



# **Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence Engagement**

## **Engagement Analysis – Outcomes Report**



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## Acknowledgements

SNAICC acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

We acknowledge the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, and communities impacted by domestic, family, and sexual violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also bring immense strength and resilience through their connection to culture, community, ancestry and land. We acknowledge the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as leaders in working to combat the disproportionate levels of violence directed against them, their children and their communities.

We also wish to acknowledge the work of countless individuals, groups, and organisations who work tirelessly to end violence and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people impacted by violence.

We want to wholeheartedly thank every person who participated in engagements to develop Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence. Every contribution included an invaluable wealth of knowledge and experience which is a testament to people with lived experience, communities, and the sectors working to end violence.

## Artwork

We would also like to thank Tovani Cox who designed the artwork that is supporting Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. Tovani was born in Broome and comes from the Bunuba, Gija and Karajarri peoples across the Kimberley region.

*Description of artwork:* “Safety is one of the core fundamentals of individual, family, and community life. Family safety specifically requires a network of support from different layers and levels of community(s), agencies, and sectors. The illustration depicts the strength of the varying layers and levels coming together to build and grow a network of family safety across Australia and is represented through various geographical locations and settings. The colours chosen, represent both the land and sea and acknowledges both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The focus of this piece is at the centre with the joining of different peoples,



experiences, and needs, coming together surrounded by supports to show strength and unity for a safer, stronger community.”

## Executive summary

The Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to end Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence (Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices) is the result of decades of advocacy and work from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, communities and services to address the complex issue of family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV). These voices have long been calling for a national plan dedicated to the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

This standalone plan will be the first of its kind and is intended to increase the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. It will do this by setting the future direction of all government action in the FDSV service system under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement), primarily Target 13. Target 13 states that by 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced by at least 50%, as progress towards zero.

This report shares findings from the engagements held for the development of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. Between August 2024 and January 2025, SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children held engagements with communities and organisations to inform the development of the Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. This included women with lived experience of FDSV, children and young people, ACCOs and non-ACCOs in the FDSV and related sectors, peak bodies, governments, researchers and experts, and the public through a public submissions process. The engagements sought to understand priorities for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices, and built off the learnings from engagements for the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32 and the related Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-25.

The engagement process included Knowledge Circles for women with lived experience of FDSV, online group and individual engagements for organisations across jurisdictions and sectors, conference activities, a PhotoYarn project for children and young people, engagements with governments, and a public submissions process.



The themes of engagement outcomes highlight several critical areas that require attention and action. Funding is a foundational element, emphasising the need for sustained financial resources to support long-term initiatives. Self-determination and community-led local solutions are crucial for empowering communities to address their unique needs and contexts. This approach ensures that interventions are relevant and sustainable. Additionally, the call for "no more pilots" reflects a preference for scalable, proven strategies over short-term projects, advocating for a commitment to long-term solutions.

A competent and well-supported workforce is essential for effective service delivery, highlighting the importance of training, support, and stability. Legal supports must be integrated with other services to provide comprehensive assistance, ensuring a holistic approach to addressing individuals' needs. Breaking down silos between different sectors and services is necessary for holistic responses, promoting coordinated efforts that consider all relevant factors. The "no wrong door" approach further supports this by ensuring that individuals can access the support they need regardless of their entry point into the system.

Education, healing, prevention, and early intervention are foundational themes that underpin many engagement outcomes. Accessible, high-quality education empowers individuals and communities, while proactive measures focus on healing and preventing problems before they escalate. Specific themes for women, men, and children emphasise the importance of tailored support and the creation of safe, supportive environments. Keeping children with their families and communities, and involving families in child protection decisions, are crucial for the well-being of children.

Finally, non-Indigenous organisations must be inclusive and culturally competent, ensuring that services are accessible to all communities. Data sovereignty and the resourcing of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) for data collection and analysis are essential for informed decision-making. Safe and secure housing options, including refuges and transitional housing, are critical for addressing the diverse needs of individuals, particularly those affected by family and domestic violence. Justice reforms, including better police responses and changes to the criminal justice system and family law, are necessary to provide fair and supportive outcomes for individuals and communities. These themes collectively underscore the importance of comprehensive, community-led, and sustainable approaches to engagement.



The themes, findings and recommendations of this report align with and reflect the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly Priority Reform Areas 1 and 2 which focus on shared decision making and on strengthening the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.

## Introduction

Family, domestic, and sexual violence (FDSV) remains a critical issue affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, requiring comprehensive and culturally sensitive responses. In 2023, the Australian Government released the first dedicated [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan](#) aimed at reducing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. This Action Plan is part of the broader [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32](#), which commits all governments to ending FDSV within one generation.

The creation of the ten-year *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to end Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence* (*Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*) to guide the policy framework for FDSV is a cornerstone of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan:

*The First Nations National Plan will guide a whole of society approach to addressing the unacceptable rates of violence against First Nations women and children. It will provide the framework for all governments' ongoing commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020-2030 (Closing the Gap), specifically Target 13 which states that by 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced by at least 50%, as progress towards zero. It will be established within the context of other priority policy agendas.<sup>1</sup>*

*Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* will guide a whole of society approach and act as a strength-based framework for all governments to address both the disproportionate rates of violence and the barriers to accessing support as part of ongoing efforts to achieve Target 13 of the National Agreement.

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2023 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*



Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices is being developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Steering Committee (the Steering Committee), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCO) sector, and federal, state and territory governments. As part of this process, the Department of Social Services engaged SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) to act as Secretariat and facilitate a policy design process to develop Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. This involved leading the engagement phase.

This report provides a comprehensive review of the engagements held to inform the development of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. It aims to document the progress made, identify challenges and barriers encountered, and highlight successful strategies and practices.

By analysing the themes of engagement, this report seeks to inform policy development and implementation, ensuring that the voices and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are central to efforts aimed at reducing FDSV. This report aims to serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, service providers, and community leaders committed to creating safer and more supportive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, and families. Due to a significant overlap in the priorities and recommendations shared, findings from all community and sector engagements have been compiled and presented together in this report.

During various sector focused conferences for the FDSV, health, child protection, youth justice and disability sectors in 2024, SNAICC asked participants for their expertise on a range of questions, including on the role of government in the FDSV system, funding priorities, and the system's successes and opportunities. This activity aimed to ensure that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices reflects any emerging evidence and is able to be flexible and adaptable to any changing needs or priorities over the policy's life course. While the findings of these activities have been incorporated into this report's analysis and recommendations, a separate overview can be found in *appendix two*.



## Methodology

### Overview

Building on the extensive engagement undertaken as part of developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025, SNAICC conducted consultations with key stakeholder groups with over 80 organisations, advisory bodies and groups, including 47 Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). These consultations aimed to ensure comprehensive input from diverse voices within the community, addressing any gaps in previous engagements.

This included:

- 14 sessions with ACCOs both online and in person
- 9 online sessions with non-Indigenous services
- 14 online sessions with individuals or specific organisations
- 9 online consultations with cross-government agency representatives in each jurisdiction
- 6 conference sessions involving a total of 997 participants
- 6 Knowledge Circles with 71 women with lived experience
- 52 written submissions, including 13 submissions from ACCOs, 3 ACCO peaks and 9 non-Indigenous organisations.

SNAICC actively engaged with the FDSV sector<sup>2</sup> through various methods. SNAICC held online group and individual engagements with over 30 ACCOs across all jurisdictions. These sessions provided a platform for stakeholders to share their insights and experiences, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. Additionally, the First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV), the national peak body for all Aboriginal

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<sup>2</sup> The family, domestic and sexual violence sector includes Aboriginal community controlled organisations and non-Indigenous non-government organisations which provide services focused on addressing, preventing, and responding to violence to people who are experiencing or have experienced family, domestic and/or sexual violence, and those who use violence. These include crisis response, emergency accommodation, outreach, safety planning, case management and coordination, legal services and paralegal supports, trauma counselling and recovery, health services, Men's Behaviour Change Programs, perpetrator interventions, primary prevention projects, system navigation and advocacy, financial assistance, and child-focused supports. FDSV services are funded and regulated through a range of pathways and mechanisms at both state and federal levels. Specialist FDSV services in many states have shared practice frameworks and ways of working guiding practice and system responses.



and Torres Strait Islander Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services, offered engagement opportunities for all its 15 member services.

