



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

Establishing an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

Consultation Paper

The Western Australian government proudly acknowledges the traditional custodians of this country and recognises the continuing connection to land, waters and communities.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures and to elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge that family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture and that its causes are deeply connected to colonisation, the dispossession of Aboriginal people and the destruction of culture.

We acknowledge and celebrate the courage and dignity of women and men who work tirelessly to create safety in their families and communities.

Table of contents

Establishing an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	1
Message from the Director General	3
In Brief.	4
Opportunity to input.....	5
Focus area Foundations for change.....	7
Focus area Aboriginal Family Safety.....	8
Focus area Primary prevention	9
Focus area Keeping victim survivors safe and holding perpetrators to account.....	10
Focus area System reform.....	11
In conclusion.....	12
Appendix one.....	13
References	15

Message from the Director General



Together with the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, the Hon. Simone McGurk, I am committed to establishing an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence within the Department of Communities. The Office will elevate the profile of family and domestic violence and provide the stewardship needed within Communities and across government to deliver improved outcomes in the areas of primary prevention, Aboriginal family safety, victim survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.

The establishment of the Office will enhance the great work already underway within Communities, across government and in the community sector. It will provide an opportunity to build upon existing strengths and

establish the necessary structures to drive system reform, embed evidence-based policy and mobilise existing and new resources to improve capacity and capability to prevent and reduce family and domestic violence.

To inform establishment of the Office you are invited to provide feedback on what you think the functions and role of the Office should be. This consultation paper provides you with information about key challenges and opportunities in the area of family and domestic violence to inform thinking about the important functions and capabilities of an Office. Your feedback will be used to inform development of a functional model from which the Office will be established.

This is an exciting opportunity to help shape the future of work to prevent and reduce family and domestic violence in the Western Australian community. I look forward to your input.

Mike Rowe

Director General

In Brief

Why establish an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence?

Establishing an Office will elevate the profile of family and domestic violence and provide the stewardship needed within Communities and across government to deliver improved outcomes in the areas of primary prevention, Aboriginal family safety, victim survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.

On 22 July 2020, Western Australia's inaugural Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence the Hon. Simone McGurk, launched *Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020-2030* (Path to Safety). Path to Safety sets out a whole of community approach to preventing and reducing family and domestic violence. Key reforms and actions are organised around four outcomes: Aboriginal family safety; keeping people safe and holding perpetrators to account; primary prevention (stopping violence before it starts); and reforming systems to prioritise safety, accountability and collaboration.

The Department of Communities (Communities) is the lead agency responsible for family and domestic violence strategic planning including implementation of Path to Safety and the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy. Through partnerships, joined-up approaches and mobilising existing and new resources, there is immense opportunity within the service system to generate impact and make real positive changes for the health, safety and wellbeing of victim survivors and the Western Australian community.

To capitalise on this potential and lead reforms that drive system and community change, strong stewardship is required comprising:

- a **leader who is an authority in the area of family and domestic violence** supported by committed and informed leadership within the agency and across government;
- **effective partnerships** with community members who hold cultural authority, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, partner agencies, the community services sector and academia;
- processes for respectfully and safely engaging **people with lived experience**;
- a clear **mandate** to make change and work differently;
- capability to **innovate and think differently** about how we create improved capacity and capability to respond to family and domestic violence, drawing upon technical expertise, the expertise of survivors and formal evidence;
- capability to **measure outcomes** and translate **evidence to action**; and
- structures to support and empower **place-based design and decisions**.

Establishing an Office is one step towards creating the structures and authorising environments necessary to enable Communities, working together with the sector, partner agencies and communities to achieve improved whole of life outcomes for women, children and families in the Western Australian community.

Opportunity to input

Tell us about the key functions of an Office

Communities is committed to establishing an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. The Office aims to improve the stewardship of family and domestic violence within Communities and across government to deliver improved outcomes in the areas of primary prevention, Aboriginal family safety, victim survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.

