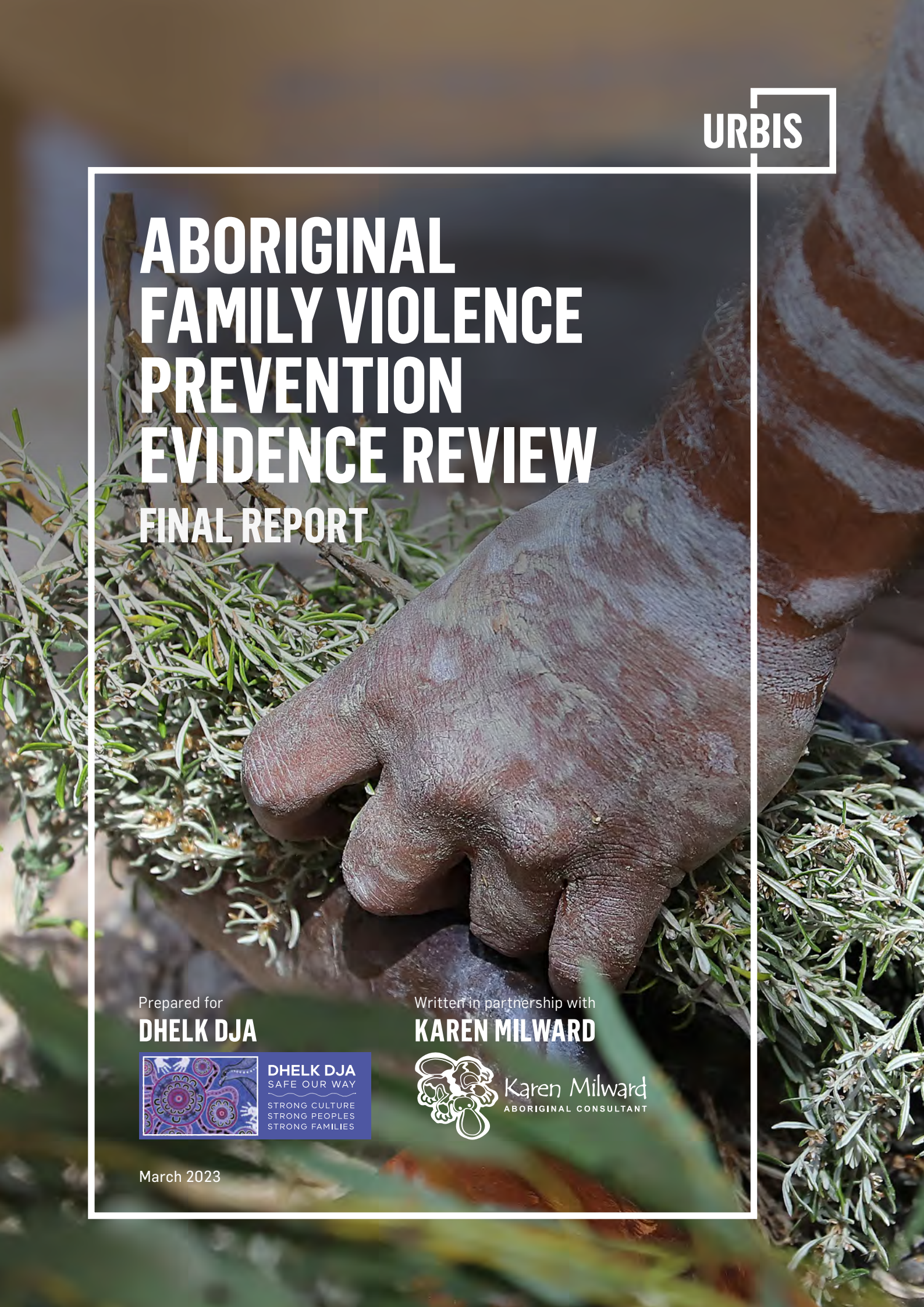
URBIS

ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION EVIDENCE REVIEW

FINAL REPORT



Prepared for

DHELK DJA

DHELK DJA
SAFE OUR WAY
STRONG CULTURE
STRONG PEOPLES
STRONG FAMILIES

Written in partnership with

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Respect Victoria is the dedicated organisation for the prevention of family violence and violence against women in Victoria. Our vision is a Victorian community where all people are safe, equal and respected, and live free from family violence and violence against women. To achieve our vision, we lead and support evidence-informed primary prevention and act as a catalyst for transformational social change.

Respect Victoria acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we rely. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of Aboriginal communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women. We acknowledge the significant disruptions to social and cultural systems and the ongoing hurt caused by colonisation. We are proud to work alongside Dhelk Dja to contribute to knowledge building efforts about Aboriginal-led family violence work. We commit to working in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate family violence and violence against women from all communities.

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TERMINOLOGY

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria have different preferences for the way their communities are collectively or individually referred to (including Koori, Koorie, Indigenous, First Nations, First Peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples). This document adopts 'Aboriginal' in the context of its use within *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, and 'First Nations', except where referencing a specific document.

Urbis acknowledges the important contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make in creating a strong and vibrant Australian society.

We acknowledge, in each of our offices, the Traditional Owners on whose land we stand.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

While family violence can impact anyone regardless of their gender, background or age, Aboriginal people – especially women and children – experience significantly higher rates of and impacts from family violence relative to the general population. Family violence against Aboriginal women and families takes many forms, including intimate partner violence, violence against children and young people, lateral violence, and abuse of Elders. Aboriginal definitions of family violence are broader than those used by non-Aboriginal people.[1] The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force defined family violence as:

> **"an issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.[2]**

Over the last decade, there has been an increased focus on primary prevention strategies to address the underlying drivers, behaviours and attitudes that contribute to the perpetration of violence against Aboriginal women and families. The focus of primary prevention is to prevent violence before it occurs, and includes a range of activities across all levels of society:

- **individual level:** promoting individual attitudes and behaviours that prevent violence, conflict resolution, healthy relationship programs
- **relationship level:** addressing the underlying drivers of violence within familial, partner and social relationships; family, partner and peer prevention programs, mentoring
- **community level:** improving the physical and social environment in community settings (such as schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods) to identify and reduce the drivers of violence
- **societal level:** addressing the broad social factors that contribute to violence; economic, educational and social policies that reduce the underlying drivers of violence and improve the social determinants of health.

This project

Urbis, in partnership with Karen Milward, has been commissioned by Respect Victoria to undertake a research project to document the evidence base for effective Aboriginal-led family violence primary prevention initiatives in Australia and specifically Victoria. The objectives of the project are to:

- establish a baseline of what we know about effective primary prevention programming for Victorian Aboriginal women and families, and more broadly Australian First Nations people – what works best, in what settings and for what specific forms of violence
- synthesise the evidence to highlight effective and/or best practice principles or guidance for prevention of violence for Aboriginal women and families
- identify gaps in the evidence base or knowledge and where additional research is needed.

The research method for this project included a comprehensive desktop review of existing evidence relating to the primary prevention of family violence in First Nations communities in Australia and other comparable jurisdictions, as well as consultations with sector stakeholders to supplement the published evidence.

Key findings

Policy landscape	▪ The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 sets the direction for family violence policy in Australia. It outlines the actions needed by all levels of society to end violence in a generation and includes a commitment by government to develop a First Nations-specific National Plan. ▪ Victoria is committed to family violence reform underpinned by Aboriginal self-determination. Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018-2028 is the key Aboriginal-led Victorian 10 Year Agreement that commits Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal services and government to work together and be accountable for ensuring that Aboriginal people, families and communities are living free from family violence. ▪ All Australian states and territories have committed to actions to end gender-based violence. Some have specific family violence policies, strategies and frameworks outlining the actions they are taking to achieve this vision. Most documents outline a focus on primary prevention as a strategy to address family violence and refer to the unique needs of First Nations communities and the need for culturally tailored prevention and response efforts. ▪ Victoria and Queensland are the only Australian jurisdictions which have First Nations-specific policies. Victoria has the most progressed Aboriginal-led policy and governance framework, dating back to 2003.
Approaches to family violence primary prevention in First Nations communities	▪ There is limited published evidence, both in Australia and internationally for comprehensive strategies that effectively tackles violence against First Nations women and families. Most peer-reviewed literature focuses on tertiary responses, rather than primary prevention approaches. There are also few examples of primary prevention programs targeting First Nations communities and even fewer that have been evaluated. ▪ There is a growing focus on knowledge translation and collaborative research to address gaps in the evidence base for First Nations family violence primary prevention. Knowledge translation activities are designed to communicate and disseminate research findings into practical actions. ▪ Promising primary prevention strategies found in the literature include: education programs targeted at young people in secondary school settings; communication and marketing programs; and activities designed to mobilise and support communities to prevent violence against women.
Enablers and barriers of effective family violence primary prevention approaches in First Nations communities	▪ Common features of effective approaches are identified in the literature and supported by consultations with sector stakeholders. Approaches are more likely to be successful if they are: holistic and involve the whole family; community-led design and delivery; prioritise cultural strengthening and reconnecting to Aboriginal culture; and are strengths-based. There is also growing focus on engaging men and boys in prevention efforts. ▪ Several enablers to support the delivery of primary prevention approaches were found that are relevant to the First Nations context. These include: long-term funding to support the incremental nature of prevention; strengthening workforce capacity; culturally safe and culturally competent service delivery; and ongoing investment in monitoring and evaluation. ▪ A number of barriers to sector-wide delivery were also identified. These include a lack of data sharing and data usage and inconsistent collaboration between primary prevention organisations (including mainstream organisations, Government agencies and ACCOs).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conclusions and implications

Overall, the evidence is still emerging regarding effective primary prevention of violence against Victorian Aboriginal women and families' programs. Very few studies or evaluations of primary prevention initiatives have been conducted, and international approaches which have been shown to be effective may not necessarily be applicable in Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. It is important to acknowledge, however, that while there is a limited peer-reviewed literature focused on effective First Nations-specific primary prevention approaches, this does not mean this knowledge does not exist within communities.

Consultations with family violence sector stakeholders confirmed that considerable Aboriginal-led prevention actions have been undertaken across Victoria for many years. These efforts can be strengthened through further investment in long term funding, targeting monitoring and evaluation activities and support for the Aboriginal-led workforce.

Future primary prevention research should focus on addressing key gaps regarding the abuse of Elders, lateral violence and violence towards LGBTIQ+ community while also ensuring that research is undertaken in partnership with First Nations communities, rather than for communities. It is also critical that efforts to measure the effectiveness of programs recognise that Western research methodologies and frameworks are not always relevant nor appropriate for the First Nations context.

01 INTRODUCTION

01 INTRODUCTION

Urbis, in partnership with Karen Milward, was commissioned by Respect Victoria to undertake a research project to document the evidence base for effective Aboriginal-led family violence primary prevention initiatives in Australia and specifically Victoria.

The project was managed through Respect Victoria with input and guidance from the Project Management Working Group (PMWG), which included representatives from Family Safety Victoria (FSV), and Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination from Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and Dhelk Dja Sub-Working Group Two. FSV is an agency within the DFFH portfolio.

This is the final report of the project.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The overarching purpose of the project was to gather information on what research and evidence currently exists for the primary prevention of family violence against Aboriginal women and families throughout Australia, with a specific focus on Victoria. Research and evidence on secondary prevention was also considered where appropriate in recognition that many Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and community groups deliver a range of activities across the prevention continuum.

The specific research objectives are to:

- establish a baseline of what we know about effective primary prevention programming for Victorian Aboriginal women and families, and more broadly Australian First Nations people – what works best, in what settings and for what specific forms of violence
- synthesise the evidence to highlight effective and/or best practice principles or guidance for prevention of violence for Aboriginal women and families
- identify gaps in the evidence base or knowledge and where additional research is needed
- present findings of the 'what works' evidence synthesis and project findings to Respect Victoria, Dhelk Dja Working Groups [3], and other sector partners.

In scope

This project was focused on the primary prevention of all forms of violence against Aboriginal women and families including children, young people, and Elders. However, initiatives that use an effective combination of primary and secondary prevention was included, where appropriate.

Out of scope

This project does not include tertiary responses to violence against Aboriginal women and families including systems, services, interventions, or programming to respond to or address violence once it had already occurred.

METHODOLOGY

Project overview

The project commenced in June 2022 and concluded in January 2023. The project was completed over three distinct stages as follows:

- **Phase 1: Establishment and Planning** – involved scoping and planning for the research project
- **Phase 2: Desktop Review and Consultations –** involved a comprehensive desktop review of existing evidence relating to the prevention of family violence in First Nations communities in Australia and other comparable jurisdictions, as well as consultations with Change the Record, Our Watch and the Equality Institute to supplement the published evidence
- **Phase 3: Reporting and Presentations –** involved development of a Report (this document), and presentation of findings to Respect Victoria and Dhelk Dja, followed by submission of the Final Report.

Desktop review

The study method for the desktop review involved:

- An initial scoping workshop with Respect Victoria and the PMWG to explore the project objectives in more depth, map out the existing evidence base (at a high level), and confirm how the project can deliver value for all stakeholders.
- A review of academic literature, grey literature and internet resources provided by Respect Victoria and the PMWG relating to the primary prevention of family violence in Aboriginal communities in Victoria and Australia
- A targeted search and review of key publications, journal articles and policy documents focused on effective approaches to family violence primary prevention in Victoria, Australia and comparable jurisdictions (USA, New Zealand and Canada)
- A narrative analysis of the literature, including identifying key themes and gaps in the evidence.

