

Media Release



Family violence legal assistance announcement manifestly inadequate, community lawyers say

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Today's Federal Government announcement of \$30 million over three years for family violence legal assistance will fail to reverse cuts to community legal centres and is manifestly inadequate to meet the needs of women seeking protection from family violence, according to the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Victorian peak body representing more than a quarter of Australia's 200 community legal centres.

'This announcement follows a Budget that allocated nothing specifically to community legal centres at the heart of free legal help for women seeking intervention orders through the courts,' said Katie Fraser, acting executive officer of the Federation, today.

'The Budget not only left in place more than \$34 million in cuts to commence in July 2017, it failed to provide a funding boost consistent with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission, which the Federal Government ignored.

'Now the government is offering to share \$30 million over three years among all legal assistance services. Whatever share we get, that would be more than we have at the moment, so it will certainly be put to good use, but it fails to reverse our cuts or go anywhere near an estimated shortfall of around \$100 million over four years for community legal centres alone.

Fraser said all free legal assistance services were underfunded and vying for insufficient resources. She said the \$30 million was also taken from broader family violence funding included in the Budget but not allocated to legal assistance services.

'What we have is an inadequate share of an inadequate overall funding pool extracted from broader family violence funding that has been widely condemned as grossly deficient by family violence peak organisations.

'All parts of the family violence system need to be fully funded, not set against each other,' Ms Fraser said.

She said the announcement today also failed to acknowledge that Federal Government cuts are set to impact free legal help through community legal centres beyond family violence, including assistance with problems arising with family law, workplace disputes, credit and debt, consumer issues, infringements, tenancy, homelessness, and discrimination.

'We help people who can't afford a lawyer and can't get help from legal aid. Without fully funded community legal centres, thousands of vulnerable people have nowhere else to go,' Fraser concluded.

For media interview and information

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