Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy

2022–2032

Dedication to victim-survivors and those who have lost their lives to family violence

The Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed in recognition of and in deep respect for Aboriginal people, families and communities across Western Australia (WA) who have been impacted by family violence. There is also a recognition of the ongoing strength and courage of victim-survivors, and an acknowledgement and mourning of those who have lost their lives to family violence. Those who have bravely and importantly spoken out and shared their stories to inform this Strategy, as well as the tireless advocacy of individuals and organisations who continue to speak out against family violence, are graciously thanked.

We acknowledge the courage and dignity of women and men who not only stand up and say no to violence but who take action to challenge violence and hold perpetrators accountable.

The word 'Aboriginal'

Within WA, the term Aboriginal is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia. Use of the word 'Aboriginal' within this document refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The word 'lore/law'

The term Aboriginal Law, rather than 'lore' or 'customary law', has been retained to describe Aboriginal laws.

Acknowledgement of Country

The WA Government proudly acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises their continuing connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures, and to Elders both past and present.
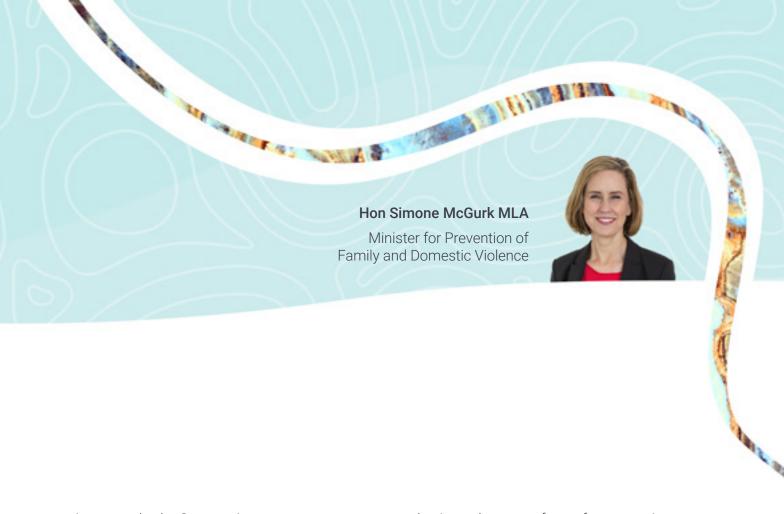
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Message from the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

In 2020, the State Government released Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020 – 2030 (Path to Safety) – WA's first dedicated strategy to address the insidious impact of family and domestic violence on women, children, families and communities across our State. This was a critical step to deal with the high rates of family and domestic violence and outline the long-term and systemic changes needed to turn these statistics around.

Path to Safety acknowledges that family safety for Aboriginal women, children and men is a particular priority, and that Aboriginal families are disproportionately impacted by family and domestic violence. It also recognises that Aboriginal-led initiatives and community-controlled services are foundational for support and healing for Aboriginal people impacted by family violence.

The development of the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy (the Strategy) is the first of its kind in Western Australia. The Strategy has been developed through engagement with over 1,000 people across the State, extensive research and evidence, and specialist expertise. It emphasises Aboriginal voices and brings culture to the centre of holistic responses to family safety. It recognises and builds off the strengths of Aboriginal families across the State and leaves room for regions and communities to develop their own solutions to enhancing family safety, guided by the principles of the Strategy.

Hon Simone McGurk MLA

Minister for Prevention of
Family and Domestic Violence

Importantly, the Strategy is a cross-Government initiative that has been developed in partnership by several Government agencies. It forms one of the State Government's four key actions in the Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan for Western Australia to respond to Outcome 13 – that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe. The Strategy is one part of a whole-of-Government effort to work with Aboriginal people to foster social and economic empowerment and acknowledges that we are all part of the solution of ensuring that all Aboriginal people in WA life safe and happy lives, free of family violence.

The Strategy commits Government, Aboriginal people and the wider community to preference any service delivery or family and domestic violence practice with healing, recognising and supporting the unique roles and responsibilities of men and boys, transforming service provision,

and using culture as a frame for prevention and early intervention.

Ultimately, the Strategy reinforces that any work in this space needs to be Aboriginal-led and hold Aboriginal values, beliefs, culture, identity and knowledge systems at the heart of holistic responses to Aboriginal family safety.

This Strategy is dedicated to all of those who are surviving or have survived this abuse in our community. It also honours those who did not. Thank you to everyone who has been involved in the development of the Strategy and who will continue to be involved in its delivery over the next ten years.

Definitions

Cultural safety

An environment that is safe for people: where there is no challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a culturally safe environment is one where they feel safe and secure in their identity, culture and community. The concept of cultural safety can be used in the context of promoting mainstream environments which are culturally competent, in addition to also ensuring that Aboriginal community environments are culturally safe and promote the strengthening of culture.[1]

Family

The use of the term 'family' acknowledges the variety of relationships and structures that can make up family units and kinship networks. It can include current or former partners, children (including adolescent or adult children), siblings, parents, grandparents, extended family and kinship networks and carers.

Intergenerational trauma

If people do not have the opportunity to heal from trauma, they may unknowingly pass it onto others through their behaviour. Their children may experience difficulties with attachment, disconnection from their extended families and culture and high levels of stress from family and community members who are dealing with the impacts of trauma. This can create developmental issues for children, who are particularly susceptible to distress at a young age. This creates a cycle of trauma, where the impact is passed from one generation to the next. In Australia, Intergenerational Trauma predominantly affects the children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations. Stolen Generations survivors might also pass on the impacts of institutionalisation, finding it difficult to know how to nurture their children because they were denied the opportunity to be nurtured themselves.[2]

Intersectional approach

An intersectional approach situates family violence within collective experiences of colonialism, systemic disadvantage, cultural dislocation, forced removal of children and trauma. Within this context, these widespread and profound traumatic impacts on women, men, youth and children, and the cultural systems and structures that once provided healthy connections, boundaries, safety, security and certainty for all people, must be properly understood if responses are to be effective. An 'intersectional' analysis positions violence at the junction of multiple forms of oppression and acknowledges the complexity and 'multitude of inter-related factors' attributable to family violence.

Lateral violence

Lateral violence, also known as horizontal violence or intra-racial conflict, is a product of a complex mix of historical, cultural and social dynamics that can include gossiping, jealousy, bullying, shaming, family feuding, organisational conflict and physical violence[3]

Law/lore

Locating the Strategy within Aboriginal culture, law/lore, and contexts means that the voices and needs of Aboriginal people are prioritised and the resulting practices are framed within Aboriginal definitions and practices rather than Western knowledge systems.

