



Sharing stories, finding solutions

Yoorrook Inquiry: Housing, Health and Education

Djirra Submission

February 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Djirra acknowledges and respects the Traditional Custodians on whose lands we are fortunate to live and work on, and we pay our respects to all Elders past and present.

We pay our respects to all Aboriginal Elders and Matriarchs who have remained strong in Culture and the fight for justice. Djirra also acknowledges the many Aboriginal women we work with who share their stories and experiences to enable Djirra to contribute to important submissions such as this.

Across Australia, we live on unceded land. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

ABOUT DJIRRA

Djirra is a specialist Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (**ACCO**) with 21 years' experience accompanying Aboriginal women, and their children, on their individual journeys. We find solutions through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ('Aboriginal') women sharing their stories, journeys, and experiences. Djirra celebrates women's strength and resilience. We are committed to a future without family violence.

We deliver holistic, culturally safe, specialist family violence support, legal services and case management, alongside cultural and wellbeing workshops and programs. Our services have state-wide reach, touching every part of Victoria to meet the needs of Aboriginal women. Self-determination is the foundation of everything we do. Djirra amplifies the voices of Aboriginal women. We advocate for system-wide change to improve access to justice, eliminate systemic violence, and strengthen women's resilience.

We are an active member of the National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (**NFVPLS**) Forum, the peak body for Aboriginal people who are experiencing or at risk of family violence.

Djirra strongly advocates for systemic change. The solutions to addressing the disadvantage and inequality Aboriginal people experience sit with specialist ACCOs.

Djirra remains committed in our calls for increased and sustained investment into specialist ACCOs, such as Djirra. In order to end violence against our women and children, their safety must be of paramount concern and prioritised. Djirra's culturally safe, holistic approach through our frontline services and programs are designed and tailored to meet the unique and diverse needs of those who need us most. Djirra acknowledges the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Djirra has the solutions. Djirra is self-determination in action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Victorian Government must act with urgency to embed Aboriginal¹ self-determination in housing, health and education policy making and program development and combat the upsurge of racism towards Aboriginal people, especially since the Voice Referendum.

Recommendation 2

The Victorian Government must fund and commit to the implementation of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) led self-determined process of design, development and implementation of culturally safe, holistic and integrated housing, health and education systems and services.

Recommendation 3

The Victorian Government and ACCO partners should apply a systems approach to transforming housing, health and education in ways that contribute to self-determined outcomes of resilience, connection to Culture, identity and Country and healing of Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence. This includes:

- More integration, for instance, between health, mental health, housing, drug and alcohol and parenting supports.
- Culturally safe prevention and early intervention services.

Recommendation 4

The Victorian Government must invest in specialist ACCOs collecting and evaluating our own data to amplify the lived experience of Aboriginal women experiencing family violence who engage with housing, health and education systems and services consistent with Indigenous data sovereignty best practices.

HOUSING

Recommendation 5

The Victorian Government must work with ACCOs to implement the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Report on the Child Protection and Criminal Justice System; Unfinished Business Koori Women and the Justice System; Cultural Review of the Adult Corrections System; Inquiry into the Victorian Criminal Justice System, Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria; and Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis.

Recommendation 6

The Closing the Gap Partnership should establish an additional target to end homelessness of Aboriginal people affected by family violence for Closing the Gap Outcome 9.

¹ Throughout this submission, where we use the term 'Aboriginal' we are referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people that live in Victoria.

Recommendation 7

The Victorian Government and partners must take urgent steps to increase the availability of culturally appropriate, safe and affordable housing relevant to the diverse needs of Aboriginal women wherever they live in Victoria. This includes:

- specialist family violence crisis accommodation
- sufficient refuges for Aboriginal women and children escaping violence and expanded housing options for perpetrators of violence so that women and children can remain in their own homes if it is safe for them to do so
- guarantee of transitional housing options for Aboriginal women leaving police custody and prison
- Housing First models that are developed by and for community which offer culturally safe and suitable housing linked to support programs, for Aboriginal women escaping family violence.

Recommendation 8

Law and justice institutions and bodies in Victoria must monitor, report and ensure that no Aboriginal woman is refused bail due to homelessness or unsuitable housing.

HEALTH

Recommendation 9

Victoria's health systems must acknowledge and prioritise overcoming the lifelong impacts of family violence on the physical, emotional and psychological health of Aboriginal women and children. This includes funding ACCOs and health partners to design and deliver specific, culturally safe initiatives that:

- assist the disproportionate number of Aboriginal women with Acquired Brain Injury because of violence
- keep Aboriginal mothers out of prison and for those Aboriginal mothers who are incarcerated ensure that they keep their babies and young children with them while in prison
- ensure Aboriginal women in prison can choose to continue gaining assistance from their existing health professionals, including allied health
- ensure culturally safe support for all Aboriginal women with a disability to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme, with dedicated programs to assist women in prison

Recommendation 10

The Minister for Corrections should regularly report to the Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) and the Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF) on the number of Aboriginal mothers in prison who have children (with and without them). This data should include the number of applications, the outcome and an explanation where the application was denied.

Recommendation 11

The Victorian Government must expand investment in Djirra to enable equitable access for Aboriginal women affected by family violence to culturally safe, holistic family violence prevention and legal services no matter where they live in Victoria. This includes:

- funding Victoria's first ever Aboriginal Women's Centre so that Aboriginal women affected by family violence have access to a comprehensive suite of culturally safe, specialist and preventative assistance in one place.

EDUCATION

Recommendation 12

The Department of Education and teacher training institutions must implement recommendations 13 and 14 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People report, *Let us Learn* (November 2023) about:

- incorporating trauma informed teaching practices into all teacher training, initial teacher education programs and early childhood educator training
- government schools adopting a 'whole school' approach to trauma and embedding trauma-informed practices throughout their school environments.

Recommendation 13

Guided by ACCOs that amplify the voices of Aboriginal women and girls, the Department of Education must update with urgency Respectful Relationships and other relevant training with content about Aboriginal women's experience of violence.

Recommendation 14

The Department of Education should work with Djirra and schools to ensure all Aboriginal girls and young women aged to 18 years can access Djirra's Young Luv program.

Recommendation 15

The Department of Education and schools must implement recommendation 23 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People report, *Let us Learn*, (November 2023) about:

- Schools taking action on racism
- Government schools reporting on measures to improve cultural safety and address racism on at least an annual basis

Recommendation 16

Corrections Victoria should prioritise access to vocational support and further education for all Aboriginal women in prison, including as part of post-release planning and support.

