

**FIRST NATIONS
ADVOCATES AGAINST
FAMILY VIOLENCE**

**Submission to the
Inquiry into Racism,
Hate and Violence
Directed at Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander People**

**Prepared by First Nations Advocates
Against Family Violence**

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee
on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Affairs



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First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV)

Who are we?

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) is the national peak body for specialist Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) and the only Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) dedicated to representing this sector at a national level.

FVPLSs deliver specialist legal and non-legal responses to domestic, family and sexual violence through culturally safe, holistic service models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, predominantly women and their children.

FNAAFV provides national leadership across policy, planning and law reform; strengthens frontline sector capacity; supports innovation and best practice; and advocates for safety, justice and self-determination for First Nations peoples experiencing violence.

We work in partnership across the ACCO sector, government and non-government organisations, and mainstream services to advance culturally safe, community-controlled responses. Our work is grounded in the principles of self-determination and aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Who are our members?

FNAAFV represents 14 member FVPLSs (from a broader network of 16 services nationally), operating across more than 30 locations in metropolitan, regional and remote communities in every Australian jurisdiction.

FVPLSs provide culturally safe, specialist family and domestic violence services to more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These services are often the only accessible and trusted supports available to First Nations women and children experiencing violence.

A full list of FNAAFV members is provided at [Appendix A](#).



What do we do?

FNAAFV works with its members, communities, governments and partners to prevent, disrupt and respond to family and sexual violence affecting First Nations peoples.


We provide a unified national voice for the FVPLS sector, advocating for culturally safe, holistic legal and non-legal responses and driving reform across policy, systems and service delivery.

FNAAFV contributes to national decision-making processes, including as a member of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks, and works to ensure that First Nations perspectives and expertise shape policy and implementation.

Our work is grounded in the lived expertise of First Nations women, children and communities, alongside frontline practice, cultural knowledge and evidence.

We align our strategic and policy work with key national frameworks, including:

- the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and its Priority Reforms
- the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025



Submission to the Inquiry into Racism, Hate and Violence Directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Executive Summary

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into Racism, Hate and Violence Directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Racism is not a peripheral concern for the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) sector. It is central to it.

FVPLS services operate at the intersection of race, gender and colonisation where power, control and structural inequality do not just shape violence, but determine who is believed, who is protected, and who is left at risk.

Every day, FVPLS services across the country witness the consequences of this:

- First Nations women who are more fearful of the systems meant to protect them than the perpetrator
- Women who do not call police because they know they may be disbelieved, misidentified or criminalized
- Courtrooms where their experiences are minimised or dismissed
- Media coverage (or lack thereof) that renders their deaths invisible
- Systems where over-policing and punitive responses compound trauma rather than deliver safety

Increasingly, racism is also experienced online, where First Nations women, communities and workers are targeted with race-based abuse that extends violence beyond the home and into every part of their lives.

Racism, in its interpersonal, institutional and structural forms, is not simply a context for family and sexual violence. It is embedded within it and drives it.



It creates and sustains the conditions in which:

- perpetrators act with impunity
- victim-survivors are reluctant to seek help
- systems fail to respond appropriately when they do, including through misidentification and criminalisation

Violence against First Nations women is gendered violence, compounded by racism. It is not a community problem and it is not a product of culture.

This submission demonstrates that:

- institutional racism within policing, courts and child protection systems directly contributes to harm
- structural racism, including underinvestment in First Nations-led services, enables violence to continue
- current accountability, reporting and data systems are not fit for purpose
- First Nations-led services, particularly FVPLSs, are proven to work and must be central to the response

This is not a knowledge problem, the evidence is clear and the solutions are known; what is required now is implementation.



