



## Public Health Association of Australia:

### Policy-at-a-glance – Prevention of Violence and Sexual Abuse in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities Position Statement

**Key message:** PHAA believes the following principles must underlie actions taken to overcome violence and sexual abuse:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well being must be the highest priority for all spheres of government;
2. politicians from all parties and all spheres of Government must work together to address the underlying causes of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, (dispossession, inter-familial and inter-generational violence, living in poverty, isolation and alcohol) i.e. a comprehensive national approach; and
3. each community must be actively engaged in determining what measures they want to have to meet their needs, as needs and solutions will vary between communities.

**Summary:** Violence and sexual abuse occurs in many parts of Australia's diverse community. A considerable body of research about, and blueprints to bring about change in, the level of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities already exist.

Underlying root causes of violence and abuse must be addressed as well as prevention, treatment, punishment and/or options for restorative justice. This position statement seeks to outline a series of principles and tangible actions designed to achieve these goals.

**Audience:** Australian, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and program managers. Other relevant stakeholder groups in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health field.

**Responsibility:** PHAA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Special Interest Group (SIG)

**Date policy adopted:** September 2009

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## **Prevention of Violence and Sexual Abuse in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: Position Statement**

This position statement should be read in conjunction with the PHAA's other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Policies, Health Inequities Policy and Gender and Health Policy.

### ***The Public Health Association of Australia notes:***

1. Violence and sexual abuse occurs in many parts of Australia's diverse community.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have consistently brought issues around violence and sexual abuse to the attention of authorities and politicians over the past at least twenty years.
3. A considerable body of research about, and blueprints to bring about change in, the level of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities already exist.
4. The response to this has been variable. Some politicians have used the issue to raise their profile, without resolving the issues that underlie the violence and without providing consistent long term funding and other support to help communities develop a capacity to lessen the incidence of violent acts.
5. Many communities have put in place partial solutions only to find funding is withdrawn after a 'pilot' program, and that on-going funding is not available, even where evaluations show clear gains.

### ***The Public Health Association of Australia believes that:***

6. The following principles must underlie actions taken to overcome violence and sexual abuse:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well being must be the highest priority for all spheres of government;
  - within this priority the safety and wellbeing of children must be paramount;
  - politicians from all parties and all spheres of Government must work together to address the underlying causes of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, (dispossession, inter-familial and inter-generational violence, living in poverty, isolation and alcohol) i.e. a comprehensive national approach;

- each community must be actively engaged in determining what measures they want to have to meet their needs, as needs and solutions will vary between communities;
- underlying root causes of violence and abuse must be addressed as well as prevention, treatment, punishment and/or options for restorative justice;
- multifaceted prevention, treatment and rehabilitation measures are required rather than single punitive approaches;
- existing successful community based programs must be acknowledged and be given recurrent rather than 'one-off' or 'project' funding;
- programs must be adjusted to meet community needs rather than the other way around;
- one area of focus must be on early childhood interventions that help families and individuals before they are in crisis as well as once a crisis has occurred;
- appropriate support measures for boys and men must be put in place to help them understand their roles and responsibilities in their communities, especially aspects of culture change;
- women and children also need strategies and identified 'safety plans' that they can rely on when abuse is threatened;
- imprisonment of men and women must be a punishment of last resort; and
- community oriented 'safe housing' must be considered, rather than removal of children to other communities, in those extreme cases where children have to be removed from their family homes.

**ADOPTED 2006, REVISED AND RE-ENDORSED IN 2009**

*First adopted 2006 at the Annual General Meeting of the Public Health Association of*

*Australia. Revised and re-endorsed in 2009.*

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