

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Forum: Domestic and Family Violence

'Change our future. Share what you know'



Background to the forum

The incidence of family violence in Indigenous communities is higher than in most non-Indigenous communities, and evidence suggests that Indigenous women experience violence at higher rates and at greater severity than non-Indigenous women.

There is limited data available on the prevalence of domestic violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander at the ACT level. But we know that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT is highly overrepresented in the number of people accessing specialist homelessness services.

And domestic violence as a reason for child protection notifications in the ACT has been increasing, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in receiving child protection services in the ACT - at 30 June 2016, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on orders in the ACT was 89.9 per 1,000 children compared to 6.9 for non-Indigenous children. And there were 197 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in the ACT—a rate of 79.8 per 1,000 children compared to 6.3 for non-Indigenous children.¹

There are also immediate and long-term health consequences for Indigenous women and children who are more likely to be hospitalised than non-Indigenous women and children².

In recognition of this, at the national level the Third Action Plan includes a priority area specifically focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families dealing with family violence. And under the Action Plan, all state and territory governments have committed to:

- ensuring that responses to family violence recognise the impact of past trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resulting from colonisation, racism and social disadvantage, and the role of these intersecting factors in perpetuating violence; and
- working with communities to develop and implement responses aimed at addressing family violence.

This provides opportunities in the ACT as part of the ACT Government's response to family violence, *Safer Families*, and the broader whole of Government approach and focus.

Summary of the Forum

On 29th and 30th March 2017 an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Forum: Domestic and Family Violence* forum was hosted by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and facilitated by Coolamon Advisers. This forum was the product of a partnership between the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.

The forum explored barriers to, and opportunities for improving, services and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT affected by family violence.

The aims of the forum were:

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. Child protection Australia 2015–16. Child Welfare series no. 66. Cat. no. CWS 60. Canberra: AIHW.

² Productivity Commission 2015, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*.

<http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/key-indicators-2014/key-indicators-2014-report.pdf>

- Raising community awareness of domestic and family violence and its impacts;
- Promoting a clear message of no tolerance of domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- Ensuring those who are experiencing domestic and family violence know how to access help and support;
- Understanding and being aware of what is currently taking place in the ACT in relation to domestic/family violence and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The forum was well attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait people; representatives from local community services (Winnunga, Gugan Gulwan, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Women's Legal Centre, Beryl Women Inc, Toora Women, Canberra Rape Crisis Centre/NGURU, Legal Aid ACT, CARE Financial Counselling, the ACT Council Of Social Services, Everyman Australia); from ACT Government (including the Office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety, Victim Support ACT, ACT Human Rights Commission, ACT Policing, the Community Services Directorate, and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate); and from the Domestic Violence Prevention Council.

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‘Change our future. Share what you know’

29-30 March 2017

Tuggeranong Community Centre

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Welcome and Introductions

The Community Forum commenced with a Welcome to Country from Ngunnawal Elder Ms Violet Sheridan.

Apologies were also acknowledged for Robyn Martin who was unable to attend. It was noted that her efforts were key in getting the forum together and that she plays a significant role for and on behalf of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community in addressing issues associated with Family Violence.

The forum is the product of a partnership between the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. In developing the agenda several meetings were held and input gained from the following people:

- Di Collins as chair of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (at the time);
- Jo Chivers - ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body;
- Leo Nickels – Aboriginal Legal Service;
- Louise Taylor – Legal Aid ACT;
- Tania Keed;
- Teletha Elemes – Women’s Legal Centre; and
- Belinda Maxwell – ACT Policing.

Marcia Williams – Domestic Violence Prevention Council Chairperson

After acknowledging the Traditional Owners Ms Williams introduced herself as the Chairperson of the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council Chairperson, a sponsoring partner for the event.

In providing background she advised that the work of the Council over the last few years has been focussed on:

- How to influence better service delivery and policy at the local level, particularly for vulnerable populations; and
- How to be better informed through data and feedback– how to know what services are accessed, and how, so we can better identify where the gaps are.

Ms Williams also outlined the 3rd National Plan on Domestic Violence that has a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. She acknowledged that the issues are even more complex for First Nations people, including that some are second and third generation consumers of domestic violence services. And that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families don’t report family violence because of the lack of cultural appropriate responses in services or concerns with the police, child protection or justice system.

