

Aboriginal Community Controlled
Culturally Safe
Prevention of Family Violence
Legal Services and Holistic Support
Cultural and Wellbeing Workshops
Policy and Advocacy



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

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

Djirra is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), Victoria's only specialist Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS) for women, and an active member of the First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV), the national peak body for FVPLSs. For over 23 years, Djirra has provided culturally safe, specialist family violence support, legal services and case management, alongside early intervention and prevention, cultural and wellbeing programs, to Aboriginal women experiencing or at risk of experiencing family violence.¹

Through this work, Djirra witnesses firsthand how racism directed at Aboriginal women is not confined to individual prejudice or isolated acts, and how Aboriginal women are failed, punished and targeted by service systems. Racism is embedded within, legitimised by, and reproduced through the systems women must engage with to seek safety and support.

This submission draws on Djirra's extensive frontline experience to inform the Committee of the depth, scale and consequences of racism and violence directed at Aboriginal women, and to outline the urgent reforms required to end this harm.

Recommendations

1. Explicitly recognise that violence against Aboriginal women is gendered and shaped by racism, requiring responses that confront racism, sexism and other biases within individuals as well as government bodies and systems.
2. Commit to system reform to address intersecting racism, violence and institutional failures that disproportionately punish and criminalise Aboriginal women and their children, including repealing punitive laws, ending criminalisation and misidentification

¹ In this submission, "Aboriginal" is used to refer to all "Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander" people.

of Aboriginal women, redressing injustice, and prioritising and resourcing self-determined, Aboriginal-led solutions.

3. Reject punitive responses and prioritise prevention, recognising that safety is not achieved through prisons or child removal but through sustained investment in preventative measures, including access to culturally safe services, secure housing, case management and specialist legal support, so Aboriginal women can escape cycles of harm established and sustained by the ongoing impacts of colonisation.
4. Establish national standards and programs to prevent child removal and support reunification, and early Child Protection Notification and Referral Systems as per Yoorrook recommendation 12.²
5. Provide long-term, sustainable funding for specialist Aboriginal-led legal and wraparound organisations, including Djirra and other FVPLSs, so no Aboriginal woman must travel more than 100 kilometres or one hour to access safety and support.
6. Invest in Djirra to establish Victoria's first Aboriginal Women's Centre as a self-determined place of safety, healing, advocacy and culturally grounded specialist legal and wraparound support for Aboriginal women in every stage of their lives.³
7. Mandate ongoing Aboriginal-led cultural safety training and accountability mechanisms across police, courts, child protection, family violence and corrections systems to address racial and gendered bias, misidentification, and systemic failures in line with Yoorrook recommendation 5.⁴
8. Ensure that behaviour change and accountability programs for men who use violence against Aboriginal women address racism, sexism and weaponisation of systems, alongside prevention initiatives for men and boys that challenge harmful attitudes and norms before violence occurs.
9. Invest in Aboriginal-led community legal education, truth-telling and prevention initiatives that address racism directed at Aboriginal women, and the intersection between racism, gender inequality, and criminalisation.
10. Prioritise and make meaningful progress in implementing commitments arising from Royal Commissions, inquiries and national frameworks, including Yoorrook for Justice and Transformation, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children, and guided by Aboriginal-led reviews that assess relevance, gendered impacts and contemporary service systems.⁵

Racism, Family Violence and Criminalisation

Aboriginal women experience family violence at far higher rates than other women. Nationally, Aboriginal women are between two and seven times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to

² Yoorrook Justice Commission. (2023). *Yoorrook for Justice Report*. (Recommendation 12, p. 31).

³ Yoorrook Justice Commission. (2023). *Yoorrook for Transformation - Third Interim Report - Vol. 4* (Recommendation 80b, p. 165).

⁴ Yoorrook Justice Commission. (2023). *Yoorrook for Justice Report*. (Recommendation 5, p. 28).

