



**Territory
Community
Safety**

Knife Crime Reduction Strategy



Knife Crime Reduction Strategy

Why do we need a strategy?

Knife or edged weapon offences have increased in the last year. Rising incident numbers and growing public concern highlight the need for the Northern Territory (NT) to action strategies to ensure there are informed responses to prevent future harm, and identify ways to improve community safety.

This strategy outlines actions to reduce knife crime and make the NT a safe place for all Territorians. It builds on existing research from across Australia and around the world to ensure a holistic approach to addressing knife crime in the NT.

This strategy informs a cooperative **whole of Government** approach to build partnerships with community, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, businesses and law enforcement to tackle knife crime in the NT.

It also builds on existing initiatives that aim to reduce violence and harm being delivered by the Department of Education, NT Police and the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

This strategy aligns with actions being taken by Government to address knife-related violence, including:

- introducing a presumption against bail for weapon offences
- introducing police wand powers to detect weapons before they are used; and
- developing Action Plan 2 under the Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework.

This strategy recognises that knife-related violence affects victims, victims' families, business, workers and the broader community's safety. It also builds on existing partnerships to work with community leaders, non-government organisations and business to provide support to victims and their families, services and the broader community. This sends a strong message that knife crime is unacceptable and is not tolerated.

The strategy is based on the findings and recommendations of a wide range of experts including NT Police, Education, Health, and more. It was determined that an approach that targets violent crime as a whole will have better outcomes by reducing all types of violent crimes, rather than focusing solely on knife crime.

Short-term (3-6 months) and medium-term (6-12 months) actions have been identified to ensure better outcomes.

Key statistical characteristics of knife-related incidents

Evidence

This strategy is based on analysis of knife-related offending data to form targeted actions in response to identified priority areas.

Knife crime forms a small proportion of overall offending. Less than 2% of offences recorded by NT Police between May 2022 and April 2023 involved a knife or edged weapon and only 5% of all violent offences and 0.6% of property offences involved a knife or edged weapon.

Data shows that incidents of knife-related offending have increased by 22% from May 2022 to April 2023. This appears to be tied to an increase in overall offending, as the proportion of assault offences involving knives (the largest component of knife-related offending) has remained steady at 5-6%.

Three priority areas were identified:

1. domestic and family violence;
2. individuals and groups sleeping rough; and
3. young people.

Domestic and family violence

In the year ending April 2023, 47% of knife-related incidents involved domestic and family violence (DFV). Overall, 81% of knife-related assaults involving a female offender were recorded as a DFV incident and 69% of knife-related assault offences with a male offender involved DFV.

In 2022-23, nearly half (48%) of the knife-related offences in DFV incidents occurred in residential premises.

Individuals and groups sleeping rough

Information provided by NT Police and the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities suggests individuals sleeping rough often carry knives for practical purposes (such as cutting foods and opening cans) and due to a belief they need them for their own protection.

There is limited data available on reasons for knife possession or how many people are carrying knives in public. Data on this will be sourced through the implementation of the wandering powers under the Police Legislation Further Amendment Bill 2023.

Young people

Young people accounted for 16% of offenders in knife-related offences between 2015 and April 2023. Anecdotal evidence suggests the reasons for knife possession by young people include:

- 'equal arms', e.g. another party is using or carrying a knife, causing a perceived need to be equally armed;
- TikTok and other social media platforms are influencing or encouraging young people to carry knives;
- knives may be considered a fashionable and practical accessory; and
- weapons-enabled offending, such as robbery.

Key findings

- Knives or edged weapons are involved in only 5% of violent crimes in the NT. Any strategy to reduce knife crime must include a focus on violent crime holistically, to reduce a range of different violent crime types.
- Domestic and family violence is strongly associated with adult knife offending in the NT, with almost half of knife-related incidents involving domestic and family violence.
- Young people make up a small number of knife-related offences.
- Individuals sleeping rough carry knives for practical purposes and protection with no intention of offending.
- Gang violence is not a significant driver of crime in the NT as in other jurisdictions. However, anecdotal information suggests some groups may have historical disputes.
- A model of prevention with a public health, education and social issues focus is needed to reduce knife and violent crime.
- No legislative changes at this time, but it is important to continually review and look to other jurisdictions to ensure we have a contemporary legislative framework.

