

# Ipswich Multicultural DFV Roundtable - Outcomes Report

January 2026

## Executive Summary

The Ipswich Multicultural Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Roundtable, held in November 2025, brought together key stakeholders from DFV services and multicultural and settlement organisations, health, education, and legal sectors to discuss barriers faced by migrant and refugee communities in accessing safety, justice, and recovery services. Discussions highlighted systemic gaps in legal processes, financial and housing insecurity, increasing severity and complexity of violence, and fragmentation across the service system with limited culturally responsive support. While best practices such as co-located models, community-led initiatives, and targeted education programs exist, overall

capacity remains constrained by short funding cycles, workforce shortages, limited training and capacity building on cultural responsiveness, limited data, language support gaps, and inadequate recognition of Ipswich as a significant settlement location in program design and planning. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action, culturally responsive practice embedded across all sectors, improved data collection, and stronger collaboration between services. This outcomes report outlines key insights under four priority themes identified during the roundtable.

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# What we heard

Settlement Services International (SSI) extends sincere thanks to all participating organisations for their time, insights, and contributions to this roundtable. Your commitment and willingness to share experiences, challenges, and key considerations have been essential to articulating the context of DFV in multicultural communities living in Ipswich. We also acknowledge your ongoing commitment to supporting migrant and refugee women and children, despite the significant resourcing challenges and barriers captured in this outcomes report.

Participants in the roundtable included:

- Aunty Heather and Aunty Leanne (Black Angel Aunties)
  - UnitingCare Queensland
  - Ethnic Communities' Council of Queensland
  - Multicultural Australia
  - Mercy Community
  - Relationships Australia Queensland
  - Women's Crisis Support Service
  - Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre
  - Darling Downs and West Moreton Primary Health Network
  - Village Support
  - Queensland Government Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety
  - Queensland Government Department of Justice
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# Theme 1: Systemic Abuse and Misidentification in Legal Processes

Systemic abuse and misidentification continue to present significant challenges in the Ipswich context. Participants highlighted the absence of reliable data to understand local DFV trends, resulting in reliance on informal reporting from services and community members. Limited data on how many incidents of DFV progress to court means that system engagement and outcomes remain unclear. Cultural misunderstandings, inconsistent engagement of credentialed interpreters, and inadequate recognition of coercive control contribute to misidentification of victim-survivors as perpetrators. Perpetrators frequently manipulate legal, migration, and service systems to delay processes, undermine victim-survivor credibility, or exert ongoing control, including through extended family involvement. Settlement pressures, shifting gender dynamics, and lack of shared cultural understanding of non-physical forms of violence further complicate system responses and risk assessments. The impact of these issues is significant, resulting in marginalisation, disempowerment, and limiting safety. Victim-

survivors may be pressured, directly or indirectly, to return to unsafe environments due to limited service options or inaccurate risk assessment. Miscommunication across police and court processes erodes trust, while concerns about confidentiality prevent full disclosure. Visa categories restrict eligibility for services, leaving some victim-survivors without access to essential legal, financial, and housing supports. Relational dynamics among perpetrators, family members, and community networks can reinforce abuse, while magistrates' decisions and police minimisation of coercive control indicators can further undermine safety. Ultimately, perpetrators who are enabled to remain below legal thresholds continue to offend without consequence, reducing community safety and deepening victim-survivor isolation.

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## Theme 2: Escalating Severity and Complexity of Violence

Participants described a noticeable escalation in the severity and complexity of violence experienced by women in the area, with growing disclosures of nonlethal strangulation and coercive control signalling heightened risk. Despite increasing awareness of these forms of violence, the system remains insufficiently equipped to respond. Women often fear authorities and lack trust in services, discouraging disclosure and contributing to underreporting. Some prefer mainstream services due to concerns about confidentiality in cultural contexts, while others disclose only in informal community spaces. Gaps in training for health professionals, police, interpreters, and early career constables, particularly regarding sexual violence, consent, and trauma, limit frontline capacity. Migration journeys, community expectations, and cultural perceptions around shame and stigma compound barriers to help-seeking, while pressure from crisis services to respond quickly restricts nuanced assessment and safety planning.

These challenges lead to re-traumatisation, repeated storytelling, and disengagement from the formal service system. Women face external (community) and internalised shame, reducing their ability to seek protection or connect with community members who could offer support. Mainstream services often lack the training required to provide culturally responsive support, while community leaders shoulder significant responsibility without adequate safeguards, resourcing, or remuneration. Fear of authority figures, potential child protection involvement, and inconsistent language across agencies further limit access to justice. Sentencing outcomes are perceived as insufficient to deter violence, and emerging patterns among young men, including escalating harm across multiple partners, highlight the need for prevention, early intervention, and culturally responsive accountability measures.

