



## Media release

*Wednesday 15 May 2024*

### **Federal Budget forces women's legal services to reduce legal assistance for women fleeing violence**

Women's Legal Services Australia says the 2024-25 Federal Budget is a step backwards for legal services that support Australian women fleeing violence.

Women's legal services play a crucial role in supporting women to leave violent and abusive relationships, engage with legal processes, and manage safety risks that often escalate post-separation.

The Budget included a very modest investment in community legal centres for indexation and wages. However, legal assistance programs dedicated to women affected by gender-based violence have been omitted.

Elena Rosenman, Chair of Women's Legal Services Australia said, "This Budget means many women's legal services will have to start planning to reduce services to women experiencing gender-based violence. This includes legal assistance for women separating from violent partners, specialist Domestic Violence Units, Health Justice Partnerships and sexual harassment legal services."

"We are deeply concerned that the Albanese Government has completely overlooked the critical work of women's legal services. We are already forced to turn away over 52,000 women every year due to lack of adequate resources."

"If we are asking Australian women to trust that the system will be there for them when they flee a violent relationship, we must ensure they can access the trauma-informed, integrated legal services they need."

"The Women's Budget Statement recognises the community legal sector is a female-dominated workforce, but this is not matched with adequate funding for Women's Legal Services to address low wages and pay disparity."

"The solicitors, social workers, First Nations caseworkers, and financial counsellors who work in frontline women's legal services are exposed to significant trauma. They deserve to be paid appropriately for their contribution to our community."