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Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and future; and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge.

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Existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities: State of knowledge paper

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This work is part of the ANROWS Landscapes series. ANROWS Landscapes (State of knowledge papers) are medium length papers that scope current knowledge on an issue related to violence against women and their children. Papers will draw on empirical research, including research produced under ANROWS's research program, and/or practice knowledge.

This paper addresses work covered in the ANROWS research project 3.2 "Existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities". Please consult the ANROWS website for more information on this project.

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Contents

Terminology	v
Executive summary	1
Introduction	5
Methods for literature review	6
What is known about violence against Indigenous women	10
Rates of violence against Indigenous women	10
Issues of under-reporting of violence	10
Self-reporting of violence	11
Criminal justice reporting and sentencing data	11
Perpetrator characteristics	12
The consequences of violence for Indigenous women	13
Hospitalisations and morbidity from violence	13
Mortality from violence	13
Causes of violence	14
Factors associated with violence and victimisation	14
How is violence against Indigenous women defined?	17
What is known about Indigenous women's experiences of violence	18
Cultural understandings and terminology	19
Violence as normalised	19
Justice system	20
Barriers to services	21
Family and kinship	22
Finding resilience and strength	22
Responses to violence against women in Indigenous communities	23
Evaluation: Programs and approaches identified	23
Program categories	24
Evidence assessment	37
Establishing an overall strength of evidence grade	39
Results of evidence assessments: Effectiveness of programs	54
Limitations of the effectiveness review	55
Method of assessment	55
Other programs and approaches	56
The need for quality evidence	56
Indigenous viewpoints on what works and what is needed	57
Holistic approaches	57
Community empowerment	58
Culturally appropriate mainstream services	59
Culturally appropriate justice system responses	60
Appropriate funding and support	62
References	63

Figures

Figure 1 Factors contributing to family violence in Indigenous communities . . .16

Tables

Table 1 Stages and approaches to integrative literature review7
Table 3 Strength of evidence grades and definitions39

Terminology

Throughout this paper we refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Indigenous Australians. We acknowledge the diversity of the over 250 distinct groups and 700,000 people that make up Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and the term Indigenous Australians is used for brevity only.

The term family violence is preferred by many Indigenous Australians, reflecting an understanding of Indigenous family violence beyond the dyad of an intimate relationship, and is used throughout this report.

The terms victim and perpetrator are cautiously used throughout as a way of distinguishing the different criminal, social and service data. However, these terms are not always used by Indigenous Australians and may not always appropriately reflect the experience and understanding for Indigenous Australians.

Executive summary

Violence against Indigenous women is an issue of national importance, acknowledged in national policies as well as in community programs and initiatives. It is difficult to assess the full extent of violence against Indigenous women and many responses aimed at preventing and reducing violence occur mostly in small programs in community settings.

This report presents published information currently available on Indigenous women and violence. Based on an extensive literature review of journal articles, evaluation reports and community reports we summarise and synthesise existing information to answer four key questions:

1. What is known about violence against Indigenous women?
2. How do Indigenous women and communities see and experience the issue of violence against women (including definitions of family violence)?
3. What are the current responses (programs or approaches) to violence against women in Indigenous communities?
4. What are the Indigenous viewpoints on what works and what is needed?

In this overview of the existing state of knowledge we:

1. Outline what we know about violence against Indigenous women based on national and state surveys as well as smaller scale research including rates of violence and its consequences and factors associated with violence.
2. Explore what has been concluded from various government inquiries, research projects, community reports and other material about Indigenous women's experiences of violence, including community definitions of violence and tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to the issue.
3. Summarise and evaluate responses to violence against Indigenous women including, where possible, specific programs and approaches.
4. Explore the perspectives of Indigenous women and communities on what responses work and future action for programs and policies.

Background

The scope of violence against Indigenous women is difficult to establish due to under-reporting by victims, lack of appropriate screening by service providers, incomplete identification of gender and Indigenous status in many datasets, and the lack of nationally comparable data on family violence available from police, courts, health or welfare sources.

Despite under-reporting, surveys show that Indigenous women report higher levels of violence and suffer higher levels of injury and death as a result of family violence than non-Indigenous women.

While there are a number of theories, no one causal factor can explain the higher rate of violence against Indigenous women. Instead, a number of interrelated factors have been identified highlighting the complex and cumulative nature of violence and victimisation including colonisation and the breakdown of culture, intergenerational patterns of violence, alcohol and other drugs, and socio-economic stressors.

Indigenous voices

The issue of violence within Indigenous communities has attracted considerable attention from academics, politicians and the media, but less is known about Indigenous experiences and viewpoints on the issue. In this review of Indigenous viewpoints on what works we found that:

- Solutions to violence developed by Indigenous people are likely to focus on community healing, restoration of family cohesion and processes that aim to let both the victim and perpetrator deal with their pain and suffering.
- Indigenous communities want to play a more significant role in shaping program and service responses.
- Because Indigenous family violence is, in part, attributed to the breakdown of traditional culture and kinship practices, the rebuilding of these family and kinship ties is often seen as central to developing any type of response to Indigenous family violence.
- Generalised services and programs can be considered effective if they operate in a culturally sensitive way and/or are run in partnership with Indigenous organisations.
- The criminal justice system is not considered the most appropriate means for dealing with family violence in Indigenous communities. Instead, communities prefer Indigenous sentencing courts aimed at integration of Indigenous community members in the court process, rehabilitation of the offender and restoration of the family.
- Ongoing planned and consistent funding for service provision is considered a major issue.

Responses to violence against women in Indigenous communities

The literature search identified a number of programs and approaches aimed at addressing family violence. Based on rigorous rating criteria, 24 programs or approaches were included in the assessment. Only two were assessed as demonstrating strong levels of evidence of evaluation, with ten studies assessed as moderate, four as sufficient and eight as having insufficient levels of evidence.

All but two of the studies reported a positive impact on various aspects of behaviour, wellbeing, attitudes and skills related to dealing with family violence in Indigenous communities.

Although individual programs have shown benefits for addressing family violence in Indigenous communities, it is not possible to generalise the effectiveness of these initiatives to the broader Indigenous population, given the variety of methods, study populations and outcome measures used.

The need for quality evidence

In reviewing and assessing the evidence for responses we note the need for dedicated resources to enhance the evidence base, in particular, information-sharing about the positive progress being made in Indigenous communities. It can be time-consuming and costly to evaluate programs. The scientific rigour of program evaluation expected by academics and policy-makers may not always be possible in smaller projects as demonstrated in our evidence review where one third of studies were assessed to provide insufficient evidence of meeting the intended program aim/s.

Determining the impact of family violence programs and approaches should include quantitative metrics including reductions in negative beliefs and behaviours, reduced service seeking treatment, reduced hospitalisations from family violence related admissions and procedures and reduced arrests or recidivism. However, randomised control trials (RCTs) are often inappropriate for family violence programs and other pragmatic designs such as longitudinal and pre-post designs should be used instead. Larger programs with adequate resourcing may be able to measure these outcomes although effectiveness is particularly hard for small-scale programs to demonstrate. As such, levels of evidence were low or insufficient in most of the programs assessed in this report.

Qualitative data should be used to contextualise and complement quantitative metrics. Where qualitative methods have been incorporated, other effects, outcomes and experiences can be identified such as community support or building of trust and confidence among program participants. Funding for services and programs should include resources for Indigenous community input and assessment for community readiness and outcomes using qualitative methods.

Information sharing about positive progress made in Indigenous communities should be encouraged through the appropriate resourcing of program evaluation. Policies and interventions, as well as evidence building on the effectiveness of those approaches, need to involve Indigenous perspectives. In a time when evidence-based practice is necessary for funding, governments also need to be open-minded to evaluative approaches that include Indigenous viewpoints and the inappropriateness of randomised control trials for small scale culturally sensitive programs.

In summary, there are limited evaluation data on the effectiveness of policies and programs targeted at preventing and reducing violence against Indigenous women and thus funding for services and programs should include resources to implement quality evaluation including both qualitative and quantitative research.

The need for holistic approaches

Our review of Indigenous viewpoints on approaches to dealing with violence against women highlights the cultural understandings of family violence and differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to perpetrators and victims. In particular, the centrality of family and community, as opposed to individuals or couples, in Indigenous perspectives fundamentally alters the desired approaches to caring for women who have been victims of violence and working with men who have been perpetrators of violence.

Family violence is the result of many issues. While there needs to be family violence focused services, a much larger effort is required to improve the wider social and economic health of Indigenous communities.

Finally, it is important to respect and understand that, despite focusing on the disproportionate burden of violence against Indigenous women in this report, violence is not normal or customary in Indigenous communities. Indigenous Australians are diverse peoples who, while having a number of areas of commonality, differ in their languages, culture and history. Not all Indigenous women are subjected to violence and not all Indigenous communities have high rates of violence.

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, the voices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, academics, service providers and policy-makers have raised the issue of violence in Indigenous communities (Keel, 2004). In response to these calls, numerous government inquiries, campaigns, programs, policies and reports have been developed investigating violence in Indigenous communities. Consistently the literature reports that Indigenous women experience violence at higher rates and at greater severity than non-Indigenous women. Much of this violence occurs in a domestic or family context.

Research with Indigenous communities and the voices of Indigenous advocates and academics report that the support needs of Indigenous people affected by family violence are not well met through general approaches and service models. Communities and advocates have called for more holistic approaches to the issue including recognising the continuing impact of colonisation, poverty, housing and other health and social issues.

In this literature review, relying only on available published materials, we recognise that we inevitably omit a range of significant work and perspectives on this issue. Reports based on generalised data can decontextualise the diversity of Indigenous Australians (Wundersitz, 2010). Broad reviews of the evidence can reduce the experience of violence to measures of risk and dysfunction, overlooking strength and resilience. For instance, expansive reviews of data can inadvertently portray all Indigenous individuals and communities as violent (Schmider & Nancarrow, 2007). The extent, causes and experiences of violence differ across locations. Family violence is not unique to Indigenous communities; it is also a serious problem in the wider community.

Furthermore, within the scope of this paper we are unable to convey in full the important contributions of Indigenous women and men who, over the years, have raised community and political awareness of the issue of violence against Indigenous women (Atkinson, 2002, 2007). Nor can we do justice to the lived experiences of Indigenous women, and their families, who have experienced violence.

Nevertheless, in providing an overview of the data, issues and responses, this report highlights important cultural aspects of violence against women in Indigenous communities, how violence is defined and experienced, and some of the policy and program approaches currently in action. It provides a useful tool to assess the progress that has been made and the work that is still needed.

Methods for literature review

Whittemore and Knaf's updated integrative review framework guided the analysis (2005). This method has previously been used to systematically and rigorously review and synthesise literature in this area (Madhani, Tompkins, Jack, & Fisher, 2014).

Integrative literature reviews are “a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco, 2005, p.356). One of the distinct advantages to the integrative review is that the method allows for the incorporation of research from diverse empirical and theoretical sources including grey or unpublished literature. The inclusion of multiple literature sources has the potential to increase the depth and breadth of conclusions and can contribute to a comprehensive portrayal of the topic of interest.

According to Russell (2005, p.8), integrative literature reviews include a “five-stage process: (1) problem formulation, (2) data collection or literature search, (3) evaluation of data, (4) data analysis, and (5) interpretation and presentation of results”.

Based on initial scoping of the literature and discussion with experts we reassessed stage 3 of the literature review: evaluation of data. Given the breadth of research questions and thus inclusion of sources from a variety of methodological approaches, it is difficult to assess the different data sources within one evaluation framework. It is, for example, difficult to assess the rigour and validity of epidemiological data alongside data from community consultation (Whittemore & Knaf, 2005). Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the quality of grey literature, government reports and other similar formats, particularly when it relates to experiences and definitions of violence. To exclude literature based on “quality” would discount literature that may reveal important insights into the lived experience and cultural understandings of violence against women in Indigenous communities.

Consequently, we have used standard inclusion and exclusion criteria to assess the collection of material for analysis. Literature that does not contain research related to the research outcomes is excluded. Using a systematic search strategy and transparent inclusion and exclusion criteria we believe that the review is more comprehensive and robust. Table 1 describes the stages and approaches.

Table 1 Stages and approaches to *integrative* literature review

Stage	Approach
Problem formulation	<p>The research questions, as defined by ANROWS, are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An analysis and outline of what is known about violence against Indigenous women. 2. An exploration of how Indigenous women and communities see and experience the issue of violence against women (including definitions of family violence). 3. A summary of what is known about Indigenous women's experiences of violence. 4. An outline of the responses (programs or approaches) to violence against women in Indigenous communities including Indigenous viewpoints on what works and what is needed.
Literature search	<p>An iterative process was used to develop search terms. Based on our knowledge of the area and preliminary investigation we used this targeted search string to assess an outline of what is known about violence against Indigenous women, explore how Indigenous women and communities see and experience the issue of violence against women and outline the responses to violence against women in Indigenous communities including Indigenous viewpoints on what works and what is needed. If additional key terms emerged during the initial review of articles these were added to the search strings.</p> <p>Online databases of peer-reviewed literature were searched using these terms:</p> <p>(Aborigin* OR Indigenous OR Koori OR Murray Or First Nation OR community OR town camp OR remote OR mission) AND (“domestic violence” OR “family violence” OR “domestic and family violence” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “sexual assault”) AND Australia.</p> <p>This search string was sufficient in finding content on violence against women in Indigenous communities, as well as information on how Indigenous women and communities see and experience the issue of violence against women and responses to violence against women in Indigenous communities including Indigenous viewpoints on what works and what is needed.</p> <p>Clearinghouses and other Australian databases have more limited search capabilities and were simply searched for “violence” and “Indigenous”/“Aboriginal”.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Literature search of electronic databases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ProQuest • Applied Social Sciences Indexes and Abstracts (ASSIA) • PAIS International • ProQuest Social Science Journals • Social Services Abstracts • Sociological Abstracts • Web of Science • Scopus b. Search of other relevant databases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Closing the gap clearinghouse • Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet • Lowitja Institute • ANROWS • Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse • Australian Institute of Family Studies Library

Stage	Approach
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Institute of Family Studies Library • Australian Policy Online <p>c. Snowballing and hand searching based on references in found articles.</p> <p>Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to assess the relevance of primary sources.</p> <p>Inclusion criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Published material including peer review journal articles, reports and reviews. 2. Published material between 2000 and 2015. 3. Contain information relevant to violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. 4. Contain empirical (primary or secondary) or theoretical evidence related to the topic. 5. English language only. <p>Exclusion criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conference presentations. 2. Newspaper, magazine and editorial articles. 3. Books. 4. Full-text unavailable. <p>Overall, 381 references were located. After reviewing the literature for inclusion and exclusion criteria and eliminating duplicates there were a total of 147 articles for review.</p>
Evaluation of literature	<p>Given the diversity of literature, from editorials to evaluations, three approaches to literature evaluation were used.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluation by themes. 2. Evaluation where relevant literature was sorted in groups and tables organised by study type. 3. Evaluations of programs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. All programs and approaches were tabled using the description of program categories adapted from Memmott et al. (2001, p. 3): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support programs (counselling, advocacy) • strengthening identity programs (sport, education, arts, cultural activities, group therapy) • behavioural reform programs (men's and women's groups) • community policing and monitoring programs (night patrols, wardens) • shelter/protection programs (refuges, sobering-up shelters) • justice programs (community justice groups) • mediation programs (dispute resolution) • education programs (tertiary courses, miscellaneous courses, media) • situational crime prevention (good street lighting, appropriate housing design, and availability of relevant amenities, closed circuit television and reduced access to alcohol) • composite programs (drawing upon many of the above areas).