INTRODUCTION

The Yoorrook Justice Commission (**Yoorrook**) presents a unique opportunity for Victoria's Aboriginal community to speak truth to the continuing legacy and harm imposed by more than 200 years of colonisation. Djirra was pleased to contribute to Yoorrook's inquiries through submissions and testimony on the child protection and criminal justice systems, and land injustice.

Djirra welcomes contributing to Yoorrook's Inquiry into housing, health and education. Our submission is informed by our frontline work supporting Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence. Our primary focus is housing and homelessness as all Djirra's clients are directly impacted by housing insecurity. Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children.

Family violence has immediate impacts on housing. Aboriginal women's fear of homelessness for themselves and their children, including the risk of child removal, often keeps them in violent relationships and for longer. Lack of safe, secure housing also leads to the criminalisation and incarceration of Aboriginal women affected by family violence through denial of bail and parole. As Djirra CEO Antoinette Braybrook said in her opening statement to the Yoorrook hearings into the criminal justice and child protection systems, 'New prisons are being built and existing prisons expanded to be used as detox and mental health facilities and to address housing shortages and dare I say it to hide the so-called Aboriginal problem'. What we need is investment in adequate, culturally safe housing to address disadvantage, not more investment in prisons. Health and education are also deeply affected by family violence. Failures within health and education systems to support our women and children experiencing family violence in culturally safe ways that build on strengths and connection to identity and Culture has lifelong impacts.

Housing insecurity and homelessness are deeply rooted in violent colonisation and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. Colonial violence, racism, trauma and oppression combine to make many of our women homeless or at risk of homelessness. Most of the women Djirra supports experience violence from non-Indigenous partners. Family Violence is not an Aboriginal problem, it's a gendered problem that stems from more than 200 years of colonisation and oppression. This continues through widespread racism and systemic discrimination. For instance, Aboriginal women in Victoria experience racism at every point of housing, health and education systems. These systems often do not support them appropriately and regularly let them down.

Current government policies and programs are not working to support Aboriginal women: homelessness is increasing, and family violence is increasing. Aboriginal women experience violence at 45 times the rate of non-Aboriginal women;¹ In Victoria, Aboriginal children are 17 times more likely to be removed from their mums than non-Aboriginal children² and are 22 times more likely to be in out of home care than non-Aboriginal children.³ Notwithstanding the Victorian Government report of implementation of all 2016 Royal Commission on Family Violence recommendations⁴ and plans for a third and final three-year Family Violence Rolling Action plan, family violence reports are increasing (75,056 in 2017 to 92,296 in 2022).⁵ Demand for services at Djirra is surging, with a 33% increase in demand for services for women and a 38% increase for children in 2023 compared with the previous 12 months.⁶

However, there are solutions. There are examples of important, self-determined housing, health and education approaches that contribute to positive outcomes and safety for Aboriginal women and children. Where ACCOs, like Djirra, accompany Aboriginal women on their journey to build resilience and secure good outcomes from housing, health and education systems and services, positive transformational change and connection to identity, Culture and Country happens.

SELF-DETERMINATION

Colonisation continues to impact every aspect of Aboriginal women's lives. Settler housing, health and education systems, programs and policies cannot understand or meet the needs of our women children and communities: these come from a background and legislative framework that was designed to and continues to marginalise First Nations people. Current models fail Aboriginal women at every point of their lives. We must have self-determined choice to access specialist services that are culturally safe, holistic, and Aboriginal led.

Aboriginal concepts of what it means to be home and safe, to be healthy, to heal are sources of strength, resilience and connection to Culture and identity for Aboriginal women. However, colonial systems that have evolved since invasion do not recognise these and too often contribute to intergenerational trauma, racism and oppression. As raised in our previous submission to Yoorrook on Land Injustice, a fundamental aspect of an Aboriginal woman's individual self-determination is the right to choose appropriate, safe services and support in their local area. Women may not always feel safe to disclose family violence to their local ACCO, particularly if workers are the family or friend of the person using violence. Mainstream services may not be culturally safe or, like The Orange Door, may be multiservice hubs that include child protection and other services that our women often do not trust because of the mandatory reporting of child protection concerns where family violence is disclosed.

A system transformation of housing and homelessness, health, and education services for Aboriginal people is urgently required in Victoria that is grounded in the lived experience of Aboriginal communities and particularly Aboriginal women and children that experience family violence. Led by ACCOs, we need a self-determined process of design, development and implementation of culturally safe and holistic housing, health and education. This includes a focus on integrated approaches, prevention and early intervention and investment in data sovereignty to enable us to collect, analyse and evaluate our own data. We must also see investment in Djirra to make available Victoria's first ever Aboriginal Women's Centre and ensure equal access to holistic, culturally safe prevention and legal services for Aboriginal women affected by family violence wherever they live in Victoria.

It also means substantially more investment in the Aboriginal workforce within ACCOs, which bears a greater risk load due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and the need to assist our community members in navigating racist systems and racist individual assumptions about Aboriginal people and cultures.

This has become increasingly urgent. For instance, more of our women have disclosed to Djirra their experience of racism, discrimination, and violence since the No result in the Voice Referendum. This includes their children experiencing greater racism and discrimination at school. Our frontline services have reported instances of Aboriginal children attending school with safety plans because of the Referendum outcome.

All Djirra regional offices are in electorates which voted No. This includes Mallee, which recorded an 80% No vote and is home to Mildura, where reports of violence against Aboriginal women are greatest in Victoria.⁷ For our staff and women, especially in regional Victoria, they need more support and assistance. Yet, the largest gaps in housing, health and education provision are in regional Victoria where most Aboriginal people and communities live.

Aboriginal-led housing, health and education system change requires governments investing in ACCO data and knowledge management systems consistent with Indigenous Data Sovereignty. This is core to building the evidence base about what works and learning and amplifying the voices and lessons from the lived experience of Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence. Our women and children's voices and experiences must drive the ongoing improvement to systems to secure better and sustained outcomes for them.

Recommendation 1

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- culturally safe prevention and early intervention services.

Recommendation 4

The Victorian Government must invest in specialist ACCOs collecting and evaluating our own data to amplify the lived experience of Aboriginal women experiencing family violence who engage with housing, health and education systems and services consistent with Indigenous data sovereignty best practices.