LGBTQIA+

An acronym used to describe people with diverse gender or sexual identities, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, asexual or questioning community.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap was developed in partnership between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations. There are four priority areas for reform and 17 targets. The objective of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[4]

Perpetrator

Refers to a person who commits an illegal, criminal or harmful act, including domestic, family or sexual violence.

Trauma

Trauma occurs when our ability to cope is overwhelmed. Trauma can have a significant effect on your physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. The impacts of trauma, whether resolved or acknowledged, may surface at any time, particularly when survivors tell or repeat their experiences, or when they encounter similar experiences are shared by others.

Trauma looks different for people depending on their experience of trauma and other factors such as exposure to previous traumatic events, access to support and mental health status.[5]

Trauma-informed

Trauma aware and informed practice is a strengths-based approach to healing that is based on an understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impacts of trauma. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for people seeking help and for the helpers. It also creates opportunities for people affected by trauma to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. It recognises the prevalence of trauma and is sensitive to and informed by the impacts of trauma on the wellbeing of individuals and communities.[6]

Victim-survivors

People who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence. This term is understood to acknowledge the strength and resilience shown by people who have experienced or are currently living with violence. People who have experienced violence have different preferences about how they would like to be identified and may choose to use victim or survivor separately, or another term altogether. Some people prefer to use 'people who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, violence'[7]

Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy
– at a glance

Vision
Aboriginal families and communities in Western Australia are safe, strong and happy, enabling our future generations to thrive

Goal
Aboriginal family safety is achieved through Aboriginal people, Government, and the wider community working together to deliver Aboriginal-led solutions

Purpose
To guide a whole of community, Aboriginal-led, collaborative approach that is flexible, responsive, and place-based to prevent and reduce family violence impacting families and communities.

Values

Shared responsibility

Culture and identity

Respect

Cultural leaders and Elders

Focus Areas

Focus area 1
Healing

Focus area 2
Recognise and support men and boys

Focus area 3
Transform

Focus area 4
Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention

Safety and empowerment

Self-determination

Ongoing Aboriginal-led monitoring, evaluation, reporting and governance

Focus area 1

Healing
Ensure healing is what guides prevention and the delivery of family violence services and practice

Services will be designed to:
- ensure that responses to family violence are holistic and trauma-informed to respond effectively to the intergenerational trauma that exists within Aboriginal communities.
- ensure those who experience family violence, including children and young people, are safe and supported to heal and recover.

Focus area 3

Transform
Transform service provision and reform systems

Systems will be reformed to:
- respond to systemic racism and discrimination by building culturally informed and sensitive agencies, policies, procedures, and practices.
- build the cultural capability of Government agencies through creating career pathways at all levels for Aboriginal workers with a focus on recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff in senior roles by specifying 50D positions where appropriate and aligning with Aboriginal workforce strategic frameworks.
- normalise the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural responses within those systems, which prioritise safety and accountability through localised decision-making.
- reform funding models to prioritise preventative measures and improve access to justice for Aboriginal families experiencing family violence.
- implement evaluative measures that are overseen by community leaders to ensure community are seeing positive changes.

Focus area 2

Recognise and support men and boys
Recognise the unique roles and responsibilities of men, boys and fathers and support them to build strong communities and safe families

Individuals and families will be empowered and responses reframed to:
- address the lack of specific support available for men, including for those who use violence.
- recognise the strong traditional role of men and fatherhood in Aboriginal cultures as central to any initiative designed to address family violence.
- ensure that a long-term approach to embedding family safety for Aboriginal children, people, families and communities is taken.

Focus area 4

Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention
Use culture as the frame for delivering primary prevention and early intervention programs

Early intervention and prevention approaches will be embedded to:
- strengthen culture and identity as a foundational and baseline response to family violence.
- build on the strengths and complex systems that Aboriginal families and communities already utilise and benefit from.
- positively reinforce cultural roles and responsibilities within families and communities – for men, boys, women and girls.
- support localised decision-making structures.
- address the social determinants that lead to family violence.

Introduction

Family, domestic and sexual violence is a national health and welfare issue that has long-lasting adverse consequences for victim-survivors and those who use violence.[8] It affects people from across diverse age groups and backgrounds, and predominantly affects women and children,[9] to the extent that on average, one woman per week in Australia is killed by an intimate partner.[10]

Of significant concern is the disproportionate rates of family violence occurring in Aboriginal families and communities, where Aboriginal women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised than non-Aboriginal women for family violence.[11] The corresponding adverse impacts on Aboriginal women, men, and children, including their physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing, can "...trap families and communities in cycles of crisis".[12]

Aboriginal advocates have highlighted that family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture and, due to the context of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and profound disadvantage, Aboriginal people experience family violence differently to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.[13] Aboriginal people also emphasise the diverse cultures and contexts that exist among the many communities across WA. This diversity is highlighted in the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy (Empowerment Strategy),[14] which notes the considerable diversity of peoples and places (urban, rural, and remote) that make up the WA Aboriginal population, and emphasises the need to develop and implement policies and programs "as close to the local or regional level as possible, with the involvement of those most affected".[15] Consequently, any strategic framework for tackling family violence in Aboriginal communities needs to be tailored to meet these unique characteristics.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 32 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be hospitalised for family violence.

Why is an Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy needed?

While noting the overall high rates of family violence in WA, the State Government acknowledges that Aboriginal women and their children in the State are disproportionately impacted by family violence. In response to these circumstances, the State Government developed the Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family & Domestic Violence 2020 – 2030 (Path to Safety). Regarding the experiences of Aboriginal people, Path to Safety acknowledges:

- the disproportionate impact of family violence on Aboriginal women, children, families, and communities and the devastating toll it takes on families and communities,
- the legacy of colonisation, dispossession, the Stolen Generations, and the impact of policies from successive governments and how this has contributed to the significant disadvantage and [intergenerational] trauma experienced by Aboriginal people, their families, and communities,
- the need to respond to the different drivers of violence experienced by Aboriginal people, which may include poor or inadequate housing, barriers to accessing services, high rates of imprisonment, unemployment and alcohol and other substance use, and
- the ability to respond to these circumstances through Aboriginal-led, community-controlled initiatives is a priority.

Further, family violence has been identified as:

- placing at risk, people's sense of wellbeing and mortality due to family violence-related homicide
- a factor in the lives of young people who suicide[16]
- a contributing factor to placing families and children at high risk of contact with child protection and juvenile justice systems[17].