She described the ACT Government’s response to 3 major reports in 2015-16 – Safer Families - and the creation of the new role of Coordinator General for Family Safety, and the appointment of the first

Minister for the prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, as an opportunity to ensure improvements in the ACT response to family violence for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Ms Williams advised that the Forum was following through on a commitment of the Council to engage with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and that she and other DVPC members in attendance wanted to listen over the two days to the feedback from community and providers on what specific actions the DVPC could recommend to Government that they believed would make a difference.

Overview of current funding within the ACT and the delivery of Domestic Violence Services

The facilitator on behalf of Robyn Martin provided the overview. What was apparent was the lack of one source of truth when it comes to tackling Family Violence in the ACT, especially for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It was noted that this layer of complexity at the strategic level is very likely to have impacts on people in crisis trying to navigate the system for assistance.

Services in the ACT providing Family Violence related services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community include:

In the 2016/17 Budget the ACT Government committed to the following responses in the ACT (they are not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific – unless specifically noted):

- A Coordinator General for Family Safety - \$3million
- Strengthening integrated case management and coordination of services for victims of family violence (\$2.6 million) through a Safety Hub
- Enhancing quality assurance and supporting improved decision making in child protection services (\$2.5 million)
- Training for front line staff across community and emergency services, Health and Education to support identification of Family Violence and Early intervention (\$770 thousand)
- Increasing the capacity of drug treatment services to deliver programs that integrate best practice in addressing Family Violence (\$2 million)
- Brokerage and bond fund to assist victims seeking to escape family violence with immediate expenses (\$315 thousand)
- Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to support people affected by Family Violence (\$1.25 million)
- Residential behaviour change program for men who use or are at risk of using violence (\$964 thousand)
- ACT Policing to assist victims applying for Domestic Violence orders (\$1.18 million)
- Support for the first stage implementation of Joint Australian Law Reform Commission Report on Family Violence – a national legal response (\$1.36 million)
- DPP to strengthen criminal justice response to alleged perpetrators of Family Violence (\$1.36 million)
- Legal Aid to improve access to legal services for victims of family violence (\$1.2 million)

- Tara Costigan Foundation to establish Tara's Angels Service – caseworker support (\$40 thousand)

ACT Government Family Violence Initiatives since 2014 include:

- Reforming victims of crime assistance scheme to make it easier and faster to get financial help and counselling services
- Establishing a pilot crisis services scheme for women with a disability
- Law changes made to establish in law the offence of strangulation, this allows the police to interview of complaints in family violence cases to be used as evidence in criminal trials and to improve victim protections in DVO Proceedings where criminal matters are ongoing
- Supporting detainee rehabilitative programs at the Alexander Maconochie Centre
- Women's Safety Grants
- The development of an ACT Domestic Violence data framework
- Learning programs in schools

ACT Partnerships and Programs include;

- Family Violence Intervention Program
 - Coordinating the ACT community and criminal justice response to Family Violence
- ACT Government and ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body – ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement
- Domestic and Family Violence Service Delivery Framework – ACT Housing
- ACT Public Service Domestic and Family Violence Tool Kit 2016
 - Raises awareness
 - Provides support
 - For employees
- Justice Reinvestment Strategy
 - Focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families
 - Enhanced and targeted support services
- Cultural Competence training for the ACT Public Service, and specifically for Child and Youth Protection Services

Delivery Agencies Panel

To commence the first panel session each speaker gave an introduction on themselves and their current roles.

Ms Jo Woods – Coordinator General

Ms Woods acknowledged the traditional owners of the lands the meeting was being held and that she was keen to listen to the group over the next two days to better understand community perspectives.

Ms Woods outlined that the ACT has a Minister dedicated to the issue of Family Violence and that her role as Coordinator General has been created to drive long term change and to work in partnership with the community, with the community and across Government to address the issue.

She acknowledged that the present system is fragmented and difficult to navigate, and that changing the way Government systems work is hard, but that engagement with the community was essential to understand their perspectives.

A key feature of her role is the development and establishment of a Family Safety Hub, which she described as requiring the following features:

- Connecting up services and information through a coordinated response;
- Assisting with the integration of broad service delivery responses, and ensure trusted services are part of the response;
- Give priority to the groups of people most vulnerable to family violence, and those who are hardest to reach with existing services;
- A focus on improving the early intervention, pre-crisis and non-justice responses to family violence, including finding better ways to support families that want to stay together and people who don't want to involve the police of the justice system;
- That it will be co-designed with the people it is seeking to assist; and
- That if it is to make a significant difference, then government and the sector is going to have to do things differently.

