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MEDIA RELEASE

Women's Legal Services hopeful Standing Council of Attorneys-General package delivers workable balance

Women's Legal Services Australia is calling for adequate and secure funding for specialist women's legal services ahead of tomorrow's Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) meeting, where it will be decided how an additional \$500 million will be allocated.

CEO Elena Rosenman said the group wanted a minimum investment of \$140 million.

"We have welcomed the National Cabinet announcement of additional funding into the legal assistance sector to respond to domestic and family violence, which has given us hope that all governments are stepping up to respond to the national emergency of men's violence against women," Ms Rosenman said.

"But more funding is needed to ensure these services are available to every woman who needs them and that will require action from all parts of government."

Women's legal services in every state and territory need funding security to ensure they can keep their doors open and maintain current service levels, pay their staff a reasonable wage that matches their qualifications, and have the ability to expand services to meet the increasing needs of the community.

"With less than nine months of funding security left, women's legal services need urgent advice on what funding is available to ensure they can keep these services open," Ms Rosenman said.

Nationally, these services are turning away 1,000 women a week.

Across Australia, women's legal services provide a critical point of call for women considering separation from their partners. They give them the information needed to make the decision and plan for their safety.

They also provide legal advice and representation to support women to make safe and fair arrangements for the care of children and division of property following separation, as well as wraparound support at a time of increased risk to risk to help women and children stay safe.

These services support more than 25,000 women each year.



Women's Legal Services Australia wants a clear commitment from SCAG that additional resources delivered to the legal assistance sector will include strong investment in specialist women's legal services.

"These services will also need additional commitments from state and territory governments to fill funding gaps caused by the chronic and historic underfunding of this sector," Ms Rosenman said.

Women's legal services form a strong frontline service sector as part of an ecosystem of critical services including crisis services, counselling and emergency accommodation that need to be well-resourced to deliver on the promise of supporting women to stay safe or leave violence.

"The neglect of the community-based services sector is decades old, and Women's Legal Services Australia accepts that it cannot be fixed by one government acting alone," Ms Rosenman said.

"We look forward to announcements from each state and territory that reflect the scale of the crisis and ensure women in their jurisdictions have access to support when and where they need it.

Women's Legal Services Australia looks forward to working with the Commonwealth Attorney-General and Attorneys-General across Australia to ensure this funding boost reaches the women it is intended to benefit.

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