Key statistics further demonstrate the need for a specific focus on cultural family safety

In Western Australia in 2018-19, 9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females aged 15 years and over experienced domestic physical or threatened physical harm in the previous 12 months.[18]

For all experiences of physical harm in the preceding 12 months, 74 per cent of females identified an intimate partner/family member as at least one of the offenders.[19]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with disability are at an even greater risk of experiencing violence and of being involved in violence and imprisoned, as they face intersecting forms of discrimination because of their gender, disability, and ethnicity.[20]

Intimate partner violence was the leading contributor to the burden of disease for Aboriginal females aged 25 – 34.[21]

Nationally in 2014–15, after adjusting for different population age structures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are hospitalised for non-fatal family violence-related assaults at a rate 32 times that of non-Aboriginal women.[22]

Nationally in 2014-15, 22 per cent of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over, had experienced physical or threatened physical violence in the preceding 12 months with one in eight experiencing physical violence.[23]

For Aboriginal males who had experienced physical or threatened harm in the preceding 12 months, 34.6 per cent of those men indicated the most recent experience of physical violence was at the hands of an intimate partner or other family member.[24]

Family violence is the most investigated and substantiated type of child abuse in WA and is a primary cause of children young people entering out-of-home care.[25]

In Western Australia, family violence was identified as a significant contributing factor in more than 70 per cent of cases where an Aboriginal young person has suicided.[26]

Female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners are likely to have been victims of family violence and sexual abuse – with one Western Australian study suggesting that up to 90 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female prisoners were survivors of family and other violence.[27]

Defining the issue

What is understood so far is that among Aboriginal communities, the broad term and concept of *'family violence'* is preferred for describing what is viewed as a complex issue.

It includes violence that occurs between intimate partners, immediate family, and broader familial kinship systems, lateral violence[28], and the inter-relatedness of these forms of violence with broader social issues. It also captures the diversity of relationships and victim-survivors for whom family violence may impact, including LGBTQIA+ partnerships, relationships with Elders or older people and Aboriginal children and young people as victims in their own right.

Advice from the Coalition of Peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to the National Plan for Closing the Gap refresh process indicated that Aboriginal people do not view family violence as being *'caused'* by any one single factor; rather there are a multitude of interrelated factors that give rise to incidents of family violence.[29] The new Closing the Gap targets also highlight that safe and secure families are essential to an individual's wellbeing, and that having safe and secure families means having strong connections to family and kin, and cultural and spiritual practices that can generate a sense of identity, which supports resilience and coping abilities.[30]

Re-framing the narrative

Aboriginal definitions of family violence differ to mainstream 'Western' understandings which place an emphasis on gender to explain the drivers for, and experiences of, family and domestic violence among non-Aboriginal women.[31] While issues of power and control exist in Aboriginal contexts, it is not considered the primary motivator for family violence, meaning a different lens is required to understand the issues and respond to them.

This Strategy requires an understanding of how Aboriginal people in local communities define the issue; how they "frame" it and make sense of what is occurring. Such framing creates space for Aboriginal people, to describe in their words what is in the foreground, what is in the background, and all the complexity within the frame[32]. It holds space for Aboriginal people to explain how they experience and understand family violence within their daily lives, and their cultural, family and community realities. Importantly, it listens to Aboriginal conceptualisations that includes that family violence does not sit in isolation from other societal and community dynamics, and that effective responses must be informed by holistic perspectives to achieve the best possible outcomes.

A strengths-based approach

While the social disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people cannot be ignored, Aboriginal people have continually highlighted the need for a strengths-based approach to responding to family violence.[33] Aboriginal people emphasise there are strengths, capacities, and resources that exist within families, communities, and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) sector, which can be utilised as the basis for further positive capability-building.

Strengths-based ways of engaging with Aboriginal families requires better understanding of the cultural norms, practices and priorities of Aboriginal parents, caregivers and community.

This reflects input from Aboriginal people and communities that have informed this Strategy. Positioning Aboriginal culture at the heart of the Strategy requires an articulation and understanding of the values and beliefs associated with family safety and caring for children from an Aboriginal perspective. Embracing an empowerment and strengths-based approach to policy development requires a shift in mainstream thinking and practice, beginning with recognition that different cultural groups place different emphasis on what constitutes safety, success, and effective caregiving.

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to outline an Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy that:

- integrates and coordinates community, cross-Government and sector outcomes and aspirations, led by Aboriginal voices.

- is culturally secure and grounded in an Aboriginal worldview.

- is evidence-informed and considers a holistic perspective.

- enables family-centred and place-based solutions.

- responds to Target 13 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap), that is – 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 per cent, as progress towards zero.

Theory of change

Figure 1 outlines the theory of change model for the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy. A theory of change narrative summarises the intent and approach of a program by using a set of assumptions to describe it.

Because...	Aboriginal values, beliefs, culture, identity and knowledge systems are at the heart of holistic responses to Aboriginal family safety
It's understood that ...	Empowering Aboriginal-led family safety responses will result in better outcomes for individual, family and community safety
So, this Strategy provides...	A framework which outlines the changes required to equip communities, Government and organisations to deliver Aboriginal-led solutions
That will lead to...	A greater and more effective engagement with community understandings, responses, supports and services to family and domestic violence
And result in...	A reduction in the prevalence and impact of family and domestic violence for Aboriginal people and communities.

Figure 1 – Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy Theory of Change

Strategic alignment overview

Delivering the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy is a priority for Government and Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities have long advocated for solutions for responding effectively to family violence that intersect with addressing issues such as poor or inadequate housing, barriers to accessing services, high rates of imprisonment, unemployment and alcohol and other substance use. Aboriginal people have importantly advised that these solutions must be anchored in connections to local Aboriginal laws and cultures, and have strong cultural identities, which are linked to roles and responsibilities. In this context, the Strategy aligns with several strategies, frameworks and policies, both from a State-wide and national perspective, as outlined in Figure 2.

Alignment of strategies in this overview will continue to be considered as part of strategy implementation.

State Government

Department of Communities

Sector frameworks

In development

National frameworks

Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy

Figure 2 – Overview of Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy strategic alignment

State Government

- WA's Jurisdictional Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap
- Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – Western Australia 2021 – 2029
- WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015 – 2030
- Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing
- A Safe Place – A Western Australian Strategy to provide safe and stable accommodation, and support to people experiencing mental health, alcohol and other drug issues 2020-2025 (A Safe Place)
- State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services
- WA LGBTI Health Strategy 2019-2024
- WA Aboriginal Procurement Policy (2017)
- Western Australian Suicide Prevention Framework 2021-2025
- Young People's Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Use: Priorities for Action 2020-2025

Department of Communities

- Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020 - 2030
- Stronger Together – WA's Plan for Gender Equality 2020 – 2030
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategy 2022 – 2032
- Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making pilot
- All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy to Homelessness 2020-2030
- Action Plan for At Risk Youth 2020 – 2030
- Beyond 2020: WA Youth Action Plan 2020-2022
- A Western Australia for Everyone: State Disability Strategy 2020-2030
- WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030
- WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019 – 2029

Sector frameworks

- Change the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children
- WACOSS Outcomes Framework
- Target 120

National frameworks

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 – 2032
- Safe and Supported – National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 – 2031
- National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019-2023

In development

- 10-Year Roadmap to Reduce the Number of Aboriginal Children in Care (being led and developed by Department of Communities)
- Implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Housing Organisation Strategy
- Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy (being led and developed by Department of Justice)

The Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy – Values

Vision

Aboriginal families and communities in Western Australia are safe, strong, and happy, enabling our future generations to thrive.