Actions

To address the underlying drivers contributing to knife-related offending, short-term and medium-term actions will be undertaken to enhance community safety.

Short term (3-6 months)

1. Together with retailers, develop a uniform practice for the security of knives and weapons to prevent theft.
2. Work with industry to ensure de-escalation and safety training is delivered to retail and hospitality workers as part of their employment.
3. Work with existing non-government service providers to ensure people sleeping rough have alternative strategies to feel safe.
4. Develop an evidence-informed, culturally appropriate violence awareness campaign about violence of all kinds, including the dangers of carrying a knife.
5. Under the auspices of the Territory Community Safety Coordination Centre (TCSCC), NT Police will lead the development of an action plan to enhance the detection and prevention of knife-related crime in public places.

The TCSCC will also lead the development of a holistic violence reduction framework that will work in tandem with the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework to coordinate actions and services, and an accompanying monitoring and evaluation framework that ties all programs and recent policy changes (e.g., DFV, bail, stop and search legislation and recent sentencing amendments) together to track the effectiveness of those strategies.

Medium term (6-12 months)

6. Continue to partner across agencies to develop consistent de-escalation training across schools and service providers.
7. Develop a trauma and injury-informed harm reduction framework that is culturally appropriate.



Current initiatives and strategies in the NT

Police Legislation Further Amendment Bill 2023

Due to tragic knife-related incidents in 2023 a new stop and search power was introduced. The legislation gives proactive police powers to detect and remove knives and other weapons unlawfully possessed in public places. It also allows police to use better detection techniques such as the use of metal detecting wands. Additional high risk areas have been declared where police can conduct stop and search operations. It is anticipated these new powers will improve the safety of Territorians by discouraging and reducing knife carriage.



Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018–2028

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018-2028 is a 10 year strategy to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence. Key aspects of the framework are:

- implementation is being progressed over the next 10 years through three action plans;
- perpetrators are held accountable and connected early to responses that change their behaviours and reduce violence; and
- legislation, policy and funding models enable a responsive, high quality and accountable domestic, family and sexual violence service system.

Data confirms that knife-related offending has a strong and direct link to DFV and actions under this strategy will complement work underway to prevent and respond to DFV through the DFSV Reduction Framework and Action Plan.

Anti-social behaviour arrangements: Territory Community Safety Coordination Centre

The Territory Community Safety Coordination Centre commenced in May 2023. The TCSCC is a multi-agency capability led by NT Police that works at a grass roots level to identify issues and provide coordinated wraparound services for individuals and families that need support.

TCSCC brings together agency liaison officers from Health; Education; Territory Families, Housing and Communities; Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; Corporate and Digital Development; and Industry, Tourism and Trade, enabling centralised reporting up, down and across agencies. Further, senior officers from CM&C and NT Police in each region engage in weekly Interagency Tasking and Coordination Groups.

The Centre works to harness and leverage existing anti-social behaviour resources and programs across the NT to drive a coordinated approach across government and non-government sectors, improving efficiency and consistency across all regions to improve social order outcomes.

The TCSCC develops hotspot mapping and tracking of recurring issues for timely responses to issues raised by the community.

Cohesive integration across the various daily patroller coordination meetings between centre staff and key partners (including night patrol, private security, Local Government, Liquor Licensing, youth outreach and police) ensures information sharing is a central tenet of the Centre.

Key initiatives underway for the TCSCC

- Coordinated anti-social behaviour measures, which include grant funding, private security contracts, programs, staffing resources and reporting systems.
- A live data dashboard for visibility of existing and emerging hotspots. This improves strategic planning and delivers more timely operational responses.
- Mapping service provision in regions and building capability tool kits to increase awareness, connectivity and information sharing.
- Ongoing engagement with community bodies including the Community Resilience Engagement Command (within NT Police), Larrakia Nation, Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, Tangentyere Council, Jawoyn Association, Kalano Community Association, Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, and Thamarrurr Development Corporation. This ensures all activities are underpinned by strong cultural authority.

TCSCC has already delivered a range of benefits, including identified and targeted hotspots, assisting families to return to their communities and enabling health checks and enrolment of children into schools.