Sources and search criteria

The following sources were used to locate relevant academic literature, grey literature, policy and strategy documents, evaluation reports and internet resources: Google; Google Scholar; and other websites in Australia and internationally, including national and state government department websites, and ACCO websites.

Key search terms used in this review comprised:

- "family/domestic violence primary prevention"
- "family/domestic violence secondary prevention"
- "family/domestic violence prevention"
- "domestic abuse prevention"
- "family safety"

and:

- "Aboriginal women/people/families/communities"
- "Indigenous women/people/families/communities/ Australians"
- "First Nations women/people/families/communities/ Australians"
- "Koorie/Koori women/people/families/communities/ Australians"

A selective approach was applied to identify relevant documents. Priority was given to documents published in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and USA over the past 15 years; however, where relevant and/or due to a paucity of relevant prevention literature, documents published prior to 2008 and in other jurisdictions were included.

Consultations

This review draws upon consultations conducted towards the Family Violence Mapping Project [4] including discussions with 28 non-government stakeholders (ACCOs and mainstream family violence organisations) and 20 government stakeholders, including Family Safety Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and National Indigenous Australians Agency. Given the recent consultations towards the Mapping Project conducted by Urbis and Karen Milward, selected organisations were invited to contribute to this project including SNAICC, Djirra and ANROWS. Consultations have been conducted with representatives from Our Watch, Change the Record and the Equality Institute.

01 INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

LIMITATIONS

The following limitations should be considered when reading this report:

- The time available has not allowed for a systematic review of the literature. Instead, a narrative review has been undertaken, which provides a synthesis of the literature available
- By their nature, family violence primary prevention efforts are often broad in scope and seek to address the underlying drivers of violence and/or strengthen the protective factors against family violence. In this context, initiatives which contribute to prevention may not explicitly aim to prevent family violence and this posed a challenge in locating relevant literature.

At the time of writing, there is limited published evidence on:

- effective approaches to family violence primary prevention targeting First Nations communities in Australia and other comparable jurisdictions
- what primary prevention approaches work best in Aboriginal communities, in what settings and for what specific forms of violence.

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2: Background and context – summarises the background and context relating to family violence primary prevention, family violence and Aboriginal communities, and common types of family violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women and families

Section 3: Policy landscape – outlines the current policy landscape in Australia relevant to family violence primary prevention and Aboriginal women and families

Section 4: Approaches to family violence primary prevention in First Nations communities – documents the evidence base for family violence prevention programs in First Nations communities in Australia and international jurisdictions

Section 5: Enablers and barriers to effective family violence primary prevention approaches in First Nations communities – draws on the evidence base to identify common enablers and barriers to effective prevention, including consideration of the principles and/or approaches which are common in prevention efforts

Section 6: Conclusions and implications – summarises the findings from the desktop review, including gaps in the evidence base, and outlines the implications for future practice and research.

02 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

02 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

KEY FINDINGS

- Primary prevention approaches seek to prevent family violence before it occurs by addressing the underlying discriminatory social norms, structures and practices that drive violence in our communities. Primary prevention is most effectively delivered as a whole population social change strategy.
- Aboriginal women and families experience disproportionate rates of and impacts from family violence relative to the general population as a result of complex, underlying drivers relating to the ongoing effects of colonisation as well as gendered factors.
- Family violence against Aboriginal women and families takes many forms, including intimate partner violence, violence against children and young people, lateral violence, and abuse of Elders.
- Efforts to prevent family violence against Aboriginal women and families must focus on addressing the underlying drivers of violence, including by challenging racism, healing intergenerational trauma, and working with men in the prevention of violence against women and families.

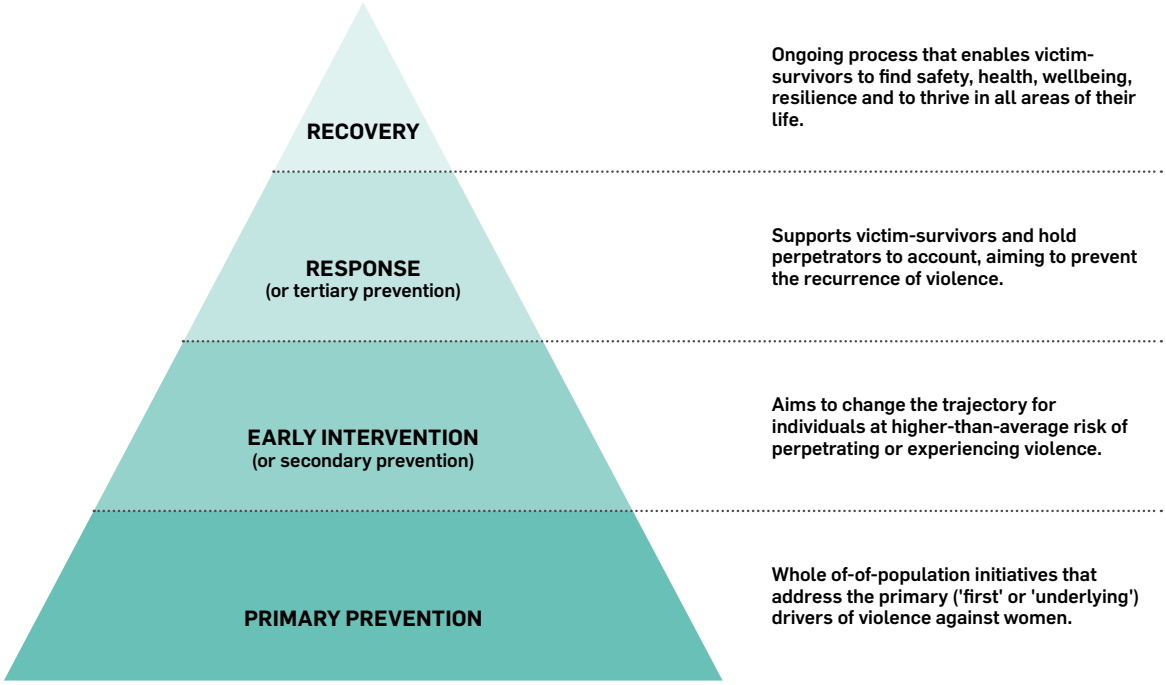
This section summarises the background and context relating to family violence primary prevention, family violence and Aboriginal communities, and common types of family violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women and families.

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION?

Australia has adopted a public health approach for the prevention of family violence. Under this approach, primary prevention strategies are those which seek to prevent violence before it occurs and address the underlying drivers of violence with our social ecosystem. Primary prevention recognises that this requires broad and systematic revision of historic social norms and gendered power structures that have given rise to family violence. This social change agenda is applied at a whole of population level and complements other forms of family violence responses.

Primary prevention is distinct from secondary prevention and tertiary response, which focus on stopping early signs of violence from escalating, preventing a recurrence of violence, or reducing longer-term harm. [5] Primary prevention must be effectively linked with secondary prevention and tertiary response efforts, as the different strategies reinforce and build on each other to prevent violence and make communities safer (see Figure 1 overleaf).

Figure 1 The relationship between primary and secondary intervention and tertiary response to address family violence



Source: Adapted from Our Watch, Change the Story, second edition (2021)

Within the literature, there are a range of theories that underpin family violence primary prevention. These include:

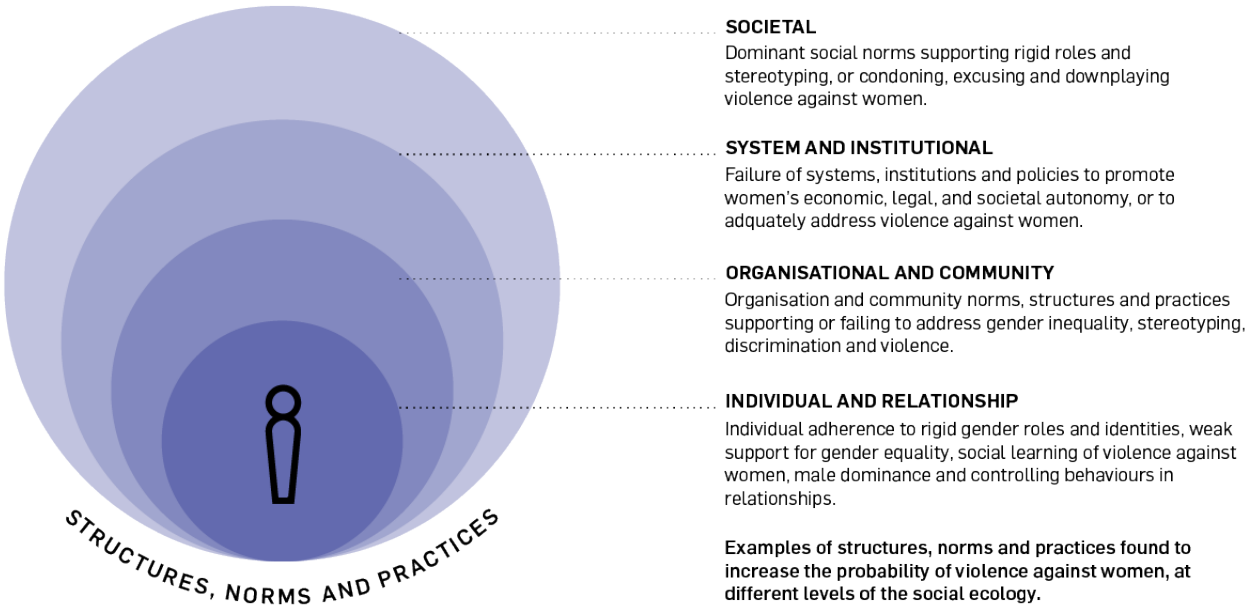
- Feminist theory: incorporates interdisciplinary activism to address how power and oppression intersect with systemic racism, class systems, sexuality, nationality, and disability [6]
- Social learning theory: the socialisation process through which the exhibition of behaviour, language, culture, educational, social, and political practices are the result of observing the actions of others
- Conflict theory: the engagement of groups in competitive activities in the fight for limited resources whereby one group gains and the other loses [7]
- Community mobilisation: working with the whole community to embark on creating activism and a process of change. This involves using multiple strategies over time that are supportive of women's rights and highlight that violence is not something that 'happens to other people'.[8]

Other models that are also discussed in the context of primary prevention include the Duluth model, a feminist approach that attempts to engage men in discussions on power and control (primarily developed for family violence response behaviour change programs), and the social-ecological model for understanding violence. [9] Australian public health approaches to primary prevention have increasingly adopted the social-ecological model to conceptualise the social ecology in which family violence prevails. Depicted in Figure 2 overleaf, as a series of concentric circles, this model recognises the interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors that influence violence, and emphasises the need for prevention efforts to occur across each level. [10]

Our Watch highlights that "social structures, norms and practices are interrelated, and each plays a role in supporting the others. This means that a comprehensive approach to prevention needs to address each of these aspects, across all levels of the socio-ecological model."[11]

02 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT CONTINUED

Figure 2 Structures and factors that influence violence



Source: Adapted from Our Watch, Change the Story (second edition), 2021

Activities to support this broad and ambitious social change agenda can take many forms and may include, but not limited to, review of government and organisational policies, media campaigns to foster awareness of gendered attitudes, educational programs in schools to promote respectful and equitable relationships among young people and increasingly employer led initiatives to promote gender equity in the workplace where historical stereotypes and patriarchal power dynamics can be prevalent.

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Overview

Aboriginal definitions of family violence are broader than those used by non-Aboriginal people. [12] The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force defined family violence as:

> **"an issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide. [13]**

The term 'family violence' (as opposed to 'domestic abuse' or 'family and domestic abuse') has become the most accepted terminology for violence against Aboriginal people as it extends to family and kinship relationships where violence may occur. [14]

By contrast 'domestic violence' is commonly defined as acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. [15]

While family violence can impact anyone regardless of their gender, background or age, Aboriginal people – especially women and children – experience significantly higher rates of and impacts from family violence relative to the general population. [16] For example, Aboriginal women are more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence, more likely to be murdered by a family member, and more likely to have their children removed, compared with non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are also 11 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to die as a result of family violence.[17]

While there is no single cause of violence against Aboriginal women, the research highlights three key underlying drivers which overlap and intersect in complex ways:

- ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, including intergenerational and collective trauma, systemic oppression, disempowerment and racism
- ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-Aboriginal people and society, including racialised structural inequalities of power and entrenched racism in social norms, attitudes and practices
- gendered factors, including gender and inequality in a general sense, and specific gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women that are a consequence of colonisation.[18]

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2017) highlighted that:

> **"... it is crucial to understand family violence as emerging within the context of deep intergenerational trauma as a result of colonisation, dispossession and the destructive impact of policies and practices such as the forced removal of children. There is no doubt that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture is the foundation upon which everything else is built and that strong cultural identity and connection is key to better outcomes.** [19]

This review acknowledges the significant, far reaching and ongoing impact of colonisation.