To inform this work, you are invited to provide feedback on the functions and role of the Office.

Structure of the consultation paper

The consultation paper provides information to inform your thinking about the role and function of an Office. The information is not intended to define the scope of your response, but rather to provide relevant background and contextual information about what an Office can value add to the work towards creating a safer Western Australia where all people live free from family and domestic violence.

The consultation paper begins with a summary of key structures enabling reform including leadership, governance and research capability. From there, the paper turns to the focus areas in Path to Safety which are: Aboriginal family safety; keeping people safe and holding perpetrators to account; primary prevention (stopping violence before it starts); and reforming systems to prioritise safety, accountability and collaboration. For each of the focus areas, a summary is provided of the key challenges or barriers to safety, current opportunities and key considerations about the important functions of an Office to deliver the desired outcomes.

While reading this consultation paper, you are asked to consider the following seven questions.

Key consultation questions

1. What does effective leadership and governance look like in the area of family and domestic violence?
2. What is the role and function of an Office in Aboriginal Family Safety? What are the key skills and capabilities the Office needs to fulfil this role?
3. What is the role and function of an Office for improving capacity and capability in the area of primary prevention?
4. What are the benefits or consequences of aligning work in the areas of family and domestic violence, sexual violence and gender equality?
5. What is the role of an Office in stewarding professional practice?
6. In what ways can an Office value add to the design of funded services?
7. In what ways can an Office inform and enable system reform?

Honouring what we have already been told

Communities works closely with partners and communities to deliver policies, programs and other initiatives that are informed by, and tailored to, the people and communities that they intend to support. In the last two years there has been extensive consultation on a range of initiatives including the Children and Community Services Act Amendment Bill, Path to Safety, the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy, two new family and domestic violence Hubs and two new women's refuges. Additionally, Communities has worked closely with stakeholders to design the Specialist Child Protection Unit, Office of Disability and the Centre for Housing and Homelessness.

The learnings from these consultation processes have informed the decision to establish an Office for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. This consultation process seeks to build on what we have already heard to inform the design of the Office including the structure, functions and key roles.

Having your say

You can get involved and have your say by:

- submitting a written response to this consultation paper by **Tuesday 6 July 2021**; and
- participating in a face to face meeting, forum or workshop.

Responses to the consultation paper can be provided via an online form at www.communities.wa.gov.au/officeforpreventionoffdv or via email to FDVconsultation@communities.wa.gov.au

Using your feedback

Feedback about the Office including the roles and functions will be reviewed, de-identified and summarised in a consultation outcome report.

Accessibility

The consultation paper is available in an accessible format and hard copies can be provided on request. If you have any issues accessing the consultation paper, please do not hesitate to contact us by email: FDVconsultation@communities.wa.gov.au.

Tips for providing feedback:

- keep your comments clear and concise, using dot points wherever possible;
- attach any additional information and provide details of the source; and
- use the feedback survey available at www.communities.wa.gov.au/officeforpreventionoffdv

Focus area Foundations for change

The prevalence of family and domestic violence, the pervasiveness of its effects on the health and wellbeing of women and children, and the complexity of interventions focused on stopping or changing perpetrators behaviour, means that responses often involve multiple services, systems and agencies¹. The number and type of interventions available has great potential to create safe outcomes for victim survivors. However, when responses operate in silos they can inadvertently create burden and danger for those trying to navigate the service system.

Driving change to harness and reform the existing capabilities in the service system to deliver the best possible outcomes for victim survivors, families and communities, starts with effective leadership, governance and partnerships.

Opportunity for an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

The Office can rethink how the prevention of and responses to family and domestic violence are led, designed and governed. Research examining the components that support effective cross-agency responses to family and domestic violence consistently highlight the importance of:

1. a leader who can set, drive and champion a vision for change;
2. an authorising environment that supports and enables collaboration;
3. structures of governance that support strong partnerships and enable focused planning and decision making at all levels of community and government (local, regional state). This includes processes for communicating successes and challenges between these structures to provide real time information about emerging issues and systemic barriers to safety; and
4. partnerships with academia, stakeholders and community to set the research agenda, enable the translation of research findings to policy and practice, and to enhance the capability to measure and monitor success through common data definitions and shared outcomes.

