

TANGENTYERE
COUNCIL
SUBMISSION



Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submission to the Legislation Scrutiny Committee

Prepared by Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation

2 April 2025



WORKING
TOGETHER
WALKING
TOGETHER

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Acknowledgement

This submission was written on Arrernte Country. We would like to pay our respects to the traditional custodians of Mparntwe and Elders past, present, and emerging and extend our acknowledgement to all First Nations people, we recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Dedication

This submission is written in memory of R Rubuntja (Ra Ra) who was murdered in circumstances of Family and Domestic **Violence on the 7th of January 2021**. We never thought we would have a lived experience of knowing and loving someone who was taken from us in the most brutal way. We remain sad, every day in so many ways but we continue to carry on Ra Ra's legacy.

As Ra Ra said, **"No more violence, we must stop the violence"**, and that we must.



Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation

TCAC is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) delivering human services for the benefit of Aboriginal people from Alice Springs, its Town Camps and Central Australia.

TCAC has 16 Town Camp Corporate Members, over 600 Individual Members and provides services to more than 10,000 people from a region



that covers approximately 873,894 km². The TCAC Board of Directors is composed of the elected Presidents of the 11 Associations and 5 Aboriginal Corporations

The work undertaken by TCAC is aligned with action on the social, environmental, and behavioural determinants of health and wellbeing. Programs delivered throughout Central Australia include: (1) Child Protection and Wellbeing; (2) Children and Schooling; (3) Community Safety; (4) Alcohol and Other Drugs; (5) Tenancy Support; (6) Employment; (7) Aged and Disabled; (8) Chronic Disease Care Coordination; (9) Family Violence Prevention; (10) Housing Maintenance; (11) Municipal and Essential Services; (12) Construction and (15) Art and Culture.

The 16 Alice Springs Town Camp Associations/Aboriginal Corporations and TCAC were formed by Town Campers to support their efforts to gain access to Land; Housing; Infrastructure; and Municipal and Essential Services. TCAC was incorporated in 1979 as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisation (ACCHO).

Between 1979 and December 2009 TCAC was an ACCHO for the Town Camps. Since December 2009 the Territory has been the Housing Authority for the Town Camps. In 2009, 11 Town Camp Associations and 3 Aboriginal Corporations executed Tripartite Alice Springs Living Area Subleases with the Executive Director of Township Leasing (EDTL) on behalf of the Commonwealth and the CEO of Housing on behalf of the Territory. The EDTL then entered Housing Management Agreements (Subleases) with the CEO of Housing (NT) making the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (DTFHC) the Housing Authority for the Town Camps. TCAC and its Subsidiary, Tangentyere Constructions and Related Party, Community Housing Central Australia (CHCA) continue to deliver Housing Related Services under contract from the Territory.

Submission on the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation (TCAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The key points we wish to emphasise are as follows:

1. TCAC recognises the urgent need for evidence-based programs and systemic reform that calls men to account for their violent and abusive behaviour and protects women and children from potential death and/or injury.
2. TCAC supports the urgent implementation of all 35 recommendations of the *Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupinu, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood [2024] NTLC 14*, as delivered by the Territory Coroner on 25 November 2024.
3. TCAC recommends the Government closely monitor the implementation of the coroner's recommendations using an online website that is accessible to the public along the lines of the system used by the Victorian Government to monitor the implementation of recommendations from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2016. A system to transparently monitor implementation of this kind would demonstrate the NT Government's high level of commitment to taking strong and co-ordinated action to end domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV).
4. DFSV cannot be reduced by any single organisation working in isolation and working together in partnership is one of the most important ways we can reduce violence. TCAC seeks to work in partnership with the Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth Government and other organisations to reduce violent and abusive behaviour and to improve safety. The NT Government's failure to consult prior to the introduction of the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is extremely disappointing and dismissive of this partnership. Consultation with people who have lived experience of DFSV and professionals who provide services to those affected by DFV would make legislation and interventions far more effective.

TCAC's long-standing experience working with Aboriginal families has demonstrated that mandatory sentencing is ineffective:

- a. TCAC believes that judges with appropriate DFV expertise are in the best position to determine the appropriate sentence for an offender taking into account the individual circumstances of the case.
- b. Aboriginal men (and Aboriginal women) are currently overrepresented in NT prisons and NT prisons are well beyond capacity.

Mandatory sentencing provides a “blunt instrument” that fails to consider the broader contextual and structural inequalities experienced by Central Australian Aboriginal people.