Stage	Approach
	<p>All literature identified as a program or approach was evaluated using a mixed method approach. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality method (Berkman et al., 2013), slightly adapted to include “Indigenous viewpoint” as an important aspect of quality in this area of research, was used to assess program or approach effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • study limitations • directness • precision • reporting bias • consistency • Indigenous viewpoint.
Data analysis	Using an iterative process of comparing and contrasting key concepts to identify themes, the literature was summarised in a narrative, thematic form to answer the key questions outlined by ANROWS. Where relevant, the data has been arranged in conceptual tables.
Interpretation and presentation of results	Findings were summarised in a narrative, thematic form including identification of: central issues in an area; potential bridges between related areas of work; gaps in current research; and future research or practice needs.

As detailed in Table 1 above, the fourth research question of outlining and assessing programs and approaches to violence against women in Indigenous communities has been analysed according to Memmott and colleagues’ approach to classifying programs (2001). We have modified the list of nine original program categories to include an additional type of “situational crime prevention”. We then take an extra assessment step to evaluate the level of evidence. We used the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality method for assessing the strength of evidence presented in individual studies (Berkman et al., 2013). We included an additional criterion, “Indigenous viewpoint”, to ensure that individual and community inputs were included with the formulation of programs or were included in the evaluation. These levels of evidence relate to the quality of the evaluation rather than the effectiveness of the program.

What is known about violence against Indigenous women

Violence against women is a serious issue for Indigenous Australians, manifesting in a range of immediate and long-term health, social and economic consequences. There are several national datasets as well as local state and service reports containing estimates of violence among Indigenous women.

Although family violence and sexual assault are sometimes referred to and responded to separately, in this report we have included literature on both. Not only is it important to include information on sexual assault among Indigenous women, much sexual assault occurs within family relationships and thus is not easily separated from the broader concept of family violence.

In this section we describe the rates of violence against Indigenous women, the consequences of violence for Indigenous women and the various perceptions on the causes of violence in Indigenous communities.

Rates of violence against Indigenous women

It is important to note that most datasets containing rates of violence among Indigenous women are either generalised at the population level or taken from a specific region. This has implications for the generalisability of these data. For example, little is known about rates of violence in the Torres Strait (Memmott, Passi, Go-Sam, Thomson, & Sheppard, 2009).

While no single data source is able to provide a comprehensive overview of violence in the Indigenous population there are a range of data sources available in Australia sampling different parts of the population and violent victimisation events (Bryant & Willis, 2008). From this information, it is apparent that “the incidence of violence in Indigenous communities is disproportionately high in comparison to the same types of violence in the Australian community as a whole” (Memmott et al., 2001, p. 6). Considerable evidence also shows that Indigenous women are more likely to be victims of family violence than non-Indigenous women.

Issues of under-reporting of violence

The full extent of violence against Indigenous women is difficult to establish due to under-reporting by victims, lack of appropriate screening by service providers, incomplete identification of gender and Indigenous status in many datasets, and the lack of nationally comparable data on family violence available from police, courts, health or welfare sources.

Surveys are often not designed to collect information on Indigenous Australians

Many national surveys are not designed to obtain estimates for the Indigenous population, or do not collect Indigenous status (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland, & Wallis, 2006). Many surveys do not include information on people living in hotels, motels, hostels, hospitals, short-stay caravan parks, prisons or other correctional facilities (Bryant, 2009). Furthermore, findings from particular geographical areas cannot be generalised to wider populations and conversely, national statistics cannot differentiate the diversity in family violence rates across communities (Schmider & Nancarrow, 2007).

Lack of consistent definition of family violence

There is no uniform definition of family violence across data sources. For example, the differences between physical

violence, sexual violence, and threatened violence data are distinguished across some data sources and not others (Al-Yaman et al., 2006; Bartels, 2012). Indigenous understandings of and terminology around violence have also been found to differ from professional language (Cripps, 2008). Understandings and terminology impact on the perceived acceptability or normality of actions that could constitute family violence, or the seriousness accorded to a specific incident, determining whether a victim considers an incident to be family violence or not and whether they report it to the authorities or not (Clare, Morgan, Ferrante, & Blagg, 2006).

Under-reporting

Criminal justice data are known to be affected by the high rates of under-reporting of violence against women (Bartels, 2012; Bryant, 2009; Willis, 2011).

Some of the reasons for under-reporting in Indigenous communities include:

- fear of negative consequences and repercussions, particularly in small, interconnected communities where privacy cannot be maintained;
- fear and mistrust of police, the legal system and other government agencies;
- fear of men's death in custody;
- the victim does not want the perpetrator imprisoned, or to be seen as responsible for the perpetrator's imprisonment;
- the interconnectedness of Indigenous society including rules and obligations;
- factors such as shame and responsibility for maintaining families;
- the normalisation of violence in some contemporary Indigenous families;
- shyness, language differences and fear of being misunderstood;
- lack of trust that services will provide culturally appropriate care;
- lack of women staff at some services, particularly the police; and
- lack of awareness of or access to services (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010a; Clare et al., 2006; Cunneen, 2010; Phillips & Vandenbroek, 2014; Taylor & Putt, 2007; Tayton, Kaspiew, Moore, & Campo, 2014; Willis, 2011).

Self-reporting of violence

Based on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), an estimated 25 percent of Indigenous people (80,200 people) experienced at least one incident of physical violence (physical assault and/or physical threat) in the previous 12 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). A similar proportion of Indigenous men (25%) and women (24%) reported experiencing physical violence. This equal rate of violence victimisation between Indigenous men and women differs markedly from the general Australian population where being a man is the significant risk factor for violent victimisation (Bryant, 2009). This means that Indigenous women experience a higher rate of violence than non-Indigenous women.

In the 12 months prior to the 2008 NATSISS, an estimated 25 percent of Indigenous women (42,300 women) reported experiencing one or more instances of physical violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Cripps et al. (2009) analysed self-reported data on being a victim of violence from the 2002 NATSISS and found that one in four Indigenous women living with dependent children younger than 15 years old reported experiencing violence in the past year, an estimated 24,221 Indigenous caregivers nationwide.

Australian Indigenous respondents in the International Violence Against Women Survey reported higher levels of physical violence during the lifetime compared to non-Indigenous women (71% vs 57%) (D'Abbs & Shaw, 2011). Indigenous women reported three times as many lifetime incidents of sexual violence compared to non-Indigenous women.

Criminal justice reporting and sentencing data

Police data are not an ideal source of information about violence because many family violence offences are not reported to the police (Fitzgerald & Weatherburn, 2002), particularly among Indigenous people (Keel, 2004).

Despite evidence for under-reporting, Indigenous people are still over-represented as victims of violence. NSW police data, for example, documented that Indigenous people were between 2.7 times and 5.2 times more likely than residents of New South Wales as a whole to become victims of violent crime (Fitzgerald & Weatherburn, 2002). Indigenous women

were between 2.2 times and 6.6 times more likely to become victims of violent offences than New South Wales women as a whole (Fitzgerald & Weatherburn, 2002).

Data from Queensland similarly revealed that Indigenous people were 5.7 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be the victim in a domestic and family violence order in Queensland (Cunneen, 2010). In this report Cunneen (2010) also found that family violence incidents involving Indigenous victims and perpetrators were more likely to involve breaches of existing orders and to result in action being taken than incidents involving non-Indigenous people.

Analyses from New South Wales suggested that Indigenous offenders found guilty of a family violence-related assault were more likely than non-Indigenous offenders to be sentenced to prison (28% vs 7%) (Ringland & Fitzgerald, 2010). Jeffries and Bond (2014) reported that non-Indigenous family violence offenders were significantly less likely than those convicted of violent offences outside of intimate and familial relationships to be sentenced to prison. However, Indigenous family violence offenders were equally likely as those convicted of other violent crimes to be sentenced to prison. Given that criminal justice data showed that most violent offending against Indigenous women is committed by Indigenous men (Fitzgerald & Weatherburn, 2002), data suggested that Indigenous families are disproportionately impacted by domestic and family violence laws in Australia.

Little is known about family violence in the Torres Strait. Police reports suggested that the rate of family violence in the Torres Strait is possibly lower than some other remote Indigenous communities, however family violence was the most common community response for police in the region (Memmott, 2010).

Perpetrator characteristics

Crime statistics suggested that Indigenous women were more likely than non-Indigenous women to be perpetrators of violence including assault, sexual assault, endangering persons, abduction, robbery and homicide (Bartels, 2012). Indigenous women were 14 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to commit homicide; most of these cases involve a family relationship. Bartels (2012) suggested that many of these violent offences were in response to family violence.

National data showed that the majority of violence in Australia, among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, is perpetrated by individuals known to the victim (Al-Yaman et al., 2006; Bryant, 2009; Wundersitz, 2010). However, a greater proportion of violent incidents in Indigenous communities experienced by both men and women are perpetrated by family members.

Indigenous women were significantly more likely to identify the perpetrator of their most recent experience of violence as a person known to them (94%), compared to Indigenous men (77%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). According to data from the NATSISS, perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women included current or previous partners (married or de facto) (32%) and/or family members (28%), or another known person (boyfriend, girlfriend or date, ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend or ex-date, neighbours, work colleagues, fellow students and other known people) (22%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

The consequences of violence for Indigenous women

In addition to the evidence that Indigenous women suffer family violence at higher rates than non-Indigenous women, there are a number of immediate and long-term health consequences for Indigenous women. Indigenous women suffer morbidity and mortality related to family violence at higher rates than other Australian women.

Hospitalisations and morbidity from violence

There is a much higher risk for Indigenous Australians of hospitalisation and harm resulting from violence. According to Berry et al. (2009, p. 219), “Indigenous people accounted for eight percent of the injury-related hospital separations for the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland, of which 35 percent were due to interpersonal violence”.

Hospital data highlighted the consequences of family violence for Indigenous women, with higher rates of hospitalisation and readmissions for interpersonal violence among Indigenous women than men. In their analysis Berry et al. (2009) found that Indigenous people, particularly women, were more likely to be hospitalised for injuries related to interpersonal violence (most commonly perpetrated by a family member or intimate partner) than non-Indigenous people. Women constituted more than half of Indigenous cases (54%) as opposed to non-Indigenous cases which were mostly men injured by stranger(s).

In a summary of the available national and state and territory datasets, Al-Yaman et al. (2006) reported that Indigenous women were 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults than non-Indigenous women. Data from Western Australia showed the rate of hospitalisation for Indigenous women was nearly 1.3 times that of Indigenous men but also that a higher proportion of Indigenous women had more than one admission episode due to interpersonal violence (Meuleners, Hendrie, & Lee, 2008; Meuleners, Lee, Hendrie, & Fraser, 2010).

Indigenous women who reported physical assault were often physically harmed or injured during the incident (60%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Indigenous people, particularly women, are over-represented in hospital data for head injury due to assault. Hospital data from Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory showed that the rate of head injury due to assault was 21 times higher among Indigenous than non-Indigenous people (Jamieson, Harrison, & Berry, 2008). The head injury rate experienced by Indigenous women was 69 times higher than that experienced by non-Indigenous women.

An additional issue in terms of morbidity is the geographical remoteness of some Indigenous communities. The social insularity of remote communities can make it difficult to report and escape family violence situations as well as receive care for serious injury (Memmott, 2010).

Mortality from violence

Despite representing just over three percent of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013), Indigenous women accounted for 15 percent of homicide victims in Australia in 2002-03 (National Women’s Alliances, 2011). Victims of homicide in Australia were more likely to be men than women, however, the proportion that were women was slightly higher in the Indigenous population data (Cussen & Bryant, 2015). In a summary of the available national and state and territory datasets, Al-Yaman et al. (2006) reported that Indigenous women were nearly 11 times more likely to die due to assault than non-Indigenous women.

Reviewing Australian homicide data comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates Cussen and Bryant (2015) identified four characteristics more common to Indigenous homicides. First, Indigenous homicides were more likely to involve intimate partners and other family members. Second, homicides involving Indigenous people were more likely to occur in public or open spaces. Third, alcohol use prior to the homicide was more common among Indigenous victims (69%) and offenders (72%) than non-Indigenous victims (27%) and offenders (31%). Fourth, the average age of Indigenous victims of 31 years was five years younger than non-Indigenous victims (36 years).

Causes of violence

There are different perspectives on the causes of violence against women in Indigenous communities emerging from disparate disciplinary backgrounds such as psychology, social work and feminism. This includes the persistent theory that family violence in Indigenous communities is customary (Lloyd, 2014). While less commonly referred to in contemporary literature, this understanding of family violence draws on the perception that tradition, especially “men’s business”, is responsible for the high levels of violence (McGlade, 2006). However, this notion of cultural violence has been discounted by a number of authors and dismissed as invalid when tested against common characteristics of Indigenous violence (Snowball & Weatherburn, 2008).

