

Submission to the Draft Refreshed NT Domestic, Sexual and Family Violence Framework 2025-2028



Prepared by Our Watch

Date August 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge, and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is an issue for the whole community. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, the evidence clearly shows the intersection between racism, sexism, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.

About Our Watch

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. We are an independent, not for profit organisation established in 2013. All Australian governments, including the Northern Territory Government are members of Our Watch. Our vision is an Australia where women and their children live free from all forms of violence. We aim to drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes and social structures that drive violence against women.

Guided by our national frameworks, *Change the story* (2nd ed, 2021), *Changing the picture* (2018) and *Changing the landscape* (2022), we work at all levels of our society to address the deeply entrenched, underlying drivers of violence against women, especially those stemming from gender inequality. In addition to the Northern Territory Government membership of Our Watch, the Northern Territory Government and Our Watch also have a partnership that aims to develop the foundations of primary prevention and capacity in the Northern Territory.

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information, evidence or advice in relation to the issues discussed in this submission.

Please contact: Amanda Alford, Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence
amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au

Executive Summary

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Northern Territory Government in relation to the Draft Refreshed Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Reduction Framework 2025–2028. This Framework presents a vital opportunity to consolidate and build on previous efforts to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence, and to embed a long-term, coordinated and evidence-based approach to prevention.

It also presents an important opportunity to support the NT Government's efforts to ensure all Territorians are safe, respected and free from violence. The estimated cost of domestic, family and sexual violence to the NT was over \$450 million in 2020-21.¹ Investment in primary prevention is a key vehicle for reducing the overall fiscal impact of violence against women. The Northern Territory Government's ongoing commitment of \$36 million annually to reduce violence, support victim survivors, and hold people who use violence accountable provides a significant and welcome investment to support this work. Long-term, sustained investment is essential to maintain momentum, support innovation, and ensure prevention efforts reach across settings and communities.

Our Watch welcomes the alignment of the Framework to the pillars of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children with the retention of a strong prevention pillar and actions. Our Watch acknowledges the important ongoing commitment to the partnership with Our Watch and the primary prevention Community of Practice identified in the Framework. Our Watch also welcomes the commitment to an effective, evidence based and coordinated system including strengthened and aligned coordination, data and reporting, governance, accountability, quality, and performance.

Our Watch identified a number of opportunities to strengthen the primary prevention work already identified by the NT Government, as well as the Framework and to support its implementation, including:

1. Sustain long-term investment in primary prevention, including by growing ongoing annual investment in the Primary Prevention Grants Program to support practical and evidence-based action.
2. Prioritise the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait women and children by including and investing in an initiative in the primary prevention domain of the Framework for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead projects that prevent DFSV against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.
3. Continue to develop primary prevention workforce sector skills and capability by including the primary prevention workforce in existing actions that focus on workforce capability.
4. Prioritise Respectful Relationships Education to ensure a comprehensive approach to RRE is accessible for all schools across the Northern Territory, including through ongoing and long-term investment.
5. Embed intersectionality as a core principle in prevention initiatives to ensure approaches are inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, women with

disability, older women, women from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ communities, and are applied across the life course.

6. Strengthen governance and reporting under the Framework, including by clearly identifying ways in which primary prevention can be part of governance and reporting mechanisms.
7. Implement governance mechanisms that allow for sector-led, co-designed implementation processes that reflect the principles of self-determination and community leadership.
8. Strengthen the next Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan (MEAP) to align with national frameworks, address data gaps, support program-level evaluation and establish clear roles, tools and reporting systems that build evidence on what works.

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to continue working with the NT Government, including under the Framework, to ensure all Territorians are safe, respected and free from violence.

Opportunities for primary prevention

Long-term sustained investment in primary prevention

Our Watch commends the Northern Territory Government for continuing to prioritise primary prevention as one of the four domains in the refreshed DFSV Framework. This aligns with national efforts under the *National Plan*.

Primary prevention focuses on stopping violence before it starts, which contributes to ensuring all Territorians are safe, respected and free from violence. There are also economic benefits of primary prevention- for example, Australian Government modelling suggests that “every dollar invested in preventive health saves an estimated \$14.30 in healthcare and other costs”.² In a constrained fiscal environment, where investment decisions will be guided by the DFSV Framework, Our Watch encourages ongoing recognition of the role of primary prevention to complement and sit alongside the equally critical work and needs of early intervention, response and recovery sectors and services.³

The refreshed Framework is an opportunity to consolidate past progress and ensure long-term, sustainable commitment to reducing DFSV in the Northern Territory. Long-term, sustained investment is an important component in maintaining momentum, supporting innovation, and ensuring prevention efforts reach across settings and communities.

There have been a number of effective activities in the NT, including the Primary Prevention Grant Program and Community of Practice. Our Watch is concerned by the reduction in funding for the Primary Prevention Grant Program—from \$1.4 million in 2025–26 to \$0.25 million ongoing. Evidence suggests that grant programs are effective interventions in preventing violence against women and children. In addition,⁴ limiting the number of organisations able to deliver community-based prevention initiatives is likely to impact engagement in the NT Prevention Community of Practice, where grant-funded outcomes are shared to build prevention capability in the NT and which provides a forum which amplifies government investment in prevention across the Territory.

