

# Safe Housing: Imperative to Ending Aboriginal Child Removal



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Victoria is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. There is a severe shortage of public housing, and a meagre two per cent of Victoria's private rental market is financially accessible for people on government supported payments.<sup>1</sup> We know that family violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Victoria,<sup>2</sup> yet there are very few viable, long term pathways for victim survivors into secure, and appropriate housing.

The relationship between homelessness and family violence is complex and underpinned by social inequality.<sup>3</sup> Those with the least resources are the most vulnerable to becoming homeless. Aboriginal women\* are at least six times more likely to experience family violence,<sup>4</sup> and 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to violent assault.<sup>5</sup> It is then no surprise that Aboriginal people are also grossly overrepresented in the homeless population. Family violence and homelessness have devastating and disproportionate impacts on Aboriginal communities, and both impact heavily upon the continued removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Providing safe housing options for victim survivors is key to keeping Aboriginal families safe and together.

Aboriginal children are a staggering 10.2 times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Aboriginal children.<sup>6</sup> Eight per cent of Victorian Aboriginal child removals have family violence listed as a protective factor,<sup>7</sup> and one third of child protection notifications cite neglect (including housing suitability and stability) as a protective concern.<sup>8</sup> When Child Protection services become involved due to family violence, Aboriginal mothers are often presented with the illusion of

choice. The choice to leave. However, with communities already struggling with extreme disadvantage and overcrowding, where can they go?

Low-income mothers face limited options and many barriers when attempting to leave violent relationships. The fear of entering homelessness, and therefore of having children removed often influences decisions to remain in unsafe homes. This fear is magnified in Aboriginal communities due to the intergenerational trauma caused from the Stolen Generations. The reality of leaving is financial stress, housing instability, potential homelessness, and Child Protection involvement. The alternative option is to remain in a household with a person who uses violence and manage the risk.

Although there has been recent implementation of strategies that focus on removing perpetrators from family homes, this is often not a safe and viable option. In these instances, mothers and their children

are at risk of entering a cycle of transience and homelessness.

If a woman does decide to leave, family violence services are generally able to move families without any shelter into refuge or crisis accommodation. This is however a short-term solution. The pathway out of crisis accommodation is a long and difficult journey, particularly for single mothers on low-incomes. Victim survivors often find themselves in unsuitable, or unsustainable housing once they exit crisis accommodation.<sup>9</sup> This is due to a shortage of social housing, with people waiting for priority family violence transfers for many months or years.

There is also a lack of affordable options in the private rental market. While Private Rental Assistance Programs and the subsidised Rapid Housing Response Programs are important and valuable, they do not offer a long-term solution. This is especially true in urban areas where the private rental market is inflated and competitive. Single parents simply cannot compete with childless couples on high incomes and are unable to afford rents once subsidies cease.<sup>10</sup>

For those who are unable to enter the private rental market, the alternative is to wait in crisis accommodation for social housing or transitional housing to become available. This puts immense pressure on the three Aboriginal specific family violence refuges in Victoria due to a low turnover of available beds. The bottleneck effect this creates significantly hinders Aboriginal women and children's ability to access culturally safe services. Without timely and sustainable exit pathways from crisis accommodation, Aboriginal-specific



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Statistics  
1. Commonwealth of Australia and Territory of Northern Australia (2019) Family Violence Statistics  
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Family Violence Statistics  
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Family Violence Statistics  
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Family Violence Statistics  
5. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Family Violence Statistics  
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Family Violence Statistics  
7. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) Family Violence Statistics



Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander KEY DATES 2020		
<b>JANUARY</b> 26 Invasion/ Survival Day	<b>FEBRUARY</b> 12-19 Ochre Ribbon Week 13 Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations	<b>MARCH</b> 8 International Women's Day 15 National Close The Gap Day 21 Harmony Day
<b>APRIL</b> 15 Anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody	<b>MAY</b> 26 National Sorry Day 27-31 National Reconciliation Week	<b>JUNE</b> 3 Mabo Day 15 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
<b>JULY</b> 5-12 National NAIDOC Week 18C Victorian NAIDOC Pride Night	<b>AUGUST</b> 2-9 Homelessness Week 4 National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day 9 International Day of the World's Indigenous People	<b>SEPTEMBER</b> 2 Indigenous Literacy Day 6-12 National Child Protection Week
<b>OCTOBER</b> 10 World Homeless Day 2-18 Week Without Violence	<b>NOVEMBER</b> 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence 18C National Dreamtime Awards	<b>DECEMBER</b> 10 International Human Rights Day

Elizabeth Morgan House acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Land throughout Australia. We pay our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Elders, both past and present.