Goal

Aboriginal family safety is achieved through Aboriginal people, Government, and the wider community working together to deliver Aboriginal-led solutions.

Purpose

To guide a whole of community, collaborative approach that is flexible, responsive, Aboriginal-led, and place-based, to prevent and reduce family violence impacting Aboriginal families and communities.

Values

Self-determination

Aboriginal self-determination based on Aboriginal systems, structures, knowledge, and expertise is critical for informing safety and wellbeing in WA's diverse Aboriginal families and communities, including young people and Elders. "We listened to our Elders. Our governance was all there, we had our own little land, flora, and fauna, what was created for us (before colonisation); We have our family kinship connections and governance; … (t)his strategy needs ownership by Aboriginal people".[34]

Shared responsibility

Aboriginal people call for accountable governance, shared leadership and shared responsibilities between the WA Government, its agencies, and Aboriginal communities. This is critical to the success of the Strategy. In addition to community-led decision-making, having Aboriginal people in leadership roles across government is important for informing governments about Aboriginal cultures and peoples.

Culture and identity

Aboriginal cultures contain values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, practices, and ceremonies. Within these cultures, Aboriginal systems and structures of discipline and law principles are important for regulating behaviour and creating and maintaining safety for all people.

Identity is important for connecting to family, kinship, Country, roles, and responsibilities, and understanding where each person fits in their family and community. "Having a strong cultural identity is the key to family safety and community wellbeing".

Cultural leaders and Elders

Cultural leaders and Elders continue to have important roles in families and communities. They are important knowledge holders and play a critical role in regulating behaviour and responding to unacceptable behaviour within Aboriginal families and communities. Colonisation and the imposition of Western systems in Aboriginal communities have undermined the authority of cultural leaders and Elders: "Elders have no power or say", and this undermines Aboriginal systems and structures important for creating and maintaining safety.

The values will drive the actions and behaviours throughout the life of the Strategy. Aligning all actions of the Strategy to these values will be a critical component of the Strategy's success and will ensure the integrity of the Strategy's approach is upheld. Embedding these values should be considered by all relevant stakeholders throughout the Strategy's delivery.

Respect

An Aboriginal worldview is holistic and emphasises the interconnectedness of the spiritual, physical, and inanimate, and living worlds. Because of this belief system, respect for all things is a fundamental value and being respectful is a valued way of being.

Systems must respect holistic Aboriginal worldviews, Aboriginal systems and structures, and the cultural knowledge and expertise that exists in Aboriginal communities.

Safety and empowerment

Being safe is important to Aboriginal people so they can enjoy a sense of wellbeing, feel empowered and have a good quality of life. Holistic and diverse responses that cater for young people through to Elders, and that support Aboriginal people to have a strong connection to culture and identity, are important elements of safety.
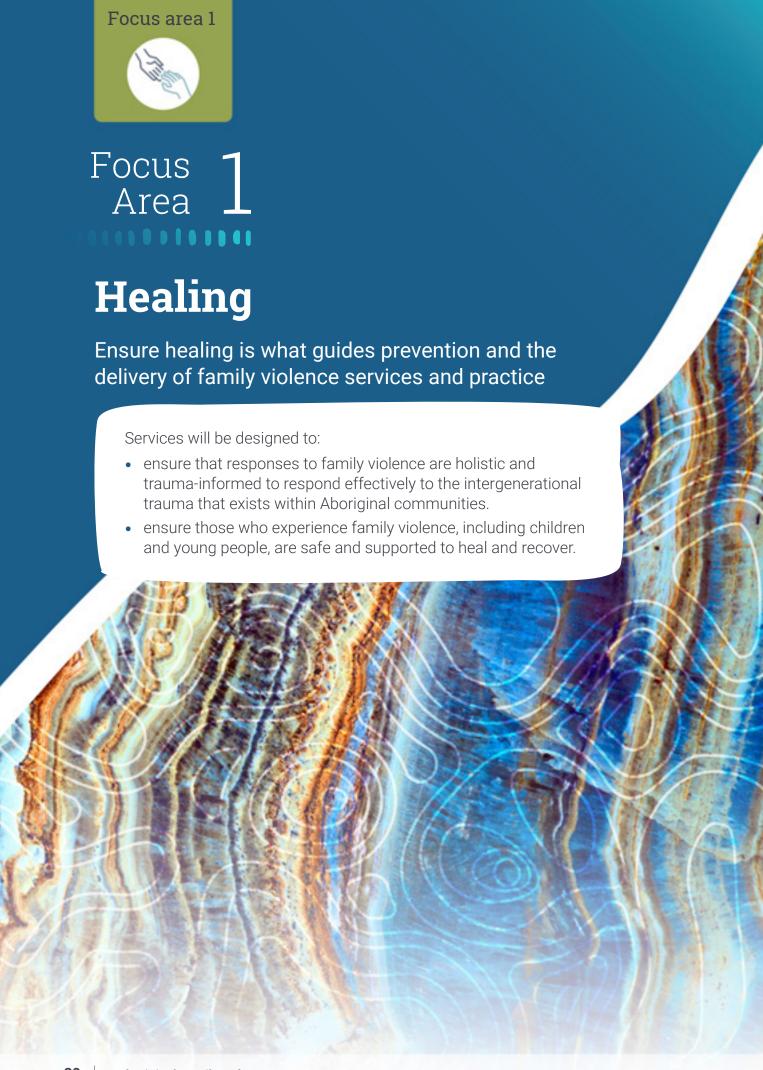
Focus Area 1

Healing

Ensure healing is what guides prevention and the delivery of family violence services and practice

Services will be designed to:

- ensure that responses to family violence are holistic and trauma-informed to respond effectively to the intergenerational trauma that exists within Aboriginal communities.
- ensure those who experience family violence, including children and young people, are safe and supported to heal and recover.

