Towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys

The Healing Foundation and
White Ribbon Australia

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The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities 0to address the ongoing trauma caused by actions like the forced removal of children from their families. Our work helps people create a different future.

Working in urban, regional and remote areas, we partner with communities to co-deign effective healing solutions, combining valued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge with best practice in western trauma theory.

We foster long term and sustainable change by providing leadership and creating an environment for:

- new research to establish an evidence-base for the development of future strategies

- establishing proven healing initiatives that have been trialled, evaluated and improved in communities

- highlighting the role of healing through community networks and healing champions and

- strengthening the healing workforce through training and education initiatives.

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White Ribbon Australia

White Ribbon is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end men's violence against women and girls, promote gender equality, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity.

White Ribbon Australia (White Ribbon), as part of this global movement, aims to create an Australian society in which all women can live in safety, free from violence and abuse. White Ribbon works through a primary prevention approach understanding that men are central to achieving the social change necessary to prevent men's violence against women. We engage men to stand up, speak out and act to influence the actions of some men and demand change. White Ribbon is dedicated to ensuring men are active advocates for changing the social norms, attitudes and behaviours that are at the root of men's abuse of women.

Through education, awareness-raising and creative campaigns, preventative programs and partnerships, we are highlighting the positive role men play in preventing men's violence against women and enabling them to be part of this social change.

The White Ribbon Policy Research Series

The White Ribbon Policy Research Series is directed by an expert reference group comprising academic, policy and service professionals and are available from the White Ribbon Australia website at www.whiteribbon.org.au/stop-violence-against-women/what-white-ribbon-does/research-social-impact/

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Executive Summary

This paper explores the essential principles required for the development of an effective violence prevention framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys, to reduce and prevent violence against women and children. Informed by a knowledge circle of nationally recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention experts, the paper considers the socio-political context in which violence occurs, identifies critical elements to guide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention and cites good practice approaches to violence prevention supported by case studies.

To date, strategies to reduce disproportionate levels of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have predominately relied on the culturalisation of western violence prevention programs, where an Indigenous spin is put on a successful mainstream program or service (Weston 2017).

This approach assumes that the factors associated with violence against women are fundamentally the same in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Many factors such as gender, age, substance misuse, unemployment, and childhood abuse and neglect are common risk factors for violence by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous males (Wundersitz 2010). However knowledge circle members emphasised the need to understand the disproportionate levels of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the context of historical and continued colonial and systemic violence. This understanding is a crucial step towards negotiating support for a genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys.

Any effective strategy to prevent and reduce family violence must recognise the historical context and acknowledge the effects of foundational violence, structural violence and ensuing cultural breakdown; as well as the impacts of alcohol and other drugs, mental health issues, poverty and overcrowded housing. The cumulative impact of dispossession, child removal, family breakdown, substance misuse and exposure to violence has given rise to a cycle of intergenerational trauma.

While recognising the common goal of both mainstream violence prevention strategies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is to eliminate violence in families and communities, the paper identifies some key points of difference in the assumptions that underpin violence prevention strategies. It is argued that a specific cultural framework is required to understand, and effectively prevent and reduce violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Strategies to prevent and reduce family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to be positioned within broader community strategies that support individual, family and community healing through approaches that draw from both Indigenous culture and western practice. Any program that seeks to reduce and prevent family violence as an outcome should be developed in partnership with communities through a genuine co-design process that respects and supports local cultural governance. That process should capture community

objectives and indicators of success, and work with communities to identify ways to measure outcomes.

While communities should collectively be engaged to identify their healing needs and aspirations, the many strong Aboriginal and Torres Islander men must be supported to lead healing work with men and boys. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in some communities live with significant levels of violence, they cannot continue to be burdened with responsibility for improving safety for themselves and children.

Knowledge circle members made it clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men do not exist on their own, independent of women and their community. Collective cultures require issues to be addressed in a collective context and so violence prevention work must also be placed within a broader community context. The voice of women in the co-design and evaluation of men and boys' violence prevention work is paramount, as we cannot support change for men without restoring the harmony in their relationship with women, children and the broader community.

An effective framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys to prevent and reduce family violence needs to include the following critical elements:

- violence should be understood within a historical context, recognising the effects of foundational and structural violence, and the wide ranging continued impacts on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys

- the many strong Aboriginal and Torres Islander men must be supported to lead work with men and boys, and reconnect men to their core cultural practices and protocols as a central factor to creating change

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should be involved in the design and development, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the framework

- prevention strategies must be positioned within broader community strategies that address intergenerational trauma through individual, family and community healing approaches – drawing from both local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and western therapeutic practice

- all work should be developed in partnership with communities through a genuine co-design process that respects and supports local cultural governance and self-determination, and empowers communities to drive change

- a focus on collective wellbeing should be supported through referral pathways to trauma-informed holistic health and wellbeing services.

Crucially, any strategy must be adequately resourced; implemented in a safe, accessible place; prioritise safety for women, children and men; and be supported by trauma informed therapeutic services and programs. A priority is investment in Indigenous family violence prevention program evaluations, which are co-designed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1. Introduction and methodology

This paper, developed by The Healing Foundation through a partnership with White Ribbon Australia, explores the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males in programs to reduce and prevent violence against women and children. The paper considers the socio-political context in which violence occurs, identifies the essential elements required in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework for violence prevention, and cites good practice approaches to violence prevention with supporting case studies.

Consistent with The Healing Foundation's genuine commitment to cultural co-design, a knowledge circle was convened, comprising more than 10 researchers and knowledge holders with expertise in violence prevention, to identify the key themes to be explored in the paper. The circle comprised a number of nationally recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention experts, and included men and women from urban, regional and remote communities across Australia; Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics; respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys workers, health experts, emerging Aboriginal researchers, and Healing Foundation staff.

Consistent with quality healing practice, which draws from both Indigenous and western knowledge systems, the circle was co-facilitated by Benny Hodges, a man of Aboriginal (Waanji-Garrawa & Kaurareg) and Torres Strait Islander (Erub Bam Le' Kul Gal Gal) heritage with a significant background in family violence prevention education, in partnership with Professor Daryl Higgins, who at the time was Deputy Director (Research) with the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Participants discussed risk and protective factors, implementation challenges, guiding principles, examples of good practice, and what needs to be done to strengthen our knowledge and evidence base about effective prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

The overarching goal of the knowledge circle was to identify a culturally appropriate framework for early intervention to prevent and reduce the incidence of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Although there are diverse perspectives on the factors associated with Indigenous violence and appropriate responses, this paper is informed by input from knowledge circle members and draws from literature and case studies – some previously unpublished – that reinforce and/or demonstrate the key themes identified. The paper seeks to identify, and provide a means of addressing, the determinants of family violence through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prevention framework as opposed to a western framework.

2. Understanding violence in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context

In recent years we have observed increased recognition of the prevalence and impacts of domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However mainstream literature has only recently offered some, although limited, insights into the pathways, trajectories and contexts of violence within Indigenous Australia. Consequently, strategies to reduce disproportionate levels of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have predominately relied on the culturalisation of western violence prevention programs, which assumes that the factors associated with violence are fundamentally the same.

Knowledge circle members emphasised the need to understand disproportionate levels of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the context of historical (and continued) colonial and systemic violence as a crucial element in a genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys. The failure to do this has led to many inappropriate and ill-targeted strategies that have had limited impact on reducing violence to date.

Any effective strategy to prevent and reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence must be based in truth, recognising the impacts of:

- founding violence
- structural violence and cultural breakdown
- intergenerational trauma
- disempowerment
- alcohol and other drugs.

2.1 The impact of founding violence

A significant body of work recognises the ongoing escalation of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a continuation of the violent dispossession of land in early settlement and subsequent destruction of social and relationship structures. Recognition of this truth is a crucial platform for any efforts that seek to prevent and reduce violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Dominant accounts of Australian history do not accurately recognise the enduring impact that massacres, settlers, station managers, native police and government policies had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and cultures (Adams 2006). Segregation and assimilation policies, which forbade traditional rituals and customs, have had 'long term physical and psychological effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (Adams 2006:2).

The Healing Foundation research has also identified that trauma inflicted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has played out in intergenerational behaviours such as violence and substance abuse, which has created a cycle of dysfunction and eroded community harmony (Healing Foundation 2014a). Rather than these problems being the unfortunate and unintended outcome of well-intentioned and benevolent colonial rule, they were the direct result of settler policies intended to eliminate Indigenous people.

A review by Blagg (1999) sought to identify causal factors associated with family violence in Indigenous Australian communities. The study identified many historical factors including collective dispossession; loss of land and traditional culture; fragmentation of kinship systems and Aboriginal law; poverty and unemployment; structural racism; drug and alcohol misuse; and institutionalisation (Blagg 1999 in Blagg et al. 2015:3). Research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirms the link between colonisation and violence, finding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were removed from their family were almost twice as likely to be a victim of violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). This is evidenced in communities where missions and dormitories were established and where significant numbers of children who were removed now have alarming levels of violence, suicide and self-harm.

The different context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence is also acknowledged in emerging Australian policy documents. The report *Change the Story: A shared framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children* (Our Watch et al. 2015:3) recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences of violence 'must be considered in the context of broader colonial violence' and specifically recognises the intergenerational impacts of dispossession, forced child removal and disadvantage, resulting in intergenerational trauma. Despite this growing recognition, there is little evidence to date of Australian government strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in addressing the trauma associated with family violence.

