

NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICES

WORKING TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

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Federal Budget provides no relief for FVPLSs despite escalating rates of family violence

The National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (National FVPLS Forum) is calling on the Federal Government to reinstate the National FVPLS Program and provide increased funding and longer-term contracts to FVPLSs in the wake of the 2015 Federal Budget. Following a gruelling open tender process, FVPLSs around the country were told in March they would receive funding at 2013-14 levels for the next two to three years under the Commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy. Last night's Budget saw no further funding committed to FVPLSs who are the only legal assistance services exclusively dedicated to assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence.

"Last night's budget announcements were disappointing for FVPLSs. We are seeing a huge increase in demand for our services, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women now 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence and 10 times more likely to die from violent assault. However, under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy our national program was disbanded and there has been no increase in funding or inclusion of CPI indexation for FVPLSs", said Antoinette Braybrook, National Convenor of the National FVPLS Forum.

Real funding per person for FVPLSs has declined by approximately 20 per cent in recent years – this is despite skyrocketing rates of family violence.

The Federal Budget included \$16.7million over three years to fund a \$30million National Awareness Campaign to Reduce Domestic Violence, with States and Territories to chip in remaining funds. However, FVPLSs are left asking how this campaign will reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and what real impact it will have on the ground. The budget contained no increase in funding for legal assistance services to provide access to justice for victims/survivors of family violence despite escalating demand.

"We are calling on the Government to reinstate the National FVPLS Program with a direct allocation and longer-term commitment of funding," said Ms Braybrook. "As a starting point, FVPLSs require a further \$2 million per service, per annum to begin meeting the rise in demand and increased reporting rates of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. If family violence is really a national priority there needs to be a tangible and sustained commitment to providing services to victims/survivors of family violence and real investment in early intervention and prevention programs", continued Ms Braybrook.

FVPLSs provide critical frontline legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence, as well as culturally safe early intervention prevention and community legal education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia.

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