Feedback from engagement

Community

- Unresolved trauma caused by colonisation is a key driver for family violence being present in Aboriginal communities.
- Understanding this trauma is essential to healing, and in turn, to achieving family safety and community wellbeing.
- Healing is needed for individuals, families, and community.
- People need time and space to heal.
- Separate men's and women's healing groups are needed.
- On-Country healing and helping boys and men to reset is important.

ACCOs and other Aboriginal stakeholders

- Aboriginal people view colonisation and intergenerational trauma as being causally linked to family violence.
- Family violence programs and services must support healing from trauma.
- Aboriginal communities identified the need for adopting an Aboriginal worldview and incorporating traditional and trauma-informed, cultural healing practices such as being on Country, yarning, music and sharing stories.

Government, peak bodies and the sector

- We need a broad depth of organisations that have a good understanding of, and experience in, complex trauma and its intersections with family violence.
- Effective solutions are place-based, culturally safe and trauma informed.

Key research findings

Family violence causes trauma physically, neurologically, psychologically, and emotionally. Such trauma affects people's sense of safety and wellbeing. Not only are there physical, psychological, and emotional consequences, but family violence has been identified as a significant cause of morbidity and mortality within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is reported to contribute to an estimated 11 per cent of the burden of disease among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women aged 18 to 44 years – more than any other single factor.[35]

Trauma as a result of exposure to persistent family violence can also affect neurological functioning, development of adaptive behaviour, and impact executive functioning.[36] Those affected by trauma may struggle to self-regulate emotionally, and they may believe that being in a heightened emotional state is normal, or may struggle with activities like planning, problem solving and academic studies.[37]

Good practice example

The First 1000 Days Model

First 1000 Days is a whole of family and whole of service approach to supporting families and ensuring that children are born into, and raised within, a family context that thrives. Key to this approach is a partnership model of care that ensures self-determination and autonomy for children and families as well as accountability that is central to Closing the Gap. The initiative works with Elders, community, researchers, policy makers, service providers and early childhood program developers, and based on principles of co-design, shared decision making, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. In this way, the initiative supports families to identify and meet the aspirations of themselves and their children by developing life and parenting skills that are consistent with cultural values.

> All family violence stems from the destructiveness of anger, which is a result of the inability to express emotional distress. Unresolved trauma builds anxiety, which feeds insecurity and a lack of ability to regulate emotions. People need the skills to identify and regulate feelings. Family violence is the result of emotional distress.
>
> **(Workshop participant)**

Priorities

- Empower and enable Aboriginal communities to determine what healing means for them and how it can guide family violence support and practice via local decision-making models.
- Use culture as the frame for delivering behaviour change programs, recognising the strength of culture in improving safety for Aboriginal children, people, families, and communities.
- Develop culturally informed information and resources to share with Aboriginal services, organisations, and communities on the physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of family violence.
- Ensure the delivery of services and programs balance accountability with healing and compassion and are holistic and trauma informed.

Desired outcomes

- Aboriginal communities' responses to family violence are guided by their own understanding of healing practices.
- Local governance structures for localised decision-making are strengthened to support the work of cultural leaders and Elders.
- Victim-survivors are provided with increased access to holistic community-led safety and support initiatives to heal and recover.
- Families report increased feelings of safety and wellbeing.
- Aboriginal children, young people and families are supported through diversion programs within child protection and criminal justice systems to enable healing and promote wellbeing.
- Culturally secure, trauma informed family violence programs are activated throughout the police and criminal justice systems.

Strategic links

Closing the Gap

- **Priority Reform One:** Partnership and Shared Decision-Making

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy

- Building Aboriginal empowerment into how we work
- Culture at the heart

Path to Safety

- **Focus Area One:** We will work with Aboriginal people to strengthen family safety

Focus Area 2

Recognise and support men and boys

Recognise the unique roles and responsibilities of men, boys and fathers and support them to build strong communities and safe families

Individuals and families will be empowered and responses reframed to:

- address the lack of specific support available for men, including for those who use violence.

- recognise the strong traditional role of men and fatherhood in Aboriginal cultures as central to any initiative designed to address family violence.

- ensure that a long-term approach to embedding family safety for Aboriginal children, people, families and communities is taken.

Feedback from engagement

Community

- There is a lack of specific support available for men and a lack of men's leadership in community.
- There is a lack of safe places for male victims and perpetrators of violence.
- Many men feel disempowered which impacts on their confidence and their role in the family
- Families and children need to feel connected and have a sense of belonging – strong family support networks can increase safety

ACCOs and other Aboriginal stakeholders

- Specific support for Aboriginal boys and men are needed. Aboriginal men have important roles as fathers and role-models. Men must take responsibility for men's behaviour and communities can work out solutions based on accountability, strengthening culture, and healing.
- Role models, community awareness, mentoring and parenting programs that help model collective caring models, respectful behaviour, and healthy relationships can help support recovery from breakdowns in families and culture.
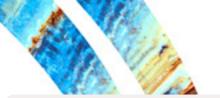
Government, peak bodies and the sector

- We need to ensure there are strong Aboriginal voices (both men and women) who can act as key conduits for the Strategy.
- Preference the connection to family and culture in policies and practices that are developed and delivered.

Priorities

- Identify strong formal and informal support networks that men can access for family violence support.
- Continue to deliver programs that educate and empower men such as healing programs and behaviour change programs.
- Identify opportunities for men to engage with leadership and decision-making mechanisms that relate to family safety.
- Identify or develop separate and safe spaces for men and women to talk about family violence and seek support, acknowledging that holistic family support is also required.
- Support the strengthening of Aboriginal family structures and locally developed programs aimed at reinforcing healthy parenting practices to heal the impacts of generational trauma.

Desired outcomes

- Programs and support groups that positively build the understanding of the role of a parent in a way that recognises history and context are developed and delivered.
- Those who cause harm are provided with increased access to holistic community-led responses that reinforce accountability, reminds them of their roles and responsibilities, and supports them to heal to prevent further violence occurring.
- An increased number of men are involved and engaged with decision-making as it relates to family violence policies.
- Men feel empowered in their role in families and community and demonstrate positive role-model behaviour.
- Aboriginal men and boys have access to culturally safe wellbeing services that promote safe communication and emotion regulation skills and reduces the use of violence.

Key research findings

An holistic approach

Over the past two decades it has been increasingly argued that a multifactorial and intersectional analysis, that situates family violence within collective experiences of colonialism, systemic disadvantage, cultural dislocation, forced removal of children and trauma, is required. Within this context, these widespread and profound traumatic impacts on women, men, youth and children, and the cultural systems and structures that once provided healthy connections, boundaries, safety, security and certainty for all people, must be properly understood if responses are to be effective.

