

MEDIA RELEASE

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ADDITIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE FUNDING WELCOME BUT INADEQUATE

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) welcomes the announcement of an extra \$30 million of Commonwealth funding over 3 years for legal assistance services to assist people experiencing family violence.

The Attorney-General George Brandis and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash made the announcement in Brisbane today. The \$30 million is part of the extra \$100 million allocated in last week's Federal Budget to implement the Third Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children.

'We welcome any additional funding for legal assistance services, including Community Legal Centres (CLCs), Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), directed at addressing family violence and this is a positive step,' NACLC National Spokesperson Daniel Stubbs said.

'This additional funding adds to the \$15 million provided to CLCs and LACs under the Women's Safety Package and means that we will be able to continue to provide some of the crucial legal help women experiencing family violence need. We also welcome the Government's commitment to consulting the sector about the best way to allocate the additional funding'.

'However, we have a number of serious concerns about the funding'.

'It is difficult to understand why the Government would provide CLCs with some share of \$10 million per year as part of this funding, but during the same period cut CLCs by 30% nationally. It is tantamount to paying for a new roof on a house but removing the foundations at the same time'.

'\$10 million per year over three years is a totally inadequate amount for legal assistance services in the face of rising demand and funding cuts. CLCs alone are facing funding cuts of \$34.83 million over three years from 1 July next year'.

'The broader package of \$100 million is also insufficient to address family and domestic violence more broadly. We know countless frontline services are facing funding cuts and uncertainty, and the Government's stated commitment to addressing family violence isn't backed up by adequate funding'.

'It is also important to recognise that women experiencing family violence face a range of legal problems. So often CLCs help women with tenancy, debt, social security and employment law issues. It is vital that this is recognised in allocating the funding, and further highlights the importance of reversing the broader funding cuts to the sector'.

'While we welcome the Government's statement that the funding will encompass targeted assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children, some proportion of \$10 million is just not enough. We know Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised and the crucial role that services like the FVPLS provide, and so additional and specific investment in these services is crucial'.

‘Overall, we look forward to working with the Government in the short-term to implement an appropriate allocation model for this one-off \$30 million funding, but also more broadly to see a reversal of the looming funding cuts facing CLCs and adequate and sustainable long-term funding for the entire legal assistance sector,’ concluded Mr Stubbs.

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Note to Editors

NACLC continues to call on the Federal Government to:

1. Reverse the \$12.1 million funding cut to Community Legal Centres nationally in 2017-2018, the \$11.6 million cut in 2018-2019 and the \$11.13 million cut in 2019-2020 (amounting to a \$34.83 million cut over the period 2017-18 to 2019-2020) under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services.
2. Implement the Productivity Commission’s recommendation from its Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry and provide an immediate injection of \$200 million per year into the legal assistance service sector, which should be shared between the Commonwealth (60%) and the States and Territories (40%). This should equate to at least an additional \$24 million per year allocated to CLCs (\$14.4 million p.a. Commonwealth and \$9.6 million p.a. from States and Territories)
3. Commit to implementing an appropriate process for determining adequate and sustainable longer-term funding contributions to the legal assistance sector by both Federal and State and Territory Governments, in consultation with the sector.