November 2024

Submission to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan

Our Watch

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Watch

Preventing violence against women

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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 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, systems and social structures that drive violence against women and their children.

Guided by our ground-breaking 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. We work with governments, practitioners, and the community, at all levels of Australian society, to address these drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work and socialise.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch emphasises the importance of meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, leaders, and organisations to ensure that any decisions that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are made in accordance with the internationally recognised principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Our Watch is committed to playing our part in addressing racism, power inequalities and other ongoing impacts of colonisation, and to working in solidarity with Aboriginal and

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Torres Strait Islander peoples to support culturally safe, and community-owned and led solutions.

Changing the picture

This submission draws on evidence from Our Watch's *Changing the picture* (2018), a national framework to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children; and from the accompanying *Background paper* that provides the evidence base for the framework.

Published in 2018, Changing the picture was produced with various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. It was guided by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Advisory Group, informed by consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations around the country, and grounded in a literature review that prioritised literature and evidence authored or produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations, and services. In producing this framework, Our Watch's aim was to respect and reflect publicly available Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, and make central the voices, experiences, knowledge, ideas, decades-long activism, and solutions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Executive Summary

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan (National Family Safety Plan).The development of this Plan is an important milestone and presents a vital opportunity to provide a clear national framework focused on preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children that reflects the vision and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

It provides an opportunity to outline specific actions that address the root causes of violence, including colonisation, systemic racism, and gender inequality. It can also contribute to establishing or strengthening the necessary systems and structures to ensure that efforts across the continuum of prevention, early intervention, response, healing, and recovery are well-supported, effective, and sustained.

Drawing from the evidence-based framework, *Changing the picture*, this submission focuses on the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It is critical for prevention efforts to be integrated with the other three pillars of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032: early intervention, response and healing strategies, with all parts of the system working together towards the same goal.

This submission identifies key areas for consideration for the National Family Safety Plan, including:

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- Take a primary prevention approach that addresses the drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.
- Establish essential systems and structures that will support and sustain prevention efforts, ensuring the effectiveness and long-term impact of the National Family Safety Plan.
- Apply and embed key principles and approaches to the design, implementation and evaluation of policy and practice under the National Family Safety Plan.
- Ensure everyone has a role and responsibility.

To create social transformation on a scale that will create a safe and equal society for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, primary prevention must work at all levels of society and involve a range of stakeholders including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and organisations,
- Non-Aboriginal people, communities, and organisations
- Non-government organisations and services, and
- Governments and government agencies at all levels.

Crucially, this includes non-Aboriginal organisations and people, and the roles and responsibilities they have in addressing the way colonisation has embedded racist and sexist assumptions, structures, and practices into how these organisations operate every day. This approach recognises that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations should lead prevention activities that address the ongoing impacts of colonisation, non-Aboriginal people and organisations also have a role and responsibility to lead activities that address racism, indifference, ignorance and disrespect towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This submission was developed in consultation with the Our Watch internal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee, which brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board members, staff, and other key organisational representatives to consider and provide advice on Our Watch's work in relation to violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch would welcome the opportunity to provide further support in relation to the issues outlined in this submission. Please contact Head of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy, Regan Mitchell at regan.mitchell@ourwatch.org.au and Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence, Amanda Alford at amanda.alford@ourwatch.org.au.

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Statement from Our Watch Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee

If there were no barriers, how would your community address Family Domestic and Sexual Violence?

This statement has been developed specifically by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the internal Our Watch Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee.

In a world free of barriers, our community envisions leading through self-determination, shaping and delivering holistic, culturally rooted services that prevent family, domestic, and sexual violence (FDSV) from occurring in the first place. This vision goes beyond addressing the symptoms of violence; it actively dismantles root causes by embedding prevention as a core principle in all facets of our community life. Our approach prioritizes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership reaffirms kinship systems, and fosters healing from the impacts of colonisation, forced assimilation, and intergenerational trauma—factors that have long contributed to cycles of violence. Addressing these causes directly is essential to creating lasting change.
To achieve this, services must be trauma-informed, acknowledging the spiritual, emotional, and psychological wounds carried by our people. They must be culturally safe, designed with our community's values, traditions, and strengths as guiding principles, and responsive to the needs of both urban and remote areas. Prevention, therefore, is not isolated but embedded within our daily interactions, community practices, and support structures, emphasizing culturally sustained healing as a continuous thread.

At the heart of this vision are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), positioned as primary leaders in the design, delivery, and oversight of prevention and support services. ACCOs bring essential cultural knowledge and trust, making them uniquely qualified to provide services tailored to our communities. For ACCOs to thrive, they require sustained, long-term, and flexible funding that allows them to adapt and evolve, free from the constraints of short-term, restrictive funding cycles.

While solutions must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is vital to recognise the responsibility of non-Aboriginal people, particularly those in positions of power. Leaders across political, corporate, and social spheres must commit to addressing systemic racism, which underlies the treatment of our people and contributes to violence. Addressing these issues requires non-Aboriginal people to engage actively in truth-telling and Treaty processes, acknowledging that these are national, not solely Aboriginal, concerns. Genuine change can only occur when non-Aboriginal leaders commit to dismantling the structural racism that fuels violence and trauma within our communities.

The Role of Truth-Telling and Treaty in Prevention

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Truth-telling and Treaty are critical to healing and violence prevention within our communities. Truth-telling commissions allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share their stories, acknowledge historical and ongoing harms, and create a platform for justice and reconciliation. This process is not only about the past; it is an essential step toward healing, trust-building, and preventing future harm. Likewise, Treaty processes support self-determination, enabling communities to assert cultural authority and shape services that directly impact their lives. Together, truth-telling and Treaty serve as foundational elements in addressing violence's root causes and empowering our communities to heal and thrive.