An 'intersectional' analysis positions violence at the junction of multiple forms of oppression and acknowledges the complexity and 'multitude of inter-related factors' attributable to family violence. Aboriginal people have long advocated for the 'opportunity to develop their own solutions to family violence and sexual abuse'. They have also championed responses to family violence that involve Aboriginal justice models and the recognition of Aboriginal Law and Culture. They also note that within models aimed at reducing family violence and improving family safety, the voices of men are often missing. Yet women continue to highlight the importance of including men's voices, that men have also experienced intergenerational trauma, and that ultimately, men have to deal with men.

Roles, responsibilities, and identities

The role of fathers is often excluded from the discourse surrounding family violence and family safety. Men are predominantly portrayed in negative ways but traditionally, the role of fathers is highly valued in Aboriginal societies. Examining the barriers which currently prevent men from engaging effectively in parenting is critical to family safety issues such as overtly gendered language which positions women's identity as primary carers, can act to exclude men from pre and post-natal programs. When coupled with a societal perception that denigrate and stereotype men as abusers, this can lead to feelings of exclusion and a lack of confidence in parenting ability, especially in the pre-natal period.
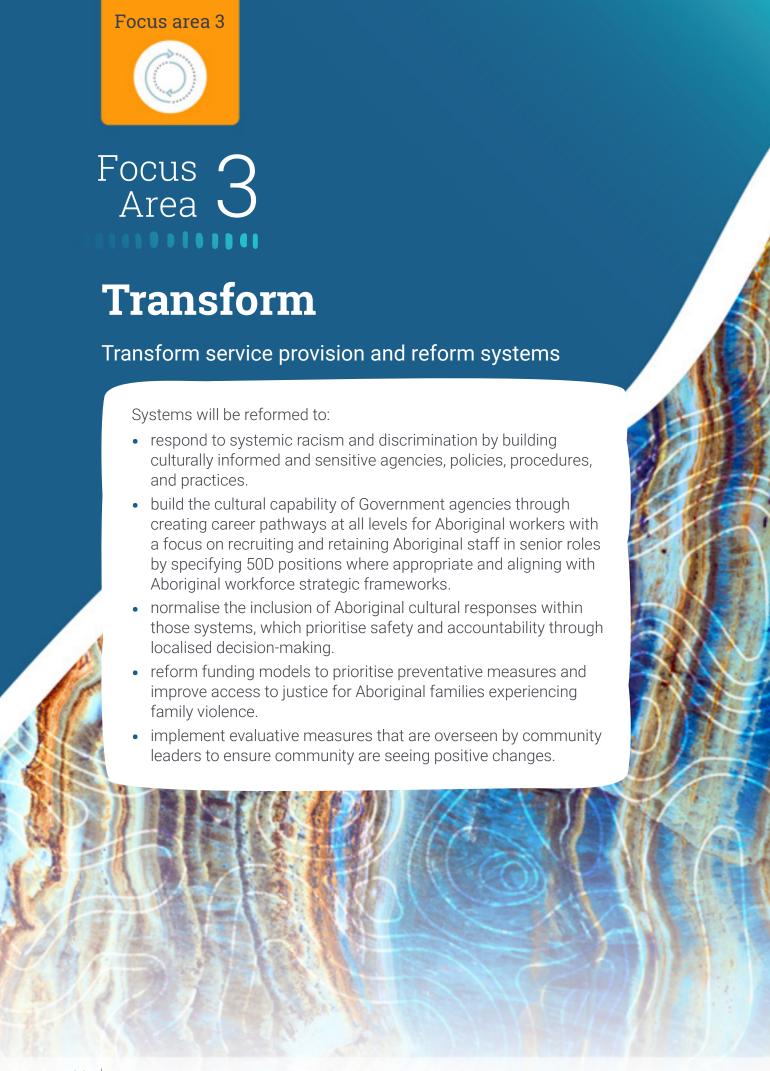
Strategic links

Closing the Gap
- Priority Reform Two: Building the community-controlled sector

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy
- Walking together
- Building Aboriginal empowerment into how we work

Path to Safety
- Focus Area Two: We will act now to keep people safe

Focus Area 3

Transform

Transform service provision and reform systems

Systems will be reformed to:

- respond to systemic racism and discrimination by building culturally informed and sensitive agencies, policies, procedures, and practices.

- build the cultural capability of Government agencies through creating career pathways at all levels for Aboriginal workers with a focus on recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff in senior roles by specifying 50D positions where appropriate and aligning with Aboriginal workforce strategic frameworks.

- normalise the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural responses within those systems, which prioritise safety and accountability through localised decision-making.

- reform funding models to prioritise preventative measures and improve access to justice for Aboriginal families experiencing family violence.

- implement evaluative measures that are overseen by community leaders to ensure community are seeing positive changes.

Feedback from engagement

Community

- Services need to be delivered by local ACCOs.
- Services need to provide holistic and trauma-informed services.
- People need to know what services are available to them and how to access them.
- Barriers to services need to be removed to increase accessibility.

ACCOs and other Aboriginal stakeholders

- Systems need to be reformed to embed a value and respect for Aboriginal Laws, cultures, languages, the authority of cultural leaders and Elders, and the role of ACCOs.
- Stresses of ongoing systemic disadvantage and poverty put pressure on families and can be a driver of family violence.
- Funding models need to be reformed to support local, Aboriginal-led preventative programs and services in families and communities.

Government, peak bodies and the sector

- Appropriate, culturally secure, and trauma-informed service delivery is key.
- Resourcing and procurement models that enable place-based delivery are needed.
- A strong guide for implementation and resourcing will be needed to successfully support the Strategy.
- Effective evaluation of outcomes, using data indicators that community value, is critical.

Key research findings

Mainstream approaches to responding to family violence, healing and justice have been consistently identified as needing reform. Holistic approaches that take into account the complex nature of Aboriginal experiences of family violence including the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma, together with present-day stresses, marginalisation and racism, past history of abuse or neglect, destructive coping behaviours (addictions), health and mental health issues and low self-esteem, are more likely to meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people have consistently highlighted the importance of Aboriginal community-led initiatives for responding to the diversity of communities, and diverse needs among women, men, children, and Elders. There is also a growing appreciation of the important role that Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) play in communities, and an increasing appreciation for Aboriginal ways of working, learning, and knowing. Aboriginal communities emphasise the importance of valuing and prioritising these ways of working, learning, and knowing, and that ACCOs are ideally placed to work within communities to respond to family violence effectively.

Assisting non-Aboriginal staff and service providers to shift their thinking to Aboriginal-led ways of working will take time and effort and cannot be completed with one-off workshops. Training must be long-term and be facilitated with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators working in partnership to support such a comprehensive change agenda.

