

Indigenous Family Safety Agenda

Family violence continues to devastate Indigenous families and communities at a much higher rate than the broader community. Its effects are brutal and long-lasting, especially for children.

A growing body of literature over many years has highlighted the causes and extent of violence, particularly family violence, in Indigenous communities. Much of this has been written by Indigenous people seeking profound changes in their communities.

Indigenous Australians have called for greater investment in the skills of local people who show leadership to prevent violence. They've called for action to address alcohol abuse, for better police presence and protection in remote areas and for more integrated community services to support vulnerable families and children.

This Agenda is part of the Australian Government's response to this call to action.

What does the Agenda do?

The Australian Government will work to reduce Indigenous family violence in partnership with Indigenous leaders, state and territory governments, non-government organisations and communities.

The Government will use every appropriate lever to protect families and children from the devastating impact of violence, abuse and neglect.

Family violence is a national problem. Stopping this violence means ending the alcohol abuse that leads to violence; changing attitudes and beliefs about violence and relationships; ensuring effective crisis responses; and taking measures to stop perpetrators from being violent.

The Australian Government is leading the development of *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*, through the Council of Australian Governments, to address these key areas. The Government is also working to ensure that family safety, alcohol restrictions and adequate police protection are priorities in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Safe Communities Strategy being developed by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General.

Why do we need to act? The scale of Indigenous family violence

Family violence is a crime and the impact can be far reaching. For a family who lives with violence, it is very hard to study, work, or to give children the nurturing they need.

Indigenous people are 11 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be hospitalised with assault-related injuries and are five to ten times more likely to die as a result of assault-related incidents.¹ In 2006-07, the rate of hospitalisation for Indigenous people as a result of spouse or partner violence was almost 34 times that of non-Indigenous people.² The presence of family violence is a strong predictor of child abuse and reduces the capacity of people who have experienced violence to enjoy the everyday freedoms of our society.

The Agenda's priority action areas

Over the next four years, the Commonwealth is making available \$64.4 million to fund innovative Indigenous family safety community initiatives focused on the Agenda's priority action areas.

1. **Addressing alcohol abuse**, with an urgent focus on reducing the supply of alcohol.
2. More effective **police protection** to reduce incidents of violence.
3. Working with strong local leaders to **strengthen social norms against violence** by changing attitudes and fostering respectful relationships.
4. **Coordinating support services** to aid the recovery of people who experience violence, including children who experience or witness violence.

ACTION AREA ONE: *Addressing Alcohol Abuse*

Reducing the supply of alcohol and tackling alcohol abuse is fundamental to reducing Indigenous family violence.

A recent study by the Australian Institute of Criminology³ found that "*alcohol is now regarded as one, if not the, primary risk factor for violence in Indigenous communities*" and that alcohol use was one of the strongest predictors of Indigenous people's contact with the justice system.

Spouse or partner homicides involving an Indigenous offender and victim are 13 times more likely to be alcohol related than non-Indigenous homicides.⁴ Seventy per cent of Indigenous homicides involve both the victim and the offender consuming alcohol, compared with 22.5 per cent of non-Indigenous homicides.⁵

¹ C. Bryant (2009) 'Identifying the risks for Indigenous violent victimisation', Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse Research Brief 6.

² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2009) 'Report on Government Services 2009' available online at <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/rogs/2009>

³ Wundersitz, J (2010) *Indigenous perpetrators of violence: Prevalence and risk factors for reoffending* Australian Institute of Criminology Reports, Research and Policy Series p105

⁴ Dearden, J & Payne, J (2009) Alcohol and Homicide in Australia. *Trends and Issues in crime and criminal justice* no.372 Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology

⁵ Bryant, C (2009) op. cit.

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The damage of alcohol is demonstrated in the 29 Remote Service Delivery communities where hospital separation rates for alcohol-related injury and poisoning are significantly higher than national and jurisdictional averages: nine of these communities have rates more than five times the national average. In 13 of the communities, alcohol was a major factor in offending.

