



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### NACLC echoes deep concern of Senate Committee's Interim Report on domestic violence and calls for immediate action

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) welcomes the recommendations made by the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee in its Interim Report released as part of its inquiry into domestic violence in Australia.

The Committee has expressed deep concern that 'funding cuts to legal services will affect already disadvantaged groups', drawing on the evidence given by NACLC and community legal centres (CLCs) and other legal assistance providers who made submissions and gave evidence before the Committee.

It recommended that 'The Commonwealth Government restore funding cuts from legal services, housing and homelessness services and the Department of Social Services grants program'.

The Committee has "added its voice to the growing number of organisations and bodies, including the Productivity Commission, calling for 'an immediate funding boost to legal assistance services of \$200 million to address pressing gaps in services'" said Mr Michael Smith, NACLC Chair.

"Funding cuts occurring now are having a major impact on the ability of CLCs to provide assistance to people experiencing family violence, and women and children in particular, will be left at risk and unable to access legal advice without additional funding" continued Mr Smith.

"Family violence lawyers in CLCs across Australia and particularly in rural and regional areas are sadly leaving their jobs now due to Commonwealth cuts and funding uncertainty, and this will have a direct impact on women and children trying to escape family violence."

Recent funding cuts and restrictions on CLCs undertaking law reform and policy work with Commonwealth funding were also highlighted by the Committee, which said that it had 'heard that cuts to advocacy and law reform funding translate, in practice, to cuts for frontline services for legal assistance being given to many victims of domestic violence'.

The Committee also highlighted the need for all levels of Government to work with stakeholders to increase 'coordination and communication between legal systems across jurisdictions' to address domestic violence. "At a time where the Commonwealth Government is attempting to devolve responsibility for the administration and funding of CLCs to State and Territory Government and are defunding national bodies, including National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), the Committee's recommendations are important" concluded Mr Smith.

*NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.*

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NACLC also welcomes the Committee’s recommendation that the ‘Commonwealth Government support and expedite the harmonisation of intervention orders across jurisdictions’, which is “something NACLC and CLCs have been advocating for over a number of years” added Mr Smith.

NACLC renews calls on all levels of Government to commit the additional \$200 million identified as being required to adequately fund legal assistance services in Australia, a move consistent with the Government’s expressed commitment to addressing domestic violence.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact NACLC Chair Michael Smith on 0421 437 883

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