- c. Prisoners do not currently receive appropriate programs and interventions while in prison to assist them to change their behaviour.
- d. Mandatory sentencing (particularly where sentences are short) creates a revolving door of persons coming in and out of prison, without offering any real chance to change their behaviour. This does little to reduce the level of violence in the community.
- e. The point at which men who use violence are released from prison is a period of extremely high risk of injury and death for women and children. Yet there is little support upon release to monitor and reduce the risk upon release. Investing in services and support post-release could make a significant difference to the safety of families.
- f. Mandatory sentencing in the absence of interventions to change behaviour is not an effective solution to domestic and family violence and will not keep women and children safe or hold people who use violence to account.

TCAC believes there are a range of interventions that are more effective in reducing DFV than the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing for certain breaches of Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs). These have been outlined in detail in the Coroner’s recommendations, and include:

- a. Ensure that men who use violence are required to attend a domestic and family violence behaviour change program, either in prison or the community, depending on their sentence (and can easily transition from prison to community programs upon release).
- b. Ensure that programs delivered in prison and the community have comparable content, educational frameworks, safeguards and adhere to minimum standards – This will ensure continuity of program engagement when men enter or are released from prison.
- c. Increase the capacity of prison programs so that people on short sentences can access them.
- d. Increase the capacity of programs in the community so all eligible men are able to attend a program to support them in changing their behaviour.

- e. Prioritise the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors, including children, through the provision of support services, risk assessment, safety planning and partner contact workers.
 - f. Ensure men's behaviour change programs are part of a broader integrated system of services to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.
 - g. Introduce specialist DFV courts throughout the NT, learning from and extending the existing model in Alice Springs.
5. Mandatory sentencing will not make victim-survivors safer or hold men who use violence to account for their behaviour. If the Government wishes to genuinely reduce the alarmingly high level of DFSV in the NT it must invest in, and expand, the services available and ensure they work together as part of a single integrated and coordinated response.
 6. Programs, services and interventions that are co-designed with Aboriginal people in the community will have the best chance of reducing DFSV. The next section outlines some important violence prevention programs developed and delivered by TCAC on behalf of Aboriginal people in Central Australia.
 7. The genuine leadership and commitment of Aboriginal people to DFSV prevention is essential if we are to reduce the alarming rates of assaults and fatalities in the NT. This leadership is evidenced in TCAC's programs outlined below. We urge the Government to work in partnership with u



Tangentyere's programs to reduce DFV

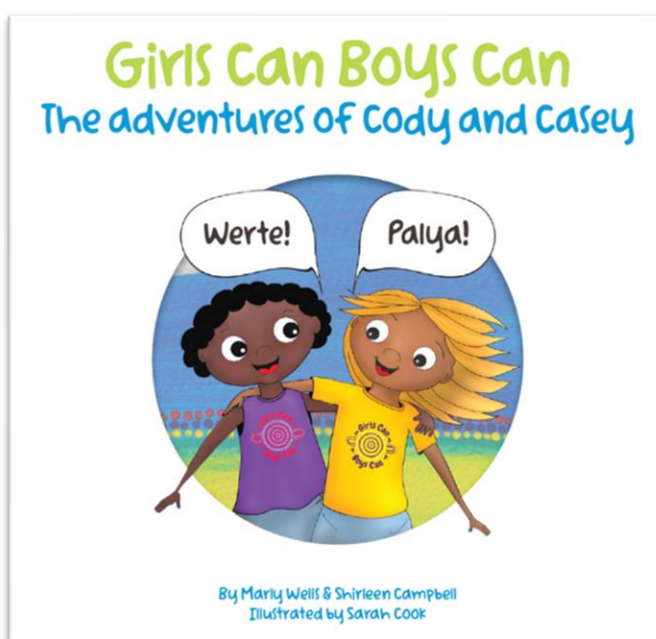
The impact of Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence (DFSV) on Aboriginal women and children, in Central Australia is overwhelming.

Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory experience the highest rate of DFSV in the world (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2018). Aboriginal children are at greater risk of exposure to family violence than non-Aboriginal children (Our Watch, 2018).

Primary Prevention

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience of violence intersects with racial inequality, that further perpetuates violence and systemic violence (Our Watch, 2018). The TFPVP has created family violence primary prevention projects that include the 'Mums Can, Dads Can project' and the 'Girls Can Boys Can' project' both projects work towards challenging gender stereotypes and promoting healthy and respectful relationships.