As a result, to increase reach, impact and engagement in prevention initiatives across the Northern Territory Our Watch suggests:

Opportunity 1: Sustain long-term investment in primary prevention, including by growing ongoing annual investment in the Primary Prevention Grants Program to support practical and evidence-based action.

Action to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

As the NT Government is aware, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experience disproportionate rates of violence, and violence that is often more severe and more complex in its impacts.

As the Framework recognises, there is an important need to ensure activities under the Framework and the Framework itself aligns with and supports the forthcoming *Our Ways Strong Ways Our Voices* National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan and contributes to the Northern Territory's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

There are some important commitments in the Framework, including ongoing investment in Aboriginal programs under Safe, Respected and Free from Violence grants program and the establishment of Aboriginal-led community based sexual assault services.

There are also further opportunities to commit to primary prevention approaches and initiatives that address the gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including by engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities to ensure local decision making, ownership and control are at the heart of prevention in NT.

To support this, Our Watch recommends the inclusion of a specific action in the Framework to invest in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead projects that prevent domestic, family and sexual violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Opportunity 2: Prioritise the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait women by including and investing in an initiative in the primary prevention domain of the framework for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead projects that prevent DFSV against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

This action would contribute to supporting the Northern Territory's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly Target 13, and aligns with the forthcoming Family Safety Plan. It also reflects the principles outlined in *Changing the picture*, which emphasises the need for prevention efforts to be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and informed by their knowledge, expertise and lived experience.

Include prevention workers in workforce development activities

Every government, sector, institution, organisation, community and individual have a role to play in preventing violence against women and children.

As a result, it is important to create the right foundations that will ensure primary prevention efforts are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, sustainable and effective in achieving the scale of change required to stop violence before it starts.

Our Watch encourages the Northern Territory Government to continue to build and expand prevention foundations in the implementation of the Framework, as part of building and maintaining a whole-of-community approach to preventing violence and more broadly, addressing the social context of gender inequality. Importantly, this includes developing mechanisms for a strong and skilled primary prevention workforce.⁵

Opportunity 3: Continue to develop primary prevention workforce sector skills and capability by including the primary prevention workforce in existing actions that focus on workforce capability.

Implementation of the Framework

Respectful Relationships Education

Our Watch commends the Northern Territory Government for the inclusion of respectful relationships education (RRE) as a key initiative under the prevention pillar of the draft refreshed DFSV Framework. In 2022, the Australian Government announced funding of \$77.6 million to states and territories and non-government school sectors to help schools invest in RRE tailored to their communities. The Consent and Respectful Relationships measure contributes to the *National Plan*, Recommendation 10 of the *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report* and Recommendation 59 of the *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence* which highlight the importance of all governments working in partnership to ensure school students receive age-appropriate RRE that embeds prevention approaches in a range of settings, including schools.

Our Watch understands that from this commitment, the Northern Territory Government received \$1.21m over five years to support the implementation of RRE within the Northern Territory Government schooling system, which is currently being used to develop a small-scale trial of a whole-school RRE approach in 8 schools across the Northern Territory, led by the Department of Education and Training. Our Watch has worked closely with the NT Government and Department of Education to support RRE in the Territory and welcomes the important steps and commitment the Department has taken. To build on this work and support implementation and evaluation of whole-school RRE in the Northern Territory, Our Watch suggests:

Opportunity 4: Prioritise Respectful Relationships Education to ensure a comprehensive approach to RRE is accessible for all schools across the Northern Territory, including through ongoing and long-term investment.

With an appropriate increase in Government investment for RRE, strong evidence-based foundations can be built to effectively sustain this work, including mechanisms for coordination and collaboration across Departments and agencies, building networks prevention and response sectors and mapping and alignment to existing policies and frameworks to ensure a multifaceted approach to primary prevention.

Our Watch's *Respectful relationships education: A blueprint for preventing gender-based violence through education systems* provides a practical, evidence-based framework for governments on how to successfully implement, coordinate and monitor an evidenced based approach to RRE. This comprehensive policy guide was developed in consultation with government and non-government sectors and other relevant peak bodies across Australia, including the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training.

Our Watch is committed to continuing to work in partnership with the Northern Territory Government to support the implementation of an evidence-based, whole-school approach to respectful relationships education.

Intersectionality

Our Watch welcomes initiative number 5 in the framework: Strengthen the support provided by disability and seniors specialist services to respond to DFSV and abuse experienced by older people and people with disability. There is an opportunity under the Framework to sustain an intersectional approach to primary prevention including:

Opportunity 5: Embed intersectionality as a core principle in prevention initiatives to ensure approaches are inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, older women, women from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ communities, and are applied across the life course.

This will ensure an intersectional approach is prioritised and aligned with the approach embedded in the National Plan.

Governance mechanisms and accountability

Our Watch welcomes the emphasis on a whole-of-government approach in the refreshed DFSV Framework, including the roles of key government agencies and the leadership of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in coordinating policy and implementation. The inclusion of mechanisms such as cross-agency accountability, ministerial advisory boards, and the proposed DFSV Partnership Forum are likely to support coordinated and transparent implementation.

