

NT DFSV Training and Resource Centre Consultation

An ANROWS submission to the
NT Government

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ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

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Content warning: This submission includes the names of Aboriginal women who have died. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this may cause distress.

Strengthening practice through evidence

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan) prioritises growing the evidence base.¹ ongoing commitment will help sustain progress by supporting DFV service providers to strengthen practice through applying existing evidence and adapting to emerging insights. In alignment with Australia's National Research Agenda to End Violence Against Women and Children 2023-2028 (Research Agenda), the DFV sector can strengthen outcomes by working inclusively with evidence, valuing practitioner expertise, lived experience and Indigenous methodologies, and making better use of data and learnings from community-led initiatives. (Lloyd et al. 2023).

The NT Government is demonstrating its strong commitment to evidence-informed practice by supporting ANROWS to evaluate two men's behaviour change programs in the Territory. This work ensures approaches are grounded in the most effective evidence for NT communities.

ANROWS welcomes the opportunity to work with the NT Government to embed evidence-informed findings and practices into the design, governance and delivery of the TRC, ensuring training and support reflect what works best for NT communities.

Recommendations

ANROWS welcomes opportunities to collaborate with the NT Government to:

- Invest in research and flexible, ongoing evaluation in the NT so the TRC can draw on strong local, contextualised evidence and help services respond to implementation needs.
- Refine the theory of change, develop a practical monitoring framework and resource data collection in Year 1. This can reduce admin pressure on frontline staff and ensure measurement focuses on what matters most for learning and improvement.
- Use evidence to guide training, practice and the functioning and governance of the TRC.
 - Use an inclusive approach to evidence that aligns with the Research Agenda.
 - Apply place-based evidence to reflect local contexts.
 - Centre Aboriginal perspectives in all stages of the work.
 - Align with the Australian Government Data Governance Framework and uphold Indigenous data sovereignty principles.
- Embed a supportive accountability mechanism, guided by a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, so that insights and recommendations lead to concrete outcomes.
- Resource evaluations to engage First Nations evaluators and collect data in culturally safe ways, including in rural and remote communities.
- Share learnings from all NT DFSV evaluations to support transparency, accountability and continuous improvement, ensuring policy, practice and training are grounded in evidence, shaped by NT communities and embedded across TRC resources.
- Strengthen the evaluation approach by using clear and specific language that is practical to apply, supporting accountability, useful learning and continuous improvement across the TRC.

¹ In this submission we use DFV when referring to findings and recommendations that draw from research focused on DFV-only (i.e. that does not specifically capture sexual violence), and DFSV when referring to the NT DFSV TRC and when referring to implications and findings with relevance across the DFSV sector.

The context of DFV in the NT

ANROWS' recent work in the NT includes an evaluation of the two men's behaviour change programs (Hamilton et al. 2025). This work investigated DFSV user responses across the justice, legal, child protection, health, specialist domestic, family and sexual violence, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) and other community services sectors. It draws attention to the unique contextual challenges of DFV in the NT. The TRC can shape its governance and operations to fit the NT context, so services deliver better outcomes for local communities.

Rates of DFV in the NT are higher than in any other Australian jurisdiction. In 2023 rates of DFV-related assault were 3.5 times the national average (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2024b),² and the rate of DFV-related homicide was 3 times the national average (ABS 2024b).³ Aboriginal people are significantly over-represented in the NT criminal-legal and justice system and in DFV incident reports (ABS 2024a).⁴ There is a common misconception that DFV in the NT is an Aboriginal problem (Our Watch, n.d.).

Aboriginal experiences of DFV in Australia are impacted by, and must be understood in the context of, ongoing colonialism and racism and overlapping with other systems of inequity including gender inequity. These legacies continue to affect Aboriginal communities through stigma, discrimination, community disruption, dispossession and trauma passed across generations (Atkinson 2002; Commonwealth of Australia 2023). These ongoing impacts contribute to higher rates of violence, harm and trauma for Aboriginal women, children and families across Australia (Cripps and McGlade 2008; Our Watch 2018; Commonwealth of Australia 2023).

