): Australian Government Implementation Update, 20 February 2026.

[National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), July 2020, Australian Government

Draft Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Sector Strengthening Plan, July 2026

Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices



Attachment A: Synthesis of the Evidence: Policy Targets, Data and What Works

Outcomes 13 and 12 Under Closing the Gap

One of the critical policy stances reflected in the 2020 National Agreement on CTG is that the desired policy change is tied to 19 specific socio-economic Outcomes and Targets, under four overarching [Priority Reforms](#).¹ While FDSV crosses all CTG Outcomes, two are deemed particularly relevant to the implementation (achievement) of the Our Voices plan/strategy: [Outcome 13 and 12](#). **Outcome 13** seeks to ensure that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe** – and measured by Target 13: By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero. While **Outcome 12** seeks to ensure that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not over-represented in the child protection system**. Target 12 sets the measure: By 2031, to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent. Each target is supported by several sub-measures (indicators).²

The most recent Productivity Commission report on progress, the [2025 Annual Data Compilation Report](#), advises that Outcome 12 ‘is not on track to be met’, and that there has not been an adequate measure to assess Outcome 13. Target 13 has not been measured since 2018-19, when the (disputed) baseline was set. The reports observe that, nationally:³

- children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system – and is growing (12b&m)
 - 3 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC continue to live with relatives, kin or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers (12e)
 - 4 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC have a cultural care plan (12g)
- data is not available to assess progress for family safety under Target 13
 - hospitalizations for family violence are declining (13h)
 - more females than males seek assistance from SHS because of FV (13q).

A Draft Policy Discussion Paper (Langton and Smith, 2026, forthcoming) commissioned by Lowitja Institute reinforces this point in their examination of the literature on the impact of FDSV on health and well-being across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁴ Langton and Smith analyse the evidence through a multi-layered framework to determine the challenges in identifying the scale and nature of the violence; understand the structural determinants which drive violence; and map the essential elements of an effective response to violence. Their analysis points to several conclusions for determining how the sector might guide implementation of the Our Voices plan:

- there is a crying need for **systemic - and systematic – national data reform** – not tinkering around the edges, if we are to understand the true scale and nature of the problem – and assess the effectiveness of system-wide responses;

¹ The four Priority Reforms include: Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Share Decision-Making; Priority Reform 2: Building the Community Controlled Sector; Priority Reform 3: Transforming Government Organisations; Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level, noted in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, July 2020.

² See box 2.7 Data Compilation Report 2025, p44 for detailed summary. . Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report*, July 2025.

³ Attachment 4 Data Compilation Report 2025 assesses state and territory progress from baseline year by ‘worsening/ improving/ no change’ – even while noting there are currently no agreed state and territory targets: in relation to T12 it observes that NSW, ACT and NT have improved but Vic Qld, SA and Tas have worsened, with no change in WA; for T13, it notes no assessment possible against every state and territory. Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report*, July 2025.

⁴ Langton M., and Smith K., (Draft) A Policy Discussion Paper, June 2026, Executive Summary, Harm and Healing: Addressing the Family Violence Crisis and Impacts on the Health and Well Being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, p1, commissioned by Lowitja Institute



- sustained improvement in eliminating violence across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities demands **structural reform, adequately resourced, under First nations-leadership⁵ (or organisations)** which is informed by a multi-layered model of causation that understands how structural determinants, intergenerational trauma and immediate risk factors intersect to shape the experience of violence for all; and
- An effective response to FDSV engages holistic, integrated, systems-wide, culturally-responsive and trauma-informed change under the leadership of ACCOs and First Nations-led organisations as genuine partners in service design and delivery – not simply as cultural interpreters.

The paper makes several key points in relation to the scale and nature of the challenges preventing change, across what we know – and what must change:

1. The scale and nature of the problem:

- While available data on hospitalizations and assaults understates the true extent of the scale and nature of violence due to barriers to reporting and structural limitations in the national data system, family violence is a public health crisis.⁶
- There is no national data set which provides a coherent national account of family and domestic violence – instead, data collection is spread across multiple agencies, inconsistently defined and rarely integrated. This includes the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey; the Personal Safety Survey; administrative data sets - across police, health, child protection and homelessness – capture contact with system, not experience of violence (hence under-reporting); all data sets inconsistently identify indigenous people across all jurisdictions and data sets; and there is no routine linkage across data sets to assess cumulative/life course trajectories of harm.

This suggests the urgent need for systemic data reform – rather than tinkering at the edges.

2. Structural determinants:

- Langton and Smith argue that the current system – across health, justice housing and child protection - compounds the harm generated by family violence, rather than reduces it.⁷ The interaction of these elements of the system influences “whether violence is disclosed, when support is accessed and how long individuals remain exposed to harm”.⁸ Interactions with these systems both shape the duration, severity and health consequences of violence and redistribute risk: exposing individuals who seek help to harm such as child removal⁹, loss of housing or criminalization - delaying requests for support and prolonging exposure to violence.

⁵ Campbell et al offer a systematic review of the effectiveness of ACCHs in improving Aboriginal Health, Australian Health Review, 2018, April, 42(2) 218-226; see also Cubillo, E., 2026, Indigenous legal services continue to challenge Australia’s colonial justice system, Pursuit, UoM, Cubillo shows that legal services have significantly contributed to reducing indigenous over-representation in prisons.