⁵ There are multiple Royal Commissions, inquiries and investigations whose recommendations remain outstanding, including: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1987); *Bringing Them Home* report (1997); Social Justice Report (precursor to *Closing the Gap*) (2005); Coroner's Court of Western Australia Inquest into the death of Ms Dhu (2016); *The Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* (2017); Coroner's Court of Victoria findings into the death of Veronica Nelson (2023); Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children (2024); Northern Territory Coroner's inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumarn Haywood (2024); *Yoorrook for Justice* (2023), *Yoorrook for Transformation* (2025); *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* (2026).

be victims of homicide.⁶ In Victoria, Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely to experience family violence than other women, and 25 times more likely to be killed or injured.⁷

Violence against Aboriginal women is not an “Aboriginal community issue”; it is gendered and reinforced by the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racial discrimination, patriarchy and structural inequality. In Djirra’s experience, most women we support experience family violence from non-Aboriginal men. These perpetrators commonly use cultural abuse, including racist slurs and denial of Aboriginality, alongside emotional abuse and coercive control. This includes exploiting and reinforcing an Aboriginal woman’s well-founded fear that police will not believe her, that she will be criminalised, or that her children will be removed.

Women supported by Djirra consistently report that police refuse to take statements, fail to properly investigate family violence or breaches of intervention orders, and rely on perpetrators’ accounts without adequate inquiry, leaving violence unaddressed. For example, we have seen instances where perpetrators tell police that Aboriginal women reported as missing do not have family, even though they do, or that they have “gone walkabout”, with this taken at face value and no further enquiries made by police.

Police also regularly refuse to apply for Family Violence Orders on behalf of Aboriginal women, forcing women to initiate proceedings themselves or remain without legal protection. These experiences erode trust in systems that should provide safety, with many Aboriginal women avoiding police altogether, even in cases of serious violence.

“From the voices of the women who we work with, they tell us they’ve been burnt too many times by the system, that they will never trust the system again with their lives, or their children’s lives. So many tell us it’s best just to stay silent about the violence.”

Antoinette Braybrook, CEO, Djirra⁸

Racism and unsafe system responses contribute to significant under-reporting of violence. Djirra’s experience aligns with broader evidence that most family and sexual violence experienced by Aboriginal women is never reported, meaning the true scale of violence is far greater than official data suggests.⁹

Family Violence Service System

Aboriginal women consistently report to Djirra that mainstream family violence response services are unsafe and inaccessible. Women are frequently refused assistance unless they

⁶ Cripps, K. (2023). *Indigenous women and intimate partner homicide in Australia: Confronting the impunity of policing failures*. Current Issues in Criminal Justice, 35(3), 293–311; Australian Institute of Criminology. (2024). *Homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Statistical Bulletin No. 46)*.

⁷ Victorian Government. (2021). *Aboriginal self-determination*.

⁸ Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria. (2013). *Standing firm for change: a journey to justice, National Conference 2012, A summary of key themes and FVPLS Victoria recommendations*.

⁹ Willis, M. (2011). *Non-disclosure of violence in Australian Indigenous communities. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 405. Australian Institute of Criminology; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2026). *Family, domestic and sexual violence – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*.

first report violence to police, despite well-founded fears that police involvement will escalate harm, lead to misidentification and trigger child protection intervention.

Multiservice entry points such as The Orange Door are often unsafe due to the presence of child protection workers and mandatory reporting obligations. Rather than supporting disclosure and safety, these settings deter help-seeking and reinforce fear and silence.

Racism is also embedded at an operational level within the family violence policy and response system. Djirra's experience, reinforced by the 2024 *Insights Report* prepared by Djirra and Safe+Equal, shows that Aboriginal knowledge and lived experience are routinely deprioritised in favour of police-centric and child protection-driven approaches.¹⁰ ACCOs are frequently consulted by the family violence sector but ignored or overridden in practice. This results in extractive dynamics and, in some cases, ACCOs disengaging from collaboration altogether.

These dynamics are reflected in everyday service practices reported to Djirra by many of the Aboriginal women we support, including risk assessment processes that racialise and stereotype Aboriginality, such as describing women as "light-skinned Aboriginal". Such experiences reinforce stigma, cause distress and compound trauma. Rather than operating as pathways to safety, these service responses expose Aboriginal women to increased system scrutiny and harmful interventions, including child removal.

Punitive Justice Responses

Racism permeates all areas of the justice system, resulting in the disproportionate targeting and criminalisation of Aboriginal women. Justice responses consistently fail to address racism, the impacts of colonisation, the ongoing state-sanctioned removal of Aboriginal children or intergenerational trauma. Aboriginal people are acutely aware the system is stacked against them, with more than one in four reporting they do not expect fair treatment from police, courts or services.¹¹

Aboriginal women experiencing family violence are frequently racially targeted and misidentified as the primary aggressor. Misidentification is not a simple error but the result of systemic policing failures, including inadequate investigations, false reports by perpetrators, incident-based responses that miss patterns of coercive control, and a failure to accurately identify resistance, self-defence or trauma responses.