While the experiences of Aboriginal women across Australia have been found to have overlapping similarities, they also manifest contingent differences, shaped by the particular pattern of colonisation in different locations (Blagg et al. 2018). In the NT, the ongoing effects of the 2007 Intervention continue to shape the lives of Aboriginal people. Some of its measures targeted Aboriginal communities in ways that weakened cultural authority, self-determination and community strength (Vivian 2010). The effects of these interventions are reflected in systemic social, economic, health and wellbeing issues which intersect with gendered drivers to contribute to the high rates of DFV in these communities and exacerbate its impacts.

Many people in the NT face multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage that heighten both the use and impacts of DFV. This is especially true for Aboriginal people, who make up a far larger share of the NT population than in any other jurisdiction (ABS 2021). Structural and systemic racism compounds other challenges, including poverty, homelessness, overcrowded and insecure housing,⁵ physical and mental health issues, alcohol and drug use,

² DFV-related assault rate (per 100,000). The latest data available from the ABS Recorded Victims dataset is from 2023 – released June 2024.

³ Homicide and related offence rate (per 100,000).

⁴ Aboriginal people accounted for 88 per cent of the DFV-related assault victim survivors in the Northern Territory in 2021, and 79 per cent of these were women; 63 per cent of prisoners are held for DFV-related offences (time period unknown). Source: Northern Territory Government. Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. Review of Legislation and the Justice Response to Domestic and Family Violence in the Northern Territory: Proposals for consultation. 22 August 2022.

⁵ The rate of Specialist Homelessness Services clients who have experienced DFV is more than 4 times higher in the NT than nationally. The NT homelessness rate is 12 times the national average, and 89 per cent of people experiencing homelessness in the NT are Aboriginal. The total unmet demand for housing in the NT is estimated

unemployment and broader socio-economic disadvantage (Corbo and Brown 2020). Remoteness, limited infrastructure, and a stretched service system with significant workforce pressures also make it harder to prevent and respond to DFV (Northern Territory Government 2023), particularly when organisations struggle to recruit and retain specialist staff (Northern Territory Government 2020).

ANROWS' evaluation identified resource constraints and system pressures as key areas for strengthening in NT services. Limited funding and high workloads can make coordination challenging, with collaboration often relying on individual relationships (Hamilton et al. 2025). This finding reflects Coroner Armitage's finding in the Coronial *Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupinju, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood*, 2024. A transient workforce and limited specialist skills create challenges in supporting men who use DFV. Many workers without DFV expertise need more training and support to respond in safe and appropriate ways (Hamilton et al. 2025). Further, there is a lack of service options for Aboriginal users of DFV in the Top End. There is only one MBCP funded by the NT Government in the greater Darwin region, delivered by a generalist organisation (Hamilton et al. 2025).

This context has clear implications for the TRC:

- **Governance:** The TRC can strengthen its impact by using governance and ways of working that support equity and reflect NT distinct challenges. Embedding genuine power sharing can support stronger relationships with Aboriginal communities and the wider sector. Clear information about the TRC's independence, transparency and accountability can support confidence in its role. Aligning its position and relationships with the sector will help build buy-in and support its purpose.
- **Role of the NT Government:** The NT Government can play a constructive role in the TRC by supporting strong relationships across the sector and being clear about how its decision-making works in practice. By focusing on partnership, shared decision making and practical support for community-led solutions, the NT Government can help the TRC add real value where it is needed most.
- **Commissioning:** Competitive tendering can make it harder for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to secure funding, particularly when they are competing with larger non-Indigenous organisations. Reporting requirements may place extra pressure on ACCOs and may not align with frontline needs or ways of working (SNAICC 2023). A commissioning approach that supports ACCOs can strengthen culturally safe services and ensure funding reaches where it is most needed.
 - As described in a recent ANROWS (2025a) webinar exploring Indigenous methodologies, Nicole Tujague co-founder of the Seedling Group described how the tendering process “wasn’t the way we as mob work. It creates lateral violence. It, you know, people would come with their budget and we’d be going, but you can’t do that in your budget.” The way we work is as important as the work itself. This is clearly set out in the National Research Agenda.
- **Recognising existing training in the NT:** The NT has strong expertise and collaboration already delivering training. The TRC can build on this by coordinating efforts, adding value and strengthening what exists. Its success will rely on the skills of people already doing this work. Supporting current providers to continue, and resourcing areas where demand is growing, can help expand access to high quality training across the NT. Recognising and using existing knowledge, relationships and delivery partners from the beginning will help the TRC achieve its goals.