Initiative 36 under the Framework includes a welcome commitment to strengthening the whole of government DFSV coordination mechanism to lead consistent and evidence-based DFSV policy, practice, service delivery and system reform and the key activities identified. This will support accountability, transparency, and alignment with national strategies, including the National Plan and the *Family Safety Plan*.

Our Watch is committed to working in partnership with the Northern Territory Government, the DFSV sector, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and others across the Territory to support the delivery of evidence-based primary prevention.

Our Watch encourages consideration of the ways in which primary prevention can be appropriately incorporated into and considered as part of governance and coordination including for example:

- Whole of government coordination that captures primary prevention initiatives and activities across portfolios, including for example education, sport, workforce development, children and families.
- Inclusion of primary prevention expertise as part of governance and relevant advisory groups and bodies.
- Establishment and operation of any advisory boards and working groups in ways that facilitate collaboration and operate in an integrated way connecting work across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.
- Mechanisms that enable the prevention sector, Aboriginal organisations, and community-led services to participate meaningfully in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Framework. This will ensure that the framework is not only well-governed but also grounded in the expertise of those working to prevent and respond to DFSV in the Northern Territory.

Importantly however, the reduction in investment for Whole-of-Government coordination from \$2.6 million in 2025-26 to \$1.5 million on an ongoing basis risks undermining the infrastructure needed to achieve a capable, culturally safe and adaptable sector.

As a result, Our Watch encourages investment to support governance and whole of government coordination under the Framework including new initiative number 36: Permanent DFSV Prevention mechanism for whole of system coordination.

Opportunity 6: Strengthen governance and reporting under the Framework, including by clearly identifying ways in which primary prevention can be part of governance and reporting mechanisms.

Opportunity 7: Implement governance mechanisms that allow for sector-led, co-designed implementation processes that reflect the principles of self-determination and community leadership.

Monitoring, reporting and outcomes

Our Watch acknowledges the Northern Territory Government's strong commitment to monitoring and evaluation of the DFSV Framework guided by the Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan 2018-2028 (MEAP).

Effective prevention of DFSV in the Northern Territory requires sustained and robust monitoring and evaluation at both population and program levels. This dual approach is essential to assess the impact of investment, identify what works, and continuously improve policy and practice. Both population-level and program-level monitoring of outcomes are necessary to build evidence about the impact and outcomes of investment, understand 'what works', adapt and continuously improve design and implementation of strategies and initiatives, and to inform policy and investment decisions.

Our Watch's *[Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring](#)* provides a framework for national monitoring and is a guide for policymakers, researchers, and advocates on measuring population-level progress towards the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. The *[Tracking progress in prevention](#)* report translates this into practice, providing both a baseline report on progress, and an example of how national monitoring could be done on an ongoing basis. In addition, Our Watch recently released a *[Report card: Tracking progress in prevention of violence against women](#)*, which provides key data updates on progress towards the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia. These documents provide clear examples of indicators that can be used to measure progress in prevention, accompanied by identification of the appropriate data sets for measurement.

To enhance accountability and transparency, Our Watch suggests that a refreshed MEAP could:

- Clearly articulate outcomes, indicators, measures, and data sources that will be used to monitor the most important markers of progress, as well as reporting mechanisms.
- Align with the *[National Plan Outcomes Framework](#)* and *[Performance Measurement Plan](#)* to enable consistent monitoring of primary prevention progress across Australia.
- Address critical data gaps, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Enable intersectional analysis through disaggregated data and makes visible multiple forms of intersecting discrimination and disadvantage that make violence against some groups more likely to occur.
- Establish mechanisms for transparent reporting and accountability.

There is an opportunity to strengthen primary prevention program-level monitoring and evaluation through a refreshed MEAP by ensuring that:

- Clear roles and responsibilities for data collection, monitoring, reporting and evaluation are established from the outset.

- Funded organisations are supported through standardised tools and resources to meet monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- Program evaluations are made publicly available to support dissemination of learnings to the sector. For example, sharing the impacts of the Primary Prevention Grants projects.
- Build evidence about what works to prevent violence against women across priority settings and with diverse cohorts, audiences, and communities to expand and inform emerging and promising prevention practice.

Opportunity 8: Strengthen the next iteration of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan to align with national frameworks, address critical data gaps, support program-level evaluation and establish clear roles, tools and reporting systems to build evidence on what works.

¹ Northern Territory Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Interagency Coordination and Reform Office. (2023). Mapping of current investment and activity to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory.

² Australian Government. (2024). A fit and healthy Australia.

³ Our Watch. (2021). Change the story, pp. 57-58.

⁴ See, for example: Fergus L. (2024). Evidence Review: Reducing and preventing violence against women: factors affecting impact, with a focus on multi-component, place-based approaches. Respect Victoria.

⁵ *Change the story* identifies eight key foundations for primary prevention, including mechanisms for workforce and sector development. See: Our Watch. (2021). Change the story, pp. 100-106.