SNAICC undertook engagement at six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FDSV and related sector conferences (details are outlined in Appendix 2), which sought to understand how the FDSV and related sectors prioritise government action and what is working well in the service system. As well as SNAICC engagement at conferences, input for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices was also gathered by the First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence at their National Forum, and at the NACCHO annual conference by Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett, Co-Chair of the Steering Committee, working with Commissioner Micaela Cronin of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. A total of 997 participants contributed to these conference sessions.

There were two online sessions specifically focused on the sexual violence sector, one targeting specialist non-Indigenous organisations, and the other reaching ACCOs. These sessions were crucial in gathering sector-specific insights and identifying unique challenges and opportunities within the sexual violence sector.

Furthermore, SNAICC acting as Secretariat engaged with ACCO peak bodies across a range of sectors, including health, housing, disability, justice, and social and emotional wellbeing. These online engagements ensured that the perspectives of peak bodies, which play a critical role in service coordination, sector development and advocacy, were included in the consultation process. An additional online engagement session was held with non-Indigenous organisations to capture their views and contributions to the broader discussion on FDSV.

Targeted engagements were also conducted with a range of advisory bodies, organisations, and sectors to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive consultation process. The Secretariat received a total of 52 written submissions through a Public Submissions process, reflecting a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Of these, eight submissions were from individuals, while the remaining 44 were from ACCOs, non-Indigenous organisations, Commissioners, Ministerial Advisory Groups, government agencies, and research institutions. Notably, submissions were received from ACCOs in all jurisdictions except South Australia.

In addition to these engagements, Knowledge Circles were held in Adelaide, Port Lincoln, Port Augusta, and Broken Hill for people with lived experience, with 71 participants in total. These



circles provided a culturally safe space for participants to share their experiences and insights, contributing to a deeper understanding of the issues and potential solutions.

SNAICC also engaged with governments in all jurisdictions to capture the perspectives, priorities, current and upcoming work of government stakeholders. Analysis and synthesis of findings from these engagements are reported separately.

The insights gathered from these engagements will also be instrumental in shaping the implementation and any Action Plan under Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices and the broader National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. By addressing the gaps identified and incorporating the diverse views of stakeholders, the plan aims to create a more effective and culturally sensitive response to FDSV within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Details of engagements are set out in Appendix 1.

### Challenges and limitations

The engagement process for the development of the Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence encountered many challenges. Despite these challenges, the process identified important insights from stakeholders, building on previous stakeholder engagement on domestic, family and sexual violence, response systems, prevention and healing.

A primary challenge was the compressed engagement timelines partly due to the completion of an ethics assessment. The tight schedule made it difficult for many stakeholders to participate, particularly those with pre-existing commitments, limited capacity, or those located in remote areas. The time period for engagement also overlapped to an extent with the wet season in Northern Australia, which meant that travel to parts of the country was not possible.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people using PhotoYarn<sup>3</sup> methodology was also affected and postponed until 2025. A separate PhotoYarn report will be compiled as an addendum to this report.

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<sup>3</sup> PhotoYarn is a culturally adapted version of the internationally recognised PhotoVoice method. PhotoVoice is used to engage people affected by social policy using photos and stories, contributing their perspectives directly to policy making.



Consultation fatigue also emerged as a significant barrier. Many stakeholders have participated in multiple government and academic consultations for various strategies and initiatives in previous years, leading to a sense of exhaustion and diminished enthusiasm for additional engagements.

Despite this, the engagement process successfully reached a broad range of participants, demonstrating the resilience and commitment of those who were able to contribute. The insights outlined in this report highlight the continuity between past engagement findings, with consistent themes emerging. This strongly indicates a need to progress the issues and needs highlighted. Stakeholders demonstrated the genuine commitment to make progress in ending FDSV experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participation of stakeholders in the specific engagement for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices demonstrates the dedication of advocates for change who have long called for a national plan to address FDSV against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

## Findings

### Overview of recommendations

Findings from these engagements have been analysed and have informed recommendations for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. These recommendations are intended to inform the plan's focus and priorities, based on the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and FDSV response sectors. These recommendations were prepared by the SNAICC Secretariat, and presented to the Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices Steering Committee to guide the development of the Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices national plan.

The recommendations emphasise the importance of ongoing, flexible funding, community empowerment, and the creation of a culturally safe and inclusive service system. By focusing on these key areas, Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices can foster a safer, healthier, and more supportive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

The recommendations are consistent with the National Agreement on Closing Gap, in particularly the Priority Reforms 1 and 2, focusing on self-determination, a different way for government and community to work together and a stronger more sustainable ACCO sector.

Recommendations from engagements with community, organisations, and individuals:



1. Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should prioritise and enable self-determination through community-led, delivered and monitored solutions to FDSV that uplift the entire community.
2. Governments need to provide ongoing, flexible funding for ACCOs to design, deliver and evaluate FDSV services to meet the needs of each community.
3. There is a major need for a holistic, strengths-based, culturally safe, flexible and whole-of-community service system that supports the entire community across people's changing life-course and needs.
4. Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should have a focus on the gaps that exist within the service system to support safe and healthy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
5. Governments should reform the FDSV and related systems, including the legal system, housing, and health, according to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, with recognition of the role of colonisation and intergenerational trauma on communities, healing, and safety.
6. Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should enable workforce and organisational improvements to ensure culturally safe, trauma-informed and resourced supports
7. Work towards a culturally safe, non-competitive, accountable and collaborative non-Indigenous sector
8. Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should recognise and address the needs of children and young people, both as victim-survivors in their own right, but also as needing community, culture, and access to education for intergenerational healing, connection, and safe families.
9. Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should lead to data collection and reporting that is qualitative and narrative-based to enable an accurate understanding of the issues and solutions, to be meaningful and beneficial to ACCOs and communities.



10. Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should have strong accountability mechanisms, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led oversight, implementation, evaluation and monitoring, with a focus on government accountability in delivering.

## Engagement themes

### Community-led solutions

**Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should prioritise and enable self-determination through community-led, delivered and monitored solutions to FDSV that uplift the entire community.**

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices is the key mechanism for community and government to achieve Closing the Gap Target 13: the consultation with all key players affirmed that the Priority Reforms are fundamental to shifting outcomes, especially Priority Reform 1 Formal partnerships and shared decision making and Priority Reform 2 Building the community-controlled sector. Participants were clear that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should prioritise and enable community-led, delivered and monitored solutions to FDSV that uplift the entire community.

**“Communities must be in the ‘driver seat’ when it comes to solutions” – *submission from an individual***

Consistent with the overarching theme of the National Agreement, feedback emphasised that self-determination is foundational. Overwhelmingly, participants raised the need for services and solutions to be **community-led, designed, and monitored**, emphasising that community-led approaches provide the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participants recommended that the role of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should be to empower and enable the community to identify and deliver solutions. Some participants also suggested a focus on enabling community leadership and developing leaders within communities.

**“We probably do things a little bit different than a lot of other organisations do, but we know that it works for us, and it works for our mob” – NSW ACCO sector engagement participant**



Participants also emphasised that many communities do not require the establishment of a new sector or service system, but rather a genuine investment and **upscale of the existing expertise** and grassroots responses.

“We want to lead the systems changes so that we can again be places of cultural and Community connection, with solutions that are led by us, for us.” – ACCO submission

Many also called for establishing or supporting existing **men’s and women’s community-led groups** which are valuable for providing positive role models, support, connection, strengths-based framing, and demonstrating growth and healthy behaviours.

Many participants recommended that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices supports **mentorship** programs within communities, such as programs where older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support younger groups, as well as elder-led community mediation models.

Some organisations noted that within communities, elders have often stepped up to provide a range of supports to people within their communities requiring help, such as guidance, accommodation, childcare, or financial assistance. These roles are generally unpaid and unsupported by existing services or governments, which can place strain on these elders. These organisations recommended having government or service **support for elders** to take these roles, as well as ensuring that the service system is holistic and adequately resourced to reduce the need for elders to take on additional responsibilities.

Participants strongly agreed that **ACCOs need to be trusted and supported by governments** to identify and provide the service portfolio that each community needs, given ACCOs are often community-led and delivered, trusted by the local community, and have a greater understanding of the needs of each community.

