



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan

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March 2023

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## Our commitment to inclusion

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The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: [salvationarmy.org.au/about-us](https://salvationarmy.org.au/about-us)

The Salvation Army is an international movement and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

More information about The Salvation Army is at **Appendix A**.





## Executive summary

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The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to inform the development of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan (Action Plan) under the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

The Salvation Army operates family and domestic violence services in almost all states and territories in Australia. It is critical to us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a say into and ownership of healing and support at all our services, regardless of whether they are situated in metropolitan, rural or remote areas.

It is well documented that in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are much more likely to experience family and domestic violence and that the prevalence and severity of this violence increases with remoteness.<sup>1</sup>

The statistics paint an alarming picture. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 27 times as likely to be hospitalised for assault as non-Indigenous women and deaths due to homicide were 7.6 times as high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as non-Indigenous women.<sup>2</sup>

Internal data from The Salvation Army's women's refuges also reflects the alarming reality of violence being perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:

- At Catherine Booth House in Darwin, **71.7 per cent of clients identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**.
- In Karratha, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women account for **89 to 92 per cent of clients at any given time**.
- At Carinya Cottage in Illawarra, to date this year **15 out of 18 women and 29 out of 36 children** at the refuge have identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- At McComb House in Tasmania, **8 out of 56 women and 15 out of 86 children identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander** in the 2021 to 2022 financial year
- At Bramwell House in South Australia, **12% of clients identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**
- In The Salvation Army's family and domestic violence services in Victoria, **114 clients out of 3,819** identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the 2021 to 2022 financial year

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<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2014 Report*, Australian Government, 2014 <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/2014/key-indicators-2014-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Indigenous Australians Agency. (2020). 2.10 Community Safety. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-10-community-safety>.



The Salvation Army's Red Shield Appeal 2023 report found that more than **one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (35 percent) said that the experience of family and domestic violence was one of their main challenges in the past 12 months**. This compared to one in four (26 percent) non-Indigenous women.

The current trajectory of local programs being overlooked and underfunded needs to change if we want to achieve Target 13 of the National Agreement of Closing the Gap.<sup>3</sup>

The single most crucial gap in the proposed Action Plan Framework is that it does not address the importance of having access to safe and affordable homes for women escaping family and domestic violence.

Every day, the lack of access to safe homes is putting women and children at continued risk of violence. It prevents them recovering and rebuilding their lives. The social and affordable housing shortfall also puts refuges and crisis accommodation under serious pressure, as women stay for extended periods because they cannot exit to permanent homes.

Housing policy is a critical area where the government can take action and its importance in ensuring safety for victim-survivors must be reflected in the Action Plan in order to achieve real outcomes.

The overarching principles framing and guiding this submission are:

- There is a need to **address unconscious bias and racism**. We continue to see responses from both government and non-government services towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors that are not culturally safe.
- Responses in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to be **community-led, culturally informed and accessible to victim-survivors with diverse needs**. A place-based approach is needed where programs are designed to respond to the specific needs of one community.
- The best way to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors of family and domestic violence is to **increase the stock of affordable and social housing**. Without an increase in investment victim-survivors will continue to be forced to choose between remaining in a violent relationship or entering into homelessness.

The Salvation Army has made 14 recommendations for the Commonwealth Government to consider implementing under the Action Plan. A summary of these recommendations follows on the next page.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission. Socioeconomic outcome area 13 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe. <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area13>.



# Summary of Recommendations

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## Recommendation 1

2.8 The Salvation Army recommends when assessing funding applications for services aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, the Commonwealth Government preference programs that have been co-designed with the community. This includes partnerships where non-Indigenous organisations provide support with governance and contract management.

## Recommendation 2

2.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government provides long term funding to support the expansion of community-led, locally embedded, programs that have a culturally safe approach while keeping women and children safe.

## Recommendation 3

2.15 The Salvation Army recommends that Commonwealth Government funds culturally appropriate child and adolescent family and domestic violence services, to support children and adolescents who have either been exposed to family and domestic violence or who have perpetrated violence.