Ms Woods gave an undertaking to build relationships and trust within the ACT community, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people before focussing on any specific solutions.

Jo Cameron – ACT Policing

Ms Cameron began by acknowledging the traditional owners. She provided some personal background on her 20-year policing career and that her current role is leading the specialist Family Violence Coordination Unit for ACT Policing.

From her work, she offered the following view on what Family Violence looks like in the ACT:

- People view the crime as minimal impact – when really Family Violence is terrorism;
- In many cases, it is only at the very critical stages that any action is taken;
- Family Violence is not one homogenous event, it looks and impacts differently across every episode; and

- It is predominately men offending against women.

The role of the police in Family Violence matters can be described as:

- Trying to keep people alive;
- That with new laws they can record evidence on site, including the raw emotion of the event (this is having a noticeable impact in later legal matters);
- Not a stand-alone solution to the problem – areas such as Mental Health and Drug and alcohol misuse are critical partners in addressing the issues;
- Police are now using a risk assessment tool to assist in consistency in approaching/dealing with matters involving Family Violence; and
- Now having dedicated male and female Aboriginal Liaison Officers to assist in connecting community and the ACT Police service.

For the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community specifically, Family Violence presents in the following ways:

- 9% of victims are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people; and
- 16 % of perpetrators are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

In moving forward, she offered the following areas of focus:

- We need to change societal structures and attitudes that are accepting of Family Violence;
- We need to engage early with perpetrators;
- There needs to be development of solutions for people who are reluctant to ask for help; and
- How to assist when victims blame themselves.

Lisa Ross – Justice Reinvestment Trial

The first justice reinvestment trial will involve using a family-centric service support model with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to improve life outcomes and reduce or prevent contact with the justice system. The delivery partner with this is Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service.

It will involve 10 families being supported over a 12-month period. Eligibility will be based on a member of the family being involved with a justice matter. An evaluation framework is being developed by the Australian National University. The trial received over \$920,000 of funding from the 2016-17 budget and Confiscation of Criminal Assets Trust Fund and will commence in 2017.

The second justice reinvestment trial is a 12-month Bail Support trial designed to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on remand and reduce the amount of time spent on remand. Funding of \$400,000 in 2016-17 has been provided through the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Trust Fund. It will commence by mid-2017.

Forum comments and questions

- We need to make sure that grass roots people have their voice heard.
- Looking forward to seeing how the trial goes with keeping families connected throughout the 12 months – have found that to be problematic.

Service Delivery, Intake and challenges faced when accessing services

The first workshop for the forum focussed on what service delivery and intake look like now and sought suggestions for improvement.

In terms of barriers the common themes that were identified included:

- Lack of flexibility/agility in the service delivery system – this had been ‘funded out’ and this impacted on the opportunity for opportunistic responses and innovation;
- The central intake approach creates barriers to service when there may be only one opportunity to engage, and there is a lack of advocacy on behalf of the client;
- Processes which are complex and take too long to navigate to access timely support as they are not geared to respond quickly (eg the One Link approach);
- Lack of consistency in approaches across the system driven by siloed funding; Lack of relationships by service providers with the broader ATSI community - trust needed to be built with the community and that relied on building capacity in the whole service for cultural competency, the need for community education and a depth of engagement with the community;
- A lack of advocacy on behalf of the family/client across the system;
- The need to prevent kids being taken from their parents which means victims are afraid to disclose;
- What about support for the men? and
- A lack of information about available services.

When discussing areas that worked well the common themes were:

- Services with long standing relationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community such as Toora;
- Services which provided diverse ways to access services -not just one point;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs such as with the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre;
- Services who sought ‘honest’ feedback on the experience of the service to inform their practice; and
- Services that had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Themed areas for improvement are:

- Improved cultural competency in the sector (including by employing and up skilling more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people);
- A more collaborative approach to funding and delivering cross sector approaches to family violence in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community;
- Delivering services, including early intervention and community education services through outreach at places with established trusted relationships;
- Focussed on crisis response and that is not sufficient;
- The system needs to fit the community to work;
- Development of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement and servicing strategies - there need to be options and support available for families connecting with the CYPS which focus on safety in the context of both the mothers and their children;
- Working with perpetrators early– men need help but who is working with them? and

Provide as thorough a service at first contact as is possible -and diverse ways to access services (not just one point).

Cultural Service Delivery

The second workshop was focussed on cultural service delivery, what does good delivery look like and how to measure it?