<b>Invasion/ Survival Day, 26 January:</b> 26th January is an important date which recognises Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people's survival and strength since colonisation, and the continued oppression of First Nation's people.
<b>Ochre Ribbon Week, 12- 19 February:</b> Aboriginal women are much more likely to experience family violence. Ochre Ribbon Week raises awareness of the impact of family violence in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities, and seeks to end violence against Aboriginal women and children.
<b>Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, 13 February:</b> The National Apology, was made in Federal Parliament on 13 February 2008 by Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. It was the first formal acknowledgement of the past atrocities and oppressive government policies, namely the forced removal of children and assimilation.
<b>International Women's Day, 8 March:</b> International Women's Day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women globally, in spite of the barriers they face. The day also calls for gender equality across the world.
<b>National Close the Gap Day, 19 March:</b> The Close the Gap Campaign aims to raise awareness of the gap in health, life expectancy & education between First Nations People and non-Indigenous Australians.
<b>Harmony Day, 21 March:</b> Harmony day celebrates the cultural diversity of all Australians and promotes inclusion, participation, respect & belonging. The ongoing message of this day is 'Everybody Belongs'.
<b>Anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 15 April:</b> 15 April marks the handing down of the final report by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and acknowledges all individuals who have passed in custody. The day also highlights the ongoing overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Australian prisons.
<b>National Sorry Day, 26 May:</b> On National Sorry Day we recognise the grief, trauma & loss suffered by the Stolen Generations, and First Nations communities broadly. It is an important opportunity for individual & collective healing.

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<b>Mabo Day, 3 June:</b> June the 3rd is the anniversary of the 1992 Mabo judgement, in which the High Court recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have rights to the land, and opened up the doorway for native title.
<b>World Elder Abuse Day, 15 June:</b> World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) raises awareness of ageism, inequality & abuse of Elders in our society.
<b>NAIDOC Week, 5- 12 July:</b> NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. The 2020 theme is 'Always was, always will be'. NAIDOC Pride Night celebrates LGBTQIA+ First Nations people & communities.
<b>Homelessness Week, 4 - 8 August:</b> Homelessness Week raises awareness of homelessness. An important week given that on average 116,000 people per night are homeless in Australia.
<b>National Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander Children's Day, 4 August:</b> Children's Day celebrates the strength and culture of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children. It is an opportunity for all Australians to show their support, and reflect on the importance of culture, family and community for children.
<b>International Day of the World's Indigenous People, 9 August:</b> This day celebrates the diversity and cultures of indigenous people around the world, and seeks to protect and promote indigenous cultures.
<b>Indigenous Literacy Day, 2 September:</b> This day is a national celebration of indigenous culture, stories, language and literacy. Activities held on this date focus on the disadvantages experienced in remote communities and advocate for more equal access to literacy resources in remote communities.
<b>National Child Protection Week, 6-12 September:</b> National Child Protection Week raises awareness of child abuse prevention in Australia, and focuses on all issues connected with child protection.
<b>World Homeless Day, 10 October:</b> This international day highlights homeless people's needs locally and provides an opportunity for the community to get involved in responding to homelessness.

<b>Week Without Violence, 12 - 18 October:</b> Week Without Violence (WWV) is a global campaign to end violence against women. The campaign is held during the third week of October each year.
<b>International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 25 November:</b> This date highlights the prevalence & pervasiveness of violence against women globally, and seeks to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.
<b>16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, 25 November - 10 December:</b> This international campaign begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, Human Rights Day. It calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.
<b>International Human Rights Day, 10th December:</b> December 10 is the anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations (UN) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR and day promote the basic human rights for everybody, worldwide.

services can only assist a small portion of the community in need.

Lack of any real viable housing option often results in ongoing transience between crisis services, family and friend's homes, and returning to the perpetrator. This leaves Aboriginal women and children particularly vulnerable to Child Protection involvement. Once children are in out of home care, a parent must have suitable accommodation before children can be returned. Although we

know overcoming homelessness is a long-term journey, parents are generally given only 12 months to address protective concerns and secure a property that is deemed appropriate. If a parent is unable to address the concerns, a Children's Court Order can be made permanent.

It is clear that a crucial factor in a mother's ability to leave a violent relationship and keep children safe and in their care is access to safe, affordable and long-term housing.

Aboriginal women and children seeking to live free from violence would benefit from increased transitional and Aboriginal social housing, as well as affordable, long-term private rental options. This will give Aboriginal women the power to make real choices:

- The ability to leave a violent home and remain out of that home.
- The ability to address Child Protection's concerns.
- And ultimately, the ability to keep their children safe and well.

\* Aboriginal is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise the term woman as inclusive of anybody who identifies as a woman.

## Endnotes

1. Anglicare 2019, *Rental Affordability 2019: Victorian Snapshot*, pp. 2.
2. Council to the Homeless Persons 2019, *Fact Sheet: Family Violence and Homelessness*, <<https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Family-violence-fact-sheet-FINAL.pdf>>
3. Ibid. pp. 1.
4. Grech K and Burges M 2011, 'Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults: 2001 to 2010', *Crime and Justice Statistics*, p. 8.
5. 'Reporting on Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities,' *Our watch*, 2014 <[https://www.ourwatch.org.au/MediaLibraries/OurWatch/Images/ourwatch\\_reporting\\_on-at-s\\_family\\_violence\\_aa\\_v1.pdf](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/MediaLibraries/OurWatch/Images/ourwatch_reporting_on-at-s_family_violence_aa_v1.pdf)>
6. Family Matters 2019, *A Reporting on Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*, p. 5.
7. Commission for Children and Young People 2016, 'Always was, always will be Koori children': *Systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria*, p. 47.
8. *Child Protection & Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*, AIFS, 2019 <<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children>>
9. Flanagan K, Blunden H, Valentine K and Henriette, 2019, *Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
10. Ibid.