Recommendations

1. Acknowledge and act on racism as a structural driver of family and sexual violence against First Nations women and children, and reject deficit-based narratives that frame this violence as a “community problem”. Violence must be recognised and resourced as gendered violence compounded by racism, including through sustained investment in First Nations-led services and full implementation of *Our Ways Strong Ways*.
2. Urgently implement the National Anti-Racism Framework (2024), including a formal government response, a time-bound implementation plan, and an independent accountability mechanism to drive whole-of-government action.
3. Invest in truth-telling and treaty processes led by First Nations peoples as essential structural reforms to address the racism that underpins violence against First Nations women and children, and to establish the foundation for effective legislative and policy reform.
4. Fully implement the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, particularly Priority Reform Two (Building the Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector) and Priority Reform Three (transforming government organisations), as core mechanisms to eliminate institutional racism across justice, health and child protection systems.
5. Establish nationally consistent accountability mechanisms for policing and justice system responses, including:
 - a. Mandatory domestic, family and sexual violence death review panels in all jurisdictions with independent First Nations expert representation
 - b. Transparent, disaggregated public reporting on policing and court outcomes
 - c. Mandatory, independently audited safeguards against misidentification across all coercive control legislation
6. Implement a mandatory Child Protection Notification and Referral System in all jurisdictions, modelled on Aboriginal community-controlled approaches, to ensure First Nations families are connected to immediate, culturally safe legal assistance at first contact and to prevent escalation and unnecessary child removal.



7. Reform anti-racism complaint and reporting systems to address institutional and systemic racism, including:
 - a. Review and reform of the *Racial Discrimination Act* to remove accessibility and evidentiary barriers
 - b. Establishment of dedicated First Nations-specific complaint pathways within the Australian Human Rights Commission
 - c. Mandatory reporting and independent oversight of racism complaints within police, child protection and justice systems

8. Strengthen regulation of online platforms and establish First Nations-specific online safety mechanisms, including:
 - a. Culturally safe reporting pathways and support for those experiencing online racial abuse
 - b. Legislative obligations on digital platforms to promptly remove content that incites racial hatred
 - c. Formal integration with existing safety and legal assistance systems

9. Invest in the expansion and sustainability of the First Nations-led service system, including:
 - a. Equitable geographic access to FVPLS services in regional, rural and remote areas
 - b. Long-term investment in prevention, including men's behaviour change programs that address racism and the impacts of colonisation
 - c. Targeted investment to address workforce sustainability, including the impacts of vicarious trauma, institutional racism and online abuse

10. Invest in First Nations data sovereignty and strengthen the national evidence base, including:
 - a. First Nations-controlled data systems capturing, experiences of racism and the relationship between racism and family violence
 - b. Mandatory, nationally consistent disaggregated reporting across all jurisdictions

11. Reform media standards and invest in First Nations-led journalism to address racist narratives and improve public accountability, including:
 - a. Mandatory adoption of Our Watch reporting guidelines across all major news outlets



b. Strengthened industry standards to prevent racist, victim-blaming and deficit-based reporting.

12. Sustained public investment in First Nations-led media to ensure accurate, community-informed representation.



Introduction

FNAAFV is the national peak body for Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS), representing specialist, community-controlled services that exist to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children safe. These services operate at the frontline of family and sexual violence and are critical infrastructure in the national safety system. Their growth and sustainability are essential because mainstream systems have consistently failed to protect First Nations women and children.

Violence against First Nations women is not a community problem and it is not a product of culture. It is gendered violence, driven by the intersection of racism and sexism.

Persistent deficit-based narratives are harmful. They shape public attitudes, influence policy responses and contribute directly to unsafe and discriminatory treatment by police, courts and government systems.

A significant proportion of violence against First Nations women is perpetrated by non-Aboriginal men. This reality is routinely excluded from public discourse and policy design.

This submission addresses the Terms of Reference by demonstrating that racism is a structural condition that must be addressed to reduce violence and improve safety outcomes.

Nature, Prevalence and Impact of Racism Experienced by FVPLS Clients and Communities

Racism experienced by First Nations women is pervasive, layered and cumulative. It operates across interpersonal, institutional and structural levels, each compounding the experience of family and sexual violence and undermining safety.

It operates across:

- Interpersonal racism: experienced in daily interactions with police, health systems and courts
- Institutional racism: embedded in justice, child protection and service systems
- Structural racism: reflected in funding decisions, housing access and service availability

At the frontline, FVPLS services see how these forms of racism are not separate: they interact and reinforce one another.



Interpersonal racism is experienced every day. First Nations women report being disbelieved or dismissed when they call police, having their injuries minimised in hospital settings, and having their credibility questioned in court.

Case example:

A First Nations woman calls police after an assault. Officers attend but treat the matter as a “mutual argument,” despite clear injuries and a history of violence. No charges are laid. She does not call again. The violence escalates.

Institutional racism has direct and, at times, fatal consequences. Evidence shows that many First Nations women who have died as a result of violence had previously sought help, but their requests were downgraded, ignored or not responded to.