Australian jurisdictions vary in the way they have operationalised these enablers to drive family and domestic violence reform agendas. All jurisdictions convene cross-agency forums of senior leaders to inform planning and decisions. Different between jurisdictions is the degree of engagement with academia and the supporting structures for engaging and hearing from Aboriginal people, victim survivors, community members and regional service providers.

Also differing between jurisdictions is the work to establish shared, measurable outcomes. Victoria and Tasmania have progressed substantially in this area developing dedicated outcome frameworks to monitor and measure their work including investment in the collection, collation and analysis of data across government. In these jurisdictions, shared outcomes provide a framework of accountability from which the performance of individual agencies, and their collective efforts, can be monitored and measured. See **appendix one** for further jurisdictional comparisons.



QUESTION: **What does effective leadership and governance look like in the area of family and domestic violence?**

Focus area **Aboriginal Family Safety**

Focus area. Work with Aboriginal People to strengthen Aboriginal family safety
Outcome: Aboriginal family safety is supported and enabled by a dedicated strategy, co-designed and led by Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal women and children experience family violence at disproportionately high rates with devastating impacts on the health and wellbeing of victim survivors and the social and cultural fabric of family and community. In recognition of the unique causes and drivers of family violence in Aboriginal communities and the importance of responses that are owned, designed and led by Aboriginal people, Communities has committed to developing a dedicated strategy for improving Aboriginal family safety.

Developing the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy

Consultation has commenced with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to inform development of the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy and while this work is still underway a number of themes have been recurring in the feedback:

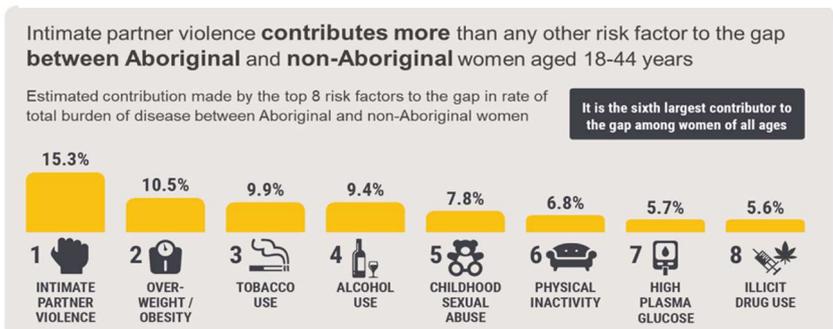
- **Aboriginal people have the solutions for Aboriginal people;**
- the drivers and manifestation of family violence in Aboriginal families is different to western conceptions and requires its own dedicated approach that recognises Aboriginal kinship systems, the Aboriginal world view and the importance of responses embedded in culture;
- acknowledge the skills, experience, knowledge and capability of Aboriginal organisation to provide the building blocks for local responses to family violence; and
- increase Aboriginal engagement and representation in decision making including through regional and state-wide governance structures.

Opportunity for an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

The Office can provide accountability to and for Aboriginal family safety. Effective stewardship can ensure that work in this area retains fidelity to the underscoring principles of substantive equality and the commitment to working **“with Aboriginal people to develop responses for Aboriginal people to be delivered by Aboriginal people.”**

Strong stewardship can also assist to elevate the profile of Aboriginal family safety by prioritising it as an essential component of Closing the Gap. Intimate partner violence contributes more than any other risk factor to the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women (see figure 1). In July 2020 this was recognised by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap through the addition of Target 13 - *“a significant and sustained reduction in violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children towards zero”*. It is also clearly demonstrated through the contribution of family violence to the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system including out of home care (Target 12).

