

MEDIA RELEASE
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Looming cut will put more family violence victims in danger

A collective of 36 family violence groups and survivors are speaking out against the danger of the federal government's planned funding cut to Community Legal Centres (CLCs).

The \$12.1 million cuts to CLCs, due to take effect on July 1, will mean a major reduction in services by CLCs – which provide front line support for women and children trying to escape family violence, putting lives at risk.

Renee Carr, Executive Director of community campaigning group Fair Agenda has called the plan to slash millions of dollars of funding to the service “incredibly dangerous”.

“Access to legal support is vital for women trying to escape an abuser. A decision to cut funding for community legal services is a decision to put more women in danger. That’s why family violence groups have come together to urge the Government to reverse the cuts.” said Renee Carr.

Survivor advocate Rebeca Carro said, “Community legal support helped save my life. Without women’s legal service I would be a statistic, not a survivor.”

Survivor advocate Liana Papoutsis said: “I knew I needed help. The first service I reached out to was my Community Legal Centre -- and they provided me with critical support to start thinking about how I could get myself and my child out safely.”

Community Legal Centres already have to turn away 160,000 people annually because of inadequate resourcing, including women affected by violence.

“Legal assistance is absolutely vital in supporting women experiencing family violence to be safe.” said Fiona McCormack, CEO of Domestic Violence Victoria.

“A cut to the funding of Community Legal Centres will have disastrous impacts for the safety of women and their children.”

In 2014, the Productivity Commission found that \$200 million of additional funding per year was needed for Community Legal Centres to meet existing demand.

“It’s great to see the Government talking about domestic violence. But the more we talk about domestic violence – the more women reach out to services for help,” said Moo Baulch, CEO of Domestic Violence NSW.

“If you’re not funding the services to keep up with demand – you’re putting women in danger, and making it harder for them to seek the right support.” she added.

“The majority of the work our Centres do is assisting people affected by family violence. Under-resourcing means we’re already forced to turn away about every second person who asks for our help - any cuts will increase that number.” Said Serina McDuff, CEO of the Federation of Community Legal Centres in Victoria.

Joanna Fletcher, CEO of Women’s Legal Services Victoria said, “These funding cuts will force services like ours to turn away women in fear for their safety, and often, their lives.”

“More and more women are reaching out for the legal help they need to be safe and recover from violence. Cutting funding to specialist family violence legal services just as women are seeking help is dangerous for those individual women and undermines the broader message that violence is unacceptable.”

“If the federal government goes ahead with this funding cut they will be denying thousands of women affected by violence legal support; and putting them in more danger.” said Dan Stubbs, Spokesperson for the National Association of Community Legal Centres.

“Last year, Victorian Community Legal Centres helped over 60,000 people. Under-resourcing forced us to turn away almost the same number. If the Federal Government’s 30% cuts go ahead, tens of thousands more Victorians will lose access to the legal support they desperately need. And most of those will be women trying to escape family violence.” Ms McDuff added.

LINK: www.fairagenda.org/media

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SPOKESPEOPLE AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT



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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)
- For Community Legal Centres, the top two areas of work are family law and family violence-related matters.
- The Federal Government’s most recent funding announcements don’t address the impact of these scheduled cuts. For example, the 2015 “Women’s Safety Package” provided \$15 million over 3 years for a handful of specific Community Legal Centres to establish additional capacity to reach out to people subjected to family violence. At the same time, \$34.4 million will be stripped from CLCs across the nation over the same period.