

# Media Release



Federation of  
Community Legal Centres  
VICTORIA

## **Royal commission vital to stronger family violence response in a system where delayed action will be measured in women's lives – community legal peak**

**Thursday 25 June 2015 – for immediate release**

A submission released today by the State peak for Victoria's 50 community legal centres has made more than 60 recommendations to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

'This royal commission is a vital opportunity to strengthen Victoria's response to family violence to better protect women and children, including through better access to free legal help and improving the specialist capacity of our courts,' said Dr Chris Atmore, senior policy adviser with the Federation of Community Legal Centres, today.

'Our recommendations span every facet of the family violence system to stem the tide of violence that on average across Australia has seen two deaths from family violence every week this year. Sadly, we will measure delayed action in women's lives,' Dr Atmore said.

Drawing on interviews and case studies from member centres, the submission highlights statewide gaps in the system and recommends action to address a lack of sustainable funding for free legal help and support services, variable accessibility to the family violence system across Victoria, including through the courts, and the need to better study and learn from each family violence death to prevent avoidable deaths in the future.

'Not enough courts have appropriately specialist responses to family violence, as well as legal and other supports for women navigating the process, not enough courts are as safe as they should be, and the police response to intentional breaches of intervention orders needs to be more consistent to better protect women and children. There is also a lot more we can do to tighten the net of accountability around family violence perpetrators,' Dr Atmore said.

She said better funding for community legal centres would enable a more holistic free legal service for women facing family violence so that they had continuity of help through a too often fragmented and uncertain system.

The submission also warns that community legal centres must not be required to adhere to a narrow interpretation of vulnerability in deciding which women should be eligible for help. It also identified systemic advocacy – including through the royal commission – as vital to improving the family violence system.

While many of the issues addressed in the submission focus on the Victorian response to family violence, community legal centres received deep cuts in the May Federal Budget. The cuts will be compounded by a new National Partnership Agreement to be concluded by the Federal Government with States and Territories within days. The agreement seeks to restrict eligibility for help and prevents centres advocating with Federal funds.

'Because of the breadth of family violence work they undertake, community legal centres are in a unique position to comment on how the family violence response is actually operating "on the ground". It is vital they not be limited to individual casework, but can also work towards broad system

improvements, even where advocating for these might be seen to challenge policies of governments, whether at State or Federal level,' Dr Atmore said.

Currently twenty community legal centres provide help at 29 Magistrates Courts, with a further 15 providing assistance to family violence victims and survivors in many related areas of law, including family law, fines, debts, housing and homelessness, and compensation for victims of crime.

In 2013–14, 'family or domestic violence order' was the top legal problem type for community legal centres across Victoria, comprising 15.1 per cent of all recorded problem types. Community legal centres provided 5125 instances of information (about 1 in every 11 overall) and 6267 legal advices (more than 1 in 9) concerning family violence.

Nearly 8500 new family violence cases were opened, meaning that greater than one in every three new cases for community lawyers were about family violence. In the first half of 2014–15, 39 per cent of new cases initiated by Victorian community legal centres related to family violence. More than 80 per cent of Victorian community legal centre clients earn less than \$26,000 a year.

'We must be in no doubt that the outcomes of this royal commission will be crucial to the safety of women and children not only in Victoria, but nationally.

'Our submission supports the national intervention order scheme proposed by the Federal Government, but a national response is needed across the broader family violence system, and that needs to be matched by a commitment to sustainable funding. A system that continues to turn away thousands of women due to inadequate resources is abandoning them to injury and death,' Dr Atmore concluded.

[Download the Federation's submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence](#) (PDF, 2.7MB)

[Browse submissions](#) from the Federation's member community legal centres

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