Figure 1. Closing the Gap and family violence



QUESTION: **What is the role and function of an Office in Aboriginal Family Safety? What are the key skills and capabilities the Office needs to fulfil this role?**

Focus area **Primary prevention**

Focus area:	Grow primary prevention to stop family and domestic violence.
Outcomes:	The whole community acts to prevent family and domestic violence. People engage in respectful relationships across all areas of life. Conditions that support victim blaming, violence, discrimination and inequality are challenged and addressed.

The prevalence of family and domestic violence in the Western Australian community cannot be reduced without dedicated attention to primary prevention. Our Watch the national foundation for the primary prevention of violence against women states that gender inequality is the social context enabling violence against women to occurⁱⁱ along with the ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people which drives violence against Aboriginal womenⁱⁱⁱ. Noting that family and domestic violence is one form of violence against women.

Gender equality and sexual violence

In 2020, Communities released **Stronger Together – Western Australia’s Plan for Gender Equality** (Stronger Together). Stronger Together is a framework for Government, business and the community to take action over the next ten years to create a better, fairer and more equitable community. A key pillar of Stronger Together is ‘Safety and Justice’ which supports work towards a society where women live safely and have adequate legal protections. Family and domestic violence is recognised in the strategy as the greatest risk to Western Australian women’s safety.

Although Stronger Together and Path to Safety are both managed by Communities, responsibility for implementation is managed through separate governance structures. Neither strategy substantively addresses sexual violence which research demonstrates predominantly occurs in circumstances of intimate partner violence.

In all Australian jurisdictions except Western Australia, responses to family and domestic violence and sexual violence are aligned. In South Australia and New South Wales this is taken a step further through the addition of the gender equality portfolio which is managed within the same policy unit and governed through shared leadership forums. Through this approach, the primacy of work towards gender inequality for primary prevention is acknowledged, accepting that prevention of family violence in Aboriginal communities must be considerate of the different drivers.

Opportunity for an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

Closer alignment of work relating to gender equality, family and domestic violence and sexual violence provides opportunity to strengthen understanding about the relationship between these areas and opportunity to leverage and consolidate impact.

16 Days in WA is one example of a primary prevention initiative that aligns work towards gender equality, sexual violence and family violence. Created and led by the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, the Hon. Simone McGurk, 16 Days in WA is an awareness raising campaign that provides a call to action for all members of the community to challenge and change the drivers of violence against women which includes gender inequality.

QUESTION: What is the role and function of an Office for improving capacity and capability in the area of primary prevention?

QUESTION: What are the benefits or consequences of aligning work in the areas of family and domestic violence, sexual violence and gender equality?

Focus area Keeping victim survivors safe and holding perpetrators to account

Focus area:	Act now to keep people safe and hold perpetrators to account
Outcomes:	Adult and child victims are safe and supported to recover and thrive. Perpetrators are visible, held to account and supported to change. People at risk of experiencing or using violence are identified early and supported to access effective, evidence-based interventions. Responses meet people's diverse and intersecting needs.

To create safety for victim survivors and support them to recover and thrive the service system must have the capability to: identify people at risk and refer them to appropriate support; provide a continuum of care from point of identification to post-crisis recovery; provide services that are person-centred, risk informed and responsive to client need; identify and effectively respond to perpetrators; and provide coordinated responses between agencies and organisations^{iv}.

Opportunity for an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

Communities has considerable potential to deliver improved outcomes for victim survivors by both stewarding change across government and by changing the way we work and contract to create capacity and capability within existing services and service delivery.

In addition to being the lead agency for family and domestic violence strategic planning, Communities forms a considerable part of the 'service system' that is enacted to provide a response, this includes:

- over 2,500 staff providing direct services to the community in the areas of child protection, housing, disability services and community development;
- \$60 million in election commitments for family and domestic violence;
- \$76 million invested in family and domestic violence services and other initiatives;
- \$33 million invested in earlier intervention in family support services and \$52 million in homelessness support services;
- is working to improve procurement processes to ensure that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are involved in service design and delivery for Aboriginal families; and
- a total workforce of 6380 people who each has individual agency to influence attitudes within their families and communities.