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## Theme 3: Financial and Housing Insecurity

Financial and housing insecurity emerged as central drivers of vulnerability for women experiencing DFV. Many face challenges navigating the Australian financial, banking, and welfare systems, compounded by limited financial literacy, stigma, and fear of system involvement. Financial lenders exploit these gaps, including encouraging coerced cosigning of loans. Employment criteria and affordability constraints lock women out of private rental markets, while visa conditions, lack of superannuation, and obligations to send remittances overseas intensify financial strain. Since COVID, the local housing landscape has become increasingly inaccessible, marked by limited stock, rising costs, systemic discrimination, and insufficient social housing. Housing systems lack coordination and flexibility, leaving victim-survivors vulnerable at critical points of safety decision-making.

These conditions significantly impact women's capacity to leave unsafe relationships, contributing to prolonged exposure to violence and ongoing financial abuse. Debt accumulation, often in women's names, creates long-term burdens that deter independence. Access to Centrelink is restricted by childcare barriers, visa conditions, and employment requirements, while eligibility rules limit support from advocacy services. Family networks attempting to provide housing support face overcrowding pressures and burnout, further destabilising communities. Frontline workers reported increasing overwhelm in navigating fragmented housing pathways. Without adequate crisis accommodation in Ipswich, women must often leave their communities to access safety. Addressing these issues requires coordinated housing planning, expanded head leasing, advocacy to remove persons using violence from leases, and investment in both immediate and long-term culturally responsive financial and housing supports.

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## Theme 4: Service System Fragmentation and Cultural Responsiveness

Service fragmentation and limited cultural responsiveness were highlighted as overarching concerns affecting all stages of help-seeking. As the number of multicultural clients experiencing DFV increases, service capacity has not kept pace. Many frontline workers, particularly in non-specialist services, lack targeted training in culturally responsive practice, while education and training institutions continue to deliver inconsistent cultural responsiveness content in social work and human services courses. The lack of recognition of Ipswich as a significant settlement area restricts program and funding planning, contributing to significant gaps in bilingual practitioners, interpreter access, and culturally responsive pathways. Short-term funding cycles, fragmented service delivery, and workforce shortages undermine collaboration, while limited and inconsistent data restricts strategic planning. Transport barriers and dispersed services further hinder access, particularly for women on temporary visas who face additional restrictions on Medicare, legal support, and income assistance.

The impact is a system that is difficult to navigate, inconsistent in quality, and often culturally unresponsive. Victims-survivors experience repeated storytelling, disengagement, and mistrust as referrals break down or services are unable to meet cultural and linguistic needs. Missed opportunities for early intervention occur across health, education, and settlement settings, while statutory processes, including mandatory reporting, can retraumatise women and discourage engagement. Community leaders take on informal support roles without protections, and frontline practitioners experience burnout due to crisis-driven demands. Building a coordinated, fit-for-purpose culturally responsive system in Ipswich as a priority settlement location will require establishing multicultural DFV case coordination groups, mandating culturally responsive practice training, and improving data systems. Longer-term funding, integrated housing/DFV planning, enhanced cross sector collaboration, and discreet access to information through community spaces, such as QR-coded resources, are essential to strengthening the system and improving outcomes for multicultural women.

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# Key Considerations

## 1. Establishing an Integrated Multicultural DFV Hub in Ipswich

Create a culturally responsive place-based hub that brings together multicultural, mainstream, legal, health, housing, and community organisations. This structure would support shared learning, coordinated case responses, consistent practice, and a central point of collaboration for complex multicultural DFV matters.

## 2. Providing Culturally Responsive Training to All Frontline Services

Embed mandatory, ongoing training in culturally responsive DFV practice for frontline practitioners across police, courts, health, housing, education, and community services. Training should include coercive control, migration related risk and protective factors, interpreter engagement protocols, non-physical forms of violence, and trauma informed engagement.

## 3. Strengthening Interpreter Access, Responsiveness and Protocols Across Systems

Develop consistent, culturally informed interpreter engagement protocols to ensure equity of access, and service quality and safety for victim-survivors. Build capacity of credentialed interpreters to work in DFV context and in gender-responsiveness, and standardise interpreter engagement across police, courts, hospitals, and housing providers.

## 4. Developing an Integrated Housing and Safety Response for Multicultural Women

Enhance collaboration between DFV, housing, homelessness, and settlement services to create flexible, culturally appropriate housing pathways. Facilitate head leasing flexibility, removal of persons using violence from leases, provision of crisis accommodation within Ipswich, and coordinated responses that address systemic discrimination and affordability barriers.

## 5. Improving Data Collection, Sharing, and Evidence Based Planning for Multicultural Communities

Strengthen data systems to capture language, visa category, migration background, family composition, risk factors, and service access barriers. Use this data to drive place-based planning, inform program and funding, identify gaps, and ensure culturally responsive interventions throughout the service system.

# Conclusion

The roundtable highlighted the urgent need for coordinated and systemic reform to ensure equitable access to safety, justice, and support for victim-survivors of DFV from multicultural communities in Ipswich. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of collaborative, culturally responsive, and sustainable approaches across prevention, intervention, response, recovery and healing. The key considerations outlined in this outcomes report provide directions for continued dialogue, joint planning and implementing shared accountability to strengthen the domestic and family violence service system and improve outcomes for the Ipswich community.

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