It was very clear that the foundations for good cultural service delivery are not dissimilar to general service delivery. The keys being understanding the customer, respectful engagement and mutually beneficial goals. The cornerstones of relationships such as trust, honesty and transparency are also critical.

Some of the ideas presented to assist service providers with cultural service delivery included:

- Symbols in communal areas such as artwork, acknowledgement of country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific information materials;
- Building your agencies knowledge bank on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, organisations and general demographics;
- Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and encouraging across sector support networks for these staff;
- Building engagement skills around appropriate use of language, understanding of kinship systems and history that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders trust and relationship with service providers;
- Making long term relationship commitments with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people centred on common goals not isolated individual incidents or needs alone; and
- Providing holistic rather than single issue services.

Community Programs Panel

Louise Taylor – Deputy CEO ACT Legal Aid

Ms Taylor provided a view from the coal face of the criminal justice Family Law Response, giving an overview of the role her organisation plays in dealing with Family Violence.

Her presentation was clear that victims are entitled to choose the intervention they want.

The support around legal solutions can be problematic – men get in first for Legal Aid funding which limits access for women. There needs to be focussed supports around affordable and accessible legal solutions for women in Family Violence matters.

Ms Taylor articulated the significance of the Culture of silence in restricting progress in eradicating Family Violence in the community. As a community, we need to do better, and this does not mean abandoning men.

Ms Taylor put to the participants the question - What does your service look like to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community from the outside – and ask yourself why?

Julie Tongs – CEO Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Medical Service

Ms Tongs discussed the layers to violence including racism, physical and intergenerational. She reminded the forum that violence comes in many forms – and it is not just about physical violence. And that we can't address one form of violence without addressing the others.

The team at Winnunga, and Doctors more generally are often the first contact point for a victim. At Winnunga this will mean having social workers wrap services around the client not just treating a presenting injury.

Winnunga gets a lot of people dropped at their door at 4:30 pm when other services deem them too hard to find a solution for. This is not a service Winnunga is funded to provide.

The service delivery model at Winnunga includes solutions for clients where an AVO may be in place so that both parties can continue to access services – including separate reception areas and home visits where that is deemed appropriate. This helps them to keep servicing clients who may hold fears for their safety, or feel shame about the issues they are dealing with.

This delivery model enables the service to work with both parties during and after resolution of family violence matters.

Recently the service developed and launched a resource kit for people experiencing Family Violence – this helps people in need to plan and understand what options they have and how to undertake them. There is often nowhere for Aboriginal women to go.

Ms Tongs highlighted the need for more workshops for all parties affected by Family Violence.

Sarah Patrick – Gugan Gulwan

Ms Patrick commenced by acknowledging the local Traditional Owners as well as recognising the efforts of women in her home communities in Cape York who have been running their own programs to combat family violence for decades.

Ms Patrick gave a quick overview from the ABS Personal Safety Survey 2014 relating to the ACT noting that the statistics for Aboriginal women are much worse:

- in the 12 months prior to the survey around 8,900 ACT women had experienced some form of violence;
- 6,900 had experienced physical violence, and 3,200 had experienced sexual violence (note: where a woman experienced both physical and sexual violence they were counted separately for each type of violence but were counted only once in the total);
- younger ACT women reported higher levels of violence than older women, during the 12 months preceding the study with 15.3% of 18 to 24-year old's and 10.1% of 25-34 years' old's reporting violence in the preceding 12 months;
- ACT women experiencing violence in the last 12 months were more likely to experience violence from a current or former intimate partner or another known person, than a stranger;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are nearly 10 times more likely to die because of assault than other Australian women, and are 35 times more likely to be admitted to hospital for family violence related injuries;
- Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities who experience domestic and family violence can face significant difficulties, including a lack of support networks, language barriers, socioeconomic disadvantage and lack of knowledge of their rights and Australia's laws;
- Women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence than other women, and the violence can be more severe and last longer. A recent survey of 367 women and girls with disability found that more than 1 in 5 had been affected by violence in the previous 3 years; and
- More than a third of women identifying as LGBTIQ have been in a relationship where their partner abused them.