HOUSING

THE FOUNDATIONAL PLANK OF IMPROVING OUTCOMES

Better access to safe, affordable housing is the single biggest thing we can do to make an immediate difference to the lives of Aboriginal women and children in Victoria. Culturally and physically safe and secure housing means:

- Increased safety for Aboriginal women escaping family violence
- Reduced incarceration of Aboriginal women
- Risks of child removal are significantly reduced
- Better health and education outcomes
- Better employment outcomes

Too often, our women face the choice of leaving a violent partner to keep themselves and their children safe and potentially be homeless or stay and risk further harm and have their children removed by child protection workers for exposing them to violence. As the risk of losing their child to out-of-home care is too high without housing, many remain in the violent relationship and for longer than they otherwise would have. Family violence is the largest driver of homelessness for Aboriginal women and children⁸ and the "main reason individuals accessing homelessness services seek assistance in Victoria."⁹

Aboriginal women trying to keep themselves and their children safe have limited housing options with the usual pathways of staying with kin or friends, refuge or safe house, and/or remaining in an unsafe home. None of these are satisfactory and women and children often move between these options as arrangements fall through or become unsafe.¹⁰

A lack of secure housing is a barrier for:

- Keeping Aboriginal children with their mums, including reunification after child removal
- Bail and parole
- Education
- Consistent health care
- Being able to access NDIS support
- Exercising fundamental citizen rights such as voting

Lesley's case

Djirra client Lesley was given a house that was infested with black mould. She tried to get it fixed through the department without success. Child Protection became involved and declared the state of the house was a risk, so rather than have her child removed, Lesley moved in with family members.

This resulted in more stress and arguments and the family were reported to Child Protection. Djirra advocated for Lesley saying she had three choices: return to the house with black mould; stay in a potentially violent house or be homeless. DFFH agreed that she return to the house and would fix the mould. The family had suffered repeated disruptions to school, medical appointments etc due to the moves when DFFH could have fixed it in the first place.

Adequate housing is good moral and economic sense

Prevention and early intervention positively change life trajectories. Governments recognise that prevention and early intervention minimises the risk of problem escalation and Aboriginal people relying on high-cost statutory services. For example, this is evident in widespread immunisation and vaccination programs to investing in early childhood education and as reflected in the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement aims of diversion at all points of the criminal justice system.

Decades of insufficient and inaccessible social housing has led to poor outcomes and places more pressure on Victoria's tertiary systems, most particularly in emergency and specialist health care and the child protection, youth justice and adult criminal justice systems. Across these systems, Aboriginal people continue to be significantly over-represented and where the needs of Aboriginal women are especially poorly addressed.

We know that the cost of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability is at least \$46.0 billion in 2021-22 and that over the lifetime horizon of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, the (present value) cost of known violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation is \$474.1 billion and the cost of additional gaps in outcomes is \$317.6 billion.¹¹ Similar economic research is necessary to support more investment in safe, appropriate housing for Aboriginal women and children.

We know from our work with Aboriginal women and children that experience family violence that when they have appropriate, safe and secure housing, their capacity for healing and building resilience, connection and wellbeing is significantly improved. For example, they are much more likely to engage with necessary supports. For instance, related to alcohol and other drugs (AOD), mental health, counselling and legal needs. Her children are significantly more likely to stay with their mum, grow strong in their cultural identity, stay in school, and avoid contact with the criminal justice system.

For too many Aboriginal women, this does not happen. If an Aboriginal woman and her children lack safe, stable housing, risks multiply and compound quickly. Currently, an Aboriginal woman experiencing family violence in Victoria will almost always stay in a range of temporary accommodations for years, while waiting for social housing.

Temporary accommodation is unsafe and increases the chances of child removal. Given the current punitive permanency care laws, once an Aboriginal child is removed from their mother, they are unlikely to return. The lifelong impacts of child removal are devastating. Once in out of home care, children are significantly more likely to interact with the youth Justice and later, adult criminal justice systems. There is a churn of police contact, remand, custodial sentences and recidivism. For mothers, there is a lifetime of grief and loss. For mothers and children, there are lost opportunities for security, education, employment and connection to Culture.

In Victoria in 2021-22, expenditure on all child protection services for per child aged 0 to 17 years in the population was \$1,329.¹² In May 2023 there were 2600 Aboriginal children in out of home care of which 100 live in residential care in Victoria and 31 are called 'cross-over' children who are part of child protection and youth justice systems.¹³

There have been many significant studies that document and make recommendations to transform social service systems. We need the expansion of that evidence base to drive housing policy and programs for Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence. For example, to make transparent the impact of insufficient and culturally unsafe housing options on the lifetime and intergenerational costs of family violence: the child removals, the criminalisation of mothers,¹⁴ lost educational and employment chances. Condemning thousands of women and children to lifetime disadvantage is not sustainable, and the first step is secure, culturally safe housing.

Recommendation 5

The Victorian Government must work with ACCOs to implement the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Report on the Child Protection and Criminal Justice System; Unfinished Business Koori Women and the Justice System; Cultural Review of the Adult Corrections System; Inquiry into the Victorian Criminal Justice System, Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria; and Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis.

Current government policies

Current government policies are not working. The Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022 reports that homelessness for Aboriginal people increased by 38% between 2015-16 and 2021-22.¹⁵

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap provides the policy context, goals and targets to improve housing for Aboriginal people. These are not on track to be met. Homelessness and insecure housing for Aboriginal people affected by family violence are not captured by current Closing the Gap measures, which assume Aboriginal people are housed. Outcome 9 targets focus on overcrowding and access to essential services, not the lack of housing or the increasing demand.

Recommendation 6

The Closing the Gap Partnership should establish an additional target to end homelessness of Aboriginal people affected by family violence for Closing the Gap Outcome 9.

Across Victoria there are long waiting lists for public housing, with the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum estimating that an additional 27,000 houses are needed for Aboriginal people in Victoria by 2036.¹⁶ For example, some Djirra clients have been waiting for public housing for 10 years. As a result, many of our women feel compelled to accept unsuitable or unsafe housing. Otherwise they risk being moved to the bottom of the waiting list or to move away from their support networks, communities and Country.

Kelsey's case

Djirra's client Kelsey has been experiencing family violence for decades. Kelsey lives in public housing and for years has been waiting for approval so that she can move to a new place where she will be safe. The house Kelsey is currently living in is where the violence occurred, and the perpetrator knows that she still lives there. Kelsey relies on a duress alarm that she can press to call police to her home when the perpetrator arrives and is threatening. Djirra provided Kelsey with the duress alarm and culturally safe counselling through our phone-counselling service.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis (2023) found that "the number of social housing households remained stagnant from 2013–2022 at just under 80,000 ... Over this time, social housing declined compared to the previous year on five separate occasions."