## Recommendation 4

2.21 The Salvation Army recommends that Commonwealth Government adopt a national definition for family and domestic violence that includes both physical and non-physical forms of violence. The definition needs to include a recognition of the broad range of kinship relationships in which violence may occur.

## Recommendation 5

2.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government works with state and territory governments to implement specialist training for the family and domestic violence service system (both government and non-government services) on unconscious bias and racism and to ensure training is repeated regularly. Training should include understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' resistance to police intervention and strategies to support victim-survivor cooperation.

## Recommendation 6

2.28 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government builds the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce within the response to family and domestic violence. This should include building the cultural capability of the workforce to make an inclusive and culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

## Recommendation 7

2.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government funds positions that support service providers adapt their service delivery for people with intersecting needs.



### **Recommendation 8**

2.36 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government prioritises the voices of lived experience when rolling out programs in rural areas, to ensure that the programs are tailored to the needs of a particular community.

### **Recommendation 9**

2.40 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government invests in specific programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders who are victim-survivors of family and domestic violence. The funding of such programs should account for necessary complementary services, such as support for the ongoing negative effects of colonisation, access to a health service and carer, and the additional transport required.

### **Recommendation 10**

2.48 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government supports the development of a data and evidence eco-system that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities.

### **Recommendation 11**

3.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government invests in social housing specifically for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.

### **Recommendation 12**

2.35 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government increases the stock of transitional and crisis accommodation – particularly in regions and rural areas where there are no or limited crisis options.

### **Recommendation 13**

3.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government invests in perpetrator intervention programs that are community driven and culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men that use violence.

### **Recommendation 14**

3.16 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body for family, domestic and sexual violence and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Commissioner.





# 1 Drivers of Violence

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- 1.1 There is no single driver of family and domestic violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The causes of family and domestic violence do not derive from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Rather, family and domestic violence must be understood within the historical context and ongoing impacts of colonisation and settlement.
- 1.2 This includes understanding how social issues that lead to violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, such as alcohol misuse, are themselves symptoms of the complex legacies of colonisation, inequality and racism.
- 1.3 Our Watch's 2018 resource, 'Changing the Picture'<sup>4</sup> outlines the following three intersecting drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:
  1. **Ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities.** This includes intergenerational trauma, destruction of traditional cultures and systemic oppression.
  2. **Ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-Indigenous people and society.** This includes entrenched racism in social norms and attitudes, perpetration of racist violence and racialised structural inequalities.
  3. **Gendered factors.** This includes the condoning of violence against women and intersection of racism and sexism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- 1.4 The intersection of these three drivers results in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experiencing disproportionate levels of family and domestic violence. Just like there is no single cause of violence, no single action will adequately address violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Salvation Army wholeheartedly supports the Our Watch 'Changing the Picture' approach, which contains a range of clear actions that are needed to address the multiple drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

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<sup>4</sup> Our Watch. (2018). Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/20231759/Changing-the-picture-Part-2-AA.pdf>

## 2 Five Action Plan Reform Areas

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### Voice, Self-Determination, and Agency

- 2.1 It is only through listening and centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices that there will be lasting solutions for healing and recovery. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse, as are their experiences with colonisation and trauma. Responses to family and domestic violence need to be community-specific, consider the local context and support healing.
- 2.2 The ownership of healing and support needs to be driven by the community. Too often we see programs implemented that have not consulted with the community and failed to enact co-design processes.
- 2.3 The Salvation Army understands that our role as a larger organisation is to not drive service delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but rather to support interventions when invited.
- 2.4 The Orange Door service in Victoria provides an exemplar of how an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led organisation can successfully work within a service to improve access and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors. At the Orange Door, The Salvation Army holds 21 percent of staffing load and out of the 164,500 clients in 2022 12,628 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Within the Orange Door Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs) are funded to drive the access point for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in a culturally safe manner. The ACCOs work within the Orange Door to provide a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples seeking service and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce through sustainable and locally driven implementation.
- 2.5 The Salvation Army has also learned firsthand the impact that partnering with a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program can have on improving the outcomes for clients. The below case study details The Salvation Army's experience partnering with a local organisation in Alice Springs.