Applying self-determination nationally, beyond local initiatives, also means prioritising Aboriginal-led leadership in governance, investment, and strategic planning, ensuring that prevention is integral across all policy and practice levels. As part of the National Family Safety Plan, there is a role for non-Aboriginal organisations to provide support that centres and empowers Aboriginal leadership in prevention efforts. This requires a commitment to resource allocation, policy alignment, and partnership, creating a system where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations lead prevention with mainstream systems in a supportive, facilitative role.

In this vision, our communities would live free from violence, in dignity, respect, and safety. This is a future where our cultural pride is celebrated, healing is ongoing, and violence—long a symptom of systemic injustice—no longer defines our communities. Through the unified efforts of self-determined communities and committed allies, this is the path we envisage toward a violence-free future.

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Introduction

Our Watch's vision is an Australia where all women live free from all forms of violence.

Our Watch is committed to taking responsibility for change and playing our part in addressing the root causes of violence. We are also committed to exemplifying the important role non-Aboriginal organisations need to play in preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, specifically when it comes to: identifying and reforming racist and discriminatory laws; addressing power inequalities in decision making positions; addressing racist social norms, attitudes and practices; challenging indifference, ignorance and disrespect towards Aboriginal people and cultures; and challenging the condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Examples of actions Our Watch is taking to uphold these commitments include:

- Our Watch has three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our Board, including the Deputy Chair. Our Board policy is that at least one Co-Deputy Chair will always be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.
- Our Watch has established an internal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee, which provides insight and direction for our work.
- Our Watch appointed a Head of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy in 2023 to guide our work and engagement in this area.
- Our Watch has several other dedicated roles.
- Our Watch has implemented a comprehensive Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and has been approved to move to a stretch RAP.

As an organisation with extensive experience and expertise in primary prevention, our submission focuses on what the national primary prevention framework *Changing the picture* says drives violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and the essential actions needed to prevent this violence.

Our Watch recognises that preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women requires a specific, dedicated approach to address the many intersecting drivers of this violence that stem from colonisation.

From invasion to the present day, the colonisation process has involved deliberate violence, in many different forms, against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This process has produced a series of highly traumatic impacts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities[1], impacts that continue today. Policies and practices of forced child removal, together with widespread institutionalisation, especially with the mission system, severely disrupted family and community relationships, parenting practices and cultural connections. Dispossession from land, in addition to economic exclusion, has produced disempowerment and

enforced dependency. Policies of protectionism and assimilation have caused a significant loss of culture, language and knowledge. This has caused serious disruption to the social and cultural norms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. High rates of incarceration — of children, young people and adults — further disrupt family and cultural relationships and cause lasting psychological damage for many.

The combined effects of this foundational violence, in conjunction with subsequent, ongoing colonial processes and practices, has created severely traumatic experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women, children and communities. This intergenerational trauma is one of the underlying drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly where this violence occurs within families and communities.

These traumatic conditions, compounded by gendered factors rooted in colonialism and the racism underlying violence perpetrated by non-Aboriginal men, contribute to the high levels of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

For many, this violence plays out in cyclical and intergenerational ways, perpetuating harm across generations.

The development of the National Family Safety Plan is an opportunity to affirm that the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is essential for the progress and health of the whole Australian community. This Plan can provide a framework to address the root causes of violence—colonisation, racism, and gender inequality—and guide actions to dismantle these harms. Most importantly, it highlights the shared responsibility of governments, organisations, communities, and individuals to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can live lives free from violence.

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Defining the problem

Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women stems from broad systemic factors, including colonial legacies, racialised power imbalances, and entrenched gender norms that condone violence and diminish women's independence. Addressing these intersecting factors through a gendered lens is essential to effectively reduce violence and foster a safe environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can thrive.

By centring women in prevention and response strategies, the Plan acknowledges the challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and highlights the broader societal responsibility to support safe, equitable conditions for all women and families within the community.

There is no one 'cause' of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, however *Changing the picture* outlines three underlying drivers:

1. The ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, which includes:

    - Intergenerational and collective trauma
    - Systemic oppression, disempowerment and racism
    - Destruction and disruption of traditional cultures, family and community relationships and community norms about violence
    - Personal experience and exposure to violence
    - Acceptance and normalisation of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

      - "For us, it's not just something that's just all in the past."[1]

2. The ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-Indigenous people and society, which includes:

    - Racialised structural inequalities of power
    - Entrenched racism in social norms, attitudes and practices
    - Perpetration of racist violence
    - Condoning of, and insufficient accountability for violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

    - "There's a kind of tolerance in the mainstream of violence against us."[2]

3. Gendered factors, which includes:

    - Gendered drivers of violence against women in Australia, including:
      - Acceptance and normalisation of violence against women
      - Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence
      - Stereotypes about masculinity and femininity
      - Disrespect and aggression towards women.

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- Additional gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including:
  - Intersection of racism and sexism
  - Impacts of colonial patriarchy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, gender roles, men, women and relationships.
    - "We're Aboriginal and we are also women!"[3]

Guiding Questions

Question 1: What are the key priorities and actions the Family Safety Plan should focus on to create real and sustainable change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families?

Include a primary prevention approach

While there is increasing awareness of the scale and severity of the problem of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, often the focus is on how to respond to its impacts. This focus is appropriate given the disproportionate rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and the need for improvements to and investment in crisis and response systems, services and processes.

However, while improving *responses* to violence will be an important component of the Family Safety Plan, it is critical that the Plan also include an explicit focus on *preventing* violence — one that identifies and addresses the root causes of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women — to ensure that the Plan helps to prevent this violence from occurring in the first place. Prevention should be integrated with early intervention, response, recovery and healing strategies to successfully work together to achieve long-term positive change.