The Commonwealth Government is investing significant resources into alcohol rehabilitation and workforce training in urban, regional and remote areas. The Government has provided:

- \$297 million in Indigenous drug and alcohol services since 2006-2007. This investment is expanding treatment and rehabilitation services for Indigenous people, including more innovative models. For example in Queensland, the Commonwealth Government is funding four new Wellbeing Centres in Cape York which provide drug and alcohol services. The Wellbeing Centres are fully operational with over 500 clients. This investment also supports treatment and rehabilitation services in urban, regional and remote settings across Australia.
- \$20.8 million over five years from 2006-07 to 2010-11 to support health practitioners identify and address mental illness and associated substance use issues Indigenous communities.
- A National Binge Drinking Strategy to address the high levels of binge drinking among young Australians. The Strategy includes \$19 million over four years from 2008-09 to 2011-12 for an Early Intervention Pilot Program (EIPP) to help young people address drinking habits which lead to offending. As part of this Program, the Australian Government is providing \$7.2 million for 38 community projects across Australia. Some of these projects specifically address problem drinking in Indigenous communities, such as the Koori Chicks Binge Drinking Project on the south coast of New South Wales.
- To stop the trafficking of drugs, alcohol and other illicit substances, the Government has also provided funding for three Substance Abuse Intelligence Desks (SAID) in Marla, Alice Springs and Katherine targeting drug trafficking, including petrol and kava. These Intelligence Desks are staffed by NT Police (and, in Marla, South Australian Police) and work collaboratively with Western Australian police to gather intelligence, to educate communities, roadhouse operators and local police and to conduct joint enforcement activities.

In tackling alcohol abuse, stemming the supply of alcohol can be just as important as reducing demand through rehabilitative and diversion programs. The success associated with targeting the supply of alcohol to reduce violence has been clearly demonstrated in some communities.

- In Fitzroy Crossing, introducing alcohol restrictions led to a 25 per cent reduction in women seeking help from the Women's Refuge, a 36 per cent reduction in the average number of alcohol-related presentations to the hospital's emergency department, and a 28 per cent reduction in the average number of alcohol-related matters attended by police.
- On Groote Eylandt, the introduction of an alcohol management system led to assaults falling by over 67 per cent.

These restrictions were particularly successful because they were driven by strong local leaders. Supporting local leadership to act against alcohol abuse and to stem the flow of alcohol is a priority for this Agenda.

Future Actions

Tackling Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

The Commonwealth will invest \$1 million in the first study of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in an Australian Indigenous community. The study, called *Marulu: The Lililwan Project*, was initiated by the Fitzroy Valley community and will pool the expertise of paediatricians, allied health professionals and social workers from the George Institute for International Health, University of Sydney, and the Nindilingarri Cultural Health Service. It will research the prevalence of FASD, and provide support to affected children and families. The work will also help to inform diagnosis and community education strategies which may be used more widely by other communities and governments.

FASD is known to cause lifelong physical and mental damage to children, including increased chances of learning and behavioral difficulty, depression, psychosis and risk of alcohol and drug abuse.

Tackling alcohol abuse that leads to violence

Funding through the \$64.4 million Indigenous Family Safety program will be available for:

- Supporting development of alcohol management plans and local liquor accords;
- In areas where there is evidence of high levels of alcohol-related family violence, building the leadership and skills of people advocating for alcohol restrictions, including advice on what has worked in other communities.
- Providing alcohol education activities in remote Indigenous communities to highlight its link to family violence.
- Piloting technologies that support alcohol restrictions, such as identification card systems that can support management plans.
- Ensuring that people with alcohol-related issues who present at safe houses and other domestic violence services are referred to appropriate treatment, rehabilitation and counselling services.

The Commonwealth will continue to roll out investments in alcohol rehabilitation including the construction of an Indigenous-specific drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation service in Port Augusta, and new residential rehabilitation facilities at South Hedland (Pilbara region), Cape York, Normanton and Woorabinda (QLD).

Recognising the link between mental health, social and emotional well-being and alcohol abuse, the Australian Government will also extend the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMS) program to ten high-need remote locations. This service gives vulnerable individuals daily support to get their lives on track, stay safe and achieve a level of independence.