### Red Dust Program

The Salvation Army had received funding to deliver an alcohol and other drugs (AOD) program focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in Alice Springs. Our program was struggling to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to the service. After listening to the community, The Salvation Army entered into an arrangement for Red Dust, a local Aboriginal organisation to deliver the program, while The Salvation Army retained responsibility for contract administration, reporting and risk through a joint governance group.

The Red Dust methodology focusses on the complex family dynamic as much as the individual and uses activities such as yarning circles, camps on country and traditional activities on country. The effect is 'side by side' counselling to talk about drugs, violence, anger and other experiences. A focus of the service is helping participants navigate both traditional and western ways of living.

The result of this partnership is that the service attracts five times the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men than before and that the community is actively involved in referring men in the community to seek assistance. Anecdotally we know that there has been a lowering of drug use and family and domestic violence among those who participate.

- 2.6 This is an example of where self-determination has led to significantly better outcomes that could have been achieved through consultation alone. In determining the best programs to fund it is critical that there is greater diversity in who the government is consulting with to inform funding decisions. The Salvation Army is hopeful that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament will achieve similar results throughout the nation.
- 2.7 The best way for the government to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are at the front and centre of program design and delivery is to listen to them and allow them to take charge to change their lives and those of their families and communities. This could include supporting interventions that have partnered with a local Aboriginal organisation or been co-designed by people from the community who possess cultural knowledge and understanding of the intergenerational impacts of colonisation. This could also include quarantining funding, and providing governance support, for grassroots trials and programs, many of which are achieving good results.



## Recommendation 1

**2.8 The Salvation Army recommends when assessing funding applications for services aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, the Commonwealth Government preference programs that have been co-designed with the community. This includes partnerships where non-Indigenous organisations provide support with governance and contract management.**

## Recommendation 2

**2.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government provides long term funding to support the expansion of community-led, locally embedded, programs that have a culturally safe approach while keeping women and children safe.**

### *Listening to the voices of children experiencing family and domestic violence*

- 2.10 The overwhelming burden of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often adversely affects children and young people.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.11 Children are often the 'silent victims' of family and domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> The Salvation Army acknowledges the importance of listening to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This must be supported with an increase in funding to services for children.
- 2.12 For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children there is a double conundrum. Firstly, the family and domestic violence sector is currently not equipped to respond to the needs of children as victim-survivors in their own right, not simply as dependents of a parent who is a victim-survivor. When there are child specific resources, they are often not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Secondly, there are few culturally appropriate family and domestic violence services available to Aboriginal and Torres

<sup>5</sup> Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022). New Ways for our Families: Designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice framework and system responses to address the impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people. [https://anrowsdev.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Morgan-et-al-RR1\\_NewWaysOurFamilies.pdf](https://anrowsdev.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Morgan-et-al-RR1_NewWaysOurFamilies.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, W, Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2016). 'Silent victims': royal commission recommends better protections for child victims of family violence. <https://theconversation.com/silent-victims-royal-commission-recommends-better-protections-for-child-victims-of-family-violence-56801>



Strait Islander people, and those that do exist primarily focus on adults and not on the specific needs of children and young people.<sup>7</sup>

- 2.13 The most effective way to listen to the voices of children is by funding a specialist family and domestic violence response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adolescents that is developmentally and culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, and informed by the long-term impacts of family and domestic violence. These services either do not exist or when they do, are not culturally appropriate and have very long waiting lists, sometimes of up to a year. We need to ensure children and young people have timely access to case management and responses that are culturally appropriate and address age appropriate attitudes toward gender and violence. For women's services to effectively respond, risk assessment and safety planning need to acknowledge the child as a victim-survivor in their own right and understand the trauma they experience. This would be especially effective for counselling and critical outreach services.
- 2.14 Therapeutic programs that support children and young people to overcome the immediate and long-term psychological, emotional, and physical impact of family violence and other associated issues also reduces the risk of intergenerational transfer of abusive behaviours and violence supporting attitudes.<sup>8</sup>