Implement the actions outlined in Changing the picture

Changing the picture outlines the essential and supporting actions needed to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The actions have been informed by consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples around the country, and by a literature review that prioritised literature and evidence produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations, and services.

The actions in *Changing the picture* are broad and could serve as a guide for the design of dedicated actions under the National Family Safety Plan.

Each overarching action will have many different elements and applications. Because the causes of violence lie at many different levels of society, the Plan needs to consider prevention actions that address norms, structures and practices at all levels and in multiple settings and contexts. For example, work addressing racist attitudes or people's attitudes towards violence at the community or organisational level needs to

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be accompanied by legislative, institutional and policy supports that protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's human rights, promote racial and gender equality, and ensure accountability for violence and discrimination. It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and community-controlled organisations lead the design, implementation and evaluation of these actions both across policy and practice.

Essential actions

The following three essential actions together address the three underlying drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. These actions are deemed essential because without them violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women will not be sustainably reduced or prevented.

As part of the development of the National Family Safety Plan, Our Watch offers the following actions for consideration:

Action 1: Address the legacies and ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.

- Heal the impacts of intergenerational trauma, strengthening culture and identity
- Strengthen and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Implement specific initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, boys and men, and children and young people
- Challenge the condoning of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Increase access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Action 2: Address the legacies and ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-Indigenous people, and across Australian society

- Challenge and prevent all forms of racism, indifference, ignorance and disrespect towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures
- Address racialised power inequalities and amend discriminatory policies and practices including in laws and policies and the cultures, practices and structures of Australian institutions (justice, health and education systems for example).
- Challenge the condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Action 3: Address the gendered causes of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

- Implement intersectional approaches to preventing violence against women across the Australian population
- Challenge the condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women by challenging both racist and sexist attitudes and social norms
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's participation in leadership and decision making
- Challenge gender stereotypes, and the impacts of colonisation on men's and women's roles, relationships and identities

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- Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships between women and men, girls and boys
- Engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men to challenge harmful and violence-supportive ideas about masculinity and relationships

Changing the picture includes significant detail about how each of these high-level actions can be implemented (see pages 17-32)

Supporting actions

Changing the picture also points to a range of 'supporting actions' to address reinforcing factors for violence such as socio-economic stressors, health and psychological factors, and alcohol and other drugs. Such actions should be implemented in parallel with the essential actions, rather than in isolation.

Implementing the supporting actions will create a more enabling environment for the essential actions to prevent violence against Aboriginal women. For example, improving housing, health and living conditions can create a more supportive environment for healing and family strengthening strategies. This approach acknowledges that violence cannot be addressed in isolation and must be addressed alongside the social determinants of health.

Our Watch offers the following actions for consideration in the development of the National Family Safety Plan:

- Enable services to intervene in and respond to existing violence, including by:
  - Providing holistic wrap around support that increases safety and access to legal, financial, social and emotional supports.
  - Ensuring men's behaviour change programs target both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men.
  - Ensuring programs for non-Aboriginal men who have used violence incorporate anti-racism approaches and educate non-Aboriginal men on the significance of culture, identity and kinship on their current/former partner and their children.
  - Investing in evidence-based, culturally safe men's healing and behaviour change programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who have used violence.
  - Improving access to justice for victim-survivors.
- Address socio-economic inequality, disadvantage and exclusion, with a particular focus on:
  - Living conditions
  - Health
  - Housing instability, ensuring culturally safe housing measures
  - Poverty
  - Access to economic resources and opportunities
  - Unemployment and underemployment

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- Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's physical and mental health.
  a) Address harmful alcohol and drug use and harmful drinking cultures, including by addressing the underlying causes of harmful alcohol and substance use, many of which also lie in the traumatic impacts of colonisation. This should include, for example Addressing the relationship between harmful alcohol use and social norms relating to both violence and gender, with a particular focus on groups and settings characterised by harmful masculine drinking cultures
  b) improving the regulation of alcohol in ways that help to change harmful social norms relating to the intersection between violence, alcohol, gender and gendered social/organisational contexts.[4]

Work across the continuum

Primary prevention should be one element of a broader, comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing violence against women, which needs to involve a continuum of interdependent and interconnected strategies across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.

Early intervention, response, recovery and healing efforts are crucial, and Our Watch recognises the significant work of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in addressing and responding to violence within and against their communities. In practice, however, the boundaries between these areas often overlap, reflecting the complex realities on the ground. It is critical that these efforts are supported and accompanied by primary prevention work undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders to address all the underlying drivers of violence, through the actions described above. In this way, as part of a holistic approach, primary prevention can help drive sustainable, long-term change in the prevalence of violence. Without primary prevention, we can reduce prevalence and provide better support for victim survivors, but never truly address the underlying causes and work towards ending violence in our communities.

Engage men and boys

Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and non-Aboriginal men.[5] Given this, it is crucial to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys, as well as non-Aboriginal men and boys, to prevent violence against women.

Working with non-Aboriginal men and boys is key to addressing the legacies and ongoing impacts of colonisation across Australian society. This involves ensuring they understand their role, challenging all forms of racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures, addressing racialised power inequalities and challenging the condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Racism, and colonisation and its ongoing impacts continue to negatively affect and disempower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, including through structural

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violence and the destruction of kinship structures and cultural practices. While all individuals must take responsibility for their use of violence, research suggests some Aboriginal men may use violence in part to reassert a sense of power and strength lost due to colonisation and the resultant loss of their traditional role, identity and status.[6] *Changing the picture* notes the need to implement approaches specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys, and to challenge the impacts of colonisation on men's (and women's) roles, relationships and identities. Promising approaches include initiatives that: are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; are culturally safe and trauma-informed; and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to heal and reconnect with traditional cultural knowledge and Elders to strengthen their identity and sense of community. Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women should be involved in the development of prevention and behaviour change initiatives.[2]

Our Watch recently held a national consultation on working with men and addressing masculinities in primary prevention. Attendees, who included representative from ACCOs, expressed desire to learn more from organisations that work in an integrated way across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery – including opportunities to learn from examples in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Additionally, participants identified the need to better value the Indigenous evidence base, in Australia and internationally, and the constraints of short-term and uneven funding on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations.