Types of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women and families

As noted above, family violence can take many forms. Some common types of violence found within the literature are outlined in Table 1 overleaf, with specific reference to the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal women and children. It should be noted this is not an exhaustive list.

02 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT CONTINUED

Table 1 Common types of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women and families

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Intimate partner violence	Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most common forms of violence against women and refers to any type of violence which is perpetrated by an intimate partner. It is estimated that three in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced a level of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15. [20] Historically, there has been an assumption that most perpetrators of IPV against Aboriginal women are Aboriginal men. However, while there is little data on the cultural backgrounds of IPV perpetrators, anecdotal and practice evidence suggests non-Indigenous men make up a significant proportion of perpetrators.[21]
Violence against children and young people	Aboriginal children and young people are at greater risk of harm from family violence relative to non-Aboriginal children. This includes impacts from exposure to family violence (such as suicide and self-harm, complex trauma, and negative developmental, learning, and emotional wellbeing) as well as direct impacts from violence itself (such as injury and death).[22] Family violence has also been recognised as one of the key factors in the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents.[23]
Lateral violence	Lateral violence, sometimes referred to as horizontal violence or intra-racial conflict, is violence "perpetrated by Aboriginal community members, against other Aboriginal community members".[24] Largely understood as the product of historical, cultural and social dynamics, lateral violence involves directing anger or dissatisfaction to members within an oppressed community rather than towards the oppressors of the community. As outlined by the Australian Human Rights Commission, feelings of shame, judgment, lack of trust and/or psychological traits can exhibit themselves in behaviours such as gossiping, bullying, jealousy or family feuds.[25]
Abuse of Elders	Violence against older people is described as "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person".[26] Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect. While an older person in Australia is generally classified as someone over the age of 65, Aboriginal Elders are not identified by their age, but rather as those who harbour wisdom, community service and cultural knowledge and have been recognised as custodian of Aboriginal lore.[27] As outlined in the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services paper 'With respect to age', the drivers of family violence against Aboriginal Elders predominantly stem from: ■ colonisation: dispossession of land, child removal policies, the breakdown of kinship systems and institutional impacts ■ marginalisation: unemployment, entrenched poverty, destructive coping mechanisms and health and mental issues.[28]

Preventing family violence against Aboriginal women and families

According to the literature, to effectively prevent violence in First Nations communities, the causes or drivers of violence need to be properly understood and explained to ensure that measures are 'treating the cause, not the symptom'. This fundamental principle — aligning strategies and actions with the specific underlying drivers of violence — is the essence of a prevention approach.

Our Watch's report, *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* stresses that efforts to prevent family violence in Victorian Aboriginal communities must focus on addressing the underlying drivers of violence, including by:

- healing the impacts of intergenerational trauma, strengthening culture and identity
- challenging and preventing all forms of racism, indifference, ignorance and disrespect towards Aboriginal peoples and cultures
- implementing intersectional approaches to preventing violence against women across the Australian population
- working with men, including those who use violence, to support their healing journey.[29]

The report also outlines that efforts to prevent family violence in Aboriginal communities must recognise that violence against Aboriginal women and children is not part of Aboriginal culture, and that perpetrators of violence include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and men and women.[30]

It is important to note that many Aboriginal-led family violence prevention initiatives combine elements of primary and secondary prevention. As outlined in Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018-2028:

> **"initiatives… work across all types of prevention – primary prevention, secondary prevention (early intervention) and tertiary prevention (response) – and [are] underpinned by culture, cultural strengthening, healing and strengthening protective factors.[31]**

The recently published report by the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor refers to 'Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention' which is the language adopted through consultation with Aboriginal family violence prevention stakeholders in Victoria.[32] For the purposes of the review, efforts have been made to identify primary prevention initiatives in line with the scope of the review.

03 POLICY LANDSCAPE

03 POLICY LANDSCAPE

KEY FINDINGS

- Building on the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010-2022*, the recently released *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* sets the direction for family violence policy in Australia over the coming decade. It outlines the actions needed for all levels of society to end violence in a generation and includes a commitment by government to develop a First Nations-specific National Plan.
- Victoria is committed to family violence reform that is underpinned by Aboriginal self-determination, as evidenced by the policies, strategies and frameworks implemented since the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report in 2003. *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018-2028* is the key Aboriginal-led Victorian 10 Year Agreement that commits Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal services and government to work together and be accountable for ensuring that Aboriginal people, families and communities are living free from family violence.
- All Australian states and territories have committed to actions to end gender-based violence. Some have specific family violence policies, strategies and frameworks outlining the specific actions they are taking to achieve this vision. Most of these documents outline a focus on primary prevention as a key strategy to address high rates of family violence. and refer to the unique and nuanced needs of First Nations communities and the need for culturally tailored prevention and response efforts.
- While most documents reference the unique and nuanced needs of First Nations communities and the need for culturally tailored prevention and response efforts, Victoria and Queensland are the only Australian jurisdictions which have First Nations-specific policies.

This section summarises the policy landscape for family violence primary prevention in Australia.

Firstly, it outlines the Commonwealth and Victorian policy landscapes, followed by other Australian jurisdictions.

COMMONWEALTH POLICY CONTEXT

Australia's commitment to ending gender-based violence is outlined in the *Australian National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (National Plan). The National Plan builds on the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010-2022*, which provided the first framework for action by governments to reduce violence.[33]

The National Plan articulates how the Commonwealth and all Australian state and territory governments must work together with the rest of society, including businesses and workplaces, media, schools and educational institutions, the family, domestic and sexual violence sector, communities and all individuals, to achieve the vision of ending violence within a generation. It sets out a series of actions across four domains including prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing.[34]

In recognition of the disproportionate impact of family violence on Aboriginal communities and the complex drivers of violence, the Commonwealth Government has committed to developing a First Nations-specific Action Plan and National Plan. The First Nations National Plan will explore solutions embedded in the principles of truth telling and self-determination. It will also highlight the need to transform current prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing efforts to ensure they counter systemic racism and promote culturally safe practices and holistic approaches that respond to deeply held historical trauma and improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[35]

03 POLICY LANDSCAPE CONTINUED

VICTORIAN POLICY CONTEXT

Policies and strategies to address family violence in Aboriginal communities

In October 2001, the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force (Task Force) was established in recognition of the disproportionate rates of family violence suffered by Aboriginal Victorians. Its role was to enable Indigenous communities to examine the issues that surround family violence and develop localised solutions. In December 2003, the Task Force's Final Report outlined the importance of family strengthening, community-driven collaborative planning and decision-making and strong partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous services.[36]

Building on the work of the Task Force, the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum was established in 2005 to enable the Victorian government and Aboriginal communities to address issues surrounding family violence against Aboriginal people and communities. The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum developed *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: towards a safer future for Indigenous families (*Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families), a 10-year plan released in 2008 outlining the actions needed to prevent and eliminate family violence against Aboriginal women and families.[37]

Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families included a commitment to develop an Aboriginal-specific prevention framework, which resulted in the development of the *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework* (Framework), released in 2012. The Framework was designed to support primary prevention capacity building, ownership and the development of sustainable activities in Aboriginal communities in Victoria. [38]

Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018-28 (Dhelk Dja) is the current ten year Aboriginal-led agreement to address family violence in Aboriginal communities. Supported by the 10-year investment strategy, Dhelk Dja guides and influences the policies, funding and practice of Aboriginal services and mainstream services that are integral to Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change.[39]

Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way identifies some key features that will contribute to a safer future for Aboriginal communities in relation to family violence: Aboriginal culture and leadership; Aboriginal-led prevention; self-determining Aboriginal family violence support and services; system transformation based on self-determination; Aboriginal-led and informed innovation, data, and research. Dhelk Dja is supported by action plans to measure progress and track outcomes.[40]

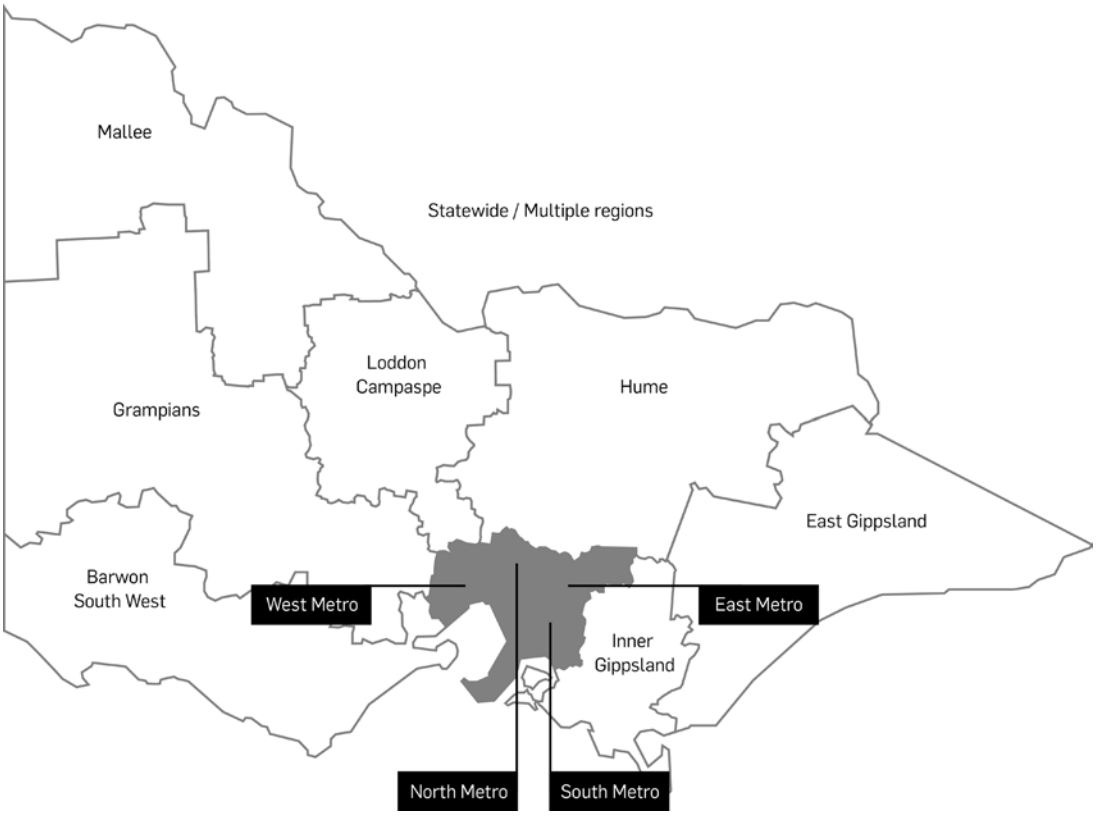
Self-determination and local governance promoted through Aboriginal action groups

Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups (IFVRAGs) were first established in 2003 to promote awareness of family violence at the local level. Led by a nominated Chairperson, IFVRAGs are made up of local Aboriginal community members who determine local priorities for family violence prevention.[41]

In 2012, these groups were renamed to Dhelk Dja Action Groups. There are now 11 Dhelk Dja Action Groups representing Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Each group is responsible for developing Regional Action Plans to address the specific needs and priorities of their communities.[42]

Along with representatives from the Victorian government and ACCOs, the Chairpersons of the Dhelk Dja Action Groups comprises membership from the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum.[43]

Figure 3 Dhelk Dja Action Groups



Source: Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way (2018)

Investment in local Aboriginal action and services

In 2003, the Community Initiatives Fund (CIF) was launched. It provides small grant funding to local ACCOs and community groups to support community-led projects that raise awareness of and seek to reduce family violence. The geographical reach and funds available under the CIF have grown since its inception and provided $2.2 million in 2022-23 across the 11 Dhelk Dja regions.[44]

Commencing in 2005, Holistic Healing and Time Out Services were established across Victoria to respond to the specific needs of Aboriginal community members who have experienced or perpetrated family violence. Healing and Time Out services are designed to support the recovery and healing of the local community, and ensure that those accessing the services receive a culturally appropriate response. [45]

More recently the Victorian Government has provided funding to Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention through:

- The Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Innovation Fund 2018-2021, providing $3.2 million for 14 initiatives led by 13 Aboriginal organisations to test trail and evaluate Aboriginal led prevention initiatives
- The Preventing the Cycle of Violence Aboriginal Fund. Established in 2018, this fund supports Aboriginal-led family violence prevention and early intervention initiatives. $2.7 million was invested over two years (2018–2020) to support 11 projects in the inaugural grant round of the fund. Additional funding was allocated in 2020–21 via the Dhelk Dja Aboriginal Family Violence Fund.