2.2 Structural violence and cultural breakdown

The systematic and persistent attack on Indigenous social and kinship structures, cultural practices, language and spirituality is recognised as a key factor in the erosion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritual wellbeing, which is a significant contributor to the levels of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. The landmark *Violence in Indigenous Communities* report, funded by the Commonwealth, cites strategies to eradicate Indigenous law and culture such as disempowerment of Elders by mission managers, the banning of ceremony and language, and punishment by colonial powers, as being critical underlying factors associated with violence (Memmott et al. 2001:12).

In traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture men had strong roles as carers and protectors of women and children. Men who are strong in their culture today recognise that they are born of women through their mothers and cared for and nurtured by their mothers within a kinship system. When boys transition to men they do not lose their connection with their mothers, which is key for their ongoing relationship with women and of critical importance when men become fathers to daughters. As fathers to sons, men have an obligation to act and behave with honour and integrity in the presence of women, as their sons learn from observing them.

The destruction of the cultural systems and practices that established the norms for acceptable behaviour and empowered community leaders to respond to breaches of those norms has had a particularly harmful effect on community harmony. This point is emphasised in the work of Hovane who recognises how colonisation impacted traditional life, destroying 'guidelines for everyday living' (Hovane 2015). *Change the story* (Our Watch et al. 2015:3) also recognises how colonisation interrupted cultural practices that would 'mitigate' against interpersonal violence.

Structural violence, which refers to structural arrangements 'embedded in the political and economic organisation of our social world' that 'conspire to constrain individual agency', has been identified as continuing to marginalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (Farmer in Burtle 2013). Discrimination, including encounters with authority figures such as police and government service providers, was one of four commonly identified triggers for anger and violence among Indigenous men in custody in South Australia (Day et al. 2006:532).

Research suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are not accessing services that could support them in addressing risk factors due to inflexible and inaccessible service models that disregard, or are not inclusive of, men's perceptions of wellbeing, and/or are staffed by people that often hold negative stereotypes about men (Arney and Westby 2012:5). Mitchell and Chapman highlight the need to shift the focus from viewing men as 'hard to reach clients' to viewing low levels of service engagement by men as 'a symptom of problematic service delivery' (Mitchell and Chapman 2010 in Arney and Westby 2012:7).

Frequently Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who have perpetrated violence are 'given a choice between no intervention or conventional (mainstream) anger management programs' (Day et al. 2006:521). Research conducted with (predominately Indigenous) Western Australian service providers found that Indigenous offenders 'actively avoid attending mainstream programs' and that the concepts used by the programs 'seem alien and incomprehensible to Indigenous participants' (Day et al. 2006:522).

The Indigenous Men's Service, a program managed by the Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter, recognised the need to overcome barriers to engaging Indigenous men at risk of domestic violence offending. Through the program, an Indigenous male worker provides family violence counselling, mentoring and group work via outreach. Through the project, many men from

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the Darwin town communities were engaged in a range of camps, workshops and gatherings to discuss what was needed to restore the balance and harmony to their communities. Men identified their need for long-term support for healing and mentoring to improve their social and emotional wellbeing, identifying their priorities as:

- healing activities (including counselling, breathing and relaxation exercises, art and cultural activities, and self-esteem building)
- drug and alcohol education
- relationships and communication education
- parenting (including healthy families and budgeting)
- health and hygiene (including nutrition, living skills, cooking, cleaning, home budgeting)
- pre-employment program (including adult numeracy and literacy)
- mentoring and positive role modelling (Social Compass 2016).

Engagement of the men in a co-design process enabled the service to be designed in accordance with the clients' needs and in settings where clients feel safe. While primarily a family violence program, the outreach service model has enabled engagement with men who were not engaged with primary and other health services, resulting in a number of men being supported to safely access primary health care, and others entering alcohol and other drug rehabilitation programs.

2.3 Intergenerational trauma

The cumulative impact of dispossession, child removal, cultural breakdown, family breakdown, structural violence, substance misuse and exposure to violence has manifested in a cycle of intergenerational trauma.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long identified unresolved intergenerational trauma as a key driver of violence against Indigenous women and children. Landmark Australian Indigenous violence studies, including reports by Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Domestic Violence (2000), the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force (2003) and the New South Wales Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Task Force (2006) all identified intergenerational trauma as a key factor in family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. More recently, the *Safer Families, Safer Communities: Kimberley Family Violence Plan 2015–2020* emphasises the importance of recognising the relationship between colonisation, dispossession and child removal, and chronic levels of trauma, violence, disadvantage and substance misuse (NACCHO 2006 in Government of Western Australia 2015). *Change the Story: A shared framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children* (2015) also recognises the need to see

violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the context of the intergenerational trauma stemming from colonial violence, dispossession, forced child removal and interruption to cultural practices.

In recent years, Australian and international criminal justice research has identified the prevalence of diagnosed and undiagnosed trauma among perpetrators of violence in the criminal justice system. Baldry et al. (2015:17) emphasises that 'the trauma resulting from ongoing colonisation must be understood and addressed' if we are going to impact the high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A study of violence undertaken by Atkinson (2002) with Aboriginal people in Queensland found anger and violence resulted from trauma stemming from the impact of colonisation (Atkinson 2002 in Day et al. 2006). Qualitative research exploring anger among Indigenous people in prison in South Australia, most of whom were incarcerated for violence offences, found they had experienced trauma, most commonly involving 'extremely violent acts, usually occurring within the family or close community' (Day et al. 2006:526). Men in the study viewed anger as 'synonymous with violent experience' and viewed violence as 'an inevitable consequence of anger arousal' (Day et al. 2006: 526). The authors suggest that the participants' views highlight the need for intervention that 'helps clients distinguish between awareness and expression'. The prevalence of childhood trauma among participants also necessitates 'interventions that account for anger experience that is embedded in early trauma' (Day et al. 2006:526).

Adams (2006) reported the trauma experienced by many Aboriginal males is associated with their experience of being survivors of sexual assault within the community and in institutions, highlighting that Aboriginal males were reluctant to report this or seek help.

There is clear evidence of the association between experiences of and exposure to violence and trauma in children (Weeks and Widom 1998, Johnson et al. 2006, Sarchiapone et al. 2008 in Miller and Najavits 2012). Research in recent years makes the relationship between experiences of trauma and the increased risk of perpetration of violence increasingly clear (Day et al. 2006; Miller and Najavits 2012; Ogloff et al. 2012). Trauma interferes with neurobiological development and reduces an individual's capacity to integrate sensory, emotional and cognitive information, causing unfocused responses to stress, which is in turn associated with significantly increased engagement with correctional and mental health services (van der Kolk 2005). There is evidence that if this trauma is passed on, it is associated with higher levels of family violence and incarceration and low levels of social and emotional wellbeing (SNAICC 2015).

2.4 Disempowerment

For some time the literature has recognised the relationship between the decline in the cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and the escalation of violence. In the paper 'Violence in Aboriginal Australia: Colonisation and Gender', Atkinson (1990:9) explains how, prior to colonisation, both men and women had a role in providing food 'separately and in different ways' and both were responsible for teaching children 'the all abiding LAW'. The author observes though that after colonisation 'men in their dispossession struggled to hold their positions as husbands, fathers, sons, teachers and elder statesmen of authority and status' (Atkinson 1990:17).

In a paper published that same year Reser explained family violence as a consequence of historical brutality, which resulted in 'confusion about one's role and cultural identity' (Reser 1990 in Memmott et al. 2001:13). Adams also observed that Aboriginal men were left powerless by past policies, with forced movement from traditional lands and forced child removal resulting in men having to adopt a lifestyle 'completely alien' to their own (Adams 2006:2). The author cites Dr Mick Dodson who suggests that the breakdown of men's traditional roles has left many Indigenous men 'demoralised and confused about their roles as fathers, grandfathers, brothers, sons and grandsons' (Dodson 2002 in Adams 2006:5).

The landmark Queensland *Violence in Indigenous Communities* report identified Indigenous men as 'dispossessed of their own roles as economic providers and ritual leaders' (Memmott et al. 2001: 29). A study involving Indigenous (predominantly violent) offenders incarcerated in South Australia found that 'profound powerlessness was pervasive' throughout the men's stories, and experienced on both a personal and cultural level. At a personal level, the powerlessness resulted from early experiences of trauma, while at a cultural level the stories spoke of dislocation and discrimination, including stories of being forcibly taken into welfare (Day et al. 2006:527).

The effects of sustained marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men can be seen in high rates of unemployment, welfare dependency, poor educational outcomes, poor health and wellbeing, overcrowded housing, social disconnection and substance misuse. These are the same factors identified across the literature as associated with violence and other offending among Indigenous men (Hunter 2001; Weatherburn et al. 2008; Wundersitz 2010; Brown 2005 in Bulman and Hayes 2011).

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's healing programs seek to support men to strengthen their identity and status within family and community, build their relationship and parenting skills, and offer pathways to employment so they can provide for their families. The Rekindling the Spirit program, a family-based healing program that evolved out of an Aboriginal men's anti-violence project in Lismore New South Wales, provides a men's healing program that balances individual counselling and case management with men's group sessions. The program identifies seven key goals for their men's program including:

- standing up as an Aboriginal man with pride: increase awareness of, connection to and respect for the best of traditional male Aboriginal culture

- recreating family: explore deeply held negative beliefs that … limit responsible participation in healthy family life

- learn new skills: build practical skills to ensure more confidence and success

- contributing to Aboriginal community life: become a valued member of a supportive networked community … so that each man can rekindle life as a responsible Aboriginal parent or family member, partner and community person (Rekindling the Spirit 2007:25).