### Recommendation 3

- 2.15 The Salvation Army recommends that Commonwealth Government funds culturally appropriate child and adolescent family and domestic violence services, to support children and adolescents who have either been exposed to family and domestic violence or who have perpetrated violence.**

### Strength, Resilience, and Therapeutic Healing

- 2.16 The Salvation Army agrees with the proposal that strength, resilience and therapeutic healing should be one of the five action plan reform areas. It is important that any efforts to implement a trauma-aware and healing-informed response acknowledges that the concept of family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts refers to a pattern of kinship relationships that extend beyond the nuclear family model. It includes a wide range of family members including grandparents, aunts, uncles and other community members who may not be blood related.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022). New Ways for our Families: Designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice framework and system responses to address the impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people. [https://anrowsdev.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Morgan-et-al-RR1\\_NewWaysOurFamilies.pdf](https://anrowsdev.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Morgan-et-al-RR1_NewWaysOurFamilies.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Cameron, P. (2016). Expanding early interventions in family violence in Victoria. Melbourne, Vic: Domestic Violence Victoria.

<sup>9</sup> Australian's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2021). What works? Exploring the literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs the respond to family violence. <https://anrowsdev.wenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/4AP5-Calrson-et-al-Healing-Programs-Lit-Review.2.pdf>



- 2.17 This recognition of the kinship relationships in which violence may occur also needs to extend to the definition of family and domestic violence. Currently in Australia, there is not a universal definition of family, domestic and sexual violence across the federal and state and territory jurisdictions.<sup>10</sup>
- 2.18 The term ‘family violence’ is the most widely used term to identify the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur. Not all jurisdictions’ definitions of family and domestic violence include this acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship systems.
- 2.19 The Salvation Army believes a nationally consistent definition of family and domestic violence, should recognise that family and domestic violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities impacts on a wide range of kin and community members. A nationally consistent approach to family and domestic violence would help avoid ongoing confusion within the community as to what ‘defines’ both physical and non-physical forms of violence, facilitate consistent responses to perpetrator accountability (for example, compliance with orders), and facilitate referral pathways and trauma-informed support that ensures that victim-survivors are not disadvantaged due to locality or situation.
- 2.20 A national definition of family and domestic violence will also serve to improve the family and domestic violence service systems’ response to and understanding of the extended family concept when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Adopting a national definition should be coupled with a nation-wide upskilling of the family and domestic violence workforce (both government funded and non-government funded services) to make certain that they see families as the whole community as opposed to just working with parents.

#### **Recommendation 4**

- 2.21 The Salvation Army recommends that Commonwealth Government adopt a national definition for family and domestic violence that includes both physical and non-physical forms of violence. The definition needs to include a recognition of the broad range of kinship relationships in which violence may occur.**

<sup>10</sup> Parliament of Australia. (2020). Family violence in Australia and the National Plan. [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Social\\_Policy\\_and\\_Legal\\_Affairs/Familyviolence/Report/section?id=committees%2Freportrep%2F024577%2F75208](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/Familyviolence/Report/section?id=committees%2Freportrep%2F024577%2F75208)



## Reforming Institutions and Systems

- 2.22 There is significant scope to address systemic bias and structural racism within the response to family and domestic violence. It is important that any reform to the institutions and systems includes a focus on unconscious bias and racism. We continue to see responses from both government and non-government services towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors that are not culturally safe. Recent research found that most Australians tested for unconscious bias hold a negative view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which can lead to widespread racism.<sup>11</sup> While this issue of unconscious bias is not confined to the family and domestic violence service and justice systems it is critical that training is implemented to make certain that all responses are culturally safe and competent.
- 2.23 Services need to be adequately funded to allow practitioners to keep issues like unconscious bias front of mind across the family and domestic violence service response. Across the sector, services are stretched to capacity because of insufficient funding. As a result of this, best practice can be compromised as we are constantly working at a deficit. Without ensuring that services are provided with funding that allows them to operate at optimal level we are going to continue to see services that are unable to prioritise cultural safety.
- 2.24 The Salvation Army acknowledges that there is a need to strengthen and build capacity in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. It is also important to prioritise building the cultural capability of the service sector to make it an inclusive and culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to feel valued and thrive. Cultural capability includes being clear about what a capable workforce looks like when it comes to cultural safety and appropriateness and acknowledging that this differs for each community.
- 2.25 Any efforts to build capacity in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce needs to be coupled with a commitment to ensure flexibility within the programs. Programs need to be adaptable to different community needs and priorities rather than adhering to a strict protocol. It is also important to have shared positions to ensure workers do not burn out.
- 2.26 The Salvation Army points to the Strong Women Strong Babies program that operates in the Northern Territory as an example of best practice. The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and practice as a fundamental component of the program has been found to be key to its success.<sup>12</sup> The program employs members from the community on a flexible basis and has been successful in responding to local needs and priorities by adapting the services they offer for different communities.