03 POLICY LANDSCAPE CONTINUED

Broader policy developments

Established in the wake of a series of deaths related to family violence in Victoria, the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) report was tabled in March of 2016. The report made a total of 227 recommendations aimed at preventing violence, improving support for victims/survivors and holding perpetrators to account. A key development in response to the RCFV was the establishment of Respect Victoria under the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Australia's first statutory authority focused on the primary prevention of family violence.[46]

As part of the 10-year *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change, the Free from Violence Strategy* (Strategy) acknowledges the deep-rooted impacts of colonisation and dispossession that contribute to the intergenerational trauma and family violence that Aboriginal families and communities experience. [47]

The Strategy commits to focusing on the drivers of family violence and affirms the Victorian government's commitment to ensuring all prevention initiatives are developed in partnership with Aboriginal communities.[48]

Released in December 2021, the *Free from Violence: Second Action Plan 2022-2025* outlines Victoria's key primary prevention priorities and sets out responsibilities across government departments and agencies. Aboriginal-led prevention is a priority of the Second Action Plan, which ensures primary prevention activities are prioritised and underpinned by self-determination in alignment with Dhelk Dja.[49]

Victoria's *Everybody Matters: Inclusion and Equity Statement* sets out Victorian Government's 10-year vision for a more inclusive, safe, responsive and accountable family violence system. It also connects with and complements Dhelk Dja.[50]

POLICY CONTEXT IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN STATES AND TERRITORIES

All state and territory governments have committed to actions and reforms to achieve the shared vision of ending gender-based violence under the new National Plan. In addition, some states and territories have specific policies, strategies and frameworks which provide a basis for action to prevent and reduce family violence.

Across all jurisdictions, there is a strong policy focus on primary prevention to end violence, as well as addressing family violence in partnership with Aboriginal communities, including through co-design and promoting the development and implementation of community-led approaches. However, outside of Victoria and Queensland, no Australian state or territory has created a First Nations-specific, stand-alone family violence policy, strategy or framework. Rather, the various documents include reference to First Nations family violence, with some citing the nuanced and specific needs of First Nations victims/survivors and perpetrators.

An overview of relevant family violence policies, strategies and frameworks provided by the different jurisdictions is provided in Appendix A.

04
APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

04 APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

KEY FINDINGS

- While First Nations women and families are at an elevated risk of experiencing family violence, there is a lack of evidence, both in Australia and internationally, of what works for the primary prevention of violence for this cohort.
- Most peer-reviewed family violence literature focuses on tertiary responses, rather than primary prevention approaches. There are also few examples of primary prevention programs targeting First Nations communities and even fewer still hat have been evaluated.
- There is a growing focus on knowledge translation and collaborative research to address gaps in the evidence base for First Nations family violence primary prevention. This includes strategies such as participatory evaluation, co-production, co-design and co-creation with First Nations communities.
- Promising primary prevention strategies include education programs targeted at young people in school settings; communications and marketing programs; and activities designed to mobilise and support communities to prevent violence against women.

This section documents the published evidence base for family violence primary prevention programs in First Nations communities in Australia and international jurisdictions. It draws on published academic literature regarding the theory base for effective prevention approaches and then presents examples of initiatives and programs with commentary on evidence of success, including whether an evaluation has been conducted, key outcomes achieved, and barriers and enablers to success. Given the paucity of published literature on prevention in First Nations communities, this section also draws on other sources of evidence including grey literature.

THEORY AND EVIDENCE BASE

Academic literature focusing on family violence primary prevention in First Nations communities

Within the literature, the majority of family violence-related policy and practice research and evaluation studies focus on tertiary response interventions.[51] According to Kuskoff et. al., prior conceptions of violence against women were generally grouped as originating from either one or more of the following: individual actions, cultural norms, systemic factors, or an amalgamation of these.[52] In lieu of this, various Australian governments throughout the last four decades have developed domestic and family violence policies that waver between considering the matter as an individual issue, a human rights issue or one of family disintegration.[53] The authors noted that in recent years, a consensus has evolved that discredits the individual, human rights or family dysfunction theory for inadequately comprehending and interacting with gender and women's social standing as the root cause of domestic and family violence.[54]

This has led to Australian policies adopting a more cultural focus that accentuate gender roles and cultural inequality as the main drivers of family violence. According to the authors, this policy focus is generating innovative changes in both structural and practice frameworks, with a specific focus on resolving family violence through the primary prevention lens.[55] Despite this shift there is still limited published literature, both internationally and in Australia, of what works for the primary prevention of violence against women in First Nations communities. Due to the various programs' characteristics and the various cultural settings of First Nations communities, the evidence is currently inconsistent.[56]

Where primary prevention measures, initiatives or programs were identified in the literature, they tended to be aimed at women, with the goal of empowering First Nations women to achieve more autonomy via building confidence and acquiring new abilities and securing more opportunities.[57] While the empowerment of women and girls is critical in prevention efforts, involving both males and females (in all-females/all-males or mixed groups) is more likely to create constructive norms.[58]

A number of studies have found that engaging men and boys is critical to the success of primary prevention strategies in First Nations communities.[59] This acknowledges that male acculturation is a key driver and that men constitute the majority of abusers. It also represents the growing understanding that males may benefit from and contribute to primary prevention initiatives and that boys and men can also be victims of family violence.[60]

Most primary prevention approaches and practices found within the literature are at the relationship or community level and seek to tackle gender imbalance or inequality through group education programs. However, the literature suggests that combining education with societal approaches that incorporate law, policy and service infrastructure recognising the uniqueness, trauma and culture of First Nations communities could better enable the effectiveness of education efforts.

While there is a lack of peer-reviewed literature surrounding First Nations-specific primary prevention theory, approaches and practice, this does not mean approaches do not exist nor cannot be identified in the cultural knowledge of communities.

Emerging research in the field of family violence primary prevention in First Nations communities

As discussed above, even though First Nations communities are at a higher risk for encountering violence, there is limited evidence-based measures for mitigating family violence.[61] The roots of this knowledge gap are multi-faceted. First, inferential statistics procedures are often questioned in the scholarship when it comes to primary prevention initiatives for First Nations people.[62] In addition to the difficulty of conducting randomised controlled trials in rural and remote areas, "many Indigenous practitioners and communities do not accept that such methods of evaluation are required".[63]

According to Blagg and colleagues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led assessment and evidence-gathering processes are needed, which take into account their unique contexts. To be effective, assessments of First Nations programs "need to be premised on the needs of the intended program users" instead of the objectives or criteria of the financial authorities.[64] Indigenous participatory assessment procedures must be developed, and community perspectives on what comprises evidence must be taken into account.[65] Hovane places a strong focus on the relevance of appraisal approaches possessing a cultural context (including Aboriginal value systems and guidelines), of elucidating the function of Aboriginal people in the assessment, as well as obtaining a pledge to co-design and co-learning; with assessors and communities strategising together with assessors acting as the mediators of the procedure.[66] Assessors need to take into account how native values, conventions, behaviours, and beliefs shape community capability and preparedness.[67]

04 APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

In recognition of the limited First Nations-specific primary prevention literature, a growing number of scholars are focusing on the importance of teamwork in research and sharing of findings with others.[68] Such approaches, which include co-production, co-design, and co-creation, seek to include lived experience voices in research which can then be translated into creating primary prevention programs.[69]

Within the literature there are two main strategies to ensure that knowledge transition gaps are closed[70] and a third strategy that can help to strengthen the dispersion of knowledge. These strategies are described below in more detail.

STRATEGY 1: Choose elevation outcomes (with and not for) partners

So far, few initiatives that expressly strive to reduce family violence within First Nations communities have been evaluated or assessed. Furthermore, programs developed tend to reflect non-First Nations researchers' worldviews (e.g., an emphasis on person-level prevention strategies), instead of those of First Nations communities (e.g., an emphasis on relationship welfare, community healing, and increasing awareness about the continuing effects of colonialism). In this setting, there is a transition away from a deficit-based emphasis on issues and towards a more competency-based, comprehensive, community-based methods to wellness and safety.

Further, gendered drivers of violence are reinforced by colonialism, and contemporary articulations of rigid gender roles in Australia are informed by colonialism and missionisation.

Partnering around strength-based programs can include peer-mentoring programs and First Nations cultural leadership courses.[71] There is an increasing body of research that defines the components of effective collaboration: it occurs early and often throughout the research phase; there is reciprocal acknowledgement of the challenge or issue; there is effective dialogue; and there is a devotion to the connection.[72]

STRATEGY 2: Be flexible and innovative about research design

An increasing corpus of scholarship recognises the importance of including First Nations voices in knowledge translation. [73] Using traditional intervention research methodologies presents a number of logistical and ethical challenges when assessing First Nations-specific communities in real-world settings. According to Crooks and colleagues, "elements of rigor that are prevalent in the evidence-based program paradigm may be impractical, culturally insensitive, or even unethical in the Indigenous context".[74] In addition, the area of First Nations methods emphasises the need of accepting multiple approaches to knowledge as equally legitimate and not prioritising positivism science above broader community knowledge. Furthermore, as previously noted, when dealing with First Nations communities, the utilisation of collaborative approaches should be a crucial concern.[75]

STRATEGY 3: Utilise multiple knowledge translation strategies to ensure uptake of evidence

"Generally, one-way knowledge translation (researcher to end-user) is less effective" in the setting of First Nations communities than omnidirectional translation which requires more time to generate and is not automated.[76] According to Cameron and colleagues, end users can be defined as "those who would make decisions or take actions based on study findings (e.g. policymakers, practitioners, healthcare professionals, researchers) and those with interest in the research, but who would not themselves directly act on the findings (e.g. lived experience participants, carers)".[77] Symlie and colleagues note that the unidirectional transfer of knowledge in First Nations communities is often conducted with little regard for Aboriginal knowledge systems that are already in place.[78] The authors highlight that this exogenous transfer of one knowledge system onto the other, although generally performed with noble intentions, is often ineffective, particularly whenever there exist significant theoretical and practical challenges.[79] They also emphasised that for First Nations peoples and communities, such unidirectional knowledge translation procedures may be reminiscent of colonial activities of the past and present.[80] Researchers Shay et. al., notes that First Nations peoples' knowledge and ways of knowing are also frequently subordinated within the dominant paradigm of academic inquiry.[81] The authors make reference to the notion of "terra nullius research," which underscores the long history of academic research that treat First Nations peoples as little more than curiosities and research subjects, from whom knowledge can be gleaned or extracted, or as subjects to be observed but never consulted or highly regarded.[82] In addition, one-way knowledge translation obscures the sources of the information that is being contributed to the study or assessment. Research proves that community-generated, empirical knowledge-based, omnidirectional knowledge transfer is more effective when it is integrated across the whole research process.[83]

Participatory activities, in-person interactions, educational events, neighbourhood networks, communities of practice, data conduits, feedback mechanisms, and assessment are some of the accelerators of the knowledge translation process.[84] According to Jull and colleagues, this further promotes increased governance and accountability, "fosters democratic knowledge co-creation processes", and chances for challenging problems with the validation and interpretation of study data.[85] Although several organisations may collaborate on family violence primary prevention projects with a same goal or subject matter, they may not communicate well with one another.[86] It was discovered that even interdisciplinary groups may be cooperating within the same subject area to encourage primary preventive strategies, but they might not be utilising uniform terminology.[87] Communication between academics and First Nations populations as end users is hampered by a lack of common vernacular, a foreign language, or a distinct point of reference.[88] Burke and colleagues proposed that in order to close this gap, capacity development could be redefined as "learn, grow, share," and robust, equitable relationships should be formed via reciprocal respect, confidence, and open communication.[89]

04 APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

Capacity building is another strategy that can be used to achieve successful knowledge translation in First Nations communities.[90] According to Cameron and colleagues, "several studies refer to capacity building as an outcome that can occur between researchers and practitioners. Often uni-directional capacity building can occur between researchers and practitioners; however, capacity building can be bi- or multi-directional." Humphrey and colleagues describe the role of knowledge translation as focusing on fostering partnerships between scholars and those who would ultimately benefit from the research findings. Workshops, seminars, mentorship arrangements and digital resources are all examples of capacity building initiatives.[91] Catleden et. al., notes that addressing gaps in expertise and authority is at the heart of capacity development.[92] The goal is to effect positive, observable change in the community.[93] There are several chances for mutual learning and knowledge transfer built into most capacity-building strategies. Social scientists may teach communities new evidence, new methods for conducting research (including how to gather and analyse data), and different methods of communicating research findings via reports, publications, posters, and conferences.[94] Researchers may get a deeper understanding of "respect" in Indigenous community-based participatory research by learning from community elders about cultural protocols, ceremonies, and relational ethics.[95] Gender-inclusive, resilience, trauma-informed, communal expertise is crucial for effective capacity development. By using a community of practice strategy between primary preventive professionals and communities, Claussen and colleagues were able to effectively disseminate study results and apply them within local populations.[96]

Identifying priority approaches

There is widespread agreement among the public health and social service sector that primary prevention can play an important role in First Nations communities.[97] Slater and associates note that many successful community-based primary prevention programs were created by First Nations groups.