at 10,000 dwellings across urban and remote locations. Northern Territory Government. Mapping of current investment and activity to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. Northern Territory Government. 2023. <https://fhc.nt.gov.au/domestic-family-and-sexual-violence-reduction/domestic-and-family-violence-reduction-strategy>

- **Training related to working with people using violence:** The capability framework can be more targeted and clearer. Outlining the workforce's training needs in more detail will help show exactly what skills and development areas are required. For example, training on non-collusion practices is essential for workers who engage with people who use violence. Being specific about these needs will support the TRC to provide training that aligns with workforce priorities and strengthens accountability.
- **Remoteness:** The TRC can strengthen its impact by having a clear and supportive strategy to reach the workforce in remote areas. A specific plan can outline how longer term funding, greater investment and flexible delivery will support local recruitment, retention and training, which are more challenging in remote than metropolitan areas. It is also important to consider how remoteness affects collaboration, knowledge sharing and costs, including travel, so resourcing is realistic and enables strong connections across the NT.
- **Whole-of-system approach:** Training alone will not deliver the workforce development needed. The TRC can show how training links to broader system strengthening efforts, including wraparound support and service coordination. Positioning the TRC within a holistic and sustainable approach will help improve how the whole system prevents and responds to DFSV.

Lessons from evidence beyond the NT

There is a strong opportunity for the NT to grow local evidence and draw on proven approaches from other parts of Australia.

In 2023, Office for Women South Australia (OfW) commissioned ANROWS to evaluate four National Plan partnership initiatives involving seven services across four focus areas: early intervention, First Nations whole-of-family approaches, people using or at risk of using violence and recovery. The findings of this evaluation (publication forthcoming) offer learnings that can inform the NT TRC:

- **Flexible funding reflective of service continuum:** The evaluation found that risk and safety levels change over time, with many victim survivors moving in and out of crisis. This challenges linear funding and service pathways across prevention, response, recovery and healing, and can affect service eligibility at different points. Services already work flexibly across all National Plan domains. Funding can better reflect these changing needs and support responses for both victim survivors and people who use violence.
- **Training across the National Plan domains:** Workforce needs to have combined expertise across crisis intervention, early intervention, healing and recovery. The TRC can strengthen workforce skills across the system, recognising that people's needs shift and services must adapt (e.g. fluid, adaptive to client needs.)
- **Wrap around services:** Tailored and responsive wrap-around services are far more effective (McCulloch et al. 2016). Embedding family safety contact workers in men's behaviour change programs, and continuing support after programs end, can strengthen safety and accountability (Seamer 2024; Morran 2022). Ongoing support and flexible funding for victim survivors, including children and young people, and for users of violence when they relocate is also important, so their history and safety plans travel with them (*Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupiŋu, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood, 2024*).
- **Whole-of-family approaches:** ANROWS' evaluation found that whole-of-family approaches strengthen early intervention and recovery by increasing visibility of people who use or may use violence, managing risk and safety for all family members including children, and addressing intersecting risks such as AOD and mental health while directly challenging DFSV attitudes and behaviours (Hamilton et al. 2025). While whole-of-family models are not a substitute for targeted victim-survivor-focused approaches, they present a

promising opportunity, particularly where families wish to stay together or remain connected, as broader and ongoing assessment will improve safety. Whole-of-family approaches offer promising practice for the TRC to draw on when building a culturally informed and DFSV-skilled workforce.