Aboriginal women are most often criminalised for matters related to family violence, poverty and systemic disadvantage rather than serious offending. Between 70 and 90% of Aboriginal women in custody have experienced family violence¹² demonstrating the pervasive connection between victimisation and criminalisation.

¹⁰ Djirra & Safe+Equal. (2024). *Insights Report: Supporting a culturally responsive and accountable specialist family violence sector*.

¹¹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2024). *Attitudes matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS): findings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents*.

¹² Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Women's imprisonment and domestic, family and sexual violence: Research synthesis (ANROWS Insights, Issue 03/2020)*.

Aboriginal women are more likely to be remanded and imprisoned than other women,¹³ In Victoria in 2023–24, 52.8% of Aboriginal women in custody were held on remand, compared with 40.5% of other women.¹⁴ Victoria's recent punitive bail reforms have intensified these disparities, with Djirra recording an 80% increase in demand for our Prison Support Program, which provides culturally safe legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal women in custody who have experienced family violence. Aboriginal women are the fastest-growing prison population in Australia.¹⁵

Once in custody, Aboriginal women report further racial targeting, including disproportionate exposure to degrading practices such as strip searching.¹⁶ Djirra staff have directly heard overt racist comments from officers, for example: "Koori girls don't like to wait". The impacts of criminalisation are cumulative. Repeated discriminatory contact with police, courts and prisons exposes Aboriginal women to separation from children, housing instability, deteriorating mental health and increased risk of death in custody.

The scale of this harm is evident in broader justice system outcomes. Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 630 Aboriginal people have died in custody,¹⁷ including the recent deaths of two Aboriginal women in the same Western Australian prison.¹⁸ These deaths occur amid governments' ongoing failure to meaningfully address the Royal Commission's recommendations made more than 35 years ago.

Perpetrators are able to exploit and weaponise entrenched racism within police, court and service systems to deter help-seeking and increase the likelihood that Aboriginal women will be disbelieved and misidentified as the predominant aggressor.

Client Story

*Susan^{*19}, an Aboriginal woman living in regional Victoria, was violently assaulted by her non-Aboriginal partner in their home. Her partner called police and waited out the front of the home so that he would be interviewed first. Susan stayed inside, where she had locked herself in the bathroom for her safety. When police attended, Susan's partner was calm, and said that Susan was Aboriginal and that she had been drinking and "went off on him and he had to push her to get her away". Police then spoke to Susan, who was still shaken and bruised from the assault. Police asked Susan several times if she'd been drinking; they asked her very little about the incident or her partner's history of perpetrating violence against her. Susan said she hadn't had anything to drink, but that she'd been hit and was still rattled and shaky. Police passed over this explanation and served her with a FVSN after speaking with her for only a couple of minutes.*

¹³ Crime Statistics Agency Victoria. (2025). [Aboriginal justice indicators dashboard](#).

¹⁴ Victorian Government. (2024). [Victorian government Aboriginal affairs report 2024](#).

¹⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2024) [Statistics about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls](#).

¹⁶ Human Rights Law Centre, FIGJAM & Flat Out. (2026). [Ending Strip Searching in Australian Prisons Report](#).

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Criminology. (2026). [Deaths in custody in Australia](#).

¹⁸ SBS NITV. (2026, April 21). [An Aboriginal woman is the second death in custody at this WA prison since March](#).

¹⁹ Client's name has been changed to uphold confidentiality.

Racism and Child Protection

Child Protection remains one of the most racially violent systems impacting Aboriginal women and their children. Aboriginal children are overrepresented at every stage of the system. In Victoria, Aboriginal children are placed in out-of-home care at 21.8 times the rate of other children.²⁰

The child protection system holds Aboriginal mothers to unattainable standards and prioritises punitive, reactionary responses rather than support. Aboriginal women report living with constant fear that disclosing violence will result in their children being removed, yet if they remain silent, they risk being deemed as “not acting protectively”. This impossible position silences our women and entrenches mistrust in government systems.

Djirra routinely supports Aboriginal women who have been flagged in the system to have their children removed upon birth, despite no reasonable “protective concerns” being listed. In these instances, it appears that systemic racism embedded in child protection’s risk assessment tools lead to targeting of Aboriginal women.