An analysis of Communities business areas demonstrates that although not all of these functions are designed primarily for dealing with family and domestic violence, they are confronted by it, and are responding to it, as a priority of their work. This is most notable across our primary service delivery streams where family and domestic violence is the most investigated and substantiated type of child abuse and a significant factor contributing to the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care^{vi}; the leading cause of homelessness for women and children^{vii}; and a significant factor impacting the health, inclusion and participation for people with disability^{viii}.

Ensuring that all parts of Communities business, all staff, and all funded services are family and domestic violence informed, can enable a substantial shift towards improving capacity and capability to prevent and reduce family and domestic violence in our community.

QUESTION: **What is the role of an Office in stewarding professional practice?**

QUESTION: **In what ways can an Office value add to the design of funded services?**

Focus area **System reform**

Focus area: Reform systems to prioritise safety, accountability and collaboration.

Outcomes: Safety is improved through better information sharing and data collection.
The right attitudes, skills and knowledge are in place to keep people safe.
Supports are person centred and easy to access.
Legislation, policy and procurement enables an effective, coordinated response.

The range of agencies involved in providing responses to victim survivors and perpetrators of family and domestic violence can mean high potential for positive impact, but also mean that outcomes delivered in one system can be dependent upon the work of another. Strong stewardship is required to ensure that all component parts of the service system are working towards the same goals; conceptualise, understand and assess family and domestic violence in the same (or compatible) ways; and organise responses around the needs of the victim survivor and the risks posed by the perpetrator^{ix}.

Consultation feedback, and outcomes of reviews and inquiries, reiterated that this ideal state cannot be delivered without dedicated and sustained stewardship that is comprised of:

- strong leadership;
- effective partnerships across government, with the community service sector and Aboriginal community controlled organisations;
- ability to be agile and responsive to emerging trends and issues;
- capability to define outcomes and measure success; and
- capability to demonstrate how strategic policy translates to operations through demonstration and delivery within Communities workforce and contracted services.

Opportunity for an Office for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

Governance models for supporting cross sector stewardship are discussed in appendix one of this consultation paper. But stewardship is more than governance. **An Office can impact on the multiple intersecting systems that work to create safety for victim survivors by translating evidence to action, identifying and addressing systemic barriers to safety and working differently to trial new responses to complex and entrenched issues.**

Some of the opportunities within Communities include co-working between the existing Offices established in the portfolios of Housing and Homelessness, Disability and Child Protection; learning from the agile and innovative work exemplified through planning for the COVID response and recovery; and learning from operational responses to family and domestic violence including models of co-location and multi-agency risk management. Each of these demonstrates the primacy of collaboration for ensuring that the right knowledge and skills are available at the right time to address emerging issues and to respond to the often complex and changing environment of family and domestic violence prevention and response.

QUESTION: **In what ways can an Office inform and enable system reform?**

In conclusion

The Department of Communities is establishing an Office to elevate the profile of family and domestic violence and provide the stewardship needed within Communities and across government to deliver improved outcomes in the areas of primary prevention, Aboriginal family safety, victim survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.

Communities is inviting feedback from stakeholders about the functions, structure and role for the Office.

Key questions to guide your response are provided throughout this consultation paper.

Feedback can be provided to Communities by Tuesday 6 July 2021.

Please share your thoughts via the online form available at www.communities.wa.gov.au/officeforpreventionofdv or direct to the Office inbox at FDVconsultation@communities.wa.gov.au.

Appendix one

To inform development of this consultation paper, Communities conducted a jurisdictional scan of family and domestic violence strategic planning processes around Australia including the role, function and governance of the responsible business unit. A brief summary of this work related to leadership, governance and accountability (measuring outcomes) is summarised below.