An earlier inquiry into homelessness in Victoria found that there was a significant lack of crisis and transitional accommodation across the state:¹⁷ "between 2015–2019 public housing only increased by a total of 28 properties, well below the project requirements of 4500 new properties per year to keep up with the national average."¹⁸

The private rental market is often racist and difficult to access,¹⁹ and rents are continuing to increase across the state.²⁰

Even with the Victorian Government's Big Build, Aboriginal women have few positive housing options. The quarantining of 10% of the Victorian Government's Big Build for Aboriginal housing is insufficient and is outstripped by demand, with 4330 Aboriginal women experiencing family violence in Victoria in 2023.²¹

The lack of public housing stock in Victoria creates blockages across the housing system. For example, in transitional housing and refuges. In Djirra's experience, we have cases of women and children remaining in transitional accommodation for seven or eight years while waiting for public housing.

Regional areas have fewer safe and suitable accommodation options for Aboriginal women fleeing family violence. Djirra clients in regional Victoria are offered tents or caravans as the only available accommodation, while in some areas they are placed in motel accommodation. Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee reports to the Aboriginal Justice Forum regularly note that housing is an ongoing crisis.

Impacts of current policies

The housing crisis severely impacts on the capacity of the wider service system to support women experiencing family violence. Research by Safe and Equal found:

- Family violence accommodation services recorded longer case management support periods than other family violence services, accounting for 75% of the average case management support periods of four months or longer.
- This lengthened support period is overwhelmingly linked to a lack of long-term, affordable housing options across the state, and the inability to exit clients from family violence accommodation into suitable, longer-term accommodation options. This creates a blockage for victim survivors entering the system who need family violence accommodation, many of whom are then placed in unsafe motels.
- The lack of affordable, long-term housing increases demand on services, leads to poor outcomes for victim survivors, and is costly for the service system and those who use it.
- 50% of services reported the main reason for referring clients to the homelessness sector is due to a lack of specialist family violence accommodation options.
- Services report being unable to secure safe and affordable housing without support from the homelessness sector."²²

As noted, unsuitable or unsafe housing are key risk criteria for child protection workers assessing whether children stay with their mums. Current permanency settings in the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* mean that inappropriate housing can result in an Aboriginal mum losing her child with limited possibility of them returning. Waiting lists to access services are mostly very long, meaning that a mum may not access assistance within the timeframe for family reunification. For example, one DFFH worker told Djirra that "Family Violence priority housing transfers have a 6 year wait list."

Even interim options like DFFH-provided motel accommodation can be a catch 22 for our women. Child protection workers can declare a motel unsuitable and remove the children, but if mum takes the children back home where there are risks of potential family violence, child protection workers will remove the children from an unsafe environment.

To stay or to leave?

Mostly, it is the woman and her children who must flee their home due to violence with all the disruptive consequences to schooling, access to trusted services, employment and so on. Proper safety planning can assess whether staying in the home is the safer option for an Aboriginal woman and her children. Djirra provides warm client referrals to Tenants Victoria to help get the Person Using Violence (PUV) 's name off the mortgage, lease and utility documents to avoid continuation of financial coercive control and to support independence. It can be better for the PUV to be removed from the home and supported to participate in behaviour change programs. For instance, those provided by Dardi Munwurro and No to Violence (for non-Indigenous PUVs). Criminal matters should be addressed separately.

Djirra administers support to women as part of the Personal Safety Initiative, providing professional home security audits to women at high risk of ongoing family violence engaged in ongoing case management with Djirra. At times, this program requires extensive advocacy from Djirra on behalf of our clients to get the support our women need to help keep them safe in their home. There is an immediate need for a First Nations Personal Safety Initiative coordinator to support the administering of this fund by Government.

HOUSING FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Djirra supports greater availability of flexible, culturally safe supported housing options for Aboriginal women leaving police custody and prison. For example, Baggarrook Women's Transitional Housing program which provides a residential model of culturally safe intensive support to Aboriginal women transitioning from prison.

Homelessness and insecure housing are a significant contributor to our women being refused bail and parole. Housing instability and a lack of culturally appropriate supports are key reasons for Aboriginal women remaining on remand. For example, women are unable to accept or keep social housing while in prison. For Aboriginal women with a disability, this is compounded by a lack of accessible housing options for women who require modifications.

Aboriginal women exiting prison into homelessness or unstable housing are more likely to experience further legal and non-legal issues. They have an increased risk of recidivism. For example, Djirra's legal team have reported instances where clients were forced to breach bail because their bail address was unsafe to return to due to family violence.

For Aboriginal women subject to both Community Corrections and Child Protection Orders, there is often inadequate communication and coordination between the services. For instance, women can be forced to nominate bail addresses far away from their children or in a geographic area that is unsafe due to family violence. Experiences of homelessness or unstable housing also make it more difficult to comply with a Community Corrections Order.

Rhianna's case

Rhianna intentionally engaged in low level offending to be brought back to Dame Phyllis Frost Centre as she could 'no longer bear to be homeless.' When she was eligible for parole, it was not granted as she did not have "stand-alone" housing. This led to her serving further time in prison, time that should have been spent transitioning back into the community. She eventually got offered a place at Baggarrook and was granted parole.

The need for system change

Current housing models do not reflect Aboriginal cultural norms of kinships' obligation, mobility and shared resources.²³ What is interpreted as overcrowding to colonial mindsets is good cultural practice for many Aboriginal families with wide community and kinship networks and obligations.²⁴ For example, an Aboriginal woman fleeing a violent relationship may be welcomed by kin which results in two families sharing a house that is designed by non-Aboriginal standards for one. Not only is this considered overcrowding and a failure to meet the Closing the Gap target, in Djirra's experience this leads to child protection workers reporting this as unsafe. This sometimes results in children being removed from their mums. New models of housing must reflect Aboriginal definitions of homelessness that go beyond physical structures to include separation from Country, identity and community.

We also need a Housing First model for Aboriginal women escaping family violence in Victoria, where appropriate accommodation is provided long-term and then tailored support services made available. For example, a culturally informed and developed community model based on Housing First principles is successfully providing housing and family violence, AOD and other programs for Noongar people in Western Australia.²⁵

Recommendation 7

The Victorian Government and partners must take urgent steps to increase the availability of culturally appropriate, safe and affordable housing relevant to the diverse needs of Aboriginal women wherever they live in Victoria. This includes:

- specialist family violence crisis accommodation
- sufficient refuges for Aboriginal women and children escaping violence and expanded housing options for perpetrators of violence so that women and children can remain in their own homes if it is safe for them to do so
- guarantee of transitional housing options for Aboriginal women leaving police custody and prison
- Housing First models that are developed by and for community which offer culturally safe and suitable housing linked to support programs, for Aboriginal women escaping family violence.

