

SRT 3: Service responses and interventions

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Partnering, Patience and Persistence: Reducing domestic and family violence in remote areas. Sharing the lessons learnt from a bottom up approach to cross-government policy implementation.

The Northern Territory Government developed its first cross-government policy to address domestic and family violence in September 2014 with the launch of the Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy 2014-2017, Safety is Everyone's Right.

The Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy is based on the learning and success of the Alice Springs Integrated Response to Family and Domestic Violence project, which was the first key step taken in 2012 for the Northern Territory Government to progress the actions and strategies outlined in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*¹ and contribute to a sustained reduction in violence against women and children in Australia.

Through extensive consultation with over 70 government and non-government agencies and community members, the Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy built on the developments and practice outcomes achieved in Alice Springs.² This level of collaboration is also embedded in the Strategy's implementation, enabling the delivery of integrated and responsive domestic violence services and initiatives that save lives and improve the safety of victims and their children.

The Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy recognises an integrated response to family and domestic violence is one in which agencies make a commitment to work collaboratively to improve the safety of women and children and to support people who use violence to take responsibility for their behaviour and to change that behaviour.

Partnering is central to the Northern Territory's integrated response to domestic and family violence. The Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy governance structure was influenced by the Alice Springs Integrated Response project's award winning Reference Group. The Reference Group involves 19 government and non-government partners. Some of these include: the Alice Springs Women's Shelter, NPY (Ngaanytjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara) Women's Council, Tangentyere Council, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, local legal services and the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, Department of Children and Families, Department of Health, Department of Housing, Department of Education, Department of the Chief Minister, Department of Correctional Services and representatives of the Australian Government.

¹ *National Plan To Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011.

² In response to recommendations that an integrated response to domestic and family violence be adopted by Australian, state and territory governments. Australian Law Reform Commission Report, *Family Violence – A National Legal Response Final Report*, Report 114 October 2010, Volume 1, pp 43-44.

The Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy is led by the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, the Northern Territory Police and the Department of Local Government and Community Services and a further seven Northern Territory Government departments. The Commonwealth Government and 39 Indigenous and non-government organisations are also partners in delivering the Strategy.

The Strategy has Local Reference Groups established in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs that provide guidance and expert advice on the local implementation of the Strategy.

The Domestic Violence Directorate has been established within the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice to provide leadership, coordinate policy, and ensure a cross-government approach. Directorate staff facilitate monthly Local Reference Group meetings in Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Darwin and over 110 individuals from across government and non-government organisations are engaged through this ongoing consultation mechanism. The Directorate also coordinates the Strategy's Cross-Government Chief Executive Officers Steering Committee and the Cross-Government Working Group, which provide high-level strategic direction and monitor progress against the Strategy's Implementation Plan.

The Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy is built on underlying principles recommended by international and national best practice to address domestic violence and the five key areas where action is required to produce change, those being:

- 1) Prevention;
- 2) Early intervention;
- 3) Protection – safety for victims;
- 4) Rebuilding the lives of victim-survivors; and
- 5) Accountability and positive change for perpetrators.

Key strategies across all five Areas for Action directly align with the Second Action Plan of the National Plan and are detailed in an Implementation Plan setting out NT Government agency responsibilities.

The Safety is Everyone's Right Strategy aims to:

- increase the safety of victims' and their children;
- reduce the rates of intergenerational trauma caused by exposure to domestic and family violence;
- increase accountability of perpetrators; and
- establish integrated service delivery systems that are sustainable and adaptable.

A Family Safety Framework (FSF) to ensure that safety is the focus of the response to family and domestic violence and improving co-ordination amongst agencies is the centerpiece of the Strategy³. Evaluation gave broad support to the Family Safety Framework and noted the important contribution and collaboration of agencies involved, with Police taking a lead role.⁴ The major strengths of the model were identified as:

³ The 2012 coronial inquest in South Australia into a domestic violence related homicide gave overwhelming support for the Family Safety Framework concept (*Death of Robyn Eileen Hayward [2012] SACC*).

⁴ The South Australian Family Safety Framework was evaluated in 2008 (Jayne Marshall, Emma Ziersch and Nina Hudson, Office of Crime Statistics and Research, South Australian Attorney General's Department, *The Family Safety Framework Final Evaluation Report*, November 2008)

- The clarification and common understanding of information sharing processes under the information sharing protocol, which enabled agencies to provide and receive a much broader range of information essential to the development of appropriate responses.
- The shift to an integrated response to domestic violence, where all agencies are ‘at the table’ compared with the previous fragmented ‘silo’ approach.
- Having a consistent risk assessment tool, which represents an agreement/common understanding of high risk factors for domestic and family violence and which subsequently forms the basis of consistent responses by different agencies.
- Enhancing the accountability of agencies to respond to domestic violence through the development, monitoring and documentation of action plans as part of the Family Safety Meeting process.

The Northern Territory applied the learning from the positive outcomes of the operation and experience of the South Australian Family Safety Framework to see it implemented as a component of the Alice Springs Integrated Response in 2012. The framework is complemented by multi-agency sector training designed to enhance the first point of contact for victims through strengthening expertise and capacity of the workforce to identify and respond effectively to domestic and family violence.

The Northern Territory Family Safety Framework is led by Northern Territory Police and protects high risk victims and their children from serious assault and homicide by coordinating an integrated response across front-line agencies, primarily through fortnightly Family Safety Meetings.

The framework includes:

- Common risk assessment;
- Interagency referral process;
- Information sharing protocol; and
- Fortnightly family safety meetings.

Under the Safety is Everyone’s Right Strategy the Family Safety Framework expanded to six locations across the Northern Territory in 2015 including two remote locations.

As at 30 November 2015, 367 high risk victims involving 316 children have been referred to Family Safety Meetings where a multi-agency positive action plan is developed to mitigate the risk of serious physical harm or homicide.

A total of 1313 government and non-government staff across the Northern Territory have attended multi-agency training.

The development of a Cross Border Protocol with the South Australian Government enables the transfer of high risk cases between the jurisdictions.

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