



10 February 2025

NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network's submission to the Federal Treasury

The NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network ('AWAN' or 'the Network') appreciates the opportunity provided by the Federal Treasury to inform the priorities for the financial year 2024-25 Budget.

The [NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network](#) was established in 2022 and operates as a mechanism to drive Aboriginal-led policy solutions to the NSW Government Closing the Gap Target 13 initiative to reduce the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children by at least 50% by 2031 as progress towards zero.¹

AWAN's Executive Council is led by Co-Chairs from Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre ('Wirringa Baiya') and the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) ('ALS'). The ALS is the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) lead on Target 13. Wirringa Baiya is the organisation that auspices the AWAN secretariat. Both Wirringa Baiya and AWAN are gender-specific and sensitive to the culturally diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

AWAN works to reduce violence against Aboriginal women and children through the following multi-pronged approach:

- Educating community around issues of domestic, family and sexual violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.
- Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across New South Wales with opportunities to provide their insights on issues that impact themselves, their families, and their communities.
- Representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's voices to government and also to frontline services.
- Advocating for better protections and support in community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

¹ NSW Government, 2022-2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap, 109.

Consultations

Whilst our consultations are ongoing, the communities that we have visited so far include Bourke, Brewarrina, Campbelltown, Dubbo, La Perouse, Illawarra and South Coast region, Mount Druitt, Redfern, Walgett, Wellington, Armidale, Glen Innes, Tingha, Inverell, and the Central Coast. Over 7 – 8 December 2023, the Network also held a State-Wide Conference around domestic, family and sexual violence which hosted over 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from urban, regional, rural and remote communities across NSW. Our Network has a membership of more than 350 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from NSW. The work of our Network and the feedback provided in this submission is informed by the valuable insights shared with us by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from across NSW.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Funding allocations must be detailed, transparent and publicly accessible

Recommendation 2: Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must have Aboriginal oversight

Recommendation 3: Funding for Aboriginal women-led solutions and organisations must be increased and made more accessible

(i) Funding priority areas must be informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their representatives

(ii) Funding should be made available to the below priority areas:

1. Holistic housing and crisis support

- Increasing housing stock and proportions allocated for Aboriginal women and children, particularly for women on medium incomes, particularly for single mothers and kinship carers who cannot afford private rentals but aren't eligible for social housing.
- Increasing access to transitional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in correctional centres in the six-months leading up to their release.
- Increasing and better resourcing of safe houses across urban to regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. Safe houses must be resourced to be open 24/7, 365 days a year, and to provide empathetic, trauma-informed and culturally safe support to all women and children seeking a safe house
- Government investment into 'healing houses' which remove perpetrators from the home and provide them with access to drug, alcohol and anger management counsellors to leave the home safer for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced the violence.

2. Expand funding of holistic healing support programs

- Proactively influence vital intervention points such as the criminal justice system to redirect investments into critical mental health support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are victim-survivors of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFS).
- There is an urgent need to fund meaningful support services to victim survivors, including post-release housing and rehabilitation programs by investing in models which have delivered successful outcomes and to fund case workers to support women transition post-release.
- Increasing and redirecting investments into critical mental health support by funding culturally appropriate healing and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, particularly for

women in the criminal justice system facing co-morbidities such as substance abuse and addictions.

3. *Legal services and advocacy support for victim-survivors*

- Victim-survivors navigating the justice system should have access to independent and specialised legal support and advocacy at every stage of a criminal proceeding, from the report to trial, and while addressing intersecting psychosocial issues.
- For Aboriginal women, this model must be culturally safe and appropriately designed for their needs.
- Stronger specialised legal support, representation and wrap around supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children to address misidentification.
- Increasing funding to Aboriginal-women specific legal services women's legal services providing these services.

4. *Public transport and digital connectivity in regional and remote communities*

- Increasing public transport in regional, rural and remote communities to support women and children escaping domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Funding vehicles within local organisations and services; especially domestic, family and violence sector services, across all regions to support women to escape domestic, family and sexual violence. There is also a need to ensure that there is a viable alternative to taxi vouchers in regional towns by utilising community transport services when victim-survivors access Link2Home, DV Line and other support services when experiencing DFSV.
- Increasing Wi-Fi and cellular connection in regional, rural and remote communities to support women and children seeking assistance.

