



Insights Report I

Domestic and Family Violence: Potential for Change
Intersection of Philanthropy and the Landscape
of First Nations-led Specialist Service Providers
Paul Ramsay Foundation

SEPTEMBER 2023

ResearchCrowd acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Elders of the land and seas on which we live and work.

1. How can we better understand the domestic and family violence landscape?

In the past month, the Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF), in partnership with the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF), awarded funding to 58 domestic and family violence specialist service providers across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia – 27 of which are First Nations-led. The primary internal objectives of this network are two-fold beyond the immediate financial support.

1. PRF aims to develop connections and capability within the network of specialist organisations with expertise in the prevention and mitigation of violence for key communities.
2. PRF will consult with this network of partners to grow its own knowledge, sector relationships, and plans for future work.

We, ResearchCrowd, an Indigenous research agency and certified supplier of Supply Nation, will work with the 27 First Nations-led domestic and family violence specialist service providers. Our aim is to better understand the landscape and to explore the possible systemic moves that need to happen to help end cycles of disadvantage through enabling equitable opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, people and communities to thrive. We will also be sharing our insights with Innovation Unit, a social enterprise, who will work with the 31 non-First Nations-led domestic and family violence specialist service providers. PRF aims to share ResearchCrowd and Innovation Unit's collective learnings with communities and professionals within the ecosystem in 'real time.'

We remain mindful of PRF's advice to avoid rushing towards conclusions without a full enough picture; advice which sits well with our approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research. At this early stage in the project, we lay no claim to having an accurate and deep understanding of the specialist domestic and family violence landscape.

At this point in time, we have developed a roadmap to guide our work with the 27 First Nations-led domestic and family violence specialist service providers, which we presented to PRF as a series of responses to questions that we had been considering with our Senior Indigenous Advisory Group.

- What is the project about?
- What should we know to get started?
- What would PRF like to know?
- What is our approach?



In this insights report, we continue to ask questions that might frame our approach to the field. In doing so, we apply a cultural lens to our Talking Stories model for looking and tracking the view across the landscape, circling around in pursuit of themes, hoping to gain insights that we can collect along the way.

In this report, we share some thoughts that inform our 'work in solidarity' with the 27 First Nations-led specialist service providers that sit across the landscape – the frontline organisations from whom we draw inspiration and refer to as Network 27.

2. How is the backdrop changing?

In 2023, unprecedented change is underway. The Australian Government is moving forward with its proposed law to alter the Constitution to recognise First Nations of Australia. A Voice to Parliament aims to provide Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait Islander communities a route to help inform policy and legal decisions that impact their lives. Governments have acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have a genuine say in matters that affect them for better life outcomes to be achieved. Debates in the public arena – in the media and on social media – are telling, but only time will tell whether Australians want (this) change.

‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ are two distinct populations made up of many groups of people, with unique, rich and diverse cultures.

Indeed, decades of activism on the part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians bears witness to the significant structural and systemic reforms that have taken place in recent years.

This is evident, for instance in: South Australia’s First Voice to Parliament; the Yoorrook Justice Commission truth telling inquiry into historical and ongoing injustices against First Peoples in Victoria, and its report into the child protection and criminal justice systems; the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is the central pillar in government policy relating to First Nations’ affairs, and the first of its kind to include a non-government party as a signatory – the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, comprising 80+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak and member organisations across Australia.

While governments have acknowledged the entrenched disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and ongoing racism faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, systemic racism is pervasively and deeply embedded in and throughout systems, policies, practices, beliefs and attitudes. For example, results from research conducted with 11,000+ Australians over a 10-year period found that three out of four Australian participants displayed an unconscious negative bias against Indigenous Australians.¹ In commenting on these findings, Tony McAvoy SC said, “[a]s a practising lawyer, I cannot help but think about these biases in terms of the justice system”.²

Australian governments at all levels have committed to structural and systemic transformation to reduce racism and unconscious bias faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and increase cultural safety in government institutions and agencies.³ Further, there is an increasing number of resources “made by and for our mob” that are helping to improve understandings and practices around social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁴

How will recently implemented reforms impact the work of frontline organisations, and how will this translate into greater access and opportunities for Network 27 in their work to prevent and mitigate domestic and family violence for the people and communities they serve?

¹ Shirodkar, S. (2019). Bias against Indigenous Australians: Implicit association test results for Australia. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 22, 3–34.

² Swinburne University Barak Wonga Oration (2022).

³ ResearchCrowd. (2023). *Research on Cultural Safety – Closing the Gap*. National Indigenous Australians Agency. Australia.

⁴ See for example, WellMob: Healing Our Way, <https://wellmob.org.au>.



3. How can we contribute to the literature?

As stated earlier, we do not have an accurate and deep understanding of the landscape, at this time. However, we are aware that there is a large body of social science and related literature on domestic and family violence in Australia. Though our insightful looking into the literature cannot be considered little more than a cursory glance (at the titles of some of these works, along with their publication and author details, tables of contents, aims and methodological frameworks), we experienced a number of ‘aha’ moments; some of which we share below.

Amongst the volumes of literature, there are a number of publications on domestic and family violence service providers. Most of these publications are presented through the prism of client experience, with the majority reporting on ‘women’s specialist domestic and family violence services’; some of which report on ‘Indigenous-led services’.⁵ For example, it was found that “there are few Indigenous-led/community-controlled specialist domestic and family violence services that focus on supporting Aboriginal women victims”. Many ‘women’s specialist domestic and family violence services’ were reported to be accessed by “Aboriginal women but, with most services, Aboriginal women would constitute a minority of clients”. In addition, “at least half of the services in the sector were estimated to currently employ Aboriginal people or have dedicated positions”.