Aboriginal women also experience racism by individual workers, whose opinions become evidence in child protection proceedings. In Victoria, child protection is viewed by the Court as the “mode litigant” so evidence, even when untested, submitted by child protection is given significant weight by the Court.

Examples of racism by child protection workers from Djirra’s frontline work include:

- An Aboriginal woman told during pregnancy by a child protection worker, “*Don’t bother buying any baby stuff because you won’t be needing it.*”
- A mother being capsicum sprayed by police while holding her baby as her other children were dragged from their beds by child protection workers. When Djirra’s lawyer argued in Court that this conduct was racist, child protection sought to have her withdraw this statement. Djirra’s lawyer refused.
- A mother called police for protection during a violent assault, only for child protection workers and police to use the violence she experienced as evidence against her, rather than prioritising her safety or holding the perpetrator accountable.

The child protection system regularly fails to uphold Aboriginal children’s right to culture. The Yoorrook Justice Commission heard evidence that, despite the legislated requirement for cultural plans to be completed for Aboriginal children, only 67% of Aboriginal children who were in care for over 19 weeks had a cultural plan.²¹ Where plans do exist, they are often of poor quality, fail to identify the child’s mob, contain errors or include tokenistic activities.²²

²⁰ Productivity Commission - Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2026). [Report on government services 2026: Community services \[Part F, Table 16A.2\]](#).

²¹ Data as at end of March 2023 - Yoorrook Justice Commission (2023). [Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria’s Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems](#).

²² Yoorrook Justice Commission (2023). [Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria’s Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems](#).

These practices do not reflect a system motivated by genuine care or protection. Rather, they are symptoms of a paternalistic system rooted in colonial control that continues to racially target and punish Aboriginal women. The child protection system is not broken; it is operating exactly as it was designed to.

Racism and the Courts

Djirra's lawyers regularly witness overt racism by judicial officers and lawyers during court proceedings, including colluding with perpetrators who use cultural abuse. Recent examples have included:

- A magistrate asking our lawyer, "*What is wrong with the father calling the mother half-Aboriginal?*"
- A judge asking the parties, "*So which one of you is ATSI again?*"
- A lawyer denying a child's Aboriginality by asserting they did not have "*one drop of Aboriginal blood*".

In Djirra's work, we see that Aboriginal women become "trapped" in the Children's Court and child protection system, rather than being given autonomy to have their matters dealt with in the family law system. When Aboriginal women can access the family law system, there is often little understanding of how police and child protection responses have operated to punish, judge and fail to protect Aboriginal women and children. This then creates a compounding effect, as these past failings are not understood or corrected and are therefore repeated or exacerbated in the family law system.

The family law system has additional mechanisms that prejudice Aboriginal women. For example, Court Child Experts often lack cultural knowledge or understanding of the impacts of colonisation in relation to Aboriginal women and the justice system. Experts often hold Aboriginal mothers to incredibly high standards, being highly critical of mothers' past or current circumstances, while overlooking or excusing even very serious violence or other risk factors by fathers.

Racism, Health and Housing

Systemic racism within health services contributes to poorer health outcomes for Aboriginal women. In Victoria, Aboriginal women are more likely than other women to experience incorrect diagnosis or not receive appropriate treatment.²³ Many Aboriginal women avoid seeking medical care due to previous experiences of racism and fear of racism, surveillance or child protection involvement.

Aboriginal women are 69 times more likely than other women to suffer a head injury from assault.²⁴ In Victoria, 42% of Aboriginal people presenting to hospital with family violence-related injuries between 2006 and 2016 sustained an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).²⁵

²³ Productivity Commission. (2023). [Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2023](#).

²⁴ Jamieson, Harrison & Berry (2008), *Hospitalisation for head injury due to assault among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*, July 1999 – June 2005.

²⁵ Brain Injury Australia (2018), *The Prevalence of Acquired Brain Injury Among Victims and Perpetrators of Family Violence* [p.15].

Any level of cognitive impairment from an ABI affects a woman for the rest of her life, with the consequences for Aboriginal women exacerbated by both individual and systemic racism. This includes increasing the risk of child removal, future exploitation and violence, and police contact. The “symptoms” of brain injury can mimic being drug or alcohol affected, so when linked with racist and biased responses by police or child protection workers, Aboriginal women are regularly perceived as being “difficult” or “uncooperative.” Perpetrators regularly exploit these ABI-related symptoms to undermine Aboriginal women’s credibility or argue for the removal of children from their care. Given the lifelong impacts and mental health risks associated with ABI, Djirra has long advocated for standardised, culturally informed ABI screening for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence.