Case example:

A woman reports escalating violence multiple times. Each report is treated as low risk. No coordinated response occurs. Weeks later, she is killed by her partner. Her prior help-seeking is recorded, but not acted upon.

Misidentification is one of the most serious manifestations of institutional racism. First Nations women are disproportionately identified as perpetrators rather than victim-survivors.

Case example:

A woman defends herself during an assault. Police attend and charge her with assault, while the primary aggressor is not charged. A protection order is issued against her. This triggers child protection involvement, and her children are removed.

This is not an isolated failure. It is a predictable outcome of racial bias in policing and justice responses. It results in criminalisation, child removal and deeper system entrenchment.

Fear of child removal remains one of the most significant barriers to seeking help. This fear is grounded in lived experience and reinforced by the ongoing overrepresentation of First Nations children in out-of-home care.

Case example:



A woman experiencing severe violence chooses not to seek support because she knows that any contact with police or services may trigger child protection involvement. Remaining in the violent relationship is perceived as the only way to keep her children.

Structural racism further compounds these risks. Chronic underinvestment in First Nations-led services limits access to culturally safe support. Housing insecurity leaves women with no viable pathway to safety.

Case example:

A woman leaves a violent partner but cannot access crisis accommodation within her region. With no housing options and children to care for, she returns to the violent environment.

Housing insecurity, overcrowding and infrastructure inequity are among the most acute structural consequences of racism for FVPLS clients, and they must be understood as direct drivers of family violence. First Nations women who leave violent situations frequently have nowhere safe to go. Housing systems that were never designed with First Nations women's needs in mind, combined with discrimination in private rental markets and chronic underfunding of social and community housing, mean that for many women, staying in a violent situation is a rational calculation made against the alternative of homelessness.

But the problem runs deeper than housing stock alone. In remote and regional communities, particularly in places like the Kimberley, the cost of fuel and freight has risen to the point where communities become increasingly isolated, women's ability to leave violence safely is reduced, and household economic stress escalates simultaneously.

These are not separate problems: isolation, financial pressure and violence risk compound one another in ways that are invisible to policy frameworks that treat them as distinct portfolio issues. FNAAFV is also observing increased movement of families into already overcrowded town centres as people relocate to access services, food and supplies, placing further pressure on stretched housing and infrastructure, and creating conditions in which family violence escalates. The chronic under-investment in remote service infrastructure, roads, housing, telecommunications, health and legal services, is not a regional development oversight. It is a product of the same systemic devaluation of First Nations lives that characterises institutional racism across every domain the FVPLS sector works in.



Investment in housing, infrastructure and remote service capacity must be understood and funded as anti-racism measures and as violence prevention measures, because in the lives of our clients, that is precisely what they are.

Racism and violence are mutually reinforcing. Racism produces poverty, housing instability, trauma and distrust of institutions. These conditions increase vulnerability to violence and reduce the likelihood of seeking help. Violence then compounds disadvantage, increasing contact with child protection and justice systems, where racism continues to operate.

A First Nations woman experiencing family violence is not navigating a single issue. She is navigating the cumulative impacts of colonisation, racism, poverty, housing insecurity, intergenerational trauma, and systemic distrust, all at once.

Fragmented, siloed responses cannot address this complexity.

Only holistic, culturally safe, First Nations-led models, such as those delivered by FVPLSs, are designed to respond to the full reality of what women are experiencing.



The Voice Referendum and the Racism It Exposed

The 2023 Voice referendum did not create racism. It exposed and legitimised it.

Racism is not new. It has shaped the lives of First Nations peoples since colonisation. What the referendum did was bring that racism into the open, giving it a national platform, amplifying it through mainstream and social media, and creating conditions in which it became more visible, more acceptable and more emboldened.

This distinction matters. If racism is understood as something the referendum produced, it can be treated as a temporary escalation. If it is understood as a deep structural condition that the referendum merely surfaced, then the response must also be structural.

The referendum campaign amplified misinformation and deficit narratives about First Nations peoples, embedding harmful stereotypes into mainstream public discourse. The framing of the Voice as “special rights,” rather than recognition of rights long denied, contributed to a broader public narrative in which opposition to First Nations equality was normalised and legitimised.