This model was developed in consultation with Indigenous communities and recognises and promotes spiritual, cultural, mental and physical healing for Indigenous Australians living with mental illness. In addition to the remote sites, there are nine mainstream sites that are required to have at least 75 per cent Indigenous clientele. Overall, eight per cent of PHaMS clients identify as Indigenous.

Further work with the States and Territories

The Commonwealth will continue work with state and territory governments to:

- Promote stronger alcohol management, restrictions, responsible drinking and license conditions in communities where high levels of alcohol consumption are leading to Indigenous family and community violence.
- Ensure that police have the power to intervene in licensed premises where there is alcohol-related violence and other unacceptable behaviour without having to wait for a request or authority from licensees or licensing authorities.
- Provide mechanisms for police to advocate for stronger alcohol restrictions on a local basis and be involved in the design and implementation of local alcohol management plans and liquor accords.
- Encourage partnerships with government, corporate and community sectors to promote responsible drinking.
- Support Indigenous substance-abuse services to improve the quality of care they provide, including building workforce capacity, improving data collection within services and nationally and building the evidence-base for best practice interventions.

The National Drug Strategy (NDS) 2010-2015 is a framework agreed amongst the Commonwealth and all States and Territories to prevent and address drug related harms in Australia. It guides stakeholders in policy and program development and service delivery and fosters collaboration across government and sectors. The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) is currently in the process of developing the next phase of the NDS, which includes an independent evaluation of the 2004-2009 NDS and a review of the National Drug Strategy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Complementary Action Plan 2003-2009 (the CAP).

ACTION AREA TWO: *More Effective Police Presence*

Many people in remote Indigenous communities feel strongly that a permanent and effective police presence is critical to reducing the incidence of crime, particularly alcohol-fuelled crime.⁶ Learnings from the Northern Territory Emergency Response have been that a greater police presence results in an increase in reported incidents.

⁶ Pilkington, J. *Aboriginal Communities and the Police's Taskforce Themis: Case Studies in remote Aboriginal community policing in the Northern Territory*. North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, 2009.

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An Independent Assessment of Policing in Remote Indigenous Communities for the Government of Australia conducted in 2007⁷ highlighted an inconsistency in policing numbers between similarly sized and located communities in remote and very remote Australia. It found that a number of communities of 1,000-2,200 people had neither police stationed with the community nor within 75 kilometres of the community.

This is despite jurisdictions having, on average, one police officer for every 261-535 people, and one police officer for every 172-311 people in Indigenous communities.

The findings have been used to inform the development and implementation of measures such as identifying priority locations for new police infrastructure. The Commonwealth has funded new police infrastructure projects in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and the NT.

However, evidence suggests that there is still an insufficient police presence in many remote and very remote Indigenous communities:

- In a recent survey, of Northern Territory communities that have an Operation Themis police station⁸, 75 per cent of respondents wanted a permanent police presence.
- A recent review of NT policing conducted by Allen Consulting⁹, suggested that the standard Northern Territory Police resource allocation tool is not necessarily effective when applied to remote and very remote communities as it is based on available statistics such as population, reported offences and recorded police activity. However, where there is no police presence, a community will have low levels of reported offences and recorded police activity. In combination with often poor population data, this can result in communities with high policing needs not receiving an adequate permanent police presence.

State and Territory Governments involved in the National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery have agreed to provide ongoing data on local policing levels in 29 remote priority locations.

Future Actions

Through the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Safe Communities Strategy with the States and Territories, the Commonwealth Government will continue to:

- advocate for greater transparency in the allocation of policing numbers to ensure communities experiencing high levels of family and community violence receive adequate protection and justice; and
- promote effective policing models that include law enforcement, community engagement and support from key services, including child protection, health, education, justice and other community services.

⁷ Valentin J, *An Independent Assessment of Policing in Remote Indigenous Communities for the Government of Australia*, March 2007.

⁸ James Pilkington, *Aboriginal Communities and the Police's Taskforce Themis: Case studies in remote Aboriginal community policing in the Northern Territory*, October 2009.

