

OCTOBER 2024



ACT Jurisdiction Report



Purpose for our visit

The visit aimed to strengthen collaboration between Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Commissioner Micaela Cronin and key government and community organisations in the ACT.

Discussions focused on identifying systemic challenges, stakeholder perspectives on ways to improve service delivery, and ensuring effective allocation of funding to address DFSV.

Who we engaged with

- Office of the Coordinator General for Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence
- Toora Women Inc
- Yerrabi Yurwang
- Yuddung Mura
- Women's Legal Service
- Sisters in Spirit
- Beryl Women Inc
- YWCA (ACT)

What we heard

Funding and service delivery

Stakeholders expressed concerns over the lack of transparency in funding allocations for DFSV services in the ACT, particularly in relation to Commonwealth contributions. Community sector organisations noted that the ACT Safer Families Levy has not always been used for frontline services and that in 2024–25, the Budget prioritised Levy funding to frontline services. The ACT Audit Office has been critical of the government's ability to measure the outcomes of initiatives funded through the Safer Families Levy.

Community organisations also highlighted the significant administrative burden associated with managing multiple contracts across different ACT and Commonwealth agencies, which reduces their capacity to deliver frontline services.

Additionally, stakeholders raised concerns that National Partnership reporting requirements are overly complex, particularly given the relatively small proportion of Commonwealth funding received in the ACT.

Performance and data

Stakeholders emphasised the lack of a clear evidence base to determine the effectiveness of DFSV responses in the ACT, particularly noting the absence of national standards to data collection and reporting.

They called for greater transparency in investment decisions and a stronger reliance on data-driven approaches to ensure funding is directed toward effective initiatives that address the needs of the community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Considerations

Stakeholders acknowledged the ACT Government's investment in building an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). However, it was also noted that as ACCOs emerge and mature, it can be difficult to demonstrate impact during this phase, which in turn affects the ability to secure additional funding.

Stakeholders highlighted the need for a DFSV service led by Aboriginal communities, with proportional funding, to support the ongoing sustainability of DFSV ACCOs.

Concerns were also raised regarding insufficient coordination between the ACT Government and the Commonwealth, particularly in relation to funding applications. ACT ACCOs report they have been unsuccessful in accessing Commonwealth DFSV funding.

Stakeholders also reported a lack of visibility regarding ACT and Commonwealth DFSV funding streams available to Aboriginal organisations.

Additionally, some ACCOs expressed frustration about not being included in national DFSV policy discussions led by the Commonwealth, with mainstream service providers largely representing the ACT. Some ACCOs also raised that they had not been engaged in the development of the standalone DFSV First Nations Action Plan.

ACCOs called for a greater focus on supporting men within families rather than defaulting to removal as the primary solution, given that men often return to relationships. They emphasised the importance of holistic interventions that prioritise whole-family safety. Aboriginal organisations reported success in delivering family-based programs, such as Functional Family Therapy, which has demonstrated positive outcomes in the ACT. There was also a strong call for balancing accountability for men with opportunities for healing, with funding decisions being evidence-based and led by Aboriginal communities.

Housing and homelessness

Stakeholders raised concerns about the Commonwealth's Safer Places program funding model, which places financial strain on community organisations. The requirement for organisations to make sizable upfront payments, which are later

reimbursed through milestone-based instalments, was identified as a significant barrier. This funding structure is particularly challenging for non-government organisations with limited financial capacity.

Workforce challenges

Stakeholders highlighted the potential for adjacent workforces, such as early childhood educators, to play a role in the early identification of DFSV with appropriate training. However, they identified that the social work workforce pipeline in the ACT has been negatively impacted by immigration policy changes,

including reductions in international student numbers and cuts to education visas. This has led to a shortage of qualified workers, and many frontline staff are engaged through internships, creating challenges in workforce retention.

Sexual assault responses

Stakeholders welcomed the selection of the Women's Legal Centre and Victims Support ACT to participate in a national pilot of a specialised, trauma-informed legal service for sexual assault victim-survivors. The ACT is one of three pilot jurisdictions, alongside Western Australia and Victoria, with services expected to be fully operational in 2024.

Additionally, stakeholders discussed the ACT Government's [Sexual Assault Police Review](#), which aimed to understand why so few reported offences progressed to charges. The final report from this review was released on 5 September 2024.

We sincerely thank everyone who generously shared their time and insights with us.