The majority of literature located in this review does not portray violence in Indigenous communities as cultural tradition. Instead, it is generally agreed that violence in Indigenous communities can only be understood and addressed in the context of the historical impacts of colonisation and contemporary political, social and economic issues affecting Indigenous Australians (Al-Yaman et al., 2006; Anderson, 2002; Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). In particular, historical and ongoing contemporary disadvantage and marginalisation arising from separation of families and the large scale removal of Indigenous people into institutions (Bhandari, 2003; Gordon et al., 2002; Smallacombe, 2004) has been linked to the destruction of Indigenous culture and undermining of social norms (Memmott et al., 2001).

Many authors highlight the tension between this broad historical viewpoint of Indigenous family violence and the dominant concept of domestic violence resulting from gendered power dynamics in intimate relationships (Cheers, Binell, Coleman, Gentle, & et al., 2006; Keel, 2004). Some authors stress the overarching context of coercive control in violence against women, particularly in response to threats to male dominance (Chan, 2005). However the majority see this viewpoint as grounded in Western feminism and too narrow to encompass the embedded nature of family violence in colonisation, loss of culture and poverty (McCalman et al., 2006).

In this section we review the available data on perpetrator characteristics and factors associated with violence and being a victim of violence, exploring the various factors and the complex and cumulative nature of violence and victimisation in Indigenous communities.

Factors associated with violence and victimisation

Research on the factors associated with violence and victimisation in Indigenous communities shows that there is no single factor that predicts the likelihood that an

individual perpetrates violence, that an individual is the victim of violence, or that some communities experience higher levels of violence. Given the complicated nature of violence perpetration and victimisation most data cannot define causal factors. However research does define characteristics of the individual, their lifestyle and the community in which they live which can be associated with higher levels of and types of violence (Bryant & Willis, 2008). These findings highlight the structural issues such as colonisation, state policies, poverty and alcohol availability that detrimentally affect the lives of many Indigenous Australians and are, in turn, associated with higher levels of violence. The factors discussed include:

- breakdown of culture;
- the normalisation of violence;
- policy and governance;
- socio-demographic stressors;
- alcohol; and
- ecological models.

Breakdown of culture

Indigenous family violence is, in part, attributed to the breakdown of traditional culture and kinship practices including disconnection from cultural roots, the detrimental intergenerational impacts resulting from the stolen generation and changes in the social roles of men and women (Cheers et al., 2006; Cripps, 2007; Davis & Taylor, 2002a; Day, Jones, Nakata, & McDermott, 2012; Gentle & Taylor, 2002; Memmott, 2010; Widders, 2003).

The normalisation of violence

Cyclic or intergenerational violence over a number of generations has been described by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as the “normalisation” of violence in Indigenous families and communities (Memmott, 2010; Widders, 2003). This perception is not meant to describe all Indigenous Australians, but rather the minority for whom violence is a common part of life (Smallacombe, 2004). Furthermore, this perception is not linked to the idea of cultural or traditional violence where violence is considered a culturally sanctioned behaviour. Rather, the normalisation of violence is thought to stem from oppression and marginalisation.

Policy and governance

Issues of contemporary governance have also been linked to family violence (Gordon et al., 2002). Funding of Indigenous communities and services is often run separately from mainstream government, creating greater divergence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (O’Shane, 2002).

Fewer resources and a lack of self-determination are seen to relate to disadvantage which in turn relates to violence.

Socio-demographic stressors

The biggest social issues for many Indigenous communities are basic housing, education, employment and health (Memmott et al., 2009; Widders, 2003). For example, in examining the risk of reoffending among male Indigenous sexual offenders in Western Australia, Allan and Dawson (2004) found that socio-economic stressors beyond the control of the offenders were inextricably linked to reoffending.

Prevalence data from the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009) revealed the range of socio-economic stressors associated with violence. Indigenous people who reported a recent experience of physical violence were more likely to:

- live in a household which ran out of money for basic living expenses (38% of men and 40% of women vs 24% of men and 25% of women);
- live in a household that had difficulty paying bills on time (33% of men and 36% of women vs 18% of men and 21% of women);
- report high or very high levels of psychological distress (38% of men and 53% of women vs 23% of men and 28% of women);
- have recently witnessed physical violence (10% of men and 11% of women vs 1% of men and 2% of women);
- have experienced removal from their natural family (12% of men and 14% of women vs 7% of men and women);
- experience a disability or long term health condition (55% of men and 60% of women vs 46% of men and 48% of women).

In modelling the relationships between different aspects of violence and socio-demographic characteristics Snowball and Weatherburn (2008, p. 227) examined a range of correlates of Indigenous violent victimisation and reported that the “results indicate that higher rates of violent victimisation are found among respondents who:

- are under the age of 35;
- are lone parents;
- live in an area with neighbourhood problems;
- are exposed to social stressors;
- are involved in social activities;
- are unemployed or working within a [Community Development Employment Projects] scheme;
- are financially stressed;

- moved at least once in the previous 12 months;
- have a severe or profound disability;
- are members or related to members of the stolen generation;
- consume alcohol [and other drugs];
- live with someone who has been formally charged with an offence; and
- were charged with an offence as a child.”

This research points to the importance of understanding and preventing wider social, economic and health issues in Indigenous communities when considering causes of and solutions to family violence.

Alcohol

While a large proportion of Indigenous Australians do not consume alcohol, many who do drink experience severe alcohol problems. Commentators point to the increase in violence that occurred in the 1970s after restrictions on Indigenous people’s access to alcohol were eased, and consider the role of alcohol to be central in the high prevalence of violence in Indigenous communities (Bryant & Willis, 2008; Chan, 2005; Macklin & Gilbert, 2011; Memmott, 2010; Ramamoorthi, Jayaraj, Notaras, & Thomas, 2014; Snowball & Weatherburn, 2008). Alcohol and other drug use issues are evident among both perpetrators and victims of violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Kelly and Kowalyszyn (2003), for example, found that Indigenous participants with high alcohol consumption reported more family conflict compared to those without alcohol problems. Research has also found situational circumstances that act as catalysts for violence, particularly Australian Rules football carnivals and fixtures where alcohol can fuel violence (Memmott, 2010).

Although alcohol and violence are commonly found to be interrelated, this does not mean that alcohol is the sole cause of violence. Memmott (2010), for example, described that there are alcohol free Indigenous communities where violence occurs as well as Indigenous people who drink alcohol but who are not violent.

Ecological models

In order to understand the many variables that contribute to violent offending in Indigenous communities several authors suggest an ecological systems approach (Memmott et al., 2001; Wundersitz, 2010) which acknowledges that “risk and protective factors for offending are located not only within the individual, but also in his or her family, the local environment (including neighbourhood, school and work), the broader community and the wider society

(including values, customs and laws)” (Macklin & Gilbert, 2011, p. 2). According to Wundersitz (2010, p. 4), ecological models for violence tend to redirect attention away from a causal model towards “an exploration of the interconnections between various factors”. Ecological models point to policy and practice responses that are targeted not just at the individual, but at the broader context of family community life and socio-economic influences.

In an attempt to explain the complex context of Indigenous violence, Cripps (2010) clustered common interconnected factors associated with violence in Indigenous communities into two groups (see Figure 1 below: from Cripps 2004 cited in Cripps 2010). Broadly, Group 1 factors relate to colonisation and the continuing effects of historical and contemporary degradation of culture and family. Group 2 factors are commonly found in marginalised and impoverished communities and, in the case of Indigenous Australians, can be caused or compounded by Group 1 factors.

While various associated factors are given greater or lesser emphasis by different authors, it is agreed that the various aspects are interrelated with non-linear impacts. The complex and cumulative nature of violence and victimisation suggests that any attempt to reduce violence requires a multifaceted approach that deals with individuals and interpersonal relationships as well as wider socio-economic issues.

Figure 1 Factors contributing to family violence in Indigenous communities



(Adapted from Cripps, 2004, p. 230)

How is violence against Indigenous women defined?

As Al-Yaman et al. (2006, p. 15) state, violence is a sensitive concept to define “because of diverse cultural and societal understandings of what is meant by the term”. The word violence may encompass many different forms of violence, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For example, domestic violence can refer to intimate partner violence, spousal violence, spousal abuse, wife abuse or battering, or family violence (Al-Yaman et al., 2006). These terms and associated definitions can vary between countries as well as cultures, jurisdictions and research fields.

The definition of domestic violence in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 (the National Plan) is:

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal. Domestic violence includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. (Council of Australian Governments, 2011, p. 2)

Highly politicised, the term domestic violence was originally used by feminists responsible for the establishment of the first Australian women’s refuges. Grounded in Western feminist theory and focused on physical abuse, these early definitions of domestic violence predominantly referred to violence suffered by women and perpetrated by men. Many contemporary authors have criticised this definition for excluding Indigenous perspectives and discussions of the intersection of race and gender (McCalman et al., 2006).

Further, this dominant understanding of domestic violence emerged from a cultural focus on intimate relationships between adult partners and is viewed as too narrow to take sufficient account of the particular historical experiences of Indigenous people and their current life situations (Clare et al., 2006). Rather than a private, domestic event as it is perceived to be in much of the mainstream literature, violence against Indigenous women is seen to take place under intergenerational, community and kinship pressures in a diversity of settings in addition to the family home (Al-Yaman et al., 2006; Cheers et al., 2006; McCalman et al., 2006).

In an inquiry into violence against women in Indigenous communities Gordon et al. (2002) found that there was no agreement on the definitions of family and domestic violence. Some Indigenous women preferred the term domestic violence as it differentiated violence in intimate relationships from that in the wider community. Similarly, Keel (2004) found that some Indigenous women are concerned that the term family violence detracts from the lived experience of being a woman abused by an intimate partner. Nevertheless, the wider

literature generally suggests that the term family violence is most appropriate for use in Indigenous communities (Cummings, 2002; Gordon et al., 2002).

For example, in one South Australian Indigenous community project participants described violence against women as part of broader issues of violence in the community including interfamily fighting, name calling, street gang violence, psychological abuse, institutionalised violence, spiritual abuse and neglect and abuse of elders (McCalman et al., 2006). The use of the term family violence in Indigenous communities does not necessarily detract from the particular damage of violence against women, rather such violence is seen to be influenced by and influencing of broader community conflict and affecting a wide range of kin and community members beyond the perpetrator and victim.

Advocates of the term family violence describe it in contrast to the Western, “scientific” way of examining and understanding individual behavioural issues within couples (McCalman et al., 2006). In this sense, family violence is understood as a multiplicity of community and family factors related to violence within close relationships, rather than one individual’s problematic behaviour within an intimate partnership (Clare et al., 2006).

In recognition of this general agreement about the use of the term family violence the National Plan supplements the definition of domestic violence with the following definition:

Family violence is a broader term that refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. It involves the same sorts of behaviours as described for domestic violence. As with domestic violence, the National Plan recognises that although only some aspects of family violence are criminal offences, any behaviour which causes the victim to live in fear is unacceptable. The term ‘family violence’ is the most widely used term to identify the experiences of Indigenous people, because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur. (Council of Australian Governments, 2011, p. 2)

In summary, family violence is widely considered a more appropriate term than domestic violence for use in Indigenous communities where violence against women is conceptualised within extended families and the wider community.

What is known about Indigenous women’s experiences of violence

Anderson (2002) noted that, despite the increase in attention on violence against women in Indigenous communities, Indigenous perspectives on the issue have not always informed the discussion. The absence of Indigenous voices, particularly women’s voices, in the discussion about family violence has been noted by several authors (O’Shane, 2002; Smallacombe, 2004). The lack of voices is, in part, due to the difficulties of talking about family violence, as well as it being a generally confronting issue and not wanting to bring more negative attention to an already stigmatised people (O’Shane, 2002; Pugh, 2006).

Nevertheless, the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey suggested that Indigenous Australians view family violence as an issue in their communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). In this section we review the Indigenous voices of both men and women on their experiences, perceptions and viewpoints on family violence in Indigenous communities including:

- cultural understandings and terminology;
- violence as normalised;
- justice system;
- barriers to services;
- family and kinship; and
- finding resilience and strength.

Cultural understandings and terminology

Indigenous communities see family violence as being interconnected with an array of community issues and problems. For example, in interviews and focus groups with an Indigenous community in South Australia, Taylor et al. (2004, p.80) noted that community members attributed a range of issues as contributing to violence: “shame and grief; loss of self-esteem; undermining of culture; disruption to, and weakening of family structures; intergenerational transmission of violence; hopelessness and despair; unemployment and poverty; anger and frustration; alcohol and drug misuse; gambling; boredom; dispossession; and racism”.

Similarly, in a study with an Indigenous women’s organisation Cheers et al. (2006) found that those who worked in the area of family violence could theoretically verbalise their understanding of the issue, while others conceptualised family violence within a variety of broader concepts of physical, emotional and material violence against women and children, inter-family fighting, name calling, street gang violence, psychological and spiritual abuse, institutionalised violence, neglect and abuse of elders (Cheers et al., 2006). These women viewed family violence as interconnected with social issues such as grief and shame, drug and alcohol misuse, gambling, poverty and unemployment.

Terms common to professionals, such as family violence, domestic violence, sexual assault or even rape, are not always used by Indigenous people because of different understandings of the language as well as the use of “language of minimisation” to protect families from unwanted attention and intrusion. Cripps (2007) pointed to the importance of the language used by Indigenous community members in understanding experiences of violence. In particular, “many Indigenous women use language in a way that diminishes violence and its consequences” (Cripps, 2007, p. 14). Cripps (2008) examined phrases such as “um ... well we were arguing”, “my husband was acting up”, “he was being cheeky”, “it was just a little fight” and “we were drinking” used by women in discussions about violence in Indigenous communities. Cripps argued that, when culturally situated, these phrases point to acts of violence which may not be understood as such by services and authorities. There is also evidence that Indigenous women commonly believe they provoke violence against them (Rawsthorne, Chivell, & Smith, 2010; Taylor & Putt, 2007).

This different use of language and understanding of violence can present issues in the reporting of incidents as well as in health and educational interventions. For example, dominant criminal justice responses to family violence require the complainant to describe the assault in sufficient detail to establish that violence occurred and to constitute a prosecution case in a trial (Cossins, 2003).