⁹ The Allen Consulting Group, *Independent Review of Policing in Remote Indigenous Communities in the Northern Territory - Policing further into remote communities - Report to the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government*, April 2010.

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The Government will trial the use of sworn community engagement officers in the NT to:

- Identify hot spots by mapping criminal activity.
- Identify suspected offenders, including by sharing information with service delivery agencies.
- Identify causal factors for offending, including through discussions with the families of offenders and residents in high crime location.
- Make recommendations to the Northern Territory Police Commissioner and the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services on services needed to address those factors.
- Liaise with relevant agencies to ensure the provision of those services.

Funding from the \$64.4 million Indigenous Family Safety Program will be available over the next four years for:

- Better links between local police and service providers focused on preventing and protecting families against violence.
- Support for improving systems for information sharing between police and service networks in Indigenous communities experiencing high levels of family violence.
- Trialling new approaches to community policing to prevent family violence.
- Funding additional research on appropriate tools for the states and territories to use when allocating police resources.

ACTION AREA THREE: *Changing social norms*

Local people are most able to change community attitudes and enforce the view that violence is neither normal nor acceptable. Some countries have had significant reductions in offending and recidivism rates through community-wide healing activities, for example the RespectED programs run by the Canadian Red Cross. The Australian Government is providing the Australian Red Cross with over \$500,000 to deliver RespectED, an innovative new anti-violence and abuse education program, in South Australian and Northern Territorian communities. Innovative healing models have also been developed in Australia, like the Diploma of Community Recovery at the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at Southern Cross University.¹⁰

A centrepiece of the Cape York welfare reforms (joint Cape York Institute, Queensland and Commonwealth Governments initiative) has been the establishment of the Queensland Family Responsibilities Commission. The objective of the Commission is to re-establish Indigenous authority to enforce obligations and rebuild social norms. The Commission creates a focal point for modelling new norms of responsibility, respect and care.

¹⁰ A number of these Australian Indigenous healing models and programs are referred to in “Voices from the Campfires: Establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation” (2009), Report by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team
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The Government has also legislated for a new national scheme of income management to support vulnerable families and children to be rolled out across the Northern Territory in the latter half of 2010. Education of young people is critical in reducing future levels of family violence. One of the key aims of the new income management model is to increase school attendance and encourage participation in study and work. Income management will also be used as an early intervention tool for child protection authorities to help vulnerable families ensure payments are spent in the interests of children.

Future Actions

The Commonwealth Government will:

- work with state and territory governments and local communities to change attitudes and behaviours; and
- fund and support the development of positive social norms and shared and respectful leadership between women and men and build stronger and more economically independent families through the Closing the Gap initiatives.

Funding will be available from the \$64.4 million Indigenous Family Safety Program for initiatives that change attitudes and support local leadership against violence, such as:

- Local skills development to prevent violence - enabling local people with appropriate skills and connections to undertake specific training to enable them to work with community members who have experienced family violence;
- Developing life-skills education - particularly to help young people understand the importance of respect, negotiation skills, and assertiveness in their relationships;
- Training leaders as community change agents so they can position their community to identify problem areas and collectively plan to act to address them; and
- Strengthening local governance, with a focus on strengthening social norms and sanctions against violence and abuse.

Recognising the important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have in parenting and families, the Australian Government will also provide \$6 million in 2010-2013 to *Strong Fathers Strong Families initiative*. This initiative complements the existing mothers and babies programs with programs for men about parenting, antenatal support, and community activities promoting fatherhood and grand-fatherhood.

ACTION AREA FOUR: *Better support for people who experience violence*

Providing high quality and timely care to people who have experienced violence is crucial to preventing the cycle of violence from continuing. Research has shown that the first point of contact for a person who has experienced family violence is critical to their recovery process.

Service delivery models that recognise the complexity of a person's needs while providing a consistent high levels of assistance and follow through with case plans are most successful. The *Time for Action* report referred to this as the "first door, right door" model.

Information sharing between service providers (such as children, parenting and women's services, night patrols, mental health, schools and health clinics) and police and governments is critical to responding before violence happens.

