



Growing stronger systems of support

Recommendations from the field of Domestic
and Family Violence Specialist Support



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Innovation Unit
acknowledges the
Traditional Owners of the
countries on which
we work, and pays respect
to Elders past and present.

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Introduction

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is an entrenched problem across all communities in all parts of Australia, but some groups experience greater risks and levels of harm and are not well-served by current provision.

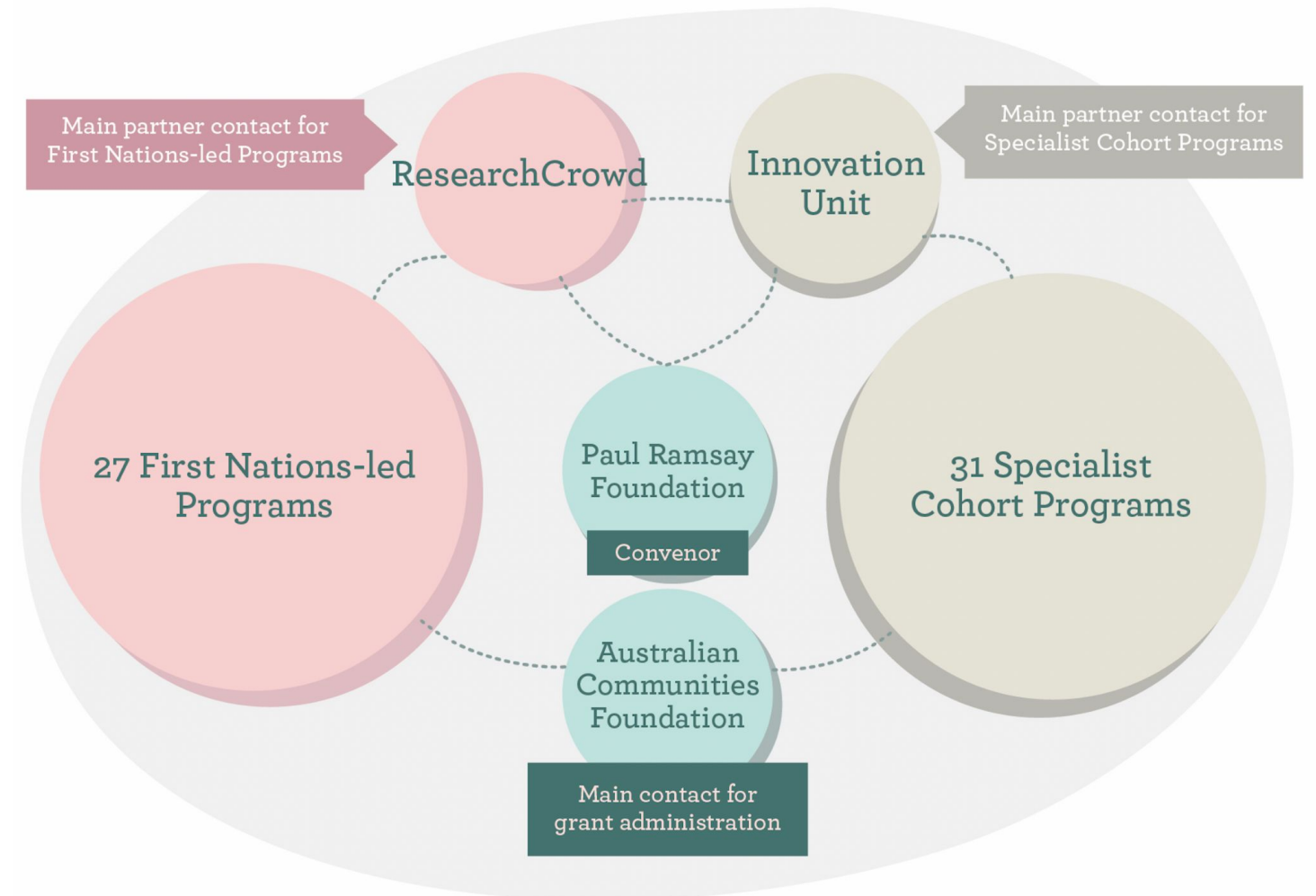
“We hope that building this national network of specialist organisations will strengthen the sector and its ability to tackle domestic and family violence through sharing experiences and information.”

Jackie Ruddock, Head, Families, The Paul Ramsay Foundation

In September 2023, Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF) in partnership with the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF) committed a total of \$13.6 million in funding to 58 organisations working with specialist cohorts and communities affected by domestic family violence (DFV). These grants aimed to engage support services working with specific groups, including First Nations communities, children and young people, migrant and refugee communities, rural and remote communities, pregnant women, LGBTIQ+ communities, single mothers, women with a disability, and perpetrators and users of violence.

Alongside making a financial contribution to the specialist support field, PRF and ACF established two networks to connect participating organisations and generate ‘field level’ insights and recommendations.

Over the past year, Innovation Unit has engaged with 31 non-First Nations-led organisations who work with a range of specialist cohorts and communities, while ResearchCrowd (an independent, community-controlled research agency) has convened a group of 27 First Nations-led organisations.

