

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

Case for funding overwhelming as Senate inquiry backs legal assistance services in the fight against family violence

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Interim recommendations of a Senate inquiry to restore and significantly boost funding for legal assistance services to help tackle family violence have been welcomed by the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the peak body for 49 community legal centres in Victoria.

‘The Senate inquiry into domestic violence in Australia adds to a now overwhelming case to properly fund community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services following the urgent concern of State and Territory Attorneys-General over legal assistance in their joint letter to Federal Attorney-General George Brandis, the recommendations of a \$200 million funding boost by the Productivity Commission, calls by the community legal sector nationally, and the welcome concern of individual Coalition MPs over the funding of specific community centres,’ said Liana Buchanan, Executive Officer of the Federation today.

‘The Senate inquiry recognises that community legal centres were already severely underfunded before these cuts, and that a funding boost is needed beyond the restoration of the cuts so that women seeking help with family violence are not turned away and left at risk.

‘Protecting women and children from family violence in Australia has depended for too long on a shoestring that is being dangerously frayed by Federal Government cuts.

‘In 2013–14 alone, the Federal Government spent \$688 million on its own legal services. In 2017–18, community legal centres will receive only \$32 million from the Commonwealth, a 25 per cent reduction from 2013–14, and that’s without further cuts that may be imposed through the May Federal Budget,’ Ms Buchanan said.

The Senate inquiry has also recommended the harmonisation of intervention orders across jurisdictions.

‘This is a welcome recommendation, but like the Federal Government’s domestic violence awareness campaign, it is one that will be undermined by cuts to the funding of free legal help for women seeking family violence intervention orders through the courts.

In Victoria, one in three new cases opened by community legal centres relates to family violence.

‘If we value access to justice in Australia, the legal system must be more than the playground of the well represented and powerful, and the courts must truly improve the safety of women and children at risk from family violence. Supporting community legal centres, not cutting, down-sizing and closing them, is a vital step towards that essential aim,’ Ms Buchanan concluded.

Media contacts

Liana Buchanan
Executive Officer
Federation of Community Legal Centres

Darren Lewin-Hill
Communications Manager
Federation of Community Legal Centres

0407 189 221

0488 773 535