

MEDIA RELEASE

*From Djirra,
For immediate release 15 April 2020*



Djirra welcomes Victorian Government's support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children escaping Family Violence during coronavirus


Djirra CEO Antoinette Braybrook has welcomed the Victorian Government's investment of \$40.2 million in crisis accommodation and specialist services for people suffering or at risk of family violence. Enforced social isolation due to COVID-19 increases exposure to violence. Aboriginal women and children's lives are at risk now more than ever.

Importantly, the package also includes targeted funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to meet additional demand for family violence case management and crisis support. "Djirra specialises in family violence prioritising the safety of Aboriginal women and children and must receive additional funding to support access to services, emergency relief and flexible support packages," commented Ms Braybrook.

Djirra is adamant that every woman and child must know that there are safety options during this time of isolation. Resourcing frontline services to support women and children at risk at this time is vital so the health crisis we are living does not turn into a much bigger disaster. Ms Braybrook stressed that the pandemic must not hide the fact that violence against Aboriginal women and their children was already at epidemic levels before COVID-19 even appeared and it is getting worse.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, Djirra has adapted its service response in a number of ways. Djirra offices in Melbourne and the regions have had to close their doors but Djirra is doing everything possible to stay visible to the women and children who need their services most.

Djirra is ensuring their service continuity and is contactable on free call number 1800 105 303 to provide legal and non-legal support. More, to keep the contact going, Djirra's Community Engagement team are reaching out to women who have attended Sisters Day Out and Dilly Bag programs. "We are continually reviewing the



way we provide services and support to adapt to this volatile environment – one which puts Aboriginal women and their children at greater risk of violence,” explained Ms Braybrook. “Djirra is here for Aboriginal women and children and especially those in our communities in Victoria who experience family violence.”

Antoinette Braybrook also said that Djirra is presented with a different issue every day and looking at innovative ways to ensure that communities can continue to access Djirra’s services and support.

Since this crisis began, Djirra has called on Governments for

- an urgent allocation of emergency relief funding to support women and children to access accommodation and essential items;
- an expansion of dedicated care packages for Aboriginal women and children to ensure their safety, health and well-being; and for
- additional funding for Djirra’s service continuity plan to ensure that Aboriginal women and children’s safety, health and well-being is prioritised.

“We want our message to be heard and we want Djirra to be visible; our doors may be closed, but we are still delivering our services. If we don’t have what our women need right now, *we will change what we do!* We need governments to invest now and commit to keep supporting our services,” concluded Antoinette Braybrook.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who feel unsafe are encouraged to contact Djirra on 1800 105 303 or visit www.djirra.org.au to find out more.

Other attributable quotes to Djirra CEO Antoinette Braybrook:

- “Djirra has not seen an increase in calls for family violence legal support, but we have seen an increase in requests for counselling. We expect that calls to Djirra will increase dramatically in coming weeks with more referrals from police, other services and family and friends.”
- “It’s the silence that scares Djirra’s frontline workers the most. We have clients we cannot get in contact with. They aren’t answering phone calls or texts. They can’t reach out for help because they are stuck inside the home with their abuser 24/7. We are terrified for them.”

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Media contacts:

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About Djirra

Established in 2002, Djirra is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation based in Abbotsford (VIC) with state-wide reach through its 7 regional offices. Djirra is dedicated to assisting Aboriginal people who are experiencing family violence or have in the past – predominantly women and children.

We provide culturally safe and holistic legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal women and Aboriginal victims/survivors of family violence, including sexual assault: frontline legal assistance, wrap-around support through our Koori Women's Place, outreach and specialist support programs to women in prison, and a range of early intervention prevention programs. Protecting and promoting Aboriginal women's wellbeing and safety is our core business.

About Antoinette Braybrook

Antoinette Braybrook is an Aboriginal woman who was born in Victoria on Wurundjeri country. Antoinette's grandfather and mother's line is through the Kuku Yalanji, North Queensland.

Antoinette has been the CEO of Djirra since the service was established in 2002. In addition to Antoinette's leadership in Victoria, she has held the elected position of Chairperson of the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (National FVPLS Forum), the peak body for 13 FVPLSs throughout Australia, since 2012.

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