Aboriginal Housing Office

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Domestic and Family Violence Guideline

Provides best practice methodology for the support of tenants, families and communities that are experiencing domestic and family violence.

NSW GOVERNMENT

Acknowledgement of Country

The Aboriginal Housing Office proudly acknowledges the collective Aboriginal people and lands within the boundaries of modern-day New South Wales, the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Our Elders' strength, resilience and guidance was and is paramount to ensuring Aboriginal people continue to thrive as the world's oldest living culture.

Since the Dreaming, Aboriginal people have practised their lore, languages, and nurtured Country by drawing upon cultural knowledge, and they continue to do so to this day.

Through the strength, resilience, and pride of Aboriginal Peoples; their cultures, communities, and economies, continue to grow and thrive.

Document approval

This Guideline has been endorsed and approved by the AHO Board and Chief Executive as of 22 April 2026.

About this document

Published by the Aboriginal Housing Office – Strategy, Policy and Evidence team
www.aho.nsw.gov.au

First published: 03 August 2026
Date of last update: 09 July 2026
Next scheduled review date: July 2029

Version: 0.1

Contents

1. Introduction 4
   1.1 Purpose 4
2. Scope and application 4
3. Policy links and legislation 4
4. Understanding and defining DFV 5
   4.1 Intimate and domestic relationships 5
   4.2 Examples of abusive behaviours 5
   4.3 Children as victim-survivors 6
5. Impacts of DFV on Aboriginal communities 6
   5.1 Elder abuse as a form of DFV 6
6. Child wellbeing and protection 6
7. Available services 7
   7.1 Finding Your Way – Transitional Housing 7
   7.2 Services Our Way 7
   7.3 Safe Housing Program 8
8. Managing a tenancy through DFV 8
   8.1 Rental arrears and rent abatement 8
   8.2 Client service visits 9
   8.3 Property damage 9
   8.4 Alterations to a property to improve security 9
   8.5 NSW Civil Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) matters 9
   8.6 Transferring to a different property 9
9. Privacy and confidentiality 10
10. Monitoring and review 10
11. Support and advice 10

Terms and definitions 11

1. Introduction

If you or someone close to you is in distress or immediate danger, please call 000.

Support is available if you or someone you know has experienced domestic, family and sexual violence.

For more information on domestic, family violence and sexual violence support services, visit the NSW Department of Communities and Justice website.

1.1 Purpose

Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is a complex issue that has a significant impact on all members of a family and community. The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) works in partnership with government and non-government agencies, in particular Aboriginal organisations, to support better outcomes for people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing domestic and/or family violence.

This guideline aims to:

- set clear standards and expectations on the delivery of AHO housing, products and/or services in relation to DFV,
- provide a consistent and coordinated approach to managing tenancies where DFV is present,
- promote the principles of best practice approaches when responding to DFV, so that responses are integrated, trauma-informed, culturally safe, and prioritise victim-survivors' safety and needs and
- ensure consistent support for tenants, families and communities regardless of which organisation manages the tenancy for a range of support functions.

The AHO aims to align with key Government strategies and plans that address domestic and family violence, including:

- NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027
- National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032
- NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027
- NSW Primary Prevention Plan 2024-2028
- Closing the Gap.

The above strategies and plans were current at the time this guideline was approved.

2. Scope and application

This Guideline applies to AHO staff and organisations that provide AHO housing, products and/or services under a contractual agreement. These are referred to as managing providers throughout this document. It should be read alongside relevant Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs), Community Housing Providers (CHPs), Homes NSW or AHO policies, plans, guidelines and documents.

3. Policy links and legislation

The legislation that informs this guideline includes:

- Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 (NSW)
- Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW)
- Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)
- Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 (NSW)

- Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Act 2022 (NSW)
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)

4. Understanding and defining DFV

DFV refers to any behaviour in a domestic relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling and causing a person to live in fear for their own or someone else's safety. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of ongoing controlling or coercive behaviour.1

4.1 Intimate and domestic relationships

Domestic relationships can include intimate partner relationships and family relationships. An intimate relationship refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership, whether the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship.

A family relationship has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and constructs of family within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer communities.

People living in the same house, living in the same residential care facility and reliant on care may be considered as a domestic relationship if their relationship exhibits dynamics which may foster coercive and abusive behaviours.