It was observed that there are a range of interventions that include features of primary prevention, however the literature is lacking in instances of primary prevention programs specifically designed for First Nations communities, some initiatives were found which incorporate elements of primary prevention. These include, First Nations men's behaviour modification initiatives, mentorship programs, men's gathering places and rehabilitation camps, and community outreach techniques aiming to increase knowledge and understanding of violence against First Nations women and families.[98] Although these are examples of both primary and secondary approaches, some of these initiatives may then assume responsibility for future violence prevention activities, including school-based educational programs.[99] In addition, mentorship programs may address personal and community-level ideological causes of violence against women, including attitudes about violence and abuse, societal norms, and influence of peer groups, as well as drug misuse, joblessness, and other historical, institutional, and economic components.[100]

The research emphasises the need for intersectionality to be addressed in the development of preventative interventions. In First Nations communities, a multi-level, affirming strategy to primary prevention would be adopted in a variety of venues. In the academic literature, many potential strategies were found:

- educational initiatives aimed towards children in school environments
- public relations and marketing initiatives
- community mobilisation and support initiatives to combat violence against women.[101]

Each of these are discussed in more detail below.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school-based educational initiatives

Based on the available literature, schools are the primary location for initiatives to prevent and reduce family violence and encourage healthy relationships. According to Crooks and colleagues, the majority of currently available preventative programs that have been found to be successful are offered in schools or colleges/universities.[102] The evidence also indicates that these initiatives should start much younger than high school in order to situate family violence in the larger framework of human interactions (encompassing gender relations and sexual morals).[103] This strategy, which is well-supported for youth from First Nations, recognises the challenges that young adults encounter while navigating intimate relationships and offers tools to help them learn how to handle the linguistic and power dimensions of intimacy.[104]

Increasing knowledge and awareness of unhealthy attitudes and behaviours have also been identified as key to recognising violence in one's own or others' relationships and to encouraging help-seeking.[105] For instance, it is recognised that interpersonal and emotional training program that create emotional consciousness and encourage prudent decision, balanced interactions, self-management, and self-awareness tackle crucial risk factors for suffering family violence in the future.[106]

In addition, anti-bullying programs present an opportunity to challenge negative gender-based attitudes and build participants' healthy relationship skills.[107] According to the Queensland Centre for Domestic Violence and Family Research practice paper, Prevention, Early Intervention and Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who have Experienced Sexual Violence, primary preventive interventions must be focused at important periods of change in the growth of children and adolescents in order to steer them away from dangerous paths before unfavourable beliefs and actions are well-established. For First Nations youth, it is advised that preventative programs commence as early as elementary school because:

- since this is the time when children's gender identities are emerging, it is crucial that they be exposed to good role models, moral norms, and lessons on the appropriate and inappropriate uses of power
- young people are more receptive to constructive influences that could have a lasting impact on their attitudes, cognition, and conduct
- "patterns of intimate relationship violence have not had as much time to develop" for this age group
- power struggles and good relationship formation start in childhood; thus teaching should begin early
- children and adolescents spend a significant amount of hours in schools, providing a "mass and captive audience"
- schools may foster collaborations amongst students, parents, teachers, and professionals such as caseworkers and counsellors.[108]

Other research indicates that training and education may perform an important function in educating men how to connect to women without using aggression. Our Watch's seminal Change the Story report recognises that cultures of aggression as one of the four drivers of violence against women.[109] It is also advised to encourage bystander action by targeting attitudes that 'condone male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect of women', particularly among males.[110]

Stakeholders and practitioners consulted towards the evidence review also pointed out that historically schools and educational settings have failed to teach Aboriginal history and have reinforced racism and the impacts of colonisation. Further opportunities exist to embed Aboriginal history into school curriculum and is expected to both enhance cultural connection and assist dispel racism among young people.

Communication and marketing approaches

To challenge beliefs, behaviours, and societal standards that lead to violence against First Nations women and their children, communication systems and the media may be utilised in a variety of methods and contexts. This activity frequently takes place in conjunction with advocacy, which entails organising group efforts to increase public understanding of the matter of violence against First Nations women and their children and to persuade government agencies, institutions, and communities to act immediately on variables causing the problem.[111]

TV ads and other media may be employed in social marketing or public education initiatives to spread messages to all members of society. These efforts may be the most effective way to promote community knowledge of upcoming legislation or policy shifts, as well as what comprises sexual or domestic abuse.[112]

The use of communication and media approaches as a primary prevention to family violence has elicited mixed reactions in the literature. Authors such as Salter and colleagues note that these campaigns, which aim to increase awareness and capacity to negotiate consent, reduce coercion in intimate relationships, intervene in misogynist or abusive situations, and improve parenting, generally seek to target individual behaviour by changing attitudes and increasing knowledge. As a result, their research discovered that these interventions were generally time and resource intensive, and thus could not be scaled up to a population level.[113] According to DeGue et. al., even if they were, it is unlikely that they could achieve the aims of primary prevention due to their consistently mixed evaluation findings, which at best find small positive changes in knowledge, attitude and intention with an unclear link to subsequent behaviour.[114]

04 APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

However, the Our Watch, National Primary Prevention Report notes that advertising and promotional strategies are prone to having a good influence if the content is repeated in other aspects of the intended viewer's life and through other interventions and activities at other societal levels.[115] The report also highlights that social branding initiatives targeting personal beliefs and actions will be more likely to succeed if legislative reforms and change-enabling mechanisms are implemented.[116]

According to the Queensland Centre for Domestic Violence and Family Research practice paper, Prevention, Early Intervention and Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who have Experienced Sexual Violence, any communication and marketing approaches geared towards First Nations communities must include:

- use of readily understood language
- a reminder that family violence is not rooted in culture and ought not be maintained in 'traditional' customs
- community involvement in the production of the content
- review that assesses the language's efficacy in reaching the intended result
- evidence-based programs for improved coordination and expansion of current initiatives
- accessibility to data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals
- specialised informational sources
- using current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, institutes, and communal homes for community information distribution.[117]

Community mobilisation and community development approaches

According to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs report, National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Progress Report 2010-2012, community mobilisation approaches involve empowering community members to identify and respond to family violence and to create a climate of zero tolerance to the issue. [118] This includes concepts of capacity building, such as community ownership and management of initiatives wherever practicable or feasible, and sensitivity to local situations and settings.[119] It also recognises the need for primary prevention measures to be developed in partnership with the community.

The community mobilisation approach to family violence in First Nations communities, which is based on the socio-ecological model, aims to address the drivers that uphold gendered discrimination and experience of violence.[120] This involves emphasising the importance of leaders and community representatives who lead community activism efforts and provide ongoing support through their journey to community level action.[121]

By strengthening messaging at the grassroots, community participation and advancement strategies have also been demonstrated to improve the efficacy of global communications efforts.[122] Nevertheless, despite the fact that localised, community-owned initiatives might be thought of as the most beneficial, their thorough assessment can be challenging.[123]

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Over the two decades, Australian governments and the family safety sector have increasingly focused attention on the creation and execution of primary prevention program designed and led by First Nations peoples. This includes initiatives aimed at challenging unequal and gendered power structures that maintain violence, addressing the socioeconomic factors that contribute to violence, and fostering non-violent practices.[124] It should be noted that some programs combine elements of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The literature has identified the following examples of primary prevention programs targeting Australian First Nations communities.

CASE STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Victoria's Aboriginal Designed Puppets *Location: Victoria* *Target group: Families*	Puppets made by Aboriginal artists provide powerful messages to youngsters, teens, and families. A unique strategy for including parents and children in discussions about family violence and repeating important lessons about improper touch, aggression, and family violence is the use of puppets. In a secure and non-threatening setting, puppets may also offer people a chance to share their own experiences with violence.[125] Children, adolescents, men, and women are all brought together in a friendly, unintimidating setting via puppet performances and exercises. The puppets were created especially for Aboriginal communities so that children and their families could connect with them. They provide parents the chance to discuss concerns of domestic abuse and impart values of wholesome, courteous relationships that may be fostered at home.[126] Through the endorsement and support of the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups, puppet performances and other events take place in a range of locations across Victoria, including classrooms, Aboriginal athletic teams, and civic groups.[127] *Note: Case study adapted from the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups. (2012). Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework. Victorian Government.[128]*
Marigurim Mubi Yangu Aboriginal Corporation: Strong Women Talking *Location: South Australia* *Target group: Young people*	The Strong Women Talking program delivers culturally relevant domestic and family violence prevention seminars and activities with the goal of educating, empowering, and strengthening First Nation women, children, and households in communities. It is guided and directed by Indigenous women who are enthusiastic about ending the intergenerational pattern of violence in communities and lowering the increased prevalence of Indigenous women and children affected by domestic abuse.[129] Participants in the program get education on the many kinds, levels, and effects of trauma as well as how they influence women's health, wellness, everyday encounters, and performance. Participants are helped to improve and build their own skills and talents by moderators using strengths-based techniques.[130] The program seeks to provide women the tools they need to develop productive engagement tactics, encourage survivors' independence and prevent relapse into violence, and rehabilitate and reclaim their lives.[131] *Note: Case study adapted from Our Watch. (2018). Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.[132]*
Aboriginal Focus Schools Program *Location: South Australia* *Target group: Young people*	In order to provide Anangu and Aboriginal children comparable potential to receive holistic relationships and reproductive health education as schoolchildren in other urban and remote districts, the Aboriginal Focus Schools Program was created as part of the Yarning On program.[133] By assisting schools in creating a comprehensive strategy for teaching about healthy interactions and sexual health to students, the initiative hopes to promote the social and emotional well-being of young people from Aboriginal communities in South Australia. Cultural appreciation, suitability, and education can only be achieved by the active participation of Anangu and Aboriginal workers (and the community at large) in the program's implementation.[134] *Note: Case study adapted from Our Watch. (2018). Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.[135]*

04 APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

Evaluated programs

Family violence primary prevention aims to shift deep seeded societal drivers of violence and gender inequity and has been recognised as a long-term endeavour that requires sustained effort. As a result, efforts must be supported by a long-term, evidence-based theory of change. As previously stated, few evaluations have examined family violence primary prevention activities in First Nations communities.

As a result, there has been a call within the literature to expand evaluations of these interventions, which will aid in the development of knowledge about what works to prevent violence in First Nations communities and how to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women. The following two programs were identified in the literature as evaluated programs geared towards family violence primary prevention in First Nations communities:

CASE STUDY	DESCRIPTION
LOVE BiTES *Location: Australia-wide* *Target group: Young people*	Teens (aged 14-17) may benefit from LOVE BiTES, an anti-violence and anti-sexual assault programme that promotes meaningful relationships and encourages mutual respect via education. There are two educational seminars on domestic violence and sexual assault, accompanied by a series of imaginative sessions meant to help participants retain and apply what they've learned. Adolescence-led group exercises, mentoring, and art, music, and theatre are just some of the presenting techniques used to get students involved and learning. Young people create and lead community-wide initiatives to end violence against women, using the finished creative works as promotional materials.[136] Students in Sydney's tenth grade underwent an assessment of LOVE BiTES. According to the results, the training significantly improved students' ability to have respectful interactions and their perceptions of the prevalence of violence against women and men. Over one hundred communities, including Aboriginal communities, in urban, regional, and rural Australia have modified and adopted LOVE BiTES. In order to do this, LOVE BiTES program administrators have collaborated with Indigenous service organisations to implement initiatives tailored to the needs of Indigenous communities. Local mythology and language have been included, gender-specific groups have been formed, and facilitators with contextual expertise have been used.[137] *Note: Case study adapted from the Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2016). Family violence prevention programs in Indigenous communities.*
Safe, Respected and Free from Violence projects *Location: Northern Territory* *Target group: Aboriginal community*	Both the Girls Can and Boys Can (GCBC) and the Old Ways are Strong (OWS) initiatives are part of the broader Safe, Respected, and Free from Violence program.[138] The GCBC program aims to adopt a community-based strategy to generate early childhood materials that promote gender equality and are disseminated to families in the Mparntwe/Alice Springs area. Violence against Aboriginal women is often attributed to "simply their culture," a claim that the OWS sought to disprove by challenging colonial assumptions about Aboriginal relationships and gender norms.[139] The Safe, Respected, and Free from Violence projects were evaluated using a consultative technique wherein employees from the project consortium participated in all aspects of the research process, including conceptualisation and architecture of the appraisal, creation of study instruments, information gathering, data processing, and drafting of the findings.[140] The review indicated that the GCBC and OWS initiatives were effective in combating traditional gender roles and shown early signs of a shift in negative perceptions and beliefs that legitimise violence against women. Respondents observed rapid shifts in their views and beliefs about gender, violence, and Aboriginal traditions.[141] *Note: Case study adapted from ANROWS. (2021). "Safe, Respected and Free from Violence" projects evaluation.[142]*

INTERNATIONAL FIRST NATIONS PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Family and domestic violence is prevalent in many communities across the globe. In countries with a history of colonisation by European countries, First Nations communities often have ongoing challenges with family and domestic violence. This review examined primary prevention approaches among First Nation communities in New Zealand and Canada as former British colonies with the aim of identifying effective strategies that may have application in Australia. The review notes that there are limitations in the extent to which lessons or principles from those settings can be applied to the Australian and Victorian context, where local cultural protocols differ.

New Zealand

While Māori are disproportionately represented as victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, this issue is pervasive across New Zealand. One in two Māori women experience physical and/or sexual relationship abuse in their lifetimes (57.6%), but just one in three European/ other women do (34.3%). When comparing 12-month incidence rates, Māori women have a prevalence that is more than double that of European women.[143] New Zealand scholarship asserts that initiatives to reduce domestic violence against Māori women must take into account the historical and current conditions of First Nations communities.[144] The literature has identified the following example of primary prevention programs targeting Australian First Nations communities.