The projects are aimed at supporting parents to challenge rigid gender stereotypes consequently influencing their children by using strength-based messages that promote images and stories that celebrate Aboriginal families, children, and culture.



TCAC considers evidence based primary prevention as fundamental to reducing rates of Domestic and Family violence to contribute to long term change, however, primary prevention should complement and not come at the expense of early intervention, prevention, and response programs or projects.

TCAC advocates for further evaluation/research into family violence primary prevention initiatives, particularly those that are culturally appropriate and responsive to Aboriginal families, communities, and individuals, building evidence relevant to the Northern Territory.

Our Women's Family Safety Group (TWFSG)

Pivotal to the strength of the TFVPP is the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group (TWFSG), whose knowledge, skills and expertise ensure that women and children's safety is at the core of the work we do.

The TWFSG meet weekly to collaborate on a variety of topics related to family violence and community safety, with an aim of keeping Town Camps free from violence. The group keeps community members' needs and priorities at the centre of their work and ensures Aboriginal women's voices and views are heard and created into primary prevention and/or early intervention programs.

The (TWFSG) was established in October 2014 out of a need identified by female Town Camp residents for a voice and action on Family and Domestic Violence prevention and early intervention issues.

The TWFSG program direction and development has been very organic and has worked from a strengths-based approach acknowledging and celebrating the skills, knowledge, history, assets, connections, and relationships that Town Camp residents have.

The core members of the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group:

- Are **all Aboriginal women** and Town Camp residents.
- Are **the experts** of Town Camp history, relationships, knowledge, and experience. They have lived experience of which government policies and practices have worked and which have not.
- Are **the influencers** in their community and the broader Alice Springs community on the area of family safety.
- Have **lived experience** of family and domestic violence on Town Camps and therefore have authoritative knowledge to share.
- Are **invested** in finding long term systemic solutions to the issues that family and domestic violence because it is their family's future.



- Are **committed** to the program because this is their home, their country, their family, their future.

The TWFSG have advocated for additional programs and funding to be implemented to hold men who use violence accountable for their choice to use violence and ensuring women's voices and experiences are at the centre when considering how to end Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

The TWFSG discussed the need for accessible programs for men so they can engage in programs advocating for a greater focus on holding men who use violence accountable.

Tangentyere Men's Behaviour Change (MBCP)

TCAC supports the further implementation of Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) across the Northern Territory, that are underpinned by minimum standards and are victim focused.

The TCAC Men's Behaviour Change program (MBCP) has been operational since late 2014, the core aim of the MBCP is the safety, autonomy and human rights of women and children. While we recognise that MBCs are not the only intervention regarding men's violence against women, they can operate as part of whole of systems response that keeps men who use violence in view and accountable for their behaviour.

TCAC aims to work assist referred men to learn non-abusive behaviour, to challenge and change their attitudes and beliefs around violence and to build safer relationships with their partners and children. Importantly, the program works with female partners to maximise women's and children's safety by providing risk assessment, safety planning, support, information and communicating women's needs and concerns to MBCP facilitators.

The Tangentyere MBCP operates as part of a consortium consisting of the Women's Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA-Women's Safety Work) and Jesuit Social Services (monitoring and evaluation). TCAC, as the lead agency, carries out risk assessments, group facilitation, data collection, community engagement and reporting.



TCAC is in a uniquely placed to identify how to keep women and children safer particularly around high-risk times when men are released from prison and ensuring men who use violence are held to account. We look forward to working beside the government to ensure that not one more Territorian has to live without their family member, friend or colleague.

Many participants in the TCAC's MBCP have been ordered to attend the program through the Specialist DFV List of the Specialist Approach to Domestic and Family Violence at the Alice Springs Local Court. TCAC has seen firsthand the many benefits of the Specialist Approach in providing a more integrated response to DFV and are supportive of this being implemented throughout the NT (that is, in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine).

A Specialist Court model has judges who have specialist expertise on DFV which assists them in making orders and monitoring the progress of men attending the programs. This helps the Court play an effective role in keeping women and children safer and ensures that men who use violence are held to account.

Investing in training to increase the skills of Judges and the judiciary system in DFV through a face-to-face comprehensive training packages such as the Prevent, Assist and Respond training (PART) TCAC believes that judges with appropriate DFV expertise are in the best position to determine the appropriate sentence for an offender considering the individual circumstances of the case

Perpetrator intervention systems, as part of an integrated response

While TCAC advocate for programs for men to address their violent and abusive behaviour, Men's Behaviour Change programs are not a panacea for all men's violence and cannot be the only response to ending men's use of violence, they must instead be seen as part of a broader, integrated response that collectively keeps men who use violence in view.