2.5 Alcohol and other drugs

Aside from cultural and family breakdown, alcohol and drug use are the most significant factors associated with family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The prevalence of alcohol as a factor in family violence is evidenced in the literature, with alcohol cited as a contributing factor in four out of five domestic homicides involving Indigenous people (Mouzos 2001 in Blagg et al. 2015). A study by Wundersitz that analysed empirical evidence to identify individual risk factors associated with Indigenous violence concluded that alcohol misuse was 'one, if not the, primary risk factor for violence in Indigenous communities' (Wundersitz 2010:x).

Restrictions on access to strong alcohol were seen as a key 'circuit-breaker' in a strategy designed to reduce the incidence of family violence in Fitzroy Crossing. Research found that the approaches driven by the Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre reduced the severity of family violence incidents as well as alcohol-related accident and emergency hospital admissions (Kinnane et al. 2009 in Blagg et al. 2015). It is important to note the perspective of June Oscar, former CEO of Marninwarntikura, that alcohol restrictions were 'never intended to be a panacea for the enormous social disadvantages' which require 'a long term and permanent healing of the gaping wounds that arise from alcohol abuse and violence' (Oscar 2010:8).

Similarly, in the Healing Foundation's submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the Harmful Use of Alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, it was noted that the abuse of alcohol 'does not only affect individuals and their families . . . the interconnected nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities means that whole of community approaches are required to make lasting change' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014a:5).

Aboriginal men who participated in research exploring anger reported being aware of the role of alcohol and other drugs in their offending, 'particularly in family violence' (Day et al. 2006:532). However, far from being a cause of violence, self-medication with alcohol and other drug use is another symptom of trauma, grief and loss. A study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in the United States cites epidemiological studies that found early life trauma is common among people who are alcohol dependent, suggesting that psychological, developmental and neurobiological effects of trauma can lead to increased vulnerability to alcohol and other substance use problems (Kezelman et al. 2015).

So far we have established that there are distinct factors which shape violence against women and girls in Indigenous contexts, which any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention effort must address. We turn now to the further insights that should guide the development of policies on violence prevention.

3. Different perspectives on the policy framework for violence prevention

As noted, there are many factors such as gender, age, substance misuse, unemployment, and experiences of abuse and neglect that are common risk factors for violence conducted by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous males (Wundersitz 2010). Aside from identifying these common risk factors, knowledge circle members identified some key points of difference in the assumptions underpinning policies that support violence prevention strategies, which may explain the apparent failure of mainstream prevention programs to improve safety for Aboriginal women and children. Critical voices maintain that the concept of domestic violence (violence by men on women in a context of power asymmetries), and the forms of legislation and practice founded upon it, are inadequate for an understanding of the nature of violence in Indigenous communities. Recently published research demonstrates that coercive control accounts for some, but not all, violence in Indigenous communities and families (Olsen and Lovett 2016). Knowledge circle members argue that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific cultural framework is required to understand, and effectively prevent and reduce, violence against Aboriginal women and children.

Key points of difference that need to be considered when developing policies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention include:

- an Indigenous theoretical framework to understand and respond to violence

- recognition that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not a cultural response

- recognition of the cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing

- understanding of how existing policy and funding frameworks create barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys' programs and program evaluations.

3.1 An Indigenous theoretical framework to understand and respond to violence

Both Australian and international violence prevention theory consistently identifies gender inequality as a key factor in the incidence of violence perpetrated by men against women. Inherent in gendered theories of violence is the assumption that men benefit from male privilege and the patriarchal control of women (Murdolo and Quiazon 2016). Knowledge circle members were critical of violence prevention frameworks underpinned by early western feminist theory, which are perceived as being informed by western gender assumptions that are not consistent with an Indigenous world view and favour a dominant western paradigm.

In particular, criticisms were aimed at policies that made assumptions about the factors associated with men's violence, emphasised punishment over therapeutic intervention and, until recently, often excluded men from efforts that sought

to change their behaviour. It was suggested that gender analysis through an Indigenous lens needed to be considered, consistent with more recent intersectional feminist theory that considers interconnection between race, culture and class.

There are of course different perspectives in the literature on gender equality in traditional Aboriginal culture, and different perspectives among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers about the relationship between gender inequality and violence. Atkinson (1990:8) asserts that the 'image created of traditional Aboriginal women as second class citizens under male rule' is not accurate. Behrendt (1993:28) observes that traditional culture was 'sexist in that it had traditional roles for men and women', but emphasises women were not in a subordinate relationship.

Liddle (2014) questions claims that gender roles were always equally valued given the diversity in cultural practice across clan groups. A report of the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey, which researched contemporary attitudes to violence against women, suggests 'the construction of gender roles and relations are … likely to influence community attitudes towards violence against women in Indigenous communities' (Webster et al. 2014). The report cites research suggesting how colonisation may have impacted gender roles through the 'imposition of gender roles and identities evident in societies of colonial powers' (Patil 2013 in Webster et al. 2014:50).

Wenitong (2006:466) emphasises the critical plight of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children but highlights how the debate about men's violence depicts Indigenous men as 'perpetrators of violence rather than being also victims' (Wenitong 2006:466). One knowledge circle member explained 'Women might be experiencing violence but they are very compassionate about what is happening to our men', suggesting women recognised the trauma men had suffered.

It is important to recognise though that views that differ from the dominant gendered theory about the causes of violence against women do not absolve men of accountability for violence and do not suggest that violence is in any way culturally sanctioned (Blagg 2008:141). Like many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and community members, knowledge circle participants challenge non-Indigenous views of the criminal justice responses as 'the best response to domestic and family violence' (Nancarrow 2006:100). Instead, they recognise that a reliance on criminal justice sanctions increasingly exposes women and children to violence and normalises incarceration, rather than harnessing the opportunity to work constructively with men who are marginalised and traumatised to prevent further violence (Blagg 2008:141).

This does not suggest men should be absolved of punishment for perpetrating violence but echoes Nancarrow's finding that Aboriginal women were 'searching for the right punishment, given the circumstances of their men and the devastating impacts of family violence on their women, children, families and communities'.

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3.2 Recognition that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not a cultural response

Knowledge circle members directly challenge assertions in conservative discourse and by some Aboriginal people that seek to explain violence against women as condoned or permitted in traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Olsen and Lovett (2016:14) highlight how studies that explore the notion of cultural violence have found it invalid when tested against the characteristics of Indigenous violence.

In traditional culture, both men and women had 'valued, specific and complementary roles' (Wenitong 2006:466). Arguably, claims by a small number of Aboriginal men that violence against women and children has a cultural basis is evidence of their own cultural disconnection and spiritual erosion. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health expert Dr Mick Adams states that violence against women and children is not consistent with Aboriginal culture and that any man who uses cultural practice to excuse child abuse or family violence is 'not practicing within the bounds of our traditional principles' (Adams 2006). Bulman and Hayes stress that 'men's business cannot be used as an excuse for covering up unacceptable activities that harm the vulnerable' (Bulman and Hayes 2011:21).

In contrast to the highly ritualised violence of traditional punishment, family violence is 'distinctively post-colonial' (Blagg 2008:138). Among traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities men are taught very old and sacred stories that define their roles, obligations and responsibilities, which they are obliged under cultural lore/law to follow in their relationships with others, including how to treat their partners with respect under the sanctity of marriage. Some stories relate the consequences or punishment for breaching these laws by harming women and children. Disconnection from these stories and displacement from traditional law, along with the lack of opportunity to reconnect to these values, has allowed new colonial versions of men's and women's relationships to become normalised in some communities.

Traditionally, fighting and violence were used as punishment in accordance with strict cultural practices and were governed by strict cultural rules, and overseen by cultural leaders. Memmott et al. describe the use of violence prior to colonisation as a form of 'institutionalised conflict resolution' (Memmott et al. 2001:23). Atkinson highlights that the public nature of traditional Aboriginal culture, where there was 'almost no private life', meant that punishment was 'kept within controllable limits' (Atkinson 1990:10). The author also cites the role of co-wives in defending and supporting one another when violence was used to resolve family disputes, and also highlights the role of women as peacemakers between men. Atkinson explains how, in traditional culture, 'old men never failed to defend an old wife from insult or injury' (Atkinson 1990:10).

The violence we see in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today does not derive from a traditional cultural use of violence for punishment. There is no

purpose or excuse under traditional law for the violence perpetrated in domestic relationships in today's world. This behaviour highlights unhealthy spirits and a real disconnect from culture, the breakdown of customary and contemporary law and order, and the presence of other harming factors such as intergenerational trauma, jealousy and mental health issues. These factors are exacerbated by modern complexities of overcrowded housing, poverty, alcohol and drug misuse, and gambling (Taylor and Putt 2007; Wundersitz 2010). While not related to traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the cycle of intergenerational trauma has, in some Indigenous communities, resulted in the normalisation of violence.

In some instances, there is a need to support men to understand this history and challenge any misunderstanding based on true cultural knowledge and leadership. There is also a need to challenge negative cultural stereotypes of Aboriginal men and boys and to promote truth about the role of men in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture.