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<sup>11</sup> Shirodkar, S. (2019). Bias against Indigenous Australians: Implicit association test results for Australia. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 22(3-4), 3-34. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.150032703197478>

<sup>12</sup> Lowell, A, Kildea, S, Liddle, M, Cox, B, Paterson, B. Supporting aboriginal knowledge and practice in health care: lessons from a qualitative evaluation of the strong women, strong babies, strong culture program <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12884-015-0433-3>.



### Recommendation 5

**2.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government works with state and territory governments to implement specialist training for the family and domestic violence service system (both government and non-government services) on unconscious bias and racism and to ensure training is repeated regularly. Training should include understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' resistance to police intervention and strategies to support victim-survivor cooperation.**

### Recommendation 6

**2.28 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government builds the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce within the response to family and domestic violence. This should include building the cultural capability of the workforce to make an inclusive and culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.**

## Inclusion and Intersectionality

### *Ensuring services are supportive and accessible for people with diverse experiences and needs*

- 2.29 The Salvation Army's family and domestic violence services support a broad range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with intersecting needs, such as those with disability, and those who are a part of the LGBTIQ+ community. As an organisation we adapt our services to ensure individuals from diverse communities can access our services. For example, when people with disability come to a refuge it is not uncommon to also allow their carer to stay at the centre as well.
- 2.30 As an organisation we have inclusion strategies in place to guide our practice and ensure our staff work safely with and our services can be adapted for a wide range of clients. The Salvation Army also has positions such as an LGBTIQ+ National Coordinator who supports services and provides advice on adaptations that need to be made to service delivery to ensure inclusivity.
- 2.31 The Salvation Army acknowledges that not all organisations have the resources or capacity to implement such structures or positions. We recommend that the Action Plan includes a



commitment to diversity by funding positions within government to support service providers adapt their services for people with diverse experiences and needs.

## **Recommendation 7**

**2.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government funds positions that support service providers adapt their service delivery for people with intersecting needs.**

*Specific services and supports required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and very remote areas*

- 2.33 The Commonwealth Government needs to prioritise the voices of lived experience and members of a particular community. The most effective way to reduce family and domestic violence in rural areas is to allow communities to lead the response in a manner that is tailored to their community. Responses in rural and remote communities need to be different from those that are rolled out in urban communities. What is effective in one rural town will also be different to what is effective in a different rural town or community.
- 2.34 Our experience is that many programs in rural areas are currently administered either by the government or large-scale non-government organisations and do not always privilege community knowledge, skills, relationships and connections. Implementing a place-based response is critical. Different communities will have different strategies that they believe are effective. Investing in these will enable the most effective response to family and domestic violence.
- 2.35 The Salvation Army reiterates the importance of consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations to ensure that the Action Plan recognises their cultural and geographical needs, and the differing nature and prevalence of violence in those communities. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are given the opportunity to lead and develop projects. Projects that are led by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should only be supported when they can demonstrate deep consultation and co-design processes that do not further marginalise or 'other' these voices.



## Recommendation 8

**2.36 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government prioritises the voices of lived experience when rolling out programs in rural areas, to ensure that the programs are tailored to the needs of a particular community.**

### Larissa's\* Story

Larissa was referred to The Salvation Army's refuge in Broken Hill with her two children by the Department of Communities and Justice as her current rental property had major safety issues and the landlord was not repairing the damage.