Question 3: What does culturally appropriate and holistic service provision look and feel like?

The principles outlined in *Changing the picture* should serve as foundational guides for all prevention work, extending beyond direct service provision to include broader, systemic initiatives. Embedding these principles across all levels of prevention—from community programs to policymaking, governance, and funding—ensures a consistent and culturally grounded approach. This approach reinforces that effective prevention is not only about actions taken but also about the respectful, inclusive, and culturally safe ways in which these actions are designed, implemented, and evaluated. These principles are essential for shaping a sustainable, equitable impact on violence prevention and should be integrated into the core strategies and systemic work within the National Family Safety Plan:

- Self-determination: community ownership, control and leadership
- Cultural Safety
- Trauma – informed care
- Healing focused
- Holistic, including kinship and family integration

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[2] For a more extensive list of suggested features, see: Our Watch (2018) *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, pp. 21-22.

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- Prioritising and strengthening culture
- Using strengths-based and community strengthening approaches
- Adapting to different community, demographic and geographic contexts
- Non-Aboriginal organisations working as allies in culturally safe ways

Self-determination: community ownership, control, and leadership

Community ownership, control, and self-determination are fundamental to successful initiatives within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially in violence prevention. Community ownership means that prevention initiatives should be community-driven, addressing community-identified needs and priorities through locally developed solutions that strengthen relationships and trust within communities.

In alignment with the National Family Safety Plan, non-Aboriginal organisations play a crucial supporting role by enabling and facilitating Aboriginal-led leadership in prevention efforts. This means that mainstream systems should prioritise resource allocation, policy support, and infrastructure development that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to lead prevention efforts. These organisations have the cultural knowledge and trust necessary to deliver culturally safe services tailored to the unique needs of their communities.

Applying self-determination nationally in prevention work also requires governance, investment, and strategic approaches that ensure Aboriginal leadership is central at all levels, from local to national.

Where prevention work takes place within mainstream settings, efforts should focus on partnerships that recognise and respect the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Non-Aboriginal organisations should work collaboratively, guided by the principles of self-determination and cultural respect, to ensure that prevention initiatives are effective and community-aligned at every level—from program delivery to systemic support.[7]

Where there is no such organisation in place to deliver prevention work, the priority approach should be training and capacity building of existing community-controlled organisations to extend their reach or activities.[8] Where this approach is not possible, non-Aboriginal providers should partner with existing community-controlled organisations.[9]

Cultural safety

Cultural safety is defined as "an environment that is safe for people, where there is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity, and truly listening."[10]

To embed cultural safety as a foundational principle in all prevention activities, the National Family Safety Plan could require that design, planning, and implementation steps explicitly foster culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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For non-Aboriginal organisations delivering prevention programs or services accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there are opportunities for the Plan to highlight and encourage government and others to ensure their procurement processes value and embed cultural safety. This may help ensure that cultural safety is not an afterthought but is integrated at every level, including policy development, staff training, and service delivery.

This would underscore the importance of cultural safety as an ongoing, systemic commitment and contribute to accountability for maintaining culturally safe environments across all prevention efforts.

Trauma-informed care

Prevention work that seeks to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people directly should be undertaken by practitioners who understand the impacts of intergenerational trauma. They should have the knowledge, training and skills to recognise and effectively respond to the impacts of this collective and individual trauma in ways that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to manage its impacts constructively. Given the complexity and significant difficulties associated with this work, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners also need to be supported to focus on their own healing and wellbeing, and on ongoing self-care, which in turn improves their capacity to maintain employment and provide services to their community.[11]

When prevention work is conducted by mainstream services or agencies (such as schools or government departments), these organisations should develop cultural awareness and competencies to create a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Family Safety Plan could help encourage this requirement.

Healing focused

A healing focus should be an overarching principle of all work undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including primary prevention.

Culturally sensitive, culturally driven, culturally developed and culturally implemented healing programs are known to provide positive pathways forward for individuals and communities.[12]

Where prevention initiatives are culturally strong, developed and driven at the local level, and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and community-controlled organisations, the incorporation of healing is more likely to be possible. A healing focus supports the spiritual, emotional, and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, there are also instances where national or cross-jurisdictional coordination is essential, especially in addressing systemic drivers of violence that require unified approaches across regions. Our Watch suggests that the National Family Safety Plan adopt the four pillars of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032, and in doing so, consider the distinct work required under

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each pillar while also acknowledging that these pillars are circular and mutually reinforcing. Healing could serve as a continuous thread throughout all pillars, grounding prevention, intervention, and recovery efforts in a holistic approach.

Holistic, including kindship and family integration

It is important that the National Family Safety Plan is holistic, both in how it understands women's lives, and how it understands the needs of the community.

Our Watch suggests the Plan should adopt a holistic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's lives; the interconnectedness of both the drivers of violence and the many other issues they face in their lives, and of their physical, social and emotional, cultural and spiritual health and wellbeing.