Priorities

- Preference delivery of family violence support services by local ACCOs.
- Promote awareness of what services are available to families and communities that build on strengths and wellbeing and encourage growth and healing.
- Deliver culturally appropriate interventions and therapeutic supports for behaviour change for those who have perpetrated violence.
- Develop a culturally informed risk assessment tool to be embedded in family violence services.
- Generate culturally informed safety planning policies and procedures for victim-survivors who need to leave a family violence situation quickly.
- Enhance family and domestic violence (FDV) workforce capability by developing an FDV workforce capability framework across all agencies, guided by national vocational training systems where appropriate.
- Identify opportunities for staff training and capacity building, particularly for first responders and other support agency workers, in relation to complex family violence issues.
- Improve the cultural capability, awareness, and sensitivity across community services and Government, by embedding a value for Aboriginal Law and cultures in the policies, procedures, and practices of systems that challenge racism and unconscious bias.
- Offer trauma-informed and culturally-informed counselling supports for children experiencing family violence.
- Embed culturally-secure awareness of what constitutes family violence in school education programs.
- Collaborate with Aboriginal communities to improve two-way data collection and information sharing, and to support data sovereignty.
- Collaborate with Aboriginal communities to develop the monitoring and evaluation plan for this Strategy.

Desired outcomes

- Mainstream systems increase their cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity to improve their interactions with Aboriginal people, families, and communities.
- The cultural capability of Government and other agencies is improved through the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff at all levels, including in senior decision-making roles.
- Aboriginal families experiencing family violence have improved access to holistic legal advice and wrap-around support. This may include access to mental health and alcohol and other drug support, supports for children, and supports for strengths and culture-based family and parenting practices.
- Aboriginal communities and their ACCOs have increased access to, and greater control over of, the use of data and information.
- A range of culturally safe and secure interventions that support the whole family, are available and suited to the needs of the community.
- Agencies are better equipped to provide suitable services and supports.

Strategic links

Closing the Gap
- **Priority Reform Two:** Transforming Government agencies and institutions
- **Priority Reform Four:** Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

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Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy
- Culture at the heart
- Building Aboriginal empowerment into how we work

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Path to Safety
- **Focus Area Four:** We will reform systems to prioritise safety, accountability, and collaboration

Focus Area 4

Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention

Use culture as the frame for delivering primary prevention and early intervention programs

Early intervention and prevention approaches will be embedded to:

- strengthen culture and identity as a foundational and baseline response to family violence.
- build on the strengths and complex systems that Aboriginal families and communities already utilise and benefit from.
- positively reinforce cultural roles and responsibilities within families and communities – for men, boys, women and girls.
- support localised decision-making structures.
- address the social determinants that lead to family violence.

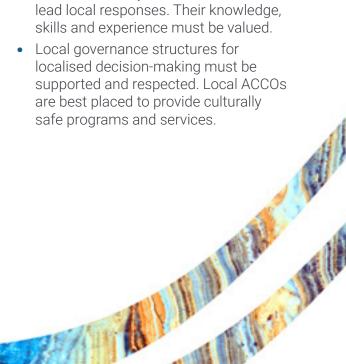# Feedback from engagement

Community

- Aboriginal culture provides the framework for creating safety and supporting behaviour change – we need to help people to reconnect with culture and values so they can be strong.
- Safety planning and self-referrals for early intervention programs are needed.
- Long-term, sustainable funding of programs need to focus on both prevention and early intervention.
- Need to identify intersecting issues, like mental health and housing, and address with professional support.

ACCOs and other Aboriginal stakeholders

- Preventative programs and services can prevent harm from occurring in the first instance and must be invested in.
- Aboriginal people have solutions to issues like family violence and must lead local responses. Their knowledge, skills and experience must be valued.
- Local governance structures for localised decision-making must be supported and respected. Local ACCOs are best placed to provide culturally safe programs and services.

Government, peak bodies and the sector

- Sustainability of investment and community building is needed for success.
- The intersection of broader issues are going to be difficult to tackle, but will be important to address.
- Partnership approaches with Aboriginal communities and leaders and Aboriginal-owned resources and solutions will be critical.

Key research findings

Recent research on Law and Culture and Aboriginal family violence , supports a fresh paradigm that enables Aboriginal peoples to develop their own solutions to family violence in their communities, underpinned by their own Laws and Cultures. The term Aboriginal Law, rather than 'lore' or 'customary law', has been retained to describe Aboriginal Laws.

These Laws and Cultures remain a relatively untapped resource. Aboriginal people are 'bound' by their Laws, and there are sanctions imposed when it is breached. For Aboriginal people, their Laws fulfill similar functions to that of Western law in mainstream society. Aboriginal people believe that the threat of sanctions deter people from offending, reinforces social norms by displays of power, and heals fractured relationships through demonstrations of remorse and punishment.

Elders maintain that responsibility for family violence reduction strategies should be place-based and part of local community safety plans. A key role of these plans would be the creation of community owned and managed diversionary programs, particularly for younger people. Communities consulted by researchers on Aboriginal family violence called for governments to increase funding for programs aimed at diverting people away from the criminal justice system, as well as involve communities in designing and delivering the programs. At the very least there needed to be a 'co-design' process where mainstream agencies work collaboratively with community organisation and Elders to build initiatives congruent with local Laws and Cultures. A defining feature of congruent programs is the location of programs 'on-Country' under the leadership of Elders. As noted earlier, connection to Country is at the heart of Aboriginal notions of being and belonging.

Women Elders play a particularly important role in ensuring the safety of women and children on an 'informal' basis. There are numerous Aboriginal women who open their homes to women escaping violence and act as an informal refuge, some continuing this service even where there is a Government funded women's refuge. Some women will not access formal refuges for a diversity of reasons, for example, they may have consumed alcohol or have older children with them and/or have infringed rules on previous visits. Refuges run by non-Aboriginal organisations are not always considered to be 'culturally safe', meaning that they do not offer an environment which is spiritually, socially, and emotionally secure as well as physically secure.

Priorities

Use culture as the frame for delivering primary prevention and early intervention programs.

- Develop culturally secure self-referral pathways for early intervention programs.
- Preference the delivery of early intervention and prevention programs and initiatives that have long-term and sustainable funding, including early intervention responses that target children and young people.
- Increase accessibility for emergency accommodation for those who are experiencing family violence.
- Grow local ACCO capacity, capabilities, and the local Aboriginal workforce to plan, develop and deliver preventative measures and other programs in communities.
- Collaborate across Government to reform funding models away from prioritising crisis-driven responses, to resourcing measures that prevent harm from happening in first instance.
- Collaborate across Government and with Aboriginal communities to develop responses to the harmful impact of alcohol and other drugs.
- Collaborate across all levels of Government and with Aboriginal communities to develop solutions for responding to poverty and meeting the basic needs of Aboriginal people. This may include:
  › the provision of suitable housing;
  › access to educational opportunities;
  › appropriate social and emotional well-being and mental health care;
  › culture-based ante-natal health care;
  › access to primary health care; and
  › access to training and employment opportunities.

