

# Changing the picture: Executive Summary



---

This is a summary of *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*. To download the full resource, please see the Our Watch website at <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>

---

## Preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women: an urgent national priority

Violence against women and their children is serious, prevalent and persistent in all communities across Australia. On average, at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner, and one in three Australian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15.

At the same time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionate rates of violence, and violence that is often more severe and more complex in its impacts. Preventing this violence must be a national priority. It requires dedicated attention and intensive effort and resourcing. It requires us to address the many complex drivers of this violence — not only gender inequality but also the ongoing impacts of colonisation and racism.

Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not an 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander problem'. Nor should Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bear sole responsibility for addressing it. This violence is an Australian problem, and it is perpetrated by men of all cultural backgrounds.

All of us, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and non-Indigenous people, communities, organisations, and all levels of government have a responsibility to work together to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.

## *Changing the picture: a new solutions-focused resource to support prevention*

Our Watch has produced a new national resource to support prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. *Changing the picture* shows how as a society we can work together to change the underlying drivers of this violence.

Our Watch has worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop this resource. The voices, experiences, knowledge, ideas, decades-long activism and solutions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at its core.

We look forward to putting this resource into practice and to building partnerships that support others to do so. As a non-Indigenous organisation, Our Watch does not claim to have all the solutions. But we are committed to playing our part in addressing racism, power inequalities and other ongoing impacts of colonisation, and to working in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to support culturally safe, community-owned and led solutions.

# Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children: disproportionate and severe

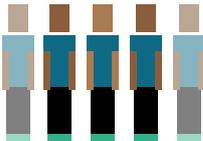
---



## 3.1 times the rate

A national survey found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report experiencing violence in the previous 12 months at 3.1 times the rate of non-Indigenous women.

---



## 3 women in 5

3 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a male intimate partner.

---



## 11 times more likely to die

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are nearly 11 times more likely to die due to assault than non-Indigenous women.

---



## 32 times the rate of hospitalisation

The physical injuries resulting from violence are frequently more severe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Hospitalisation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women due to family violence-related assaults are 32 times the rate for non-Indigenous women and 3 times the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

---



## Significant health impacts

Intimate partner violence contributes 10.9% of the burden of disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women aged 18 to 44, more than any other health risk factor, including alcohol or tobacco use and being overweight or obese. The contribution of intimate partner violence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's burden of disease is 6.3 times higher than for non-Indigenous women.

---



## Children are at greater risk

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are at greater risk of exposure to family violence than non-Indigenous children, with two thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who experience violence sharing the household with children. Family violence against women is the leading reason for the disproportionately high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

---

# Challenging misconceptions about violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Misconceptions about violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women take the focus away from the deeper issues that need urgent attention. Challenging these can help direct attention, effort and resources to the actual underlying drivers of this violence.



## **Violence is not part of traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures**

Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not a part of traditional culture. When violence occurred prior to colonisation, it was regulated and controlled, and bore no resemblance to the kinds of violence and abuse seen today. Many aspects of traditional culture and customary law were respectful and protective of women. As custodians of some of the longest surviving cultures in the world, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people successfully managed interpersonal, family and community relationships for over 60,000 years prior to colonisation.



## **Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous men**

Public debate and media reporting frequently imply that this violence is always perpetrated by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander men, when this is not the case. Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated by men from many cultural backgrounds. Anecdotal evidence suggests that non-Indigenous men make up a significant proportion of perpetrators. For intimate partner violence, this reflects data showing the majority of partnered Indigenous women have non-Indigenous partners, especially in capital cities. Perpetration patterns vary geographically, with this data suggesting violence against women in remote areas more likely to be perpetrated by Indigenous men, and violence in urban areas more likely to be perpetrated by non-Indigenous men.



