

Media Release



More needed for family violence legal help, as State boost threatened by Federal cuts

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While welcoming \$2.5 million for community legal centres under yesterday's family violence funding announcement by the Victorian Government, at least an additional \$4 million per year is needed to tackle family violence related legal problems, according to the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

'We acknowledge that the Victorian Government is carrying more than its share of funding for community legal centres, but legal help is central to an effective family violence response and we urge further support in this month's State Budget, and strongly encourage the State Government to advocate for a significant increase in funding at the Federal level,' said Dr Chris Atmore, senior policy adviser with the Federation, today.

'Incremental increases in State funding for free legal help are set to be swamped by a Federal Government 30 per cent national cut to community legal centres in July next year.

'Following on the report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, yesterday's announcement by the Victorian Government now creates an urgent expectation that the Federal Government will respond with a significant funding boost in the May Federal Budget.

'Last September's Women's Safety Package cannot be the Federal Government's continual response when it knows that legal help funding in that package is more than wiped out by 2017 cuts it has locked in under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services.

'The Federal Government remains in the untenable position of being committed to a national intervention order scheme, at the same time as it cuts community legal centres that have a central role in helping women secure intervention orders through the courts,' Dr Atmore said.

Family violence legal help has seen a big increase in the work of community legal centres in Victoria, with 40 per cent of new cases each year relating to family violence and 20 community legal centres providing around 10,000 duty lawyer services across 29 Victorian courts.

As well as their role in the intervention order process, community legal centres help women resolve the many other legal issues resulting from family violence, including family law and debt arising through violent relationships.

'Community legal centres are the mainstay of free legal help for victims of family violence,' Dr Atmore said.

She said the chronic underfunding of family violence legal help was part of a broader crisis in legal assistance funding that had led State and Territory Attorneys-General to write twice to Federal Attorney-General George Brandis last year.

'Sadly, little has changed, and urgent concerns remain. A September 2014 Productivity Commission report to which the Federal Government is yet to respond recommended an immediate yearly increase of \$200 million to combined legal assistance services, including community legal centres.

'We need a funding commitment from the Federal Government that matches its rhetoric on family violence,' Dr Atmore concluded.

The Federation has supported a Federal Budget submission by the National Association of Community Legal Centres arguing for the reversal of the 2017 Federal cuts, a funding boost reflecting the recommendations of the Productivity Commission, and a plan to fund legal assistance on a sustainable basis to reflect rising legal need.

For media interview and information

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