In looking and tracking the view across the landscape of literature, we further found that there appears to be a comparatively large number of publications on the programs being delivered by ‘women’s specialist domestic and family violence services’. Some of these reports explore and examine the experiences of ‘Indigenous-led’ domestic and family violence programs, most of which have been authored by ‘non-Indigenous’ research teams.

Our early journeying into desktop research landed us on social media platforms; some of which showed that the reporting of ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s’ experiences of domestic and family violence by non-Indigenous research teams was not always well-received. Some ‘Aboriginal’ critics questioned claims being made in various reports, with some raising concerns about the incompatibility of ‘white feminists’ to lead and speak to the discrete and particular experiences of ‘Aboriginal women and men’.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson⁶ has maintained that “the real challenge for white feminists is to theorise the relinquishment of power so that feminist practice can contribute to changing the racial order”. She went on to say, “Indigenous women will continue to resist this dominance by talkin’ up, because the invisibility of unspeakable things requires them to be spoken”.

How will opportunities for bringing together Network 27 and the 31 non-First Nations-led organisations contribute to better understanding the domestic and family violence ecosystem, and how will this enhance the potential for capability and change across the landscape?

⁵ ANROWS. (2017). Women’s specialist domestic and family violence services: Their responses and practices with and for Aboriginal women: Final Report. *Horizons*. Issues 01.

⁶ Moreton-Robinson, A. (2000). *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*. University of Queensland Press, 325-329.

4. What can we learn from the National Plan?

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022-2032* builds on the work of the 2010-2022 National Plan. Since then, fewer Australians have been reported to hold attitudes that support violence against women, most support gender equality and women are said to increasingly feel safer in private and in community settings (p.15). The 2022 National Plan has as its vision: 'ending gender-based violence in one generation'. Ten findings from the 2022 National Plan are presented (verbatim) below.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionately higher rates of violence than non-Indigenous women, are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised because of violence than non-Indigenous women, report 3 times as many incidents of sexual violence as non-Indigenous women, and are more likely to be killed due to assault. (p.42)
- The 2022-2032 National Plan has called for a reduction by 50% in all forms of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls by 2031, as progress towards zero. (p.31)
- Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated by men of all cultural backgrounds. (p.42)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men also experience extremely high rates of violence, as both children and adults. (p.42)
- Family violence is a significant factor contributing to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, with children removed from their families at disproportionately higher rates than non-Indigenous children. (p.42)
- Fear of child removal remains one of the greatest deterrents for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to report violence or seek assistance, which can be due to a fear of involvement by the child protection system, a fear strengthened by the current over representation in out-of-home care. (p.42)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are being misidentified as perpetrators when they seek assistance. The legal and justice systems are not well adapted or informed to respond effectively to the interlocking and compounding forms of violence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience. More work is needed to educate and develop the legal and justice systems, particularly at the frontline of policing. (p.42)
- Data and data-sharing mechanisms are inadequate to provide quality measurements in relation to outcomes for victim-survivors and holding people who choose to use violence to account. Data disaggregation is limited and we lack the evidence to understand the experiences of certain communities, such as the LGBTIQ+ community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (p.27)
- There are differences in measures and legal terms between jurisdictions. (p.27)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must lead responses for their communities. (p.25)

An outcome of the 2022 National Plan has been the development of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025*.

How will the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 inform the work of Network 27, and how will this impact the domestic and family violence sector?

5. Where to from here?

Our core vision at ResearchCrowd has always been to ‘strengthen cultural integrity in Indigenous research’. We recognise that better understanding the call for involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the design and application of research and its governance frameworks is not merely a structural reform within the Australian research landscape.⁷ Rather, it is a call for systemic change in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including First Nations-led domestic and family violence service providers, their programs and the communities they serve.

At the time of the 2023 PRF Grant Round – Specialist DFV Programs: National Open Grant Round, each of the First Nations-led specialist service providers agreed to participate in data collection activities. We later included an additional ‘consent mechanism’, where we invited each of the participating organisations – our Network 27 – to indicate their willingness (i.e., verbal, free, prior and informed consent) to participate *or not* in data collection with us, by saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ at PRF’s Welcome Event on 23 August 2023.

A resounding ‘yes’ was heard – in what was an informative and heartening occasion. Thank yous were extended to the team at PRF at the Welcome Event, and cheers rang out to Paul Ramsay AO himself. It was understood that his benevolence would enable equitable opportunities for the delivery of much-needed programs, collaborative approaches and important advocacy across the domestic and family violence landscape. It also revealed a faith in the capabilities of First Nations organisations, people and communities.



Readers will have noted that we used the phrase ‘domestic and family violence’, as well as the terms First Nations, Indigenous, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in this, the first of two, insights reports. We understand that there will be differences between organisations, people and communities regarding preferred terminology – to describe and make meaningful the domestic and family violence landscape, and to make known the ‘cultural names of nations’ that are home to the organisations that form Network 27, which we explore further in later work.

Working together, we are well-positioned to gain more accurate and deep understandings that can map the domestic and family violence sector, which sits at the cross-roads of intersecting points – of view, values and mindsets; people, power and polices; and whole organisations, institutions and systems. Guided by the Strong Field Framework and the principles of empowerment evaluation, we take next steps. We turn now to Network 27 to explore and narrate our shared understandings of the specialist domestic and family violence field around the potential for change, including the systemic moves that need to happen to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, individuals and communities to thrive – advancing self-determination for First Nations and progressing reconciliation with ‘other’ Australians.

How will engaging with Network 27 make meaningful the landscape, and how will it compass directions for actionable priorities and transformational change in Australia?

⁷ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2020). AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. <https://aiatsis.gov.au>