Our Watch also suggests that the Plan could play a role in facilitating actions that adopt a holistic, whole-of-community approach that addresses the needs of women, men, children, young people and adults. While the goal is to ensure safety, respect, and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, the Plan should recognise that achieving this cannot happen in isolation. It should enable actions that reflect the interconnectedness of families, kinship networks, and communities. The Plan can help facilitate a recognition of the significant role of family and kinship and ensure that extended family networks are considered integral to the healing process. These structures must be embedded in the design and delivery of services, supporting a community-led, culturally informed approach.

There is an opportunity for the National Family Safety Plan to focus not only on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but also engage the wider Australian community, particularly non-Indigenous men with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners. In certain circumstances, holistic programs that bring families together to strengthen relationships and build strategies for violence prevention may be appropriate, provided they are chosen by women and offer a safe environment for them and their children.

The goal of preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should be achieved in partnership with many other initiatives, as part of 'the mutual goal of healing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities, breaking the cycle of violence and creating safer, healthier, nurturing environments for all'.[13]

Prioritising and strengthening culture

The primary aim of prevention activities is to reduce violence, but they must also focus on strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and enhancing connections to culture, as research shows that a strong cultural identity and connection to traditional practices are protective factors against violence. By fostering cultural pride, identity, and belonging, prevention efforts are more likely to achieve sustainable reductions in violence. Studies demonstrate that cultural strengthening, including

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community connection, is associated with improved social and emotional wellbeing, which reduces risk factors for violence. Healing Foundation's research in Growing Our Children Up Strong and Deadly[14] further emphasises the role of cultural connection in healing trauma and preventing future violence.

An approach that prioritises the cultural determinants of health and safety is fundamental to the National Family Safety Plan. This approach recognises:

- the unique protective factors contained within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities.
- the cultural strengths Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have developed — particularly regarding their deep understandings of the need for healing that brings all aspects of wellbeing into balance.
- the positive impacts of culture on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including identity, language, spirituality, and connection to country, family and community.[15]

This principle's meaning and application in each area or context should be determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As part of their basis in culture, any prevention approaches should be grounded in the principle that family violence is not part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, establishing that violence is a crime, is unacceptable within the community and that people's safety and security is the number one priority.

Case study: Tangentyere Council 'Girls Can Boys Can' Program

The 'Girls Can Boys Can' project is a primary prevention initiative of the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group, which provides early childhood and primary school educators with age-appropriate resources, activities and lesson plans. These challenge rigid stereotypes, showing healthy, fun, equal and respectful relationships between girls and boys, along with strengths of Aboriginal children, families and communities. Girls Can Boys Can has also been expanded to be used in community settings with adults. Girls Can Boys Can seeks to promote gender equality and create and disseminate strengths-based representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities to speak back to the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

Developed in 2019 by the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group, alongside educators from the Larapinta Child and Family Centre and Braitling Primary School in Mparntwe, funded by the Northern Territory Government and the Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, Girls Can Boys Can is a community-led, evidence-based project guided by a strengths-based approach, which acknowledges and celebrates the skills, knowledge, history, connections, and relationships of Aboriginal people.

Using strengths-based and community strengthening approaches

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There are opportunities for the National Family Safety Plan to draw on and seek to enhance the existing strengths and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and enhance the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their communities. This could be informed by the principle that the healthy functioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and cultures is the foundation for social and emotional wellbeing and resilience.[16]

In the context of prevention, supporting and strengthening families should be a priority — to provide the foundation for building strong and resilient communities. In turn, community resilience is incredibly protective for individuals — it supports people to be genuinely confident, responsible, individually resilient and self-regulating.[17]

Similarly, prevention work undertaken with individuals should aim to build self-esteem and resilience and strengthen people's ability to make positive choices about their lives, as this in turn will help build the capacity of the whole community to prevent violence.

Adapting to different community, demographic and geographic contexts

To be relevant to and effective in different community contexts, it will be important for the National Family Safety Plan to recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and provide a framework to support the implementation of diverse strategies that are tailored or adapted to suit different communities or contexts.

The National Family Safety Plan can also play a role in supporting decisions and activities that respond to and are relevant in diverse geographic settings. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in urban, rural and remote settings, in urbanised, traditional and other lifestyles, and many frequently move between these ways of living.[18] There are significant differences between remote and non-remote areas, particularly regarding their socio-economic and demographic profile, the kinds of social, cultural and community relationships and dynamics that are typical of each, and the often very different levels of infrastructure and services available.

A National Family Safety Plan designed to facilitate coordinated implementation across diverse geographical contexts should be grounded in an understanding of regional differences in dynamics, meanings, experiences, and contextual issues related to violence. To support this, the Plan could recommend establishment of communities of practice, provision of shared resources, and creation of a centralised knowledge base to prevent local teams from needing to reinvent solutions. The governance structures developed to support implementation of the Plan could also support this work. This approach would enable practitioners to collaborate, adapt resources, and share effective strategies, ensuring both coordination and flexibility to meet the unique needs of different regions.

Non-Aboriginal organisations working as allies in culturally safe ways

Where non-Aboriginal organisations or services, or non-Aboriginal workers, undertake prevention work that seeks to actively involve or engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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Islander participants, or reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, they should do so in culturally safe and respectful ways.

This requires non-Aboriginal organisations like Our Watch to break down the silos they work in, and instead prioritise the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, develop their cultural competencies, ensure cultural safety, and work in ways that are based on genuine and meaningful engagement and partnership. The aim should be to work with, not for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to be effective allies — recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's expertise and leadership, and supporting their goals and aspirations, including both their definitions of the problem and their development of their own solutions.

Question 4: How can governments and mainstream services best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including workforce and clients), services and solutions?

Preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children requires engaging the widest range of people and organisations to drive broad, lasting social change. This calls for establishing the right foundations—systems and structures that ensure prevention efforts are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, sustainable, and effective at achieving the scale of change needed to stop violence before it starts. Governments have a critical role in building these foundations, and the National Family Safety Plan has an opportunity to facilitate this foundational work.

