

MEDIA RELEASE (10.02.2021): Government plan to combat family & domestic violence in WA.

A key stakeholder in the West Kimberley has expressed disappointment in the proposal by the Western Australian Government to spend some \$60million to help prevent family and domestic violence.

The proposal, announced Thursday, would see a number of initiatives including additional “hubs” a \$29.5 million Safe Home Safe Family package, Specialised Family and Domestic Violence Forensic Unit and a number of preventative initiatives.

Aboriginal Family Legal Services WA, a specialist FV organisation, which provides legal assistance, preventative education, and social supports for Aboriginal victims of family and domestic violence throughout remote and regional WA said that whilst the intent of the package appeared well intended, the details and available information were vague and apparently did not include a boost to essential services such as the provision of early legal advice to victims.

Particularly disappointing was the scant consideration of services for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal community controlled organisations, even though FDV disproportionately affects Aboriginal women who are 34.2 times more prone to hospitalisation as a result of family and domestic violence than non-Indigenous women.¹ In WA, they are 17.5 times more likely to die from homicide than non-Aboriginal mothers,² and comprise 3.8% of the female population of WA but make up 46% of the WA adult female prisoner population,³

CEO Corina Martin said that victims of FDV were often terrified and confused, disempowered and with no knowledge of their legal rights. Without knowing these they made poor, ill informed decisions and often ended up in dangerous and compromising situations.

“What the Government needs to understand is that FDV within Aboriginal communities occurs as a consequence of ongoing colonialism and systemic racism.”

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015. *Australia's welfare 2015*. Australia's welfare series no. 12. Cat. no. AUS 189. Canberra: AIHW. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129552312> accessed December 8 2016

² Early mortality from external causes in Aboriginal mothers: a retrospective cohort study, Jenny Fairthorne, Roz Walker, Nick de Klerk, and Carrington Shepherd, BMC Public Health 2016, accessed 6 December 2016 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4888491/>

³ Adult Prisoners in Custody: Quick Reference Statistics. March 2016. http://www.correctiveservices.wa.gov.au/_files/about-us/statistics-publications/statistics/2016/quick-ref/201603-qrs-adult-custody.pdf. Accessed 8 December 2016

Yet the entire package contained no obvious recognition that new services would be culturally sensitive and specialised, something at which the Government currently has a “poor track record.”

In the West Kimberley, where rates of FDV are particularly high, it is seen a major reason for children to be taken into care with a staggering 100% of children in care being Aboriginal.

Yet AFLS has not been consulted at all in relation to the proposal to spend \$4.8 million on the establishment of an Aboriginal-led Specialist Family Violence Court.

“It is frustrating and upsetting,” said Ms. Martin, who is a Jaru/Kitja and Gooniyandi woman born and raised in Broome. “Our people are hurting, our children are being taken away, the Government announces a huge spending spree, and we have no idea what their intentions are or whether appropriate persons are being involved, let alone whether our people will truly benefit.”

A lack of proper planning ran the risk of such a court being under-utilised or achieving poor outcomes.

The same comments could be made in relation to an Aboriginal-specific rapid rehousing pilot trial, which will also support up to 40 women and their children to get into private accommodation.

“It’s as though we are an afterthought” Ms Martin said, describing the few measures in the package that pertained to Aboriginal people as “token” in appearance.

Ms Martin also questioned why new “hubs” were taking centre stage when the current hubs in Kalgoorlie and Mirrabooka, which underwent a cumbersome and lengthy establishment process and only opened last year, have yet to be evaluated. “Would it not be better to see if the current arrangements achieve recognisable and improved outcomes? And where are they going to be situated?”

Not in one of the regions where the AFLS operates strongly and is a key specialist Aboriginal community controlled FV organisation stakeholder, Ms Martin hopes, or the lack of consultation will reflect even more poorly on the Government.

Ms Martin urged the WA Government to ensure a thorough and transparent consultation process with Aboriginal people prior to the implementation of new measures, to ask specialist Aboriginal community controlled FV organisations at the front line, what would work best.

“It’s the only way to guarantee a good return on taxpayer money. Surely that matters. Even if nothing else apparently does.”

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