



Response to the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2023

Prepared by the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (NAAFLS)

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About the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service

The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Services (NAAFLS) is an independent Family Violence Prevention Legal Service. We have offices in Darwin, Katherine and Nhulunbuy and service 46 remote communities spanning from the Tiwi Islands down to Borroloola and over to Lajamanu.

Our legal team provides culturally sensitive, and trauma informed legal representation and advice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Top End communities who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence. Our practise areas include child protection, family law and Domestic Violence Orders. Our client support officers provide holistic and culturally appropriate non-legal supports to our clients.

Acknowledgment of Country

NAAFLS acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community and thank them protecting this land and sea since time immemorial. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. NAAFLS recognises that sovereignty has never ceded.

Response to Draft National Action Plan

We are generally satisfied with the Draft National Action Plan, including the four Foundation Principles and the National Pillars.

With respect to Aboriginal communities, there are key themes throughout the focus areas of the four pillars that we agree are critical to ending family violence.

- Empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices through:
 - Addressing intergenerational trauma; and
 - Community led and culturally safe services and solutions;
- Funding models that recognise the complexity of service delivery in remote communities;

Top-down strategies delivered by Government are unlikely to make significant change in Aboriginal communities and risk causing further harm. All strategies for Aboriginal communities must come from or be co-designed with the community and the community must retain ownership of such strategies for meaningful change to occur. Aboriginal community controlled organisations need sufficient and secure ongoing funding to be able to carry out their work.

- Addressing the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys throughout the process, from prevention through to response and recovery;

This is sorely needed in the Northern Territory. There are very few family violence rehabilitation or men's behaviour change programs, particularly for remote community residents. In terms of prevention, we understand NAPCAN is working with remote communities to individual tailor their Love Bites program to fit each community's needs. This is a slow and costly process, but we hope that culturally safe and community-developed respectful relationships education for young people in remote Aboriginal communities will create positive change.

- Addressing the intergenerational trauma caused by historical policies and practises of government that creates complex barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in accessing services;
- Implementing culturally safe policing and justice responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We are pleased to see recognition that current policing and justice responses do not necessarily serve the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, to focus only on historical policies

and practises of government that have created barriers to accessing services ignores that current systems continue to inflict this harm in Aboriginal communities. Harmful systems that create barriers to accessing services include the disproportionate rate of removal of Aboriginal children by Child Protection Agencies, the over incarceration of Aboriginal men and the income management and “work for the dole” schemes that disproportionately target Aboriginal people.

We believe a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan will best serve the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and are happy the National Plan includes a commitment to develop this. We hope that this specific plan will lead to Government listening to the solutions offered by Aboriginal communities and offering sufficient and secure funding to local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

In lieu of providing more of our own feedback, we have included the Pathways to Safety report prepared by Change the Record with this submission. Change the Record is Australia’s only national Aboriginal led justice coalition of Aboriginal peak bodies and non-Indigenous allies. Change the Record consulted with the fourteen Family Violence Prevention Legal Services across Australia (including NAAFLS) in preparing this report. The report clearly outlines what is needed in a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan.

We look forward to the opportunity to contributing to the development of the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan.