

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

20 March 2015

Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence calls on Government to immediately provide more funding to legal assistance services

The National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (NFVPLS) welcomes the interim report on domestic violence released today by the Senate Finance and Public Administrations References Committee ('the Committee'). The report calls for a reversal of funding cuts to legal assistance services, housing and homeless services and for an immediate funding boost to legal assistance services.

'The findings of the interim report are encouraging but they don't tell us anything new,' said Antoinette Braybrook, National Convenor of NFVPLS. 'Members of the Senate Committee have listened to our frontline experience and recognised that victims/survivors of family violence need greater access to legal representation and other essential support services. This is particularly true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are vastly over-represented among victims/survivors of family violence. Hospitalisation and reporting rates for Aboriginal women are escalating. In comparison with other Australian women, Aboriginal women are now 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence', continued Ms Braybrook.

Senator Corey Barnardi has said "the Commonwealth government can't do everything" and expressed disappointment that the report did not highlight what the government is doing. "Of course we recognise the contributions the Commonwealth has made, but this year we have seen two women die each week. Clearly the Government needs to do more," said Ms Braybrook.

The Committee also called on governments to work with frontline services and peak advocacy bodies in developing meaningful prevention programs, to increase co-ordination and communication between jurisdictions and increase the availability of behaviour change programs for perpetrators.

'In 2012, the federal government cut funding to FVPLSs early intervention and prevention program, despite evidence that preventative programs for victims/survivors of family violence support safety and can quite literally save lives. We are calling for greater investment in the entire FVPLS program, including early intervention programs, said Ms Braybrook.

Despite the recommendations by the Committee, FVPLSs will receive no increase in funding and many are only guaranteed one additional year through recent funding decisions under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. This perpetuates funding uncertainty and brings into question the long-term commitment to the program. It also runs counter to the wealth of evidence pointing to an urgent need for increased legal service funding, including last year's Productivity Commission report which called for a \$200million funding boost. The NFVPLS await the final report of the Committee, which is set to be released on 18 June 2015.

FVPLSs provide critical frontline legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence, in areas including intervention orders, victims of crime assistance, child protection and family law.

Media Contact:

Antoinette Braybrook, National FVPLS Convenor (03) 9244 3333 or via twitter @BraybrookA
<http://www.nationalfvpls.org/>

Media Release