The evidence of over 50 years of Aboriginal Community Control shows that the best support can be through appropriate level of funding for our services with long-term security; it means following our guidance and leadership out of acceptance that we are the experts; and ensuring that government agencies and other government-funded organisations and agencies are appropriately collaborative and follow our leadership with regards to the needs and particular context of our community. – ACCO submission



Participants spoke about the need to trust the evidence that the best results are obtained by community-led responses, and that **ACCOs and communities can identify the solutions and programs** that are required. Many ACCOs voluntarily expressed a willingness to collect evidence for evidence-based funding approaches for community-designed programs to establish the effectiveness of these approaches, if governments provide adequate, long-term funding.

Many participants also recommended **ongoing genuine consultation** with communities by governments, involving getting to know the community over time and having a presence at community events when the community requests – avoiding the fly-in-fly-out consultation processes undertaken mainly by governments that often exist where participants feel unheard, misunderstood, or as a ‘tick the box’ exercise.

“Our ears, eyes and hearts are in the community” – NT ACCO sector engagement participant

In South Australia, many participants talked about the benefit of **family group conferencing** and Aboriginal Family-Led Decision-Making in child protection matters, recommending that these approaches become more widespread for safe and connected families and keeping children with their families. Participants recommended ensuring family group conferencing occurs earlier, is upscaled and more widespread, and led by ACCOs.

### Flexible funding

**Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Australian governments have committed to:**

- Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (Priority Reform Two target, Clause 81.b.)
- funding for programs and services align with jointly agreed community priorities (Clause 32.c.vi)
- adequate funding to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to be partners with governments in formal partnerships (Clause 33)
- a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities, responsive to the needs of those receiving the services, and is developed in consultation with the relevant peak body (Clause 45.d.)



- increase the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations, including by (Clause 55):
  - implementing funding prioritisation policies across all Closing the Gap outcomes that require decisions about the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to preference Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
  - where new funding initiatives are decided by governments which are intended to service the broader population across socio-economic outcome areas of the Agreement, that a meaningful proportion is allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with relevant expertise, particularly community-controlled organisations
- Increase accountability through transparent funding allocations (Clause 55.d.).

**Governments need to provide ongoing, flexible funding for ACCOs to design, deliver and evaluate family violence services to meet the actual needs of each community.**

Across all sector stakeholder groups, respondents talked to the need for **long-term and unrestricted funding to ACCOs** that facilitates holistic, community-led and collaborative service coverage. Respondents talked to short-term, competitive and siloed funding as a major barrier to addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and communities who are impacted by FDSV.

Given the complex and interrelated nature of FDSV with other needs and sectors, multi sector response is required “to ensure holistic, trauma informed, family centred therapeutic supports, as well as a pathway to healing” – ACCO, submission.

“[long-term, increased ACCO funding] would decrease the burden of reporting and funding applications and create greater time for the on the groundwork that drives real change and empowers communities to build sustainable safety plans” – ACCO, submission.

**The siloed approach to funding creates barriers** for ACCOs to provide the holistic responses that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities require. Funding



models should be co-designed with providers. Funding models must account for and sufficiently resource integrated service delivery, and should be localised and collaborative. Some participants also recommended ACCO led commissioning, joint venture frameworks or similar approaches for building a collaborative system.

Participants talked to the need for funding to be based on and cover a service's actual needs, with several service areas identified as requiring funding attention. These include:

- Brokerage.
- Organisational administrative requirements, with administrative budget line cuts having a tangible impact on ACCO functions.
- Outreach funding, particularly for regional and remote areas. Regional and remote services have additional costs for providing services, including transportation.
- Infrastructure funding to ensure communities and ACCOs have the physical spaces required.

Some organisations noted that state and Commonwealth governments should be working together more to improve funding and service delivery, with transparency and line of sight between Commonwealth and state funding.

Many organisations identified that **pilot programs are having a negative impact** on communities and services, especially when discontinued. The period allocated for most pilots is insufficient to build rapport with the community, hiring the workforce, evaluating the program and implementing improvements based on feedback.

Current funding does not support a **whole-of-family approach to FDSV** that many ACCOs and communities have. ACCOs must be adequately resourced for taking on these additional activities, which is more than current funding agreements provide for.

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should also enable **communities to identify suitable KPIs** and measuring requirements for funding arrangements to ensure services and programs are meeting the needs of the community and are community-designed and self-determined.

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should see governments working with FDSV service providers to **scale-up successful programs**.



Participants also noted that inflexible or inadequate funding arrangements often limit the scope that services are supported to provide or the ability to tailor to the intersectional needs of a community. While ACCOs often expand service scope to meet community needs, this is often unfunded or done without resourcing. This also limits the ability of services to seek training around an issue, proactively tailor or establish specific programs, or adequately support all people within a community. Some of the groups that require more targeted support and investment include:

- People who are LGBTIQA+SB, including gender diverse people and LGBTIQA+SB people experiencing or using violence
- People with disability, including disability-specific forms of violence such as controlling access to medication and disability caused by violence
- Elders and elder abuse
- Children and young people, including children and young people who use violence against other family members
- Men and boys as victim survivors
- People seeking support across state borders

### **Holistic, culturally safe service system**

**There is a major need for a holistic, strengths-based, culturally safe, flexible and whole-of-community service system that supports the entire community across people's changing life-course and needs.**

A significant number of participants recommended that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices prioritise the upscaling or development of **'one stop shop'** and **'no wrong door'** **services** in all communities to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to holistic supports that are trusted and reduce complex and overwhelming processes. With the complexity of the current system, some participants noted that service users are often required to retell their story multiple times, which continues harm. It was recommended that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices focuses on enabling cultural service provision for referrals and simplifying the referrals process, uplifting systems and processes for data collection and sharing between organisations, and better information sharing and client cross-referencing between organisations. Having a centralised body, such as local 'one stop shops'



may mitigate some of the service burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim/survivors.

Given the community-led nature of ACCOs, many informally provide ‘no wrong door’ approaches but do not have the funding, capacity or workforce required to meet the entire needs of the community. Funding and enabling ‘one stop shops’ that include spaces for children and childcare was a theme across submissions, ACCO engagements, and Knowledge Circles.

“Family violence doesn’t occur in isolation, but the siloed buckets of money are a barrier to enabling worthwhile programs and approaches. Perhaps there needs to be a different bucket of money for community initiatives that enables the holistic approach – could cover health, justice, education, domestic violence. Make the funding system accessible to local communities for their initiatives.” Submission

Participants overwhelmingly talked to the need for **supports for everyone within a community**. While some ACCOs emphasised that FDSV responses should keep women who experience violence at the forefront, there is a clear desire for holistic supports that are available and tailored to all experiences, whether support seekers are children, young people, women, men, gender diverse, victim survivors, or people who use violence. Participants agreed that men should be at table and part of the solution in FDSV responses.

“Women hold extensive knowledges about maintaining social and ecological equilibrium; supporting the healthy growth of babies and educating children; keeping families and communities strong and connected; sustaining societal safety; and protecting children and families against danger. When First Nations women are invested in, and their lives, roles and knowledges are recognised and reflected in surrounding systems, children thrive, economies grow, communities are cohesive, and harms and violence are minimised.” – submission

Most participants discussed the need for a **holistic approach to FDSV**, with many pointing to service, sector and funding silos as barriers to an effective system. When addressing FDSV, many participants discussed the interrelated nature of other sectors and client needs, such as housing, alcohol and other drug use (AOD), mental health issues, disability including disability caused by FDSV, and intergenerational trauma. Many of these issues exacerbate experiences of FDSV, or impact prevention, early intervention and healing efforts. Basic unmet needs, such as food insecurity and phone credit, is increasing the vulnerability of women.



“Given the complex and interrelated nature of FDSV with other needs and sectors, multi sector response is required to ensure holistic, trauma informed, family centre therapeutic supports, as well as a pathway to healing” – ACCO, submission.

Many participants talked about the **siloed nature of governments** as a primary barrier to accessing funding and providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children with the cross-sectoral and wrap-around service needs that are often required. Numerous ACCOs noted that governments often do not recognise the wide scope of ACCO service delivery, which is often reflected in insufficient funding amounts and restrictive requirements, and recommended greater recognition and support for the range of supports that ACCOs provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, and communities.