Violence as normalised

Conceptual differences in the understanding of family violence have been linked to the normalisation of violence in some Indigenous communities (Fredericks, Adams, Angus, & Australian Women’s Health Network Talking Circle, 2010; Kinnane, Farrington, Henderson-Yates, & Parker, 2010; Victims of Crime Coordinator, 2009; Widders, 2003). Many Indigenous authors discuss the perpetuation of intergenerational violence and learned violence in Indigenous communities (Willis, 2011), including the public nature of violence in some communities (Kinnane et al., 2010). For example, in a report on Indigenous violence in the Australian Capital Territory authors pointed to accumulated experiences of violence and abuse in Indigenous communities, as evidenced by high levels of contact with the criminal justice system (Victims of Crime Coordinator, 2009).

A community report from Bundaberg in Queensland found widespread concern from male and female community members about the normalised cycles of violence in families (Blair et al., 2014). Participants reported that:

- young people can consider sexual assault as a normal part of dating relationships;
- some families believe that violence is normal and therefore do not discuss it;
- many women and children accept violence as normal; and
- many people believe that violence, especially intergenerational violence, is a problem and want to break the cycles.

Although some authors describe family violence as cultural (Lloyd, 2014), most reports link the high rates of violence in some Indigenous communities to colonisation and contemporary socio-economic issues (Blair et al., 2014; Quayle, 2002). This includes the impact of colonisation, dispossession of land and forced removal of children across successive generations which has resulted in a legacy of trauma and violence pervading the lives of individuals, families and communities and is seen as a “causal factor for a range of other social, economic, psychological and emotional issues that themselves are situational factors contributing to violence” (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015, p. 120).

Justice system

Rates of domestic violence order use are higher among Indigenous than non-Indigenous people and Indigenous Australians are much less likely to be the person applying for the order (Cunneen, 2010). As described above, some of the reasons for under-reporting in Indigenous communities include:

- fear of negative consequences and repercussions, particularly in small, interconnected communities where privacy cannot be maintained;
- fear and mistrust of police, the legal system and other government agencies;
- fear of men's death in custody;
- the victim does not want the perpetrator imprisoned, or to be seen as responsible for the perpetrator's imprisonment;
- the interconnectedness of Indigenous society including rules and obligations relating to family;
- factors such as shame and responsibility for maintaining families;
- the normalisation of violence in some contemporary Indigenous families;
- shyness, language differences and fear of being misunderstood;
- lack of trust that services will provide culturally appropriate care;
- lack of women staff at some services, particularly the police; and
- lack of awareness of or access to services (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010a; Clare et al., 2006; Cunneen, 2010; Phillips & Vandenbroek, 2014; Quayle, 2002; Taylor & Putt, 2007; Tayton et al., 2014; Willis, 2011).

Much of the literature on women's experiences of violence highlights the difficulties for Indigenous women engaging with, and feeling comfortable with, the legal process, as well as the availability of services to assist women navigate the system (Quayle, 2002). Women reported that police do not always take their requests for help seriously (Laing, 2013). Also, during legal processes, women reported a lack of information and emotional support needed to be confident to pursue the matter (Moore, 2002).

In addition, several authors describe discrimination against Indigenous women and the ways in which the justice system fails to take into account Indigenous customs (Quayle, 2002). Reviewing two high profile sexual assault cases against Indigenous women in the Northern Territory, McGlade (2006) described discriminatory treatment of Indigenous women in the court system. McGlade argued that this stems in part

from historical cases in which Indigenous women and girls lacked legal status where, for instance, rape of Indigenous women was not considered as serious a crime as rape of non-Indigenous women. McGlade (2006) also explored cultural justifications made in Australian courts reflecting the fundamental misunderstanding of Indigenous culture as one that sanctions violence, particularly assaults by men against women. As discussed above, the cultural tradition view of Indigenous violence has been repeatedly rejected.

Indigenous women do not necessarily wish to deal with family violence through the criminal justice system. They do not, for example, necessarily want the offender arrested or charged (Victims of Crime Coordinator, 2009), or if they do want the offender to be arrested, their preference can be for rehabilitation rather than a prison sentence (Quayle, 2002). These actions or motivations are not necessarily understood within the criminal justice system. Nancarrow (2006) summarised the key issues for Indigenous women experiencing family violence and accessing the criminal justice system: the process can be irrelevant, symbolically, to Indigenous communities; it can escalate rather than end violence; and it is experienced as an artefact of historical government policies and institutions intended to separate Indigenous families.

Over the past 20 years Australian jurisdictions have made a number of changes to criminal justice systems to meet the needs of Indigenous victims and offenders, including managing family violence through specialist court and justice processes (Cox, Young, & Bairnsfather-Scott, 2009; Family Law Council, 2012; Marchetti, 2010; Morgan & Louis, 2010). Such justice initiatives recognise the need to reduce the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system, incorporate Indigenous communities and victims in the justice process, and ensure Indigenous people have some responsibility for their own justice system. Examples of this include circle sentencing in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory and the Nunga Court model used in Queensland, South Australia and Victoria (Marchetti, 2014b). Indigenous people were involved in the development and implementation of these programs and the aim is to take a more holistic view of victims' and offenders' needs including taking into account offenders' experiences of past abuse and family issues (Cox et al., 2009). Marchetti (2014a, p.87) described Indigenous sentencing courts as "operating according to a transformative, culturally appropriate and politically charged participatory jurisprudence" by involving Elders and community representatives in offender rehabilitation.

Research suggests that Indigenous women prefer these Indigenous-led justice approaches to family violence where the offender can access rehabilitation and the overall aim is restoration of the relationship between the offender and the victim, and between the offender and the broader community (Nancarrow, 2006). Indigenous victims and offenders reportedly found Indigenous sentencing courts fairer and more culturally appropriate for Indigenous clients and better able to facilitate a resolution (Faulkner, 2009; Morgan & Louis, 2010). In one study of both offenders and victims' experience of the sentencing court, offenders explained that the opportunity to express their views and concerns about the justice procedures made them feel respected and supported. The offenders' acceptance and preference for the Indigenous sentencing court process was attributed to an appreciation of their cultural identity by the legal system and stemmed from the perceived respect of magistrates, police prosecutors and defence lawyers for Elders and community members (Marchetti, 2014a).

Marchetti (2014a) noted these viewpoints were in contrast to non-Indigenous feminist approaches to family violence which highlight gender (that family violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women) and the need to protect victims from further harm and thus have a preference for a more punitive criminal justice response.

Barriers to services

In addition to a lack of trust in government agencies (Southern Domestic Violence Service & Nunga Mi Minar, 2007), literature suggests that Indigenous women lacked knowledge about the way the legal system operates and a lack of awareness about what services are available (Family Law Council, 2012; Gordon et al., 2002). It was commonly stated that Indigenous women experience the legal system predominantly within the scope of criminal justice and child protection, and are unaware of other elements of the legal system including family law and the availability of social services such as legal assistance and family relationship services. Further, because the legal system relies heavily on oral and written English language, educational barriers can make it difficult for Indigenous women to engage (Family Law Council, 2012; Gentle & Taylor, 2002).

Additional barriers to services for Indigenous women experiencing family violence included a lack of:

- Indigenous-specific victim support services;
- Indigenous staff within general services;
- services in remote communities and country towns;
- safe houses; and
- services offering help with basic needs such as telephones, transport, financial assistance and housing (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010c; Gordon et al., 2002; Laing, 2013; Martin, 2006; McCalman et al., 2006; Moore, 2002; Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015; Willis, 2011).

Furthermore, generalised programs do not always understand the nature of kinship and family relationships, and the importance of these networks for Indigenous women seeking help for family violence issues (Family Law Council, 2012; Lumby & Farrelly, 2009). Research has found that Indigenous people often prefer Indigenous-specific formal help sources to general programs (Lumby & Farrelly, 2009).

Family and kinship

Throughout the literature, authors stress the importance of a holistic approach to addressing Indigenous violence (Fredericks et al., 2010). In contrast to processes operating in generalised services for women escaping violence, Indigenous women often did not want to leave their family and home; did not want to be isolated from family and friends; did not want to bring shame or disruption to the community; feared losing custody of children and did not want to risk exposure to child protection services, and wanted to follow a process which involved sympathy for the offender (Cheers et al., 2006; Cunneen, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2010; Lumby & Farrelly, 2009; Southern Domestic Violence Service & Nunga Mi Minar, 2007). Researchers reported that women want responses to family violence that focus on the needs of all community members, particularly in healing rather than excluding or punishing perpetrators (Keel, 2004). This can include family support and counselling.

Finding resilience and strength

Amid the sombre accounts of family violence, authors also point to Indigenous community pride and strong culture (Cheers et al., 2006). In considering responses to family violence Indigenous women share hope about the community's strengths, Indigenous culture, traditions, and organisations, in particular, developing community-led programs, enhancing community autonomy through local programs, sharing information and experiences and keeping families together (Pugh, 2006; Rawsthorne et al., 2010). These Indigenous viewpoints on responses to violence against women are discussed in greater detail below.

Responses to violence against women in Indigenous communities

Over the past 30 years federal, state and territory governments have led inquiries, developed policies and provided resources to support family violence services and prevention initiatives. Many of these policies and programs are specific to Indigenous communities. In addition, local communities and services have also initiated their own responses to violence.

This section summarises some of the national, state and territory and local initiatives developed to address and prevent violence in Indigenous communities over the past 15 years. While we have endeavoured to include as many responses and projects as possible, inevitably some will not be included due to the limitations of literature reviews.

Evaluation: Programs and approaches identified

The literature search identified a number of programs and approaches aimed at addressing family violence. Programs and approaches are listed in Table 2. Like Memmott et al. (2001, p. 3) we classify programs according to their time of implementation and the typology of the programs using the following criteria:

1. Early reactive programs

Early reactive programs “are implemented during or immediately after the occurrence of a violent incident, but usually occur prior to any police prosecution” which might include night patrols, youth suicide intervention strategy, women’s refuges, petrol-sniffing intervention programs, and sobering-up shelters.

2. Late reactive programs

Late reactive programs are focused after an act of violence has occurred and are concerned with “resolving the negative outcomes of that violence”. These programs include approaches such as mediation and conflict resolution (for example trouble meetings), counselling and group therapy (men’s group, social-emotional wellbeing), justice group meetings, and offenders alternate programs (prison-based).

3. Early proactive programs

Early proactive programs “aim to counter any likelihood of violence as early as possible, working on the assumption that there is some risk of violence occurring in the future and that members of a community need to be motivated to undertake sustaining and diversifying activities”. These proactive programs comprise diversionary activities aimed at preoccupying people in worthwhile pursuits, education methods, which target all age groups from infancy, the communal promotion of definitions of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours, the training of Indigenous violence counsellors to ensure resourced personnel are available in communities to counter any prospects of violence, and alcohol management strategies.

4. Late proactive programs

Late proactive programs refer to those that “occur prior to violence occurring, but which are triggered by signs of

imminent violence and targeted at vulnerable persons”. These programs include mediations in disputes, group therapy and counselling, night patrols and wardens, removal of at-risk youths to safe houses, youth centres, outstations etc, and youth suicide prevention strategies. Many of these methods are similar to those in early and late reactive programs but they are targeted at a different category of people, namely at-risk individuals as opposed to offenders or victims.

Program categories

Memmott et al. (2001) further classified program types into program categories. We have extended the list of nine original program categories to include an additional type of “situational crime prevention” (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013). The full list of program categories as defined by Memmott et al. (2001, p. 59), including our additional category, is:

1. support programs (counselling, advocacy);
2. strengthening identity programs (sport, education, arts, cultural activities, group therapy);
3. behavioural reform programs (men’s and women’s groups);
4. community policing and monitoring programs (night patrols, wardens);
5. shelter/protection programs (refuges, sobering-up shelters);
6. justice programs (community justice groups);
7. mediation programs (dispute resolution);
8. education programs (tertiary courses, miscellaneous courses, media);
9. situational crime prevention including good street lighting, appropriate housing design, and availability of relevant amenities, closed circuit television and reduced access to alcohol (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013); and
10. composite programs drawing upon many of the above areas.

