

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

Policy shift, not better communication, needed to reverse family violence cuts and risk to women

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Deep Federal cuts to community legal centres and advocacy restrictions will affect women and children at risk of family violence, and contradict the prime minister's claimed commitment to ending family violence in his announcement of Rosie Batty as Australian of the Year .

'There's no way of "selling" or better communicating the current policies to women at risk of death from family violence. What is needed is a significant policy shift to reverse these cuts and freedom for community legal centres to speak out on the problem and suggest ways it can be stopped,' said Liana Buchanan, Executive Officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres, today.

'Significant cuts commence as of July this year. By 2017-18, Commonwealth funding for community legal centres will have been cut by 25 per cent (\$41.6m to \$32.6m),' she said.

More than a third of cases dealt with by community legal centres in Victoria currently relate to family violence.

'Community legal centres are losing lawyers who help women with intervention orders to keep them safe, while others face closing outreach services in outer-urban and regional areas.

'There is just no substitute for local, free legal help for women who in many cases are already isolated from services and have nowhere else to go,' Ms Buchanan said.

A recent Productivity Commission report on access to justice arrangements supported the case both to increase funding for legal assistance services and to protect their right to carry out law reform and policy advocacy.

'Cutting and silencing community legal centres is the wrong way to tackle family violence, and if Prime Minister Abbott wants to "reset" his government, reversing these damaging policies is a vital start,' Ms Buchanan concluded.

As well as frontline services to tackle family violence, the cuts will also impact free legal help offered by around 60 centres nationally across a range of common but often serious legal problems related to homelessness, credit and debt, and employment. The Australia Institute estimates that around 500,000 Australians miss out on free legal help every year.

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