4.2 Examples of abusive behaviours

DFV can include a perpetrator committing acts of, or inflicting fear of, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual identity, and economic/financial violence or abuse. For example:

- technology-facilitated abuse
- coercive control
- stalking, intimidation and harassment, threats to self-harm or harm others, including children or animals
- identity-based abuse, such as capitalising on a victim-survivor's fear of exposure or experience of discrimination to control and coerce them by, for example, threatening to expose or "out" someone
- threats of or acts to withhold medicine or assistance-of-care needs
- threats of deportation due to migration or residency status
- systems abuse, for example, by making false reports or using the criminal or family law systems to intimidate and perpetuate control.

Abusive behaviour can include other tactics that keep a victim isolated from family, friends and other support networks, including support services and systems.

[1] The Aboriginal Housing Office uses the common definition of domestic and family violence used in the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027*

4.3 Children as victim-survivors

Children and young people can be victim-survivors of DFV. This can be a result of being directly targeted by perpetrators or through exposure to violence directed at other family members (e.g. by witnessing or overhearing DFV) including fear and insecurity, economic hardship and homelessness.

This can cause serious, long-term and distinct consequences. It can impact their mental and physical health, social, emotional and neurological development, sense of security and attachment in relationships and their ability to cope and adapt to different situations and contexts. Often children exposed to DFV have contact with other systems, including child protection.

5. Impacts of DFV on Aboriginal communities

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience violence in all its forms at disproportionate rates, creating ongoing barriers to improved social, cultural and physical wellbeing. This is further aggravated by the compounding impacts of colonisation, racism, oppression and social expectation and disempowerment.

As a result, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and communities can experience DFV in ways that are distinctly linked to intergenerational and collective trauma. For example, social isolation resulting from DFV can disconnect victim-survivors from culture, Country and community, limiting their access to healing, support and sense of belonging.

The healing process for victim-survivors can be prolonged and prevent people from accessing culturally appropriate support. The victim-survivors will exhibit poorer health outcomes, lower life expectancy and higher rates of encountering further violence. It can mean victim-survivors have limited access to safe and affordable housing, education and employment, contributing to lower socio-economic outcomes and stability. Despite these challenges, Aboriginal Communities show incredible strength, resilience and leadership. Supporting community-led, culturally safe and trauma-informed solutions is essential to creating lasting change for victim-survivors.

5.1 Elder abuse as a form of DFV

Aboriginal Elders are not only older individuals but are respected custodians of culture, knowledge and community leaders. Aboriginal Elder abuse refers to any act or failure to act that causes harm or distress to an Elder, particularly within relationships where there is an expectation of trust.

Risk factors for Aboriginal Elders include:

- intergenerational trauma and grief
- cultural dislocation and historical dispossession
- breakdown of traditional kinship systems
- shame and fear of community judgement
- financial and housing dependencies within family unit
- strong family obligations that may discourage reporting abuse.

6. Child wellbeing and protection

Protecting the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people is everyone's responsibility. If you are concerned about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child, young person or family you can contact Family Connect and Support (FCS) to connect them to the right services and supports at the right time. FCS is available across NSW. FCS is free and voluntary. Anyone can contact or make a referral to FCS.

In NSW, community housing providers (managing providers) are mandatory reporters under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (the Care Act). When mandatory reporters have concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person they are to use the (Mandatory Reporting Guide) MRG in deciding whether to report their concerns to the Child Protection Helpline or identify what alternative responses and supports should be provided.

7. Available services

The AHO is committed to providing culturally safe and supportive housing solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants, families and communities affected by DFV. If a tenant or additional occupant is a victim-survivor of DFV, the managing provider must provide an immediate, informed and supported referral to appropriate local service providers, which may include:

- Women's refuges or crisis accommodation services
- Specialist DFV support services
- Crisis accommodation
- Private rental support – Start Safey program
- Staying Home Leaving Violence program
- Link2home Homelessness (available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, every day of the year): 1800 152 152.

The AHO has the below programs available for tenants, families and communities.

7.1 Finding Your Way – Transitional Housing

The Finding Your Way program provides short-term housing accommodation and services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples that is culturally appropriate and that meets the needs of the community. The program provides individualised solutions to identify and address the applicant's needs through a dedicated support plan. It aims to:

- Reduce the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness and/or who are at risk of homelessness
- Support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people escaping DFV and/or exiting custody or leaving Out-of-Home care
- Support tenants to transition into longer-term stable housing through an agreed and personalised support plan, including building a rental history and independent living skills that would be necessary to sustain a longer-term tenancy.

Refer to the Finding Your Way guidelines on the AHO website.

7.2 Services Our Way

The Services Our Way (SOW) program provides culturally appropriate service coordination and support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and families experiencing vulnerability. SOW enables clients to improve their wellbeing and capacity to navigate support services by connecting them to a network of relevant government and non-government programs, specialist services and community resources.