“Recognising Aboriginal people in all their diversity, so ensuring approaches and resources consider all the factors in an Aboriginal person's life, not just defining them solely by their Aboriginality.” – Victoria ACCO sector participant

Participants talked to the need for **services, programs and supports for men**, designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. These should be strengths-based and culturally-grounded, with a focus on connection, healing, social and emotional wellbeing, and accountability. Ideally, these programs should be longer-term to facilitate relationships based on trust and consistency. These should sit alongside intensive case management for the entire family to address the causes of violence. The service system also needs access points for men seeking help. Some participants recommended having safe houses for men, which would be beneficial in instances of violence or for men participating in behaviour change programs or recovering from addiction, allowing their families to remain at home.

“Men to lead development of their own resources. Find that balance between ensuring accountability and also strengths-based work to heal and support. Local men are really strong in wanting to work to connect young men with culture and yarning circles, how can we facilitate it?” – ACCO sector engagement participant



## Addressing service gaps

**Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should have a focus on the gaps that exist within the service system to support safe and healthy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.**

Many participants talked to the need for **healing services, for women, men, children, and families**, with a focus on support for the whole of community to heal. Some participants suggested establishing healing centres for communities that address trauma, wellbeing and connection. Providing spaces for yarning, support and connection is important for cultural safety and healing for entire communities, and can have a longer-term impact on women and families navigating difficult experiences. Some ACCOs recommended healing houses for people using violence to be referred to, allowing the person/s experiencing violence to stay in the home and providing all people with support. Within the healing house, the person using violence would be given access to a range of supports such as counselling or assistance for alcohol and other drugs or mental health issues.

“There’s gaps in our areas around the crisis response, but also what’s next after that in healing and going on that journey because there’s no one with a continued plan for the family to take those next steps” – WA ACCO sector engagement participant

Many participants noted that **supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women that wish to keep the family unified** are notably absent, with women often facing judgement or cultural misunderstandings in the non-Indigenous sector. Participants noted that in many cases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are not supported with these preferences, as the non-Indigenous service system’s support is often built for women leaving their homes to escape violent relationships. Participants noted that in some cases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women wanting to stay are turned away from services. However, many participants, including women with lived experience and the ACCO service sector, emphasised that “many women don’t want to leave, they just want the violence to stop”.

Participants recommended:

- more services that support keeping the family together, including designing services to support women who wish to stay and also support the person using violence.
- a focus on increasing cultural awareness and responsiveness among the non-Indigenous and government response system



- empowering women and providing them with tools to navigate their experiences.

“Many women don’t want to leave, they just want the violence to stop”. – Individual, Knowledge Circle

Many participants stated the need for **increased investment in refuges and safe places** in all communities as a priority. Safe houses should be community owned with well-paid and trained staff. Some participants also suggested additional resourcing for different safe house models, including specifically for young people and safe houses for men, using a similar model to women. Currently, many safe houses do not welcome older children, whether as victim/survivors in their own right or accompanying their mother. There is a major service gap for young people.

Culturally-informed behaviour change programs “that balances healing and accountability while providing intensive case management for whole family to address root causes of violence and restore relationships” – ACCO, submission

Many participants talked to the need for **education for individuals and communities**, which should begin at a very young age. Training and education should be culturally informed, age-appropriate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and designed at a local level, involve education around healthy relationships and consent, identifying violence, and other growing FDSV issues such as tech-facilitated abuse.

Participants also talked about how the health sector is often the first responder to experiences or disclosures of FDSV. Responses to FDSV need to **recognise the role of the health sector**, particularly Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) in working with people impacted by FDSV. Some health groups also noted that a holistic response to FDSV should involve addressing root causes of violence and elements that either exacerbate violence or inhibit support seeking, and issues that emerge due to violence, such as intergenerational violence, health disparities, or financial hardship. FDSV can lead to additional health disparities, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and primary health issues, requiring integrated and holistic health services, cross sectoral collaboration, trauma informed care, and resourcing. Given the underreporting of violence to the police and the lack of culturally appropriate FDSV services in many areas, participants recognise the importance of strengthening referral pathways and training the health sector in responding to incidences of FDSV in a trauma-informed way.



Participants also identified **major gaps in service availability in regional and remote areas**. Participants emphasised the need to have supports in place to avoid women having to leave their town and community in times of crisis. Participants recommended significant funding injections to regional and remote areas to be able to upscale or establish community-led FDSV responses and safe accommodation options.

“Firstly, focus on regional communities to address the gap in services. Ensure that the national umbrella of services is being filtered to each individual community” – NSW ACCO sector engagement participant

Participants identified **primary prevention** as a key area that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should focus on. This would support early intervention, response and recovery efforts.

In engagements with sexual violence support providers and experts, participants recommended **safe spaces for the family**, including space for the person/s perpetrating violence. Sexual violence is often not talked about and remains unreported within communities – **discreet, confidential support options** are required to encourage women to seek support.

Communities should also receive education and support to navigate and reduce the taboo and shame around sexual violence.

Regarding addressing sexual violence, one ACCO recommended using holistic, social and emotional wellbeing-based programs as these make people feel better about participating than with programs limited to only a sexual violence focus, suggesting strong men and women groups and Country and land-based supports.

“Not just the right conversations, but also the right conversations with the right people on the right land” – ACCO, sexual violence service engagement participant

Some participants noted that services are unable to support people impacted by sexual violence if their basic needs are not being met. Many frontline workers are required to prioritise other issues, such as housing or financial insecurity, over providing sexual violence support and healing, which can be challenging in under-resourced areas where there are limited supports or workers.



## System reform

**Governments should reform the FDSV and other government systems, such as the legal system, housing, and health systems, according to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, with recognition of the role of colonisation and intergenerational trauma on communities, healing, and safety.**

Participants frequently discussed **intergenerational trauma from colonial violence and systemic racism** as both drivers of violence and barriers to accessing culturally safe and beneficial supports. Participants agreed that the ongoing impact of colonisation is a primary driver of violence and other disadvantages within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, and that governments need to address their role in this continuing trauma and put actions in place to reduce systematic racism and other barriers to healing. Across engagements, participants consistently called for **reform in systems that intersect with or address FDSV**, including justice, child protection, health, and education. Participants identified systems reform as a clear opportunity for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices to see better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Participants strongly agreed that services should be **safe to access without fear of child removal**. The mandatory notification process is a deterrent for women reporting violence or seeking support and requires addressing to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can seek help for safety and healing. There were strong calls within engagements for the mandatory reporting and child protection legislation to be reviewed to ensure all elements of the FDSV systems are protective factors for people seeking help.

It is essential to ensure that safe spaces are built to encourage victim-survivors to access support without feeling policed by child protection services. – submission, ACCO

Participants frequently echoed that the **child protection system is closely tied to the FDSV system** with FDSV being a primary driver of children entering the system. Many participants recommended reforming the child protection system to support healing and preventing child removal, with reunification in instances where children are removed. Some participants also recommended:

- Better partnerships and truth-telling between community, child protection and police



- Move child protection and social service systems away from using child removal as the primary response to FDSV and move towards safety and restorative practices
- Move towards a child protection notification and referral scheme, noting that this requires well-resourced and culturally appropriate services.

Participants also called to **establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Notification and Referral Scheme**. According to one submission, “this would require child protection workers to provide warm referrals to FVPLS or another ACCO with relevant expertise for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers in contact with the child protection system to independent, culturally safe, specialist and preventative legal advice and ongoing culturally safe wraparound support at the earliest possible opportunity, especially where family violence is a factor in potential child removal”. Other participants also recommended that police be required to do this referral when called to incidents of FDSV.

“They requested that I complete all these programs; I had to jump through so many hoops, which I did. Yet my children are still wards of the state.” – Individual, Knowledge Circle

With a primary focus on police, many participants talked to how **government organisations, such as schools or hospitals, often play an important role in initial disclosures**, access to families, and beginning support journeys. However, participants agreed that systemic racism, lack of cultural safety, and other structural issues are causing harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These institutions are often either inaccessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needing support, such as those in regional or remote areas, or actively causing harm. Contacting police is seen as risking child removal or misidentification of victims as the predominant aggressor, whereas police should be a protective factor. Participants suggested a range of options for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices to consider:

- A transparent audit to identify where discrimination is occurring, paired with reforms that promote equitable access and treatment.
- Education in all government sectors on racism, culturally appropriate support, and the impacts of colonisation on presentation and reporting. Ensure that police are providing safe and culturally appropriate support and are continually trained to stop the misidentification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as perpetrators.