There are eight foundations for primary prevention, and each includes a range of actions needed to support its effectiveness.[19] There is a significant opportunity through the development of the National Family Safety Plan to establish the systems and structures needed to support the primary prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

The key foundations for primary prevention are interrelated and at times interdependent. Together the eight foundations help to:

- Prioritise and sustain primary prevention efforts with evidence-based, outcome-driven programs.
- Ensure sufficient workforce and resources to meet the demand for effective prevention activities.
- Coordinate efforts across jurisdictions to avoid duplication and ensure investments are guided by known impacts and outcomes.

As part of the development of the National Family Safety Plan, Our Watch encourages consideration of the following foundational elements:

1. Ensure sustained political leadership

Sustained bipartisan political leadership is essential for successful prevention efforts, with political leaders setting clear expectations and maintaining momentum for

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addressing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Governments can lead change by creating environments that address the drivers of violence. There are also opportunities for government to address gendered and racial power imbalances in decision-making and investment.

There are a range of opportunities for governments and political leaders, including appointment of and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in leadership and decision-making roles, as highlighted by the Wiyi Yani U Thangani project. There are also opportunities in relation to funding and investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and the integration of anti-racism and Indigenous-led prevention strategies into policy and decision making the prevention of violence core to all government work.

2. Reform key policy, regulation and legislation

Policy, regulatory and legal reforms help drive broader societal change by shifting social norms, supporting and reinforcing prevention activities and contributing to systemic and institutional reform.[20]

There are a range of existing recommendations from significant national inquiries and reviews that can usefully inform priorities and actions arising under the Plan. These include, for example:

- The priority reforms and socio-economic outcomes outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

- The recommendations from the Inquiry into Missing and murdered First Nations women and children.

- The priorities and outcomes in the WiYi Yani U Thangani Change Agenda for First Nations Gender Justice.

- The recommendations from the Anti-Racism Framework: Experiences and Perspectives of Multicultural Australia.

- Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

- The outstanding recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaths in Custody report.

- Adherence to the principles of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In addition to these existing reform opportunities, there are a range of policy and legislative reforms that address the drivers of violence, support redistribution of resources, and transform the underlying causes and structures of inequality. Examples of these include:

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- Supporting, and providing long term funding for primary prevention efforts.
- Undertaking intersectional gender responsive policymaking across all jurisdictions and all portfolios to identify ways to advance equality, and improve the health, safety, wellbeing and economic independence of all women (for example, policy/legislation in relation to women's employment security, labor force participation, pay equality and parental leave).
- Challenging the structural and institutional condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including by reforming systems and institutions that, in their operation, may justify, trivialise, excuse or downplay violence against women, or blame the victim of violence. This includes reforming internal government systems and institutions to ensure that governments lead by example.
- Taking action to address other forms of systemic and structural discrimination and oppression that result in inequality for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people particularly where they intersect with the drivers of violence and play a role in exacerbating violence.
- Responsive budgeting to ensure the design of all budget measures is informed by an intersectional gender lens, to determine if they will benefit or disadvantage some over others.

The Anti-Racism Framework: Experiences and Perspectives of Multicultural Australia (2024)

The Anti-Racism Framework highlights how racism, intertwined with other forms of discrimination, permeates existing power structures and impacts marginalised communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In developing the National Family Safety Plan, we recommend considering or incorporating aspects of this framework to guide anti-racist principles within violence prevention efforts. Specifically, the Plan could adopt the framework's call for a whole-of-society approach to anti-racism, led by government, that holds private and public institutions accountable for addressing racism. Embedding these elements within the Plan can reinforce its focus on dismantling systemic barriers to safety, while fostering a zero-tolerance stance toward racism in all forms.

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3. Establish mechanisms for coordination, collaboration and quality assurance

Mechanisms that enable coordination and collaboration across jurisdictions, sectors and settings, are essential components of a national effort to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. There is an opportunity through the National Family Safety Plan to establish or further strengthen and support these mechanisms. There are real opportunities to consider the existing coordination mechanisms and structures under the National Plan, the Family Safety Plan and related national strategies and identify the most effective mechanisms to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

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One opportunity could involve, for example, the establishment, and effective resourcing, of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander national peak body or agency to address domestic, family and sexual violence. The establishment of a peak or agency would need to be designed, implemented and governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with support from allies and ally organisations.

Additionally, the continued engagement, guidance and advice of an expert First Nations Steering Committee would provide an important mechanism to support ongoing implementation, monitoring and review of the Plan.

4. Establish mechanisms for workforce and sector development

The success of primary prevention efforts relies in part on the size and strength of the national and jurisdictional workforces and the capacity of this workforce to plan, implement and scale-up initiatives. Governments have a vital role to play in establishing mechanisms to create this capacity and ensuring the National Family Safety Plan is supported by a workforce that can effectively implement the actions and deliver outcomes.

The workforce for preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women includes all practitioners—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—across primary prevention, response, early intervention, healing, and recovery, spanning sectors such as healthcare, legal services, government agencies, and community support. This workforce has a range of knowledge, skills and expertise, and often limited access to professional development opportunities, cultural awareness training, or information about how their individual efforts contribute to broader prevention outcomes.

There is a significant opportunity to develop a Workforce Strategy inclusive of the prevention sector, to support the implementation of National Family Safety Plan and National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032. A Workforce Strategy would ensure dedicated resources are invested in developing the skills, size and coordination of the workforce across all states and territories to ensure workers are not only best placed to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women but also ensure they are not perpetuating many of the factors that drive violence.