Recommendation 8

Law and justice institutions and bodies in Victoria must monitor, report and ensure that no Aboriginal woman is refused bail due to homelessness or unsuitable housing.

HEALTH

Systemic racism and discrimination in the health system affects Aboriginal women in Victoria. Aboriginal women are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes, lower life expectancy and greater likelihood of incorrect diagnosis and not being treated for their health conditions compared with other women in Victoria.²⁶

Health service provision for Aboriginal women must be reconceptualised, based on Aboriginal concepts of health and wellbeing. Aboriginal approaches to healing have been acknowledged for more than 20 years through inquiries and reports. This includes Bringing them Home, *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* Little Children Are Sacred, Wiyi Yani U Thangani and the report of the Royal Commission into Institutionalised Sexual Abuse.

Research by The Healing Foundation and the Lowitja Institute has found that "Culture is the gateway to healing. For Aboriginal peoples, Culture is made up of four elements – lore, Country, family, and spirit. Culture gives purpose, identity and connection, acting as a compass, and guiding people through challenges. Stronger connections to Culture and Country build stronger individual and collective identities, a sense of self-esteem, resilience and improved outcomes."²⁷

We know that Aboriginal-led healthcare delivers better outcomes for Aboriginal people.²⁸ It is crucial that ACCOs are funded to lead the work to redesign and implement reform to health systems so that these are culturally safe, appropriate and contribute to positive health and wellbeing outcomes for all Aboriginal women.

For example, in Djirra's work, we are acutely aware of how the health of Aboriginal women we work with are affected by the lack of cultural safety and trust in mainstream health care services. Our experience reveals health problems for Aboriginal women affected by family violence, child removal and mental ill health. We also have deep understanding of how the health needs of Aboriginal women are poorly met within Victoria's criminal justice system.

Djirra early intervention and prevention programs assist Aboriginal women address health impacts arising from family violence. This includes the disproportionate impact of family violence on Aboriginal women trusting health care and wider support services to meet their needs, including from injuries, mental ill health and acquired disabilities.

Through our frontline services working alongside Aboriginal women, we know that self-determined, culturally safe services that build trust with Aboriginal women over time and build their resilience, connection to Culture, identity and Country are essential. Djirra's women connect with each other and share and learn from each other. They share the solutions that work for them, while our workers offer extra support with information and advocacy for access to specific services. For example, Djirra's Community Engagement team operates the following programs identified by the Royal Commission into Family Violence as examples of best practice:

- **Sisters Day Out/ Sisters Day In** is Djirra's long standing wellbeing workshop, where Aboriginal women support each other, enjoy wellness sessions, access information and

engage with support services. The workshop focuses on community awareness raising around family violence prevention and accessing services in a culturally safe space. Sisters Day Out workshops are held regularly in community, and Djirra has also delivered "Sisters Day In"; a specialised version of Sisters Day Out for women in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

- **Dilly Bag** - is a small residential workshop that draws on Aboriginal cultural principles and the strength of our Culture to live a cultural safe and meaningful lifestyle. Over four days, program activities focus on individual strengths and the richness of, and traditional values found within, Aboriginal society and Culture. The strengths and roles of Aboriginal women are reaffirmed and validated.

Appendix One sets out details of Djirra's key services.

FAMILY VIOLENCE HEALTH IMPACTS

Family violence can have lifelong impacts on Aboriginal women and children's health. This includes psychological and trauma related mental health issues, physical injuries and too often, death. Of the 63 women murdered in Australia in 2023, at least 7 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women, a significant over representation²⁹. Aboriginal women are 33 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence than other women³⁰ and are 11 times more likely die as a result of violent assault than other women.³¹ It's clear from the available, but incomplete, data that Aboriginal women experience disproportionate violence, that the violence is often more severe, and that Aboriginal women and children are murdered and disappear at higher rates than non-Aboriginal women.

Aboriginal women experiencing family violence are often reluctant to seek medical advice and support. Sometimes this is because there are no accessible or affordable specialist services where they live, especially in regional Victoria. For many women that Djirra works alongside, they worry about sharing their personal information with someone they know well, while others report a lack of trust in mainstream health services and sometimes ACCOs where these have responsibilities for child protection. For example, our women report to us their worries about the risk of their children being removed due to mandatory reporting requirements. Again, this is even more so in regional Victoria where options are even narrower or non-existent.³²

DISABILITY AND ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

One aspect of intersectionality that Djirra sees every day is the connection between family violence and disability, particularly Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). Aboriginal women experience high rates of family violence and associated ABIs and are 69 times more likely to be hospitalised with head injury from assault than non-Indigenous women.³³ At a minimum, there should be much more standard screening of ABI's for Aboriginal women where she presents to health care services with family violence symptoms, including non-fatal strangulation.

At the same time, in Djirra's experience it is often difficult and expensive for Aboriginal women to navigate the system and obtain the diagnosis and assessments required to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS could facilitate personalised support to mitigate the impacts of an ABI. A key reason that also impedes many Aboriginal women's access to the NDIS is the requirement to have a fixed, stable address. This is also a particular problem affecting Aboriginal

women in custody.

Jennifer's case

Jennifer is an Aboriginal woman and mother currently serving a prison sentence. Jennifer has an acquired brain injury and sometimes has issues understanding information. Jennifer sought assistance from Djirra for issues she was having with Child Protection regarding access for the father of her children to them. Jennifer's children are currently in the care of Jennifer's sister.

An Aboriginal Family-Led Decision-Making meeting was organised, and Djirra supported Jennifer to participate. An agreement was ultimately made resulting in the children's father having access to the children in accordance with Jennifer's wishes.

Recognising that Jennifer may need extra help, the Paralegal Support Worker (PLSW) discussed the support available to Jennifer under the NDIS. Jennifer also asked for help with managing her anger and self-regulation. The PLSW submitted an access support request application on her behalf and contacted NDIS/Intereach to connect them with the prison to assist the women who were in need of support.

MENTAL HEALTH

Research confirms the widespread mental health burden on Aboriginal people. This includes higher rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and related conditions including alcohol and other drugs (AOD) issues and ABIs.

The Lowitja Institute reports that "Trauma is a pervasive and complex aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people, and, inevitably, a part of any conversation about mental health. It operates at an individual, collective and community level and has historical and contemporary manifestations."³⁴ This trauma is compounded by mental health professionals who do not understand intergenerational trauma and context and that the mental health system is inadequate to meet the needs of Aboriginal people.³⁵

More than 90% of Aboriginal women in prison in Victoria have a mental health diagnosis.³⁶ Aboriginal women in prison are more likely to have trauma. Mostly, this arises from family violence and sexual assault, mental health issues, and ABIs.³⁷ The Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System report (the Cultural Review) made specific recommendations to better support Aboriginal women's mental health while in custody.³⁸ The Victorian Government has yet to adequately respond to this report. Of the 86 recommendations, the Government have only announced plans to progress six. Focusing on such a small number of the nominated issues cannot make any substantive difference to the institutionalised racism that the Cultural Review found.