3.3. Recognition of the cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing

While violence prevention programs typically draw from the public health model, Knowledge circle members questioned the adequacy and appropriateness of the current public health policy framework – which assumes characteristics about the broader population – as a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention. Most public policies in Australia were developed for white Australians and have implicit assumptions embedded in them that need to be challenged (Fredericks et al. 2011). This is a key factor in the perceived exclusion from mainstream health services that many Indigenous people experience, which suggests the need for recognition of specific cultural determinants of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and a specific cultural health strategy to reduce violence and improve health outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The National Review of Mental Health Programs and Services identified specific weaknesses in support for Indigenous Australians, citing the cultural incompetence of general services, the lack of a social and emotional wellbeing framework, and failure to provide referral pathways from primary health to specialist services (National Mental Health Commission 2014). A recent study of Indigenous people with mental illness and cognitive disability in New South Wales and Northern Territory prisons found that the lack of integration and appropriateness of services, and the absence of trauma-awareness, failed to meet the therapeutic needs of Indigenous people (Baldry et al. 2015). It also identified barriers to support due to policies of exclusion for people with mental illness, alcohol and other drug issues, and/or histories of incarceration or violence.

Knowledge circle members also identified limitations in how 'risk and protective factors' are contextualised in some mainstream early intervention programs, which can impact their relevance and effectiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Collective Indigenous culture can pose a challenge for Western prevention frameworks that often seek to target individuals at risk. Intervention strategies developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should adopt a collective, as opposed to individual, wellbeing focus.
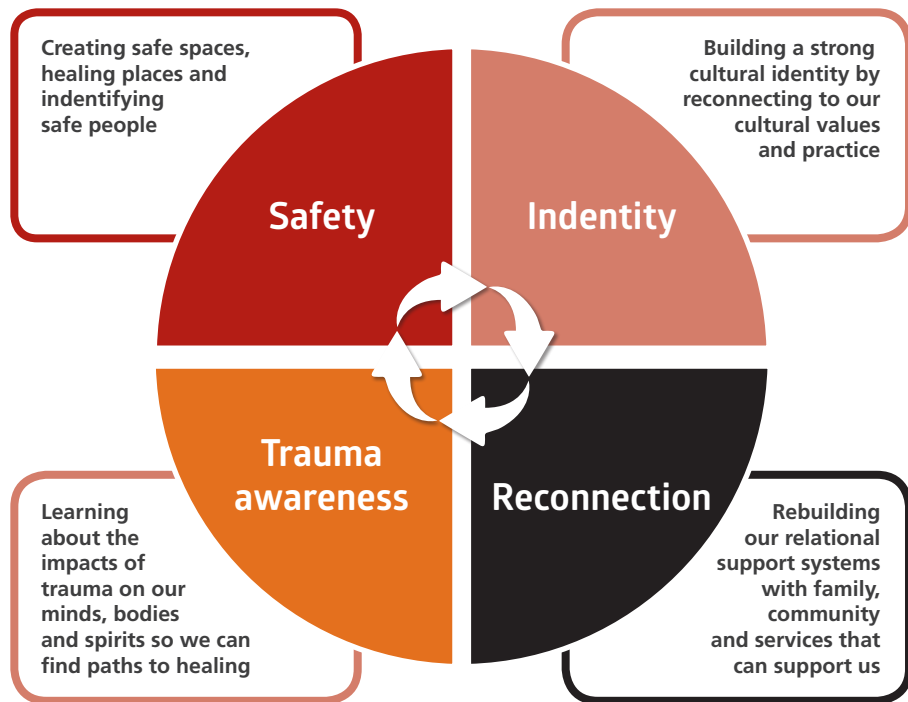
The 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey data estimated close to 80,000 first, second and third generation Stolen Generations members at that point in time (Australian Bureau of Statistics in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014b). The trauma stemming from child removal and cultural marginalisation is far reaching and affects all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The notion of an early intervention approach that can identify and target Indigenous children who are not in some way impacted by trauma, grief, disadvantage or discrimination is simply not appropriate for a collective culture that shares the pain of the legacy of genocide, child removal and dismantling of culture.

Furthermore, mainstream risk assessment models do not figure the risks posed to Indigenous men, women and children from the mainstream system, including its system of justice. Recent revelations regarding violence against Indigenous children in Don Dale Detention Centre (Northern Territory) and the death in police custody of Ms Dhu in the South Hedland police lock-up (Western Australia) demonstrates the degree to which contact with the mainstream system can be a risky business for Indigenous people.

Social and emotional wellbeing frameworks supported by public health policies seemingly assume the same baseline for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Further, programs for men are generally cognitive programs that do not consider the importance of cultural and spiritual wellbeing. Prevention programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have to address emotional and spiritual wellbeing rather than just cognitive function.

Analysis of Aboriginal men's wellbeing programs shows how men are engaged safely through fishing trips or camps, and that group and individual counselling sessions are supplemented by narrative talking circles (Bulman and Hayes 2011; Shepherdson 2014; Healing Foundation 2015). There is a significant focus on traditional hunting and bush tucker collection, traditional art, making of spears and artefacts, and teaching stories as well as traditional ceremonies such as smoking ceremonies, dance and song, which carry meaning and story. While these traditional practices are healing and empowering, they also facilitate engagement of men and boys into the program and reconnect them to their cultural identity through connection with Elders. These traditional practices are a form of mindfulness and along with therapy may assist men and boys in their recovery and growth.

The diagram below demonstrates how an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework for violence prevention informed by the cultural determinants of health could facilitate trauma recovery across four key pillars.

Creating safe spaces, healing places and indentifying safe people

Building a strong cultural identity by reconnecting to our cultural values and practice

Safety

Indentity

Trauma awareness

Reconnection

Learning about the impacts of trauma on our minds, bodies and spirits so we can find paths to healing

Rebuilding our relational support systems with family, community and services that can support us

3.4 How existing policy and funding frameworks create barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys' programs and program evaluations

Studies suggest that evidence on what works to reduce violence against Aboriginal women and children is inconclusive due to the limited number of programs funded, the short-term nature of funding and the lack of adequate evaluation (Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2016). Despite growing recognition across Australian government policy frameworks of the need for Indigenous-specific approaches to reducing and preventing violence, policy frameworks to support funding streams have not been adapted to support sustained, measurable, community-driven, culturally specific strategies.

While there are Indigenous streams within mainstream violence prevention funding programs, these are generally aligned to centrally pre-determined goals and performance indicators that prevent true self-determination and genuine co-design. This commonly results in funding being provided to non-Aboriginal non-government organisations, who in many instances are the same agencies that partnered with government in the removal of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The failure of these programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members is attributed to the client group being 'difficult to engage' rather than recognising the deficits of flawed, culturally irrelevant top-down service design. The comparatively small number (anecdotally) of effective community-driven programs that seek to engage men and boys commonly operate on small non-recurrent grants that do not fund or support meaningful performance measurement. In many instances the oral nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture means that program outcomes are not being documented in a way that Western researchers deem valid.

Further, the increased labelling of mainstream men's programs as perpetrator programs has been identified as another barrier to engagement by both Indigenous men and women. With the persistent problematisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is no surprise that perpetrator programs fail to engage Indigenous men. This does not suggest that men who commit violent offences should be absolved or treated leniently, but that there is a crucial need for programs that will engage men by recognising their past trauma. Knowledge circle members emphasised that culturally effective practice programs seek to support holistic family and community healing, rather than demonising men and branding them as 'perpetrators'. These programs seek to restore strong cultural values and morals that support men to live within a safe, respectful way within their families and communities.

4. Towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys

Consideration of the context in which violence occurs, the factors associated with violence against Aboriginal women and children, and key differences between western and Indigenous views on violence prevention supports the argument for an Indigenous-specific violence prevention framework. Despite chronic Indigenous offending and incarceration levels there is little by way of culturally specific offender programs 'largely due to a lack of recognition of Aboriginal knowledge bases as legitimate and valuable … and a lack of commensurate resource allocation aimed at improving these circumstances' (Hovane et al. 2014:509).

Knowledge circle members emphasised the importance of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework, with a cultural bedrock, that is owned by community, as opposed to a 'culturally appropriate' model which offers a supposedly culturalised adaptation of a western program model. There are at least five crucial elements for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework for prevention of violence:

- strong cultural governance and self-determination
- commitment to genuine co-design
- basis in local culture
- underpinned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and principles
- safe spaces for trauma-informed healing.

4.1 Strong cultural governance and self-determination

Strong and effective cultural governance is, among other things, about having respected and strong culturally based decision-making and governing processes. Indigenous cultural governance involves Indigenous people identifying collectively as a nation or people and exercising decision-making power and responsibility in the interest of Indigenous goals. Similarly, principles of self-determination empower communities to make decisions and choices about the factors that influence their daily lives.

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural governance allows for Indigenous communities to engage in 'the practical tasks of governing' with a focus on empowering Indigenous decision-making (Cornell 2015:2). Communities, services and initiatives that have strong cultural governance will generally measure success in terms of collective, rather than individual, achievement.

Cultural governance facilitates strong leadership and representation with integrity that gives voice and effect to community members through appropriate engagement channels – and processes that are inclusive, accessible, open and transparent – so that decisions are made in accordance with, for, and by the will

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Cultural governance facilitates strong leadership and representation with integrity that gives voice and effect to community members through appropriate engagement channels – and processes that are inclusive, accessible, open and transparent – so that decisions are made in accordance with, for, and by the will of the people. It involves honouring and respecting traditional cultural process, lore and practice, and charging the local leadership with responsibility to govern.