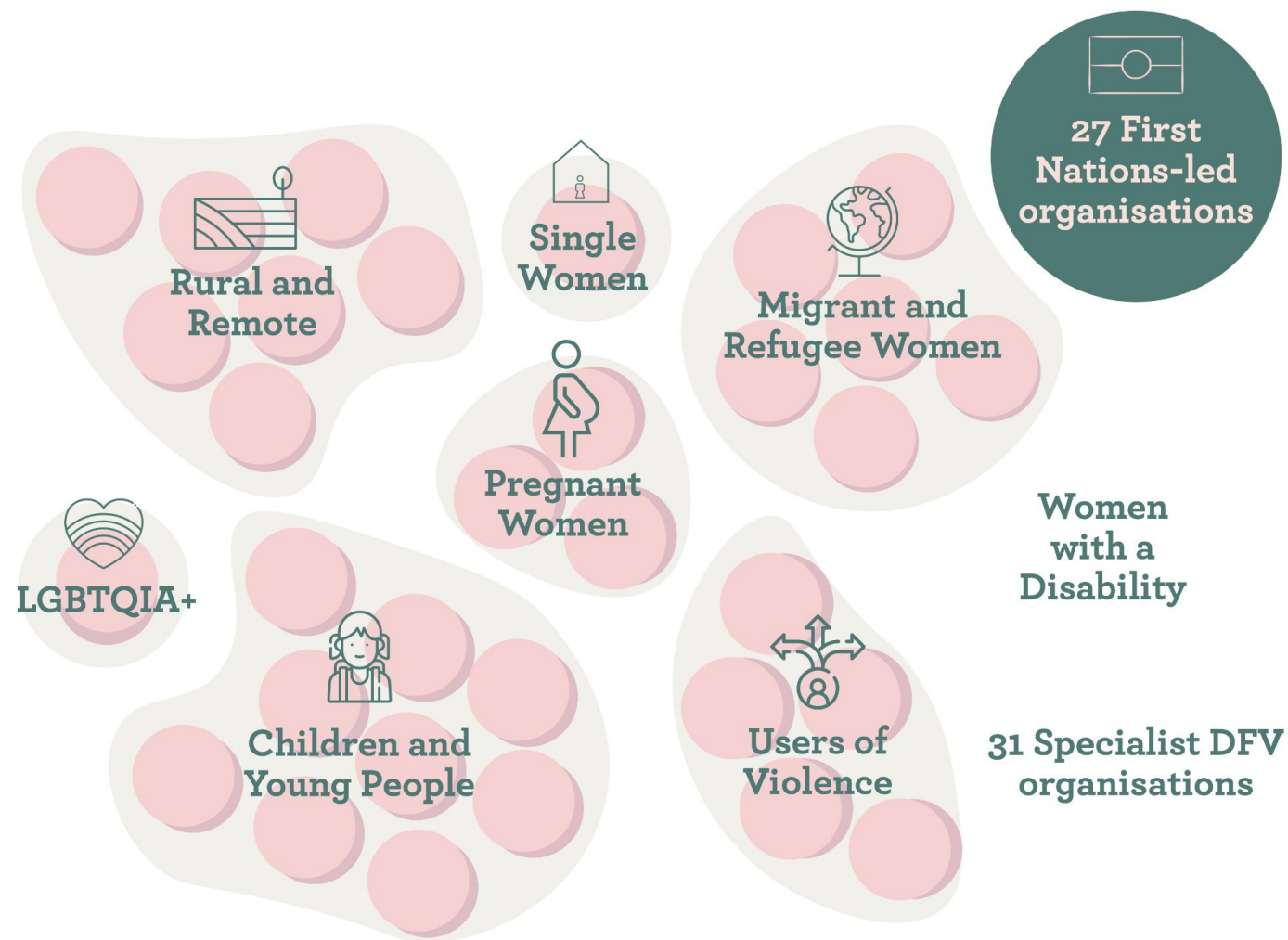


Through a series of engagements, these networks have worked independently (but in conversation with one another) to surface shared challenges and develop our understanding of the field of specialist DFV support.

This is the second Learning Paper from the PRF DFV network. It builds on our first Paper published in May 2024, [*Passionate, Relentless, Grassroots Problem-solving: Insights from the Field of Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Support*](#).

This Paper shares ideas and recommendations from the network for strengthening the field of specialist DFV support for diverse cohorts and communities.

Who's in the program?



The diagram above shows the cohort groups that have participated in the PRF Network (part of the Open Grant Round). Each pink bubble represents a participating organisation.

There are four sections in this Paper.



10 steps to transformation

This section sets out system-level actions that might be taken forward to connect and strengthen the field of specialist DFV support. Though network members support people in diverse cohorts and communities across Australia, they agree that these actions matter for the field and will enhance its impact.



Features of powerful practice

This section shares features of great practice in support for people who are experiencing and recovering from DFV and its harms. Network members agree that these features of practice are things that make a difference for people, regardless of their context.



Ideas and actions

This section shares specific ideas and actions that colleagues from the network would like to see happen to strengthen responses to specialist cohorts and communities in Australia.



Insights from cohorts and communities

This section shares insights and recommendations that are specific to cohorts and communities. Understanding the unique experiences and priorities for different groups underlines just how important bespoke responses are for people experiencing DFV, and how mainstream systems and solutions don't work for everyone.

Learning about the field

In Australia, as around the world, social sector funders are making strategic attempts to coordinate collective efforts and encourage collaboration to address complex and entrenched social challenges, such as Domestic and Family Violence (DFV).

These initiatives bring diverse players together across places, 'fields' and systems to explore how to work in more aligned and connected ways to achieve shared goals.

In our work with the network, we have used a tool called the Strong Field Framework* to explore the strengths, weaknesses and gaps of the DFV specialist support field.

Developed by the Bridgespan Group in 2009 through research with 60 leaders from the field of education in the United States, the Framework is one of a number of tools that now exist to support efforts to coordinate and catalyse change at scale.

“Funders and nonprofits increasingly recognize that no single organisation or strategy, regardless of how large or successful it may be, can solve a complex social challenge at scale. Instead, organisations need to work collaboratively to tackle pressing social problems.”

Taz Hussein et al**

*The Bridgespan Group, *The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact*, 2009.

**Taz Hussein, Matt Plummer and Bill Breen, *How Field Catalysts Galvanise Social Change*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2018.

The Strong Field Framework has given us a way to make sense of the challenges that colleagues in this network are experiencing, as they endeavour to support specialist cohorts and communities in different parts of Australia.

The Framework supports evaluation on the strengths of a 'field' with reference to the following domains:

Shared Identity			
Community aligned around a common purpose and a set of core values			
Standards of Practice	Knowledge Base	Leadership and Grassroots Support	Funding and Supporting Policy
<p>Codification of standards of practice</p> <p>Exemplary models and resources (e.g. how-to guides)</p> <p>Available resources to support implementation (e.g. technical assistance)</p> <p>Respected credentialing/ ongoing professional development training for practitioners and leaders</p>	<p>Credible evidence that practice achieves desired outcomes</p> <p>Community of researchers to study and advance practice</p> <p>Vehicles to collect, analyse, debate and disseminate knowledge</p>	<p>Influential leaders and exemplary organisations across key segments of the field (e.g. practitioners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers)</p> <p>Broad base of support from major constituencies</p>	<p>Enabling policy environment that supports and encourages model practices</p> <p>Organised funding streams from public, philanthropic and corporate sources of support</p>



A call from the network

The PRF DFV network holds deep, practical knowledge around how to work with specialist cohorts and communities towards support, prevention and healing.

This national network was formed as part of an effort to strengthen violence prevention in Australia, by connecting DFV practitioners working on shared challenges, and supporting them to collectively develop insights, ideas and opportunities for change at ‘field’ level.

When we started this work in mid 2023, we already knew that the challenges of short-term funding, coordination and collaboration, information sharing and collective capacity building needed to be addressed. These priorities had been highlighted in the Federal Government’s [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#).

Drawing this network to a close, these remain key challenges. There is acute frustration in the network (and the sector more generally) that many key insights are well understood, and continually not addressed. But there is also tremendous energy and relentless optimism, and a deep commitment to working with communities, government and others to grow stronger systems of support that are accessible to everyone.

We have often been struck by the fierce agreement that exists in this network about the key opportunities for strengthening the field. We set out these areas of fierce agreement in this Paper.

Through engagement with this network, a recurring theme has been the critical importance of cohort and community-led solutions. People seek help with people they trust, and specialist cohorts and communities need access to support that is accessible, non-judgemental, culturally safe, and understands the context of their lives. Provision that represents and advocates for specialist cohorts and communities is what makes a difference.

Alongside the need to shape responses from cohort perspectives, hidden burdens and unhelpful power dynamics in the field have been a resonant theme, getting in the way of community-led solutions. Often the small organisations that are most trusted by cohorts and communities struggle to have influence with government or receive appropriate compensation for the work they do.

We hope this Paper amplifies key messages from the network and prompts shifts in the policy and funding environment to better support organisations doing critical work with specialist cohorts and communities.



10 steps to transformation

This section sets out system-level actions that might be taken forward to connect and strengthen the field of specialist DFV support.

Though network members support people in diverse cohorts and communities across Australia, they agree that these actions matter for the field and will enhance its impact.

Key priorities

- 1 Ensure reliable funding
- 2 Enable cohort and community leadership
- 3 Address hidden burdens and unfair dynamics
- 4 Prioritise community-based responses
- 5 Remove barriers to collaboration
- 6 Grow capacity beyond delivery
- 7 Provide flexible funding for relational working
- 8 Invest in strategic learning and support emergence
- 9 Support replication and scale
- 10 Develop wider workforce relationships and capabilities



1 Ensure reliable funding

Short-term contracts and sporadic, uncertain investment prevents specialist support agencies and organisations from doing the work they need to do.