Table 2 Characteristics of response or program¹

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/descriptive/evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (2010c)	Policy paper	Primary: Consultation with staff working in services.	Descriptive	Victoria	Policy	10	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased attention on women's and children's law and justice issues at the state and national levels; • broaden cultural appropriate specialist legal services; • flexible legal aid; • linking services; • culturally responsive after hours services; • service for children impacted; • culturally appropriate counselling services; • Koori-specific sexual assault initiative; • cultural awareness of legal and justice system staff; • community legal education for young people; • improve awareness of women's incarceration and impact of family violence and sexual assault; and • support for a cultural retreat for women.
Arney & Westby (2012)	Grey: The Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research literature review	"Systematic plus" literature review.	Review	Remote communities	A review of the literature regarding the prevention of and response to family violence with a focus on engaging Indigenous men in remote communities.	10	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with Indigenous men; • acknowledge that perpetrators are likely to remain in their partner's lives; • recognise the limitations of the legal system in reducing family violence in Indigenous communities; • recognise the lack of a solid evidence base for community based approaches to preventing and responding to violence; and • incorporate service models which accurately represent men's attitudes to violence, health, service delivery and behaviour change. <p>The review also describes a number of approaches for engaging men in service delivery.</p>

¹ Some results in the "Strategies/actions/conclusions" column in this table have been taken verbatim from the relevant studies.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/ descriptive/ evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Australian Institute of Criminology et al. (2011)	Grey: Government report: Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011	Primary: Community Safety and Wellbeing Research Study, covering 16 communities and more than 1300 people. The study used a mixed method approach of both quantitative surveys and qualitative participatory style research.	Intervention evaluation*	Northern Territory Emergency Response areas	Program	10	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take into account the complexity and the range of policies and programs already operating; • the need for a strategy supported by ongoing, or at least long-term, funding assurances; and • shared ownership of community-specific initiatives between community and government.
Australian Institute of Family Studies (2013)	Grey: Close the Gap Clearing House review of community patrols.	Secondary data: Review of evidence for community patrols	Review	National	Program	4	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve administrative data for ongoing program monitoring and insights on the role community patrols play in relation to community safety; • improve Indigenous identification in police apprehension data across the states and territories; • the limited amount of empirical data on the outcomes of community patrols; and • the widespread support for community patrols by Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, communities and organisations.
Beacroft, Richards, Andrevski, & Rosevear (2011)	Grey: Government report: Community night patrols in the Northern Territory	Primary and secondary data: A review of the literature, interviews with stakeholders on community night patrols.	Evaluation framework	Northern Territory	Program	4	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • separate the roles of community night patrols and roles of police; • respond to challenging service environments where additional services may be needed and effectiveness of services may be unknown; and • work in diverse situations in regard to governance and community cohesion.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/ descriptive/ evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Blair et al. (2014)	Grey: Yarning up project report	Primary: 62 community members, open ended, unstructured interview. Two surveys were administered, one for Indigenous community members and the second for Indigenous people employed as community workers in welfare and social services. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data to describe barriers and enablers to reporting and treatment of family violence.	Descriptive	Bundaberg, Qld	Program	1, 5	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve consultation with police and provision of ongoing cultural safety information and training; • maintain the Police Liaison Officer role and the need for additional similar positions; and • identify an Indigenous court support worker to develop alternative Indigenous-led legal responses.
Carnarvon Family Support Service Inc (2003)	Grey: Report	A sample of 59 refuge clients was surveyed during a 10 week period in March to May 2003.	Evaluation*	Gascoyne, WA	Program	1, 5	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assist women and children who are experiencing domestic violence to work through the crisis; • assist women and children who are escaping domestic violence to access safe and supportive accommodation in a non-institutional setting; • assist women to develop increased knowledge and skills so they are better informed about the options and resources available and can become more self-determining and independent; • assist women not wanting to return to an abusive situation move to appropriate accommodation; • assist women leaving accommodation to develop an exit plan; and • assist accompanying children to feel safe and link them into appropriate services.
Caruana (2010)	Peer review: Journal	Secondary: Overview of the literature regarding the therapeutic healing.	Descriptive	National	Review	1	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider different approaches; • affect personal healing; and • consider not only the needs of the person, but their family and community.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/ descriptive/ evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Cripps & Davis (2013)	Grey: Newsletter	Secondary: Examples of promising programs.	Descriptive	National	Review	10	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be flexible and holistic; and • respond to the multiplicity of factors contributing to the occurrence of violence and to the many people affected by it.
Cunneen (2002)	Peer reviewed: The University of New South Wales Law Journal	Secondary: A review of crime prevention programs which focus on Indigenous men (including young men and boys).	Descriptive	National	Review	10	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise that programs are being developed in specific Indigenous contexts; • recognise that Indigenous-led programs are far more likely to succeed than a government-imposed “one size fits all” approaches; and • work within the framework of self-determination.
Fitzgerald (2008)	Peer reviewed	Frequency of reoffending, time to reoffend and offence seriousness were examined and compared between circle sentencing and a control group. Tests of statistical significance were applied.	Evaluation*	NSW	Justice	6	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce reoffending by giving Indigenous people direct involvement in the sentencing of Indigenous offenders; and • extend beyond direct involvement in sentencing of offenders to include other programs (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, drug and alcohol treatment, remedial education) that have been shown to alter the risk factors for further offending.
Gibbons & Paterson (2000)	Grey	Longitudinal follow-up data of mass media campaign.	Evaluation*	WA	Program	3, 8	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of prevention campaigns with men at risk of perpetrating violence; and • mass media campaigns can influence specific beliefs about domestic violence.
Hennessy & Willie (2006)	Grey	Count of instances of recidivism after intervention, description of two case studies.	Evaluation*	Qld	Program	3, 6	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide assistance to offenders and the community as a means to divert offenders from violent offending; and • identify at risk offenders and offer diversion programs.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/descriptive/evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Karahasan (2014)	Grey	<p>Qualitative data from face-to-face and telephone conversations with participants. FVPLS Victoria provided results from surveys completed by participants of Sisters Day Out and Dilly Bag workshops held in 2013.</p> <p>More formal evaluation approaches such as written questionnaires, surveys and control and sample groups were deemed inappropriate for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the project timeframe; • the scale of the project; and • data collection through formal methods would represent “white system” tools which carry negative associations e.g. invasive and impersonal. <p>Quantitative data on the EIP activities held since 2007. Additional statistical information was obtained from sources as identified within the report.</p>	Evaluation*	Vic	Program	1, 2, 8	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise the impact of European settlement and domination and how this has affected Indigenous communities; • recognise the importance and value of Indigenous women coming together at Sisters Day Out and Dilly Bag, raise awareness of family violence, recognise that family violence is a deeply personal matter that erodes confidence and self-esteem and that for some women it takes time and gentle encouragement before they are able or willing to address the issue; • reinforce the message that family violence should not be tolerated, is not part of Indigenous culture; and • highlight services available for victims.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/ descriptive/ evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Kinnane et al. (2010)	Grey	Quantitative data from police. Qualitative reports from police and hospital on levels of trauma presentations.	Evaluation*	WA	Program	10	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction of domestic violence and anti-social behaviour with alcohol restrictions; • general community support for alcohol restrictions; and • take into consideration service provider opinions which were less supportive.
Kowanko & Power (2008)	Grey	Qualitative and quantitative data using mixed methods, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interviews with Indigenous clients and participants of the Program; • interviews and focus groups with FCH workers, peer educators, volunteers; and • review of documents regarding FCH Program processes and outcomes. 	Evaluation*	SA	Program	9	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence for beneficial impact on clients and the community; • the need for sustainable funding and organisational support; and • the need for expansion.
Laing & Toivonen (2012)	Grey	Semi-structured interviews with clients, staff and partners, quantitative data on client demographics, document analysis.	Qualitative evaluation*	NSW	Program	9	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need for recurrent funding; • development of the service within the local health district including increased collaboration and referrals between other services use this program as a model for the development of similar programs; and • enhanced funding to respond to violence by young people against their parents.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/descriptive/evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Laming et al. (2011)	Grey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature review of relevant international and local literature; Face-to-face interviews with key players; Focus groups with participant groups; Audit of visual products; and Analysis of media coverage, photographs and video documentation. 	Qualitative evaluation*	Vic	Program	2, 8	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the importance of Indigenous leadership; the importance of community empowerment; and the importance of community education.
Lauw, Spangaro, Herring, & McNamara (2013)	Peer reviewed	Interviews	Case study – qualitative evaluation*	NSW	Program	8	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the need to build an Indigenous workforce to address family violence; and the importance of programs that empower Indigenous people and respond to trauma.
McCalman et al. (2010)	Peer reviewed	Meta-synthesis of previous studies by same authors and participatory action research.	Qualitative evaluation*	Qld	Program	3	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the importance of empowering men to take greater control of their health and wellbeing; the importance of supporting social cohesion in the home; and acknowledging the willingness and commitment of many men.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/descriptive/evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Morgan & Louis (2010)	Grey	The development of data collection system. An assessment of the operational components of the Murri Court process. A qualitative assessment of the impact of the Murri Courts on the relationship between the court and community. A quantitative assessment of the impact of the program.	Evaluation*	Qld	Sentencing process – Murri Court	6	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the potential for Indigenous-led legal responses to improve the relationship between legal services and the community; community support, particularly from Elders, is essential; and Indigenous-led legal approaches can take more of an intervention-focused role.
Nickson, Dunstan, Esperanza, & Barker (2011)	Peer review (journal article)	Description of process.	Description	Qld	Program	1, 2, 3	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the benefit of collaborative learning between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous workforce; and the benefit of a community development approach.
O'Connor & Fisher (2005)	Grey	29 semi-structured interviews with providers/agencies and clients, short survey (12 questions) with 24 returned.	Qualitative evaluation*	WA	Program	4, 5	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the benefit of a multi-agency partnership and collaborative service delivery; the importance of the integration of legal services; and the need for continued funding.
Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs) (2007)	Grey	The methodology consisted of a review of relevant literature, consultation with key stakeholders including service users, a survey of FaCSIA project managers and program data analysis.	Evaluation of grants programs only – does not evaluate outcomes of individual projects within	National	Program	9	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is a gap in service provision for early intervention and prevention; the need for appropriately designed evaluation methods; and the need for simplified, long-term funding structures.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/descriptive/evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Poelina & Perdrisat (2004)	Grey	Primary data were collected through the mix of the methodological approaches including participant observation in community and organisational activities, formal and informal interviews, and regular monthly attendance at project steering committee meeting and by the project coordinator/s, program managers and the researchers in the form of personal and community narratives and case studies. Filmmaking to collect visual evidence of the project's impact and outcomes.	Qualitative evaluation*	WA	Program	2, 3, 8	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of educating young people about the unacceptability of violence; and • the role of media and community awareness activities in increasing knowledge of family violence.
Ralph (2010)	Grey (Clearinghouse newsletter)	Overview of literature regarding therapeutic healing in Indigenous Australia including programs dealing with family violence.	Descriptive	National	Various programs	1, 2, 3	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of community ownership; • careful preparation prior to program implementation; • recognition of the unique needs of Indigenous families; and • ensuring a culturally-appropriate workforce.
Rawsthorne et al. (2010)	Grey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire data from group participants • Focus group discussions with group participants, Steering Committee, key stakeholders. 	Qualitative evaluation*	NSW	Program	3, 8	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the value of a safe space for discussing violence; • breaking down the barriers of formal services and approaches; and • recognition of women's determination to address violence in their communities.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/descriptive/evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Rees et al. (2004)	Peer reviewed	28 of 52 participants were interviewed plus 8 significant others. The interview data was supplemented by 1998-99 diary entries from 10 participants as well as the evaluators' participant observations.	Qualitative evaluation*	NT	Program – Alice Springs Family Wellbeing Program	2, 3, 8	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of recognising family violence as a public health issue; and • the importance of personal empowerment and understanding historical and contemporary factors impacting on wellbeing.
Research and Analysis Branch Department of the Attorney General (2014)	Grey	Effectiveness evaluation including recidivism and financial cost.	Evaluation*	WA	Program	6	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • utilising mainstream courts in conjunction with case managed behaviour change programs is likely to be more effective in reducing reoffending by family violence offenders; and • utilising mainstream courts in conjunction with case managed behaviour change programs could also be more cost effective.
Rosser (2004)	Grey	Action research using the Indigenous research agenda. Individual and group interviews, community meetings and workshops. A survey was distributed to all communities: 71 out of 120 were returned. Phone interview with 2 interstate services for comparison. Financial audits of safe houses examined through desktop analysis.	Qualitative evaluation*	Qld	Program – SAAP Safe house project	2,5	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need for additional resourcing and support for 'safe house' services; • the potential development of a network for remote Indigenous family violence services; • the need for plain English resources for remote Indigenous services; • the need for workforce development; • the need for innovative models backed by government; and • consideration of financial viability.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/ descriptive/ evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Schineanu, Velandar, & Sagers (2010)	Grey	Police data on domestic violence pre and post intervention. Interview with nurse on prevalence of domestic violence presentations post intervention. (Also includes quantitative and qualitative evaluation of other non-domestic violence impacts from intervention).	Quantitative and qualitative evaluation (includes qualitative aspects)*	WA	Program	10	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need for an alcohol and other drugs support position; • consideration of inclusion of restrictions on all types of alcohol; • the need for collaborative service development with the Indigenous community; and • the need for culturally appropriate services.
Watson (2011)	Peer reviewed	Descriptive	Description and analysis of feminist discourse on Northern Territory Emergency Response	NT	Program	10	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need to critically assess with programs such as the Northern Territory Emergency response; • the need to consider programs within the historical experience of Indigenous people, including women; and • the potential for state interventions aimed at protecting women to further regulate communities.
Wendt & Baker (2013)	Peer reviewed	Interview based research	Qualitative evaluation	SA	Program	1, 2, 5	Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the value of taking into account women's perceptions and experiences; • the value of individualised, flexible and open-ended support for women escaping violence; and • the potential for programs to strengthen confidence and self-efficacy.

Reference	Reference type	Data and method	Type: program description/ descriptive/ evaluation	Location	Response focus area	Response type	Strategies/actions/conclusions
Wright (2004)	Peer reviewed	None	Description of programs	Qld	Program	6	<p>Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognising that the current family violence service system based on non-Indigenous feminist principles may not always be suitable for Indigenous families; • the importance and effectiveness of Indigenous community justice groups in developing, owning and taking responsibility for solutions to community violence; and • the importance of inclusiveness and family for Indigenous communities.

*included in effectiveness assessment (Table 2).

Evidence assessment

In outlining and assessing programs and approaches to violence against women in Indigenous communities, this section takes the extra assessment step to evaluate the evidence of programs and approaches. We have used a modified Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) method for assessing interventions (Berkman et al., 2013). Based on Berkman et al. (2013), programs and approaches had to be consistent with the following criteria to be included in the review of evidence:

- be evaluations of an intervention rather than, for example, guidelines or reviews;
- provide information on at least one outcome of interest from a list of family violence outcomes;
- examine outcomes such as reduction in violence experienced among persons exposed to the intervention, either concurrent comparison between different groups or before-and-after comparison within the same group; and
- be published after December 2000.

This section reports on the level of evidence provided for programs identified from Table 2 with outcomes consistent with increasing awareness of family violence, behavioural programs, reducing family violence or assessing changes in the impact of family violence within programs and approaches. Studies were included only if they assessed family violence outcomes or proxies for family violence outcomes. Programs and approaches were reviewed regardless of whether family violence was the primary target or outcome of the program; the program only needed to be consistent with the specified inclusion criteria. The effects on outcomes other than family violence were not assessed systematically but are reported selectively if relevant. These levels of evidence relate to the quality of the evaluation rather than the effectiveness of the program.

The domains for grading the strength of evidence, as defined by Berkman et al. (2013), include study limitations, directness, consistency, precision and reporting bias.

Most of the literature reviewed involved single evaluations (programs), so the consistency criteria were limited within this review. It is recognised that in order to achieve the goals of consistency, transparency and usability reviewers should interpret these domains with uniformity and predictability. Although no single approach for reporting results and grading the related strength of evidence is likely to suit all fields, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality method is a consistent approach that is useful in summarising and evaluating programs.

