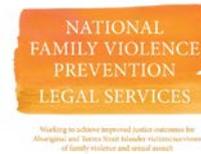




NATSILS
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES



MEDIA RELEASE

TUESDAY 28 JUNE 2016

LAST CHANCE FOR PARTIES TO PRIORITISE LEGAL HELP FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The peak bodies for legal assistance services today joined forces calling for all parties to prioritise funding for vital legal services ahead of the Federal Election this weekend.

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (NFVPLS) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) expressed concern about the funding cuts and challenges facing legal assistance services and called for urgent action.

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) face funding cuts of up to 30% nationally and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services have had their national program abolished and are significantly underfunded.

'Community legal centres across Australia are being forced to turn away hundreds of thousands of people each year at the same time as we are seeing a rise in demand for services. Whichever party forms Government, it is crucial that ensuring people can get the legal help they need is a priority' said Dan Stubbs, National Spokesperson for NACLC.

'In terms of CLC funding, we are concerned that neither major party has fully committed to reversing the broad funding cuts, or implementing the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission for urgent additional funding for the sector' he added.

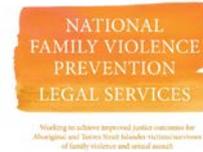
Convenor of the National FVPLS Forum Antoinette Braybrook expressed concern about the situation facing FVPLS across Australia:

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and 10 times more likely to die of violent assault than other women. This is the epicentre of the national family violence crisis' she said.

'FVPLSs respond to this crisis by providing essential services for safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence. We are calling for the reinstatement of our National FVPLS Program with long-term funding to create certainty for our services across the country' she said.

'Whoever wins the election on Saturday we need a greater commitment to ensure that FVPLSs are adequately funded to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence can access our culturally safe services. We have been disappointed by the failure to back up stated concern for addressing family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with adequate funding' she concluded.

'The ATSILS provide vital legal help to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and they're in crisis mode trying to cope with current demand. Without the provision of new funding the ATSILS will be required to withdraw from front line services in 2017 leaving more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to cycle through the justice system with enormous social, cultural and economic costs to this country' said Wayne Muir, Co-Chair of NATSILS.



'We have been fighting hard to secure funding stability, particularly to allow the ATSILS to deliver vital services in family law. Adequately funding culturally competent family law services will help us invest in the front end before our children and our families reach a crisis point. It will help us turn around the state of access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' Mr Muir concluded.

'Importantly, neither the ALP or Coalition funding commitments are sufficient to address the broad funding cuts or to solve the crisis facing the legal assistance sector. We need an additional investment in the sector consistent with the Productivity Commission's recommendations, as well as a long-term commitment to adequately funding the sector' said Ms Braybrook.

'Time is running out for the parties to show the sector and people across Australia that they care about ensuring people can get access to the legal help they need' concluded Mr Stubbs.

NACLC, NFVPLS and NATSILS call on all parties to commit to:

1. Reversing funding cuts facing Community Legal Centres (\$34.83mill over the period 2017-18 to 2019-2020) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (\$18mill over the period 2017-18 to 2019-2020) and reinstating the National FVPLS Program.
2. Implementing the Productivity Commission's recommendation from its Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry and providing 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%).
3. Committing to implementing an appropriate process for determining adequate and sustainable longer-term funding contributions to the legal assistance sector by both Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, in consultation with the sector.
4. Funding for NACLC, NFVPLS and NATSILS in recognition of their key role as peak bodies.

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