

## Member's Newsletter: March 2024

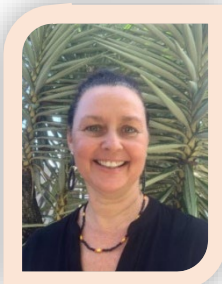
### Message from our Chair



Hello Members! It has been great to connect with you at our monthly Forum Member meetings this year and share the progress of our advocacy, policy, and member engagement work. Our focus since late 2023 has been to finalise our Strategic Plan and embed it into our activities, and we are well on our way to achieving this.

The next big step in our governance journey will be to hold our first Board meeting in April. I'm looking forward to the discussions as we progress the incorporation of the Forum. We have also commenced planning of this year's face-to-face Member's meeting and would like to hear from each of you on any important topics you would like included in the agenda. Feel free to reach out to Kerry and the Forum team with any ideas you have. I hope you enjoy this first edition of the Member's Newsletter. See you at the next meeting. - *Wynetta Dewis, Chair*

### From the CEO's Desk



Hi all and welcome to our first NFVPLS Forum newsletter! For those of you who were able to make the last members meeting, I am sure you have been hanging out to receive this first edition 😊

I have just clocked six months in the role as CEO and wanted to extend a big thank you to everyone who has met with me and shared your unique challenges and potential opportunities for your services.

This newsletter may be a little longer than we anticipate moving forward, we will try to keep our news to two pages. Being the first one I thought it was important to include our Strategic Plan for the next 5 years, which has been endorsed by the Board. Thank you again for your feedback on our conference last year - I am sure you will see your suggestions included in the plan. The Forum team recently met to develop our operational plan for the coming year, which is the first step to ensuring we can deliver on the Strategic Plan over the next 5 years.

Also included with the newsletter is a rundown of some of the activities we have been working on since June last year, to support members and the establishment of the new company. We are in a unique position of having both an established and mature member base, while at the same time setting up a company and all that goes along with establishing new governance and practices.

In closing, with a Federal Government election looming, it is a good time for us to gather and document our collective impact. We will begin working on some ideas that we can share with members on how to measure our impact as a sector to enhance our lobbying and advocacy work within a national context... we will keep you posted. - *Kerry Staines, CEO*



## Latest News, Policies, Submissions

### Closing the Gap Priority Reforms Performance Measurement Project

The Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) were contracted to build on the initial work of the Productivity Commission (PC) to develop a coherent and consistent framework measuring progress under the 4 Closing the Gap Priority Reform areas. In December 2023, the project team shared an interim Report (attached) which NFVPLS responded to through the Coalition of Peaks.

This submission will inform the development of the draft framework, which is expected to be completed mid-June 2024. NFVPLS will continue to monitor progress on this project and the Policy Team may seek member input once the draft framework has been released.

### Crimes Amendment (Strengthening the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Violence) Bill 2024

The Policy Team are currently reviewing the *Crimes Amendment (Strengthening the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Violence) Bill 2024* and will provide a submission by the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2024. The Bill is a schedule of amendments to the Crimes Act 1914, specifically focusing on enhancing protections for vulnerable persons involved in criminal proceedings. The Bill implements recommendations 52, 53, 56, and 61 of the 2017 Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The amendments outlined in the Bill aim to expand the application of special rules protecting vulnerable persons, including child witnesses, child complainants, and vulnerable adult complainants. The amendments also introduce provisions for evidence recording hearings, which allow vulnerable persons to provide recorded evidence to reduce the risk of re-traumatization. **Members have been provided with a summary of the changes and asked to provide any feedback to the Policy Team by the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2024.**

### Increasing awareness of coercive control

The Commonwealth Government has released new resources that explore how to recognise coercive control and seek help. They include new, simple information for groups considered to be most at risk of family violence; factsheets on tech-facilitated abuse and economic and financial abuse; and resources to help service providers identify coercive control. See the resources for First Nations communities [here](#) and Guides for healthcare practitioners [here](#).