Community safety plans

In regional and remote areas, NT Police have already developed Community Safety Committees working with stakeholders to develop community-led measures to address identified safety issues, including public violence and knife crime.

Community Safety Committees provide an opportunity for communities to drive local initiatives. Each remote community has a tailored plan under the Committee framework which has 3 core pillars:

1. mutual respect and working relationships;
2. reducing DFV (including abuse and neglect of children); and
3. reducing harmful substance misuse.

Young people

There are a number of existing programs to educate young people on social values and build their confidence and trust to know when and where to seek support. Some of the existing measures include the safe relationships curriculum that develops skills in young people to build and maintain healthy and safe relationships.

Schools often work in partnership with health professionals, such as school nurses or clinical staff to deliver specialised programs. Social and emotional learning curriculum resources are also available to all schools through the national Be You website.



School Based Police Program

The Department of Education and NT Police work collaboratively to deliver programs, activities and services in NT Government schools aimed at:

- improving young people's understanding of community and safety issues;
- establishing strong and positive relationships between police, students, families, schools and school communities; and
- maintaining safe and supportive school environments.

The School Based Police Program operates in 13 NT Government schools and is focused on students in years 7 to 10. This program improves young people's understanding of community and safety issues. The program employs 15 School Based Police Officers.

School Based Police Officers work alongside teachers to deliver a tailored education program aligned to the Australian Curriculum learning areas of personal safety, road safety, alcohol and other drugs safety, cyber safety, and community safety. Any additional education program is a school decision and must meet the needs of the school community.

Other initiatives for young people

The below initiatives have been designed to build positive relationships with young people across the NT.

Healthy Life, Creative Life Program

Intervention support for disengaged young people in the Big Rivers and Barkly regions, including programs for literacy and numeracy, community-based programs and access to Vocational Education and Training/work experience. Delivery is through an integrated program of sports, arts, social and emotional learning, culture, language and learning on country for remote secondary students at risk of disengaging from school and their communities.

Palmerston Young People Skills Centre

The Skills Centre provides practical life skills and work-readiness training to instil in young people the knowledge and skills required to kick-start their working lives. This centre puts young people on the path to success by mentoring and supporting them to learn alongside employers, get the qualifications they need, and acquire the experience and confidence to find work and succeed in their chosen careers. It is expected that through positive engagement in the centre there will be a reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour by young people in the community.

Yipirinya Sunset School

The Sunset School operates outside normal school hours, across weekends and on school holidays. The Sunset School aims for long-term positive pathways for young people through engagement in meaningful activities, promoting agency and self-determination from a strength-based perspective.

Activities include team sports, cooking, information technology, cross-curricula priorities, and arts and crafts, while targeting community engagement, social development and relationship building. Key program elements include working with families to provide culturally appropriate trauma-informed and client-led practices. It also provides wraparound holistic service delivery offering employment opportunities for Aboriginal staff and referrals for families to other support services.

Respectful Relationships

NT schools deliver education about healthy and safe relationships (in accordance with the Australian Curriculum), and personal and social capability. Currently, the general concept of 'consent', personal safety, respectful relationships and sexuality education are addressed through the Health and Physical Education focus areas of:

- Safety (foundation to year 10);
- Relationships (foundation to year 2); and
- Relationships and sexuality (year 3 to year 10).

Implementing the strategy

Guiding Principles

The NT Government is committed to ongoing coordination and cooperation across Government agencies, business and non-government groups to implement this strategy.

The following principles will guide the implementation:

- A Public Health Response Committee will be established to oversee implementation. This will allow for expert representatives to continue the research, broadly consult with government and non-government groups, and track and adjust agreed actions. As part of this work, the Committee will enter into a data sharing arrangement with NT Police to track the effectiveness of stop and search legislation.
- Police will continue to identify trends on knife-related offending to ensure future programs and police engagement reflects the breadth of situations in which knife-related offending occurs.
- Evaluations will be commissioned for relevant knife crime reduction strategies, including a 2 year outcome evaluation to ensure programs and projects are evaluated for effectiveness.
- Continue our work in reducing DFV.





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August 2023