- **Non-DFSV workforce training and integration:** Multi-disciplinary teams with expertise such as NDIS, AOD, mental health and financial counselling can provide strong integrated support for families (Hamilton et al. 2025). Expanding DFSV capability across health, housing and community services can create multiple safe and warm entry points for support, build early intervention and recovery capacity, and ensure people receive holistic responses wherever they seek help. The community development activities in the Early intervention, Assessment, Support and Empowerment (EASE) program⁶ showed significant promise in this regard and could serve as a model for expanding cross-sector education and training (ANROWS National Plan partnership initiative evaluation forthcoming).
- **Cultural safety requirements:** ANROWS' evaluation recommended strengthening cultural safety requirements in contracts for non-community led DFV services. This includes mandating training delivered by ACCOs or Aboriginal organisations and ensuring frontline workers who support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients have access to cultural supervision. (Hamilton et al. 2025). The evaluation also recommended developing an Aboriginal DFV peak body to:
 - Inform government's development of the DFV sector to ensure responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities; and
 - Create an accountability mechanism for mainstream DFV services and oversee DFV and support sector training (and accreditation) regarding cultural safety.

TRC functions and objectives

- **Set clear objectives:** Clearer objectives aligned with an evaluation framework can support accountability, learning and adaptation.
- **Prioritise secure employment opportunities:** High staff turnover in sessional training pools makes capability hard to sustain, especially in rural and remote areas where services are already limited (Day et al. 2019; Cullen et al. 2022). Workforce shortages across the DFSV sector further reduce the availability of trainers who often come from frontline roles (Campbell et al. 2025; Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission 2025). Secure employment options, such as part time contracts or a preferred provider panel model, and backfilling staff time during training can strengthen workforce stability and support ongoing collaboration and service delivery (Cullen et al. 2022).
- **Consider access to clinical supervision:** It is important for workers' wellbeing and safety that they have access to clinical supervision beyond their line managers, and ideally external. There could be a role for the TRC to play in the provision/ facilitation of clinical supervision.
- **Establish sector collaboration early:** Securing genuine buy-in may take longer than the Phase 1 timeframe. The functions focused on collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, communities of practice and strengthening culture are important, and many practitioners already work in these ways. The TRC can build on locally led solutions by supporting and expanding approaches that are already trusted and working well. The success of the Queensland Framework shows the value of taking time to consult, co-develop and build trust with the sector. That process took 2.5 years and produced a credible and useful framework that resonated with the workforce because relationships had been built and commitments followed through.

⁶ See <https://www.centacare.org.au/programs/earlier-access-to-support-engagement>

- **Consider language and accessibility:** Meeting language and accessibility needs can help the TRC engage and support a broader and more diverse workforce.
- **Define the learning approach:** The learning approach can use adult learning principles to ensure content is engaging, relevant and practical for participants' roles. Clear learning outcomes for both participants and facilitators can then be measured to track progress (Adult Learning Australia 2025).
- **Align with existing practice frameworks:** The TRC can draw on existing practice frameworks to support learning, including:
 - ANROWS frameworks: *Quality practice elements for men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) in the Northern Territory* (ANROWS 2025b)
 - *Connecting the dots Practice Framework* (Foley et al. 2023)
 - *Prioritising victim/survivor safety in Australian perpetrator interventions* (Green et al. 2020),
 - *Responding to sexual violence against trans women of colour from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds* (Hawkey & Ussher 2020)
 - *Invisible Practices: Working with fathers who use violence* (Healey et al. 2018)
 - *SUSTAIN Guidelines: The “REAL” Transformation Model* (Hegarty et al. 2020)
 - *Overarching principles for responses across the service system* (Hegarty et al. 2022)
 - *Healing our children and young people: A framework to address the impacts of domestic and family violence* (Morgan et al. 2023)
 - *Advocacy with and for Aboriginal women experiencing domestic and family violence* (Putt et al. 2017)
- **Improve capability across universal sectors:** There is an opportunity to recognise the strengths that universal workers bring, while also acknowledging the distinction between services working in universal as compared with DFSV specialist contexts. While there will be overlap, needs and targeted training between universal and DFSV specialist contexts may be different. The MARAM model in Victoria is a good example of having different levels of training for different levels of interaction with victim-survivors (see training delivered by [Safe & Equal](#)), and people using violence (see training delivered by [No to Violence](#)).
- **Align with training across sectors to avoid duplication:** The TRC can align with existing training in related sectors to avoid duplication, reduce workforce burden and ensure continuity between DFSV and universal services. Mapping current training options in the NT and beyond, including tertiary and vocational pathways, will help the TRC add value to the broader ecosystem. Clear links with NT Police training developed by the Attorney-General Department, as well as Prevent Assist Respond PARt training.⁷, can support consistent messaging and shared understanding.