It is also critical that children who are exposed to family violence and child abuse are given support, time and space to recover. Their recovery from this trauma is also vital in preventing the cycle from continuing.

There is a growing local and international literature on the steps communities can take to reduce family violence, child abuse and neglect¹¹ including:

- Working intensively with parents on core parenting skills such as setting boundaries for children.
- Providing childcare, playgroup and other services that can provide parents with respite, friendship networks, and information and skills.
- Ensuring that additional supports are available for families in times of need or heightened vulnerability.

Future Actions

Indigenous Family Safety funding will be available for initiatives that provide support for people who experience family violence, such as:

- Better understanding and responses to women and children at risk of violence.
- Scoping the appropriateness, adequacy and reach of services, including provision of adequate care to help children who have witnessed violence to recover.
- Identifying service gaps, barriers to service use and strategies to address these.
- Working with service providers within particular locations to ensure that people are appropriately referred between services.
- Informing workers, volunteers and community members about local service options, training them in the "first door, right door" approach and embedding this concept in delivery.
- Extending and improving the reach of existing service responses to difficult-to-target groups, such as people who live in outstations.
- Training local community members to take part in service delivery, either paid or voluntary, or to act as natural facilitators within their families and community.
- Providing infrastructure to support such activities or to establish ongoing services.

In the 29 Remote Service Delivery (RSD) locations, Indigenous people are putting forward solutions to reduce the impact of alcohol and tackle family violence through Local Implementation Plans. The Government will ensure that:

- Local Implementation Plans incorporate best practice models for preventing child abuse and family violence.
- Communities develop strong and evidence-based Community Safety Plans that focus on the safety and wellbeing of women and children in particular.

¹¹ Schorr, L. & Marchand, V. *Pathway to the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*. June 2007. *Future directions in Indigenous family safety: a statement by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*

How will we take this forward? Joint action with Indigenous leaders

Families need to know that these difficult issues can be talked about and addressed. Leadership at all levels is critical including change at the grassroots level:

- In May 2010, Aboriginal men held a Stop the Violence workshop in Ross River, Northern Territory. These leaders came together to reject violence and reclaim their roles as strong fathers, brothers, uncles and sons.
- The Tjaegans Warriors Men's group in Dandenong, Victoria, has an ethos of non-violence and practice sobriety, as positive role-models for youth.
- On the sporting field, teams are implementing their own non-violence codes.

The Commonwealth Government is supporting the establishment of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples which will be fully operational by January 2011. Through the Congress, many advocates for tackling violence and alcohol abuse will be able to collaborate and put forward their solutions.

The Government has also funded six new Women's Alliances, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance and Women Everywhere Advocating Violence Elimination.

The new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, established with Commonwealth Government funding of \$26.6 million over four years, aims to build evidence of best practice models for addressing the underlying causes of trauma and violence.

Governments are also working with families and communities in the 29 RSD locations to assess progress against best-practice evidence for preventing family violence, child abuse and neglect to help communities develop strong Community Safety Plans.¹²

The Commonwealth will continue to work collaboratively with Indigenous Australians and these bodies on priority-setting, policy and implementation.

Funding - Indigenous Family Safety

The Commonwealth Government will support the Indigenous Family Safety Agenda with \$64.4 million funding over four years, by streamlining and reprioritising the Family Violence Partnership and Family Violence Regional Activities Programs.

The Government will continue to support initiatives which show strong promise or require one-off injections to purchase required capital assets, such as vehicles, safe places or support centres, but will target funding to initiatives aimed at promoting protection and prevention.

Funding - Applying for funding

In coming months, organisations will have the opportunity to apply for the first round of projects under the Indigenous Family Safety program. The first new funding announcements are expected later in 2010.

Services currently funded under the Family Violence Partnership and Family Violence Regional Activities Programs have had their funded extended to end June 2011, and will have the opportunity to apply for transitional funding where needed.

¹² For more information on the Remote Service Delivery Partnership go to:
http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/families/RSD_NPA/Pages/default.aspx
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