Aboriginal women also face significant barriers within mental health systems. Intergenerational trauma is often poorly understood, culturally unsafe responses are common, and fear of racism, disbelief or child removal can deter disclosures of family violence and mental health concerns.²⁶ Aboriginal-led healthcare delivers better outcomes for Aboriginal women and must be prioritised and appropriately resourced, as per Yoorrook recommendation #85.

The cumulative impacts of racism, violence and unequal access to safe, effective services are reflected in life expectancy. Aboriginal women live, on average, more than eight years less than non-Indigenous women.²⁷ This gap reflects systemic disadvantage and violence, and persistent failures across health, justice, housing and social service systems.²⁸ Closing the Gap outcome 14 recognises the serious negative impact of racism on social and emotional wellbeing and in 2024, 57% of Aboriginal Victorians experienced at least one form of racial prejudice in the last six months.²⁹ Despite national commitments under Closing the Gap to close the life expectancy gap within a generation and have a significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal people towards zero, progress is not on track for Aboriginal women.³⁰ In 2023, the suicide rate for Aboriginal women was 2.6 times higher than other women nationally.³¹

Racism is also evident in housing and homelessness systems, particularly for Aboriginal women fleeing family violence. Aboriginal women face discrimination in the private rental market, severe shortages of crisis and long-term housing, and rising rental costs, especially in regional and rural areas.³² As a result, women supported by Djirra in regional Victoria are often offered inadequate temporary options such as motels, caravans or tents due to a lack of emergency accommodation.

²⁶ Lowitja Institute. (2023). [Journeys to healing report](#).

²⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy](#).

²⁸ Productivity Commission. (2024). [Closing the Gap Information Repository: Socio-economic Outcome Area Target 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives](#)

²⁹ See Closing the Gap Dashboard at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/outcome-area/social-and-emotional-wellbeing/#experience-of-racism>

³⁰ Productivity Commission. (2024). [Closing the Gap Information Repository: Socio-economic Outcome Area Target 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives](#)

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023), [Suicide and intentional self-harm hospitalisations among First Nations people](#).

³² Parliament of Victoria (2023) [Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis](#); Department of Families Fairness and Housing. (2023). [Rental Report](#).

Housing instability carries heightened risk for Aboriginal women because it intersects with punitive and discriminatory system responses. Temporary accommodation may be deemed unsuitable, leading to child removal, while returning to an unsafe home in order to avoid homelessness is also used against women as explained above. Barriers to accessing emergency accommodation, including requirements to attend police stations for identification, further compound harm. These untenable situations arise from systems that prioritise surveillance and punishment over safety and support. Access to safe, stable housing is foundational to Aboriginal women's safety, recovery and keeping mothers and children together.

Racism, Advocacy and the Voice Referendum

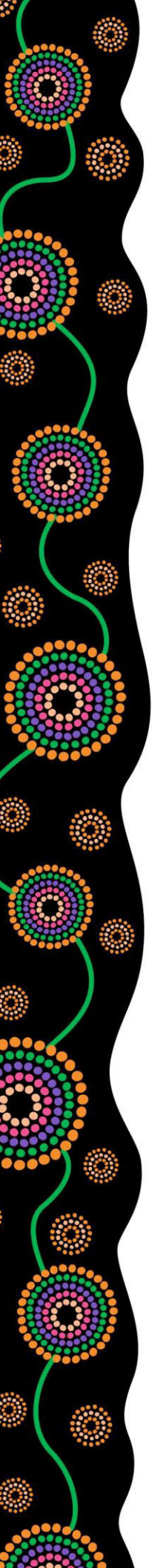
Djirra has witnessed significant racist backlash directed at Aboriginal women and at Djirra itself in response to advocacy, support for Aboriginal women and celebration of Aboriginal culture. These experiences illustrate how racism continues to shape the treatment of Aboriginal women and organisations in public and institutional spaces.

In 2022, Djirra received a racist planning objection to establishing a new office in Melbourne's West, claiming it would "attract people who have no interest in our society" and "disrupt our whole existence", alongside derogatory references regarding Aboriginal people and alcohol use. Such objections seek to deny Aboriginal organisations legitimacy, visibility, safety, space and access to resources.

