



4 November 2024

SNAICC
Suite 1, Level 8
36 Wellington Street
Yalla-birr-ang/Collingwood
VIC 3066

Dear SNAICC,

Re: Our Ways- Strong Ways- Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan (Family Safety Plan) Public Submissions

The Northern Territory Council of Social Services (NTCOSS) is the peak body for the social and community service sector in the Northern Territory (NT). NTCOSS's membership is comprised of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations, which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy.

NTCOSS acknowledges that we live and work on what always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures and country, and to Elders both past and present. We acknowledge the courage and dignity of those who stand up and say no to violence, and the FDSV knowledge and learning provided to us by Aboriginal people we work and live with in our communities.

NTCOSS advocates for and with the family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) service sector in the NT to improve safety, wellbeing, economic and social justice outcomes for individuals and communities impacted by FDSV. Recognising that the NT experiences the worst rates of FDSV in the country and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families are disproportionately impacted by this violence. We recognise that in the NT, this year alone, seven Aboriginal women have lost their lives to FDSV and that it is critical we do not let those Aboriginal women and their deaths be forgotten. We recognise that families and communities are left grieving their loss. We recognise the profound effects of FDSV throughout the NT and note how it intersects with other structural disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal Territorians.

NTCOSS represents approximately 100 members across the NT, including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), and organisations based in regional and remote areas. NTCOSS recognises the specialist knowledge of members and external stakeholders with expertise in matters relating to FDSV. In this submission, NTCOSS has focussed our input to matters relating to workforce and make the following recommendations for consideration in reference to our work with the FDSV sector in the NT and the specialist FDSV ACCO member organisations we work with.

Recommendation 1: Culturally informed, trauma-integrated healing approaches implemented across all services working with Aboriginal people

Our ACCO membership and members with a large Aboriginal workforce, especially in remote and very remote areas, report that many workers and services do not engage in appropriate levels of cultural safety, security and cross-cultural competency training, which impacts the effectiveness of their services, projects and programs. This is of particular detriment to the work performed by statutory or government services, where a historic and current power dynamic, and systemic racism often entrenches injustice and perpetuates trauma.

Our specialist FDSV and ACCO members advise that a culturally informed, trauma-integrated healing approach is critical to keep staff safe and avoid misunderstandings between staff and service users that can re-traumatise individuals and cause them to disengage from a program or service. Effective programs and systems take a healing approach with Aboriginal people recognise the impacts of ongoing colonisation and trauma.¹

In working in FDSV the idea of ‘safety’ must include physical, psychological, and emotional safety for clients, communities, and staff. Our FDSV and ACCO members advise that this approach is critical to keep staff safe and avoid quandaries between staff and service users that can re-traumatise individuals and cause them to disengage from a program or service.

Culturally informed, trauma integrated healing approaches to working alongside Aboriginal people also highlight that ‘safety’ and creating safe organisations and services is not just physical, it is also psychological, and emotional safety, and it is about prioritising safety for clients and whole communities, and all staff.²

NTCOSS recommends the development of a national workforce strategy which promote understanding of culturally informed trauma integrated healing approaches to work in FDSV. NTCOSS recommends the strategy include:

1. Support for staff who are personally impacted by FDSV.
2. Support programs that recognise clients’ experiences of trauma.
3. Committing staff to understanding trauma and its impacts, and to trauma-informed care practices and culturally informed healing approaches.
4. Ongoing culturally informed, trauma and healing-related workforce training and support for staff. Appropriate support activities might include regular supervision, team meetings and staff self-care opportunities.

¹ Rodaughan, J., Murrup-Stewart, C., & Berger, E. (2024). Aboriginal Practitioners’ Perspectives on Culturally Informed Practice for Trauma Healing in Australia. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 52(7), 1113-1141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00110000241268798> and [Culturally Informed, Trauma Integrated Healing Approach - We Al-li - Culturally Informed Trauma Integrated Healing Training](#)

² Ranjbar N, Erb M, Mohammad O, Moreno FA. Trauma-Informed Care and Cultural Humility in the Mental Health Care of People From Minoritized Communities. *Focus (Am Psychiatr Publ)*. 2020 Jan;18(1):8-15, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7011220/>.

Recommendation 2: National workforce strategy for the FDSV sector

The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, and family and community life.

The NTCOSS membership collectively report a significant crisis in workforce in services working in the social and community sector in the Northern Territory. This encompasses the FDSV workforce but also other crucial services. The characteristics of this workforce crisis are:

- Being unable to recruit appropriately qualified staff due to:
 - A national shortage of FDSV workforce.
 - An acute shortage of FDSV workforce with experience in working in remote and very remote communities.
 - Insufficient funding to be able to competitively remunerate vacant positions.
 - Lack of FDSV training and upskilling opportunities within the NT.
 - Negative media impacting views regarding the liveability of the NT.
 - An acute NT housing crisis impacting workforce considering moving to the NT from intra-state, inter-state and internationally. In some remote communities, the lack of housing prevents positions being filled.
 - An acute NT shortage of childcare places impacting recruitment of workforce with children who require care.