HEALTH CARE IN PRISON

Aboriginal women experience adverse health impacts from incarceration. In all but the extremely rare cases of significant and immediate risks to community safety, no Aboriginal mum should be incarcerated, and her babies and young children removed from her care.

Djirra's experience is also that it is rarely the case for Aboriginal women in custody to have access to the same level of health care they can access in the community. Rather, Aboriginal women in prison face significant problems in accessing health care. This has been highlighted in multiple inquiries, royal commissions and investigations. These include the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in

Custody, Victorian Ombudsman's report on the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) 2017, Coroner's Court findings on the death in custody of Veronica Nelson and the Cultural Review.

Noting the caveats above about ending the criminalisation and incarceration of Aboriginal women, Djirra broadly welcomes the transfer of responsibility for health care to VACCHO and Dhelkaya Health for Aboriginal women in the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower prison in response to the Coroner's Court findings on the death in custody of Veronica Nelson. This should improve the cultural safety of Aboriginal women accessing health care in prison. However, it is too early for Djirra to discern a marked change in health care for our women.

INCARCERATION-RELATED HEALTH IMPACTS ON ABORIGINAL MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

Most women in prison that Djirra assists are mothers. Separation of mothers and children, even for short periods of time, is devastating. The harm of child removal from Aboriginal mothers must 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]'.³⁹

The Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee Report (2022) noted the intergenerational impacts of the decades of the formal Stolen Generations policy that saw thousands of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families by the state.⁴⁰ It is estimated that more than 11,000 direct descendants of the Stolen Generations are over 18 years of age in Victoria.⁴¹ The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system estimated that 47% of the Victorian Aboriginal population have a relative who is part of the Stolen Generations.⁴² This is intergenerational individual, family and community trauma.

Despite a well-established program in Victorian prisons for mothers to keep their babies and young children with them,⁴³ Djirra's Legal team reports that over the last decade they have never succeeded in applications for a pregnant mother to keep her baby with her in prison. There are also delays in securing a decision from the Steering Committee that oversees this process. Djirra is also aware of cases where Aboriginal women were taken from prison to hospital to give birth and the baby was removed from them.

Melissa's Case

Melissa was taken to hospital from prison to give birth. The baby was with urgency taken from her and placed in out of home care, and she returned to prison without her newborn.

There must be culturally appropriate processes in place to ensure that Aboriginal mothers who are incarcerated are able to keep their babies while in prison. These processes should also be available to those with young children. The Aboriginal Justice Forum and the Aboriginal Children's Forum should regularly receive updates on the number of Aboriginal mothers who have their children in prison. This data should include the number of applications, the outcome and an explanation if the application was denied.

Recommendation 9

Victoria's health systems must acknowledge and prioritise overcoming the lifelong impacts of family violence on the physical, emotional and psychological health of Aboriginal women and

children. This includes funding ACCOs and health partners to design and deliver specific, culturally safe initiatives that:

- assist the disproportionate number of Aboriginal women with Acquired Brain Injury because of violence.
- keep Aboriginal mothers out of prison and for those Aboriginal mothers who are incarcerated that they keep their babies and young children with them while in prison.
- ensure Aboriginal women in prison can choose to continue gaining assistance from their existing health professionals, including allied health.
- ensure culturally safe support for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait women with a disability to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), with dedicated programs to assist women in prison.

Recommendation 10

The Minister for Corrections should regularly report to the Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) and the Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF) on the number of Aboriginal mothers who have their children in prison. This data should include the number of applications, the outcome and an explanation if the application was denied.

INVESTING IN DJIRRA, INVESTING IN WHAT WORKS FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S HEALTH, WELLBEING AND CONNECTION TO CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COUNTRY

The Victorian Aboriginal population is growing. At the same time, Aboriginal women affected by family violence continues to increase, the proportion of our children removed from their families in Victoria is one of the highest in Australia and near double the national average¹¹, and our women are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system. Our own experience is of surging need with a 33% increase in demand for services for women and a 38% increase for children in 2023 compared with the previous 12 months.

Our early intervention and prevention programs and more specialist provision such as AOD, intensive support and case management meet many of the diverse needs of Aboriginal women and children affected by family violence. Our evaluation work identifies that Aboriginal women feel safer and report improvements in their health, wellbeing and connection to Culture, identity and Country. However, we are unable to support all Aboriginal women and children across Victoria and we know we could do much better for our women and children if we could co-locate many more of the key services that our women and children need with us. For example, counselling, primary and mental health care, NDIS and homelessness services.

To address the gendered nature of colonisation, and the impact of family violence on all aspects of Aboriginal women's health and wellbeing, Djirra advocates for the establishment and ongoing funding of the first Aboriginal Women's Centre (AWC) in Victoria. Consistent with what Aboriginal women tell us, we want a single fully integrated centre that offers Aboriginal women access to the most comprehensive suite of culturally safe, Aboriginal women led services and support. This will help realise their aspirations for self-determined solutions. It is a safe place to gather, connect to Culture and community and access assistance that meets the spectrum of our women and their children's needs.

The AWC is a key strategic priority in the *Djirra Strategic Plan 2023-2028*. We are conducting and finalising a feasibility study in 2024, with plans to support Aboriginal women from across Victoria to access the AWC.

Throughout this submission, Djirra's experience is that Aboriginal women in regional areas have particularly poor choice in services. There are some areas where our women have no access to holistic, culturally safe services. These gaps have become more challenging in some regional areas as more ACCOs take responsibility to deliver child protection services on behalf of DFFH. Wherever our women live in Victoria, they deserve equal support to self-determine the services that meet their needs including in relation to family violence.

Djirra has completed a business plan to facilitate a regional service expansion strategy that improves access to holistic, culturally safe family violence prevention and legal services for Aboriginal women and their children within no more than a one-hour drive across Victoria.

Recommendation 11

The Victorian Government must expand investment in Djirra to enable equitable access for Aboriginal women affected by family violence to culturally safe, holistic family violence prevention and legal services no matter where they live in Victoria. This includes:

- funding Victoria's first ever Aboriginal Women's Centre so that Aboriginal women affected by family violence have access to the most comprehensive suite of culturally safe, specialist and preventative assistance in one place.