CASE STUDY	DESCRIPTION
The Violence-Free Communities Project *Location: New Zealand* *Target group: Indigenous community*	Te Aroha Noa Community Services' Violence-Free Communities Project in Highbury, Palmerston North employed a community dialogue approach using community consultants, locals with first-hand knowledge of and opinions on local violence, to create solutions for reducing violence (both primary and secondary prevention). It emphasised the use of action-reflection, network-oriented preventative initiatives, and activity-based learning. The employment of locals as consultants was inspired by Te Aroha Noa's philosophy, which views everyone as both a teacher and a student.[145] According to evaluation report, the community dialogue method was successful in bringing about change and increasing awareness. For instance, people claimed to have more trust in their capacity to confront abuse and to make changes within their own families. Additionally, it discovered that knowledge of violence had grown. The assessment study discovered that after the official funded initiative ended, work towards establishing a violence-free community had deepened and become a core component of the Te Aroha Noa organisation, demonstrating the project's success in generating traction and ensuring continued the impact of the program.[146] Being theory-driven, the already-existing solid connections, collaboration, and shared history of Te Aroha Noa were success factors noted in the review "(local people knew and trusted the organisation and its commitment to the local area)". The idea was based on five major theories: ecological viewpoints, Frierian pedagogical ideas, strengths-based strategies, systems analysis, and structural community change theory.[147] *Note: Case study adapted from Sanders, J., Munford, R., & Liebenberg, L. (2012). Young people, their families and social supports: Understanding resilience with complexity theory.[148]*

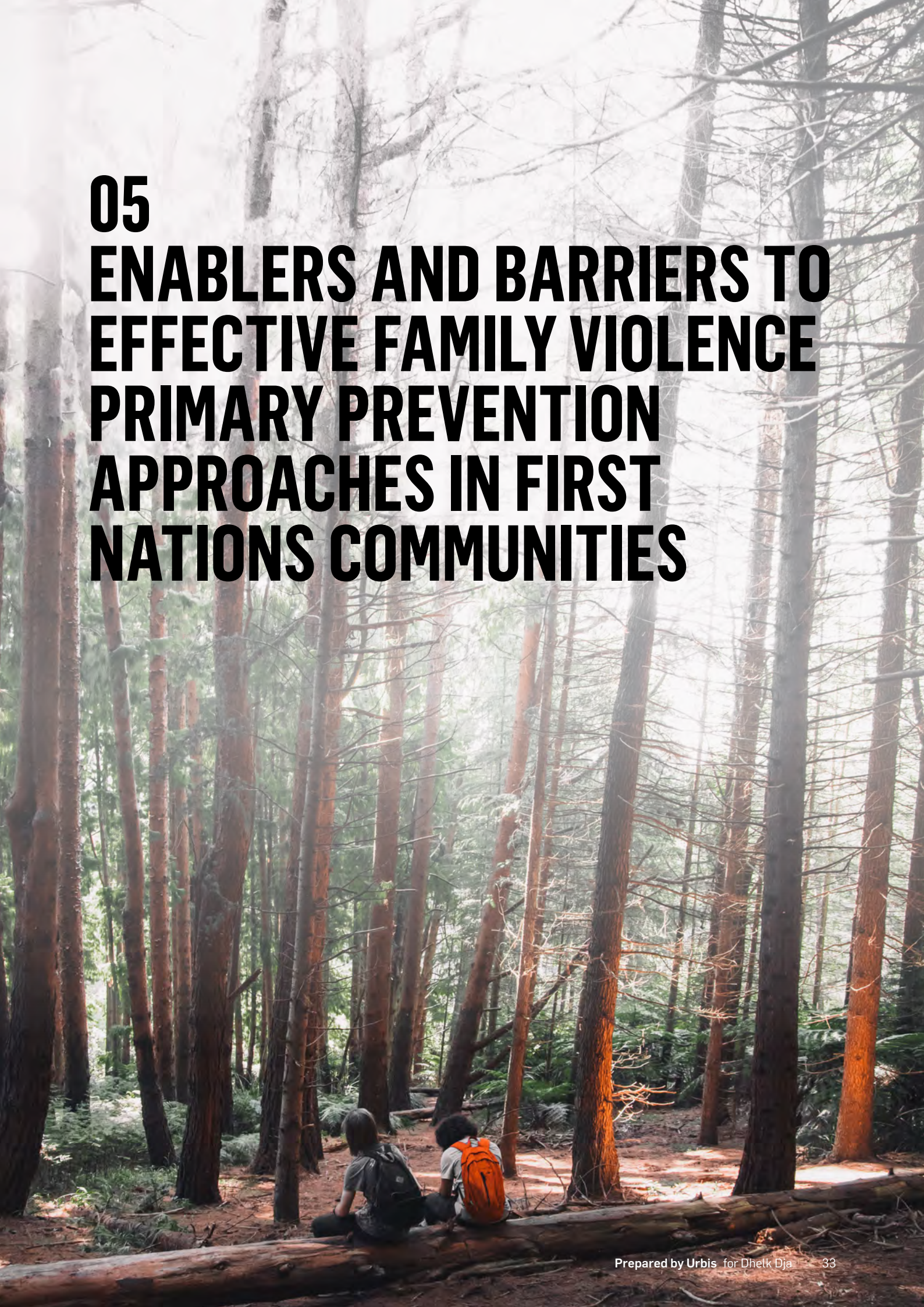
04 APPROACHES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

Canada

According to the University of Toronto policy brief, *Interventions for the Prevention of Family Violence in Indigenous Populations Policy Brief*, Indigenous women are three times more inclined as non-Indigenous women to report domestic abuse.[149] The report also noted Indigenous heritage is a major risk predictor for violent victimisation among women, regardless of whether other risk variables are controlled for.[150]

The National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence report, *Ending violence in Aboriginal communities: best practices in Aboriginal shelters and communities*, notes the techniques to combat family violence in Aboriginal communities are quite limited; they are barely in their infancy.[151] Lack of knowledge of the implications of this scenario is a primary factor. Another factor is the persistent shortage of resources. Another probable cause is that domestic violence is normalised in many regions, hence increasing the need to raise awareness about the long-term negative repercussions of this problem.[152] As a result programs like the Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships Strategy was implemented in an attempt to raise awareness towards preventing family violence in these communities.

CASE STUDY	DESCRIPTION
The Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships Strategy *Location: Canada* *Target group: Young people*	Teachers use the Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships Strategy (AHYR), an evidence-based, comprehensive tool to reduce dating victimisation, as part of the normal health/physical education curriculum for students in grades 7-9. "(i.e., youth receive the intervention in the classroom)".[153] It consists of four sections that address four different topics: drug abuse, good nutrition, human sexuality, and personal security.[154] Although the program has not been properly assessed, reaching more adolescents, professionals, and parents was a major success, as shown by reach statistics. Additionally, educators stated their high levels of satisfaction with programme trainings, and several community-based practitioners felt that the AHYR had improved the alignment of their preventative work.[155] *Note: Case study adapted from Exner-Cortens, D., Wells, L., Lee, L., & Spiric, V. (2021). Building a culture of intimate partner violence prevention in Alberta, Canada through the promotion of healthy youth relationships.*[156]



05
ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION APPROACHES IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

05 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE FAMILY VIOLENCE PRIMARY PREVENTION APPROACHES IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

KEY FINDINGS

- While there is a limited literature of what works for the primary prevention of violence for First Nations women and families, some common features of effective approaches are identified in the grey literature and through sector consultations.
- Approaches are more likely to be successful if they are holistic and involve the whole family; prioritise cultural strengthening and reconnecting to Aboriginal culture; and are strengths-based.
- Several enablers to effective delivery of primary prevention approaches were found that are relevant to the First Nations context. These include community-led design and delivery; engaging men and boys in prevention efforts; culturally safe and culturally competent service delivery; long-term funding to support the incremental nature of prevention; strengthening workforce capacity; and ongoing investment in monitoring and evaluation.
- A number of sector level barriers to delivery were also identified. These include a lack of data sharing and data usage and inconsistent collaboration between primary prevention organisations (including mainstream organisations, government agencies and ACCOs).

Drawing on the documented evidence base and consultations with sector stakeholders, this section considers the key features of effective approaches to family violence prevention in First Nations communities and identifies the key enablers and barriers to delivery. Given the paucity of published literature on prevention in First Nations communities, this section also draws on mainstream literature regarding what works for primary prevention.

KEY FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE APPROACHES

Among the research and confirmed through stakeholder consultations, there is strong consensus that primary prevention program in First Nations communities are most effective when they are inclusive of Aboriginal values and ideas, holistic notions of healthcare, theology, cultural rituals, and healing practises.[157]

Solid social support structures should underwrite preventative efforts and alter the local view of the family violence problem, as is acknowledged by many writers on primary prevention. The authors also acknowledged the importance of community participation in the process of developing, designing, and implementing family violence initiatives in order to increase community agency, improve the reception of prevention measures among community members, and increase the likelihood of the intervention's success.[158]

According to the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence research[159] and supported by sector stakeholders: the following elements are critical aspects of optimal primary prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- led and driven by community
- community participation, commitment, and long-term acceptance
- sensitive to cultural diversity
- culturally appropriate service delivery and program integration, including using local languages
- holistic focus and a flexible approach
- planning for long-term sustainability
- concentrate on the particular problem of family violence while situating it within a larger family/community framework and highlighting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ties and linkages
- campaigns should be built on visual and vocal messaging, and arts and theatrical forms have been regarded as acceptable media for children and adolescent people
- it is necessary to design and test messaging and presentation with the target community.

Research by Olsen and Lovett about the methods most likely to succeed in preventing violence against Aboriginal women and families show the following best practise aspects are crucial.[160] The activities must:

- rely on Aboriginal communities as leaders
- consist of community-wide initiatives and efforts to improve the entire neighbourhood
- focus on preserving and enhancing existing cultural norms
- advocate for the normalisation of peaceful behaviour and the enhancement of community buffers
- expand availability of aid programs and other resources
- timelines, responsibility, and assessments should all be included.[161]

Scholars such as Sam Morley note that almost without exception, successful and strong First Nations community-driven initiatives were those in which members of the community identified and addressed their own needs. According to Hoffman and colleagues, in order for communities to meet their own needs, it is essential that they feel that they have control over every facet of the project. This feeling of ownership fosters a sense of unity among all participants in the program, from funders to volunteers.

Across the primary prevention literature and sector consultations, the most cited features of effective approaches for First Nations women and families were:

- holistic approaches that involve the whole family
- community-led design and implementation
- approaches which prioritise cultural strengthening and reconnecting to Aboriginal culture
- strengths-based approaches
- an emphasis on cultural healing.

Each of these is discussed in more detail below.

Holistic approaches that involve the whole family

Given the complex nature of family violence, effective approaches must take a holistic view to include the whole family structure. Programs should be owned by the community in alignment with self-determination principles, with a specific emphasis on the underlying drivers at a family and community level.[162]

According to Bolis and colleagues, holistic approaches that involve the whole family includes:[163]

- comprehensive family therapy to end the transmission of violent stress
- by trained personnel implementing primary preventive strategies in the community based on an understanding of the effects of trauma
- help in comprehending how previous policies and practises of intergenerational trauma have influenced the way we experience loss, sorrow, and traumatic events.

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating a dire need for comprehensive strategies to tackle family violence in Aboriginal communities. A person's mental, physiological, emotional, and spiritual well-being should all be considered in any strategy, as has been stated, in a truly holistic approach.[164] A person or family's recovery is also situated within their community and culture in holistic methods, which helps to foster resilience and social support.[165]

05 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS CONTINUED

Western methods seldom consider the potential therapeutic benefits of cultural expressions like music and dance in alleviating negative symptoms and fostering a more positive sense of self and community. Aboriginal people acknowledge that holistic techniques are a useful way to address intergenerational trauma and restore wellness at the communal, household, and individual levels.[166] Through mending ties to spirit, country, tradition, community, familial and kinship, one's thoughts and emotions, and one's physical body, one may help restore social and psychological health and welfare for the complete individual and the whole family.

Community-led design and implementation

According to Fulu and colleagues, critical mass can only be reached by achieving community buy-in.[167] That is why preventative efforts need to be created by and adapted to the communities they serve.[168] According to the CARE research report, "community-based prevention must also be supplemented by structural changes that affect the personal experiences."[169]

According to the Australian Government report, National plan to reduce violence against women and their children, the goal of community-led violence prevention program is to confront the systemic and gendered variables that motivate and perpetuate violence against women, as well as to push and support men as positive examples in their communities and families.[170] The report also notes that community-led prevention projects will empower people to:

- combat mindsets and actions that encourage violence
- encourage equality between the genders
- develop mutually respectful interactions.[171]

Sector stakeholders emphasised the importance of community-led approaches that are place-based and imbued with local culture and practices. These approaches help to build trust within community and also engage local staff with employment and capacity building activities. Some ACCOs highlighted that involvement of Elders in the design and delivery can be very effective in gaining local buy-in and assist in strengthening cultural knowledge and practices between generations.