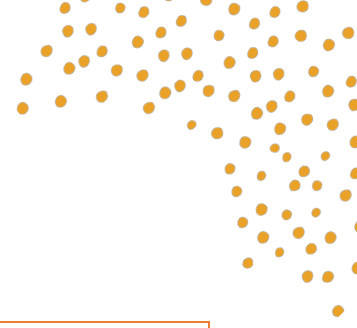
## Current Lobbying Positions

The NFVPLS Forum (the *Forum*) aims to ensure that all strategic planning and policy positions link to the Closing the Gap Agreement and Priority Reforms; National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children and associated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025; and the Justice Policy Partnership Sector Strengthening Plan, to be developed this year. In the Forum's pre-budget submission, we have requested an additional \$60M of direct investment across FVPLS services.

CATEGORY	NFVPLS Forum Position
PEAK Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Forum is recognised and respected as the PEAK Body representing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Sector.</li></ul>
Sector sustainability	<p>Our member services require recurrent core funding from multiple Commonwealth Department portfolios including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Department of Social Services (DSS) to allocate a separate, dedicated funding stream to FVPLSs for holistic, culturally safe, non-legal work such as counselling, case</li></ul>



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	<p>management and early intervention and prevention programs. The level of funding required needs to be established in partnership with ACCOs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attorney General’s Department to fund the legal service provision components in accordance with the unique needs for service delivery by ACCOs (such as remote housing, FIFO workforce).</li> <li>• The Minister for Finance, Minister for Women, Minister for the Public Service needs to advocate for pay parity to ensure the sectors workforce sustainability.</li> <li>• Government Departments need to work across portfolios to align the funding agreements and ensure that the sector co-designs and establishes appropriate procurement, contract reporting and monitoring processes.</li> <li>• Government Funding Agreements should be for a minimum term of 5 years with options for 2 additional 1-year extensions to the term. Variations to enact Agreement extensions are to be based on transparent assessment and evaluation methodology with ‘no-surprises’ for member services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Standalone Plan to End Violence Against First Nations Women and Children</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the <a href="#">Standalone First Nations National Plan</a> will be led by DSS and will guide a whole-of-society approach to addressing the unacceptable rates of violence against First Nations women and children.</li> <li>• The Forum welcomes the appointment of the Expert Steering Committee for the Standalone Plan, including FVPLS Chair Wynetta Dewis.</li> <li>• We continue to call for the Standalone Plan and funding to be quarantined for member services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Forum is calling for the public release of the report of the Independent Review of the NLAP (prepared by Dr Warren Mundy), that was presented to the Hon Mark Dryfus, Auditor General.</li> <li>• FVPLSs are open to moving forward with an access to justice partnership administered by the AGD where:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There is a clear transition period with consultation to ensure a smooth process for our services and their clients.</li> <li>○ Funding is quarantined for FVPLS sector with an uplift in salaries for FVPLSs in 2024/25 to ensure pay parity with other legal services.</li> <li>○ Has indexation been applied annually throughout the term of the Agreement,</li> <li>○ Move to a longer-term Agreement (5+ years) to bolster staff attraction and ensure retention of trained and skilled staff within the services.</li> <li>○ Maintaining the integrity of the FVPLS holistic, culturally safe legal and non-legal service delivery model is paramount.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Adequate funding is required for real change, to meet the needs of this specialised sector; the complexity and longevity of supports our clients require needs to be recognised - noting the majority are already marginalised and severely disadvantaged.</li> <li>• The refreshed NLAP is an opportunity for the Federal government to substantially boost investment in FVPLSs to ensure there is coverage and equitable access for First Nations women to access critical family violence support from our services when it’s needed.</li> </ul>



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<p><b>Child Protection Notification and Referral System</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For over 10+ years the FVPLS Forum and members have been advocating for a child protection notification and referral system, both for a nationally consistent approach and within our own states and territories.</li> <li>• A new National child protection notification and referral system would increase efficiency, broaden referral pathways, support culturally safe service provision and provide timelier outcomes.</li> <li>• This would ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mums have early access to legal and non-legal supports as soon as there are children protection concerns, which in turn would minimise child removal and displacement.</li> <li>• There have been positive developments on this in some states and territories:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NSW has progressed a child protection referral system to legal assistance providers.</li> <li>○ Yoorrook inquiry in Victoria supports a system of notification to Aboriginal legal services providers for pre-birth and for substantiated children protection concerns for all other children (Rec 12).</li> <li>○ The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service received a grant to pilot the <a href="#">NT Aboriginal Child Protection Notification and Referral Program</a>.</li> <li>○ Learnings from the above initiatives may be applied across other jurisdictions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Measuring What Matters</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treasury have developed the <a href="#">Measuring What Matters Framework</a> which sets out the factors that are important to Australians' individual and collective wellbeing across all phases of life in five broad themes - healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous.</li> <li>• Supporting the Framework is a <a href="#">Dashboard</a> which is updated annually and provides an overview of the Framework's 50 indicators, including those which relate specifically to the FVPLSs:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Index of Australia's performance in providing accessible and affordable civil courts and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.</li> <li>○ Proportion of people who experienced physical violence in the last 12 months.</li> <li>○ Proportion of people who experienced violence by an intimate partner in the last 12 months.</li> <li>○ Proportion of people who have experienced physical or sexual abuse before the age of 15 years.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Treasury are looking for opportunities to embed the Framework into government decision making. This will involve guidance for agencies to inform policy development and evaluation. The Framework could also be used in areas of policy that require different levels of government to work together.</li> <li>• The Forum will continue to monitor the evolution of the Framework and collaborate with Government on the metrics and its implementation.</li> </ul>