Working with individuals and families around DFV relies on building trust and relationships over time. Constant one-off funding and connected workforce churn is not just burdensome, it stops agencies from being able to provide reliable and consistent support to key cohorts and communities.

We heard that while the specialist support field needs support to try new things and continue to learn about prevention practices, so much of what people need and find helpful is not rocket science - it already exists.

While philanthropy invests in DFV prevention, government is the key player in funding service provision. A crucial part of the prevention solution has to be reliable investment from government in organisations that are already working well and are trusted by specific cohorts (with funding for these to increase their reach or replicate strong models). It's a message we've heard time and again, and it has to be repeated.

"We do all this incredible work to build relationships and presence with community. We do it for a year, and then we're out, you know? ... If you want generational change, and if you want attitudinal change, you can't drop in and drop out of it."

Network participant

"I think the way ministers work and governments and funding bodies is just always looking for this new innovative idea, when some of the solutions are not necessarily that innovative."

Network participant

"One of the things we always encourage our clients to do is to come back if they need help. But if there's not that door for them to come through, how do you? You never want to discourage the fact that you might need help because we know trauma can last lifelong. When the next phase of their life or next part of the journey comes, if there's a closed door, all the work you might have done is just wasted. So the continuity has to be there at various levels ... It has to consistently be there for us to see the change of decades of damage that has been done. It can't be the way we're doing it right now."

Network participant



2 Enable cohort and community leadership

Many organisations feel they don't have sufficient influence on government or on system-level priorities.

Sometimes they also feel like they are not taken seriously as leaders because they appear too 'grassroots' or too aligned with 'community.' But these organisations are often the only places where people seeking help feel culturally safe, and have the possibility of finding help within a confusing support landscape.

Colleagues in the network suggest that organisations that are often most trusted by communities and cohorts are not the same organisations that are most trusted to deliver services by government.

Some network members describe the mainstream DFV field as 'elitist' and 'colonial'. It can appear that some more established

organisations and institutions are privileged, supported and invested in by governments, while others are overlooked.

While national strategies place 'survivors at the centre,' network members suggest that the system has a 'top down' approach and those setting the agenda can be quite removed from understanding what's really going on for communities and cohorts. Stronger and more effective responses will invest more in decisions and approaches shaped and informed by community leadership and cohort leadership.

"... it has to come from the people with the experience, the lived experience ... it has to be led by the community. And the government can't decide what that looks like, because our family violence action plan doesn't recognise 'survivors at the centre'. That's its name on the front page ... but then the content of it doesn't reflect any initiative that's actually looking at where the impact of family violence exists. And we say that over and over again with our strategies here. So it's just don't let the government define what that is because they won't get it right."

Network participant

"Communities are complex there are close connections, traditional roles, histories, complex family structures – but we don't invest in communities. Instead we keep reinvesting in the high-end family violence response that is patriarchal and often detrimental to communities. And it comes to the detriment of victim survivors who aren't able to access relevant services which have been designed for them, where there's trust and where there's the family violence specialisation."

Network participant



3 Address hidden burdens and unfair dynamics

Funding should flow to organisations that best represent specific cohorts and communities.

There are some dynamics in the system that are felt by many, but may be difficult to talk about and address. Small community organisations that are trusted by the community and known to work well with specific cohorts often take on work they are not funded to do. This shows up in a variety of ways, for example through requests to share expertise and help others to build cultural knowledge, and taking on referrals from larger, mainstream organisations.

There is an unacknowledged burden that many of the smaller and more niche organisations experience - addressing this might help funding flow to organisations who are best placed to work with specific cohorts and communities.

“Yeah, it is funny when a big organisation who is funded for housing refers women to us because they think they're overloaded, but sometimes it's because they're migrant and refugee women. They refer them to [us] for housing support when we only have one worker, and they've got a whole suite of workers. So it's really bizarre.”

Network participant

“The whole family violence sector was a very insular, selective, elitist sector. Okay, we pushed our way through to be accepted. We had to put on a big fight to get into it, because they don't want diverse organisations, boutique organisations like ours, to be in there ...”

Network participant

“The structure continues to perpetuate power dynamics that exist within Australia as a colonial kind of space ... We know what we need to do for our cohorts, or our communities. And we just can't spend so much time jumping through the hoops or the priorities of government ... if we spent less time doing that and more time doing what we know we need to do, we would affect a lot more change and have a lot more impact.”

Network participant

“What we know from some of the meetings we go to is, there are so many organisations supporting different community groups who are not funded and who are doing the work off their own back, either through volunteers or through whatever else ... We all need to be valued for our expertise.”

Network participant



4 Prioritise community-based responses

Community-based responses play an important role in DFV support for specific cohorts and communities.

We heard that community-based solutions are able to offer people a deeper level of understanding and acceptance. They might also provide support that is separate to police and justice responses, and the imperatives of the child protection system. This is important for many people seeking help for DFV who might want to avoid connecting to these things (but those running support in this way can also miss out on funding as a result).

Network members would love to see more investment in community-based responses. There is a concern that investment in a police response is dominant and preferred by government,

while community-based support is less of a priority (but preferred and more useful to many victim/survivors).

Even those help-seekers who want to involve police will also need other forms of support (and police are not always aware and informed about how to direct people to services).

“... we're a values-based organisation. So for us, it's hard to find other organisations that have the same values base as we do. So it's very, very hard to collaborate sometimes with some organisations just in that sense, because, you know, they might report to child safety, or they might report to parole, whereas we never do that to the women. And then that's why the women can trust us because we have that relationship with them ... that's just some of the barriers we have with collaborating with other organisations”.

Network participant

“We can garner from [the] bureau statistics and other data that about one fifth of people who experience family violence actually use police services. So the majority of the people who are experiencing family violence might be looking for a community response. We need to be finding a way to be relevant and accessible to the majority of victim-survivors. But the government always elevates the formal police response.”

Network participant

“[The service] is problematic because it combines government services and non-government services. The government services end up dictating the environment and there are conflicts within that. We have a sexual assault service model which brings together community-based sexual assault services alongside the police. So it's a police station with community workers at the front, and then the police at the back. It's a different entry but into the same system. I don't want to use the time and the expertise that I have in the community sector to be advocating for improved police responses. I know that they're not advocating for an expanded community-based response. There's always that inequality there.”

Network participant



5 Remove barriers to collaboration

Collaboration is essential, but there are lots of barriers and not many incentives for organisations to work together.

Siloed funding models put organisations into competition. This means that even when ambitions and values are aligned, organisations often find it difficult to work in joined-up and collaborative ways for the benefit of cohorts and communities.

Collaboration needs support and encouragement, with place-based facilitation and resources to help people build relationships and connect parts of the system around the needs of cohorts. Organisations are excited by the potential of more place-based working (integrated services and hubs, place-based coordination) but need support and incentives to make it happen.

“... what we really want to do is sit down and collaborate on work, because we know that's what community needs, and community needs more than one service..”

Network participant

“... there seems to be almost a sense of wariness towards other services in that we have a small pie, and we're all vying for the same piece of the pie. And I think that probably is something that would be echoed across other similar small communities when you and your colleagues, you're working towards a common purpose. But also, you know that this particular funding is going to be coming up so you want that particular funding. And are you really going to be sharing, like your particular insight with these people? You do for them from the goodness of your heart, but you have to kind of put your service also at the forefront.”