5. *Deliver gender specific programs*

- Design and deliver gender-focused solutions, including women's groups and workshops centred around connection, healing, empowerment, self-esteem and self-defence; as well as, men's educational and meaningful change behavior programs groups centred around empowerment, education and support.
- Invest into Aboriginal-led domestic, family and sexual violence behaviour change programs. Whilst we recommend gender specific programs for both men and women, we note that men are the predominant users of violence against women and should as such be the funding priority for behaviour change programs.

6. *Workforce strategies*

- Develop and implement a workforce strategy to increase employment and retainment of Aboriginal women across the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.
- Invest in Aboriginal workforce by creating pathways into vocational educational pathways
- Develop a peer workforce model to engage victim-survivors with lived experience of domestic to facilitate client referrals and access to services

7. *Early intervention*

- Implement place-based, gender-specific, community driven, matriarchal and Aboriginal, elder-led responses to work with the community, develop safety plans relevant to individual families and communities.
- Empower communities to decide what services they need and facilitate access to services on their terms with walk in one stop-shop services by:
 - Strengthening models for community led advocacy support and elder-led community mediation; and
 - Proactively encouraging early intervention engagement support with services without fear of repercussions from child protection agencies, necessitating appropriate jurisdictional reform in each state.

Priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Our Network emphasises that the principles of transparent funding allocations, prioritisation of funding for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) and community- controlled sector, and accountability for funding allocations from government cuts across all priority reforms under Closing the Gap and the associated NSW Implementation Plan. Those Priority Reform are as follows:

Priority Reform 1: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

The Commonwealth Government has committed under this Priority Reform to take action to ensure that partnership arrangements work effectively to advance progress of Closing the Gap through joint decision-making and self-determination. A focus is needed to upskill place-based community organisations. centred to the diverse needs and representation of communities across NSW. There is currently an imbalance in how partnerships take place with Aboriginal organisations. There is a need to ensure that there is adequate technical support, information sharing and resourcing to adequately support organisations to be sustainable to achieve self-determination.

Priority Reform 2: Building the community-controlled sector

The Commonwealth Government has committed under this Priority Reform to increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations

Priority Reform 3: Transforming government organisations

The Commonwealth Government has committed under this Priority Reform to improve mainstream institutions by ensuring that Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.

Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

The Commonwealth Government has committed under this priority reform to enable shared access to location specific data and information that will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to support the achievement

Previous Federal Budgets

There are broad issues around lack of economic commitment and transparency in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and communities in Australia. By way of example, we refer to two of the preceding Women's Budget Statements from financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. In the Women's Budget Statement May 2024-25, the Federal Government acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are disproportionately burdened when it comes to women's economic equality; ending violence against women; and, gender equality, health and well-being for Australian women.

We welcome the efforts to progress a First Nations National Plan to provide a whole of society approach to address the disproportionately high rates of family violence and abuse against First Nations Women and Children and provide further action to address Target 13 of Closing the Gap. It is imperative that recommendations are implemented and direct funding investments are made to enable their long term delivery. We also refer to our submissions made to the Family Safety plan informed by consultations with our members.

We welcome the \$10.0 billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) investments to help support 20,000 new social homes, including for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness. However, there is a need to provide further breakdown of targeted funding to Aboriginal women and children given the disproportionate impact they face experiencing Domestic and Family Violence (DFV).

There is a need to increasing social and affordable housing stock and proportions allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, mothers and kinship carers on medium incomes who cannot afford private rentals but aren't deemed eligible for social housing. This is particularly the case in metropolitan cities due to the rising cost of housing which creates significant obstacles for women escaping a violent relationship.