## Member Spotlight



### Marninwarntikura Family Violence Prevention Unit WA (Fitzroy Crossing)

W: <https://mwrc.com.au/>

#### 1. How many staff does your service have, and what role do they each play?

At Marninwarntikura, **“two-way” teams deliver all our programs.** That is, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff working side-by-side to ensure that services are delivered in a way that is culturally integrated and trauma-informed.

Our FVPLS includes a solicitor, paralegal, social worker, counsellor, and Community navigators. We hope to grow our team to better meet the needs of our community.

Our FVPLS sits as part of the wider Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre which has a total team of about 75 staff – with programs from Early Years/Early Learning, through to youth/young people, a therapeutic artist’s studio, a crisis refuge, social & emotional wellbeing (SEWB) programs and telehealth/FDV services.

#### 2. What locations does your service support?

We work in the Fitzroy Valley in the Central/West Kimberley region of WA. We are situated in the township of Fitzroy Crossing and offer services to approx. 30 remote communities across the valley. We also offer links and services to other towns across the Kimberley such as Derby, Broome and Halls Creek. Geographically, we service an area roughly the size of Victoria.

#### 3. How would you describe the service that you offer to your communities?

Culturally integrated, trauma informed programs delivered under MWRCs “healing framework.” Our programs view the “whole of person” and try to provide as many wraparound supports to that person, their family and Community as is possible.

#### 4. Tell me about a program that your service offers that you are particularly proud of.

Our women’s “Art & Yarn” groups are a wonderful way of creating a soft entry point for women and families in the Community. Through these engagements are opportunities to provide community legal education and discover unmet legal needs in an environment that is safe and supportive.

#### 5. If you had one wish for the clients that you support, what would it be?

Additional services for people “where they are at.” Many of our clients live remotely, without access to reliable vehicles (or roads) that limit their access to a service many of us would take for granted.

#### 6. What motivates you and your team to deliver your services?

CEO, Emily Carter, always reminds us with her mantra “Your postcode shouldn’t determine your access!”



## Out and About



The Forum team recently gathered on Kabi Kabi country, Sunshine Coast, to work together to develop their operational plan in line with the three key strategic priority areas outlined in the Forum's new Strategic Plan 2024 – 2029.

The team (pictured from left, Lianne Brown, Kerry Staines, Kari Greenswag, Jenn Fitzgerald, and Priya Devendran) also spent a morning with the amazing team at Tribal Link in Mapleton, taking part in a cultural awareness workshop that helped improve their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, to be able to offer appropriate and effective service delivery in a culturally safe environment.

## Important dates

- **Upcoming Member's meetings**
  - Thursday, 28 March 2024 at 2:30pm AEST
  - Thursday, 2 May 2024 at 2:30pm AEST
- **Member's conference + AGM**
  - 15 to 17 October 2024; location in South Australia
- **Member speaking engagements**
  - Antoinette Braybrook, Djirra speaking at the Elise Conference; 15-16 March 2024 at the University of Sydney
  - Kathleen Wincen, AFLSQ & Melissa Calliss, Warra Warra Legal Service speaking at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Disrupting & Reducing Family Violence against First Nations Women and Children Conference; 8-9 May 2024 in Gadigal Land, Sydney
- **QIFVLS Conference**
  - 28-29 May 2024, plus 30 May 2024 as on-country workshop day; Cairns, QLD