The consequences have been direct and measurable:

- Increased racial abuse, harassment and threats, both in person and online
- Reduced trust in institutions, including police, courts and government services
- Decreased willingness of First Nations women to seek help when experiencing violence
- Evidence from the Call It Out Annual Report documented a significant escalation in racist incidents during the referendum period, including verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and physical violence.

For the FVPLS sector, these impacts are not abstract. They are immediate and lived.

First Nations women have reported feeling less safe seeking help, particularly in regional and rural communities where the No vote was strongest, and where access to culturally safe services is already limited.

Workers across the FVPLS sector have reported increased experiences of racism in their professional interactions with police, courts and government agencies. Clients have described perpetrators using racist language as a tool of coercion and control, invoking the referendum result to reinforce messages that Aboriginal women will not be believed, will not be protected, and are not valued.



At a community level, the referendum deepened distrust in public institutions. When systems are already experienced as unsafe, and the broader community has publicly signalled that First Nations voices and rights are not supported, the threshold for seeking help becomes even higher.

The referendum also contributed to an escalation in ideologically motivated hostility. This includes organised and targeted acts of racial violence, which must be understood as part of a broader continuum of harm, from everyday racism, to online abuse, to coordinated acts of violence.

These developments did not emerge in isolation. They were enabled and intensified by the public discourse of the referendum campaign.

This must be understood as a structural issue requiring structural responses.

Responses must go beyond addressing individual incidents of racism and instead confront the conditions that allow racism to persist and escalate. This includes investment in truth-telling, justice and accountability processes led by First Nations peoples, creating the shared understanding necessary for meaningful reform and ensuring that future policy and constitutional processes are grounded in truth, not misinformation.

The referendum did not change the nature of racism in Australia. It revealed it, and the task now is not to manage its visibility, but to address its cause.

FVPLS Workers: Racism, Vicarious Trauma and Workforce Sustainability


The FVPLS workforce operates under compounded and sustained pressure. The workers in the FVPLS sector:

- support clients experiencing trauma and violence
- navigate institutional racism in their professional roles
- experience racism personally, within their communities and increasingly online

The racism experienced by FVPLS workers is a significant and insufficiently acknowledged dimension of this inquiry.

First Nations workers in the FVPLS sector are not only advocates and service providers, they are also community members who carry their own lived experiences of racism alongside the vicarious exposure to trauma and racist harm that their work entails every day.

FVPLS workers routinely navigate racism in their professional interactions with police, courts, child protection authorities, corrections systems and other government agencies. They advocate for clients whose disclosures of violence have been dismissed or minimised due to racial bias. They



sit in courtrooms where their clients are treated as less credible. They engage with systems that apply different standards to First Nations families.

They do this work while also being First Nations people themselves, people who have often experienced racism personally, across their lives, in their families and in their communities.

This dual exposure, professional and personal, produces a specific and compounding form of harm.

The combination of vicarious trauma from supporting victim-survivors, racial discrimination in professional settings, and the ongoing personal experience of racism creates a level of psychological burden that is not adequately recognised within existing workforce support frameworks.

Online racism has added a further and intensifying dimension.

During and following the referendum period, First Nations workers and advocates experienced a marked escalation in targeted online abuse. Many report being selective about how and whether they identify as First Nations in public or online spaces due to the risk of racial targeting. This has a chilling effect on advocacy, limiting the ability of the sector to speak publicly and hold systems to account.

The consequences for the FVPLS workforce are direct and severe.

The sector already faces:

- high levels of burnout
- significant challenges in recruitment and retention
- wage disparities compared to equivalent mainstream roles
- Racism - experienced personally, vicariously, and online, is a significant driver of workforce instability.


It means that the sector best placed to respond to the intersection of racism and family violence is itself being undermined by the very systems and conditions it is working to address.

This is not simply a workforce issue.

It is a workplace safety issue, a service system issue, and a structural anti-racism issue.

Workforce sustainability is not separate from anti-racism reform. It is central to it.

Addressing this requires:

- 
- sustained investment in supervision, wellbeing and workforce development within the FVPLS sector
 - equitable funding and pay parity with mainstream services
 - and critically, structural accountability for the institutional racism that FVPLS workers encounter in their professional roles

Without this, the system will continue to rely on a workforce that is being asked to absorb the impacts of racism while simultaneously responding to its consequences.

What is Working Well in Responding to Racism, Hate or Violence

First Nations-led solutions work.

This is not theoretical. It is evidenced every day through the FVPLS sector and should be the foundation of the Committee's response.

