

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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Calls for commitment to Aboriginal children impacted by family violence

The National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (NFVPLS) welcomes the report released today on children in out of home care by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee. The report calls for improved access to legal and other advice and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing family violence.

This is the latest in a string of reports calling for increased legal assistance and access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence. The Productivity Commission's Report on Access to Justice Arrangements and the Interim Report of the Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia both recommended an immediate funding boost of \$200 million into Legal Assistance Services, including Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.

"There is all this evidence at hand, showing the devastating consequences in our families and communities, but we see less commitment, not more," said Antoinette Braybrook, National Convenor of NFVPLS. "Our national program was defunded under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and must be reinstated."

FVPLSs provide critical frontline legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence. In October 2014, FVPLSs were forced to competitively tender for their services under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. No longer recognised as a national program, FVPLS has no secure or transparent commitment for Commonwealth funding and, without CPI increases, the declining funds available will mean losses to frontline staff.

FVPLSs are not gender exclusive, but nationally over 90% of our clients are women and children. Compared with other Australian children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are nine times more likely to be in out of home care. Work undertaken by Taskforce 1000, under the oversight of the Victorian Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People Andrew Jackomos, shows that men's violence against women is the primary driver in Aboriginal children entering out of home care.

"This is the case in Victoria and our members confirm this same horrifying picture in every state and territory," said Ms Braybrook. "Once our women lose their children to the system, it is an uphill battle to get them back. It's absolutely essential that our women have access to a specialist frontline legal service such as FVPLS to stop the removal of our children."

NFVPLS is calling on the Government to reinstate the National FVPLS Program with a direct allocation and long term commitment of funding. NFVPLS also calls on the Commonwealth to implement a series of recommendations for legal assistance to victims/survivors of family violence, including improved access in child protection matters and increased funding for relevant legal assistance providers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence and 10 times more likely to die from violent assault. FVPLSs provide critical frontline legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and undertake culturally safe early intervention prevention and community legal education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia.

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

Media Release