In traditional remote cultural (and to an extent non-traditional urban cultural) frameworks, there are complex kinship obligations and relationships that define and govern appropriate behaviour towards one another, including among partners, siblings, close and extended family and community members. There are many factors (outlined above) that may destabilise these relationships and individual coping capacity to deal with stressors. Respected cultural governance, where the voices of strong men and women are elevated and pleading for change, is essential to overcome the normalisation of violence as a response by men and boys caught in cycles of intergenerational trauma.

In some urban cultural environments traditional cultural knowledge may not be strong or strictly practiced, but local leadership networks may still provide strong cultural governance, ensuring representation from, and connection to, a cross-section of different groups in the Indigenous community to inform local decision-making. Strong cultural governance and self-determination allows communities to have effective and direct input into addressing issues like family and domestic violence, and to find locally relevant solutions while maintaining honour and respect for local custom and lore or laws. It allows vital and effective cultural components to be embedded into solutions alongside contemporary interventions and support.

The experience of the Our Men Our Healing project in the Northern Territory provided valuable lessons on the benefits of allowing men to determine their own healing priorities and pathways. The project allowed men to name and talk about highly sensitive issues through a culturally managed and properly considered process that facilitated the men taking ownership and providing their own solutions. This thorough, flexible, engagement process built trust and safety, and ensured ownership of responses to issues such as family violence, which was crucial after the Northern Territory 'emergency response intervention' when Indigenous men in the Northern Territory, especially in remote areas, were totally disempowered and felt they had been universally labelled as perpetrators. Through a cultural process men were given an opportunity to have a voice and be listened to, and they took responsibility for finding appropriate solutions to enable them to restore their natural roles as nurturers, providers, and protectors of their families (Healing Foundation 2015).

To address sensitive issues such as family and domestic violence, communities must be empowered to own the issues in their local community and to take a major stake in designing or developing the solutions, and both men and women must be at the forefront to lead and support this. Strong cultural governance, which incorporates fair inclusive process, is an inherent phenomena in functional and thriving Indigenous culture and society. When strong cultural governance is respected, honoured, consulted and followed, it enables successful community led and owned solutions, offering greater potential for local buy in or support, which increases the likelihood of positive outcomes and contributes to broader community transformation.

Cultural governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities empowers local communities to reinstate cultural practice, values and principles.

It allows decision-making that is respectful of family relationships, 'culturally relevant boundaries' and governance relationships that 'resonate with traditional jurisdictions, laws, customs, relationships and specific histories' (Hunt and Smith 2006:viii). Strategies that seek to prevent and reduce family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are more likely to succeed if they are informed and driven by local governance. The Australian Indigenous Community Governance Project found that strong, sustainable Indigenous governance 'correlated to socioeconomic and community development outcomes' (Hunt and Smith 2006: viii).

4.2 A commitment to co-design

Co-design of programs involves services and communities working together from the outset to develop services and programs that are genuinely informed by the clients.

By working directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women and children on every aspect of program design and evaluation, communities can ensure that programs are designed to be safe, accessible and culturally and locally relevant. This process ensures responses that are created by the community, informed by evidence, practical, and able to create real change in the local context.

The manner in which colonisation occurred, with different impacts in different regions and communities, requires localised responses to address the way trauma manifested in different communities. Recognition of truth in a local context is crucial to effective healing. While national priority outcomes underpinned by key principles can be agreed in partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, peak bodies and service providers, the means by which these outcomes are achieved needs to be tailored to the circumstance of individual communities and/or regions.

The critical elements of quality healing (see Section 6.1: Collective community healing), identified by the Healing Foundation through an analysis of Australian and international healing literature, highlight the importance of strategies that are developed to address issues in the local community, driven by local leadership, and based in understanding of the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma and grief. Genuine co-design processes recognise this and provide pathways to healing and recovery through recognition of truth at the local level.

Through co-design, community members are able to articulate their needs and expectations of agencies and advise on the better integration and use of available local services. Further, given the history of the government's relationship with Indigenous communities, the co-design process allows the opportunity to acknowledge the 'tensions in relationships and lack of trust that is the result of this history', which is essential if effective partnerships are to be established (Social Compass 2016:5). It also allows service delivery to be tailored to cultural

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boundaries, which often 'bear no relationship to government administrative or jurisdictional boundaries' (Social Compass 2016:5). Co-design requires a genuine willingness for government and non-Indigenous organisations to change and, to some extent, surrender control. It 'demands that public service staff shift from fixers who focus on problems to enablers who focus on abilities, enabling community ownership and a continued commitment to local needs, culture and knowledge systems' (Healing Foundation 2015). Co-design also allows communities the opportunity to identify their own goals, aspirations and indicators of success, which can inform a meaningful evaluation framework.

The evaluation of the Our Men Our Healing program in Wurrumiyanga – which reported a significant reduction in domestic violence offending and positive transformation of participants – found the genuine engagement of the men in the co-design process to be a key element in the program's success (Healing Foundation 2015).

4.3 Based in local culture

The significant association between violence and the destruction of social and cultural practice reinforces the importance of reconnecting men and boys with culture in any strategy to prevent violence. 'Culture is the critical lens through which family violence must be understood in order to improve outcomes, and should not be treated merely as another variable to be taken into account' (Gonzales in Hovane 2015).

Adams identified the importance of returning to country to assist men to strengthen their wellbeing and 'capture the culture they had lost' (Adams 2006:9), emphasising the link between land, tradition and culture, and positive social, emotional, physical and mental health for Indigenous men. Country-centric programs allow men to reintroduce lore and culture, including reconnecting to gender-specific obligations such as respect for women (Adams 2006:9). Day et al. (2006:528) identified the need to channel anger into positive action rather than violence, suggesting that engagement in culturally based and arts-based activities can offer a means of reframing experience and expressing affect.

Strengthening cultural identity is an important stage in the process of healing from trauma. Supporting people to understand the truth of their own story and identity – and how trauma has impacted them and their families in the context of country and community – is a necessary step towards healing and moving forward to a better life. Strengthening ties to culture, country and kinship strengthens individual and family wellbeing.

Men in the Mibbinbah men's health project identified camps as a culturally friendly and safe environment where men could engage in learning about health. Through the camps men were reintroduced to cultural activities such as storytelling, spear-making, stone-knapping; to boomerang and didgeridoo; and

visited cultural sites (Bulman and Hayes 2012). Men on the camps also developed their own agreement, which outlined rules and boundaries to ensure safety and respect for everyone. These processes empower men to reconnect with cultural protocols around respect for others and to explore their role as strong, proud leaders and protectors.

The aforementioned men's healing project in Wurrumiyanga in the Northern Territory, which saw men reintroduce ceremony which had not been performed for decades, was credited with a decrease in family violence and with women reporting enhanced perceptions of safety (Healing Foundation 2015). While this project also provided therapeutic support and case management, the program evaluation found that 'connection to country, culture and identity increase empowerment and confidence to: take the cultural lead with younger men, provide increased safety for families and take up employment' (Healing Foundation 2015:3).

Case study: Northern Territory – Our Men, Our Healing

Through Our Men, Our Healing, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation supported the development and implementation of three pilot Aboriginal men's healing projects in the Northern Territory with funding from the Northern Territory Department of Children and Families. The projects, which were co-designed with men in each community, aimed to support men to re-establish themselves as:

- nurturers who are nurturing and growing their children strong and healthy

- teachers who are teaching and taking care of cultural knowledge

- protectors who are protecting and caring for their families and keeping their communities safe (Healing Foundation 2015).

Close to 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys participated consistently in the healing projects across all three sites, with almost 40 per cent of participants under 18 years of age. Through the program, older and younger men access group and individual counselling, health services, and employment pathways, and participate in a range of traditional cultural activities and ceremonies, some of which had not been performed for decades.

At Wurrumiyanga, where the program started first, men in the program have learned about trauma and ways to deal with grief and loss. A local Aboriginal man has been employed as the cultural group facilitator for the program. Elders have shared cultural knowledge through the teaching of songs and songlines, language, traditional dance and storytelling. The men have made spears for ceremony and participated in hunting and fishing trips, often bringing sons and younger men along to share knowledge and culture. The men have engaged with primary and mental health services through the program and some men have been supported to enter alcohol and other drug rehabilitation.

 As the Wurrumiyanga men's confidence and capacity has grown they have partnered and participated in other local violence prevention initiatives such as supporting, marching and providing food for women at events on White Ribbon Day, and partnering with the No More family violence prevention initiative. Men from the program supported alcohol and other drug education at Wurrumiyanga High School.

The Our Men, Our Healing program evaluation was launched at Charles Darwin University on White Ribbon Day. This independent evaluation found reduced rates of family and other forms of violence, suicide and self-harm after the program's implementation. Women reported feeling safer and more supported by men, and the men reported improved health, emotional wellbeing and leadership. In Wurrumiyanga, there was a reported 50 per cent reduction in the number of men registered with the Northern Territory Department of Correctional Services and a 'significant' reduction in rates of recidivism over the duration of the program (Healing Foundation 2015).

The evaluation cited the co-design of the program with men, and the establishment of a safe place for healing, as critical to the program's success. It found connection to country, culture and identity empowered the men to take the cultural lead with younger men. Men in the program reported realising how important culture is to supporting healing and overcoming substance use (Healing Foundation 2015).