- Establish Aboriginal-led education, from pre-school to tertiary, to address institutional discrimination and truth-telling.
- Implement Aboriginal-led localised programs to improve relationships between ACCOs, communities, child protection and police.
- Independent oversight of police to ensure police are held accountable for misconduct.

Participants called for **reform in the legal and child protection spaces** to address the racism that exists within these systems and create a justice system that is more accessible and culturally safe. Participants discussed the need for:

- Raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years
- Aboriginal worldviews, cultural practices and support to be embedded into the colonial systems that families have to navigate as part of their support journey, such as court.
- Culturally safe independent legal assistance for victim-survivors at all stages of criminal proceedings with support for other intersecting legal issues.
- Reforming the justice system to have a genuine goal of rehabilitation, including greater supports for people who are incarcerated and post release for both victim-survivors and perpetrators.
- Alternative justice pathways, such as Circle Sentencing, Family Yarning, Care Circles, and Rehab programs appropriate for families and where alongside violence, other issues such as drug and alcohol use can be meaningfully addressed. Some participants recommended the establishment of alternative justice pathways that embed more traditional law in approach and sentencing, such as led by community elders, to see better outcomes for victims and perpetrators.

Some participants talked about the importance of strengthening relationships between services and police. One ACCO noted that the co-responder model being trialled in Queensland, a crisis and early intervention model where FDV specialist services respond in real time alongside police, is showing some merit.<sup>4</sup> However, the model has notable limitations in remote areas with limited police and services.

Many participants were also concerned about the **rate of misidentification** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as perpetrators in FDSV incidents by police, noting that many incarcerated women have experiences of FDSV and that police should be protective. National

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<sup>4</sup> <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/101514>



guidelines to mitigate the misidentification of Aboriginal women as perpetrators of violence were recommended in state and federal court and policing systems.

ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders have found that many people have issues navigating the clinical approach in non-Indigenous services and recommended **using cultural approaches**. Cultural approaches are more beneficial, while helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with services and supports.

Some participants called for **an expansion of specialised legal services**, namely Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, legal services for women and ACCO legal services to ensure people experiencing violence are adequately supported throughout the justice process.

Some participants recommended that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices adopt the recommendations of the [Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25](#), particularly as pertaining to Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS), to meet service needs in all areas across Australia. To ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can readily access culturally safe FDSV services as required. This review recommended “the Commonwealth to work with the FVPLS forum, FVPLS units and ACCOs to ensure national geographic coverage of FVPLS.”

Much of this feedback was consistent with commitments under Priority Reform 3 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

### **Culturally safe, trauma-informed and resourced supports**

#### **Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should enable workforce and organisational improvements to ensure culturally safe, trauma-informed and resourced supports**

Participants shared the need for **better pay for workers** within the FDSV sector. Governments should provide long-term funding for appropriate pay as well as workforce development. Some participants mentioned that short-term contracts and difficult roles are leading to issues with recruitment and burnout, which subsequently impacts trust building and service delivery within communities. Many organisations are experiencing a younger workforce as the older, more experienced staff have left. ACCOs need to have same ability to provide consistent funding and pay parity with non-Indigenous organisations, with recognition that



ACCOs often have a greater cultural responsibility. Some participants suggested a workforce evaluation to understand the state of the current workforce and propose strategies for improving the sector.

Participants agreed that more **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are required in the workforce and leadership**. As an example, men's services need more Aboriginal men to be safe and encourage engagement. Participants identified developing leadership skills for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce as an opportunity for the plan, recognising that Aboriginal-led decisions and leadership can lead to better outcomes and more representative services.

Many ACCOs recommended that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should address barriers that inhibit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those with lived experience, from working in the sector. The plan should provide alternative pathways to qualifications to address barriers with tertiary education and police or Working with Children checks. Suggestions included:

- A national fee waiver for social work degrees so that Aboriginal people can access them more equitably.
- Increasing the perceived value of lived experience and cultural knowledge in workforce qualifications.
- Recognising cultural expertise in job roles and responsibilities.
- Paid study, cost-of-living supports and bursaries to support study, accommodation and transport
- Government funded traineeships and internships in ACCO and non-Indigenous services for young people.

Governments should provide support for **ACCO capacity building**. Some participants suggested different ways in which this can be achieved, such as:

- Group and cultural supervision
- Learning and development opportunities, including Indigenous management training and leadership programs

Many respondents talked to the need for ongoing, comprehensive training for FDSV, trauma, and cultural safety needs to be provided to government and non-Indigenous organisations.



“Critical failures in service responses often stem from a lack of understanding in these areas” –  
ACCO, submission

Participants also discussed ongoing access to **training and development for workers** in the FDSV sector, particularly ACCOs. While some participants noted that training is available, there are access issues such as training fees and travel and accommodation costs for regional and remote workers to access training. The workforce also faces burnout and vicarious trauma, with some participants recommending group and cultural supervision opportunities, pay parity and better pay, longer contracts, and greater investment into professional development.

“Our workforce does not have the same access to tertiary/specialist education and training but is expected to work with families that have significant lived experience of trauma and intergenerational trauma” – ACCO, submission

In engagements with sexual violence service providers and experts, participants discussed the importance of upscaling the workforce that are skilled and trained to support the complex situations and trauma that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can present with. Often, the best workers have lived experience and can provide support without judgement or shame. It is important that workers have regular supervision across the board. Some participants recommended cross-organisational check-ins that allow workloads to be safely shared. Participants also recommended upskilling and training the community, as grassroots and on the ground approaches challenge the dominant culture, noting that sexual violence has been used as a tool of colonisation against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Non-Indigenous sector reform

### **Work towards a culturally safe, non-competitive, accountable and collaborative non-Indigenous FDSV sector**

Citing the best interests of clients and communities, many ACCO and non-Indigenous participants shared an interest in **increased collaboration between ACCOs, non-Indigenous and public organisations** (such as schools and local health services) in local communities to ensure a seamless, holistic service experience for users, improved service choice, and stronger referral pathways. This would involve a shared commitment to cultural safety and responsiveness, as well as resources for joint programs and initiatives. This would



also work to reduce siloed services, funding and approaches. Many participants also specified that these partnerships should refer to ACCOs first.

Some ACCOs observed an increased interest from non-Indigenous organisations to work with and uplift ACCOs, however it appears that non-Indigenous organisations do not always know the best way to begin these collaborative journeys. *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* should consider how to facilitate partnerships where community has identified these as priorities.

Some participants suggested **embedding Aboriginal ways of working in non-Indigenous FDSV services**, with caution to avoid culturally inappropriate behaviours or competing with ACCOs for funding to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Other participants also recommended **capability-focused partnerships** between non-Indigenous services and ACCOs that could include communities of practice, co-facilitated groups, staff placements, and advanced practitioners from other organisations supervising emerging ACCO staff.

Some ACCOs acknowledged that in the existing system, sometimes non-Indigenous organisations are best placed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, notably in instances without other local support options, or where the individual's family or partner's family work at the ACCO option.

**“Cultural safety is essential for all services particularly as not all Aboriginal peoples will access ACCOs – mainstream organisations need to offer culturally appropriate assistance to help Aboriginal clients, acknowledge community context, and consider holistic approaches that are sensitive to the cultural context.” – ACCO sector engagement participant, Victoria**

Many participants talked about how there are issues in the non-Indigenous service system such as accountability, resource competition, cultural capability, and understanding the role of ACCOs. Participants noted that non-Indigenous organisations have the advantage when working with governments or accessing funding and have been known to duplicate ACCO offerings and take available funding. Participants suggested a range of approaches that *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* could take to address these issues, including:

- Making cultural awareness training and cultural audits mandatory in non-Indigenous organisations for accountability. If non-Indigenous organisations are funded to provide



services in Aboriginal communities, then cultural responsiveness should be a requirement of their funding to minimise cultural and colonial load for ACCOs.