Most reviews of evidence are heavily focused on randomised controlled trials as the gold standard. Given the complexity of family violence and the many other factors impacting

effective composite and other complex interventions there are practical and ethical implications for avoiding the use of randomised controlled trials in family violence. As a consequence, the evaluations located here used either mixed methods or were qualitative alone. In this context the method of assessing effectiveness required slightly different interpretation, particularly related to the assessment of precision. Thus, we modified the criteria to reflect the predominance of qualitative studies so that if a trend in, for example, thematic coding was evident, this could be interpreted to demonstrate precision of a trend. An overview of the modified criteria is presented below.

Finally, after beginning the review we identified the need to include one additional criterion of Indigenous views. In line with the focus of this review to incorporate the views of Indigenous people about the effectiveness of these programs and approaches it was important to assess the presence of Indigenous voices in the evidence for each program.

The domains for grading the strength of evidence (Berkman et al., 2013, pp. 8-9), as well as our additional criterion, are defined below.

Study or evaluation limitations

“Study limitations are the degree to which the included studies for a given outcome [e.g. reducing family violence] have a high likelihood of adequate protection against bias (i.e., good internal validity), assessed through two main elements”:

- Study design: Whether the design was appropriate.
- Study conduct: Aggregation of ratings of risk of bias of the individual studies under consideration.

Coded as: **Low** or **Medium** or **High**

Directness

Directness relates to “whether evidence links interventions directly to an outcome of specific importance for the review”. Evidence may be indirect in several situations such as:

- “Data do not come from head-to-head comparisons but rather from two or more bodies of evidence that compare interventions”.
- “Data are available only for proxy respondents (e.g. obtained from family members or nurses or others) instead of directly from recipients for situations in which recipients are capable of self-reporting and self-report is more reliable”.

Indirectness always implies that more than one body of evidence is required to link interventions to the most important outcome.

Coded as: **Direct** or **Indirect**

Consistency

Consistency refers to the degree of similarity in the direction of effects or the degree of similarity in the effect sizes across individual studies within an evidence base.

- Direction of effect
- Magnitude of effect

Coded as: **Consistent** or **Inconsistent** or **Unknown** (such as a single study)

Precision

Precision is the “degree of certainty surrounding an effect estimate with respect to a given outcome, based on the sufficiency of the sample size and number of events”:

- “A body of evidence will generally be imprecise if the optimal information size is not met. Optimal information size refers to the minimum number of participants (and events when assessing dichotomous outcomes) needed for an evidence base to be considered adequately powered”.
- Consider the narrowness of the range of confidence intervals or the significance level of p-values in the individual studies in the evidence base.
- Consider the consistency of effects (such as themes emerging from the data) in qualitative studies.

Coded as: **Precise** or **Imprecise**

Reporting bias

“Reporting bias results from selectively publishing or reporting research findings based on the favourability of direction or magnitude of effect”. It includes:

- “Study publication bias, i.e., non-reporting of the full study”;
- “Selective outcome reporting bias, i.e., non-reporting (or incomplete reporting) of planned outcomes or reporting of unplanned outcomes”; and
- “Selective analysis reporting bias, i.e., reporting of one or more favourable analyses for a given outcome while not reporting other, less favourable analyses”.

“Assessment of reporting bias for individual studies depends on many factors e.g. availability of study protocols, unpublished study documents, and patient-level data. Detecting such bias is likely with access to all relevant documentation and data pertaining to a publication, but such access is rarely available”.

Coded as: **Suspected** or **Undetected**

Indigenous viewpoint

Given the prominence of the issue of family violence within the community, community engagement and viewpoints on how the program was perceived and viewed is paramount. It is widely acknowledged that if there is limited engagement with Indigenous people in the development and implementation of programs, effectiveness will likely be limited. Engagement of stakeholders is also true in assessing the effectiveness of any program or approach of a highly sensitive nature.

Coded as: **Yes** or **No**

Establishing an overall strength of evidence grade

Based on the Berkman et al. (2013) framework for grading the strength of a body of evidence, we assessed the strength of the evidence of program effectiveness as strong, moderate, sufficient or insufficient. Broadly, the four levels of grades are intended to show the level of confidence we have in the evidence presented. The four levels of grades outlined by Berkman et al. (2013, p.18) are presented in Table 3. The studies are then evaluated in Table 4.

Table 3 Strength of evidence grades and definitions

Grade	Definition
Strong	We are very confident that the estimate of the effect of the program lies close to the true effect for this outcome. The body of evidence has few or no deficiencies. We believe that the findings are stable, that is, another study would not change the conclusions.
Moderate	We are moderately confident that the estimate of effect lies close to the true effect for this outcome. The body of evidence has some deficiencies. We believe that the findings are likely to be stable, but some doubt remains.
Sufficient	We have limited confidence that the estimate of effect lies close to the true effect for this outcome. The body of evidence has major or numerous deficiencies (or both). We believe that additional evidence is needed before concluding either that the findings are stable or that the estimate of effect is close to the true effect.
Insufficient	We have no evidence, we are unable to estimate an effect, or we have no confidence in the estimate of effect for this outcome. No evidence is available or the body of evidence has unacceptable deficiencies, precluding reaching a conclusion.

Source: Berkman et al., 2013, p. 18.

Table 4 Summary of evidence of programs and approaches²

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Moderate	Freedom from Fear Campaign	Arney & Westby (2012); Gibbons & Paterson (2000)	Early proactive	<p>Mass media campaign directed at males at risk of perpetrating violence and perpetrators of violence. Aimed at education and behaviour change for those at risk of perpetrating family violence and current perpetrators. Significant changes in specific beliefs about domestic violence were noted in Wave 1, 2 and 3. Favourable changes to some transitory beliefs which will hopefully lead to eventual shifts in longer term attitudes and behaviour.</p> <p>Over 6000 calls have been received. A large proportion (64%) of those calling were men in the Campaign's primary target group of perpetrators or men 'at risk'. Half (53%) of these men (1,352) have accepted a voluntary referral into men's behaviour change (counselling) programs.</p>	Unknown	Low	Direct (longitudinal)	Unknown	Precise	Undetected

² Some results in the "Summary and findings" column in this table have been taken verbatim from the relevant studies.

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Sufficient	Ma'Ddaimba-Balas Indigenous Men's Group	McCalman et al. (2006)	Advocacy	An Indigenous Men's Group aimed at health promotion strategies including reducing violence. Overall program has 7 focus areas; the court support examined as part of this review. Measures court appearances, breaches of domestic violence order trends only (proxy respondents). Evidence suggests some reduction in breaches of domestic violence orders.	Yes	Medium Court report trends and program staff effectiveness assessment	Indirect	Unknown	Imprecise	Suspected – internal program commentary on effectiveness only
Moderate	Northern Territory Emergency Response evaluation report: Chapter 3: perceived changes in local communities as a result of recent reforms	Australian Institute of Criminology et al. (2011); D'Abbs & Shaw (2011)	Composite	Research into community safety, wellbeing and service provision provides an overview of two studies (individuals and service providers) No links with police, court or hospital/clinic data. Results show: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant impact on indicators of alcohol-related harm, especially violence. • Widespread community support and perception that levels of family violence had improved. • Improved access and availability of services. 	Yes (community survey)	Medium (observational)	Direct: survey of community members and service providers	Consistency	Precise	Undetected
Insufficient	Best Practice For Early Intervention and Prevention of Domestic Violence in the Gascoyne Region	Carnarvon Family Support Service Inc (2003)	Late reactive	Evaluation of the delivery model of the local women's refuge service. Did not fully evaluate program effectiveness, evaluated service objectives.	Yes	High	Indirect	Unknown	Imprecise	Suspected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
N/A	Assessment of the Risk of Reoffending by Indigenous Male Violent and Sexual Offenders	Allan & Dawson (2004)	Proactive or late reactive	A risk assessment tool developed specifically for Indigenous offenders. Does not fit the classical AHRQ criteria in that determining if a screening instrument is effective is classified as an intervention.	Yes	Medium	Indirect – uses proxies as predictors of the outcome (reoffending)	Unknown	N/A	N/A
N/A	Government Partnerships with the Indigenous Community in Tasmania: Building a Stronger Community to Overcome Family Violence. 2006	Pugh (2006)	Early proactive Review of COAG trial in NE Tasmania	Anecdotal review by Tasmanian government and community groups to develop partnerships to reduce family violence and to develop ways in which the federal, state and territory governments can work together more effectively. Anecdotal account of the effectiveness of the consultation process. Suggests indicators for evaluation of the trial.	Yes	N/A	Indirect – no data used	Unknown	Imprecise	Undetected
Moderate	Ending Family Violence Program Woorabinda. 2006	Hennessy & Willie (2006)	Late reactive	A diversion program in Central Queensland placing family violence offenders on probation with conditions to attend and satisfactorily complete the Ending Offending and Ending Family Violence programs. Proportion of recidivists after a mandated probation referral program. Found 64% of previous offenders did not commit further offences of violence after the intervention.	No	Medium (small sample size)	Direct	Unknown (single study)	Precise	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Insufficient	Evaluation report of the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria's early intervention and prevention program	Karahasan (2014)	Early proactive, late proactive, early reactive	<p>An early intervention and prevention program, Sisters Day Out, aimed at promoting self-esteem and wellbeing among women as well as increasing access to family violence services. Reported positive impacts on health and wellbeing demonstrated by participant Satisfaction Surveys. Medium-long term impacts included decisions to ensure safety for themselves and their families.</p> <p>Women attending the Dilly Bag programs described renewed confidence and courage to make difficult and important decisions and provided examples of how their choices had led to positive outcomes for them and their families.</p>	Yes	Medium – qualitative interviews with small number of participants. Number of surveys analysed not indicated.	Indirect – guide interview questions did not go directly to aims of the program. Formal survey questions not provided.	Unknown	Imprecise	Suspected – no information provided about how responding participants were selected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Strong	Fitzroy Valley Alcohol Restriction Report December 2010	Kinnane et al. (2010)	Early proactive and late reactive	<p>A program restricting alcohol in two communities. Qualitative and quantitative results indicate improvements. But data also shows an increase in incidents, authors say due to greater reporting post intervention.</p> <p>Found: reduced severity of domestic violence; reduced severity of wounding from general public violence; reduced street drinking; a quieter town; less litter; families purchasing more food and clothing; families being more aware of their health and being proactive in regard to their children's health; reduced humbug and anti-social behaviour; reduced stress for service providers; increased effectiveness of services already active in the Valley; generally better care of children and increased recreational activities; and a reduction in the amount of alcohol being consumed by Fitzroy and Fitzroy Valley residents.</p>	Yes	Low	Direct	Unknown	Precise	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Moderate	Central Northern Adelaide Health Service Family and Community Healing Program: Evaluation Report	Kowanko & Power (2008)	Early proactive, late proactive, early reactive	<p>An early intervention program aimed at building the capacity of Indigenous families including counselling and group activities aimed at building confidence, increasing personal skills in conflict resolution and increase awareness of forming positive relationships.</p> <p>The primary aims of the program were met and clients and workers were unanimous in their support for the program.</p>	Yes	Medium (focus groups, surveys, interviews, literature review)	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Precise	Undetected
Insufficient	Evaluation of the Green Valley Liverpool Domestic Violence Service (GVLVDS): walking with women on their journey away from violence	Laing & Toivonen (2012)	Early proactive, late reactive	<p>A specialist family violence service in NSW providing direct services to women and children experiencing family violence as well as the promotion of integrated responses to family violence.</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative data showed: an improved sense of emotional and social wellbeing; decreased isolation and a new sense of connectedness; overcoming the effects of domestic violence on children; feeling safe and starting a new life. The evaluation also found that the service facilitated an effective coordinated response which included working in partnership with other services.</p>	Yes	High (no control trial, small sample size (14) – self selecting participants likely to view service better)	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise – anecdotal only	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Moderate	The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence: evaluation report	Laming et al. (2011)	Early proactive	A community initiative that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members to celebrate Indigenous culture, discuss family violence and increase access to a range of services. Qualitative data shows: enhanced and developed self-esteem, particularly for Indigenous men, women and children.	Yes	Medium (focus groups, interviews, literature review)	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise	Undetected
Moderate	'Talk, talk, cry, laugh': learning, healing and building an Indigenous workforce to address family violence	Lauw et al. (2013)	Early proactive	A case study of a training program for Indigenous workers responding to sexual assault and other forms of family violence. The course's qualification rate has grown from 52% to 92%.	Yes	High: case study	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Precise	Undetected
Sufficient	Indigenous men's support groups and social and emotional wellbeing: a meta-synthesis of the evidence	McCalman et al. (2010)	Early proactive, late proactive, late reactive	A participatory action research project involving two Queensland Men's Groups. Self-reported benefits included improved social and emotional wellbeing, modest lifestyle modifications and willingness to change current notions of "gendered" roles within the home, such as sharing housework. Authors conclude: "may be" helping to assist in strategies to reduce family violence.	Yes	Medium – meta-ethnography of various men's programs	Indirect	Consistent	Imprecise	Suspected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Insufficient	Indigenous Practice Approaches to Women, Violence, and Healing Using Community Development: A Partnership between Indigenous and non Indigenous Workers	Nickson et al. (2011)	Early proactive	Work-based placement program that aimed to provide improved cross-cultural practice, community development and reflective process related to Indigenous women and violence for non-Indigenous social work students. Learning cards were developed in a partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, which resulted in positive and respectful relationships.	Yes (with the development of the cards)	High	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Sufficient	An evaluation of Domestic Violence Advocacy Support (DVAS) Central: Outcomes achieved to date and the identification of challenges arisen during development and implementation	O'Connor & Fisher (2005)	Late proactive, early reactive	A qualitative analysis of the development and implementation of the Domestic Violence Advocacy Support Central model in Perth. Interview data shows that the model works well for clients, staff and the community and provides value for money; that there is a positive attitude to the service remaining located in the community; that it should continue and that, if replicated elsewhere, it is important that all stakeholders have full commitment to the model and to making a financial commitment to it. Numerous benefits for clients were noted, such as: not having to repeat their story to numerous agencies decreased a sense of trauma; an increased sense of safety; and a decreased rate of "giving up" on seeking help due to access difficulties. Other benefits were enhanced staff skill due to cross-discipline learning and a single focus on providing a domestic violence service.	Yes	Medium (interviews)	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise	Suspected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Insufficient	Evaluation of the FaCSIA Family Violence Programs: Family violence regional activities programs - family violence partnership program	Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs) (2007)	All	<p>Evaluation of Indigenous-specific family violence programs managed by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Consultation, survey and program data show the importance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound governance and administration; • Realistic timelines; • Service coordination; • Community engagement; • Providing a variety of interventions; • Sustainability; and • However there were no evaluation outcomes. 	Yes	High (no evaluation of outcomes)	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise (no data collected)	Undetected
Insufficient	A report of the Derby/West Kimberley Project: Working With Adolescents To Prevent Domestic Violence	Poelina & Perdrisat (2004)	Proactive	<p>A Western Australian project for adolescents aimed at showing the social unacceptability of violent behaviour.</p> <p>Describes program initiatives established within the community and identifies some key elements essential for establishing and maintaining such programs.</p> <p>The project had a positive impact on adolescents' understanding of the unacceptability of violence.</p>	Yes	Medium (many methods)	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Moderate	Aboriginal women against violence project: evaluation report	Rawsthorne et al. (2010)	Proactive	<p>The project aimed to establish an Aboriginal Women Against Violence Committee and to train local Indigenous women to become trainers, mentors and advocates. Survey and focus group data shows that the project was successful in supporting Indigenous women to become mentors and advocates against violence. Focus group discussions, questionnaires and project staff reflections indicate that the training programs impacted on the individual, family and community level.</p> <p>The program enhanced participants' knowledge and attitudes in relation to domestic violence. Participants expressed more confidence in seeking support for themselves or for others in the event of violence.</p>	Yes	Low	Direct (pre-post design)	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise	Undetected
Moderate	Empowerment and human rights in addressing violence and improving health in Australian Indigenous communities	Rees et al. (2004)	Early proactive, late proactive	<p>Assessment of the Family Well Being program as a tool for addressing endemic family violence. Participants report that the programs builds personal strength, increases ability to assist others, and increases motivation to challenge structural factors impacting on health equality.</p>	Yes	Low	Direct	Consistent	Precise (follow up studies)	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Strong	Evaluation of the Metropolitan Family Violence Court and Evaluation of the Barndimalgu Court	Research and Analysis Branch Department of the Attorney General (2014)	Late reactive	<p>Offenders who never attended the family violence court and had no behaviour change program were significantly more likely to reoffend than those who attended the program in the mainstream court.</p> <p>Participation in the family violence court produced less effective results in terms of reoffending than the mainstream courts. However, the results also suggest that participating in a case managed behaviour change program is of potential benefit to offenders.</p> <p>Participation in Barndimalgu does produce a more effective result in terms of reoffending than the mainstream court.</p>	Yes	Low	Direct	Consistent	Precise	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Moderate	“Don’t wake up angry no more”: the evaluation of The Norseman voluntary liquor agreement	Schineanu et al. (2010)	Early proactive alcohol restrictions	<p>Community-led restrictions on the sale of take-away alcohol. Qualitative and quantitative data shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% decrease in police call-outs post introduction of restrictions; 15% decrease in domestic violence incidents; 60% decrease in alcohol-related admissions to hospital. • An increase in voluntary and early health care seeking behaviour (flu vaccine, regular blood glucose testing). • Improvements in nutrition (eating breakfast and healthy home cooked food regularly, making financial arrangements for children’s school lunches). • An increase in participation in family, community and sporting activities. • Attempts to become self-reliant (seek employment, start-up businesses, growing own food). • A decreased in violence and arguments. • A decrease in public drunkenness. <p>Limitations include a small sample size – data includes those not impacted by intervention and confounding factor of global financial crisis stimulus package impacted on results.</p>	Yes	Low	Direct	Unknown (single study)	Precise	Undetected