FVPLSs provide:

- holistic, culturally safe, wraparound support
- specialist legal and non-legal assistance
- community-based prevention and early intervention programs

FVPLS workers are trusted precisely because they share lived experience, are embedded in community, and operate within culturally safe frameworks. FVPLSs provide not just legal assistance but counselling, safety planning, court support, community education, and prevention programs. This holistic model disrupts the cycle of violence and the pipeline from family violence into child protection and justice system involvement.

Importantly, the FVPLS sector does not operate from a single model. Member services were established in different eras, in response to different community needs and mandates, and reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Some FVPLSs work across the full spectrum of family violence response, from prevention and early intervention through to perpetrator programs and behaviour change.

This holistic model disrupts the cycle of violence and the pipeline from family violence into child protection and the justice system.

Accessibility is critical.



The FVPLS sector has consistently advocated for a minimum standard: that no First Nations woman should have to travel more than one hour or 100 kilometres to access culturally safe specialist family violence support. In practice, this standard is not being met.

In regional and remote communities, often the same communities where violence is highest and trust in systems is lowest, the absence of local FVPLS services forces women to choose between unsafe mainstream systems or no support at all.

This is not simply a service gap.

The Role of Media in Promoting or Preventing Racism and Hate

Media plays a significant role in shaping public understanding and reinforcing racism.

It is not a neutral actor. It is a structural force that influences community attitudes, institutional responses and policy priorities, with direct consequences for the safety of First Nations women.

Violence against First Nations women is consistently underreported and, when it is reported, often misrepresented. First Nations women who are killed by their partners or family members routinely receive less media coverage than non-Indigenous women. As First Nations journalist Dan Bouchier has observed, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are murdered or subjected to serious violence, it does not receive the same level of attention or treatment as comparable cases involving non-Indigenous women.

This silence is itself a form of racism. It communicates that First Nations women's lives are less valued, signals to perpetrators that their violence will not attract scrutiny, and reinforces to victim-survivors that their experiences may not be recognised or believed.

Where First Nations people do receive media coverage, it frequently reinforces harmful stereotypes. Reporting has consistently framed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within a criminal justice lens, most often as offenders, rather than as victims of violence.

Research has shown that media narratives normalise the over-policing and criminalisation of First Nations people. The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (Don Dale) found that media reporting contributed to distorted representations of Aboriginal young people, fueling heightened surveillance, over-policing and punitive responses.

These representations have direct and harmful consequences.

Media narratives shape how police, courts and child protection systems respond. Stereotypes that portray First Nations people as inherently violent contribute to victim-blaming, reduce the likelihood



that disclosures are taken seriously, and reinforce institutional bias. They also shape broader community attitudes, creating environments in which violence is minimised or excused.

The referendum period intensified these harms.

Misinformation and deficit narratives about First Nations people, amplified through mainstream and social media, contributed to a sustained period of legitimised public racism. The effects were felt directly by FVPLS clients and workers, through increased racial abuse, reduced trust in institutions, and a heightened reluctance to seek help.

While social media has amplified these dynamics, the traditional media landscape continues to play a significant role. Underreporting of violence, stereotyping in crime coverage, and the absence of First Nations voices in editorial and decision-making positions continue to shape a narrative environment that undermines safety and accountability.

Reform is required to ensure accurate, responsible and culturally informed reporting.

This includes:

- Mandatory adoption of Our Watch reporting guidelines on violence against First Nations women across all major media outlets
- Strengthening industry standards and regulatory frameworks to prevent racist, victim-blaming and deficit-based reporting
- Sustained public investment in First Nations-led journalism, including through outlets such as NITV, the National Indigenous Times and community-controlled media
- Embedding media accountability and representation within the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework

Without reform, media will continue to reinforce the very conditions that enable violence against First Nations women.

With it, media can play a critical role in shifting narratives, strengthening accountability, and supporting safer, more informed communities.



Gaps in Government Systems and Accountability Mechanisms

Government systems continue to fail First Nations women.

The FVPLS sector's daily experience is one of navigating systems that were not designed for First Nations women and which frequently cause harm. These failures are not isolated, they are systemic.