⁶ AIHW data indicates that First Nations people are hospitalised for family violence at a rate 26x that of non-Indigenous Australians (2024); 72% of hospitalisations for assault on First Nations people in 2023-24 were due to family violence; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were hospitalised at 27x the rate of non-Indigenous females. The leading perpetrator relationship was a spouse or domestic partner in 56% of cases especially amongst those women aged 35-44; 44. Head and neck injuries were most common in jury type, followed by strangulation and suffocation – of concern given link to neurological damage and homicide. Over 34 years, between 1989-2023, 460 aboriginal and Torres strait islander women were 3 victims of homicide 97% knew their offender.; 72% were killed by a former or current partner. Family violence is also strongly associated with suicide and self-harm. Langton and Smith June 2026, p1

⁷ An assessment supported by the earlier findings of Nakata (2007), Rigney (2020), Bond and others (2018; 2020; 2020), who outline, in detail, the very real harm emerging from the failure to systematically examine/respect indigenous knowledge and experience in relation to access to and delivery of, education, health care, health promotion and broader indigenous affairs policy.

⁸ Langton M., and Smith K., A Policy Discussion Paper, June 2026, Executive Summary, Harm and Healing: Addressing the Family Violence Crisis and Impacts on the Health and Well Being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, p1, commissioned by Lowitja Institute

⁹ Langton and Smith (op. cit) argue that child removal addresses the consequence of violence, not the cause – and prolongs long- term trauma, grief and loss for children and caregivers. Evidence demonstrates that the ATSICPP, requiring



- While colonization they agree, can explain the history of intergenerational trauma - arising through forced removals, loss of language and culture, and institutional and physical and sexual abuse - its consequences have a contemporary expression through alcohol and other drug use, mental ill-health and related social and emotional well-being, disrupted parenting, victimization and perpetration of violence, poverty and housing insecurity. These factors must be addressed alongside the immediate consequences of violence, if we are to generate effective, sustainable, systemic change.
- Contemporary family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities “reflects both colonially-imposed patriarchal gender norms and racialized structural disadvantage that limits women’s access to safety and support. Standard feminist or anti-racism frameworks applied in isolation, fail to capture this intersection.”¹⁰

The implications of structural determinants for the response is multi-layered: the response must demonstrate it understands several critical factors:

- That the experience of violence on **children and young people** – as witnesses, victims, or as potential future perpetrators - is particularly profound and enduring.
- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are **over-represented, as victim-survivors and respondents, within the legal and justice system**. FVPL services – uniquely positioned to deliver essential combinations of legal and non-legal support in a culturally responsible, trauma-informed manner – are chronically under-funded and unable to meet demand across remote, regional and urban communities.
- That **pathways for men who use violence** are fragmented, under-resourced, inconsistently available, with limited access to culturally appropriate and sustained programs addressing the drivers of violence behaviour.¹¹

Langton and Smith’s analysis indicates that sustained improvement in eliminating violence across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities demands not only structural reform, adequately resourced, under First nations-leadership (or organisations) – but that the change-strategy must be informed by a layered model of causation that understands how structural determinants, intergenerational trauma and immediate risk factors intersect to shape the experience of violence. However, they argue, we do know what factors can work together to create change.

3. What we know works:

The evidence shows that improved health and well-being outcomes are associated not with individual programs in isolation but specific combinations of service design, system integration and structural conditions. An effective response to FDSV engages:

- ACCO and First Nations-led organisations are consistently associated with improved engagement, access to care and health outcomes – with higher levels of trust and continuity of care, compared to mainstream services. NSW and Victoria can offer examples.
- Outcomes are improved by coordinated pathways. Integrated holistic services models are associated with improved access and more consistent engagement over time. Individuals experiencing violence require multiple support pathways, across multiple domains, simultaneously. Not short-term interventions.
- Cultural safety is not optional, it is essential for determining whether services are accessed. Trauma-informed and culturally safe approaches are associated with improved service engagement and reduced re-traumatisation. This means programs incorporating cultural practices, identity and community connection are associated with improved social well-being.

children to be placed with family kin and community, has not been implemented adequately despite being national policy since 1987.

¹⁰ Langton and Smith,(op cit) p3

¹¹ Including weak accountability mechanisms and limited consequences for breachers of protection orders, which allows patterns of violence to continue unchecked. Perpetrators can wait six months before accessing AOD counselling services can leaving victims at continued risk.Langton and Smith, p6



- And, finally, while alcohol supply restrictions are a legitimate and effective acute harm reduction tool when called for by communities – but must be accompanied by investment in healing, housing, employment and community-controlled services. They cannot substitute for investment in social determinants.

Langton and Smith argue that we know what works: if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have adequate resources they can meet the challenges that lie in implementation – and systems reform. An effective response to FDSV engages holistic, integrated, systems-wide, culturally-responsive and trauma-informed change under the leadership of ACCOs and First Nations-led organisations as genuine partners in service design and delivery – not simply as cultural interpreters.