



natsiwa

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

Policy Position Missing and Murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children

June 2024 updated September 2026

Problem identification

Missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is a national human rights crisis. Women and children are being murdered, disappearing or dying in unresolved circumstances while families are too often left to fight for a proper response, information and justice.

The crisis is not limited to domestic and family violence. Violence and disappearance can also be connected to racism, exploitation, institutional neglect, homelessness, incarceration, child removal, unsafe services and failures by police and justice systems. These risks are heightened for women and children with disability and for those facing poverty, housing insecurity or isolation.

The full scale remains hidden by gaps in national data. The national MMIWC Roundtable Report estimated that at least 476 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and gender-diverse people, including Sistergirls, were victims of homicide between July 1989 and June 2023.¹ Australian Institute of Criminology research covering the same period found that 97 per cent of victims knew their killer, and around two-thirds were killed by an intimate partner.² Despite this evidence, the full scale of the crisis remains obscured by significant gaps in national data, underscoring the need for consistent definitions and reliable national reporting.

NATSIWA's position is that governments already have extensive evidence about the causes of this crisis and the reforms required. More inquiries without implementation will not keep women and children safe. The priority must be national coordination, accountability and action led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and community-controlled organisations.

Definitions

For the purposes of this position paper:

¹ *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Children Roundtable Report*, 9 July 2026, p. 3.

² Australian Institute of Criminology, *Homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*, Statistical Bulletin 46, 2024.

- MMIWC means missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. This includes women and children who have disappeared or died in unresolved circumstances.
- Family includes immediate and extended family, kinship networks and people recognised as family through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and community relationships.
- The focus on women and children recognises the gendered nature of the crisis. People using violence may be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous, and may be male or female.
- Cultural practices must never be blamed for violence. Culture is a source of identity, strength, healing and protection and must never be used to override a woman's or child's right to safety, dignity, family, community and Country.

Australian policy context

The 2024 Senate inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children documented systemic failures across policing, justice, child protection and services. Its recommendations included improved police practice, review pathways for past cases, better data, greater access to Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, sustainable funding for Aboriginal community-controlled services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women leading the design and implementation of responses.³

The inquiry followed decades of evidence, including coronial findings, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's advocacy, the 1986 Women's Business Report, the 1991 Inquiry into Racist Violence, Wiyi Yani U Thangani and engagement with international human rights mechanisms. Too many recommendations remain unimplemented or only partially implemented.

Our Ways Strong Ways Our Voices National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036 is an important foundation. However, MMIWC requires a dedicated response that extends beyond the domestic, family and sexual violence framework and addresses racism, institutional violence, unsafe systems, disappearances and unresolved deaths.

The 2026 national roundtable

On 11 June 2026, the Governor-General, Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, hosted a national MMIWC roundtable at Government House. The roundtable was initiated by NATSIWA's Western Australian Director, Associate Professor Hannah McGlade, and convened by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Katie Kiss and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin.⁴

The roundtable brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women leaders, affected

³ Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, *Missing and murdered First Nations women and children*, Parliament of Australia, August 2024.

⁴ *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Children Roundtable Report*, 9 July 2026; Australian Human Rights Commission and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, *National Roundtable Calls for Urgent Action on Murdered and Disappeared Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children*, 9 July 2026.

families, advocates, legal experts, community-controlled organisations and civil society. Government representatives attended to listen.

NATSIWA's Western Australian Director, Associate Professor McGlade, developed the Seven Sisters Project, which was a key catalyst for the meeting. The project has pursued accountability through cases concerning Aboriginal women and their families submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It draws attention to wrongful incarceration, homicide, discriminatory justice responses and broader systemic and state failures. Her related work with ANROWS found a serious lack of research and no comprehensive national dataset, while available evidence suggests that missing, murdered and wrongfully incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women number in the hundreds, if not thousands.⁵

The roundtable reinforced that this crisis must be understood through human rights, racial justice, gender equality and self-determination. Families have carried the burden of truth-telling and advocacy for too long. Governments must now demonstrate that the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are valued equally through sustained action.

NATSIWA policy position

NATSIWA supports the four Calls to Action issued by the national roundtable and calls for their urgent implementation.

1 National Cabinet must report on action taken since 2024

National Cabinet must provide a public update on action taken since its September 2024 commitment to maintain a central focus on MMIWC. This must include progress against every recommendation of the 2024 Senate inquiry, the government responsible, funding committed, delivery dates and any delays.

Oversight should be independent and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, affected families and community-controlled organisations. Progress must be reported annually to Parliament and to communities in clear and accessible language.

2 MMIWC must be a priority across every government

The Australian Government must recognise MMIWC as a distinct national priority and establish a coordinated national framework. The Department of Social Services should audit recommendations from inquiries, coronial findings and reviews and publish an implementation plan that prevents duplication and identifies gaps.

MMIWC must be placed on the agendas of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, Police Ministers Council, Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council and Joint Council on Closing the Gap. Responses must extend across policing, justice, housing, health, disability, child protection and social services.

Police must respond immediately to reports of missing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. Risk must not be minimised because of a woman's location, housing status, criminal record, disability, use of alcohol or other drugs, or previous contact with

⁵ C Bevan, J Lloyd and H McGlade, *Missing, murdered and incarcerated Indigenous women in Australia: A literature review*, ANROWS, 2024.

services. Families must receive a consistent liaison person, regular information and access to culturally safe advocacy and long-term support.

3 National data collection and transparency must improve

The Data Policy Partnership should lead work to establish nationally consistent, culturally informed data about violence, disappearances, homicide investigations, unresolved deaths and institutional contact before a death or disappearance.

This work must be governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and community-controlled organisations must have authority over how data are defined, collected, linked, interpreted, accessed and reported. Community-controlled organisations must be resourced to collect, analyse and evaluate their own data.

National reporting should show whether cases were resolved, response and investigation timeframes, the quality of Indigenous status identification, and implementation of coronial and inquiry recommendations. Data must be used for prevention and accountability, not to reinforce deficit-based narratives or increase surveillance of families.

4 National remembrance must be matched by substantive reform

The Prime Minister's Office and Office for Women should establish culturally appropriate national mechanisms to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who have been murdered or disappeared. These mechanisms must be designed with families and respect cultural authority and family wishes.

Remembrance cannot stand alone. Recognition must be supported by properly investigated cases, independent review pathways for unresolved or mishandled matters, sustainable funding for Aboriginal community-controlled prevention and response services, safe housing, legal assistance and healing support. Symbolic action without systemic reform will not prevent further deaths or disappearances.

Conclusion

The solutions have been put forward repeatedly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families. What is missing is not knowledge but implementation, accountability and sustained political commitment.

NATSIWA calls on all Australian governments to act on the national roundtable's Calls to Action and the recommendations of the 2024 Senate inquiry. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women must lead this work. Families must be heard, supported and kept informed. Every disappearance must receive an urgent response, every death must be properly investigated, and every government must be accountable for preventing further harm.