

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Cross Agency Working Group – Communiqué

The 11th meeting of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Cross Agency Working Group (CAWG) was held in Darwin on Wednesday 12 May 2021.

Northern Territory DFSV Budget Overview

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (the Department) Chief Financial Officer provided a briefing on the Department's DFSV budget.

The Department's DFSV budget in 2021-22 is \$26.5 million, which is \$2.3 million less than the previous year. The 2020-21 DFSV budget included \$2.3 million from the Australian Government to bolster domestic and family violence support as a result of increased demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department's 2021-22 budget includes:

- \$13.1 million to specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services to enable essential DFV service delivery across the Northern Territory (NT);
- \$6.49 million additional funding, which commenced in 2019-20 to support implementation of the NT's 10-year [DFSV Reduction Framework](#)
- During the discussion on the budget, CAWG members were advised that the Department will be evaluating the prevention grant program in later years, including consideration of multi-year funding for relevant prevention projects.

Policy update

Action plans

The online progress report for the first action plan of the 10-year Reduction Framework, [Action Plan 1: Changing Attitudes, Intervening Earlier and Responding Better \(2018-2021\)](#) will be published in the first half of the year, and will be updated biannually.

The CAWG was provided a broad timeframe for developing Action Plan 2, with the consultation phase expected to commence in June and be finalised by the end of August 2021.

The NT Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) will undertake consultation with non-government service providers across the NT. The Department will lead consultation with government agencies. Drafting, refining, further consultations and approvals are expected to be finalised by March 2022.

Centralised DFSV training structure

Consultation on the independent centralised DFSV training structure, a key action under the [Workforce and Sector Development Plan](#), is planned to commence in the first half of 2021. NTCOSS will lead consultation with the non-government sector on the preferred model for the centralised DFVS training structure.

The centralised DFSV training structure is an important enabling mechanism for building the capability and responsiveness of the DFSV workforce; developing local training skills and experience; and providing evidence-based training options for workers across the Territory.

Katherine Local Reference Group T Tennant Creek Local Reference Group Top End Remote Safe House Network NT Legal Assistance Forum



DFV legislative review and coercive control

CAWG members were updated on the review of DFV legislation being led by the Department of the Attorney General and Justice, which will:

- identify amendments to the NT *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* and other relevant legislation to improve the legislative response to DFV;
- identify non-legislative systems changes to help strengthen justice responses to DFV; and
- consider the question of criminalisation of coercive control, noting that addressing coercive control in law may help drive change in the justice system.

The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice is establishing a working group to provide input into the legislative review and to foster cross-agency collaboration in improving justice responses to DFV.

The review is also considering the issue of criminalisation of coercive control. The CAWG noted that, in Scotland, coercive control was legislated as an offence, with the legislation co-designed with people with lived experience and with experienced DFV sector personnel. The Scottish model is based on coordinated investment in implementation that included a public awareness campaign and training for police, lawyers and Judges.

CAWG members agreed there is a need to consider changes to the law and policy to effectively address coercive control as an integral part of DFV. This could include criminalisation, as well as:

- amending the definition of DFV in the NT *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* to better incorporate coercive control (noting a national debate currently underway on developing a national definition and whether physical violence in the absence of coercive control should still be considered DFV);
- amending the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* to provide stronger guidance to courts and police in identifying the person most in need of protection in cases where there are cross allegations of violence; and
- amendments to encourage courts and Police to deal with DFV as a course of conduct rather than a single incident.

The NT Legal Assistance Forum representative noted that the Central Australian Women's Legal Service has been collecting data, delivering training, and publishing articles about coercive control in the Law Society journal *Balance*. The organisation has observed a large number of women being misidentified as the primary aggressor.

Departmental structural integration

From 1 July, the Department will be organised into five divisions – Strategic Enabling Services, Housing, Regional Services, Communities, and Families. The Office of Gender Equity and Diversity (OGED) will be located in the Communities division, within the Social Inclusion area.

The Office of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction (ODFSVR) will move into the Families division, with Jeanette Kerr as Deputy CEO overseeing this division.

Concerns were raised about the resourcing for the ODFSVR team, and about splitting OGED and ODFSVR.

Information on the current ODFSVR structure was provided: Principal DFSV Advisor, Director, Manager, two Senior Policy Officers, and one Policy Officer. The two DFSV Regional Coordinators will remain in the Barkly and Big Rivers regions and link in with ODFSVR.