Larissa was identified as being at imminent risk of homelessness due to there being no alternative options available for safe housing. Larissa requested assistance with getting her two children enrolled into kindergarten and pre-school. The Salvation Army connected with the local Aboriginal Health Service to get the children's records and assisted with filling in the forms for enrolment.

Our staff transported Larissa and her children to their respective schools to submit enrolment documents and helped Larissa to interact with school staff and make enquiries about matters such as uniforms. Both the children were successfully enrolled in time for the 2023 school orientation sessions. Larissa has also re-enrolled in her TAFE course, that she will complete while her children are at school.

While The Salvation Army was able to connect Larissa and her children with health services and education pathways, Larissa is still accommodated at the refuge due to the lack of affordable housing in the Broken Hill region. There are few social housing options in the area and unfortunately private rentals are also not an option due to landlords being reluctant to take on families who are relying on Centrelink.

*\*Name Changed*



### *Ensuring services are accessible to Elders*

- 2.37 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders play a vital role in First Nations society and are of critical importance in ensuring the wellbeing of the community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders are not immune to experiencing family and domestic violence and our services are particularly concerned about its prominence in rural and remote areas. Evidence suggest that identifying and responding to elder abuse in rural and remote areas may be more difficult than in metropolitan areas due to a lack of service knowledge about the issue, as well as staff shortages and heavier workloads resulting from fewer available resources.<sup>13</sup>
- 2.38 When responding to elder abuse in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities culturally sensitive approaches are required to address intersecting disadvantages for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples relating to ongoing negative effects of colonisation and the Stolen Generations.
- 2.39 Currently there are very few specific services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders who are victim-survivors of family and domestic violence. Elders who experience family and domestic violence may require necessary complementary services such access to a health service, carer or transport. Current funding models fail to account for these additional needs, or the significant time and travel costs associated with providing support services to this cohort. This issue is even more pronounced in rural and remote areas where necessary services may be a significant distance apart. Funding ratios for rural and remote areas do not account for this significant difference in time commitment per client, leaving rural and regional areas significantly under-resourced.

#### **Recommendation 9**

- 2.40 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government invests in specific programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders who are victim-survivors of family and domestic violence. The funding of such programs should account for necessary complementary services, such as support for the ongoing negative effects of colonisation, access to a health service and carer, and the additional transport required.**

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<sup>13</sup> Warren, A., & Blundell, B. (2018). *Elder abuse in rural and remote communities: Social policy, prevention and responses*. Perth: Curtin University. Retrieved from <https://espace.curtin.edu.au/handle/20.500.11937/71488>



## Evidence and data eco-systems

- 2.41 The Action Plan should include a specific commitment to support the development of a data and evidence eco-system that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities. The Salvation Army's Research and Outcomes Measurement team works on evaluation projects with a range of Salvation Army services. These services operate in rural, regional and metropolitan areas and serve a broad range of clients and communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This section draws on the experience and expertise of The Salvation Army's Research and Outcomes Measurement team.
- 2.42 Both community-level data and national prevalence surveys will improve our nation's understanding of the prevalence and extent of family and domestic violence in Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander communities and how this violence differentiates in local contexts. This must be informed by sound understanding of what data collection methods would be culturally safe and appropriate. It is important that potential survey participants know how their information will be used and importantly, not used. People with previous negative experiences with government may choose not to participate for fear of the information being used to harm or punish their community.
- 2.43 The Commonwealth Government should facilitate yarns with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the nation to capture both individuals' and communities' experiences. This would allow communities to have a say about the issues, solutions and barriers to family and domestic violence in their area. It also provides the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to yarn about what data would capture the information that is important to them.

## *Building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research capacity*

- 2.44 In working to collect culturally informed data and evidence the government needs to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research organisations to understand the barriers for their people to participate in and deliver research, evaluation and outcomes measurement. Consultation should also establish what resources are needed to train and build capacity of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to design and deliver research, evaluation and outcomes measurement.
- 2.45 Any projects need to be resourced to include community consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where they can provide feedback about the research, evaluation and outcomes measurement purposes, design, and how the findings would benefit their community. Such projects usually require longer timelines for design and implementation to incorporate consultation findings. While this process could increase a project's timeframe significantly it is still crucial to build trust, relationships and capacity for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate. It is also important to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the project team either as researchers and evaluators or members of the advisory or steering committee.