4.4 Underpinned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and principles

Consistent with the need for any violence reduction strategy to be based in culture is the need for programs to be underpinned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and values:

- respect: This not only includes respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and governance but principles of respect that guide conversations and ensure safety for everyone at a local level.

- accountability and confidence: Men must be accountable for their behaviour; government and other service providers must be accountable to community and community leaders; and members must demonstrate accountability to each other. We must work with communities to restore their confidence in governance.

- safety: Everyone – including women, children, Elders and men – has the right to feel safe and live in peaceful household and community environments. Everyone must be afforded protection through traditional cultural lore/law and under mainstream Australian law. Everyone must contribute to building safe communities for children.

- respect for identity and kinship: Recognition and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and kinship structures must inform any Indigenous programs that seek to prevent and reduce violence.

- support for cultural governance: Policy makers must respect and empower cultural governance for programs, informed by the voices of family and community members, not just service providers.

4.5 Creating safe spaces for trauma-informed healing

Safety for everyone is a key concern when designing strategies to prevent violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

For men and boys' programs it is crucial that men identify where they feel safe so that they will engage. This is particularly important given the many barriers to health support identified for Indigenous men. Knowledge circle members suggested that safe spaces may simply be a fishing trip, a barbecue or an outdoor activity where men feel comfortable to open up and talk to other Indigenous men. Many examples were shared where men who would not, or could not, access mainstream health services willingly engaged with Aboriginal and other culturally competent workers who delivered outreach services in a safe environment, often involving social networking, food, fishing and cultural activities. Access to healing and support through a men's group, men's program or healing

program overcomes the stigma for men who are habitually seen as problems and referred to with deficit labels such as mental health, offender, child protection (Shepherdson 2014).

The Mibbinbah research project, implemented by Jack Bulman and Rick Hayes with a research grant from the (former) Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (now incorporated into the Lowitja Institute), was designed to understand what constituted a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. The project, which was informed by earlier work by Dr Mick Adams, Dr Mark Wenitong and Frank Spry, recognised that a safe place is any place where men feel they belong, feel empowered and feel safe to yarn (Bulman and Hayes 2011). This research identified the importance of safe places being facilitated to 'diminish the presence and effect of lateral violence and to enhance the habits of respect . . . ', suggesting that true leaders 'make honouring codes of conduct and committing to collaboration second nature' (Bulman and Hayes 2011:21). A genuinely safe place can 'ensure that transfer of knowledge can take place because we are confident in ourselves and able to entrust ourselves appropriately to others' and can open 'personal and structural pathways to physical, emotional, social and spiritual health' (Bulman and Hayes 2011:21). A safe place is particularly crucial for Elders and older men to pass down cultural knowledge to younger men and boys, including education about cultural responsibilities and respect for women.

A common element in many programs that create safety for men is leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who have made considerable progress on their own healing journey. Research of men with significant levels of trauma in the Rekindling the Spirit men's group found that the men who had negative experiences of service providers, willingly engaged with counselling, group therapy and rehabilitation. One program participant, referring to his Rekindling counsellor, explained 'he's talking about the same thing I've gone through, rather than rock up with someone who doesn't know the world you come from' (Shepherdson 2014).

While much of the literature (referenced above) cites the importance of country to men's healing, Bulman highlights the voice of urban Aboriginal men who felt comfortable meeting in urban settings, wanting their healing to be 'more closely related to their everyday lives in the city'. This reiterates the importance of local ownership of every aspect of program design (Bulman and Hayes 2012:24).

Given the levels of trauma among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it is also important that safety planning is conducted for any gathering where discussion could trigger trauma among participants. Safety plans should include establishing rules of respect, having a time out space, identifying people with counselling skills to support participants, and follow-up to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants after any yarn that explores trauma-awareness.

Case study: Dardi Munwurro

Dardi Munwurro is a Victorian program that supports healing for Aboriginal families and communities through the Strong Spirit behaviour change program for Aboriginal men and the Journey Program for younger Aboriginal men and boys. Dardi Munwurro programs are delivered by two counsellors, Alan Thorpe and John Byrne. The program has been supported by a range of partners including the Department of Human Services, Department of Justice, Corrections Victoria and Relationships Australia.

Strong Spirit supports men in healing the trauma stemming from past events – including grief, loss and abuse – through an approach that balances cognitive therapy with cultural healing. A man's primary healing needs are identified through intake assessment, with some men being supported through individual therapy to address presenting needs (such as alcohol and other drug issues) to stabilise them before transitioning into the men's group program. Strong Spirit supports healing for men at different locations across Victoria, offering 12 fortnightly, structured men's group sessions supplemented by a three-day intensive work camp that connects men back to country. The Dardi Munwurro counsellors link with local managers in health services and family violence services to sustain appropriate support for men in the program. The Strong Spirit program has also been adapted to an eight-day intensive program delivered to men in Victorian correctional facilities.

The Journeys Program for younger men was developed after evaluation of the correctional program found that participants felt they would not have ended up in custody if they had access to the program earlier in life. The Journeys Program provides mentoring and cultural connection for younger Aboriginal men. With a similar model to the Strong Spirit program, the Journeys Program offers fortnightly groups and camps with an emphasis on connecting back to culture, developing life skills and self-esteem, and dealing with shame. The voluntary program is promoted locally to encourage schools and families, and sometimes courts, to refer young people to the program, although the program's primary focus is prevention.

Dardi Munwurro is now expanding to offer a residential court-referred program for Aboriginal men who have committed family violence. With financial support from the Collingwood AFL club, a nine-bed facility has been purchased that will provide a three to four month residential behaviour change program, supported by two case- workers and community Elders.

A Dardi Munwurro participant's testimonial explains:

'This has helped me start my healing and gave me a strong focus on what it means for me to become a strong leader in my community. This opportunity has also given me the tools to become a stronger father, friend, family and community member.' (Dardi Munwurro accessed 2017).

5. Demonstrating good practice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention

The knowledge circle identified the following good practice approaches to violence prevention:

• holistic collective healing

• men's leadership of healing for men and boys

• support through access to trauma-informed services

• adequate resourcing.

5.1 Collective community healing

The collective nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, along with the widespread impact of child removal and other policies, requires a holistic, collective healing 'on a massive scale' (Memmott et al. 2001:17). Blagg observes that, unlike a domestic violence framework that offers criminal justice pathways, an Indigenous family violence framework 'leans towards pathways to family healing, rather than new routes into the criminal justice system' (Blagg 2008:141).

Yet despite calls for healing across Indigenous family violence research (Thompson 1999 in Blagg 2008; Robertson 2000; Adams 2006; Day et al. 2006; Blagg 2008) in lieu of 'largely ineffective' correctional responses (Nancarrow 2006 in Blagg 2008:137), healing appears to still be overlooked in Australian family violence prevention policy frameworks. This may indicate that healing as a concept is not always understood and in some areas of public office there may still be 'confusion over its appropriateness as a public policy response' (Phillips 2007:141).

Healing programs encompass a range of practices, both traditional and Western, addressing a range of issues or problems being experienced by individuals, families, and/or whole communities, with a core focus on spirituality and culture. They span the areas of mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, family violence, child protection, addictive behaviours (alcohol, drugs, gambling etc.), sexual abuse, youth development, justice and corrections.

A critical element of healing programs is an emphasis on restoring, reaffirming and renewing a sense of pride in cultural identity, connection to country, and participation in and contribution to community. Collective healing reinstates and reconnects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to their core cultural value systems, where obligations and reciprocity were central to community survival. These values are essential to preventing abuse and violence, both broader community violence as well as family violence. Without enabling the reclaiming and reconnection to these value systems, the predominant responses to the significant issues facing contemporary Indigenous communities will continue to be justice, child protection and welfare.

Collective healing moves away from the individual 'treatment' of individuals to a model where 'individuals develop their own skills and capacities to empower

healing in themselves and their families and communities' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014b:14). It is important that healing be supported for men and boys as well as women and girls if we are to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Quality healing balances Indigenous and western concepts, may provide for individual support within a broader collective approach, and supports cultural and spiritual renewal concurrently with psychological and therapeutic support.

Men's programs often adopt healing approaches to promote safe, respectful family relationships. The Mibbinbah men's program is focused on spirit healing, which promotes 'a shared vision of the future that creates hope in the hearts of individuals, groups and communities' (Bulman and Hayes 2011:20).

Healing is always underpinned by a strong cultural and spiritual base, recognising that 'the pathway to healing is through cultural activity and connectedness to country and land' (Higgins et al. 2013). Healing supports cultural reconnection through the recovery of language and traditions (Kirmayer et al. 2003 in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014c), art, dance, stories, traditional food and medicines.

International and local research suggests that healing programs should be specific to local regions and groups, and are best delivered on country by people from the same cultural group as participants (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014d; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014b). Localisation of healing can ensure a trauma-informed approach delivered by skilled workers who understand the history and collective experiences of local Aboriginal people, 'both traumatic and positive' (Caruana in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014d:18).

A member of the knowledge circle explained, 'It's hard to change behaviour if you haven't healed. When we talk about healing it's holistic, it's about the children and women too, how we heal the whole family . . . it's psychological and therapeutic, it fits'. Adams (2006) also calls for holistic healing to address social, spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing (Adams 2006).