There remain significant improvements required to the processes and priorities of the Federal Budget for financial year 2025-26 to ensure that there are targeted investment in programs to address violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Processes and Priorities for the Financial Year 2025-26 Federal Budget

To lay the foundations for a stronger, more inclusive and more accessible economy, funding must be proportionate, transparent and accountable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and communities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Funding allocations must be detailed, transparent and publicly accessible

Funding allocation information must be precise, transparent and publicly accessible. There needs to be more detail, transparency and accessibility on information around the purpose of funding and to organisations that are receiving that funding. Too often, funding will be allocated to mainstream organisations to achieve an outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when the funding would be better placed with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

A particular issue is when funding is allocated to mainstream services for programs to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but that funding is then used or misused for alternative and vague purposes such 'administration' or 'consultancy services'. Alternatively, funding will be positioned as for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, when in fact the funding is allocated for another purpose which may incidentally have a benefit for Aboriginal peoples

There are significant concerns around investments into mainstream companies which are declared to "flow through" or "trickle down" to Aboriginal communities. It is inappropriate for the federal Government to be funding millions towards mainstream organisations for the purpose of closing the gap, without adequate input or oversight from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives or community organisations. Funding decisions relating to identifying priority areas for investment and allocating such investments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes must be done in collaboration and with the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives and community-controlled organisations.

It is important for funding to be invested in organisations which have a proven record of commitment and success in achieving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as supported by the evaluations of the communities that they service.

Recommendation 2: Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must have Aboriginal oversight

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must have oversight in relation to both determinations of funding allocations for Aboriginal communities and assessments of the success of all programs, particularly in relation to programs delivered by mainstream organisations, which have been funded to provide benefits for Aboriginal communities. For the Women's Budget Statement specifically, such oversight should be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community women and community-controlled organisations which are led by and for Aboriginal women.

We welcome measures that the Federal Government is taking to partner with SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children, to provide secretariat support to the Steering Committee, conduct community consultation and develop the First Nations National Plan under the Steering Committee's guidance.

It is inappropriate for the Federal Government to be funding millions in funds towards mainstream organisations for the purpose of Closing the Gap, without any input or oversight from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives or community organisations. Funding decisions relating to identifying priority areas for investment and allocating such investments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes must be done in collaboration and with the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives and community-controlled organisations. It is important for funding to be invested in organisations which have a proven record of commitment and success in achieving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as supported by the evaluations of the communities that they service.

A potential solution would be the creation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Budget Statement. However, the Network would only put forward this recommendation if the Statement had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander oversight to ensure that funding priority areas and allocations were informed by community.

For example, a mainstream organisation which is the recipient of Federal Government funding is 1800 Respect, the national counselling, information and referral service for people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. However, the access of the service by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is lacking. In the Women's Budget Statement May 2024-25, \$253.4 million is allocated over five years from 2023–24 for 1800RESPECT. An evaluation of 1800RESPECT in January 2020² found that performance data for people at risk indicate that around 7% are from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. Trauma Specialist Counsellors expressed that more could be done to encourage engagement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote and regional areas. There is a need for more community engagement and partnerships with Aboriginal community organisations to improve the uptake of calls from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

² Smyth, C., Cortis, N., Cama, E. Giuntoli, G., Breckenridge, J., & valentine, k. (2020). Evaluation of 1800RESPECT – Final Report. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney

Recommendation 3: Funding for Aboriginal women-led solutions and organisations must be increased and made more accessible

- (i) Funding priority areas must be informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their representatives**
- (ii) Funding should be made available to the priority areas determined by AWAN consultations**

There must be greater investment directly into priority areas that have been identified by Aboriginal women and communities. This needs to be matched with higher investment levels into Aboriginal women, communities. Funding allocations should be prioritised for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) which are culturally safe, community trusted, trauma informed and also gender-specific.

The Federal Governments have often acknowledged the disproportionate harm and economic disadvantage which is imposed against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and peoples in Australian society. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people are overrepresented as both victim-survivors and perpetrators of family and domestic violence (that is, violence that occurs within family or intimate relationships).³

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 33 times more likely to be hospitalised and 5.7 times more likely to be murdered from family violence than other Australian women.⁴
- The life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is about 10 years less than the national average for Australian women.⁵
- The workforce participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women has been 18 percentage points below other Australian women. With ongoing experiences of intergenerational trauma, racism and workplace discrimination, alongside increased likelihood of being carers, being some of the reasons explaining this statistic.⁶

The Federal Government's commitment to funding issues that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and communities must be ongoing and expanding.

Funding priority areas

Informed by our consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, our Network recommends the following areas as funding priorities:

1. **Holistic housing and crisis support**
 - Increasing housing stock and proportions allocated for Aboriginal women and children, particularly for women on medium incomes, particularly for single mothers and kinship carers who cannot afford private rentals but aren't eligible for social housing.