- Facilitating partnerships and genuine dialogue for non-Indigenous organisations to understand cultural needs, responsibilities, the role of ACCOs and cultural safety. One ACCO noted that educating non-Indigenous organisations is a two-way street – if non-Indigenous organisations are open to learning, then ACCOs have a responsibility to help true understanding rather than risk misunderstanding if non-Indigenous teach non-Indigenous.
- Ensuring ACCOs are prioritised in funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, as non-Indigenous services do not tend to be community-led or designed.

Many participants noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led responses and services provide better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Some participants recommended that *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* facilitate the transition strategies to ensure services are delivered, evaluated and monitored by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Many of these findings are consistent with findings from the Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly with findings related to the role of governments as funders of non-Indigenous organisations.

### **The needs of children and young people**

**Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should recognise and address the needs of children and young people, both as victim survivors in their own right, but also as needing community, culture, and access to education for intergenerational healing, connection, and safe families.**

Participants identified that **children and young people are often overlooked** within the FDSV service system. There are few services and supports that view children and young people as individuals, whether as victims in their own right, as requiring supports due to displaying potentially problematic behaviours to family members and others, or as people navigating relationships for the first time.



Many participants talked to the need for more services and programs for all children. Examples of service gaps mentioned include:

- Services and programs for children and young people of all ages
- Services for high school students in relationships with adults
- Services for children showing signs of trauma or negative behaviour patterns, especially for children of mothers experiencing domestic violence and children who are left in systems and are experiencing significant trauma.
- Services that connect children to community and culture
- Services for response and healing for children and young people that are or have previously experienced FDV
- Supports for children and young people who have missed school or other important milestones due to experiencing or witnessing violence, who are at risk of flow on effects. This should include supports for children to attend school, such as breakfast programs.

**Early intervention and prevention for children and young people** was identified as critically important by many participants, requiring intentional investment and commitment by governments to support safer families and individuals. Supporting the child brings along the parents and wider family which can facilitate access to services and support. Some participants said it is important to identify children and hold them in community. Focus on healing and cultural connection – connecting young people with their communities and culture gives a sense of belonging. Many ACCOs emphasised the importance of empowering children and young people to have a strong sense of identity and belonging which will support them during difficult times or incidents. This is also important for learning key life skills to help them navigate life.

**“Primary prevention begins with children” – ACCO, online sector engagements**

SNAICC frequently heard that **education is a vital tool** for prevention and early intervention. Children and young people should have access to education that models healthy relationships and communication, and helps them to identify violence. This education should begin in their early years and continue throughout their teenage years. Many participants recommended education that is community-led and taught, with any national program or course being able to be tailored to community-specific needs.



At the time of writing, PhotoYarn workshops with young people had not been completed with sufficient time to incorporate findings into this report. PhotoYarns are being held in 2025, and will be summarised in an additional report.

## **Data collection and analysis**

**Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should lead to data collection and reporting that is qualitative and narrative-based to enable an accurate understanding of the issues and solutions, to be meaningful and beneficial to ACCOs and communities.**

A significant number of participants noted that **deep dive qualitative data gives a richer picture** and more accurately conveys the nature of ACCO service delivery approaches.

Current data requirements for funding and reporting only show a small element of service delivery and client presentations without demonstrating the full scope of service delivery or the narrative around families.

Data systems are expensive and the siloed nature of these systems do not reflect the holistic nature of services and complex issues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities may be navigating.

Participants identified **data storage, ownership, and sharing** as key questions for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. One participant expressed the need to consider how data should be stored appropriately in the case that an organisation is defunded and does not continue. Many participants agreed that data should be owned or accessible to community Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should progress Priority Reform 4 – Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

Some participants recommended **national guidelines for interstate information sharing** across sectors, suggesting an approach similar to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework, a legislated framework in Victoria to increase the safety and wellbeing of people experiencing violence by supporting relevant services to identify, assess and manage family violence risk. While many challenges and issues exist with MARAM currently, the model could create a useful basis for national guidelines.



Participants also noted that there was little **transparency on data** once services had reported to governments and talked about embedding accountability for governments.

“The lack of transparency for community related to their own data on this subject is frustrating. How can a community know what to improve if they are never involved in the conversation?” – submission, individual

Many participants strongly agreed that Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should have a focus on **evaluations and research of programs and services**, with resources built into funding agreements and successful programs upscaled. Current data fails to demonstrate outcomes and embedding evaluations is required to show the impact of responses.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led accountability mechanisms

**Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should have strong accountability mechanisms, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led oversight, implementation, evaluation and monitoring, with a focus on government accountability in delivering.**

While engagements did not directly ask for input on the mechanisms of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices, some participants did provide insight and recommendations for how Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should be implemented and structured.

Some participants recommended that **strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms** should be central to the development of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices due to concerns that the existing National Plan and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan have no effective accountability mechanisms built in. Some participants expressed disappointment in the implementation status of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and the related Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025.

Some participants called for a **genuine effort from governments to implement** the included actions and reform for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices’ success, noting that no change will occur unless it is implemented.



Participants identified that an **Aboriginal-led oversight, implementation, evaluation and monitoring approach** for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices as a key element of accountability in FDSV reform. Roles and responsibilities for implementation and monitoring must be clearly articulated for cross-jurisdictional delivery.

When the option of a **national peak body** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FDSV was raised in engagements, participants strongly agreed with the necessity of a peak body. Many also recommended that the peak body could support the evaluation, implementation and monitoring of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices.

Participants talked about the need for **Aboriginal-led and defined success measures** for measuring the outcomes of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices.

## Conclusion

The engagement process for the development of the Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices has been a comprehensive and inclusive effort, aimed at ensuring that the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are central to the formulation of strategies to address FDSV. Despite facing several challenges, the process has yielded valuable insights and highlighted critical areas for improvement and future action.

One of the key strengths of the engagement process was the extensive participation from a wide range of stakeholders, including ACCOs, non-Indigenous organisations, government agencies, and individual community members. This broad participation has ensured that the strategies developed are reflective of the diverse needs and experiences within these communities. However, the engagement process also revealed gaps in representation, particularly among LGBTQIA+SB individuals, men, people with disabilities, and prisoners. Addressing these gaps is essential for the successful implementation of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices.

Several key recommendations have emerged from the engagement findings for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices that are crucial for effectively addressing FDSV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Empowering communities to lead their own strategies and activities is a key requirement that underpins all other recommendations. Community-led initiatives ensure that responses are culturally appropriate and tailored to local contexts, fostering greater ownership and sustainability. This approach aligns with the principles of self-



determination and respects the knowledge and expertise within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices should prioritise community-led solutions that uplift the entire community and address systemic gaps. To enable communities to lead activities to address FDSV, governments need to provide ongoing, flexible funding for ACCOs to design, deliver, and evaluate family violence services tailored to each community's needs. Further, a holistic, strengths-based, and culturally safe service system is crucial for supporting individuals across their life-course. Additionally, reforms to the FDSV and related systems should align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, recognising the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

In conclusion, the engagement process has laid a strong foundation for the development of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. By addressing the identified gaps and implementing the recommendations, we can create safer, more supportive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, and families. The lessons learned from this process will be instrumental in shaping future engagement efforts and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in the ongoing fight against FDSV.



## Appendix 1: engagement activities

Engagement for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices involved over 80 organisations, advisory bodies, research institutions and sector experts, including over 40 ACCOs.

The public submissions process was open from 4 September to 4 November 2024. SNAICC received 52 written submissions from individuals, ACCOs, non-ACCO service providers, research organisations, government departments, and peak bodies.

71 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with lived experience of DFSV participated in six Knowledge Circles in South Australia and New South Wales.

14 online engagements were held with over 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations. Online engagements were held for each jurisdiction, with 50 participants in total. SNAICC also met with 15 ACCO participants in organisation-specific meetings.

Two online engagements were held with organisations about sexual violence – one with ACCOs that support people with experience of sexual violence, with 11 participants and one session with non-Indigenous sexual violence specialist services.

An online engagement was held with non-Indigenous organisations that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

One online engagement was held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies.

Engagements were held at eight conferences during 2024. (See Appendix 2)

Online engagements were held with state and territory Steering Committee members and DFSV policy units across government agencies, with 108 participants in total.