Prioritising cultural strengthening and reconnecting to Aboriginal culture

Reviewing the research on family violence in First Nations communities, it becomes evident that primary prevention programs, as well as other forms of services and support, must align with local culture and cultural practices. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have long pushed for judicial systems that are built on their own strengths and include Aboriginal justice models and acknowledge Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander law and culture. However, there is a lack of data on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition can play a role in preventing and responding to family violence.[172]

The findings suggest that the impact of colonialism and cultural loss may be felt through generations, making Aboriginal women four times more likely to be victims.[173] Revitalizing the soul is a crucial best practise for sustaining the welfare and well-being of Indigenous people, since culture is seen as the "outward manifestation of spirit."[174] By rediscovering the value of ritual, dialect, and customs, people are able to rediscover their own strengths and reunite with their own background, kin, community, and the environment.[175] According to Wilson et. al., long periods of time are required for recovery because of the cumulative impact of centuries of abuse and trauma on Indigenous communities.[176]

There has to be an emphasis on maintaining connections to one's family, one's land, and one's community as a means of strengthening cultural connectedness.[177] For example, in many First Nations cultures, one's social status and the rules for interacting with others are determined by one's familial ties. Thus, the family unit plays a vital role in Australian First Nations culture. A First Nations person's sense of belonging to their homeland, their people, and their culture all stem from their ties to their immediate family.[178]

Recent consultations[179] with the Victoria family violence sector strongly emphasised the importance of cultural connection to strengthen cultural identity and knowledge. A number of prevention and early intervention actions also have a focus on healing and trauma-informed approaches.

Strengths-based approaches

The most widely used paradigm for preventing family violence is on changing societal attitudes and behaviours to ultimately influence individual actions. This mindset, which emphasises autonomy and independence, is rooted in Western culture and perpetuates the hegemonic ideals of settler colonialism. Community and culture are seen as problems that need to be solved by imposing Western models. At the same time, people's cultural backgrounds, their ability to effect change in their communities, and their own sense of agency are all wiped out.[180]

"Strengths-based approaches," mean policies, practice techniques, and strategies that focus on and build upon individuals, families, and communities' existing resources and assets.[181] By emphasising the family's strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses, strengths-based therapy moves away from a deficit approach that focuses on issues and pathology. This strategy recognises that every family has its own set of problems and opportunities, and involves the family as active participants in creating and executing strategies to prevent family violence.[182]

Instead of forcing families to conform to pre-determined care models, they are collaborated with to develop service plans that take into account their unique set of needs and assets. Particular family members, the family as a whole, and the community as a whole are all considered in a strengths-based evaluation. Therefore, a belief in the capabilities and contributions of the person, rather than a focus on their difficulties, underlies a strength-based approach, which in turn encourages community action and addressing inequities in society.[183]

Victim survivors of family violence may benefit greatly from the promotion of programs that encourage the development and nurturing of individual strengths. One novel strategy to preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) is found in primary preventative intervention programs that focus on people's strengths rather than their weaknesses.[184]

Engaging men and boys in prevention efforts

As stated earlier, there is a growing body of research advocating the inclusion of men and boys as 'key allies' in core family violence prevention initiatives. Researchers and program developers have cautioned against deploying terminology in primary prevention initiatives that may stigmatise or discourage the involvement of men and boys. According to Flood, designing primary preventive initiatives must take gender and masculinity norms into serious consideration since they have a significant impact on family violence.[185] Current researchers like Carmody et. al., support Flood's assertion and adds a few more specific points that program designers and educators should be aware of in order to increase the involvement of men and boys in primary preventive efforts for family violence:[186]

- speaking directly to men and boys about the significance of gender in domestic abuse in a way that they can relate to
- men and boys are more likely to 'receive' messages against violence if they are delivered by educators they can connect to as role models
- acknowledging that masculinities vary from person to person, group to group, and community to community
- since class, race, culture, sexual orientation, and other variables all influence one's sense of masculinity, there is no "one size fits all" perception of manliness
- primary prevention efforts, including pedagogical initiatives, are more successful when designed with males in mind. This includes, for instance, using teaching strategies that First Nations men will find engaging
- primary prevention efforts may be strengthened by targeting men and boys in the places where they spend their time, such as their homes, schools, and places of employment
- so that boys and men are not "responsibilised" in lack of a supporting environment, preventative methods must function at the community/institutional level as well as the personal level.[187]

Therefore, primary preventive program should aim to concentrate on problem-solving activities that help men and boys to create respectful relationships with women, rather than labelling them as prospective perpetrators of family violence. School-based strategies for reducing family violence have consistently been shown to be effective, as they may assist young people recognise inappropriate or aggressive behaviour while also shaping their expectations and ability to create and maintain respectful relationships.[188]

05 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS CONTINUED

KEY ENABLERS TO DELIVERY

The following section presents key enablers to the delivery of an initiative which focuses on the nature of investment provided, workforce considerations, timeframes and the role of monitoring and evaluation.

Long-term funding to support the incremental nature of primary prevention

Prevention efforts can only be effective over the long run with consistent, reliable investment and resourcing. In the past, preventative efforts have received inadequate support, and when money was allocated, it was usually for a single initiative rather than an ongoing strategy. Short-term politically oriented financing cycles and the significant effort required to qualify for such money are two of the main obstacles to the long-term viability of preventive initiatives, as pointed out by Julieann Coombes and colleagues.[189] This was supported by consultations with ACCOs who emphasised that annual funding cycles inhibit the long-term work required to make incremental and sustainable social change.

Consultations undertaken towards the Mapping Project identified the prevalence of short-term funding (typically annual) for prevention activities, which was universally recognised as a constraint to creating sustainable change.

Meeting administrative reporting requirements and narrowly defined performance indicators were also identified as a common constraint in the delivery of family violence funded activities. Short-term financing with restrictive performing measures demonstrates a lack of recognition and support in the sector's highly qualified staff, as well as a lack of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander methods of engaging comprehensively with families over extended periods.[190] According to the September 17 Policy Paper, *Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*, to guarantee the efficacy of treatments, all authorities should commit to long-term, sustainably supported, and community-driven traditional healing.[191]

Strengthening workforce capacity through training and professional development

Aboriginal-led and managed prevention programs are viewed as significant not only for communities, but also for the skills and knowledge these organisations offer, which are central to the family violence prevention system.[192]

According to the Northern Territory 2020 background paper, Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Workforce and Sector Development Plan, some of the staff in these groups have advanced degrees; they tend to come from disciplines like law, social work, sociology, and politics. There are also others who lack a formal education but make up for it with extensive practical experience, lived experience, and a solid theoretical foundation in the field of women's services. As a result, the study emphasises the importance of coordinated, consistent training development and delivery to help workers with effective program delivery. Current research on the topic shows that the industry does not have a unified strategy for educating and developing its workers.[193] Other areas of the literature suggests there is no mandated schedule for career growth and no need to participate in professional development in order to keep one's licence or certification current.[194]

Consultations with the family violence sector identified the need for sustained capacity building support for ACCOs in specialist family violence training, the application of family violence prevention and early intervention frameworks and in monitoring and evaluation.[195]

Culturally safe and culturally competent service delivery

Researchers such as Gardiner and Wilson suggest that due to a lack of cultural competence in the workplace, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to get insufficient or unsuitable answers when it comes to providing family safety services including primary prevention initiatives, increasing their exposure to the dangers and repercussions of violence.[196] The authors noted that it is essential that conventional agencies offer culturally appropriate assistance to help Aboriginal clients, acknowledge community context, and consider holistic approaches that are sensitive to the cultural context.

According to Helen Gardiner and Geraldine Wilson, staff members who are competent, well-trained, and resilient will guarantee the implementation of these safeguards in an atmosphere free from cultural danger. According to studies, it is possible to advance towards a more culturally competent workforce by:

- education and progress towards a career goal
- culturally competent response training
- defined roles and responsibilities
- mentoring
- peer support.[197]

According to Victorian Health and Human Services report, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework*, cultural safety is about:

- mutual appreciation, a common understanding, and a pooled body of information
- a shared moment of respect and attentive learning
- revision of policies and institutions to eliminate roadblocks
- supporting Aboriginal self-determination and minimising prejudice, bigotry, and injustice are essential to improving Aboriginal people's health, welfare, and safety
- people, institutions, and governments take accountability for the possibility for unconscious prejudice, racism, and bigotry stemming from their own cultural beliefs in relation to Aboriginal peoples.[198]

Consultations towards the Mapping Project also identified that working in the family violence sector can be very stressful and challenging for Aboriginal staff. The prevalence of lateral violence and vicarious trauma needs to be further addressed and mitigated across the sector.

Ongoing investment in monitoring and evaluation

The complex and long-term nature of primary prevention activity makes measuring and demonstrating progress a challenge.[199] While measuring the prevalence of violence against women or changes in individual attitudes are important, they are not enough alone to understand if programs are on track to preventing violence against women in the long term.

Seeing reduced rates of violence against women will take time. However, there are short and medium-term indicators that can indicate whether programs are making progress. Monitoring change at the population level is only part of the task.[200] Knowing what works at the program level is critical to building the evidence base for prevention. It also helps communicate successes to stakeholders and opens the possibility of expanding programs.[201] While some population measures may be useful for evaluating programs, it is important that these evaluations are tailored to the specifics of the initiative or project. The measures chosen should be sufficiently precise to measure the outcomes of a particular program.[202]

05 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS CONTINUED

KEY BARRIERS TO DELIVERY

The following section highlights some barriers to delivery that were identified in the literature and desktop research.

Limited data, data sharing and data usage

The gathering, processing, and sharing of correct and relevant data is a persistent challenge in primary prevention. According to Meurn, there is a wide range of data collection capabilities between nations. Problems with data quality and consistency have been identified.[203] The issue of understanding just "the top of the iceberg" persists, since studies show that many programs and initiatives' efficacy is unclear because of inadequate monitoring and assessment.[204]

Technology's ability to streamline processes has the potential to increase data quality and the speed at which it is gathered, as well as the amount of information that can be gleaned from it. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018 report, while there is a lot of information available on some topics related to family, domestic, and sexual violence in Australia, there are still certain data gaps that need to be addressed in order to effectively deploy primary prevention measures in the sector. To be more specific, there is insufficient information about:

- specific at-risk population groups, including First Nations Australians; persons with disabilities; the LGBTQI community and CALD communities
- the role that established risk variables play, such as socioeconomic standing, occupation, income, and place of residence
- programmatic analysis and evaluation assessment.[205]

The report also noted that the following needs to be implemented to close these gaps in order to promote high-quality service delivery:

- sharing data among governmental institutions using current, unpublished data while respecting individual privacy
- using and analysing previously collected information; this might include, for instance, doing further research at a regional or even geographical level
- improvement of data collecting to learn more about vulnerable populations and the services they utilise.[206]

The Domestic Violence Prevention Council report, *Findings and Recommendations from the Review of Domestic and Family Violence Deaths in the Australian Capital Territory*, notes that, as it pertains to prevention and intervention approaches "information was often seen in isolation by service providers and information sharing was limited… this further highlighted the problems associated with information sharing between agencies and services".[207] The review concluded that to protect those who are at risk of or suffering family violence, timely access to and data exchange is crucial.[208] The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute in their report, Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families, echoed a similar sentiment noted that there must be improved cooperative working arrangements between government agencies and service providers, including mechanisms for exchanging data in order to begin the task of preventing family violence in First Nations communities.[209]

With more information at hand, decisions and results may shift. According to the AbSec - NSW Child, Family, and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation 2019 report, *Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy Workforce Development Project*, partnerships should be linked with the present changes, as was emphasised in discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander institutions working on family violence. According to the research, there is widespread concern that service practitioners serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are also not sharing information or best practices regarding family prevention.[210] Effective information management relies on effective systems and processes. Many primary prevention organisations understand how data can be used to inform prevention measures and improve the quality of programs provided for First Nations communities, but there is still a lack of capability and capacity to produce and use this data.[211]

Inconsistent collaboration between primary prevention organisations

Collaboration between primary prevention agencies (including mainstream organisations and ACCOs) is an important strategy for improving the delivery of culturally safe primary prevention programs for First Nations communities. Collaborative effort benefits from organisational elements including having a common purpose and establishing targets and aims that are aligned.[212]

Crucial procedures include having a well-defined, long-lasting collaboration in place and developing plans to assess the partnership's effectiveness.[213] Local constraints to prevention programs agency coordination have received little academic attention.[214] Some of the problems with inter-organisational cooperation that have been recognised in the literature include a lack of a standardised vocabulary and measurement tools.[215] According to researcher, Sarah Stewart, "despite legislative and policy differences between the Australian States and Territories, service systems are uncoordinated, interventions are inconsistent and that better integrated interagency responses are required. Indeed, one of the most frequently cited problems in relation to responses to DFV [domestic family violence] is 'fragmentation', which results in what has become known as 'siloed' service provision, with agencies operating in isolation from each other, separated by seemingly impenetrable walls of bureaucracy".[216]

Findings from the State of Victoria 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: report and recommendations*, suggests that service dispersion is still a serious challenge in the sector.[217]

The literature is in consensus that working collaboratively has numerous challenges and impediments. There are a number of different explanations for why it is so challenging to collaborate across departments and organisations. There are two main types of these problems: those that arise from differences between agencies and those that are more directly related to resources and infrastructure.[218]

According to O'Leary and colleagues, there are challenges to interagency cooperation that arise from a lack of resources, such as financial resourcing.[219] This is an indication that the delivery of integrated services is not cost-neutral and that insufficient financing leads to limited capacity to enable coordinated responses.[220] These issues are frequently worsened by a lack of information sharing within the sector, which reinforces the impression that agencies operate as isolated silos.[221]