Network participant

“The constant investment in those relationships is something that really isn't funded anywhere. It's part of the work you have to do to get women through, but it's not really recognized in terms of the amount of investment and just time and energy you have to put into those relationships.”

Network participant

“[while] the government is pushing for working in partnership, the funding models are still very much siloed.”

Network participant



6 Grow capacity beyond delivery

The specialist support field comprises many smaller, boutique organisations who do fabulous work with particular cohorts and communities, but may have little time to do anything beyond day-to-day delivery.

Activities such as research and development, place-based collaboration, evaluation of programs, data gathering and outreach can all feel like luxuries to many organisations in the network and yet they are also key to being able to grow and develop.

These organisations would love additional support to be able to do these things and they could expand the quality of their offer, and improve their reach and influence.

“We have case workers, but I don't have all the other support roles that I need in that team as well. You know, you look at the other organisations - they have people who don't do any case work. They are in the family violence team, but they have the luxury to go attend meetings, do research, meet here, meet there, write submissions ... We don't have that. Our caseworkers have just got their heads down, and all they're doing is helping women, helping women, helping women every day. That's because again, it's like you've got to fight tooth and nail to get those extra bits of resources you need to do the job better, and to get the data you need.”

Network participant

7 Provide flexible funding for relational working

Holistic, relational approaches are difficult to deliver within the constraints of government funding. More flexible funding is needed to enable approaches that work most effectively.

Organisations that can fund their work through diverse avenues (such as philanthropic funding or mixed funding) find they are able to create very different conditions for working

with people flexibly, and on their own terms (and where doors can always be open for people).

“The strength of not thinking, okay, I've only got 10 weeks to work with this person, I can work with this person for however long is incredibly important. Also being really flexible. If their child has been removed by child protection, some other family services will stop working with that person because they're no longer an active parent. We will keep working with them. For us, it's because we've got such a flexible funding model. We're not just relying on government grants. 40% of our funding is from individual donors and corporate partners. That money doesn't have strings, which means we can work for a long time with people.”

Network participant



8 Invest in strategic learning and support emergence

Learning what works around DFV prevention is a long-term proposition.

Colleagues suggest we need more honesty around our elements of 'not knowing' and to recognise the highly emergent nature of knowledge in this domain. This is especially the case around tackling the wider mindsets and culture that hold acceptance of violence in place, and understanding what works to shift the behaviours of users of violence.

Network members say we need to invest in long-term strategies for experimental and developmental work, scaffolded by learning and evaluation, and longitudinal research. Colleagues are interested in the ongoing potential of 'communities of practice' especially and establishing 'what works' agencies (similar to those that exist in the UK).

"Often we are just doing work in isolation, so we're not necessarily connected with other services and seeing and hearing the great outcomes they're having ... I think that the opportunity for people to come together and to grow and learn from other people's experience who are doing really good work provides that ongoing encouragement and support for continuing the work that we're doing."

Network participant

"It's not one simple thing, but at some point, as a country and at States and Federal level, we have to accept some responsibility that there are none of the mechanisms in place in which we can have a progressive framework for working out what works for whom ... the bottom line is that we need some leadership."

Network participant



9 Support replication and scale

The field of specialist DFV support needs a strategic approach to convening across places and systems in ways that support learning about 'what works' for different cohorts and communities, and in different kinds of contexts.

The theme of great practice being trapped 'on site' has been a strong one in the network, along with a recognition that colleagues are often 'doing the same work' for their own communities and contexts.

They also imagine that a mixed funding model (with resourcing from philanthropy and government) would offer the necessary flexibility and influence for this kind of endeavour.

There is a desire for promising models of practice to be more widely understood and available for use, though network members also recognise the critical importance of contextual adaptation.

Colleagues consider that looking at practice development and spread through a national frame might be helpful, enabling an understanding of 'what works' to be shared across States and Territories.

"The model is there. We've all been around for however many ridiculous number of years. So we know how the work should be done. It's just about mobilising it and maybe putting it into the right places."

Network participant

"Having some sort of clearinghouse would be great because there's so much work happening around the country, but there's not one place to access all of that."

Network participant

"Why would you go through the heartache of developing something from scratch when it's already been tried and tested somewhere else? And people have developed a model which is fit for purpose. It doesn't make any sense at all."

Network participant



10 Develop wider workforce relationships and capabilities

Workforce training and development is critical. It needs to be seen as a shared endeavour that brings together multiple, different kinds of players.

Network members see that wider workforces connected to specialist DFV support (such as police, housing, early years and educational settings) need to be properly trained in DFV in ways that support a more aligned, holistic and trauma-informed response around help-seekers. They are also keen to see greater cultural competencies developed in mainstream settings and in government commissioning so that the needs of cohorts and communities are better met.

Creating cadres of peer supporters and people with lived expertise is also a priority that colleagues believe will make a difference to help-seekers.

The big challenge is the depth of learning and culture change that is required across places and systems.

Across universal services and wider community activities that engage children, young people and families, there are opportunities to focus on violence prevention and build shared and aligned approaches. Whole communities need to be involved in modelling healthy relationships and addressing challenging behaviours, and also in shaping what local systems of support need to work. This requires thoughtful, ongoing work.

“What we really need is the culture change. And unless the police and other powerful structures are prepared to engage in culture change ... we're really only just going to be keeping the status quo that we've got ... short term amounts of occasional training don't change culture.”

Network participant

“Any kind of strategy towards addressing domestic family and sexual violence has to have an appropriate workforce strategy.”

Network participant

“Some people have talked about care navigator models and peer care navigator models. The thing that I think is not represented in current discussions enough is who do we need? We need more lived experience or experts by experience.”

Network participant



Features of powerful practice

Supporting specialist cohorts and communities experiencing DFV requires deep personalisation and approaches that centre trust and cultural safety.

There are, however, similar hallmarks of great practice across organisations in the network working with different cohorts and communities. Every person needs...

Accessible pathways into support

Personalised support, on your own terms

Someone to walk the journey with you

Culturally-attuned support

Peer support / community connection or navigation

Holistic support, addressing a wide variety of needs

Responses that work in places and communities



Features of powerful practice



Accessible pathways into support

Pathways into support need to be accessible for everyone, and wider exclusions such as racism and social isolation should be considered. We need great outreach and engagement efforts that understand and respond to the barriers to access for different cohorts and communities.

Personalised support, on your own terms

Support is effective when it works with people compassionately and without judgement, at their own pace and on their own terms. Good support recognises the nuance of different people's contexts and responds flexibly and holistically.

Someone to walk the journey with you

Building trust is a critical component of effective support, along with relational working. People really value someone who's able to walk alongside them for the long-term.

Culturally-attuned support

Providing support that is culturally attuned and culturally safe is critical. Respecting and incorporating cultural practices into the response improves outcomes, as does having a workforce or practitioners that are from communities and cohorts.

"... it's a softly approach. It's not about, 'We're here, we've got to get all of this done.' It's just like, 'What do you need? What do you need right now that we can support you with?' We do this work and then, down the track, we might be talking about the domestic violence, but we've done a whole lot of other work for this woman to trust us to let us in before."

Network participant

"We recognise the importance of really setting roots in a community and building momentum."

Network participant



Features of powerful practice

Peer support / community connection or navigation

Being able to connect with people who are peers and have lived expertise can be a powerful part of support and healing, as is system navigation provided by peers.