Structure and leadership

In all jurisdictions, a dedicated team or division holds responsibility for family and domestic violence strategic planning. The majority of these teams exist within a human service organisation that has portfolio responsibilities for child protection. Many of the teams with portfolio responsibility for family and domestic violence strategic planning also have responsibility for addressing sexual violence and working towards gender equality.

Governance structures

In all Australian jurisdictions, family and domestic violence strategic planning is led by cross-agency forums comprised predominantly of senior government leaders. What differs between jurisdictions is: the seniority and reporting lines of the governance arrangements; the involvement of representatives from community sector services and Aboriginal organisations; alignment to regional decision-making structures; and structures for regular participation of Aboriginal people in solution focused discussion and planning.

A brief snapshot of some unique governance arrangements include:

- **South Australia:** family violence strategic policy is overseen by a Chief Executives Group chaired by the Minister for Human Services. The group is comprised of Chief Executives from key departments addressing family, domestic and sexual violence. The Chief Executives Group receives advice from a Key Partner Network co-chaired by the Office for Women (policy lead) and peak body for family and domestic violence services.
- **New South Wales:** convene a cross-agency board comprised of Senior Government leaders reporting directly to the responsible Minister. Evaluation of [Blueprint for Reform](#) demonstrated that this provided an ideal forum for raising and resolving complex issues but was criticised for not having representation from community services or Aboriginal organisations^x.
- **Victoria:** has established three '[family violence change committees](#)' to provide regular advice to government. The change committees include a Victim Survivor Advisory Council, an Aboriginal Partnership's Forum and an Aboriginal Children's Forum.
- **Queensland:** convenes an [Implementation Council](#) comprised predominantly of representatives from business, community and sector alongside five ex-officio members representing the Queensland government. The Council was established by the Queensland Premier and has a specific remit focusing on partnerships with corporate and community organisations, local government and community members to build momentum for local community-led action.
- **South Australia:** convenes regional '[Violence against Women Collaborations](#)' which are multi-agency partnerships that aim to mobilise action at the local level to prevent and reduce violence against women. The collaborations work to develop and implementation regional action plans; share decision making about the allocation of social housing in a region; and coordinate case management for people/families with complex needs.

Accountability

Mechanisms for reporting against the progress of family and domestic violence strategic plans and their outcomes vary between jurisdictions. Most have a mechanism for annual or bi-annual

reporting against the progress of policy and program initiatives. A smaller number regularly report against outcomes, through defined success measures. The best examples of this are:

- **Victoria:** developed a Family Violence Outcomes Framework and has established whole-of-government family violence outputs that are specified in the State Budget. Agencies are required to report against output targets annually.
- **Queensland:** has established an evaluation framework for their strategic plan including bi-annual reporting.
- **New South Wales:** developed an Outcomes and Monitoring Framework.
- **Tasmania:** identifies success measures attached to the following four areas for improvement: safety for families; behavioural change; perpetrator accountability; and support services.

References

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- ⁱⁱ Our Watch 2015, Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Our Watch 2018, Changing the Picture: Preventing Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women, Our Watch, Melbourne.
- ^{iv} Breckenridge J, Rees S, Valentine K & Murray S 2016, Meta-Evaluation of Existing Interagency Partnerships, Collaboration, Coordination and/or Integrated Interventions and Service Responses to Violence against Women: Key Findings and Future Directions, ANROWS, Sydney.
- ^v Putt J, Holder H & O’Leary C 2017, Women’s Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Services: Their Responses and Practices with and for Aboriginal Women: Final Report, ANROWS, Sydney.
- ^{vi} Department of Communities 2020, Child Protection – activity performance information 2019-20. Government of Western Australia.
- ^{vii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017, Specialist Homelessness Services 2016–17, AIHW.
- ^{viii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, Family domestic and sexual violence in Australia, AIHW.
- ^{ix} Humphreys C et al. 2017, Pathways and Research into Collaborative Inter-Agency Practice: Collaborative Work across the Child Protection and Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Interface: The PATRICIA Project, Final Report, ANROWS, Sydney.
- ^x KPMG 2020, Evaluation of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021.