Australia in recent years has had several Royal Commissions into Family Violence and the continual evolving knowledge and experience of working with men who use violence has shifted its lens to include Men's Behaviour Change programs as part of a

broader integrated system that includes law enforcement, legal services, and the human services sector. Further to understanding perpetrator interventions, evidence demonstrates that a service system that is coordinated and collaborative and working together to share responsibility is more enduring than a siloed approach and that a suite of interventions is required.

As the men's perpetrator intervention system continues to grow and mature in its responses to men who use violence, so will the acknowledgement that building a perpetrator intervention system that



target's needs, addresses risk in a coordinated way and responds to all family's needs will be the intervention that has the greatest opportunity to reduce risk and build a safety framework for partners, ex-partners, and children.

Investing in a consistent whole of systems responses and ensuring that users of violence are visible and not slipping through service gaps or dropping off the justice radarⁱ including Courts,

Prioritising the safety and wellbeing of DFV victim-survivors, including children

TCAC acknowledges the high levels of violence in the Northern Territory and the reality that women are being killed at alarming rates and that judges need to be empowered to make appropriate decisions and send men to prison if required.

However, safety is not just about legislation. Safety is increased through the services and supports available to families. Government must invest in the system as a whole to reduce repeat DFV offending that is currently creating high levels of trauma and harm.

A 2024 evaluation of the MBCP, commissioned by the NT Government, highlighted areas for improvement. It recommended additional tools to enhance practitioners' ability to assess, monitor, and respond to risk, including homicide-suicide and homicide risk.



On 25 November 2024, Judge Elizabeth Armitage released findings from the *Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupinu, Ngeygo Ragurk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood [2024] NTLC 14*.

The findings underscored the need for a tailored risk assessment tool for men in the NT, aligned with the ANROWS MBCP evaluation recommendations. This tool will complement the NT's existing Risk Assessment Management Framework (RAMF) and Common Risk Assessment Tool (CRAT), which currently lack an equivalent for men who use violence.

Tangentyere Council has engaged experts Hayley Boxall and Rodney Vlasis to develop this tool, drawing on their expertise alongside frontline experience from Tangentyere staff. This initiative aims to fill a critical gap in perpetrator-focused risk assessment in the NT and beyond.



Outreach support program

Evidence demonstrates that Men's Behaviour Change group work is one component of behaviour change, however, broader interventions such as casework and case planning that address many of the needs of men also further mitigates risk they pose to increases behaviour change. We understand that issues with housing, legal, alcohol and other drugs as well as mental health issues impact on men's ability and readiness to change.

This model of case work for men who use violence delivered alongside (or within) a MBCP addresses multiple needs of the man and increases his chance of sustainable behaviour change. Case Support (while men are in group and post-group) reduces the level of risk they pose, keeps them engaged, in view and in the system. Importantly, case support work with men who use violence is delivered by workers who are skilled and experienced in working with people who use violence and are cognisant to not escalate the risk.

Men's healing groups

Aboriginal men's healing groups are community-led programs and are an important option in supporting individual men and are generally not victim-focused. Healing groups are acknowledged as having positive impacts on men, by assisting men to find connection and support from each other, providing support to men from different age groups and providing purpose and meaningful interactions with each other.



TCAC believe Men's Behaviour Change Programs and men's healing programs have a different remit. MBCPs are overtly focussed on women's safety and men's accountability regarding men's use of use of family and Domestic Violence. Men's Behaviour Change seek to "stop the violence now" and are focused on risk assessment, risk management, group work and women's safety work and while it is acknowledged that there is a level of healing within MBCP (if done well) healing is not the focus of the program and

should not be conflated with men's healing groups. The Tangentyere Men's Family Safety Group is an example of a "healing" group specific to this context.

Tangentyere Men's Family Safety Group

The Tangentyere Men's Family Safety Group (TMFSG) was founded by a leadership program known as "Four Corners" which was first formed in 1991 as a committee made up of the elders from the Town Camps. The name "Four Corners" was based on the importance of Caterpillar Dreaming travelling in from the Four Corners of the country and was established due to concerns about violence, community safety and wellbeing and visitor management, with a primary



focus on the safety concerns for Aboriginal people in the Town Camps and urban Alice Springs. In 2020, Four Corners chose to rename Four Corners to the Tangentyere Men's Family Safety Group (TMFSG) and work in collaboration with the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group (TWFSG), to address family and community safety.

