



25 October 2024

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
familysafetyplan@snaicc.org.au

Dear team

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan. We are writing to you as co-chairs of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (the Advisory Group).

The Advisory Group was established in January 2023 by the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, to provide advice on supporting progress towards Outcome 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement). Outcome 17 seeks to ensure that First Nations Australians have access to the information and services they need for informed decision-making regarding their own lives. Aligned to this is Target 17, which aims for First Nations people to have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.

In October 2023 the Advisory Group published its initial report, available at [Initial Report | First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group](#), which recommended practical measures to address access, affordability and digital ability for First Nations people. It is the Advisory Group's position that digital inclusion and Target 17 underpin other Targets in the National Agreement, including Target 13 – *by 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero.*

Overall, we recommend that the Family Safety Plan consider how domestic violence can be perpetuated through the use of withholding of digital technologies, the role that improved digital inclusion can play to mitigate and prevent harm, and the risks of technology-facilitated abuse. For example, in terms of technology-facilitated abuse, we understand that First Nations women report high levels of online threats, including harassment and stalking. Partly, this is related to the reliance in many remote communities on shared mobile phones and on community Wi-Fi which may only be available in public areas.

For example, the 2023 Wadeye community report conducted by the Mapping the Digital Gap research project noted a number of concerns, including:

- that in domestic violence situations, phones are being damaged by partners or other family members, forcing victim-survivors to buy new phones with money that could be spent on other necessities
- phones can be used by perpetrators to track family members.

In line with this, Recommendation 1.13 in our initial report recommended that government “establish a national device bank to provide households with refurbished devices”. This included recommending that government work with not-for-profit organisations to collect and donate mobile phones to victims of domestic violence, who may have fled without their belongings when seeking safety.

The Advisory Group also recognises the importance of reliable connectivity being available in women's shelters in regional and remote communities, as well as across the community, so that people can contact emergency services when needed. The 2023 Wadeye community report also noted that:



- although the government has provided outstations with one satellite phone per community, there is a lack of transparency around who has control over access to the phone, meaning that domestic and family violence is being underreported
- there was a significant increase in violence across Wadeye when perpetrators realised that no one could report domestic violence due to a lack of access to the satellite phone and poor connectivity and access to devices across the community.

We recommend that the Family Safety Plan emphasises the importance of government and service providers design and deliver programs in close collaboration with community organisations, so that they are responsive to the needs of each community. This place-based approach is central to our advice and advocacy to government so that policies deliver the best outcomes for First Nations people and communities.

We further suggest that the Family Safety Plan encourages telecommunications providers to provide appropriate assistance to victim-survivors, including addressing issues around cultural and language barriers for First Nations Australians. Our initial report recommended that the Government work with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to strengthen protections for telecommunications customers experiencing family violence in alignment with the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2023. As such, we were pleased to see Minister Rowland's announcement earlier this month around directing the ACMA to make an enforceable industry standard to ensure appropriate support for consumers experiencing domestic and family violence.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback. If you would like to discuss our submission further, please contact our secretariat at firstnationsdigitalinclusion@infrastructure.gov.au

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dot West".

Ms Dot West OAM
Co-chair
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lyndon Ormond-Parker".

Associate Professor Lyndon Ormond-Parker
Co-chair
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group