Holistic support, addressing a wide variety of needs

Support needs to connect help-seekers into a wide variety of potential services, from housing to employment, to legal advice and therapeutic support. It also needs to recognise the needs of a family. Being able to connect people to these things in seamless ways relieves a huge burden.

Responses that work in places and communities

Strong, place-based responses are likely to be highly effective in supporting communities by providing continuity of care, helping people connect into services as well as working with wider partners and communities on prevention.

“Research shows that what 1,000 survivors want the most is an ally.”

Network participant

“We found that that's exactly what practitioners want and survivors want ... that connection and continuity and 'seamlessness' - if that's even a word.”

Network participant

“... we are alerting the woman that even if she says no on that day, for whatever reason, that we're interested in this. There is a model, if she says yes, where we're attempting to work out her needs - it might be parenting, it might be mental health, it might be alcohol and drugs, it might be social work and onto housing. But there's also a group of women who don't want to access any of that in a public way. So it's understanding what the other services are, even in the private health sector in terms of psychology, or even in community health or in general practice. We need to be able to give a woman a choice of where she's going.”

Network participant



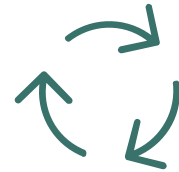


Ideas and actions

This section shares ideas and actions that colleagues from the network would like to see happen to strengthen responses to specialist cohorts and communities in Australia.



Family hubs



Centre of practice excellence



Place-based, whole community responses



Learning about prevention and healing with users of violence



Ideas and actions

“... a place where they know they can go that they're gonna be believed. They're gonna be trusted. They're gonna be safe and also culturally safe as well. That's what I would envision in my head - a place where women could go and all their needs would be met in this one place.”

Network participant

“One of the things we're trying to look at ... is a child and family hub where we will partner with the child and maternal health sector. They will be based at the hub, but the hub will also offer free childcare on site for when women are having appointments. So if they're in a relationship it may look as though they're coming for their children, but there will also be the specialist workers on site so that, if they need to or they want to, they can tap into this. They may not want to for ages, but they'll come, we hope, because one, the child maternal health nurse will be there and two, we'll be running a playgroup ... So we're hoping.”

Network participant



Family hubs

Colleagues want to see the development of more integrated family hubs that offer safe (and culturally safe) DFV support to women and children.

Hubs should have the flexibility to support people with all their needs, including legal support, accommodation, health care, employment advice and more.

Some good Hub examples exist in Australia and colleagues in the network point to these, but more are needed and the quality of their approach needs to be assured.

It's the co-location of services and supports that colleagues find powerful in the model, especially the offer of childcare or maternal health services as a discreet front door for DFV services.

A key consideration for the network is whether or not Hubs are connected closely to the police or child protection. Colleagues suggest that partnership with police and child protection services will deter some help-seekers, and could be a barrier to establishing conditions of trust and safety.

In order to better support rural and remote communities, colleagues also suggest a national online virtual 'Hub' staffed by specially-trained practitioners could help in a context of workforce recruitment and retention challenges.



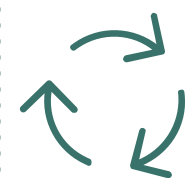
Ideas and actions

“It needs to support a group of lived experience people and their wisdom ... I think it needs a national approach for listening to survivors that's funded. Similarly, a practice wisdom approach combined with the research approach.”

Network participant

“Often we are just doing work in isolation, so we're not necessarily connected with other services and seeing and hearing the great outcomes they're having. So for me, I guess it's about having some sort of a mechanism that promotes a commitment to practice, communities of practice, where we can be sharing learnings of what's working in particular cohorts, but also within particular cultural groups.”

Network participant



Centre of practice excellence

Colleagues in the network are enthusiastic about the potential of a Centre for Practice Excellence that could share and develop practice in DFV support and prevention.

The most compelling version of this initiative understands how to centre lived expertise and community wisdom, while also bringing together research and emerging practice across State and Territory boundaries (recognising that bringing these things together is a delicate art, requiring expert program design and facilitation).

The Centre would support learning about 'what works' for different cohorts and communities, and in different kinds of contexts, convening across communities and in dialogue with government and other system players.

The theme of replication and great practice being trapped 'on site' was a strong one in the network. There is a hunger for more visibility around and access to great models of practice, while also recognising the critical importance of cohort and community leadership and contextual adaptation.

Colleagues consider that national positioning would be powerful for a Centre so that knowledge and practice sharing across States and Territories could be incentivised and supported. They also imagined that a mixed funding model (with resourcing from philanthropy and government) would offer the project flexibility and influence.



Ideas and actions

“[We need] a whole of community response, because DFV just doesn't happen within one component. So ... that integrated response needs to be really strong. And it's not just police or it's not just the courts or it's not just child safety or services or the government, but it's about all of us understanding what our level of intervention, and when I say intervention, I mean what part we can play in addressing or challenging people's behaviours.”

Network participant

“There is no way to get women through the system without some level of collaboration ... It's about organisations building sustained relationships with services and becoming trusted members ... and actually staying with a client through that journey, or whether it's navigating housing systems, that whole client advocate model essentially is built off a relationship model. And it's built off a collaborative approach to working with service systems and first responders.”

Network participant



Place-based, whole community responses

Colleagues see potential in deeper place-based collaborations that make strong, whole community responses to people experiencing DFV.

This is about strengthening the critical connections between specialist DFV support and other services such as health, housing, and legal advice, and ensuring wider workforces have DFV training and take a trauma-informed approach.

The importance of place-based collaborations is also about recognising that everyone in a local system needs to work together for effective support and prevention, and in many cases this involves new effort to strengthen relationships and build shared approaches. And beyond the obvious services and support structures, whole communities need to be involved in modelling healthy relationships and addressing challenging behaviours - wider community awareness raising matters.

We have heard that effective collaboration needs resource, support and incentives, and that if these things are available there is a strong appetite and interest in working in stronger place-based, 'whole system' ways.

The idea of investing in and learning from 'demonstration projects' in place-based settings was highly appealing. Such projects could be a great way to explore and test new ways to engage, support and work with specific cohorts.



Ideas and actions

"Women in our prevention programs constantly say, 'Can you please do this work with our men? Can you please do this work with our boys?'"

Network participant

"They don't understand that the family is so important. And unless you bring everyone along with you on this journey ... you're gonna create more harm."

Network participant

"I think it would be about strategic investments in different approaches to really trial, test and evaluate."

Network participant



Learning about prevention and healing with users of violence

Colleagues want to see a long-term commitment to learning about violence prevention that responds to our emergent understanding of what actually works.

Increasingly seen as the most important area to focus on to shift the dial on DFV, men's behaviour change is a key focus for many organisations in the network.

There is general agreement from the network that mainstream, current approaches do not make much of a difference. Colleagues are interested in promising models that focus on early engagement with young people and with men at key moments in life such as the birth of a child. They are also interested in emerging forms of specialist support for healing and recovery that is culturally-informed (and often involves whole families and communities in responses).

Learning what works to promote prevention and shifts in behaviour is a highly-emergent area of practice.

A more disciplined approach to learning could be supported through a combination of communities of practice around promising new models; test and learn projects (that experiment with new ways of working across communities and localities); and longitudinal research.