## Appendix 2: Conference engagement findings

During six conferences in 2024, SNAICC asked participants for their expertise on a range of questions (Appendix three), including a quantitative exercise on funding priorities, and qualitative questions on the drivers of violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the role of government in the FDSV system, and the system's successes and opportunities. These questions aimed to get a broad overview of the FDSV system from the perspective of the workforce, with detail sought in the formal engagements, such as the jurisdictional online sector engagements. While there is existing evidence and research around the drivers of violence, this activity aimed to ensure that *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* reflects any emerging drivers and is able to be flexible and adaptable to any changing needs or priorities over the policy's life course. The conferences had a focus on a range of sectors, including FDSV, child protection and wellbeing, youth justice, and disability. The conferences were:

- Overcoming Indigenous Family Violence in Cairns, QLD
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Forum in Mackay, QLD
- Sharing and Strengthening our practice: Domestic, family and sexual violence conference in Alice Springs, NT
- Youth Justice 24: Prevention not Detention in Northern Rivers, NSW
- National Aboriginal Child Safety, Family & Domestic Violence Summit 2024 in Adelaide, SA.

In addition to the above conferences where the SNAICC Secretariat presented, the non-government Co-Chair of the Steering Committee, Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett, and DFSV Commissioner Micaela Cronin presented at the 'Our Health in Our Hands: Building Our Workforce' conference held by NACCHO in Canberra, ACT.

All conferences included a quantitative activity where participants were asked to identify two priority areas for where funding and programs should be focused in the family, domestic and sexual violence system. Participants could choose a prevention, early intervention, response, or recovery and healing focus across national, state, regional, or local level responsibilities. Over 1,000 priorities were identified in this activity. Overwhelmingly, participants identified that programs should be set at the local level, particularly recovery, healing and response. There is



also a notable appetite for national-level prevention and early intervention programs, as well as prevention and early intervention in general. Comparatively few participants prioritised programs and approaches sitting at the state or regional level, or programs that focus on responding to FDSV. However, the majority of those who prioritised response for funding and programs believe response should be at the local level. This activity provided a valuable snapshot of where the workforce believes the FDSV service system should increase its focus and gave insight into the perceived role, or opportunity, for each level of responsibility.

At three conferences, SNAICC asked participants qualitative questions (see Appendix 3). During these conferences, participants spoke to the significance of collaborative responses and the importance of healing and recovery. National funding for culturally safe responses, early intervention, and education were deemed vital. Staffing and training of personnel, along with addressing both individual and community trauma, were also considered critical components. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, doing, and being were championed, highlighting the necessity of holistic, community-led service delivery. There needs to be investment into growing the workforce, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and leadership. Education and awareness campaigns are essential, as is ensuring accountability for those using violence. Furthermore, initiatives led by LGBTIQA+SB communities were mentioned, highlighting the need for inclusive and diverse approaches.

There also needs to be more investment in prevention, early intervention and healing, with recommendations for a multi-faceted approach to prevention and early intervention within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Key initiatives identified included community legal education delivered in local languages, and focusing on healthy relationships for young people. Yarning circles and educational programs targeting healthy relationships were highlighted as crucial measures. Additionally, the inclusion of financial abuse in the National Plan and the implementation of men's behaviour change programs and education were underscored.

Young people require more supports, as do regional and remote areas that often have no safe houses or metro-centric service approaches applied to regional areas. We heard about the importance of having supports for men and having men at the table when addressing family, domestic and sexual violence. There is currently limited funding for men and people using violence – there should be men's programs and wellness centres led by men.



Participants discussed the role of governments in providing longer-term, flexible funding to support communities to lead solutions and transitioning power to community to address systemic issues. Participants also recommended simplifying reporting structures and increasing the role of trust and flexibility in reporting. Emphasising collaboration and systemic transformation, participants called for a shift towards curiosity-driven approaches rather than authoritative stances, and prioritising cultural awareness and safety in official reports. Participants noted that funding for community-led solutions is for the benefit of children, not government structures. The focus is on maintaining children within family, kinship, and community contexts. Participants also recommended that governments work towards implementing existing recommendations, evidence and data.

Participants identified data as requiring a focus in the plan. There is a lack of transparency to families and communities about decisions and data. Data should be relevant, such as when families and people access services. Some participants reported examples of data being misrepresented to suit narratives or communities not included in data collection or conversations around data.

Engagement participants spoke to an array of effective responses led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including justice reinvestment, community-led projects, youth involvement in reform, and kinship systems.

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*governments' role should be] “giving up decision making to those who are best placed to make decision. Part of the journey rather than driving” – conference participant*

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As well as SNAICC engagement at conferences, input for Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices was also gathered by the First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence at their National Forum, and by NACCHO at their annual conference.



## Appendix 3: engagement questions

### Online sector engagements

Broad Aim	Questions
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What are three key policy recommendations or activities the Plan should focus on to create real and sustainable change for Aboriginal Families?</li><li>2. What would your service ideally look like?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Prompt - If there were no barriers or limitations to meeting community needs what would your service look like?</li></ol></li><li>3. What are the biggest gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing domestic, family, and/or sexual violence (DFSV)?</li><li>4. Do you provide any prevention activities (services or programs), what do they look like?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What about for children and young people?</li><li>b. What about specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys 12-25 (at 25 - who are still defined as young people)?</li><li>c. What about specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys girls 12-25?</li></ol></li><li>5. What support do you need for these?</li></ol>
What's working well – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led responses to amplify, scale up, invest in.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>6. Tell us about what works well in your service?</li><li>7. What are the factors that contribute to this success?</li></ol>



What we can learn from each other – How different communities deliver place-based responses	<p>8. How does your service make sure it meets your community's needs?</p> <p>a. What, if any, are the barriers to meeting this need?</p> <p>b. What, if any, support from governments do you need for this?</p> <p>c. What, if any, support do you need from other agencies in your community?</p> <p>9. How should the service system respond to the intersectional needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities?</p>
What's missing – challenges and barriers	<p>10. Tell us about the challenges your service faces in meeting community needs for FDSV</p> <p>a. How could these challenges be addressed?</p> <p>11. Are there any new/emerging issues in community your service is needing to address?</p> <p>a. Please describe these</p>
Data	<p>12. What type of data do you collect for your organisation?</p> <p>a. What do you see as the main purpose for collecting this data?</p> <p>b. If you do not collect data, what supports do you need to collect data for monitoring and evaluation purposes?</p> <p>13. What evaluation tools do you use?</p>



The DFSV workforce	<p>14. What steps does your organisation take to make sure non-Indigenous workers provide culturally safe support?</p> <p>15. How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers provided with opportunities to have their cultural expertise recognised and valued?</p> <p>16. We recognise that much of your workforce may have lived experience of DFSV - how do you manage this?</p> <p>17. What do you think could be done to help the FDSV workforce under this new Plan?</p>
Understanding if and how men are supported	<p>18. Who supports men with lived experience of violence in your community?</p> <p>19. Who provides services to men who use violence in your community?</p> <p>20. What should these services look like? What is needed to achieve this?</p>
Understanding if and how children are supported	<p>21. Who supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in your community who are experiencing or using violence?</p> <p>22. What are some of the barriers to supporting these children in your community? How can these be addressed?</p>
<b>ACCOs only</b>  Mainstream services support Aboriginal-led community responses.	<p>23. What is your relationship with mainstream service providers like?</p> <p>24. What, if anything, could make these organisations more accountable to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?</p>
<b>Mainstream services only</b>	<p>25. What is your relationship with Aboriginal Community Controlled service providers like?</p>



Mainstream services support Aboriginal-led community responses.	26. What, if anything, could improve how non-ACCO organisations work together with ACCOs?
Funding	27. What are the strengths and challenges of your current funding arrangements?  28. What are the gaps in the funding you receive?