The Workforce Strategy could also:

- Identify targets for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
- Establish pathways into the sector for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Provide career progression opportunities and professional development pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Establish culturally safe workplaces and working conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Ensure appropriate sector governance and coordination.

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- Ensure non-Aboriginal workers who work with, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and children receive comprehensive cultural safety training.

Our Watch's resource, _Growing with change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women_ identifies the key elements to prevention workforce development.[21]

5. Build a robust evidence base, informed by ongoing data collection, research, practice and evaluation

There is a strong and existing evidence-base in relation to what works to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. However, like all social issues, it is important to continue to build, deepen and strengthen the evidence base to ensure that efforts remain responsive to changing social dynamics, emerging data and trends, and evolving needs.

Developing an evidence base should be strategic and guided by identified gaps in knowledge and needs. This action has two components, involving ongoing data collection, research, practice and evaluation. Together, these contribute to building the evidence-base to strengthen understandings of what effectively prevents violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (and what does not).

The first component requires fostering strong connections between policymakers, practitioners and academics and investing in collaborative partnerships. There is an opportunity through the National Family Safety Plan to consider investing in strategic research, data collection and data analysis into emerging issues, critical knowledge gaps, and population-level or cohort trends to further an understanding of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch supports further discussions with SNAICC to explore ways to build upon the existing evidence base of _Changing the picture_, incorporating contributions from the past six years. We are committed to working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to contribute, where appropriate, to continuing to build the primary prevention evidence base.

The second component of this action requires the development and/or implementation of evaluation frameworks for primary prevention activities to support knowledge building and sharing for mutual learning across sectors and stakeholders.

This could involve the development of shared monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks and resources. These tools would ensure the approaches, outcomes and learnings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led prevention programs are captured and contribute to the broader evidence-base. It would also enable effective programs to be scaled up and replicated in other communities, where appropriate.

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In addition to the development of supporting frameworks and resources, it is also important that there is dedicated funding to implement the tools as well as ongoing training and support for practitioners.

6. Establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms

It is critical that the National Family Safety Plan includes commitments to data monitoring and public reporting. This will enable the tracking of progress towards the intended outcomes of the National Family Safety Plan, as well as shifts in the drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Reporting also enhances transparency and accountability of government investment in prevention strategies.

Our Watch's resource, _Counting on change_ provides guidance for policymakers, researchers, and advocates on measuring population-level progress towards the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. Monitoring progress towards long-term goals requires periodic assessment of change along the way, with a focus on short and medium-term steps and achievements that indicate we are heading in the right direction.

Tracking progress in prevention provides baseline data against the indicators in _Counting on change_ to present a picture of the state of progress towards primary prevention of violence against women in Australia. Where possible, it also analyses the degree, nature and process of change over a decade (2010-2020).

The Outcomes Framework and Performance Measurement Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 draws on data from nationally consistent data sources to measure progress. Data reporting is hosted by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and will be updated annually. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap Implementation Tracker monitors progress towards commitment of parties to work in partnership towards Closing the Gap. This includes Commonwealth, state and territory governments, the Local Government Association and Coalition of Peaks. Commitments include reform and socio-economic targets, with data published on the Closing the Gap website and the Productivity Commission Dashboard. Government parties have also agreed to share quantitative and qualitative data, where appropriate.

As part of the development of the National Family Safety Plan, Our Watch suggests consideration of the following actions:

- Commonwealth, state, and territory governments establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of activities designed to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Evaluation learnings should be shared publicly or among parties to support evidence-based design and delivery of effective services and programs.

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- Commonwealth, state, and territory governments commission regular cultural audits of mainstream services and agencies delivering services and programs for, or that include, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- All levels of government ensure that indicators and measures related to the primary prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are integrated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- Commonwealth, state, and territory governments support a coordinated and consistent national approach to monitoring and reporting to demonstrate collective impact and population level change across primary prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery. This is work Our Watch is currently supporting and we encourage ongoing work to strengthen this coordination, monitoring and reporting, including with a particular focus on and consideration of principles of Indigenous data sovereignty.
- Commonwealth, state, and territory governments address data gaps through the Data Development Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 Outcomes Framework.

The above actions would continue to strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and reporting landscape that effectively monitors progress in preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.

Case Study: Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre – Fitzroy Crossing

The Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre in Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia, is a leading Aboriginal-led organisation delivering culturally safe, trauma-informed services to Aboriginal women and families affected by family violence. Known for its holistic, wraparound approach, the Centre addresses immediate needs such as legal assistance, housing, and mental health support, while prioritising cultural healing and on-country reconnection.

Marninwarntikura's model is deeply rooted in community-led solutions and self-determination, fostering Aboriginal women's leadership and enabling communities to drive their own healing and advocacy efforts. This Centre's success underscores the importance of sustained government funding and partnerships with mainstream services, ensuring its programs align with the unique cultural and social dynamics of the Fitzroy Valley.

Marninwarntikura exemplifies how the National Family Safety Plan can incorporate a primary prevention focus by supporting long-term, community-driven responses. While Marninwarntikura primarily addresses immediate safety and support needs, its foundation of cultural strengthening, leadership, and self-determination illustrates how prevention can be embedded within a continuum of support, helping reduce family violence over time.

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7. Ensure private sector, civil society and community leadership

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The private sector, community, and civic leadership have a shared responsibility to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. This is not solely an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—it is an Australian problem. Non-Aboriginal organisations and leaders like Our Watch must play an active role, but their leadership must be grounded in the guidance and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities, and leaders.

Our collective role should be to amplify the priorities and key messages outlined in the National Family Safety Plan, ensuring they are driven by culturally appropriate approaches that reflect community-led solutions. Non-Aboriginal organisations should work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal organisations, respecting self-determination and enabling Aboriginal-led responses to be at the forefront of efforts to prevent violence. Their leadership must be supportive, ensuring that Aboriginal voices are central, and that efforts to prevent violence are community-driven and culturally informed.

