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Money needed to save lives

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Stakeholders welcome DV law changes but say more funds required

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Advocates have welcomed reforms to modernise and strengthen the Territory's domestic violence laws, but say it will be "meaningless" without needs-based funding.

New legislation, which passed through parliament on Tuesday, introduces a definition of coercive control into NT law, requires more information sharing from police, and recognises the role of technology in abuse.

It modernises the definition of economic abuse, includes a definition of emotional abuse, and strengthens requirements for people placed on Domestic Violence Orders.

The laws stop short of making coercive control a stand-alone offence, as other states such as Queensland and New South Wales have moved to do.

Anti-domestic violence campaigner and researcher Chay Brown said the cautious approach to criminalising coercive control was important to minimise the risk of women being misidentified as perpetrators by police and prosecutors - something Aboriginal women are at risk of.

"We need to see how it plays out in other states, we don't want to rush into it," Dr Brown said.

"There's a fear of criminalising Aboriginal women who are primary victims, historically we've seen that play out."

"All the frontline services need to have a solid understanding about what domestic violence looks like and what coercive control means."

Under the new laws, coercive control is defined as acts involving "violent, threatening or intimidating behaviour" that have the effect of "restricting the freedom of a person".

Dr Brown said the move was a positive step but little would change without more funding.

"We can have all the best legislation in the world but unless the government steps up and funds the essential services there's no hope for things changing," she said.

Northern Territory Council of Social Service similarly warned that without more money and training, the Territory's domestic violence crisis was unlikely to improve.

"We welcome the modernisation of the definition of 'domestic violence' to include coercive control to better reflect the experiences of victim-survivors in the NT," senior policy officer Sophie Hantz said.

"Legislative change is one piece of the broader solution, we need comprehensive training provided to those who will implement these laws.

"The NT domestic, family and sexual violence sector needs a significant increase in funding to meet the extraordinary level of need. Without funding based on need, women and children will continue to go without access to support and safety, which will continue to result in deaths."

The rate of domestic violence homicide in the NT is seven times higher than the national average, and Indigenous women are 13 times more likely to be killed by their intimate partners than non-Indigenous women and men.