Ms Patrick described the self-perpetuating cycle of destruction created by Family violence and gave the following examples:

- A variety and combination of different life pressures that often lead to violence, resulting in a chaotic and unstable home;
- Women often delay leaving as they do not want welfare to take their children and they often have nowhere to go;
- Family violence can lead to children missing out on school regularly, staying out on the town away from home and running away from what they see as an unsafe house;
- It is our lived experience that children are removed from women experiencing violence. In effect this is a punishment for and a very strong message that women are responsible for the violence;
- Children on the street due to Family Violence issues are forced to earn money to survive usually by illegal means. Due to the constant instability at home, they usually don't complete their

education and often become involved in crime to make money and to establish a surrogate family that can take care of their basic needs. A life spent in and out of jail then follows; and

- Those who experience domestic violence in their primary years have a higher probability of becoming victims or perpetrators of it.

Issues that are often encountered at Gugan Gulwan:

- People don't want to talk or engage for fear of having their children or partner taken away by authorities;
- There are not enough Women's refuges especially ones that can properly accommodate children;
- The children we encounter on the street who are trying to escape family violence are sometimes as young as 12 years old. Since they are not teenagers they are ineligible to apply for a refuge and this leaves them very vulnerable to criminal elements, substance abuse and exploitation;
- There is not enough focus on services and programs for the people acting violently within the family. Most women will keep returning to their violent partner because all they want is for the violence to stop. We need programs such as Men's groups, anger management courses and classes to break the cycle of violence;
- The current specialist services for Domestic Violence in the ACT struggle to service and engage the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community;
- The current specialist services for Domestic Violence in the ACT fail to take into consideration the cultural needs of the whole family experiencing violence; and
- The current specialist services for Domestic Violence in the ACT struggle to provide service when the violence is being done by other family members.

Key characteristics from Gugan Gulwan's model of service:

- **Let the community generate programs.** The most successful programs are those developed by and for the Aboriginal community;
- **Engage the community.** It is crucial to consult the community throughout the program's development, especially when the initiative comes from the government. Confidentiality is very important for us to establish and maintain;
- **Empower the community.** For communities to own family violence initiatives they need to be involved and supported, for example by men's groups which help build leadership and spread anti-violence messages;
- **Form partnerships.** Many of the successful case studies had partnerships with government and non-government agencies;
- **Take a holistic approach.** Initiatives need to address all aspects of violence and involve all the family, including what makes people be violent;
- **Connect to culture.** Respect for traditional law reinforces anti-violence messages and builds positive community identity;
- **Involve men.** Most responses to family violence are created by and for women, leaving some men feeling alienated. Men need to be part of the solution;
- **Empower women.** Women's traditional culture and authority in the community needs to be promoted;

- **Build on community strengths.** Programs have a greater chance of success when they build on the resources, networks or knowledge already present in communities; and
- **Employ Aboriginal staff.** The expertise of Aboriginal staff makes a crucial difference in successful services.

In conclusion Ms Patrick also highlighted the need to review the services available to victims.

Anthony Rochester – Room 4 Change

Mr Rochester commenced with an acknowledgement of country. He reminded the forum that family violence is everyone's business.

He spoke about the program Room for Change (which is part of the DVCS) that bring men into the solution in addressing Family Violence, that deal with men's use of violence and that as a service provider they are catching up on delivering with a whole of family focus. He acknowledged that behaviour change is difficult and that needs supports outside of the criminal justice and legal system, and that men want to be part of the solution.

Mr Rochester agreed that family violence is more than just physical violence, noted that healing is important and that non-Indigenous Australians need to learn more about this. He also offered the community access to training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to be able to work with their communities in addressing the use of violence. The training takes approximately 15 days to complete.

Forum comments and questions

Family violence is also about the use of violence against elderly women (grandmothers) who are subjected to this violence from grandchildren. It is the silent abuse.

If you can't work with/provide services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, then don't take the funding.

The Aboriginal services do not have the workforce to help the mainstream organisations, and are concerned about the workforce because of the trauma and pressures on Aboriginal members to move from one service to another. A sector response needs to be looking at the workforce and supporting it, as ATSI staff are becoming burnt out.

Policies need to be driven from the ground up.

Workshop

Growing leadership skills

The group focussed on what an Indigenous leader required which included:

- The sector to understand that cultural authority is of greatest value - to engage well an organisation must understand and value that;
- Organisations in the sector need to create training pathways to assist in developing these skills in their Indigenous staff;
- Indigenous staff with leadership skills and/or aspirations need to be mentored;
- Don't assume every Indigenous person wants leadership roles;
- Like any relationship based role communication is key – expectations, limitations and agreed measures of success; and
- The sector needs to create a network and support process so Indigenous staff across the sector can leverage off each other and grow their abilities and work on solutions together.

Pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a voice

Representatives from the sector discussed how they can encourage leadership within their agencies/services. The suggestions focussed on the following areas:

- Activities that attract and retain more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Building the organisations cultural competency including standards and metrics to keep them accountable;
- Having sector wide approaches that are designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Higher levels of engagement with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; and
- Recognition that resource constraints and funding processes have created disincentives for collaboration.

Workshop – Focus on Men

The strongest recommendations for assisting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in leading work relating to reducing and dealing with Family Violence in the community were:

- Hosting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men’s leadership conference;
- Enhancing a previous role model program to assist in mentoring young boys and youth – Strong Uncle’s; and
- A focus on healing programs for men who use violence.

Workshop – Focus on Women

The group focussed on suggesting programs for women in addressing Family violence suggested:

- Education and process design in the sector that ensures that the choices of women are respected, whilst always maintaining accountability for their safety
- There is a need for changes to how women addressing Family Violence can access housing
- Child protection responses need to change to work with women to keep their kid’s safe not to be punitive as they are now when they are the victims
- A greater focus on Indigenous delivery capability and understanding of the community by the service providers
- Evaluation of how the mainstream sector is performing in assisting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community address and reduce Family Violence in the ACT.

Workshop – Focus on Children

The focus for children was very much in keeping families connected. This includes through educational and professional support services, advocacy for this within the child protection processes and having an independent voice and focus on the needs of the child(ren).

Throughout the forum, there were reminders of the “We Don’t Shoot Our Wounded Report” (ACT Victims of Crime Coordinator March 2009), and the following were common themes from the Report which were also reiterated in the forum:

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence are very aware of the pressures on their community, and of the need to protect their children;
- They just want the violence to stop, but support is needed for the men to stop them perpetrating family violence;
- Victims of family violence don’t see the violence they experience as criminal, and only report as a last resort - police involvement is not widely viewed as a ‘protective measure’ for victims;

- Victims of family violence feel they contradict widely held Indigenous family and community values if they report and seek prosecution of offenders;
- Victims manage the cycles of violence in their lives by leaving home for two or three days and returning home after the 'danger time' has passed', but the current ACT crisis responses and housing options do not support this; and
- Violence both perpetrated and experienced by Indigenous people cannot be dissociated from broader contributing social, cultural, historical and economic factors - these include the experience of colonisation, the disintegration of traditional laws and community norms, disruption of family and kinship ties, and the experience of forced removal from families and substance abuse.

When asked to identify the main things that would assist local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in leading work relating to reducing and dealing with Family Violence in the community, the participants highlighted:

- Hosting an ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's leadership conference;
- Enhancing a previous role modelling program to assist in mentoring young boys and youth – Strong Uncles; and
- A focus on healing programs for men who use violence.

When asked to identify the main things that would assist local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in addressing Family violence the participants identified:

- Education and process design in the sector that ensures that the choices of women are respected, whilst always maintaining accountability for their safety;
- There is a need for changes so that Aboriginal women can access alternative culturally appropriate approaches to 'leaving the violence' than the current crisis housing response allows;
- Child protection responses need to change to work with women to keep the family together and the children safe – and understand that the women are also the victims;
- A greater focus on Indigenous delivery capability and understanding of the community by the service providers; and
- Evaluation of how the mainstream sector is performing in assisting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community address and reduce Family Violence in the ACT.

When asked to identify the main things that would assist local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the focus was very much in keeping families connected. This includes through educational and professional support services, advocacy for this within the child protection processes and having an independent voice and focus on the needs of the child(ren).

The forum also highlighted:

- The importance of co-design of the Family Safety Hub and other local responses to Family Violence – it is important to have direct experience of the issue inform the approaches, and it needs to be a non-justice response; and
- The need for a broader workforce strategy so that Indigenous workers in the sector don't burn out, that they get supported, and that there is recognition of the generational trauma for the workers – and that recognises that the lived experience skills of these workers complement their other skills.

Recommendations for the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

Participants at the Forum felt that the Domestic Violence and Prevention Council and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body should take a lead role in, or at least be the champions to progress with the right stakeholders the following:

- How to inform the next steps for designing family violence responses for the Indigenous community in the ACT by using the information and recommendations from the “We don't shoot our wounded” Report
- Development of an ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy for the sector
- A range of supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the sector including a conference, regular catch ups to debrief and to build cross sector approaches
- Development of an interactive functional directory to assist all service providers
- Develop a strategy and seek resources to support post-intervention work.