The TMFSG is made up of Aboriginal men who meet weekly to address issues such as suicide prevention, the prevention of family and domestic violence, harm reduction and minimisation related to Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD), support for at-risk young people as well as elderly people at risk of abuse and neglect.



The TMFSG program has broadened its scope to include younger men who are mentored by the senior men recognising the need to nurture young men as the next generation of community leaders.

Unfortunately, this program is unfunded and relies on small grants to sustain its operations.

The Fathering Project

The MBCP recently collaborated with the Tangentyere Men's Family Safety Group to create films and session plans exploring fatherhood. These resources facilitate discussions with MBCP participants about their roles as fathers, promoting healthy relationships and breaking cycles of violence.

Topics include:

- The journey to fatherhood
- The impacts of incarceration on parenting
- Alcohol's effect on parenting
- Relationships with men's own parents
- The importance of active fathering
- Peaceful conflict resolution

By fostering positive parenting practices, the project strengthens families and contributes to safer communities.

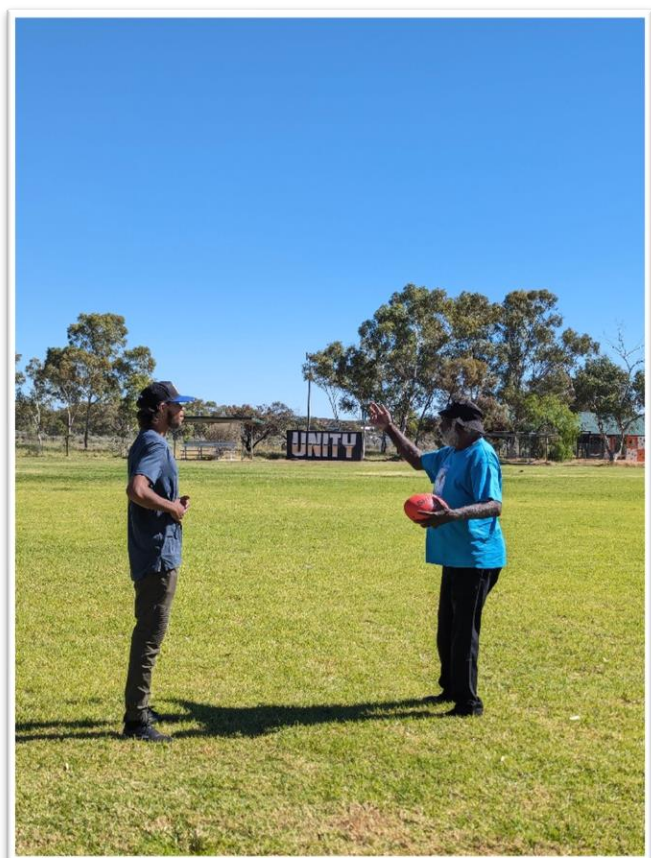
MBCP Peer Support Program

The MBCP has integrated peer support workers—men who have completed the program and use their lived experience to foster trust, engagement, and cultural safety. This initiative enhances program relevance and outcomes by drawing on shared experiences.

Peer support workers must have completed at least 16 weeks of the MBCP, demonstrate a commitment to non-violence and healthy relationships, and consent to partner contact. While they continue their own change journeys, they receive mentorship, supervision, and remuneration to maintain their commitment to non-violence.

This initiative addresses a critical gap in the MBC sector, particularly the shortage of Aboriginal men working in Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Aboriginal peer workers bring valuable cultural knowledge, community connections, and lived experience to enhance accountability and engagement.

The program is currently undergoing action research evaluation. Findings were presented at the No to Violence Conference, and the aim is to develop a scalable peer support model for national implementation.



Quality practice elements

In 2024 the MBC partnered with ANROWS to develop the Quality Practice Elements (QPE'S) with a particular focus on MBCs in the NT. The QPE's provide a continuous improvement tool and rubric drawing on recent research and practice-based knowledge to improve the effectiveness of MBC programs.

The MBCP continues to evolve in response to the high rates of intimate partner violence in the NT. Through initiatives such as CAMS, risk assessment tools, the Fathering Project, peer support, and the Quality Practice Elements, the program strengthens community-wide efforts toward non-violence and safer families.