EDUCATION

All forms of family violence have negative impacts on children's developmental, psychological and education outcomes that continue across the life course.⁴⁴ As well as the accumulating trauma across life, family violence directly impacts children's capacity to engage and learn at school. For instance, from the child witnessing trauma or directly suffering from family violence, disruption from moving house (and schools) and poor school attendance.

Djirra has mixed experience of Victorian schools' willingness to engage and support Aboriginal women and children who experience family violence. We know that school staff are not always aware of women and children experiencing family violence. The reasons are varied. For example, sometimes this reflects mistrust on the part of Aboriginal mums from sharing this information with schools. Sometimes schools are not advised by relevant agencies, such as DFFH.

However, all schools should operate as trauma-informed, with school staff equipped with the know-how to identify and assist Aboriginal mums and children at risk of or are experiencing family violence. Even where some schools are aware of a child's experience of family violence, they are reluctant to assist. For example, not all schools proactively develop safety plans and support letters for court matters for our women and their children. In our experience, early childhood education centres and kindergartens are more actively engaged with Djirra on these important aspects of assisting Aboriginal children affected by family violence.

Some principals and teachers are proactive in seeking information on IVOs, parenting orders and children's living arrangements. Where there are Koori Education Support Officers available, there is greater support and understanding of the issues. However, Koori Education Support Officers are "thin on the ground" (Djirra case worker) and often overstretched so their capacity to engage is limited.

We know that more prevention and early intervention in schools is crucial to mitigating the impacts of family violence on children and to build resilience and wellbeing. For example, Djirra's Young Luv is a successful program aimed at young Aboriginal women, aged 13 to 18. Young Luv is a half day workshop that engages these young Aboriginal women in a culturally safe space where they can talk about, reflect on, and better understand important issues affecting their lives. The workshop aims to equip young women with information and skills to challenge unhealthy relationships, and to apply positive and safe behaviours. So far in the 2023-24 nearly 100 young Aboriginal young women have participated in Young Luv workshops in metropolitan Melbourne and regional areas. These types of programs need government and school investment to make these more widely available. Currently this program reaches less than 5% of young Aboriginal women in Victoria.

Recommendation 12

The Department of Education and teacher and early educator training institutions must implement recommendations 13 and 14 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People report, *Let us Learn*, (November 2023) about:

- incorporating trauma informed teaching practices into all teacher training, initial teacher education programs and early childhood educator training
- government schools adopting a 'whole school' approach to trauma and embedding trauma-informed practices throughout their school environments

Recommendation 13

Guided by ACCOs that amplify the voices of Aboriginal women and girls, the Department of Education must update with urgency Respectful Relationships and other relevant training with content about Aboriginal women's experience of violence.

Recommendation 14

The Department of Education should work with Djirra and schools to ensure all Aboriginal girls and young women aged 13 to 18 years can access the Young Luv program.

RACISM IN SCHOOLS

As set out at page 9, racism in schools has been an ongoing problem for Djirra's clients. Racism has also increased in the lead up to, and since, the Voice Referendum in October 2023. Racism against Aboriginal children and young people is regularly reported to the Aboriginal Justice Forum and the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum. As well as the mental health and wellbeing impacts on Aboriginal children and young people, racism is a known risk factor for school attendance, disengagement and youth offending.

Djirra supports the findings and recommendations of the Commission for Children and Young People's report *Let Us Learn*, most especially findings 16 and 17.⁴⁵ It is consistent with Djirra's experience to read that the Commission's consultations found that racism persists in the education system from early childhood settings onwards and that there is an evident lack of cultural safety. The Commission heard that for Aboriginal students, a culture of low expectations is compounded by racist attitudes and that for those Aboriginal students that have been removed from their mums and placed in out-of-home care, these experiences can be exacerbated because of their removal from family and community and Culture.

Recommendation 15

The Department of Education and schools must implement recommendation 23 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People report, *Let us Learn*, (November 2023) about:

- Schools taking action on racism
- Government schools must report on measures to improve cultural safety and address racism on at least an annual basis

TERTIARY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Aboriginal women escaping family violence face limited education and employment prospects unless they receive support. In Djirra's experience the most important support that Aboriginal women need to engage in education and employment is long term, safe and stable housing. As mentioned at page 16, a Housing First model should be implemented to address long-term accommodation needs so that Aboriginal women experiencing family violence can have their wider needs for building resilience, wellbeing and connection can take place.

For Aboriginal women in prison, there is limited capacity to access educational programs as most Aboriginal women are on remand (as noted earlier because they did not have adequate housing) or have short custodial sentences. The Cultural Review recommended that Corrections Victoria should increase work and educational opportunities for women in custody to support their chances for successful reintegration into the community post release.⁴⁶ Given how many more young Aboriginal women have entered the youth justice system (the overwhelming majority on remand) in Victoria in

recent years, this will grow increasingly important.⁴⁷ We know that it is significantly more likely that any child with experience of youth detention will enter the adult prison system.

The present system has seen the incarceration of Aboriginal children for breaching bail and parole orders. 93% are re-offenders and the majority have been in the child protection system and out-of-home care. Approximately 19% of all young women in the youth justice system are Aboriginal. We welcome changes to bail laws and plans to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years in Victoria. However, there is a generation of Aboriginal children and young people that have been incarcerated and who are at most risk of poor educational and employment outcomes.

Recommendation 16

Corrections Victoria should prioritise access to vocational support and further education for all Aboriginal women in prison, including as part of post-release planning and support.

ATTACHMENT A: DJIRRA PROGRAMS

Djirra develops and delivers early intervention and prevention programs. These programs are at the core of what Djirra does. They focus on building trust and confidence and promoting cultural connection and a strong sense of identity for Aboriginal women. Our successful signature programs Sisters Day Out®, Dilly Bag and Young Luv® take us to our women no matter where they are in Victoria. These programs create safe and alternative ways for women to understand the warning signs of family violence and how key services for their safety can be accessed. Our signature programs have been recognised internationally and by Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence as best practice.

Koori Women's Place

Djirra's Koori Women's Place (**KWP**) is a unique cultural program based in Abbotsford and provides a diverse range of supports. Aboriginal women can visit or call the KWP to:

- Join cultural, wellbeing and social activities, for example damper making or basket weaving. These activities are delivered in person and online.
- Access practical support.
- Connect with other Djirra services (Lawyers, Case Managers, Counsellors).
- Access our visiting services to get information and advice (e.g. Centrelink, Births, Deaths and Marriages).
- Learn about upcoming Sisters Day Out, Dilly Bag and Young Luv workshops.