The program operates in Campbelltown, Coffs Harbour, Armidale, Nowra, Penrith, Dubbo and Tamworth, with outreach services in Pilliga, Narrabri, Moree, Gilgandra and Gulargambone. SOW's specialist staff work holistically and collaboratively with clients and service providers. This ensures that a culturally suitable and tailored solution is developed to help address the underlying causes that contribute to daily instability and challenging situations.

Refer to the Services Our Way guidelines on the AHO website.

7.3 Safe Housing Program

The Safe Housing program is part of the AHO's broader commitment to ensuring Aboriginal people in NSW have access to safe, secure, and culturally appropriate housing. The program focuses on supporting Aboriginal individuals and families who are experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence.

Key features include:

- Culturally safe housing options for Aboriginal people escaping violence
- Partnerships with DFV services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to provide wraparound support
- Flexible evidence pathways, acknowledging that many Aboriginal people may be reluctant to report violence to police due to historical and ongoing trauma. Support letters from trusted services are accepted as part of the referral process.
- Trauma-informed and community-led approaches, ensuring that housing solutions are respectful, empowering, and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal families.

8. Managing a tenancy through DFV

Tenants may be required to provide evidence of DFV to managing providers so DFV procedures can be applied. The AHO acknowledges that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families may be reluctant to report violence to police due to historical and ongoing experiences of discrimination and child removal. This can make it difficult to provide formal evidence when seeking support.

In recognition of this, the AHO encourages the use of support letters from trusted DFV services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, ensuring families can access help in a culturally safe and respectful way.

Valid evidence includes current:

- police reports, an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) and/or Domestic Violence Order
- reports or letters from Community Services
- reports or letters from Corrective Services NSW
- reports or letters from a social worker
- reports or letters from a community support agency, such as a refuge, community centre or neighbourhood centre worker
- reports or an assessment from a medical practitioner or health professional (including a mental health case manager)
- reports or letters from a school principal or school counsellor.

8.1 Rental arrears and rent abatement

Victim-survivors often experience severe financial hardship due to financial abuse in the relationship, costs associated with displacement and limited access to safe and secure income or support services. Tenants experiencing DFV may accrue rent arrears due to periods of instability, loss of income or coercive control. It is essential that tenants are not placed on an unrealistic rent arrears payment plan as this can unintentionally set tenants up to fail, increasing their risk of eviction and homelessness. Rental arrears must be managed in a way that prioritises tenancy sustainability and prevents further harm.

Managing providers must have realistic and culturally safe rent arrears payment plans for victim-survivors. In addition, managing providers are encouraged apply a rent abatement to the victim-survivor's portion of the rent for a period of up to 12 weeks if they are seeking refuge in alternative accommodation.

8.2 Client service visits

Managing providers are contractually required to conduct Client Service Visits (CSV's) on AHO-owned properties that they manage. CSVs provide an opportunity to identify and respond to people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing DFV. Managing providers and AHO staff are encouraged to engage with victim-survivors of DFV in a space where the person and/or family members are not put at further risk of harm.

The AHO promotes the safety and wellbeing of staff and encourages managing providers to follow their own polices on field visits and WHS requirements. Where DFV has previously been identified, the AHO recommends that two staff members attend CSVs and that staff determine who may be the most appropriate person(s) to attend the visit.

8.3 Property damage

Victim-survivors are not financially responsible for property damage that has occurred to an AHO owned property as a result of DFV. Victim-survivors are not required to apply for grants or financial support to cover the cost of damage.

Managing providers are responsible for ensuring that repairs to AHO properties are completed in a timely manner.

Repairs that will ensure that the property remains safe and secure, including window and door locks, broken windows and other security devices must be repaired immediately. This is to support the tenant to remain safely in the property.

8.4 Alterations to a property to improve security

The AHO supports collaboration between managing providers and DFV service providers to install security upgrades that enables victim-survivors to remain in their home while improving safety and wellbeing.

Managing providers can approve the installation of items, including cameras, improved and additional locks to doors and windows, security doors and any other item as per the client's safety plan (without seeking approval from the AHO). The managing provider is responsible for ensuring documents relating to the alternations are saved to the client's file and are available if requested by the AHO.

Managing providers are responsible for removing safety equipment from the property (e.g. cameras) and addressing any minor repairs associated with the removal of that item.

8.5 NSW Civil Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) matters

Managing providers should not begin the process to end a tenancy or pursue any NCAT action against a victim-survivor of DFV without first taking all reasonable steps to sustain and maintain the tenancy.