Desired outcomes

- Through community-led initiatives:
  › The capacity, capability and workforce within local ACCOs is strengthened to deliver preventative measures, healing, and other programs.
  › Self-determination is strengthened and Aboriginal people feel empowered.
- Increased availability of safe houses or accommodation in Aboriginal communities for women, men, children and young people to support their immediate safety needs.

Strategic links

Closing the Gap
- **Priority Reform Three:** Transforming Government organisations

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Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy
- Investing in foundations and futures

. . . .

Path to Safety
- **Focus Area Three:** We will grow primary prevention to stop family and domestic violence

Achieving the vision

The Strategy will be delivered through a series of action plans over a ten-year timeframe. Noting the diversity and unique strengths of the regions and communities across WA, ensuring these plans are developed with local and place-based voices will be key to their success. Mechanisms for ongoing engagement and consultation with community and stakeholders will be established to support implementation and delivery of these plans.

Principles for implementation

The following principles have been developed to guide the approach for implementation and delivery of the Strategy. These principles have been informed by the valuable feedback received throughout the community and stakeholder consultation process and are aligned to the Empowerment Strategy which sets out how the WA Government will direct its effort towards a future in which all Aboriginal people, families and communities are empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation.

Aboriginal-led

A key principle for implementation is that responses are Aboriginal-led and delivered. This means working with local Aboriginal communities and stakeholders to drive implementation, which could be through grass-roots community groups, ACCOs and other forums identified by communities.

Designed in partnership

Aboriginal people, Elders and leaders want to lead the design of responses, in partnership with Government and the sector. This approach is intended to both engender ownership and build efficacy of the responses, based on community readiness.

Place-based

To ensure the Strategy remains responsive and flexible to the unique needs of communities across WA, responses will need to be designed and delivered through a place-based model.

Responsive to different groups and people

The Strategy acknowledges that different cohorts are impacted uniquely by family violence. This includes the diverse ways in which family violence may be experienced by LGBTQIA+ people, Elders and older people, and children and young people. Impacts from family violence may be felt directly by people experiencing violence first-hand or indirectly by witnessing violence or being in a close relationship with someone who has experienced it. The Strategy acknowledges that these distinct groups and cohorts need to continue to be engaged throughout implementation to capture their unique experiences and needs.

New and better ways of working

To successfully deliver the Strategy, new and better ways of working between Government, organisations, cultural leaders and Elders, and community will be needed. For Government and organisations in particular, this may include embedding trauma-informed practice and practitioner self-care, using strengths-based and community strengthening approaches, addressing intersectional issues and discrimination, and a commitment from non-Aboriginal organisations and people to work as allies in culturally safe ways.

Identifying and reporting success

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure continuous improvement, make progress and demonstrate change. Regular monitoring will ensure the Strategy is meeting its objectives and will help to identify where adjustments may be needed. Central to this approach is the need to disseminate information back to Aboriginal communities, Government and the sector so that evidence about successful Aboriginal-led initiatives and responses can be shared more widely.

A monitoring and evaluation plan will be developed and will detail the approach for evaluation over the duration of the Strategy. It will include performance measures which focus on progress towards the action plans implemented and demonstrate impact towards supporting safe Aboriginal families and communities.

Importantly, the evaluation of the success of the Strategy should ensure that data and metrics used represent those valued by Aboriginal people and communities. The evaluation model should be reflective of Aboriginal ways of being, recognise local and cultural knowledge and be driven by the values outlined in this Strategy. As such, the monitoring and evaluation plan will be developed in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities.

For consistency purposes, it will also take into account the data metric and measurements used in:

1. Path to Safety: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020 – 2030

2. National Agreement and WA's Implementation Plan on Closing the Gap

3. National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 – 2032
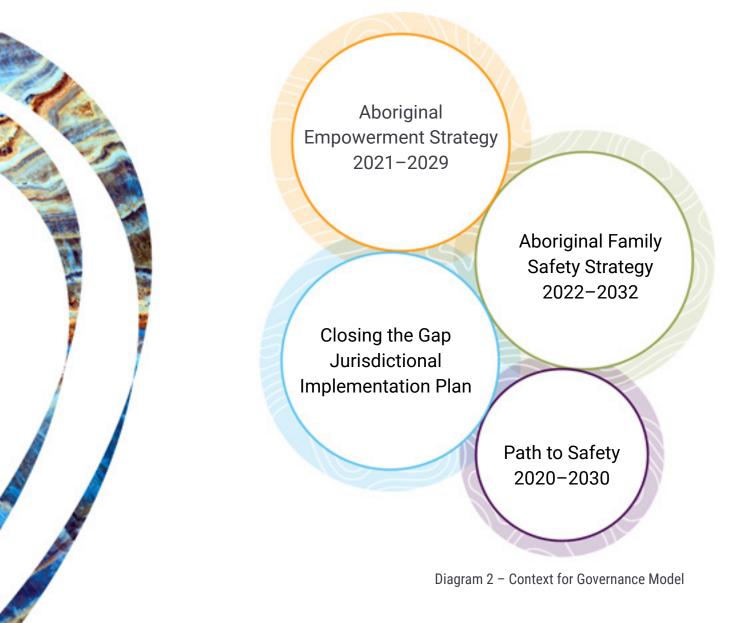
4. The WA Government Outcomes Framework

Outcomes of the Strategy will sit across the four tiers of individual, community, service and system level.

Governance

An appropriate governance model will be developed to provide oversight of the delivery of the Strategy. The governance model will take into account existing mechanisms and ensure there is appropriate representation from the Aboriginal community, the sector, Government and (if appropriate) industry. Governance of the Strategy will be driven by Aboriginal voices.

A whole-of-Government approach to governance and implementation will ensure actions are coordinated and building off one another. Government and sector alike will be required to consider their roles and impact in delivering on the actions outlined in this Strategy. Governance sits within state and national policy contexts as outlined in Diagram 2.

Aboriginal communities and stakeholders will continue to be engaged to inform a governance model. Where possible, existing Aboriginal forums, governance bodies and local decision-making structures will be integrated into this model.

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2021–2029

Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy 2022–2032

Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan

Path to Safety 2020–2030

Diagram 2 – Context for Governance Model

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