Strength of evidence	Program name	Reference	Program type	Summary and findings	Indigenous viewpoints	Study limitations	Directness	Consistency	Precision	Reporting bias
Sufficient	Aboriginal Women's Perceptions and Experiences of a Family Violence Transitional Accommodation Service	Wendt & Baker (2013)	Late reactive	<p>A study of a transitional housing program in South Australia established to assist women experiencing homelessness and family violence. Interview data shows that the program was valued for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individualised, flexible, and open-ended support; • the provision of stable, safe housing for women and children; and • enhancing feelings of strengthened confidence and self-efficacy. 	Yes	Medium	Indirect	Unknown (single study)	Imprecise	Suspected

Results of evidence assessments: Effectiveness of programs

We now present the characteristics of programs as summarised from Table 4. There were 24 programs or approaches included in the assessment. Only two were assessed as demonstrating strong levels of evidence, with ten studies assessed as moderate, four as sufficient and eight as having insufficient levels of evidence.

All but two of the studies reported a positive impact on various aspects of behaviour, wellbeing, attitudes and skills related to dealing with family violence in Indigenous communities.

Although individual programs have shown benefits across a range of domains related to family violence in Indigenous communities, it is not possible to generalise the effectiveness of these initiatives to the broader Indigenous population, given the variety of methods, study populations and outcome measures used.

The focus of this evidence assessment concerned the effect of programs on family violence (or proxy family violence) indicators only. This does not mean that other aspects of these programs are ineffective or effective for outcomes unrelated to the family violence outcomes. To assess evidence of program or service effectiveness on other outcomes (or aims), additional assessment of these programs is required.

Effectiveness of programs: Strong levels of evidence

The two programs assessed as having a strong level of evidence were the Fitzroy Valley Alcohol Restriction Report (Kinnane et al., 2010) and the Evaluation of the Metropolitan Family Violence Court and Evaluation of the Barndimalgu Court (Research and Analysis Branch, Department of the Attorney General, 2014). Both programs demonstrated benefits to participants and the community when compared to other mainstream approaches. The alcohol restriction program evaluation in the Fitzroy Valley Alcohol Restriction Report (Kinnane et al., 2010) used surveys of individuals, community services and business in the community, police data, hospital presentation data, school attendance data and alcohol purchasing data. Two years after the restrictions were put in place domestic violence reporting had increased but remained significantly less prevalent than before the restrictions. The potential for bias in the report was significant; this was dealt with by using mixed methods to assess the quantitative data against the qualitative findings from a variety of sources. Another feature of this program was the measurement of its impact across multiple domains as it was not solely focused on family violence.

The evidence suggested the Barndimalgu program showed effectiveness in reducing the rate of reoffending. The program

resulted in increased involvement of the community in justice initiatives and improved perceptions of fairness in the system. The data collection in the evaluation was substantial. Most literature located for this review focusing on justice or circle sentencing courts did not specifically involve family violence outcomes and therefore was not included in this assessment. However interviews with offenders, victims and community members provided a similar view as the Barndimalgu court on the positive perception of fairness and involvement from local community members in Indigenous sentencing courts (Research and Analysis Branch, Department of the Attorney General, 2014).

Effectiveness of programs: Moderate levels of evidence

Programs with a moderate level of evidence were often those implemented in multiple sites, were observational in design and used multicomponent approaches. There was a level of precision in reporting of associations with program outcomes. An example includes the evaluation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response where perceived changes in community safety were assessed following a multicomponent intervention that used community and service level data. Programs with moderate evidence also reported limitations to their approach. The Northern Territory Emergency Response program demonstrated this by showing an improvement in perceived community safety three years after implementation while also highlighting that there had been consequences for programs such as lower levels of community control over program delivery.

Another innovative approach was the Freedom from Fear Campaign that targeted media messaging to "at risk" men and perpetrators of family violence in an attempt to encourage behaviour changes and to promote action (Gibbons & Paterson, 2000). The campaign took baseline indices of awareness of the men's help line and a range of other family violence related attitudes. Three waves of follow up showed a sustained improvement in reducing negative attitudes and increased use of the helpline by men 'at risk' of perpetrating violence. Around half of those accessing the helpline volunteered to then undertake further counselling and behavioural therapy.

Other community specific programs were assessed as having moderate levels of evidence if they could directly relate outcomes to the program. Programs such as the Ending Family Violence Program (Hennessy & Willie, 2006), the Aboriginal Women Against Violence Project (Rawsthorne et al., 2010), and the Don't Wake Up Angry No More Program

(Schineanu et al., 2010) used pre-post designs and reasonably robust data collection to demonstrate the effect of program activities on outcomes measures, despite the smaller size of the programs.

Effectiveness of programs: Sufficient levels of evidence

Programs assessed as sufficient were those that reported positive outcomes, but scored low on two main criteria. Reporting bias and study limitation were the main factors responsible for the grading of these programs as sufficient. The self-selection and staff selection of participants was a feature of study limitations for programs assessed as sufficient and are likely to represent limited resources for undertaking more formal rigorous evaluations (McCalman et al., 2006; O'Connor & Fisher, 2005; Wendt & Baker, 2013).

Effectiveness of programs: Insufficient levels of evidence

Over one third of programs were classified as having an insufficient level of evidence. The reasons for inclusion in this category were: not reporting or not being able to report the outcomes of the evaluation against the stated aims (Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs), 2007); only describing the process of the program and not reporting impact (Carnarvon Family Support Service Inc, 2003; Nickson et al., 2011); or a combination of self-selection, small samples and anecdotal evidence (Laing & Toivonen, 2012).

Limitations of the effectiveness review

Given that qualitative research can be more suitable for Indigenous engagement than surveys, trials and other quantitative evaluation, much of our knowledge and understanding of family violence in Indigenous communities has come from qualitative studies. Qualitative studies provide a rich source of information about the experiences of violence, the interrelationships between victims, perpetrators and families, wider community views and actions as well as cultural understandings of causal and prevention factors. However, qualitative data are not always suitable to assess for relative effectiveness of specific factors in initiatives and programs aimed at responding to violence. Our assessment is that mixed methods (where possible) create the best chance of achieving a robust evidence base as it allows for the inclusion of measures as well as Indigenous voices.

Measuring the impact of family violence programs and approaches including reductions in negative beliefs and behaviours, reduced service seeking, reduced hospitalisations from family violence related admissions and procedures, and reduced arrests for family violence is particularly hard for small scale programs and approaches to demonstrate. Larger programs with adequate resourcing may be able to measure these outcomes, however this was not possible for most programs and approaches assessed in this report.

Those evaluations using pre-post, longitudinal and multi-sites approaches were better able to report improved outcomes. Those evaluations that used qualitative data or triangulation were also able to provide greater context to evaluation outcomes. The effectiveness review found that there are relatively few evaluations and those that have been conducted are limited in their generalisability to other communities due to issues of consistency.

Method of assessment

We had to modify the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality classification system to allow for the mostly qualitative approach used by most of the programs in the effectiveness review. Where most evaluations fail to demonstrate program effectiveness is in the consistency and directness of criteria. To be considered direct the evaluation has to demonstrate that there is a direct link between the inputs of a program and the outcomes. It is hard to demonstrate the direct relationship between inputs and outcomes unless a randomised control trial is used. In overcoming this, some programs used longitudinal follow-up or pre-post designs. The majority did not.

The consistency criteria relates to similarity of findings across comparable studies. As most evaluations occurred in small communities or services, the same outcomes of a program would not necessarily be expected if applied in another community given the diversity of populations and the differing local circumstances for implementation.

One of the limitations of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality approach in this effectiveness review was the inability to confidently combine or group like evaluations together and analyse pooled outcomes. However, given the differing needs of different communities, differing approaches for complex interventions will likely be required as a one-size-fits-all approach would be inappropriate.

Other programs and approaches

Programs and interventions including the Assessment of the Risk of Reoffending by Indigenous Male Violent and Sexual Offenders did not fit within the classification system as they concern the development of screening instruments validated retrospectively on those convicted of family violence offences (although they may fit the category of early proactive). These types of instruments may be useful to predict risk of offending before family violence occurs. The authors rightly pointed out problems with this approach, in that the risk of predictive instruments may lead to pre-emptive risk profiling and incarceration, posing human rights issues this poses (Allan & Dawson, 2004).

Further, the review found that many initiatives are developed and implemented at the community level. These community level initiatives often operate outside broader service delivery programs and therefore we believe that there are likely to be many other community-level programs that have not been found using our review methodology.

The need for quality evidence

In reviewing and assessing the evidence for responses we note the need for dedicated resources to enhance the evidence base - in particular, information sharing about the positive progress that is being made in Indigenous communities. It can be time-consuming and costly to evaluate programs. The scientific rigour of program evaluation expected by academics and policy-makers may not always be possible in smaller projects as demonstrated in our evidence review, where one third of studies were assessed to provide insufficient evidence of meeting the intended program aim/s.

Determining the impact of family violence programs and approaches should include quantitative measures including reductions in negative beliefs and behaviours, reduced service seeking and treatment, reduced hospitalisations from family violence related admissions and procedures, and reduced arrests or recidivism. However, randomised control trials are often inappropriate for family violence programs and other pragmatic designs such as longitudinal and pre-post designs should be used instead. Larger programs with adequate resourcing may be able to measure these outcomes although effectiveness is particularly hard for small scale programs to demonstrate. As such, levels of evidence were low or insufficient in most of the programs assessed in this report.

Qualitative data should be used to contextualise and complement quantitative measures. Where qualitative methods have been incorporated, other effects, outcomes and experiences can be identified such as community support or building of trust and confidence among program participants. Funding for services and programs should include resources for Indigenous community input and assessment for community readiness and outcomes using qualitative methods.

Information sharing about positive progress made in Indigenous communities should be encouraged through the appropriate resourcing of program evaluation. Policies and interventions, as well as evidence building on the effectiveness of those approaches, need to involve Indigenous perspectives. In a time when evidence-based practice is necessary for funding, governments also need to be open-minded to evaluative approaches that include Indigenous viewpoints and the inappropriateness of randomised control trials for small scale culturally sensitive programs.

In summary, there are limited evaluation data on the effectiveness of policies and programs targeted at preventing and reducing violence against Indigenous women and thus funding for services and programs should include resources to implement quality evaluation including both qualitative and quantitative research.