Feasibility, practicality and usefulness of the TRC

- **Implementation strategy:** ANROWS-funded research shows that while many workplaces provide cultural competency training, this has not translated into culturally safe practice when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Cullen et al. 2022). Training matters, but the workforce also needs support to apply learning in systems that still operate within colonising structures and cause harm (Cullen et al. 2022). ACCOs are already leading promising, locally informed approaches, highlighting the importance of partnering with them, strengthening place-based implementation and addressing barriers that prevent lessons from being put into practice.
- **Evidence-informed capability models across Australia:** Building on capability frameworks already used in other states offers the NT an opportunity to accelerate outcomes. A consistent, evidence-informed approach can strengthen coordination, reduce

⁷ See <https://doyourpart.com.au/>

duplication and improve outcomes for victim survivors. By connecting NT strengths with national efforts, the TRC can help lift capability while ensuring training reflects local contexts. ANROWS can support this through national coordination, evidence translation and sharing learnings across jurisdictions. An integrated and well-resourced hub and spoke model may be particularly useful in remote areas to improve coordination, consistency and service access (Wendt et al. 2017).

- **Intermediate and advanced training opportunities:** The consultation paper focuses on baseline training, but the TRC could have impact across foundational, intermediate and advanced levels. The National Plan emphasises that foundational work alone is not enough. Three key considerations include:
 - Support across all workforce levels: Intermediate and advanced workers need targeted training for complex situations (Family Safety Victoria 2017). They are essential for safe responses and for supporting foundational staff (Cortis et al. 2018). Resourcing these roles helps recruitment and retention across the system.
 - Clarify the TRC's role in foundational training: Foundational training may be delivered through higher education or other training providers. The TRC can focus on consistency, alignment and value adding to existing training rather than duplicating effort.
 - Include whole-of-organisation development: Training at organisational and team levels supports implementation, mentoring and cross-team capability.
- **Feasibility risk matrix:** Delivery and uptake of training in the NT will be shaped by factors such as remoteness, cultural and linguistic diversity, high staff turnover, competing priorities, weather disruptions, connectivity issues and cultural practices like sorry business. These challenges can limit access and delay implementation. A risk matrix and an action learning approach in the early phase can help anticipate barriers, adapt quickly and support more sustainable outcomes for the TRC.
- **Evolving delivery landscape:** The NT sector has engaged in extensive consultation over the past five years, demonstrating strong commitment and momentum. With rapid policy and legislative change underway, the TRC has a valuable opportunity to build on this foundation and move into implementation that reflects current priorities. Clarifying the timeframe for developing the capability framework, and how it will stay agile and responsive to emerging needs across different workforces, will support confidence in the process. By building on progress already happening, the TRC can remain relevant and add real value in a fast-evolving environment.

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Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS) is the country's independent, trusted voice for reliable and informed evidence on domestic, family and sexual violence.

ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments under Australia's first National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010–2022). As an ongoing partner to the National Plan, ANROWS continues to build, strengthen and translate the evidence base that informs the current National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

Our work is underpinned by a commitment to producing high-quality, policy-relevant evidence to inform and influence practice, service delivery, and systems reform. Since our establishment, ANROWS has led, contributed to, or commissioned more than 150 research projects. We undertake targeted research both internally and in collaboration with academic institutions and sector partners.

Every aspect of our work is motivated by the right of women and children to live free from violence and in safe, equitable communities. We engage closely with victim-survivors, communities, service providers, governments and policymakers to ensure our work reflects the diversity of lived experiences and supports collective responses.

We are committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and work to recognise and amplify the strength and knowledge that exists in First Nations communities.

ANROWS is a not-for-profit organisation jointly funded by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments. We are also commissioned from time to time by individual jurisdictions, and competitively tender for research and evaluation work.

We are registered as a harm prevention charity and deductible gift recipient, governed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

ANROWS