2.46 Funding of projects should also account for additional resources to train local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to collect information from their own community. Resources will also be required to translate or adapt the research, evaluation and outcomes measurement materials to be accessible and culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that participate in the project.

*Using local, culturally informed evidence to develop solutions*

2.47 The Salvation Army's Research and Outcomes Measurement team has identified the following learnings from their work in conducting research, evaluation and outcomes measurement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and using that evidence to inform decisions:

- **Prioritise the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors** of family and domestic violence. All victim-survivors will have different experiences and perspectives. Placing the perspectives and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the centre is key to improving the quality and usefulness of the evaluation and the data strategy.
- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities **requires priority to be placed on relationship building and cultural safety**. This includes regular, critical reflection on the part of the researcher.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most researched community globally<sup>14</sup> and there is significant risk of re-traumatisation. **Careful consideration should be given to the data collection processes**, which should ideally be in person, informal and genuine – with support from Elders or other community advocates or known supports. This requires planning and consultation – significant time should be set aside for this to occur.
- **Engagement and remuneration should not be tokenistic**. It is important to consider the reciprocal nature of the engagement and not to make assumptions regarding what would be of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- It is important to carefully consider how any research or outcomes measurement aligns with the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council. (2018). Ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/ethical-guidelines-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples#:~:text=Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Peoples%20are%20considered%20to%20be,received%20very%20little%20perceivable%20benefit>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.





## **Recommendation 10**

**2.48 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government supports the development of a data and evidence eco-system that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities.**

## 3 Outcomes

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### Addressing Immediate Safety Needs

#### *Housing*

- 3.1 The most effective way to address the immediate safety needs of women and children is to ensure victim-survivors have access to safe housing and do not have to return to the perpetrator. Across all states and territories social housing waiting lists in metropolitan, regional and rural areas are at an all-time high. In addition to this, the private rental market is highly competitive and has increased in costs exponentially due to the housing shortage and rises in interest rates. This housing shortage has detrimental effects for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.
- 3.2 At The Salvation Army's refuge in Karratha, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women account for 89 to 92 per cent of residents. In the Pilbara region, there are only three shelters available for victim-survivors: The Salvation Army's crisis accommodation in Karratha and two other shelters in Port Hedland and Newman. The lack of services in combination with a lack of affordable houses makes leaving a violent relationship increasingly difficult.
- 3.3 As a result of the low vacancy rate in the social housing system, the number of clients able to transition from these temporary accommodation options into long-term accommodation has stagnated. This housing bottleneck has been highlighted by our family and domestic violence services as one of the most urgent issues that the Commonwealth Government needs to address in the Action Plan.
- 3.4 In Karratha our staff are reporting a five year wait for social housing. The Salvation Army's family and domestic violence service in Karratha is a short-term crisis service, but because of the housing crisis women who should only be staying for six to eight weeks are now staying for up to 12 months and are sometimes living in hotel-sized rooms with up to four children. Most concerningly the absence of affordable housing exits means that many victim-survivors of family violence feel they have no option but to return to the residence of the perpetrator.
- 3.5 The extended length of stays not only affect victim-survivors who are unable to move into stable long-term accommodation, it also means that new clients cannot enter crisis services, placing increased pressure on service providers. In the last 12 months our service in Karratha has anecdotally reported having to turn away individuals on 600 occasions.
- 3.6 For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing family and domestic violence this lack of available services and housing has detrimental consequences. Our services report that many victim-survivors have limited options to keep themselves and their children safe in their community due to the lack of housing. Many women are also reluctant to relocate away from their community and out of Country.

- 3.7 For other women who do travel great distances to access a service and escape a violent relationship, they often have to return to the perpetrator because of the financial pressures and lack of social supports associated with moving to a new area. It is often the case that the perpetrator's control only increases after a victim-survivor returns and her safety put at greater risk.