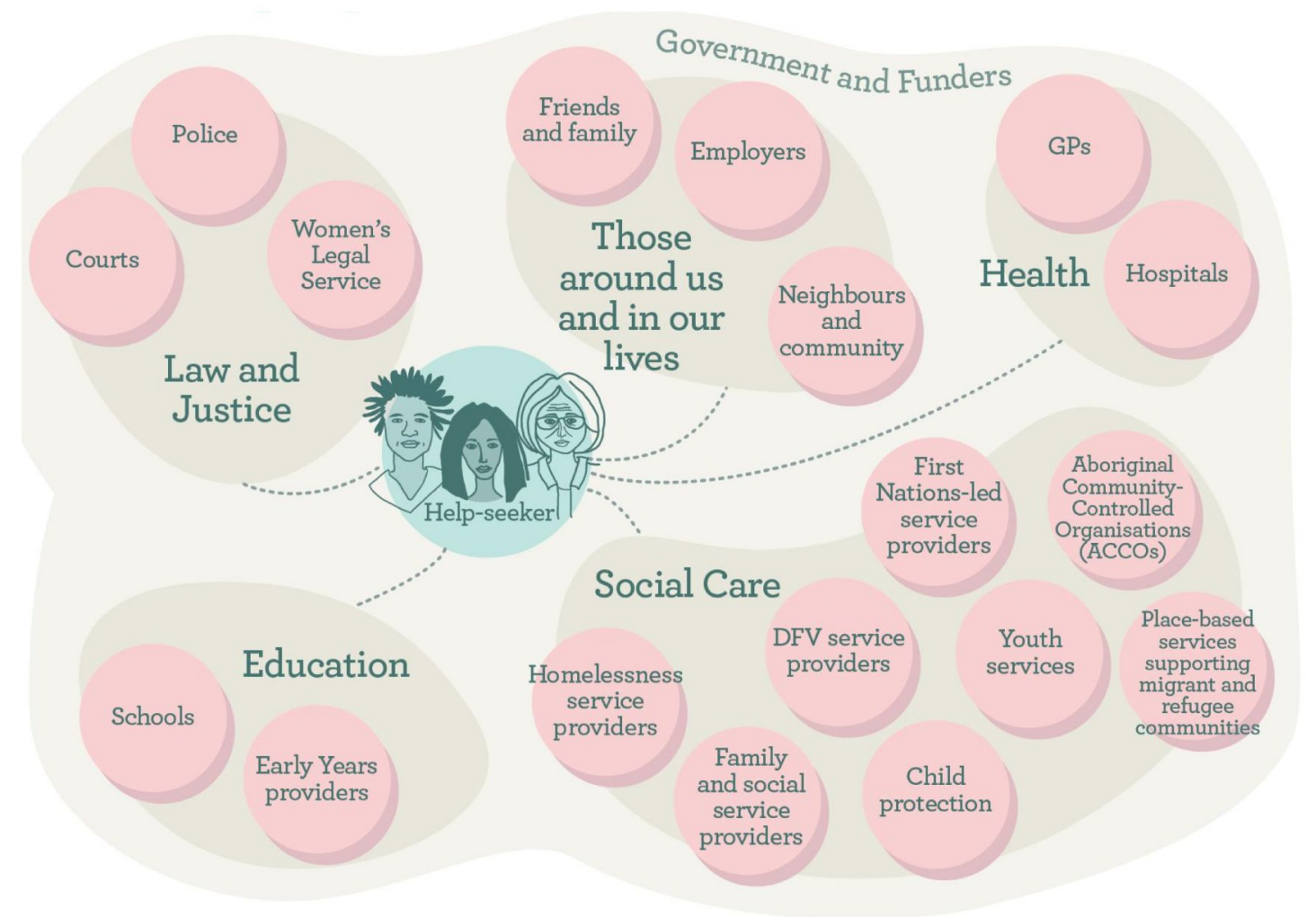


Insights from cohorts and communities

This section shares insights for change that matter for the different cohorts and communities involved in the network.

Though there were many shared messages for change across the network, experiences of help-seeking in Australia can look very different depending on the cohort and community context.

The following pages share priorities that are particular to cohorts, communities and contexts. They show that tackling DFV requires a deeply personalised responses, grounded in community knowledge, understandings and leadership.



Insights from cohorts and communities | Rural and remote

Women and children in regional and remote areas face higher rates of DFV compared with women and children in capital cities.

They also face significant barriers to accessing support, from geographic location and poor infrastructure to fear of identification. Many communities lack local provision, forcing women to travel long distances or seek virtual support with unreliable technology.

We heard that individual communities have unique needs and that solutions must be tailored to context, and community-led and informed.

There is an urgent need for a workforce strategy for attracting skilled, compassionate workers to rural and remote regions, as well as online solutions with funding models that truly respond to the realities women and children face on the ground.

Without these changes, the system will continue to fail those most in need.



Rural and remote

Barriers To Accessing Support

Geographic isolation

“Some places have no local services. People may travel two or three hours to access a service, which only an online approach can address, but that's assuming that there is a good enough internet connection and the person has access to a phone with credit to contact us.”

Service gaps including infrastructure

“We also need to look at roads between communities, between services.”

Visibility and power dynamics in small communities

“It's not as easy ... [maybe] the family of the perpetrator works at the women's shelter. There's a lot of complexity.”

System Challenges

Dominance of a police response

“The police have more power, more resources and more capacity to respond to family violence, whereas our community-based services that have specialisation, expertise and a deep understanding of the nuance and patterns of family violence are desperately underfunded and under resourced.”

Each community has unique complexities

“There are very different types of communities, and *how* you work with the people in remote communities matters.”

Recruitment and retention

“... how can we encourage them to stay? And how can we ensure they're skilled enough and supported enough to work in that space?”

Things That Help

Community-based responses

“... a community hub with women workers, where they are believed, trusted, safe, including culturally safe, with all their needs met in one place.”

Strong online support

“... a national approach to pool resources so technology and the workforce supports regional and rural remote centres to help bolster some of the capacity issues we have.”

Enabling Environment

Needs-based funding that tailors to communities

“As long as we keep looking to governments for solutions, we're going to get it wrong because our solutions won't be designed to address the challenges and the issues sitting in the community.”

Specialist DFV training for police

“We have been working on training (advocated for and developed by the sector) for police recruits, for which we finally have funding. It's five days of intensive training for recruits, and we spend a significant amount of time talking about misidentification.”

Incentivising workers

“We need to incentivise people to go to these regional and remote areas for the domestic family and sexual violence sector. We are on the front line, so we need a workforce strategy that recognises that and is appropriate to attract workers to work and stay in these places.”





Users of violence

Insights from cohorts and communities | Users of violence

Working with Users of violence is becoming a crucial focus in efforts to prevent family and domestic violence.

It's clear that a whole community approach, one that brings together different systems and partnerships, is key to holding individuals accountable and offering meaningful support.

We heard that while group sessions are standard, they aren't right for everyone. Personalised approaches that speak to each individual's unique circumstances are what's needed.

There is a shortage of skilled facilitators who understand the complexities of violence perpetration and the different ways this is understood in different communities.

Early intervention, especially with young people and new fathers, is a critical opportunity for making a difference.

We heard there is a need for risk reduction strategies, collaborations with police and justice services, and a stronger community response.

To build effective support systems and learn about what works, long-term, sustainable funding and a dedication to research and learning are essential.

Barriers To Accessing Support

Group sessions aren't the most effective approach (and they are standard)

"Not all men fare well in a group setting, and some men are not yet ready to participate in a group."