Trauma impacts how people think, feel and view the world. Its impact on neurobiological development affects how people with trauma communicate, relate to, and interact with other people, as neurobiological development and social interaction are 'inextricably intertwined' (van der Kolk 2005:4). Healing is necessary to help restore balance to individuals, families and communities affected by trauma.

The Healing Foundation's literature review identified that healing programs have had positive impacts on health, knowledge and skills acquisition by community members, as well as building individual, family and community capacity. Analysis of the literature from Australian and international healing practice identified eight critical elements to inform the development and evaluation of Australian healing initiatives.

Quality healing programs:

- are developed to address issues In the local community
- are driven by local leadership
- have an evidence and theory base
- combine western methodologies and Indigenous healing
- understand the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma and grief
- build individual, family and community capacity
- are pro-active rather than reactive
- incorporate strong evaluation frameworks (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014c).

Case study: *Safer Families, Safer Communities: Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan 2015–2020*

The *Safer Families, Safer Communities: Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan 2015–2020* is one example of a government-funded violence prevention initiative that recognises the impact of trauma on communities and is consistent with the elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework for prevention. The plan presents a whole-of-community approach to violence prevention.

It includes a Recognition Statement that identifies the impacts of dispossession, interruption of culture, and intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal people, as well as their strength and resilience. It identifies an approach to family violence prevention that is 'grounded in Aboriginal law and culture' and recognises that family violence has 'no basis' in either Aboriginal law or culture but that any strategy to prevent and reduce violence must be based in culture (Hovane 2015 & Hovane and Cox 2011 in Government of Western Australia 2015). The plan's commitment to working alongside 'Law People, Elders and community leaders' suggests recognition of the importance of commitment to cultural co-design.

The Kimberley plan recognises the need for healing from the impacts of trauma stemming from past government policies and that healing is 'integral' to the reduction of family violence. Importantly, it recognises that healing can take many forms, has a strong cultural and spiritual basis, and is not an outcome but an ongoing process that 'enables individuals, families and communities to gain control over the direction of their lives and reach their full potential' (Healing Foundation in Government of Western Australia 2015:11).

The *Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan* has four key action areas that support collective healing underpinned by a strong cultural basis:

1. sharing responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children, individuals and families

2. developing culture and community-based responses to family violence

3. building strong and safe communities

4. developing services and a service system that is integrated, culturally appropriate, client centred, accessible and effective (Government of Western Australia 2015:12).

The plan will be supported by annual work plans, which appear to be structured flexibly to allow genuine input and partnerships with key local community Elders, members, Law bosses and service providers. The first action plan includes partnering with a number of Aboriginal service providers across the Kimberley to develop place-specific strategies to reduce family violence. Ideally this will allow community to identify their own healing priorities and indicators of success.

5.2 Empowering men to take a leadership role in healing for men and boys

Members of the knowledge circle highlighted a key difference in Indigenous and Western approaches to men's violence prevention, referencing the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men who advocate that men be supported to lead their own healing. This contrasts with the practice promoted for mainstream non-Indigenous men's violence prevention work, which sometimes advocates that men be engaged through the leadership of women. Even Australian research exploring immigrant and refugee men's violence prevention suggests this is necessary as the leadership of men in the field of violence against women 'has tended to relegate women to a subordinate role' (Murdolo and Quiazon 2016:23).

Much Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's healing occurs within the context of men's groups. There is now a significant network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's groups and programs around the country, allowing men to 'develop skills and use their own experience to take control of their responsibilities and behaviours' (Adams 2006:8).

Citing Frank Spry, Bulman and Hayes emphasise that empowering Aboriginal men to define and take control of issues that affect them is crucial to improving their quality of life, health and spiritual wellbeing (Spry 1999 in Bulman and Hayes 2011:19). Similarly, Adams highlights that empowering men to reclaim their role as fathers, uncles and grandfathers is crucial to ensuring safety for women and children (Adams 2006). This does not mean that women are excluded from providing input on Indigenous men's violence prevention work, with recognition that it is important that Aboriginal families and communities collectively 'determine their own health and wellbeing in accordance with local cultural traditions' (Adams 2006:6).

Typically, women will lead their own healing for women and girls while men lead healing for men and boys. Far from the suggestions of 'collusion' occurring when male perpetrators work collectively, Franks emphasises the importance of men being part of the domestic violence solution, suggesting 'part of the healing process must involve each man acknowledging his actions, and the effects they have within the family and community' (Franks in Adams 2006:5). Women have a central role in the evaluation of the effectiveness of this work and their views should be continuously sought and heard to ensure that program design meets community-change expectations. This will require a redirection of resources to allow accessible men's services with greater involvement of male health workers delivering holistic strategies to improve outcomes in education, employment, self-esteem and justice (Adams 2006).

While men and women traditionally, and still, gather separately for men's and women's business, women do have a voice in strategies that seek to reduce men's violence within broader wellbeing outcomes. In the Torres Strait, a men's healing

initiative evolved out of Iling Sidaun, a healing gathering that was held over three days in 2014. Through this gathering the community collectively identified their healing priorities: community safety, children's safety, spiritual health, self-determination, and leadership and governance. Women and men identified concerns about lateral violence and family violence, voicing concerns about the isolation of women dealing with these issues.

The community identified a lack of community led responses, the absence of family healing services, the lack of healing for perpetrators of violence, and frustration with a reliance on the justice response to violence (Healing Foundation undated). Among other strategies, a men's healing strategy was developed to enable men to reclaim their cultural authority. Through the Ker Kar Bau men's project, men are now engaging with younger men and boys to teach them culture and responsibility. Concurrently, a Women's Leadership Healing Strategy was developed, recognising that increasing the number of women in positions of authority would empower them to navigate issues that adversely affect their spirit, including family violence.

While men are engaged in healing through the creation of safe places by positive male leadership, they are also supported on pathways to access counselling, rehabilitation, primary health services and other supports. Many of the men's healing programs studied in this paper are led by qualified Aboriginal counsellors. In other instances, the therapeutic elements of a healing program are provided by trauma-informed Western therapeutic service providers.

The common element is trauma-informed practice, which supports individuals and communities to understand the relationship between problem behaviours and history and life experience, yet emphasises that 'each person must take responsibility for their own healing journey' (McKendrick et al. 2014:40). This is often supplemented by engagement of men and other community members in cultural activities such as collecting and preparing bush tucker; performing ceremonies, song, dance and art; as well as cultural knowledge sharing from Elders, which often includes guidance on parenting and respectful relationships.

The work of men with younger men and boys is also critical, particularly for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who may not have an Indigenous father or positive father-figure role model in their life. The large numbers of young men who have experienced family breakdown, or the loss of a father through incarceration or death, need positive role models among strong Indigenous men. Where safe places are established, younger men can connect with older men and Elders who can share knowledge with them (Bulman and Hayes 2011:13). This can reinstate the teaching of lessons that once happened when boys became men through traditional ceremony.

Aside from being involved in community healing discussions that inform healing programs, it is imperative that women be involved in the evaluation of any initiative that seeks to improve safety for women and children.

Case study: Quop Maaman – The Aboriginal Fathering Project

Quop Maaman: The Aboriginal Fathering Project, evolved from the Fathering Project, a not-for-profit initiative that seeks to engage fathers more effectively in the lives of their children. Professor Len Collard, a Noongar Elder from University of Western Australia, developed the project in collaboration with Dr Mick Adams, Dr Dave Palmer and Dr John McMullan in consultation with a group of strong Noongar men. The project, developed by Noongar men for Noongar men, involved a series of workshop resources themed around Aboriginal fathering, within a Noongar cultural framework. The importance of culture, country and language – and of reinstating safe spaces for older men to share knowledge with younger men – is evident in the key workshop themes identified by strong Noongar fathers:

- *Quop boodjar, quop maaman*: Healthy country is central for healthy men.

- *Moort karnyiny gnulla quop*: Family and respectful values keep us good.

- *Boola Nyungar wangkiny yarn*: Noongar language and talking is critical.

- *Ni ngarlang katatjiny wangkiny boondo*: Listening to and practicing culture and language is central.

- *Ngulla deman wer dembart boorda baranginy koorlangka ngulla koorlangka quop karnya minniny wangkiny katatjiny boorda*: Old people carry young people respectfully through knowledge (informing them by and by).

- *Buranginy katatjiny moordtij boordier maaman kura, yeye*: Learn from the successful lessons of strong male leaders from yesterday and today (Collard et al. 2016:6).

While violence prevention is not stated as an explicit goal among the program themes, there is a strong emphasis on family, culture and respectful values. The program recognises the devastating impacts of child removal, banning of language and cultural ceremony, and other ways that government interfered with the role of men as fathers, uncles, grandfathers and brothers. The themes of the program reflect the desired goal of supporting men to reclaim their role as respectful leaders, protectors and providers.

An evaluation was conducted of a trial of the program delivered over six two-hour sessions, in which participants were asked to rate program

elements on a scale of zero to five. Eight out of ten men and young people rated the session five out of five and the remaining two participants rated the session four out of five. A number of participants identified the 'connecting families' exercises as highlights and participants reported having learned from these, while 'language and culture' sessions were also well received. Men involved with the program emphasised the importance of programs for Noongar men and their children (*maaman* and their *koorlangka*) being conducted on country (Collard et al. 2016:14). Participants, however, did suggest there would be value in delivering the program in correctional facilities.