Key gaps include:

- **Inadequate policing accountability**
Institutional racism in policing directly contributes to unsafe responses and, in some cases, to the deaths of First Nations women. While police services have acknowledged systemic racism, this has not translated into meaningful accountability. Domestic and family violence death review processes do not consistently examine police conduct through a racial lens, nor do they mandate First Nations expert representation. As a result, racially biased failures are not systematically identified or addressed.
- **Lack of racial analysis in death reviews**
Without explicit examination of racism as a contributing factor, systemic issues remain invisible. This limits the capacity of review mechanisms to drive meaningful reform and perpetuates unsafe practices.
- **Disproportionate child removal without adequate oversight**
First Nations children remain significantly overrepresented in out-of-home care. Child protection interventions are frequently driven by poverty, housing insecurity and the criminalisation of mothers who are themselves victim-survivors, all of which are products of structural racism. There is no consistent, First Nations-specific accountability mechanism for these decisions.
- **Weak implementation of Closing the Gap commitments**
While the National Agreement commits governments to shared decision-making and system transformation, implementation remains inconsistent. Engagement is often tokenistic, co-design is limited, and funding continues to bypass Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

These are systemic failures requiring structural reform.

Without accountability mechanisms that explicitly address institutional racism, these systems will continue to produce the same outcomes



Effectiveness of Reporting Mechanisms for Racism

Current reporting mechanisms for racism are not fit for purpose.

The existing framework, including the Racial Discrimination Act and Australian Human Rights Commission processes, is largely inaccessible to those most affected and poorly suited to addressing systemic harm.

They are:

- Inaccessible: requiring legal knowledge, time and resources that many victim-survivors do not have
- Slow: with processes extending over months, offering no timely remedy
- Retraumatizing: requiring repeated recounting of harm in formalised, adversarial settings
- Ineffective at addressing systemic racism: designed to address individual incidents rather than institutional patterns

For First Nations women experiencing family violence, these processes are not viable pathways to justice. The evidentiary burden is high, outcomes are often non-binding, and successful complaints rarely lead to systemic change.

There is a fundamental structural problem: the forms of racism most commonly experienced, embedded in policing, child protection and court systems, cannot be effectively addressed through individual complaints mechanisms.

Existing alternative pathways, including state-based bodies and the eSafety Commissioner, present similar limitations, including inconsistency, lack of cultural safety, and dependence on voluntary compliance.

There is a critical need for:

- First Nations-specific, culturally safe reporting pathways
- mechanisms capable of addressing institutional and systemic racism
- mandatory reporting and independent oversight of racism complaints within government systems

Without reform, reporting mechanisms will continue to compound, rather than address, the harms of racism.



Online Racism

Online racism is increasing in scale, severity and impact.

It is:

- targeted and persistent
- identity-based and community-wide
- intersecting directly with family violence
- used as a tool of coercion and control

First Nations people are disproportionately targeted in online environments, with higher rates of abuse from strangers and on social media platforms.

For FVPLS clients, this presents specific risks.

Technology-facilitated abuse, including harassment, surveillance, stalking and image-based abuse, is increasingly a feature of family violence. When combined with racial abuse, this creates a heightened and complex risk environment that is not adequately addressed by existing policy frameworks.

The impacts are significant:

- psychological harm and trauma
- reduced willingness to engage online or publicly
- increased risk of escalation into offline violence

Online racism also contributes to broader patterns of radicalisation. Recent incidents of organised violence targeting First Nations people demonstrate how online hate can translate into real-world harm.

Current regulatory frameworks are inadequate.

The voluntary, self-regulatory model for digital platforms has failed to address the scale and severity of online racial abuse. Reporting mechanisms are inconsistent, removal of harmful content is slow, and culturally safe support pathways are largely absent.

Platform accountability must be strengthened through:

- legislative obligations to remove content inciting racial hatred
- accessible, culturally safe reporting mechanisms
- integration with legal and support services



Closing the Gap and Practical Actions for Reform

The Closing the Gap framework provides both the policy architecture and the accountability mechanism within which responses to racism must be grounded. FNAAFV submits the following practical priorities:

- Priority Reform Two – Investment in frontline services to directly respond and implement racism policy, including the government's response to this Inquiry. First Nations peak bodies, including FNAAFV and its members, must be genuine partners in designing, implementing and evaluating anti-racism policy not consulted after decisions are made (Priority Reform One – Shared Decision Making & Partnership). However, ultimately these partnerships mean nothing if our communities are not equipped with the resources to address these issues head on, in a way that is meaningful to place, and makes an impact on the ground in the communities we serve; and
- Priority Reform Three - Transforming government institutions must include a specific and mandatory focus on eliminating institutional racism in the justice, child protection, health and social service systems that FVPLS clients rely on. This includes mandatory First Nations cultural competency training, independent accountability mechanisms, and binding diversity and inclusion targets at senior and decision-making levels.