System Challenges

Not knowing enough about effective strategies for prevention

"There's something about bravery and being honest enough to admit that there are a lot of myths in this space, and that we would be better served by saying we don't know if there is evidence to this, let's try to work out ways that we could test, trial and evaluate what works for whom and when, right? Because I think there's a lot of just whole gaps we don't know."

Things That Help

A personalised approach

"We need to acknowledge that it's not a one size fits all approach."

"The way we respond would see people more as individuals, rather than labelling everybody as one group in which they all have common factors."

Enabling Environment

 **Collaboration across services**

"How can we better work with the Department of Justice and police, because this alone doesn't work, and we've got no joined up data."

Continued investment in prevention and work with users of violence

"The way the money is presently being used is at program level and often in isolation. I think it is ineffective. [Instead, we should] think about it as an ecosystem and where that money could be best spent."

Motivational approaches, rather than 'behaviour change'

"There is something about shifting away from behaviour change to more of a motivational approach."

Focus on risk reduction

"We could start to think about risk reduction strategies, as opposed to getting caught up in only being able to have a conversation about risk elimination."

Early intervention with young people and new fathers

"We've got an early youth diversion scheme where our staff walk alongside the police. We divert kids out of criminal behaviour, and we have had quite a bit of success."



Insights from cohorts and communities | Migrant and refugee women

Women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds face significant challenges accessing the support they need for DFV experiences.

Visa restrictions, cultural differences and language barriers, compounded by systemic racism, often leave many feeling isolated. The lack of culturally sensitive services further exacerbates these issues, leaving women excluded and unsupported.

We heard that whilst grassroots organisations are working hard to help, they are underfunded and struggling to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

We need long-term, community driven solutions that genuinely listen to and respond to the unique and complex needs of migrant women and their children.

This group often requires holistic support that goes beyond domestic and family violence services, recognising the additional challenges they face such as coercive control, financial abuse and navigating unfamiliar systems. Policies and services must move beyond a one-size-fits all approach, allowing for the necessary time, trust and tailored resources to prevent further marginalisation.



Migrant and refugee women

Barriers To Accessing Support

Racism and other exclusions from services

"Just the underlying racism and discrimination that actually is really pervasive and is often why we have to constantly act as client advocates to navigate [people] through the system. It is extremely problematic."

Social isolation and language barriers

"I think with certain communities it's really difficult for women to actually engage with the system ... schooling systems ... court system ... nearly everything is still in English and not translated, and there's no active support for migrant women ... [this] leads to greater risk and greater isolation and greater disengagement."



Things That Help

Cultural competency and accessible entry points for support

"Community needs more than one service. And they need ... warm referral pathways and all those different things."

"We develop resources that are in simple English or in other languages, or work with them in a way that they can access that knowledge and information."

System Challenges

Difficulty influencing policy-making

"We spend so much time jumping through the hoops or the priorities of government ... not with our voices included."

Unrecognised delivery burden

"They draw on our expertise all the time, and we don't have that ability to respond to all their needs, whether it's for training or for secondary consultations and stuff like that."

Lack of understanding at a policy level

"We're still boxed as 'diverse communities.' We're still an add-on, or an afterthought, or a smaller component to a broader policy or strategy."

Enabling Environment

Policies that address systemic racism

"Central to all of that is probably the missing piece for me, is equity and equality in systems. You can build a system for people, but you need to have pathways of entry for different people, and that requires some real investment."

Support for community-driven responses

"We know what's working for our communities. And we're just not given the freedom to just do that work."



Children and young people

Insights from cohorts and communities | Children and young people

Children and young people are direct victims of domestic and family violence, not just bystanders. Increasing and enabling access to specialised, therapeutic support is needed.

We heard that children's healing relies on early intervention, care that is tailored to their individual needs, and a nurturing bond between the protective parent and child. Yet, access points to services remain unclear for many and short-term funding is disrupting an ability to develop strong practices that reach those who may need support.

There is an urgent need for trauma-informed, collaborative approaches across education, health and justice to truly support children and young people experiencing DFV. Early years intervention is key to breaking the cycle of trauma, giving children the chance to heal and thrive.

Barriers To Accessing Support

Helping whole communities to understand CYP as victims

"Children are not just passive bystanders in domestic violence situations. They are often directly affected by the violence."

Age-appropriate strategies are needed, along with clear avenues into support

"... it's important to have an early years lens and age-appropriate responses for children and young people, rather than treating them as byproducts of their parents' experiences."

Things That Help

Listening to children and young people

"In [our state], especially through the courts, there is a big move to ensure that the child's voice is a large focus. One advocacy piece was around ensuring more single expert witnesses and children's lawyers. This aligns with what [participant] said, emphasising listening to the child's experience."

Specialised services (tailored to age)

"[Children] may need specialised services to help them cope with the trauma. Specialised services can provide children with a safe place to talk about their experiences, help them develop coping mechanisms, and teach them about healthy relationships."

Primary prevention work with teachers and early years staff

"We have an education model, which is specific training and development for teachers, for educators and school leadership, around understanding [trauma and] it's impact on student learning and behaviours."

System Challenges

Insufficient evidence around extent and nature of needs

"I think potentially an all-access point for data to understand what we're working with. It's often hard to find accurate and up-to-date data on family violence statistics, state and federal."

Lack of funding for specialist practitioners, services and responses

"... there is no additional funding for roles to actually work with children directly in a really hands-on way, as you need to when children are being treated as victim-survivors in their own right."

Enabling Environment

Raising trauma awareness across police, justice, education, and health and child protection

"Additional work is needed to raise general trauma awareness in other services like police, justice, education, and health."

Investing in collaboration with a wider workforce

"We need to work differently with multiple players in the community and build that understanding and collaboration among schools, health, employers, and the whole wider system."



Insights from cohorts and communities | Single and pregnant women

Women are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence during pregnancy, with those aged 18-24 at the highest risk.

Pregnancy also presents a critical opportunity to identify and respond to domestic violence, as women frequently interact with health professionals during this time.

We heard that early intervention is essential, yet gaps in services, especially around responding to coercive control, continue to leave women unsupported.

Pregnant women require consistent, trusting care that allows them to guide their own journey. Flexible, long-term services, along with targeted interventions for family and partners who use violence, are crucial to preventing further harm.

To achieve this, creative funding and integrated services are needed to ensure that support is accessible, compassionate and comprehensive.



Single and pregnant women

Barriers To Accessing Support

Understanding how to support people who stay

"There are not great support models for the people who feel safe to go home [to their partner] from antenatal care."

GP responses are not always consistent

"There are very good guidelines and standardised approaches. It's just that we haven't rolled that out across the country completely."

Missed opportunities

"I don't think there's the leadership in the health system for early intervention with perpetrators."



Things That Help

Making the most of the opportunity of childbirth to support people

"We've done amazing work around women having a good birthing experience. A safe birth for women is a great outcome for us."

More work on staying strategies

"Women survivors, pregnant or otherwise, are often staying with the person, their partner. There isn't a lot of understanding or work around that ... if you're deciding to stay, and many of them are, then what are the things that would be helpful to them and their families. I think we haven't got enough information about that."

Housing solutions (that work with the other elements of people's lives)

"Just practical things like, if you're going to go and put them in a hotel emergency accommodation, that's great. But then how does the 3-year old get to pre-school?"

System Challenges

Rigidity of government contracts makes relational working difficult

"...we're existing on grant money. Grants often don't allow for learning and development and reflection."