This leadership also can draw national attention – across the public, media, institutions, and all levels of government – to the importance of the work and help promote widespread participation by a range of stakeholders. They play a critical role in shaping community attitudes and setting an expectation of zero tolerance for violence within their spheres of influence. As outlined earlier in this submission, this should include requirements in relation to cultural safety.

In addition, it is important prevention strategies and plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream communities are underpinned by the understanding that preventing violence against women is everyone's responsibility including by outlining clear roles and responsibilities for non-government stakeholders.

There is also a role for private and not-for-profit sector workplaces to promote equal and safe working environments and to play a role in primary prevention– for example through investing in settings-based approaches to prevention and workplace initiatives such as Workplace Equality & Respect.

8. Support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

Building the capacity of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations is key to undertaking effective activities and delivering effective services that are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Ensuring sustainable, meaningful and adequate funding for ACCOs should underpin their work. In addition, it is also important that Commonwealth and state and territory governments continue to ensure equity of access to consultation and policy development opportunities, while keeping in mind consultation fatigue among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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Question 5: How should the service system respond to the intersectional needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities?

Intersectional analysis

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as a group, face unique issues by virtue of their social, political and economic status as Indigenous people. Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are not a homogenous group; in addition to colonialism and racism and the impacts of historical trauma, there are overlapping and compounding forms of discrimination and oppression that impact on some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including sexism, ableism, ageism, heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia. Factors such as cultural heritage, socio-economic status and geography mean different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities have different needs and priorities.

This means that in some contexts, gender inequality, racism and colonialism are not necessarily the only, or the most important, drivers of violence. Other forms of oppression (and their corresponding systems of power and privilege) can intersect to increase the prevalence and influence the nature and dynamics of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For example, for some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women and girls with disabilities, other drivers of violence, including ableism; racism and colonialism, including through intergenerational trauma; access to health services and supports; and socio and economic disadvantage can be significant.

Similarly, Brotherboys and Sistergirls (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who identify as transgender or gender diverse), may face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, including homophobia, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, transphobia, biphobia, racism, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism. These challenges often overlap with socioeconomic disadvantage and intergenerational trauma, significantly impacting their access to health, housing, and social support.

Intersectional approach

Just as an intersectional analysis of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is essential for understanding the issue, an intersectional approach is equally crucial in preventing it and should underpin the approach in the National Family Safety Plan Such an approach must not only account for the diversity of lived experiences and identities, but also actively address the intersecting systems of oppression, discrimination, power, and privilege that shape the social context in which violence occurs.

There is an opportunity for the National Family Safety Plan to highlight the importance of an intersectional approach being integrated into both policy and practice, at every stage of prevention efforts – from advisory functions, to design, implementation, evaluation and governance.

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For example:

- **Advisory functions:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQA+ people should be represented in key advisory functions to ensure the specific needs and approaches are integrated and addressed.
- **Design:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with disabilities should lead the design of actions impacting them in the National Family Safety Plan.
- **Implementation:** Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in remote areas should implement prevention programs tailored to their specific communities.
- **Evaluation:** Progress toward gender equality and anti-racism should be measured in Outcome Measurement Frameworks.
- **Governance:** Including representatives from a range of communities within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community increases transparency and accountability across governance structures.

Other areas for consideration

Climate change

There is a growing body of research that links natural disasters and crises to increased levels of violence against women.[22] Such situations, which are increasingly occurring because of climate change, produce a series of social stressors, including disrupted social networks, social isolation and limited or no access to support services, all of which weaken pro-social behaviours and increase the likelihood and prevalence of violence against women. This risk is most acute for women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.[23] Additionally, the impact of climate crises on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is unique due to their spiritual and cultural connection to the land.[24]

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani Change Agenda identifies 'we are at the heart of Country and climate justice' as a key outcome area for First Nations gender justice, emphasising the need to integrate Indigenous knowledges about caring for and managing Country into sustainability and climate policy.[25]

The growing body of literature about the interconnectedness of disasters, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and gender, emphasise some key recommendations. They include:

- Prioritising and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and leadership.
- Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is critical to disaster preparedness, response and recovery effectors.
- Recognising historical trauma and resilience and the restorative power of Indigenous healing frameworks to address collective trauma from disasters.
- Prioritising and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and leadership and sharing decision-making.

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- Establishing culturally safe and gender-informed evacuation and recovery centres.[26]

Online and digital space

The online and digital space poses complex challenges, with evolving technologies, shifting abuse tactics, and a fragmented governance system. Despite these complexities, Our Watch suggests that there is an opportunity for the National Family Safety Plan to address online safety to promote digital inclusion and ensure that spaces where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people socialise, learn, and work online are safe and respectful.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are highly active online, using digital platforms for connection, self-expression, and information.[27] While social media fosters community, it also exposes users to racist and sexist content that promotes aggression, dominance, and control, often through harmful networks like the 'Manosphere.' [28] Many digital platforms rely on engagement-driven models that amplify divisive content, making abuse pervasive.

Technology-facilitated abuse is expanding, including stalking, emotional abuse, image-based abuse, and online harassment. The National Family Safety Plan could align with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 to emphasise shared responsibility among public and private sectors in preventing this abuse. In line with Our Watch's recommendations to the Online Safety Act review, the Plan could:

- Include digital primary prevention initiatives targeting online harm.
- Ensure organisations have capacity-building support for monitoring and evaluating digital prevention efforts.
- Apply a gender and intersectional lens in Safety by Design for government and public digital systems.

Through consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, these recommendations could be tailored to effectively prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women online.

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