5.3 Trauma-informed services

The significant levels of trauma among Indigenous people indicate the importance of a trauma-informed approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community violence prevention strategies. Speaking at the inaugural Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited domestic and family violence conference, June Oscar of the Marninwarntikura Women's Fitzroy Resource Centre argued 'We cannot discuss violence without discussing trauma. We need healing-informed and trauma-informed organisations … Current ways of funding do not allow for preventative healing work that draws on our cultural strengths'.

Trauma-informed services among men are accessible, and understand and take into account their primary and mental health care support needs (Adams 2006). While a diverse range of services and programs can be trauma-informed, Atkinson suggests common elements of a trauma-informed service model include understanding trauma and its impacts, creating safe places, employing culturally competent staff, actively involving trauma survivors in their healing, sharing power and governance through community co-design, providing integrated holistic care, and supporting safe relationship building to promote healing (Atkinson 2013).

Trauma impacts men and women in different ways with American studies finding that females are more likely to internalise trauma, with symptoms including self-harm, eating disorders, addiction and avoidance; while men externalise trauma through violence, substance abuse, crime and hyper-arousal (Miller and Najavits 2012). Trauma-informed services are alert to the symptoms of trauma, which can prevent the risk of misdiagnosis. Services must also be mindful that the presence of trauma can undermine the potential impacts of therapeutic interventions (Miller and Najavits 2012). Further, members of the knowledge circle emphasised the importance of programs balancing cognitive behaviour change with spiritual and cultural wellbeing.

Case study: Rekindling the Spirit

Rekindling the Spirit is a trauma-informed Aboriginal family counselling program in Lismore that supports clients to deal with violent behaviour and substance issues, and strengthen relationships with partners and children. The program was developed by Greg Telford, a Minjungbal man from the far north coast of New South Wales, who became a qualified counsellor after turning around a life of trauma, substance misuse and violence many years ago.

Rekindling the Spirit offers a range of programs including men's and women's group therapy, individual counselling and a support group for Stolen Generations. It also provides a supported pathway to mainstream service providers, including primary and mental health services as well as training and employment providers. Rekindling the Spirit's primary goal is to reduce domestic and family violence, and child abuse, and promote family and community healing and wellbeing. The organisation's vision is 'a world where Aboriginal communities are free from social injustice, substance misuse, family violence and child abuse' (Rekindling the Spirit 2017).

Rekindling the Spirit's separate group programs for men and women offer a structured three-and-a-half-hour group session once a week over 12 weeks. While each session has a key theme, the groups are flexibly facilitated by Aboriginal counsellors so that they can respond to emerging issues as group members check in each week. Topics for the group sessions include:

- what is violence and abusive behaviour
- the impacts of violence on self, partner, children, extended family and community
- self-awareness and emotional regulation (anger)
- time out and other methods to avoid violence
- intimacy, building trust and listening skills
- self-awareness of thoughts
- beliefs and ethics, steps to change (manageable goal setting)
- listening and responding
- parenting and child development (Rekindling the Spirit 2017).

A previous study exploring the perspective of five men in the Rekindling the Spirit program found that men in the program benefited from linkages between it and the local Namatjira Haven Drug and Alcohol Healing Centre, as well as an Aboriginal Alcoholics Anonymous group led by the founder of Rekindling the Spirit. Two men had transitioned from rehabilitation into the

Rekindling the Spirit men's group and counselling service, while another two men were supported to access opioid treatment to address heroin addiction by their Rekindling the Spirit counsellor. Two of the men reported their counsellor supported them in moving from homelessness to stable housing, while all five men in the study had sustained engagement in counselling. Two of the men reported having engaged with psychological support to deal with the lifelong trauma of child sexual abuse. Through the men's group therapy all of the men had learned about early childhood development and engaged in workshops exploring how to be a strong Goori man, father and partner (Shepherdson 2014).

6. Addressing the gaps

There are a number of priority areas that warrant urgent attention if we are to reduce the levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence, including:

- improving our evidence
- elevating the voice of men in family violence prevention
- increasing access to recurrent funding and resources.

6.1 Improving our evidence

Studies of Indigenous family violence program outcomes invariably conclude that there is 'little' or 'inconclusive' evidence of effectiveness (Cripps and Davis 2012:1; Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2016:2). This is consistent with findings related to Indigenous programs more broadly, with an Australian National Audit Office review of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Indigenous Advancement Strategy concluding that the program's performance framework and measures 'do not provide sufficient information to make assessments about program performance and progress towards program outcomes (Australian National Audit Office 2017).

Evaluations identify many factors that undermine the evidence base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, including:

- the limitations in the extent to which mainstream evaluation methodologies can be applied to Indigenous community programs (Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2016:15)
- the lack of in-depth data to determine medium- to long-term program impacts (Higgins and Davis 2014)
- the lack of program funding for monitoring and evaluation of program outcomes (Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2016)
- a focus on process rather than outcomes in program evaluations (Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2016).

Much of the literature questions the relevance of empirical research methodologies to Indigenous programs. Aside from randomised controlled trials being impractical in regional and remote settings (Carey 2013; Day et al. 2013 in Blagg et al. 2015), 'many Indigenous practitioners and communities do not accept that such methods of evaluation are required' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation 2014c:42). Some peer-reviewed academic studies of Indigenous programs are poor quality, not contextualised and, in some instances, misleading for policy makers. There is a need for contextualised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led approaches to both evaluation and evidence production. Indigenous program evaluations 'need to be premised on the needs of the intended program users' (Blagg et al. 2015:29) rather than the priorities or standards of the funding bodies (Carey 2013 in Blagg et al. 2015).

Increased commitment to Indigenous program evaluation is a priority. There is a need for development of participatory Indigenous evaluation methodologies and for recognition of community views on what constitutes evidence. Hovane (2016) emphasises the importance of evaluation methodologies having a cultural context (incorporating Aboriginal world views and protocols), of clarifying the role of Aboriginal people in the evaluation, and having a commitment to co-design and co-learning; with evaluators and communities planning together with evaluators as the facilitators of the process. Evaluators should be mindful of community capacity and readiness within the context of local values, norms, attitudes and perceptions (Hovane 2016). An Indigenous-led, Indigenous-specific evaluation framework should support strategies to reduce and prevent family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

6.2 Elevating the voice of men in family violence prevention

Discussion within the knowledge circle highlighted a perceived absence of the voice of men in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention policy, literature and programs. While there is now some (limited) participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in reference groups to steer violence prevention policy and programs, there still seems to be little opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to influence the policies and programs designed to improve safety for them and their children. Arguably, the voice and perspective of men is absent, and sometimes excluded in this domain. The knowledge circle emphasised the need for men, along with women, to be involved and have a say in the programs that are designed to influence their behaviour. There is a need for a national network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to share knowledge and support other men in their work with men and boys. Similarly, men as well as women must be included on Commonwealth, state, territory, regional and local reference groups established to support programs for reducing and preventing family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This should include the voice of strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who have transformed from being perpetrators of violence to become violence prevention champions with the support of women.

6.3 Increasing access to recurrent funding and resources

Discussion among members of the knowledge circle reiterated the recognition across literature of the detrimental impact of inadequate and non-recurrent funding for work with men and boys to prevent family violence. Frequently men and boys' programs are not funded, rely on contributions from non-government services to cover costs of transport and supplies, or are afforded only small non-recurrent leftover' funds. Olsen and Lovett (2016) found that many Indigenous family violence programs are funded as short-term pilots, which does not allow sufficient time for meaningful relationships to be established between service providers and communities. The authors also highlight the challenge of obtaining funding from agencies that will only support proven approaches when there has been little comprehensive evaluation of Indigenous family violence prevention initiatives (Olsen and Lovett 2016:62).

Indigenous family violence prevention programs require dedicated recurrent and adequate funding if we are to achieve demonstrable outcomes. Inadequate funding results in programs being run inconsistently, without adequate professional development and support, and in programs being unable to retain suitably skilled staff. As highlighted above, programs need to be provided funds as well as technical support if we are to identify and monitor performance indicators that can assist with continuous program improvement and demonstrating program outcomes.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

There are many factors that are common to family violence in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities share a common goal with mainstream violence prevention programs in wanting to eliminate family violence.

However, an effective framework to prevent and reduce family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys needs to include the following critical elements:

- violence should be understood within a historical context, recognising the effects of foundational and structural violence, and the wide-ranging continued impacts on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys.

- the many strong Aboriginal and Torres Islander men must be supported to lead work with men and boys, and reconnect men to their core cultural practices and protocols as a central factor to creating change.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should be involved in the design, and development, and evaluation of the effectiveness of a framework.

- prevention strategies must be positioned within broader community strategies that address intergenerational trauma through individual, family and community healing approaches – drawing from both local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and Western therapeutic practice.

- all work should be developed in partnership with communities through a genuine co-design process that respects and supports local cultural governance and self-determination, and empowers communities to drive change.

- a focus on collective wellbeing should be supported through referral pathways to trauma-informed holistic health and wellbeing services.

Crucially, any strategy should be adequately resourced, implemented in a safe place, and supported by trauma-informed therapeutic services and programs. Dedicated recurrent funding is required to allow time for violence prevention programs and services to build capacity, and for workers to build relationships of trust with communities.

Investment in Indigenous family violence prevention program evaluations, which are co-designed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is a priority. There is also a need to establish forums that elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women and allow the sharing of knowledge about good practice Indigenous men and boys violence prevention work; and to build the evidence base of how we can promote safety and harmony for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and families.

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