Workforce recruitment and retention

"The other struggle we have is that all the community services are overworked because we can't attract staff."



Enabling Environment

Flexible funding models

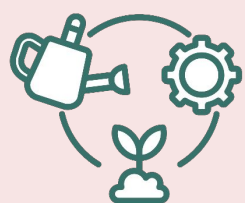
"40% of our funding is from individual donors and corporate partners. That money doesn't have strings, which means we can work for a long time with people."

Integrated working (between health and specialist DFV services) and good system navigation

"... in an integrated service we've been able to work with some women really strongly around the DFV."

Upskilling the DFV workforce around the specific needs of pregnant women

"Somehow we need to be upskilled to work with both [survivors and perpetrators]."



Learning together: what next?

This network has tested a model for supporting collective learning through the opportunity of philanthropic grant-giving.

We are fascinated to notice that so many of the strong ideas that came from network conversations focussed on the need to invest in and scaffold new ways of learning together.

What does this mean for the work we need to do next to grow stronger systems of support for people experiencing DFV?

Grant rounds are full of potential for collaboration and systemic learning. They bring multiple initiatives together around a shared priority or area of action.

But too often, this is where it ends. Individual projects go forward with independent streams of action, without much opportunity to learn from and with one another, or connect energy and ambition in ways that could lead to change at greater levels of scale.

We have appreciated the different conditions PRF has built around its Open Grant Round for Specialist DFV support, building a simple scaffold for 31 organisations and initiatives (within a wider group of 58) to connect with one another as they undertook the work that had been enabled by their grants.

Colleagues in the network report that participation brought new knowledge, new relationships and new value into their work. They also reflect that contributing to field learning seemed likely to yield more value than conventional grant reporting, with its tick box requirements and project reviews that few would read.

We hope that funders and governments, and others with convening power, continue to explore models for collective learning and action in areas of urgent public need, such as DFV prevention.

There are many barriers to collaboration across localities and service systems, and few incentives. At the same time, most of the ideas that excite colleagues involve time to connect more deeply with others working on shared challenges. Colleagues want to grow their capacity to work systemically, with communities and across organisational boundaries. They want to strengthen the great work they already do by joining up with others who are focussed on the same goal of violence prevention. They want to learn what's working, and adapt promising practices in partnership with cohorts and communities so that they work for people and places.

What different things could funders, governments and others be doing to enable this collaborative work? We'd love to keep this conversation going.

Perrie Ballantyne, Tally Daphu
and Emma Scott



Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the practitioners who have contributed to this network, generously sharing their thoughts, experiences and recommendations for change. Their drive to support clients to lead safer, more fulfilled lives is deeply inspiring. We all owe a great debt to those who take on such difficult and important work.

Thank you to our colleagues at ResearchCrowd, the brilliant Catherine and Hellene Demosthenous, who have been great collaborators through this project, offering critical friendship and valuable feedback. Everyone should read their latest report, *Potential for Change: At the Intersection of Philanthropy and the Landscape of First Nations Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Service Providers.*

We would also like to thank Paul Ramsay Foundation for funding this learning opportunity, and for being such great thought and practice partners through this work.

This document has been designed and prepared by Georgina Lewis, with original design concepts from Zenaida Beatson.



Appendix



Appendix 1: Organisations who received grants from the PRF Specialist Cohorts Open Grant Round 2023 under the Specialist Cohort funding stream.

[Allambee Counselling Inc](#) will use the funding to expand its Respectful Relationship Education programs in secondary schools across Western Australia's Peel Region.

[Anglicare Victoria](#) will use the funding for an Individual Mens Behavioural Change program for fathers who use violence in the home.

[Anglicare WA](#) will extend its Young Hearts program, a free counselling service for young people who have experienced DFV.

[Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights](#) will strengthen its Supporting Muslim Women's Safety program, which includes culturally sensitive DFV response and prevention services.

[Berry Street Victoria](#) will channel the funding into its Mother-Infant Village program, which provides independent accommodation and wraparound support to mothers who have experienced DFV.

[Brisbane Youth Service](#) will expand its K.I.N.D Program, which provides psycho-educational intervention to young people using violence in their relationships.

[Centre Against Domestic Abuse](#) will strengthen its Moreton Multicultural Unique Mums (MMUMs) project which engages with women from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Moreton to deepen its focus on DFV and sexual assault.

[The Centre for Non-Violence](#) are strengthening their current response to working with children and young people by appointing a case manager to work with children and young people directly in the new Growing Futures program across the Loddon area of central Victoria.

[Domestic Violence Action Centre](#) will extend its men's behavioural intervention program, Positive Choices, Safer Families.

[DVassist](#) will use the funding to continue decreasing barriers to DFV support for people living in rural or remote areas of Western Australia.

[Engender Equality](#) will extend its phone and video counselling services to ensure more people experiencing DFV in Tasmania receive timely counselling.

[Family Access Network](#) will hire a DFV therapeutic arts practitioner to provide healing and recovery support to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced DFV.

[inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence](#) will work towards building a national approach to family violence in migrant and refugee communities.

[Karinya House for Mothers and Babies](#) will develop an evaluation framework for its work supporting homeless women who are pregnant or parenting a newborn.

[Liberty Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services](#) will use the funding to continue delivering its men's behavioural change program, Safer Men Safer Families.

[Micah Projects](#) will extend its specialist support to women experiencing DFV during pregnancy, birth and post-birth.

[Multicultural Families Organisation Inc](#) will expand its Support Assistance, Recovery and Advocacy (SARA) program, which delivers DFV support to Migrant and refugee women on the Gold Coast.

[Multicultural Youth South Australia](#) will enhance the therapeutic and outreach components of its DFV services.

[Northern Rivers Women and Children's Services](#) will use the funding to expand and streamline its DFV services across multiple community cohorts, including women with a disability and children.

[NT Legal Aid](#) will increase the capacity of its Respondent Early Assistance Legal Service in the Katherine Local Court.

[Parkerville Children and Youth Care](#) will expand its capacity to deliver tailored support to children and young people experiencing DFV in Western Australia.

[Refuge Victoria](#) will use the funding to develop specialised refuge support for LGBTQIA+ people experiencing DFV.

[Sisters Inside Inc](#) will use the funding to employ a community-based counsellor under its North QLD Anti-Violence program to support women and children at risk of incarceration, and/or exiting prison.

[Southern Women's Group Incorporated](#) will extend its community engagement and response program in the Eurobodalla region.

[Stopping Family Violence](#) will extend its early intervention and education program for West Australian adolescents who are or may be at risk of perpetuating DFV.

[Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation](#) will use the funding to support an occupational therapist to deliver a trauma-informed practice within the Child Protection Unit (CPU) at Sydney Children's Hospital.

[The Royal Women's Hospital](#) will use the funding to support its Family Violence Prevention program to improve pathways to safety and wellbeing for pregnant women affected by DFV.

[Top End Women's Legal Service Inc.](#) will scale up innovative and place-based services to women who are experiencing or are at risk of DFV in the Northern Territory, particularly women seeking refuge at the Darwin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Shelter Indigenous Corporation and women incarcerated at the Darwin Correctional Centre.

[Wellsprings for Women](#) will extend its specialist housing support for migrant and refugee women who have experienced DFV.

[Women's Community Shelters](#) will grow its Walk the Talk program, educating high school students in respectful relationships and consent.

[YWCA Australia](#) will extend its capacity to deliver DFV support services to rural towns in Wingecarribee.



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