Sisters Day Out®

- Sister Day Out is a one-day wellbeing workshop held regularly in communities throughout Victoria.
- This workshop breaks down social isolation and provides a space for Aboriginal women to support each other, gain knowledge about legal rights and options, and engage with mainstream and Aboriginal support services.

Sisters Day In

- A specialised version of Sisters Day Out delivered to our sisters in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison.
- Our women on the inside gain access to Djirra services, and other mainstream and Aboriginal services that we invite to attend.

Dilly Bag

- Dilly Bag is a three-day retreat held on Country.
- It is a gathering of Aboriginal women that draws from cultural principles to inform Aboriginal women's ways of being in order to live a culturally safe and meaningful lifestyle.

Young Luv®

- For young Aboriginal women, aged 13 to 18.
- A half day workshop to engage Aboriginal teenagers in a culturally safe space where they can talk about, reflect on, and better understand important issues affecting their lives.
- The workshop equips young women with information and skills to challenge unhealthy relationships, and to apply positive and safe behaviours.

Individual Support Services

Djirra's Individual Support Service provides culturally safe wrap around support for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence. Services include:

- Case management, (short to medium term practical support for issues including family violence and safety, housing stress and concerns related to health needs, finances and children and/or family).
- Alcohol and other drug support.
- Financial assistance support packages.
- Counselling (including phone and online support)
- Warm referrals to other services.
- Assistance to reconnect to mob and Country.

Legal Team

Djirra's Legal Team provides legal representation and non-legal support to Aboriginal people experiencing family violence. This includes legal advice, casework and court representation in relation to:

- Intervention Orders
- Family Law
- Child Protection
- Victims of Crime Assistance
- Other family violence related legal issues

Prison Support Program

- Djirra's Prison Support Program provides legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal women at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower.
- Includes Lawyers, Paralegal Support Workers and Case Managers who connect with and support Aboriginal women in prison.
- Links women to other culturally appropriate services and programs that assist women to maintain connection to family, Culture, and community.

Endnotes

¹ *Royal Commission into Family Violence, Final Report: Volume 5* (2015), p. 13.

² SNAICC Family Matters (2023) – Entry into to OOH rate.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Royal Commission into Family Violence, Final Report: Volume 5* (2015).

⁵ *Ending Family violence Annual Report*, Victorian Government (2022).

⁶ Internal Djirra Data.

⁷ *Violence Against Women Stats + Facts*, Women's Health Loddon Mallee.

⁸ *Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2022) p. 31

⁹ *Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, Parliament of Victoria (2021) p. 69.

¹⁰ Kylie Cripps and Daphne Habibis, *Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2019).

¹¹ *Research Report Economic cost of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability*, Vincent, J., McCarthy, D., Miller, H., Armstrong, K., Lacey, S., Lian, G., Qi, D., Richards, N., Berry, T. (2022)

¹² *Report on Government Services*, Productivity Commission (2023).

¹³ Yoorrook Truth Commission: evidence of DFHHS Associate Secretary Alisandratos 28 April 2023.

¹⁴ When an Aboriginal mother is incarcerated, the impact on their children and families is profound and lifelong. Children whose mothers spend time in prison are much more likely to be removed and have a disrupted education, poor health, poor mental health and unstable housing – factors that heighten the risk of a young person entering child protection and subsequently the justice system. This is particularly concerning given that Aboriginal children are the most vulnerable and over-represented cohort within the child protection system. See *Our Youth Our Way: Inquiry into the Over-Representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system*, Commission for Children and Young People (2021).

¹⁵ *Victorian Government of Aboriginals Affairs Report* (2022) "The number of Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services has continued to increase. In 2021-22, over 11,000 Aboriginal Victorians accessed homelessness services, a 38 per cent increase since 2015-16. The proportion of all Aboriginal Victorians accessing homelessness services was 16.9 per cent compared to 1.2 per cent for non-Aboriginal Victorians."

¹⁶ *Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum Submission* (January 11th 2023).

¹⁷ *Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, Parliament of Victoria (2021) p. 210.

¹⁸ Ibid p256.

¹⁹ *Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis*, Parliament of Victoria (2023) p. 143.

²⁰ *Rental Report*, Department of Families Fairness and Housing (2023).

²¹ *Family Incidents by Aboriginal status*, Crime Statistics Agency (2023).

²² *Measuring family violence service demand and capacity an emerging picture of the specialist family violence sector*, Safe & Equal (2023) p. 44.

²³ *Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2022) p32

²⁴ This makes the Closing the Gap overcrowding target problematic unless it is sharpened to focus on issues of safety.

²⁵ *Noongar Housing First Principles*, Shelter WA (2021).

²⁶ *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report*, Productivity Commission (2023).

²⁷ *Journeys to Healing and Strong Wellbeing Final Report*, The Lowitja Institute (2018).

²⁸ *Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations address health equity through action on the social determinants of health of Aboriginal peoples in Australia*, BMC Public Health (2020).

²⁹ *Counting Dead Women Australia Project*, Destroy The Joint (2023).

³⁰ *Family, domestic and sexual violence data in Australia*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022).

³¹ *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report*, Australian Human Rights Commission (2020).

³² *Improving family violence legal and support services for Aboriginal women*, ANROWS (2020) p. 79-81.

³³ *Hospitalisation for Head Injury Due to Assault Among Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians, July 1999 – June 2005*, Medical Journal of Australia (2008).

³⁴ *Journeys to Healing and Strong Wellbeing Final Report*, The Lowitja Institute (2018) p. 21.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Koori Prisoner Mental Health and Cognitive Function Study—Final Report*, Victoria Department of Justice (2013) p.13.

³⁷ *Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria Criminal Justice System*, RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice (2021) Attachment 2.

³⁸ *Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System*, Corrections Review (2023) p. 532.

³⁹ *Women Transforming Justice*, Centre for Innovative Justice (2020) p. 32.

⁴⁰ *Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee Report, Stolen Generations Reparations Victoria* (2021).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System*, Final Report: Volume 3 (2021), p. 149.

⁴³ *Pregnancy and Childcare in Prison, Corrections, Prisons and Parole*.

⁴⁴ *Family Violence and Education: Review of the Evidence on Impacts of Violence and Responding to Violence in the Education Sector*, The Equality Institute for the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2018).

⁴⁵ *Let us learn. Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in out of home care*, Commissioner for Children Young People (2023).

⁴⁶ *Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System*, Corrections Review (2022) p. 757

⁴⁷ 'Of the 63 Aboriginal children and young people under custodial orders in 2022-23, 48 were on remand 15 were sentenced.' Information provided by Andrea Davidson, Youth Justice Commissioner to the Aboriginal Justice Forum, October 2023.