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*“If victim-survivors don't have a safe place to go to they are going to stay with the perpetrator. Having access to affordable and safe housing changes that.”*

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**- State Manager of Family and Domestic Violence**

### Sara's\* Story

Sara is a young Aboriginal woman who got in contact with a Salvation Army refuge after being evicted from her family's home. Sara came to the refuge with her toddler and was pregnant with her second child. She expressed high levels of distress and has an intellectual disability associated with a background of fetal alcohol syndrome.

During intake discussions Sara advised that the perpetrator is her parent, Sara is frequently screamed at, called stupid and threatened. Sara fled her home after the perpetrator threatened to kill her. The perpetrator lives locally and is aware of the location of the refuge, frequently contacting Sara and asking her to come back home. Sara feels hope for the family to be reunited, often choosing to return to the perpetrator's home after their constant pleading. These visits result in Sara being assaulted and 'kicked out' once again and returning to the refuge.

Sara has few options for living independently in the local community, with government housing having up to a five-year wait for those on the priority list in the region and private rentals being unaffordable for someone on disability support payments. Sara does not want to continue living in the refuge, which has a shared living room and kitchen, repeatedly returning to the family home to ongoing coercive control and violence. Case workers hold concerns that Sara is becoming institutionalised and that this pattern of abuse will continue to escalate while she waits for housing.

*\*Name changed*





### **Recommendation 11**

**3.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government invests in social housing specifically for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.**

### **Recommendation 12**

**3.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government increases the stock of transitional and crisis accommodation – particularly in regions and rural areas where there are no or limited crisis options.**

#### *Investing in perpetrator intervention*

- 3.10 To break the cycle of violence the Action Plan needs to invest in men’s behaviour change programs that are community owned, have a focus on men’s healing, fulfil the cultural needs of participants and adopt a holistic approach.<sup>16</sup> This is the most effective way to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to address their use of violence. It is equally important to acknowledge cultural practices and principles within these programs. This includes respecting that addressing these behaviours can be deemed men’s business and the confidentiality that comes with that. Programs should work in partnership with a local specialist family violence service who can work with the victim-survivors, this should occur even when men’s business is addressed separately.
- 3.11 Interventions should be community led and designed to acknowledge the intergenerational impacts of colonisation. The Salvation Army points the government to the work of Tangentyere Council’s family violence prevention program and Codes 4 Life men’s program as examples of best practice. Both these programs are community driven and adopt a culturally safe approach to keeping women and their children safe while holding men accountable for their use of violence.

<sup>16</sup> Andrews, S, Gallanet, D, & Harrison, W. (2021). Holistic program developments and responses to Aboriginal men and who use violence against women. *International Social Work*. 64(1). 59-73. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0020872818807272>





### **Recommendation 13**

**3.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government invests in perpetrator intervention programs that are community driven and culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men that use violence.**

#### Laying strong foundations for long term change

##### *Establishment of family, domestic and sexual violence peak body and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner*

- 3.13 The Salvation Army strongly supports the establishment of a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body. Having a peak body that solely represents the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and domestic violence service sector would perform a critical role in giving voice to, and therefore prioritising, the lived experience of victim-survivors. This would ensure that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are being heard when policy decisions and funding allocations are occurring at a national level.
- 3.14 Establishing a peak body would not only be a practical action for listening to and prioritising the voices of victim-survivors, but it would also make a positive difference in the governance of family and domestic violence services. A peak body would provide an opportunity to collectively advocate on behalf of the sector without the added pressure of competing for services or funding. Peak bodies are also afforded the policy time and space to discuss sector issues and work with government and non-government organisations on initiatives to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.
- 3.15 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Commissioner would also play a crucial in engaging with victim-survivors and ensuring their input is sought when designing programs and solutions.

### **Recommendation 14**

**3.16 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body for family, domestic and sexual violence and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Commissioner.**

## 4 Conclusion

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- 4.1 The Salvation Army thanks the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to provide a written submission to inform the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan.
- 4.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought by contacting [government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au).

**The Salvation Army Australia Territory**

**31 March 2023**



## Appendix A About The Salvation Army

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The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at:

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au>.

