

Family and Domestic Violence

The evidence base for this paper draws on the work of the National Disability Footprint, including the Data and Research Footprint (Element 2) delivered in partnership with Dr Scott Avery and Girra Maa Indigenous Health, University of Technology Sydney.

First Nations people with disability remain at the epicentre of Australia's family and domestic violence (FDV) crisis. They are more likely than any other group to experience violence, compounded by systemic racism, ableism, historic and current trauma, and barriers to services, housing, and justice (Disability Royal Commission 2023; AIHW 2024a; McGlade 2024). FDV is both a cause and consequence of disability, including traumatic brain injury and compounding mental and physical health impacts, a cycle documented in both national statistics and lived experience.

Recent evidence shows First Nations women are 33 times more likely to be hospitalised from FDV, and homicide rates for First Nations women are more than seven times those of non-Indigenous women (AIHW 2024a; AIC 2024; McGlade 2024). More than 74,000 First Nations people received specialist homelessness services in 2022-23, with FDV the major driver (AIHW 2024b).

Too often, mainstream responses fail to account for the intersectional and compounding risks faced by First Nations people with disability, especially women and children. Systems too often miss kinship related, spiritual and Cultural abuse. Gaps in data, a lack of accessible and culturally safe housing and services, and persistent systemic bias continue to put lives at risk.

This statement calls for urgent, co-designed systems reform and meaningful partnership with First Nations people with disability, in line with the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, the Closing the Gap Target 13, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Key reforms must prioritise prevention, healing, safe housing, justice and advocacy, funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations (ACCOs) and accountability for results. Without swift and significant action, the current crisis and cycle of harm will continue.



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Disproportionate risk and harm

First Nations people with disability experience disproportionately high rates of FDV. Multiple, intersecting forms of systemic discrimination (ableism, racism, colonial trauma, gender inequality) create unique vulnerabilities and compound barriers to safety and justice (Disability Royal Commission 2023). Women and children are particularly exposed to severe and complex forms of violence—including violence that is specifically disability-related, such as the denial of essential care, the misuse of medication or assistive equipment, and reproductive control (AIHW 2024a; Our Watch 2024).

Violence itself is both a cause and a consequence of disability: studies confirm a significant link between cycles of violence and acquired disability, particularly brain injury, among First Nations women (ANROWS 2024; McGlade 2024).

Key Evidence

- In Australia, First Nations women are 33 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be hospitalised as a result of family violence (AIHW 2024a; McGlade 2024).
- First Nations people comprise 20% of homicide victims (28% of offenders) but only 3.8% of the population. Most Indigenous female victims are killed by someone they know, largely intimate partners (AIC 2024; LSJ 2024).
- In 2022–23, 74,713 First Nations people were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services, and 80,935 women and children sought help due to FDV (AIHW 2024b).
- Between 2010–2018, 26% of children killed by a parent in a FDV context were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, although they account for around 6% of Australian children (ANROWS 2024).

- People with disability (particularly women and children) are at increased risk across all types of violence, abuse and exploitation. Intersectionality compounds risk (Disability Royal Commission 2023; AIHW 2024a).
- Women with disability experience sexual harassment and sexual violence at twice and three times the rate, respectively, of non-disabled women (Dowse et al. 2016; Victorian Government 2025).
- First Nations women, particularly those with disability, avoid reporting family and domestic violence due to fear that child protective services will remove children from their care (Jones et al 2023; AHRC 2020).
- First Nations people experience barriers to assessments and diagnoses, making it difficult to access support (Jones et al 2023).
- First Nations people experience a lack of support and cultural safety from staff in mainstream services (Jones et al 2023).
- There is a paucity of research around the incidence and effects of discrimination and violence for First Nations women and people identifying as LGBTQI with lived experience of disability (Jones et al 2023).

Barriers to safety

- Service gaps, fragmentation, and poor cross-sector links remain, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Significant distrust and fear of service systems, often due to experiences of discriminatory practice and heightened risk of child removal.
- Inadequate, inaccessible and culturally unsafe housing, health, and justice responses.
- Data collection that fails to identify the intersection of Indigeneity, disability and gender hampers policy and service planning (Commonwealth of Australia 2023).

Recommendations

- 1. Establish integrated FDV safety policy mechanisms.** Formalise cross-portfolio structures at all levels of government, with paid representation from First Nations people with disability and accountability for joined-up policy, funding and monitoring across FDV, disability, child protection, justice and housing.
- 2. Fund self-determined, community-controlled FDV safety services.** Increase, sustain and fully resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and specialist First Nations disability organisations to design, lead and deliver the full spectrum of culturally safe, disability-inclusive FDV and housing services.
- 3. Mandate intersectional FDV service and cultural safety standards.** Co-design, fund and implement enforceable National Disability-Inclusive Cultural Safety Standards for all FDV-related services in partnership with First Nations people with disability.
- 4. Reform NDIS for FDV safety and response.** Urgently review and reform NDIS planning, funding and access processes to explicitly support the FDV safety and recovery needs of First Nations people with disability, including funding for specialist supports, crisis housing, security upgrades and communication assistive technology.
- 5. Transform child protection responses to FDV.** Mandate culturally safe, strengths-based and non-punitive approaches in child protection legislation and practice. Prioritise family preservation, invest in ACCO- and disability-inclusive support, and ensure implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).
- 6. Guarantee equitable access to justice and advocacy.** Government investment and legislation to guarantee ongoing funding for legal and advocacy support services including Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS) and independent disability advocacy, with mandatory training for police, prosecutors and judiciary on disability-specific abuse.
- 7. Prioritise immediate, safe and accessible housing.** Recognise and fund safe, accessible and affordable housing as the foundation of FDV safety. Invest in an expanded, integrated range of crisis, transitional and long-term housing.
- 8. Fund targeted, community-led prevention.** Direct funding for co-designed, culturally grounded, community-led primary prevention programs that address the specific intersecting drivers of FDV, including colonisation, racism, ableism, and gender inequality.
- 9. Establish intersectional FDV data collection governed by First Nations Data Sovereignty.** Co-develop national strategies to collect, report and use comprehensive data (prevalence, service access/outcomes, and disability-specific forms) to inform services and resource allocation, governed under data sovereignty principles.
- 10. Ensure transparent implementation and accountability.** Governments must publicly commit to and resource the full and timely implementation of all FDV-specific reforms in partnership with First Nations people with disability, with independent monitoring and public reporting of outcomes.

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