³ Cripps K (2023) *Indigenous domestic and family violence, mental health and suicide- external site opens in new window*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 26 May 2023.

⁴ *Budget 2023-24: Women's Budget Statement*, 42, 46, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

⁵ Ibid 68.

⁶ Ibid 14.

- Increasing access to transitional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in correctional centres in the six-months leading up to their release.
- Increasing and better resourcing of safe houses across urban to regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. Safe houses must be resourced to be open 24/7, 365 days a year, and to provide empathetic, trauma-informed and culturally safe support to all women and children seeking a safe house
- Government investment into ‘healing houses’ which remove perpetrators from the home and provide them with access to drug, alcohol and anger management counsellors to leave the home safer for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced the violence.

2. Expand funding of holistic healing support programs

- Proactively influence vital intervention points such as the criminal justice system to redirect investments into critical mental health support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are victim-survivors of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSVM). There is an urgent need to fund meaningful services to victim survivors, including post-release housing and rehabilitation programs by investing in models which have delivered successful outcomes and to fund case workers to support women transition post-release.
- Increasing and redirecting investments into critical mental health support by funding culturally appropriate healing and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, particularly for women in the criminal justice system facing co-morbidities such as substance abuse and addictions.

3. Legal services and advocacy support for victim-survivors

Efforts to address domestic and family violence must consider the extent of Police misidentification of Aboriginal women as perpetrators of family violence; and the significant adverse impacts this has on women and children’s safety. For Aboriginal women, misidentification as perpetrators of violence occurs more frequently than it does for other women. In addition to the impacts on women and children’s safety, misidentification leads to Aboriginal women’s criminalisation, incarceration and removal of their children.

- Victim-survivors navigating the justice system should have access to independent and specialised legal support and advocacy at every stage of a criminal proceeding, from the report to trial, and while addressing intersecting psychosocial issues.
- For Aboriginal women, this model must be culturally safe and appropriately designed for their needs.
- Stronger specialised legal support, representation and wrap around supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children to address misidentification.
- Increasing funding to Aboriginal-women specific legal services women’s legal services providing these services.

4. Public transport and digital connectivity in regional and remote communities

- Increasing public transport in regional, rural and remote communities to support women and children escaping domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Funding vehicles within local organisations and services; especially domestic, family and violence sector services, across all regions to support women to escape domestic, family and sexual violence. There is also a need to ensure that there is a viable alternative to taxi vouchers in regional towns by utilising community transport services when victim-survivors access Link2Home, DV Line and other support services when experiencing DFSVM.

- Increasing Wi-Fi and cellular connection in regional, rural and remote communities to support women and children seeking assistance.
5. Deliver gender specific programs
- Design and deliver gender-focused solutions, including women's groups and workshops centred around connection, healing, empowerment, self-esteem and self-defence; as well as, men's educational and meaningful change behavior programs groups centred around empowerment, education and support.
 - Invest into Aboriginal-led domestic, family and sexual violence behaviour change programs. Whilst we recommend gender specific programs for both men and women, we note that men are the predominant users of violence against women and should as such be the funding priority for behaviour change programs.
6. Workforce strategies
- Develop and implement a workforce strategy to increase employment and retainment of Aboriginal women across the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.
 - Invest in Aboriginal workforce by creating pathways into vocational educational pathways
7. Early intervention
- Implement place based, gender-specific, community driven, matriarchal and Aboriginal, elder-led responses to work with the community, develop safety plans relevant to individual families and communities.
 - Empower communities to decide what services they need and facilitate access to services on their terms with walk in one stop-shop services by:
 - Strengthening models for community led advocacy support and elder-led community mediation; and
 - Proactively encouraging early intervention engagement support with services without fear of repercussions from child protection agencies, necessitating appropriate jurisdictional reform in each state.

Conclusion

The NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network reiterates our appreciation for the opportunity provided by the Federal Treasury to inform the priorities for the financial year 2025-26 Budget. The Network is open to ongoing discussions and input towards a 2025-26 Budget which has funding allocations that are proportionate, transparent and accountable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

If Treasury has any questions about this feedback, or wishes to speak to us further, please contact the NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network's Policy and Advocacy Officer, Yusra Metwally by email y.metwally@awan.org.au or by phone on 0436 326 427.

Yours Sincerely,

Shaquille Robinson

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