Managing providers will support victim-survivors to manage property care concerns, rent and water arrears and will make immediate, informed and supported referrals to appropriate local service providers.

NCAT action should be the last resort against any victim-survivor of DFV.

8.6 Transferring to a different property

There may be times when a tenant would like to transfer to a different property to escape DFV. The AHO acknowledges that this can be a challenging time for victim-survivors especially if it means the possibility of leaving their Country, kinship connections and established support networks.

Tenants seeking to apply for a transfer will need to discuss this with their managing provider.

9. Privacy and confidentiality

The AHO supports the privacy and confidentiality of victim-survivors. Managing providers are unable to document instances of DFV in their database programs and should not disclose personal victim-survivor information or information about a DFV incident to any party without consent.

To further support the clients right to privacy and confidentiality, victim-survivors are required to complete their organisations version of a consent to exchange information form. Alternatively, managing providers can use the Homes NSW - Consent form - Information sharing to prevent domestic violence.

10. Monitoring and review

This guideline is managed by the AHO Strategy, Policy and Evidence team. It will be reviewed and updated to reflect any significant legislative change, policy change or organisational change when appropriate.
Roles and responsibilities

Managing providers including ACHPs, Homes NSW Housing Services and CHPs, under a contractual agreement with the AHO, are responsible for ensuring compliance with this Guideline. The AHO Director Housing and Client Services is responsible for ensuring that this Guideline is adhered to by contracted providers.

11. Support and advice

Support and advice about the guidelines are available from:

- AHO Policy Team: Policy@aho.nsw.gov.au
- AHO regional offices and Regional Relationship Managers
    - Sydney South East email: SSE@aho.nsw.gov.au
    - Northern email: Northern@aho.nsw.gov.au
    - Western email: Western@aho.nsw.gov.au.

Terms and definitions

The table below lists key terms and/or abbreviations used throughout this document.

Term	Definition
Aboriginal person	A person who: • Is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia, and • Identifies as an Aboriginal person, and • Is accepted by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal person.
Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO)	NSW Aboriginal House Office is a statutory authority of the NSW Government that is responsible for the planning, development, delivery and evaluation of programs and services to support Aboriginal people in meeting their housing needs in the state of New South Wales.
Aboriginal Community Housing Provider (ACHP)	Aboriginal community housing providers are registered organisations that provide housing wholly or predominantly to Aboriginal people under Aboriginal community control. ACHPs may own their own properties and may also manage properties on behalf of the AHO or other organisations.
Community Housing Provider (CHP)	Community housing providers offer secure, affordable rental housing for people on very low to moderate incomes, who have a housing need. CHPs manage properties they own, and/or that are owned by the government, and may also manage properties on behalf of various entities.
Confirmation of Aboriginality (CoA)	Confirmation of Aboriginality is a document that confirms a person's Aboriginality.
Homes NSW Housing Services	Homes NSW, Housing Services provides a range of housing solutions for both the private rental market and public housing. Homes NSW, Housing Services works with service agency partner and individuals, to provide a range of housing solutions to meet the needs of today's community.
Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC)	Aboriginal Land Councils, land councils, or land and sea councils, are Australian community organisations, generally organised by region, that are commonly formed to represent the Indigenous Australians (both Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Island people) who occupied their particular region before the arrival of European settlers.
Registered Aboriginal Organisation (RAO)	Registered Aboriginal Organisation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that is controlled and operated by Aboriginal people. It is an entity that is registered with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations. As stipulated un the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 OR under the Corporations Act 2001 OR the Northern Territory Associations Act 2003. For example, the following organisations are recognised as RAOs under this policy: • Stolen Generation Organisations • Aboriginal Medical Services • Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). AHO may update this list from time to time also contact AHO for more information.
Stolen Generations Organisation (SGO)	The Stolen Generations refers to a period in Australia's history where Aboriginal children were removed from their families through government policies. This happened from the mid-1800s to the 1970s. There are currently more than 17,000 Stolen Generations survivors in Australia. Over one-third of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are their descendants. The children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations may experience disconnection from their extended families and culture and have high levels of stress. This creates a cycle of trauma, known as Intergenerational Trauma, where the impact is passed from one generation to the next. Stolen Generations Organisations are ACCOs who represent Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants.
Torres Strait Islander person	A person who: • Is a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of the Torres Strait are within the meaning of the Commonwealth Act, and • Identifies as a Torres Strait Islander person, and Is accepted by the Torres Strait Islander community as a Torres Strait Islander person.

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