

## Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria- committee questions

### Background and context:

On Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> of September VACCHO gave evidence at the inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria. Aunty Jill Gallagher and Sheree Lowe sat in front of the Legal and Social Issues Committee who are undertaking the inquiry. During the hearing the Committee asked VACCHO to provide supplementary information on the following two questions:

1. What is the connection between family violence reports and removal of children?
2. Is research being conducted in family violence/ in communities/ on perpetrators

This document outlines our responses for the Legal and Social Issues Committee as well as Djirra's who we reached out to regarding this.

### VACCHO's responses:

1. What is the connection between family violence reports and removal of children?

There is a strong link between reporting instances of family violence and families having their children removed.

- 9.2% of referrals to Orange door are through child protection
- 60% of the notifications VACCA gets are for family violence

2. Is research being conducted in family violence/ in communities/ on perpetrators?

Broadly speaking, there doesn't appear to be any formal community led research into perpetrators of family violence. However, there is certainly a strong appetite for this and for more investment into perpetrator programs, both at the prevention and intervention ends. At the most recent Dhelk Dja Family Violence Forum in September, there seemed to be a clear consensus that working with men and those at risk of/or using violence is currently a missing piece of the puzzle in combatting family violence. Forum attendees agreed that while investment into helping those impacted by violence at the crisis end is of huge importance, if we are to end family violence, a strong emphasis needs to be put on prevention and working with those who are committing violence or at risk of.

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*For additional information please see responses from Djirra below. We also recommend reaching out to ANROWS who may hold data for further insights into these questions.*

### Responses from Djirra:

#### 1. What is the connection between family violence reports and removal of children?

Fear of having her children removed is a key factor in whether Aboriginal woman reports violence or not.<sup>1</sup> Family violence was a factor in 88% of Aboriginal children removed from their mums in Victoria<sup>2</sup> and Victorian Aboriginal children are 22 times more likely to be in out-of-home care (OOHC) than non-Aboriginal children.<sup>3</sup> This is getting worse, not better.

The harm of child removal from Aboriginal mothers must always be considered in the context of the ongoing harms of colonisation. Aboriginal women have described child removal as 'the most significant injury to their health and social and emotional wellbeing'.<sup>4</sup>

Due to concerns around confidentiality, mandated reporting, trust and safety Aboriginal mums experiencing family violence are reluctant to disclose violence to services and risk child removal.<sup>5</sup> On the ground, the system consistently fails and reinforces mistrust for Aboriginal women, 'punishing' women and children for the lack of culturally safe service, housing and family violence support and response. This includes the overlap between the 'system infrastructure response' of child protection and family violence.<sup>6</sup>

A specialist, holistic ACCO like Djirra gives Aboriginal women the space and time to undertake her healing journey on her own terms and is why the existence of specialist, holistic, Aboriginal led family violence services is so important.<sup>7</sup> Only

<sup>1</sup> *Improving family violence legal and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*, Langton M et al, ANROWS 2020

<sup>2</sup> *Always was, always will be Koorie Kids*, Commissioner for Children and Young People 2016

<sup>3</sup> *Child protection Australia 2022–23*, AIHW 2024

<sup>4</sup> *Women Transforming Justice: Final Evaluation Report*, Centre for Innovative Justice 2020

<sup>5</sup> *Improving family violence legal and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*, Langton M et al, ANROWS 2020

<sup>6</sup> *Submission into the Yoorrook Justice Commission*, Djirra 2023

<sup>7</sup> *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and recommendations*, State of Victoria 2016

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self-determined Aboriginal-led services can provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal women to disclose family violence, and seek support to keep herself and her children safe.

2. Is research being conducted in family violence/ in communities/ on perpetrators?

ANROWS is the best source of information about current research on perpetrators of violence.

Most perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal women in Victoria are non-Aboriginal men.<sup>8</sup> In Djirra’s own research of case files we found that 72% of our Individual Support Service clients experienced violence from non-Aboriginal men and 65% of our Legal Services clients experienced violence from non-Aboriginal men.

We therefore urge the Committee to challenge the perception that we should be looking at family violence as a ‘Aboriginal community problem’ and suggest that viewing family violence in this context can poorly impact on Aboriginal women’s safety.

For example, an examination of violence against Aboriginal women in Victorian border towns showed that a significant proportion of the family violence funding for Aboriginal communities was allocated to programs that focussed on the rehabilitation of Aboriginal men leading to inadequate funding for essential safety services for Aboriginal women victim survivors.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Changing the Picture, Our Watch 2018*

<sup>9</sup> *Improving family violence legal and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*, Langton M et al, ANROWS 2020

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