## Public submissions

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?
  - a. In your response, you may like to talk about your ideas for what safety could look like in your community and what would be needed to achieve that – things like long-term approaches, including funding models or ideas of things that could help.
2. If there were no barriers, how would your community address FDSV?
  - a. In your response, you may wish to talk about what works well and any barriers or gaps in the service system within your community. This may include whether people in your community know about services available and what types of supports your community prefers.
  - b. You may also wish to talk about how services and supports come together and whether you feel there are some needs that are not being met. You could also comment on how the services are provided and the skill sets required to work with your community in a supportive healing way. This may also include how to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to become leaders in their community. You may also like to consider healing pathways for families that are aligned with community protocols.
3. What does culturally appropriate and holistic service provision look and feel like?
  - a. In your response, you may like to talk about positive examples from your community, or what your community needs for a more holistic approach. This means an approach that looks at all your needs together and not just one specific issue. This could include current gaps in cultural safety. If you are

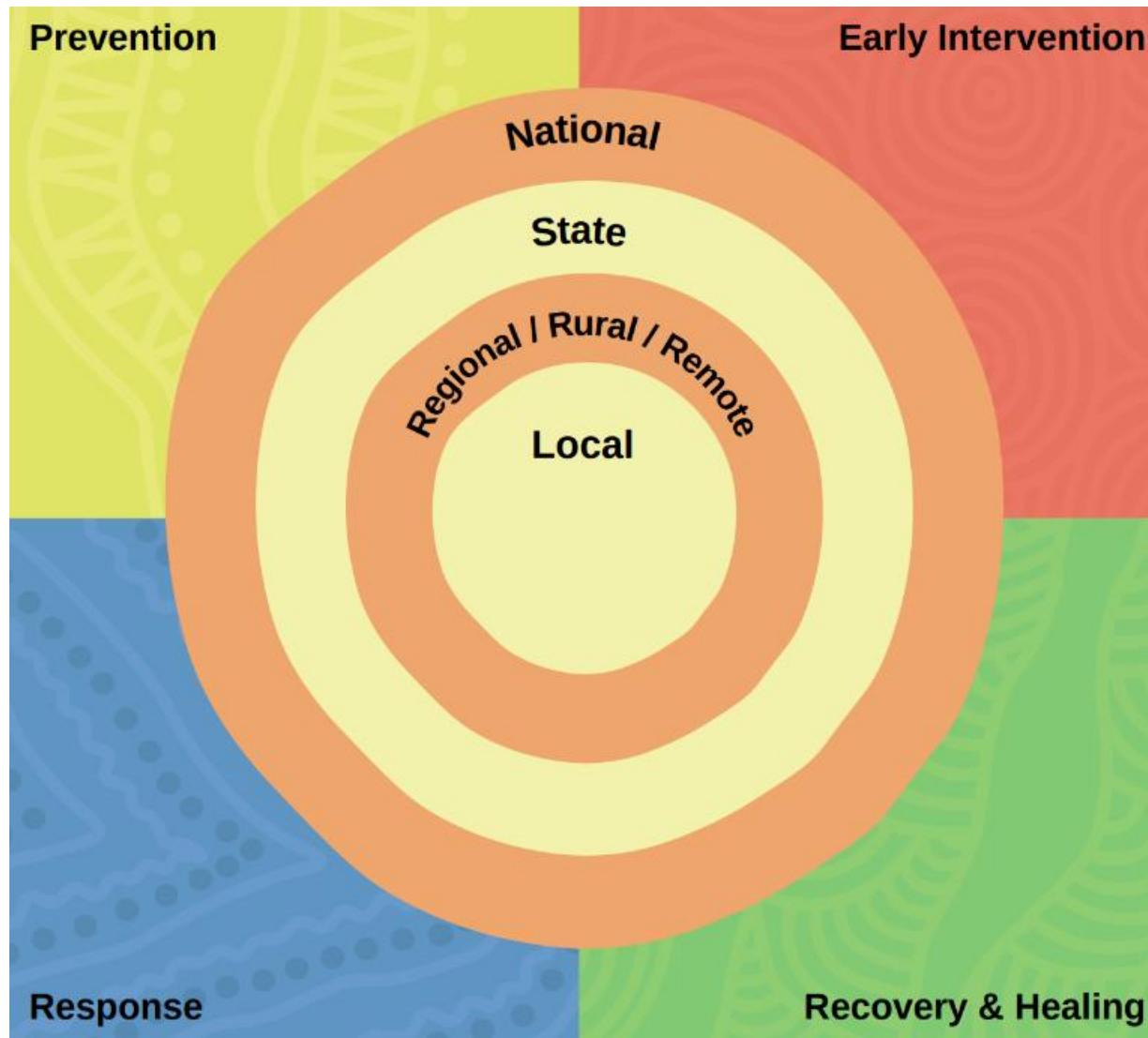


representing an organisation, you may like to talk about all the community supports you deliver and the strengths of this approach.

4. How can governments and mainstream services best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including workforce and clients), services and solutions?
  - a. When we say mainstream services, we mean organisations that deliver services to all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
  - b. In your response, you may like to talk about how mainstream services in your community currently support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and whether this is effective and appropriate, or how mainstream services can ensure culturally safe and accessible service delivery or workplaces. You may like to consider how mainstream services and governments could work with or elevate ACCOs and other community-led solutions, or how mainstream services funded to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients should be monitored.
5. How should the service system respond to the intersectional needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities?
  - a. In your response, you may like to talk about how services manage intersecting needs when addressing FDSV, such as housing, health, transport, healing, or clients with cross border issues.
  - b. You may also like to talk about the unique needs of people in your community when addressing FDSV, such as the broader family unit, children and young people, Elders, people with disability, people who are LGBTIQA+SB, women experiencing incarceration, men who are impacted by FDSV, or people who use violence, including young people.

## Conference engagements

1. What's working well – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led responses to amplify, scale up, invest in
2. What's missing – challenges and barriers
3. What is the role of government in enabling community-led responses
4. What do you think are the main drivers of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?



## Lived experience Knowledge Circles

### General questions

1. What sort of help would have been really useful when you needed it to feel safe? (such as *money, transport, services, family support*).
2. Tell us about the help you got when you needed it (such as *money, transport, services, family support*).



- a. Who helped you?
- b. Where did you access support from?
- c. How did you hear about the supports that were available?
- d. What worked well for you and your family?
- e. What did not work well?

3. Were services accessible to you?
4. What other sort of support do you think you need to keep you and your family safe?
5. What do you think your community needs to keep all families safe? (i.e. *whole of family support, Aboriginal community-controlled services, kinship support, friends, church, sports club etc*)
6. How should these things/services be provided in your community? Who would provide them?
7. What does healing mean to you?
8. Tell us about any healing supports in your community? (such as connection to Country, culture, spirituality, identity ancestry, family and community, healing activities include gatherings, art, dance, song, weaving, and cultural ceremonies)
9. What would really good healing support look like? Are these different for men, women and children?
10. What things could support families before violence starts or gets worse, or the family breaks down?
11. Is there an organisation in your community that provides family safety support that makes you feel comfortable?
  - a. Yes - What is it about the support they provide that makes you feel comfortable there?
  - b. No - If not, are there any services in your community you can seek support from?



### **Optional Thematic Questions**

(If partner ACCO identifies this as a priority or conversation leads here)

Child Wellbeing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. When you needed help, were your children supported? How?</li><li>2. What do you think children need in this situation when violence is happening in the home?</li></ol>
Intersectional experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Were services accessible to your needs?</li><li>4. What should services look like to meet your needs?</li></ol>
Justice system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. If you contacted the police, what was your experience like?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. If you didn't contact Police – why not?</li></ol></li><li>6. Did you go to court, what was that experience like?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Did you have any support?</li><li>b. Were there any other legal supports you tried to reach out to?</li></ol></li><li>7. If you didn't access legal supports – why not?</li></ol>
Transport and Access	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. Does your location impact your ability to access support and services?</li><li>9. What would make getting support easier?</li></ol>
Financial support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>10. Tell us about the money/ financial support you received to help you?</li><li>11. Did you receive money to help you stay safe when you needed it?</li></ol>



	12. What resources – money and other things would have made keeping safe easier?
Social Media and Online Safety	13. Do you feel safe when using social media and being online? (for example using social media like Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram)  14. Was there any service that could support you to feel safe online?  15. What do you need to feel safe online?  16. What do you need to help keep your child/ren safe online?
Technology facilitated abuse	17. Is technology abuse an issue in your community?  18. What needs to change to enhance safety?  19. Are phones or the internet used as part of abuse in your community? Could you give an example of what happened?  20. What are some steps needed to address this issue?
Alcohol and Other Drugs	21. Do you feel safe when people in your family or community are drinking or doing drugs?  22. What does your community do to stay safe when people are drinking or taking drugs?  23. What does your community do to keep children safe when people are drinking or taking drugs?

### **Closing Questions**

12. What makes you strong?
13. How did you find this yarn/interview?