Racism and public hostility intensified during and after the 2023 First Nations Voice to Parliament Referendum. Djirra received increased disclosures from Aboriginal women experiencing racism, discrimination and violence. All of Djirra's regional offices are located in Victorian electorates that produced a high "NO" count, with more than 80% of people in Mildura having voted "NO". These results showed Aboriginal women that their local police officers, teachers, shop keepers, and other workers they regularly interact with likely voted "NO".

Racist graffiti was sprayed across one of Djirra's offices following a Voice Referendum information session held for the community.





Additional security was required at public events, some speakers withdrew due to safety concerns. Aboriginal Staff and clients reported heightened racism toward Aboriginal children in schools, with some Aboriginal children requiring safety plans in order to attend, or being kept home altogether.

The referendum period emboldened racist rhetoric, including the politicisation of Welcome to Country ceremonies. In 2025, respected Elder and Djirra Keeper Aunty Joy Murphy was informed at the last minute that her Welcome to Country at an Anzac Day sporting match was cancelled, amid ongoing hostility toward such ceremonies. During this period, Djirra accessed a wellbeing grant to provide counselling and debriefing for Aboriginal staff to address the cumulative impacts of racism and public hostility.

Individual experiences of racism and hostility are not isolated incidents but expressions of the ongoing legacy of colonisation and systemic racism. In Djirra's experience, these forms of racism intersect with discriminatory policies and practices to compound intergenerational trauma and disadvantage for Aboriginal women and children. Urgent, coordinated government action is required to address racism directed at Aboriginal women across public, institutional and structural settings.

Self Determination and Systemic Harm

Colonisation continues to impact every aspect of Aboriginal women's lives. Settler legal, housing, health and social service systems do not meet the needs of Aboriginal women. They are grounded in legislative and policy frameworks that were designed, and continue, to marginalise Aboriginal people. As a result, these systems consistently fail Aboriginal women and perpetuate intergenerational trauma, racism, violence and oppression.

For Djirra, self determination is not an abstract principle or a discrete policy goal. It is central to whether Aboriginal women are safe, believed and supported. Self determination requires governments and systems to recognise that Aboriginal women must be able to access support through Aboriginal-led, culturally safe services, and that Aboriginal-led organisations must be trusted and resourced to lead responses grounded in lived experience and community knowledge.

Self determination does not mean simply shifting responsibility for harmful systems onto ACCOs without structural change. It requires governments to confront and reform systems that continue to harm Aboriginal women, invest in Aboriginal-led solutions to end racism and violence, and shift decision-making power so Aboriginal women have genuine authority and influence over policies that impact their lives.

In response to the longstanding invisibility of Aboriginal women in national family violence policy, Aboriginal women led decades of advocacy that resulted in *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*, launched in early 2026 as the first dedicated national strategy to address violence

against Aboriginal women and children. While *Our Ways* represents a critical shift in acknowledging Aboriginal women's lives and experiences, it is only an initial step. Dismantling systemic racism and ending racist and gendered violence against Aboriginal women requires sustained, long-term commitment to structural reform, alongside secure and ongoing resourcing of specialist FVPLSs such as Djirra.

Conclusion

Racism and violence directed at Aboriginal women is systemic, entrenched and ongoing. Systemic racism drives the disproportionate rates of family violence experienced by Aboriginal women, who are then frequently punished by a child protection system that removes Aboriginal children from their mothers and culture at vastly disproportionate rates. Punitive child protection responses create pathways into the justice system, with Aboriginal children in out-of-home care at significantly higher risk of entering youth and adult custody.³³

The safety of Aboriginal women and children are inextricably linked. When Aboriginal mothers are supported to escape violence, access stable housing and receive culturally safe wraparound supports (legal and non-legal), their children are far more likely to remain safely in their care and out of the criminal justice system.

Djirra urges the Committee to center the voices and experiences of Aboriginal women and demand governments take responsibility for dismantling systemic racism through structural reform that addresses the root causes of racism, gendered violence and inequality experienced by Aboriginal women.

It is time to move beyond repeated inquiries and deliver meaningful action. Djirra and other specialist Aboriginal-led organisations and self determined solutions must be invested in to address both immediate harm and long-term structural racism.

Djirra thanks the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss the matter raised above further, please do not hesitate to our office at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Antoinette Braybrook AM
Chief Executive Officer

May 2026

³³ Sentencing Advisory Council. (2019). *Crossover Kids: Vulnerable Children in the Youth Justice System Report 1: Children Who Are Known to Child Protection among Sentenced and Diverted Children in the Victorian Children's Court*.