The Australian Institute of Family Studies, CFCA paper 53, *Working together to keep children and families safe: Strategies for developing collaborative competence,* cited the following as the most prevalent obstacles to sector collaboration:[222]

- System-level barriers: are the institutional and contextual factors of the work that impede cooperation.
  - insufficient financial and personnel resources
  - various conceptual structures, objectives, and methods
  - limited organisational support.[223]
- Challenges encountered by practitioners:
  - uncertainty on when and how to work collaboratively
  - ineffective communication.[224]

According to the Social Ventures Australia quarterly, Data sovereignty, community control and better outcomes, currently, the majority of research findings is owned by the Federal Government. This evidence has been compiled over time and encompasses information gathered via grant disbursement procedures.[225]

The quarterly report also notes that government control of the data also reduces the ability for the First Nations organisations and communities to access the obtained data and further posits that if ACCOs were given greater authority regarding what data is gathered, how it is generated and utilised, and the system that underpins these activities, the particular strengths of people, families, and communities may be utilised to achieve better results.[226]

05 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS CONTINUED

Aside from the aforementioned, Guedes and colleagues noted that frequently, "turfism", bureaucratic roadblocks, and the marginalisation of some perspectives have also stood in the way of productive collaboration among service providers.[227] According to the authors "Turfism," in which one party actively or passively tries to maintain dominance for the sake of advancing his or her own goals, is a common problem in seemingly cooperative endeavours.[228] According to Guedes and colleagues, turf concerns influence each agency's perception of safety, stability, and participation in the larger systems, which in turn were reflected in the cooperative process, and thus continue to act as an obstacle.[229] Even though joint work might provide the best possible chance for lengthy remedies to the family violence preventative measures, loss of enthusiasm due to organisational issues with discussion planning and the inability to clearly define aspirations present perceived risks to cooperation and the achievement of primary prevention goals.[230] According to Michau and associates, "in view of the scale of violence against women and girls, innovative collaboration and coordination across sectors is necessary".[231] The researchers also noted that primary prevention of violence against women and girls requires more funding in program innovation, strategic partnerships, and health service-leadership, as well as increased creative cooperation and coordination across sectors.[232] Guedes and colleagues noted that "opportunities for greater collaboration include preparing service providers to address multiple forms of violence, better coordination between services for women and for children, school-based strategies, parenting programmes, and programming for adolescent health and development".[233]

This is not to say that the sector is void of any evidence of collaboration. According to the Our Watch, *National primary prevention report 2: Exploring collaboration, networks and techniques for effective practice*, "there are promising examples of coordination, collaboration, partnerships and networks for primary prevention across Australia. These networks are at varying levels of maturity, with some long-standing collaborations and others which are more recently formed".[234] Nevertheless, the report was also quick to note that, more robust connections between preventative initiatives and the system addressing to violence against women are needed to guarantee that actions and communities in both domains are collectively reinforcing, and that adequate capacity is available to meet increases in disclosures and help-seeking.[235] The report noted the following as needed in the sector to ensure consistent collaboration:

1. Partnership, connection, and network development must be allowed and enabled as key to successful primary prevention activities. This work often takes time and, in many situations, is now carried out independently of official program provision financed by the outcomes framework.[236]
2. It is vital to support the long-term sustainability of cooperation via planning in order to maximise the effect of preventative efforts throughout the nation.[237]

06 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

06 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This section summarises the findings from the desktop review and consultations, and highlights gaps in the evidence base. It then outlines the implications for the Victorian context and for future research regarding what works to prevent family violence against Victorian Aboriginal women and families.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The evidence considered for this project highlights that the problem is well understood – Aboriginal women and families in Australia experience disproportionately high rates and severity of family violence relative to the general population. The factors driving this are complex and interwoven, but can be broadly understood as the result of ongoing impacts of colonisation (for both Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal society), as well as gendered factors (such as societal norms, attitudes and behaviours).

In Australia and internationally, there is increasing support for a public health approach to address high rates of family violence, including for First Nations communities. Under this approach, investment in primary prevention efforts – which aim to prevent violence before it occurs – are critical. While there is strong support for primary prevention within the peer reviewed literature, there remains a paucity of published evidence regarding what works, both within mainstream and First Nations literature. This is due to the nascent (but increasing) work undertaken on primary prevention, which has received less funding and evaluation effort, compared to the more established tertiary interventions such as crisis management, emergency care, and criminal justice against perpetrators.

Within the First Nations literature specifically, the reasons for this knowledge gap are more complex. For example, some scholars have suggested that empirical research methodologies may not be relevant to the First Nations context and have called for community-led approaches to evaluation and evidence production. In response to this, there is an emerging body of literature focusing on knowledge translation strategies to address gaps in the published evidence.

These include collaborative research approaches with First Nations communities (such as co-production, co-design and co-creation); flexibility in research design, including recognising and privileging different ways of knowing (such as community knowledge and wisdom); and multi-directional knowledge translation (such as participatory approaches, communities of practice and feedback loops).

Although there are few examples of primary prevention programs targeting First Nations communities within the literature, and even fewer which have been evaluated, several promising approaches have been identified:

- education programs targeted at young people in school settings
- communications and marketing programs
- community mobilisation and community development approaches.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The primary objective of this research project was to establish a baseline of what we know about effective primary prevention programming for Victorian Aboriginal women and families, and more broadly Australian First Nations people – what works best, in what settings and for what specific forms of violence.

As outlined above, there is limited literature to demonstrate the effectiveness of family violence primary prevention approaches targeting First Nations women and families. However, consultations with sector stakeholders supported by grey literature, highlighted that the following features should be considered for future program design:

- **holistic approaches** which locate the individual or family within their broader network or community
- **community-led design and implementation** that involves the local community and Elders
- approaches which prioritise **cultural strengthening** to help build the protective factors against family violence
- **strengths-based approaches** which focus on an individuals', families' or communities' strengths instead of deficits
- **engaging men and boys in primary prevention** is emerging as a focus area.

A number of enablers and barriers to the delivery of primary prevention interventions targeting First Nations communities were also identified. Enablers include:

- long-term funding to support the incremental nature of primary prevention
- culturally safe and culturally competent service delivery
- strengthening workforce capacity through training and professional development
- ongoing investment in monitoring and evaluation

While common barriers to more effective sector-wide delivery were identified as:

- lack of data sharing and data usage among primary prevention agencies
- inconsistent collaboration between primary prevention organisations, including mainstream organisations, government agencies and ACCOs.

Overall, the evidence is still emerging regarding effective primary prevention programs for Victorian Aboriginal women and families. Very few studies or evaluations of primary prevention initiatives have been conducted, and there is limited evidence that even those approaches which have been effective, (e.g., comprehensive in nature, having met the program objectives including positively influencing the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and/or skill development of participants through culturally sensitive delivery), resulting in long-term positive change, given the incremental nature of primary prevention. In addition, international approaches which have been shown to be effective are not necessarily applicable to Australia's First Nations context due to the role of locally defined cultural protocols. It is important to acknowledge, however, that while there is limited peer-reviewed literature focused on effective First Nations-specific primary prevention approaches, this does not mean this knowledge does not exist within communities.

Consultations with family violence sector stakeholders confirmed that considerable Aboriginal-led prevention actions have been undertaken across Victoria for many years. These efforts can be strengthened through further investment in long term funding, targeting monitoring and evaluation activities and support for the Aboriginal-led workforce.

This review has identified gaps in the literature regarding lateral violence, abuse of Elders and LGBTIQ+ community. Future primary prevention research should focus on addressing key gaps in the evidence base while also ensuring that research is undertaken in partnership with First Nations communities, rather than for communities. It is also critical that efforts to measure the effectiveness of programs recognise that Western research methodologies and frameworks are not always relevant, useful nor appropriate for the First Nations context.

DISCLAIMER

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This report has been prepared with due care and diligence by Urbis and the statements and opinions given by Urbis in this report are given in good faith and in the reasonable belief that they are correct and not misleading, subject to the limitations above.

APPENDIX A
SUMMARY OF THE AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY PREVENTION POLICY LANDSCAPE

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JURISDICTION	POLICY/ STRATEGY/ FRAMEWORK	TIMEFRAME	OVERVIEW	FIRST NATIONS FOCUS	FUNDING
Australian Capital Territory	Fourth Action Plan 2019-2022 as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children	2019-2022	The plan's agenda is to improve existing initiatives under the national plan, addressing gaps in previous action plans and providing a platform for future family violence prevention policy.	The plan pays particular attention to including the voices of Aboriginal communities and working holistically across all actions.	A total of $100,000 is allocated to The Women's Safety Grants to fund community-led primary prevention initiatives.
New South Wales	Integrated Prevention and Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect Framework	2019-2025	The framework focuses on providing a coordinated and consistent health response to family violence in NSW.	The framework acknowledges how the health and wellbeing of the individual is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of wider community and the importance of supporting efforts of Aboriginal communities to reduce the impact of family violence.	The NSW Government allocates $10 million of recurrent annual funding in addition to VAN service budget allocations distributed through local health districts.
Northern Territory	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018-2028: Safe, Respected and Free from Violence	2018-2028	The framework is a territory-wide approach to build agency effort across the region to build on 'what works' and expand family violence prevention, intervention and crisis responses.	The framework outlines the current state of family violence against First Nations communities and incorporating services that are accessible, equitable and responsive.	The Safe and Respected and Free from Violence Prevention Grants program provides $1.2 million to local prevention and early intervention projects of intergenerational family violence.

JURISDICTION	POLICY/ STRATEGY/ FRAMEWORK	TIMEFRAME	OVERVIEW	FIRST NATIONS FOCUS	FUNDING
South Australia	A Right to Safety	2011-2022	The plan aims to combine government and community efforts to bolster family violence prevention. It hopes to contribute to cultural change regarding discrimination and inequity.	The plan recognises the importance of self-determination and partnership to recognise the impact of colonisation, respond to family violence and facilitate healing.	Same as Committed to Safety: A Framework for Addressing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in South Australia.
Queensland	Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy: 2016-2026	2016-2026	The strategy is designed to support the needs of the community to prevent violence by embedding cultural change, system reform and community ownership.	The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Group was established to oversee the strategy and the progress of partnerships with First Nations communities.	The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Positive Family Relationships Grants are available to First Nations communities. A maximum of $10,000 is granted to recipients for action planning and capacity building initiatives
Queensland	Queensland's Framework for Action — Reshaping our Approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Domestic and Family Violence	2019-2021	The framework is concerned with partnership with First Nations communities to deliver holistic services through community-controlled organisations.	This framework is dedicated address and support First Nations communities to determine what, when and how services and responses are needed in communities.	Same as The Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy: 2016-2026.

APPENDIX A
SUMMARY OF THE AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY PREVENTION POLICY LANDSCAPE CONTINUED

JURISDICTION	POLICY/ STRATEGY/ FRAMEWORK	TIMEFRAME	OVERVIEW	FIRST NATIONS FOCUS	FUNDING
South Australia	Committed to Safety: A Framework for Addressing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in South Australia	2019-2022	The main features of this framework are primary prevention, service support and justice. These features will be led by communities to maintain the momentum of the reform agenda.	There is a consideration of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander design, implementation and controlled services at a holistic level.	The SA Government has committed $125,000 to support community initiatives as part of the 125th anniversary of suffrage community grants and $120,000 as part of The Youth Services Primary Prevention Training and Small Grants program.
Tasmania	Safe Homes Families Communities: Tasmania's Action Plan for Family and Sexual Violence 2019-2022	2019-2022	This framework is concerned with improving the service system through integration and capacity building of specialist and mainstream workforces to improve the primary prevention response.	The promotion of delivery by Aboriginal communities to Aboriginal communities of primary prevention and early intervention programs and improvement of the service delivery system.	From 2022 the Safe Homes, Families, Communities grants program invests $26 million over three years across 40 actions to prevent family violence.
Western Australia	Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022	2012-2022	This strategy focuses on the outcomes of prevention and early intervention, victim safety and perpetrator accountability. It emphasises the need for community sector and government collaborative approach.	This strategy briefly mentions the need to improve partnerships between Aboriginal organisations, government, and the community sector to provide an integrated response.	No mention of specific funding arrangements or grant programs.

JURISDICTION	POLICY/ STRATEGY/ FRAMEWORK	TIMEFRAME	OVERVIEW	FIRST NATIONS FOCUS	FUNDING
Western Australia	Pathway to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020-2030	2020-2030	This Strategy provides a basis for a whole-of-community response to family violence.	The strategy outlines future development of a co-design Indigenous-specific strategy to improve Aboriginal family safety. It also communicates the need to strengthening the strengthen inclusion of Aboriginal communities across all elements of primary prevention.	A total of $3 million is available under the Family and Domestic Violence Primary Prevention Grants Program for initiatives that address and prevent family violence.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	Meaning
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CIF	Community Initiatives Fund
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
FSV	Family Safety Victoria
GCBC	Girls Can Boys Can
IPV	Intimate partner violence
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
OWS	Old Ways Are Strong
PMWG	Project Management Working Group
RCFV	Royal Commission into Family Violence
RV	Respect Victoria

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