

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

COAG commitments to act on domestic violence must include funding for services that fight it

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COAG commitments to act on domestic violence will prove ineffective unless they include sustainable funding for the services that fight it, according to the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria).

'Laudable goals such as a national intervention order scheme risk being undermined by a continuing crisis in legal assistance funding that has not been fixed by the partial withdrawal by Federal Attorney-General George Brandis of threatened cuts that were to take effect in July.

'If women can't get free legal help when applying for an intervention order, how effective in protecting their safety will those orders be?' said Liana Buchanan, executive officer of the Federation, today.

'The message should be clear from the Senate inquiry on domestic violence, the Productivity Commission, and a recent joint letter by State and Territory Attorney's-General warning of the crisis that legal assistance needs to be sustainably funded both for domestic violence and across a range of areas impacting vulnerable people around Australia'.

The Productivity Commission has recommended an immediate boost of \$200 million to legal assistance services, with community legal centres receiving only \$44.6 million in Federal funding in 2013-14, compared to Federal Government spending of \$688 million in legal assistance for itself in the same year.

Last week former Governor-General Quentin Bryce urged action, calling on leadership from government on funding and services, and warning that there could be no bystanders in the response to domestic violence.

'Sadly, Federal Government policies risk making unwilling bystanders of services that just aren't properly funded to meet the increasing demand for help from women at risk.

'Today's COAG meeting and the forthcoming Federal Budget can choose to match claimed commitments on domestic violence with concerted, national action and investment,' Buchanan said.

She said the Federation supported a joint letter to the Prime Minister in advance of today's meeting that called for 'robust, long-term and adequate resourcing of women's specialist violence and related services (including health, counselling, housing and legal services) to enable better outcomes for women who present in crisis and with complex needs'.

'Cutting or failing to properly fund services that tackle domestic violence is a deadly austerity we cannot accept,' Buchanan concluded.

Liana Buchanan
Executive Officer
Federation of Community Legal Centres
0407 189 221

Darren Lewin-Hill
Communications Manager
Federation of Community Legal Centres
0488 773 535

