

NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICES

WORKING TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

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Visibility and voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is critical in addressing disproportionate rates of violence.

The coroner's decision to release the CCTV footage in relation to the tragic death of Ms Dhu will shine a light on the desperate need for better responses to victims of family violence, according to the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (National FVPLS Forum). Ms Dhu was a 22-year old Aboriginal woman who died in police custody of injuries related to family violence after being imprisoned for unpaid fines.

"The CCTV footage of Ms Dhu's death is a graphic representation of the consequences of lack of appropriate services and poor police responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence," said Antoinette Braybrook, Convenor of the National FVPLS Forum. "The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continue to be hidden from the public consciousness."

Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and 10 times more likely to die of violent assault than other women.

"Releasing this harrowing footage enables the public to witness the intersectionality of family violence, poor police responses and the lack of supports experienced by far too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

"The coronial findings in Ms Dhu's case emphasise the need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and invest far more in holistic and culturally appropriate early intervention, prevention and diversion strategies", said Ms Braybrook. "Ms Dhu needed to be helped and supported, not locked up."

The National FVPLS Forum is comprised of 14 Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLSs) member organisations across the country that provide culturally safe legal assistance and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children who experience family violence. They also deliver essential community legal education and early intervention and prevention activities. "FVPLSs see the failings in the system on a daily basis and the devastating impact this has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence," said Ms Braybrook.

"Giving visibility to Ms Dhu's experience is essential in addressing the disproportionate impact of violence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children" said Ms Braybrook. "Family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is a national emergency. Urgent and concrete action needs to be taken to prevent more deaths of vulnerable women".

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Media Release