## **Alcohol is a contributing factor, and often a trigger for violence, but it is not the 'cause'**

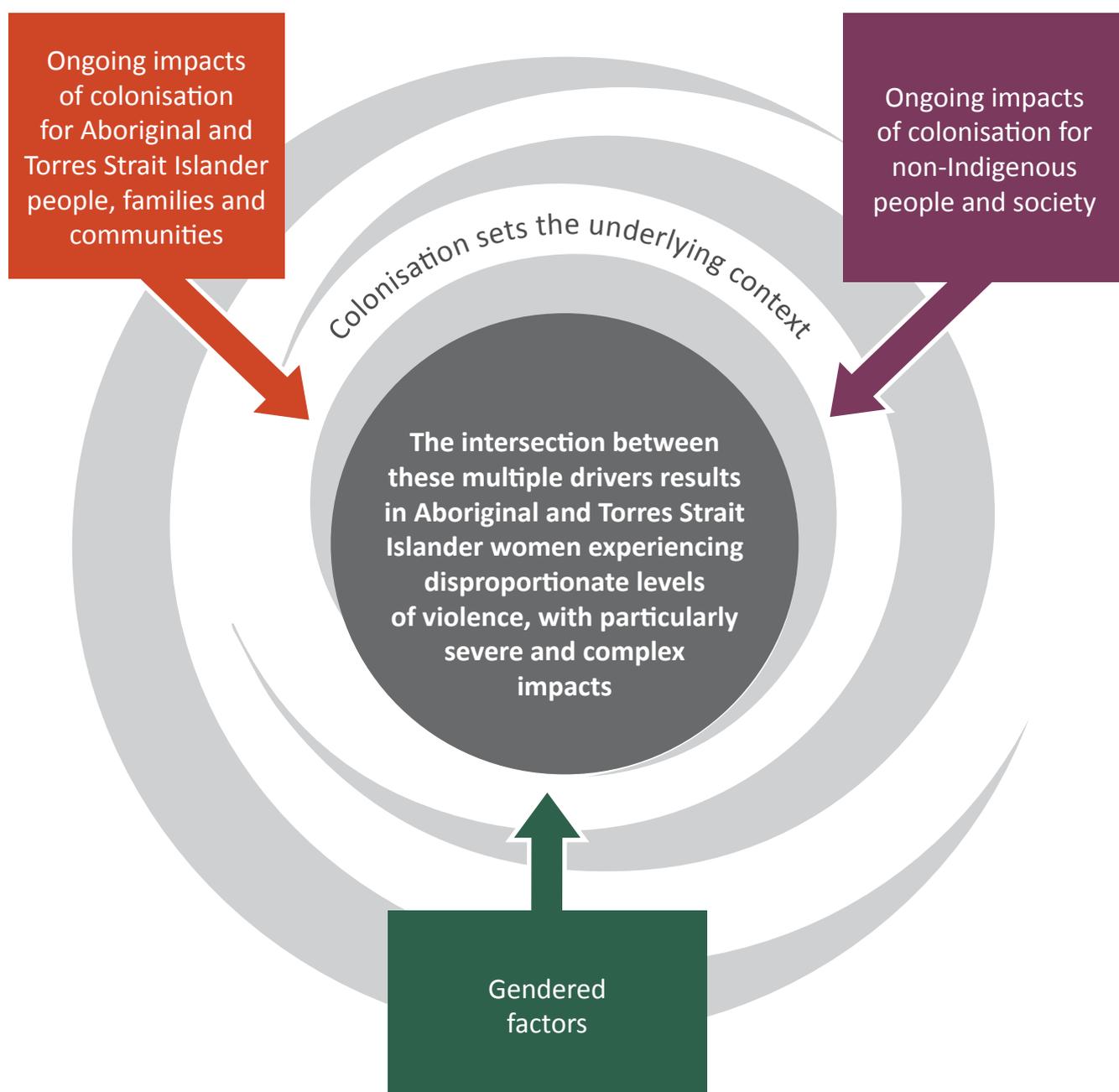
Across Australia, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, alcohol can increase the frequency or severity of violence. However, on its own, alcohol doesn't explain violence. It can't be simplistically seen as a 'cause' of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, both because violence occurs where alcohol is not involved and because many people consume alcohol but are never violent.

Where there is a correlation between alcohol and violence in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this needs to be understood in context. Colonisation introduced alcohol to disrupted, displaced and traumatised communities, resulting in high rates of harmful alcohol use in some contexts as a coping mechanism or a self-medicating behaviour. This means strategies need to address the underlying reasons for harmful alcohol use.

We also need to understand alcohol in relation to social norms and practices that condone violence against women generally, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in particular. Prevention strategies need to address drinking cultures among all groups of men that emphasise aggression and disrespect for women, as well as drinking cultures among non-Indigenous men that involve racism and disrespect towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Reducing harmful alcohol use is a useful supporting strategy, which delivers many positive outcomes, and which may also help reduce the severity or frequency of violence. However, this needs to occur not in isolation but in addition to addressing the deeper drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

## The drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

There is no single 'cause' of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; however, research and consultation points to three main underlying drivers that intersect to produce such high levels of this violence. These are summarised in the diagram below. *Changing the picture* discusses the many complex factors that make up each driver and the interactions between them.



For the complete version of this diagram please see page 14 of the full resource, *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*.

# Essential prevention actions

Responding to current extreme levels of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is critical. But to prevent this violence from happening in the first place, we need actions that directly address its three underlying drivers.

## Action 1



### **Address the legacies and ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities**

- Heal the impacts of intergenerational trauma, strengthening culture and identity
  - Strengthen and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
  - Implement specific initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, boys and men, and children and young people
  - Challenge the condoning of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
  - Increase access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- 

## Action 2



### **Address the legacies and ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-Indigenous people, and across Australian society**

- Challenge and prevent all forms of racism, indifference, ignorance and disrespect towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures
  - Address racialised power inequalities and amend discriminatory policies and practices
  - Challenge the condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- 

## Action 3



### **Address the gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women**

- Implement intersectional approaches to preventing violence against women across the Australian population
- Challenge the condoning of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women by challenging both racist and sexist attitudes and social norms
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's participation in leadership and decision making
- Challenge gender stereotypes, and the impacts of colonisation on men's and women's roles, relationships and identities
- Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships between women and men, girls and boys
- Engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men to challenge harmful and violence-supportive ideas about masculinity and relationships

This a summary only. *Changing the picture* discusses the many different ways and contexts in which these actions need to be implemented. It also points to a number of supporting actions to address other factors that exacerbate violence.

# Principles for prevention in practice

For prevention to be effective, it's not only what we do that's important, it's how we do it. Prevention work should be guided by these principles:

- self-determination: community ownership, control and leadership
- cultural safety
- trauma-informed practice and practitioner self-care
- healing focused
- holistic
- prioritising and strengthening culture
- using strengths-based and community strengthening approaches
- adapting to different community, demographic and geographic contexts
- addressing intersectional discrimination
- non-Indigenous organisations working as allies in culturally safe ways

## Want to know more?

The comprehensive resource on which this summary is based, *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, is available on the Our Watch website.

A background paper detailing the research literature and consultation that informed the resource is also available.

## Our Watch

Our Watch aims to drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes and social structures that drive violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. We work at all levels of Australian society to address these deeply entrenched drivers of violence, and to promote gender equality. Our vision is an Australia where all women and their children live free from all forms of violence.



Our research and resources to prevent violence against women are continually evolving, so keep an eye out for new resources on our website or sign up to our e-newsletter.

[www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)

