

MEDIA RELEASE, 16th March 2016

Federal funding failures leave thousands of women in danger

An alliance of family violence experts, survivor advocates and community groups is calling for the federal government to stop leaving thousands of women in danger, by fully funding family violence services in the next budget.

“Prime Minister Turnbull has declared that domestic violence is a national priority – but the under-funding of services is blocking the escape route for thousands of women and children” says Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda.

“Finding a way to escape your abuser can be dangerous and difficult, and for many women it’s impossible to do without support. For some women service access can mean the difference between life and death” added Rosie Batty.

The most recent national statistics show that 81,900 women have wanted to leave a current partner who has used violence, but never have.

“The reality is funding isn’t in line with the scale of the problem. Specialist services can’t keep up with referrals. Refuges can’t shelter all the women seeking their help. Community legal services are being forced to turn away women relying on their help. Perhaps our Cabinet Ministers should spend time in these services and tell women themselves why there isn’t enough funding for them - why they can’t get the protection they so desperately need.” says Dr Ann O’Neill, survivor advocate. “Everyone tells them to protect themselves and their children, but how can they without help?” she added.

"Domestic and family violence has devastating impacts across all our communities. We know the scale and severity of the problem. It's time for governments to adequately fund services responding to this national crisis" says Moo Baulch, CEO of Domestic Violence NSW.

Fiona McCormack, CEO of Domestic Violence Victoria adds: “In Victoria, police now respond to 70,000 domestic violence incidents a year. That’s a 70% increase over 5 years, but in the same period, the frontline services women rely on have received almost no additional funding.”

Access to legal assistance is also vital to women’s safety says Rosslyn Monro, Chair of the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC): “Without access to legal help, many women can’t access the information or advice they need to escape their abuser, or protect themselves or their children. Inadequate funding is forcing Community Legal Centres to turn away hundreds of thousands of people each year, and funding is set to be cut a further 30% nationally from 2017.”

Antoinette Braybrook, CEO of Family Violence Prevention Legal Services adds: “Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence, however their access to specialist services is woefully inadequate. There are women across the country, particularly in metropolitan and urban locations, who we cannot reach because our services are not funded to do so.”

Jacqui Watt, CEO of No To Violence/Men’s Referral Service adds: “Right now, men at a high risk of using violence are having to wait up to six months to even be assessed as eligible for a men’s behaviour change program. That’s a wait list before the real wait list. This leaves women in danger.”

70 organisations have signed on to the joint call for the federal government to make good on its commitment to address domestic violence by fully funding services.

LINK: www.fairagenda.org/media

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SPOKESPEOPLE AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT



Renee Carr - Executive Director of Fair Agenda, AFR 100 Women of Influence 2015. 0435 597 976.



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Moo Baulch – CEO of Domestic Violence NSW. Recent panellist on Q&A's family violence special. 0400 936 192.



Antoinette Braybrook - Founder and CEO Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service. (Contact via Renee Carr 0435 597 976).



Rosslyn Monro – Chair of National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), Coordinator of Women's Legal Service Queensland. 0407 633 084.



Jacqui Watt - CEO, No To Violence/Men's Referral Service. 0425 406 659.

Additional survivor advocates who have relied on services also available on request.

FAST FACTS

- 81,900 women have wanted to leave a current partner who has used violence, but never have. Further, 1 in 12 women indicated that one of the reasons they returned to a violent previous partner was because they had nowhere to go. (ANROWS, 2012)
- Over the past 5 years, in Victoria police reports of family violence have increased 70%, to 70,000 annually. But frontline services that deal with referrals from these incidents have received almost no additional funding.
- There are currently 14 Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLSs) across Australia. Currently FVPLSs are not resourced to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women affected by family violence can access their services, regardless of their location. Major service gaps exist, particularly in metropolitan and urban areas. At least \$28 million is needed to address these geographic gaps in coverage.
- For Community Legal Centres, the top two areas of work are family law and family violence-related matters. Inadequate funding forces CLCs to turn away more than 160,000 people annually. Demand is increasing, but Commonwealth funding for CLCs is set to be cut by \$12.1 million (30%) nationally from 2017, leaving more women affected by violence without the legal help they need. \$14.4 million is needed this year.
- Men who have used violence currently have to wait up to 6 months to even be assessed for programs. They then face an average waiting time of 3 months to start a program. Men's Behaviour Change experts are calling for \$56 million federal funding to expand and improve programs.
- The Women's Safety Package was a step in the right direction; but didn't even come close to addressing the scale of these major funding shortfalls. For example, only \$5 million per year over 3 years was provided for legal assistance, and it was limited to a handful of providers.