Data sovereignty: knowing the true scale of racist harm

Australia does not have an adequate evidence base to measure racism as a driver of family violence.

This is not incidental. It reflects a long-standing system in which data about First Nations people has been collected without their control, and often used in ways that do not reflect lived experience or support effective policy responses.

Existing systems:

- do not capture lived experience of racism
- do not measure institutional or systemic racism
- do not adequately track misidentification or policing outcomes
- do not support effective, evidence-based policy design

As a result, governments cannot accurately measure progress, including against Closing the Gap Target 13.



Current data frameworks also fail to capture the full scope of FVPLS service delivery, particularly in prevention, early intervention and community-based work. This leads to systematic under-recognition of what works and underinvestment in effective responses.

First Nations data sovereignty is essential.

This includes:

- First Nations-controlled data systems
- disaggregated reporting on outcomes across policing, child protection and justice systems
- community-led data collection on racism as a barrier to help-seeking
- longitudinal data capturing the impact of culturally safe, holistic services

An evidence base governed by First Nations peoples is more accurate, more trusted, and more capable of driving meaningful change.

Ideologically Motivated Extremism

Ideologically motivated violence targeting First Nations people is an emerging and serious threat.

Recent events demonstrate increasing organisation, coordination and targeting of First Nations individuals, communities and gatherings. These incidents exist on a continuum of racialised harm, from everyday racism, to online abuse, to organised violence.

This escalation is not occurring in isolation. It is connected to broader patterns of:

- normalisation of racist discourse
- amplification of harmful narratives in media and online spaces
- increasing radicalisation of individuals and groups

For First Nations women experiencing family violence, this broader environment of hostility compounds risk and reduces safety.

Current intelligence and law enforcement frameworks do not adequately recognise racially motivated violence against First Nations people as an extremism risk warranting the same level of monitoring, prevention and response as other forms of ideologically motivated violence.

This gap must be addressed.

An effective response requires:

- recognition of racially motivated violence as a form of extremism
- adequate resourcing of intelligence and law enforcement agencies

- cultural competency within these responses
- accountability to First Nations communities and organisations

Without this, the escalation of ideologically motivated violence will continue to pose a growing risk to First Nations communities.

Conclusion

Racism is a primary driver of violence against First Nations women and children.

This is not a knowledge problem. The evidence is clear. The solutions are known.

What is required is action.

That action must be:

- Structural
- Sustained
- Led by First Nations people

This Inquiry presents an opportunity to move beyond acknowledgement and deliver meaningful change.

FNAAFV urges the Committee to act.

End notes

For any further information, please contact FNAAFV on ceo@fnaafv.org.au.

Appendix A: FNAAFV Member List



QIFVLS

Queensland Indigenous
Family Violence Legal Service



Ngaanyatjarra
Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council



NAAFLS

NORTH AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL FAMILY
LEGAL SERVICE



CAAFLU
1800 088 884



Family Violence Legal Service
Aboriginal Corporation (SA)



Aboriginal
Family Violence
Legal Service



- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Western Australia (Perth Head Office, Broome, Derby, Carnarvon, Kununurra, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Port Hedland)
- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Queensland (Toowoomba Head Office, Roma, Murgon and Gympie)
- Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Forbes)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation (Alice Springs Head Office, Tennant Creek)
- Djirra (statewide service with head office in Melbourne and 8 regional offices in Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Echuca, Shepparton, Morwell, Melton and Mildura)
- Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (Port Augusta Head Office, Ceduna, Pt Lincoln)
- Many Rivers Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Kempsey Head Office, Grafton)
- Marninwarnitkura Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Fitzroy Crossing)
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Domestic and Family Violence Service (Alice Springs, NPY Tri-state Region)
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (Cairns Head Office, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Bamaga, Thursday Island and Brisbane)

- Thiyama-li Family Violence Service Inc. NSW (Moree Head Office, Bourke, Walgett)
- Warra-Warra Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (Broken Hill)
- North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (Darwin Head Office, Katherine)
- SIS Tasmania (Hobart Head Office, Tasmania)

