

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

First decision of Cabinet on family violence a positive step but falls short for women seeking legal help to stay safe

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This morning's announcement of a package of initiatives to tackle family violence, reflecting the first Cabinet decision of the Turnbull Government, is a positive indication of a greater focus on family violence but will still leave thousands of women without family violence legal help, according to the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

The announcement of funding for family violence legal help recognises that many women escaping violence cannot get the help they need. It is also an important acknowledgement of community legal centres' family violence work, and their development of cutting-edge ways to help victims of family violence including through justice-health partnerships.

However, the funding announced today will help just three Victorian community legal centres to boost services and help more women. Sadly, women outside these centres' catchment areas will not benefit, while community legal centres more broadly still face severe Federal funding cuts that will swamp today's investment,' said Federation executive officer, Liana Buchanan.

In July 2017, the Federal Government has locked in cuts of nearly 30 per cent to national community legal centre funding, taking \$12.1 million from community legal centres and free legal help for women facing family violence in just that year.

The \$15 million over three years, or \$5 million nationally, announced today barely covers the national funding the Federal Government is taking in just the first year of the cuts, let alone the sustained underfunding in the years that follow.

Buchanan rejected a statement on national radio by Senator Michaelia Cash this morning that claims of cuts were a 'false and misleading campaign of misinformation', and called on the Federal Government to reveal exactly how much community legal centres would be funded in each year across the current agreement as a result of today's announcement.

'Unfortunately, the National Partnership on Legal Assistance Services, signed by the former Prime Minister in July 2015, makes it very clear that funding to community legal centres will drop from \$42.2 million nationally in 2016-17 to \$30.1 million in 2017-18. This runs counter to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission, which has found legal assistance to be severely underfunded and recommended an urgent investment of \$200 million a year.

'When the Federal Government is proposing a national intervention order scheme in which community legal centres will play a vital role, the cuts planned for 2017-18 simply make no sense.

'Today, a small number of selected community legal centres will be grateful that some women won't be denied the help they need, but the Federal Government continues to endanger thousands of others,

by denying them help with intervention orders and the many legal problems that flow from family violence,' Buchanan concluded.

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