- Being unable to retain staff due to:
 - Insufficient funding and insufficient workforce to meet demand for services placing extreme stressors on current workforce.
 - The impacts of trauma and vicarious trauma on workforce:
 - The high prevalence of family violence across the community results in workforces that include people with their own past or current lived experiences of family violence. This trauma is exacerbated by work in the social and community sector.
 - Exposure to FDSV in programs, projects and with clients is a psychological hazard and work, health and safety issue. Exposure results in experiences of vicarious trauma, distress, dissatisfaction, hopelessness, ethical dilemmas, and mental or physical health problems.
 - Workers being threatened by users of violence.
 - Being unable to compete with remuneration offered in other sectors, including the government.

The challenges recruiting and retaining workforce create an under-resourced and crisis driven approach to service delivery that is not sustainable. Services also report having to recruit non-specialist workers to specialist FDSV positions because of workforce shortages and in some services, new graduates with little to no experience are working in remote and complex FDSV

service delivery contexts. In the NT there is no capacity for rapidly upskilling these generalist and inexperienced workers in safety focused, non-collusive and culturally informed, trauma-integrated healing approaches to FDSV which risks safety of workers and service users.

The Australian Government committed \$169.4 million over 4 years from 2022-2026 to generate 500 new jobs for community organisations.³ These positions have not been filled nationally or in the NT for the reasons outlined above.

NTCOSS recommends the development of a national workforce strategy for the FDSV that also includes:

4. Properly funded culturally informed, trauma-integrated healing approach (as per recommendation 1).
5. Appropriate orientation courses and training opportunities are readily available to ensure that staff being recruited to regional, remote and very remote areas are resourced for early successes in their jobs. With consistent, safety focused, non-collusive, culturally informed, trauma-integrated healing approaches to FDSV being delivered. Workers should receive explicit instruction protocols for handling emergency safety situations that might occur in a remote community.
6. Accessible and culturally safe Communities of Practice to support First Nations staff and others working with First Nations clients to share learnings and resources to allow for continual improvement and innovation in service delivery.
7. Support for organisations to understand the scope of trauma exposure for staff to effectively implement hazard control measures.
8. Recognition that organisations can be better structured to value or recognise cultural knowledge or the currency of First Nation's workers relationships with community.
9. Adequate resourcing for organisations to set up employment models and program design that support effective *two-way learning*⁴, practice and ways of seeing with the recognition that genuine collaboration between First Nations and mainstream or Western knowledges, can result in unique insights, practices and programs. See Tangentyere Family Safety Group's work in this area.⁵
10. Recognition that First Nations workers may experience a greater rate of disclosures, particularly when working in their own community, may be asked to perform work tasks outside of work hours, and may experience higher rates of lateral violence as a result of working in this area. A workforce strategy should support organisations to structure roles

³ See the media release here: <https://www.dss.gov.au/women-programs-services/500-workers-initiative>

⁴ Two-Way Learning: A Model for Decolonising Feminist Leadership and Advocacy. 2024, UniSA Press Volume 22 Number 1, Brown C, Cambell, S, Corbo, M, Simpson C

⁵ Two-Way Learning: A Model for Decolonising Feminist Leadership and Advocacy. 2024, UniSA Press Volume 22 Number 1, Brown C, Cambell, S, Corbo, M, Simpson C

for these individuals in creative and more supportive ways with different remuneration and leave packages and different work hours or flexible arrangements.

11. Recognition of the important role an 'authorising outsider' or 'authorising other' can have in remote and regional communities in the NT, where victim survivors, families and local workers may be constrained and fearful in what they can publicly say, or be seen to be doing or saying, especially about safety and DFSV. The 'authorising other' is often a worker or a service who exists outside of kinship and community obligations, someone who is known, trusted and authorised to invoke activities that will bring safety.

For decades Aboriginal women in remote communities have identified that victims and their families wanted and needed outside authorities to deal with DFV. "... women can often expect limited protection from their kin when other social, ritual and economic interests moderate their safety. For the women and their children whose social world is largely defined by their kin in this region, leaving a relationship and their communities is rarely a long-term option." (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunyatjara [NPY] Women's Council, 2015)⁶

Given the kinship ties that exist within remote communities, women may be reluctant to report domestic violence for fear of reprisal from family members, or may be pressured by family members not to follow through with legal action. Women looked to the service to act on their behalf and facilitate women's access to criminal justice and assist in holding men accountable. The principle of empowerment can become a contested one in this context, in that invoking the "authorising outsider" purposefully removes some responsibility from the victims of domestic violence, yet is also the means by which women are empowered to respond to domestic violence within the socio-cultural context in which they live.⁷

Finally, NTCOSS recommends a long-term, needs based investment to tackle this issue in the NT. Work must progress, and new work is urgently needed in FDSV prevention, early intervention, behaviour change, crisis response and healing and recovery to address the devastating rates, and impacts of, FDSV in the NT. Each of these areas require organisations and a workforce that are set up and supported to adequately meet the high level of need in the NT. Current population-based funding models should be moved to needs-based funding models to account for higher rates of violence experienced in some parts of the country, such as the NT, and the additional costs associated with staffing and providing culturally safe, trauma informed services in remote and very remote parts of Australia.

Please contact NTCOSS if you require any further information on the above, via email admin@ntcoss.org.au or telephone on 08 8948 2665.

Kind regards,



For Sally Sievers
Chief Executive Officer

⁶ Jane Lloyd, *Violent and tragic events: the nature of domestic violence-related homicide cases in Central Australia*, Australian Aboriginal Studies 2014/1

⁷ Cath O'Leary, Dr Judy Putt, Dr Robyn Holder *Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunyatjara Women's Council's Domestic and Family Violence Service: a history and overview*, September 2016