Indigenous viewpoints on what works and what is needed

Given the lack of consensus over the causes of Indigenous violence, there are a variety of voices and viewpoints on how best to respond to it. As described in the section above, there is evidence for a range of large and small scale responses to violence against Indigenous women and Indigenous voices are regularly featured in the development or assessment of programs and initiatives.

Much of the literature reviewed in this report includes viewpoints of non-Indigenous researchers, advocates and commentators, including those which describe Indigenous viewpoints on what is needed. However, in this section we have, as much as possible, focused on the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of Indigenous Australians.

Holistic approaches

Dominant responses to family violence conceptualise the issue as a problem between two people and thus focus on providing short-term refuge and the implementation of the law to assist victims. While these components of a response to family violence can help to provide options for Indigenous people, they are not regarded as the most effective response (Gordon et al., 2002). The focus of government funding on individualised models of treatment and care for victims is seen as a barrier to responding to the complexities of Indigenous family violence (McCalman et al., 2006) and the legal system is seen as engendering and reinforcing historical oppression of Indigenous peoples (Cripps, 2007).

In line with ecological models that seek to understand and explain violence at the individual, family, community and societal levels (Cripps, 2010; Memmott et al., 2001; Wundersitz, 2010), literature on Indigenous responses to violence against women consistently makes reference to holistic approaches. Violence is seen as a multi-dimensional problem sharing many of its fundamental antecedents with a range of other health and social problems (Anderson, 2002) such as colonisation and marginalisation (Blair et al., 2014), drug and alcohol use, gambling and unemployment (Gentle & Taylor, 2002).

Family violence is characterised as a whole community problem and thus “the restoration of the fabric of the community and the culture is seen as integral and fundamental to addressing the problem of family violence” (Taylor et al 2004, p.81). Holistic, inter-sectoral strategies are perceived to attend to the needs of all members of the community (Anderson, 2002), including economic, social and structural issues relating to broader community issues (Cheers et al., 2006), the cultural context of family (Cripps, 2007), and healing rather than excluding or punishing perpetrators (Davis & Taylor, 2002b; Keel, 2004).

Central to holistic approaches to preventing and dealing with family violence, many reports focus on the normalisation of violence, particularly the issue of intergenerational violence. Colonisation, poverty and other social issues are believed to “lead to cycles of intergenerational abuse, with each successive generation failing to grow up being taught how to be respectful and recognise the rights of others” (Blair et al., 2014, p. 29). Reflecting the concern that violence is normalised in some settings, the National Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Women's Health Strategy includes a recommendation that violence in Indigenous communities should be de-normalised through the provision of supportive environments such as community development opportunities to promote the value of women (Fredericks et al., 2010).

In stark contrast to dominant approaches to criminalising family violence offenders, a common theme across the literature is the belief that holistic models must incorporate a role for the offender "...in recognition of the perpetrator being a direct part of and/or extended family" (Southern Domestic Violence Service & Nunga Mi Minar, 2007; Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015). Based on concepts of kin and community, Indigenous people believe that support is needed for everybody within the family, including the perpetrator (Cripps, 2007). Programs should aim to strengthen family and social ties, and ensure continued cultural growth by keeping families together (O'Shane, 2002; Tayton et al., 2014).

In summary, Indigenous voices call for multi-component programs that address the broader wellbeing of Indigenous families and communities including the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

Community empowerment

Within this overall integrated and holistic response, Indigenous commentators report that Indigenous communities need to have a more significant role in shaping program and service response (Cripps, 2007; Gordon et al., 2002; McGlade & Hovane, 2007). Many argue that the approaches that are Indigenous-led and staffed, involve family and other community members, and are based on self-determination, are most effective (Chan, 2005; Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015; Victims of Crime Coordinator, 2009). As a part of the holistic approach a community-led focus was seen to be using existing community strengths and building new ones to repair structural issues (McCalman et al., 2006). In particular, there was a concern about the persistence of family violence across generations and the normalisation of violent behaviour (Keel, 2004; Memmott, 2010). Family violence was not seen as custom or tradition but rather a sign of community dysfunction resulting from colonisation (McGlade, 2006). Authors called for community-led approaches to name and reject domestic violence (Rawsthorne et al., 2010).

Because Indigenous family violence is, in part, attributed to the breakdown of traditional culture and kinship practices, the rebuilding of these family and kinship ties are often seen as central to developing any type of response to Indigenous family violence (Cripps, 2007; Memmott, 2010). In contrast to the individualised services provided across much of Australia, it is considered essential to acknowledge that all family members are affected by violence (Cripps, 2010). Strong kinship ties are considered essential to community healing where families can reconcile in order to move on in life in a constructive way (Memmott, 2010). For example, there are a number of community projects that aim to increase awareness of family violence and develop communication and conflict resolution skills and resilience through locally developed resources or activities such as art classes (Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs), 2007).

The broader issue of social and economic empowerment of women was a common theme in the literature, however many authors stressed that the Western feminist approach to women's empowerment was not suitable. Instead of basing community empowerment on Western feminist theory authors called for Indigenous women to reclaim their voices through Indigenous knowledge systems (Smallacombe, 2004).

This can be seen as a strategy to place family violence on the public agenda as defined by Indigenous people (Cripps, 2007).

Some of the specific community-led approaches discussed in the literature include:

- training an Indigenous workforce (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010c);
- distinguishing "women's" from "men's" business, separating the roles that both men and women play in addressing violence (Keel, 2004) and using men's gatherings and women's gatherings (Pugh, 2006);
- using or developing Indigenous material such as visual images or artwork as a more culturally familiar and less confrontational way of talking about violence (Keel, 2004);
- developing culturally appropriate safe houses for women and children (Memmott et al., 2009);
- developing flexible appointments and program sessions (Thorpe, Solomon, & Dimopoulos, 2004);
- developing programs that include offenders as part of the healing process (Thorpe et al., 2004);
- developing community-led education about family violence (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010c);
- valuing elders as mentors and support people playing central roles on programs and services (Southern Domestic Violence Service & Nunga Mi Minar, 2007);
- including women staff at services (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010c);
- developing anti-violence education campaigns to raise public consciousness about the extent of the problem and ways to address it (Moore, 2002; O'Shane, 2002); and
- providing community development opportunities to de-normalise violence; for example, promoting the value of women in the community, men supporting women, and increased knowledge that family violence is illegal and unacceptable (Fredericks et al., 2010; Rawsthorne et al., 2010).

Led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, there has been government support for practical and flexible grassroots projects to address family violence in Indigenous communities (Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs), 2007).

Culturally appropriate mainstream services

Despite the focus on Indigenous-led responses to violence against Indigenous women there was also an understanding that general services can and do offer important options for Indigenous families and communities and that partnerships between services would be fruitful (Keel, 2004; Memmott, 2010). For example, evidence suggests that general family violence programs can be well received when delivered by an Indigenous organisation in the position to offer social and community support and connection to the wider community (Tayton et al., 2014).

Many Indigenous people report not wanting to or fearing accessing non-Indigenous services and the literature contains a number of examples for improving and developing culturally appropriate services (or partnerships) for family violence:

- employing Indigenous workers or partnering with Indigenous services (Lumby & Farrelly, 2009; Rawsthorne et al., 2010);
- establishing communications pathways which promote integrated service delivery and continuity of service (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015);
- providing culturally competent service delivery for Indigenous families in regional and urban areas (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015);
- developing models or frameworks acknowledging the past practices of governments including how contemporary Indigenous family violence is impacted by this history (Widders, 2003);
- providing cultural awareness training for police, lawyers, judges, support workers and service providers (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010b; Laing, 2013);
- enhancing communication from the police and lawyers with the victims of crime about the laws and processes as cases proceed (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010a);
- providing a range of services and long term assistance to improve service use and outcomes (Wendt & Baker, 2013) for Indigenous victims of family violence presenting with a wide range of protection, psychological, mental health, accommodation, financial and child assistance needs (Victims of Crime Coordinator, 2009);
- understanding that Indigenous women may use refuges differently from non-Indigenous women (Gordon et al., 2002): Indigenous women are more likely to use refuges for immediate safety rather than intending to separate in the long term;

- recognising services should cater for families, particularly children, not just women alone (Wendt & Baker, 2013); and
- providing one-on-one counselling, stressing that counsellors need to be culturally aware, as well as the focus on family centred approaches (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010c).

Culturally appropriate justice system responses

For many commentators the need for culturally appropriate justice responses lies in the negative perceptions of police and legal system among Indigenous Australians (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010a) as well as the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in Australian prisons (Toki, 2009). Indeed, statistics show that violence is a significant mediating factor resulting in incarceration for Indigenous people. Indigenous men are more likely to be sentenced to prison for family violence offences than non-Indigenous men (Jeffries & Bond, 2014; Ringland & Fitzgerald, 2010).

Personal and family experiences with the criminal justice system are reflected in community attitudes towards dealing with family violence and Indigenous viewpoints on justice are often in contrast to current criminal justice approaches. For example, research suggests that many Indigenous victims who do report violent incidents to police do so in order to remove the immediate threat, but do not necessarily want the offender arrested or charged (Victims of Crime Coordinator, 2009). These actions or motivations are not necessarily understood or managed within the criminal justice system.

The conflict in values and attitudes between Indigenous viewpoints and the criminal justice system is a common theme in the literature (Carney, 2004; Cox et al., 2009; Stubbs, 2004). Indigenous approaches to justice and family violence are aimed at reducing the number of Indigenous people in prison as well as human rights (Larsen & Petersen, 2001) and self-determination (Hovane, 2007). Broadly, commentators advocate for the empowerment of Indigenous women and communities in playing a role in the criminal justice system's response to family violence (Bhandari, 2003; McGlade, 2006) as well as the use of a culturally appropriate justice system able to understand the issue of family violence in the context of social and structural disadvantage (Stubbs & Tolmie, 2008). A number of community justice and healing approaches, broadly called Indigenous sentencing courts, have been developed and evaluated (Cox et al., 2009; Lawrie & Matthews, 2002). Descriptions of the aims and outcomes of these sentencing courts differ in the literature. While many authors describe these approaches as restorative justice (Cox et al., 2009; Morgan & Louis, 2010), others argue that the court process are based on "therapeutic jurisprudence" as well as a political foundation of cultural recognition and empowerment (Marchetti, 2014b). Despite these differences in definition, it is agreed that Indigenous sentencing approaches focus on helping offenders to change their behaviour and assisting families to rebuild relationships (Atkinson, 2002; Marchetti, 2014b; Widders, 2003).

Indigenous courts currently in use in Australia do not practise customary law, but allow Elders and community representatives to participate in the process of enacting Australian criminal laws, thereby creating a more culturally appropriate justice response for Indigenous communities (Marchetti, 2014b; McGlade, 2006). This includes an emphasis on addressing the underlying issues for Indigenous perpetrators, not just presenting issues (Hovane, 2007). A key aim of the process is to encourage perpetrators to take responsibility for their violence (Cheers et al., 2006).

Research suggests that Indigenous women preferred Indigenous sentencing court approaches to family violence issues, except in cases of homicide and serious assault or abuse (Nancarrow, 2006). According to Morgan and Louis (2010, p. 132), Indigenous victims and offenders reportedly found Indigenous sentencing courts to be fairer and more culturally appropriate for Indigenous clients than mainstream court processes because:

- Elders are in a designated position of authority in the court process;
- Indigenous people are directly involved in the court process;
- Indigenous traditions are acknowledged within court practice, such as the display of Indigenous artwork and flag in the courtroom; and
- the more adversarial elements of the Magistrates court are removed.

Other potential approaches to Indigenous sentencing courts identified by Indigenous women include:

- mediation involving extended family members;
- outstations where Elders guide people to achieve a sense of belonging and self-worth; and
- community or family meetings. (Nancarrow, 2006)

It is important to note that, in addition to the positive evaluations and responses to Indigenous sentencing court approaches, there are a number of concerns about the appropriateness of these approaches for violent offences including the potential for these systems to be too lenient on offenders, too harsh in sentencing and lacking provision of safety and additional services for victims (Siegel, 2003). While such models generally exclude sexual assault cases (McGlade, 2006), some commentators have challenged the appropriateness of specialist Indigenous sentencing courts in adequately addressing family violence as the process has the potential to diminish the significance of the offence by suggesting that it can be resolved through “mediation”

(Weatherburn, 2010). Further, the safety of the victim should not be jeopardised and contact between the victim and the perpetrator must be contained and controlled (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010c). Gender and power imbalances are also discussed, particularly where panels of Elders do not include men and women (Faulkner, 2009). Marchetti (2010), for example, found that because victims are present at Indigenous sentencing courts they are at risk of experiencing further controlling behaviours and abuse without appropriate support. Indigenous sentencing courts attempt to address these power imbalances between offenders and victims in culturally appropriate ways such as through the use of “shaming”. More research is needed “to determine what impact the courts have on offenders and victims of intimate partner violence” (Marchetti, 2010, p. 32). Finally, the effects of these approaches on re-offending are unknown (Marchetti, 2010; Weatherburn, 2010). Due to limitations in the research it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of Australian Indigenous sentencing courts. However, research suggests that “they do provide a more culturally appropriate sentencing process, which is able to consider the wider circumstances of a defendant’s life, and that they facilitate increased participation by the offender and the broader Indigenous community in the sentencing process” (Marchetti, 2014b, p. 348).

Appropriate funding and support

Authors point to the difficulties implementing community-led solutions to family violence in Indigenous communities due to a lack of policy and economic support (McCalman et al., 2006). Indigenous communities can be geographically isolated with small populations lacking human and financial resources, training and other community services (O’Shane, 2002). Additionally, a significant proportion of Indigenous Australians live in major cities and regions where services are available, yet culturally competent service delivery may be lacking (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015).

Funding constraints and inflexible funding guidelines mean that, at times, government funding is only available for models of service delivery that have “proven” to be successful. Yet, as demonstrated in this report, many delivery models and programs developed in Indigenous communities have not been comprehensively evaluated. Many of the responses appear to be funded as trial programs, however developing meaningful and effective working relationships between services and communities is unlikely to occur through short-term projects (Keel, 2004; Pugh, 2006; Smallacombe, 2004). Indigenous commentators call for ongoing planned and consistent funding for service provision (Gordon et al., 2002).

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