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## URGENT FUNDING NEEDED TO MEET GROWING DEMAND

*Budget 2025-26 must consider impact of cost of living crisis on domestic violence*

Women fleeing domestic, family and sexual violence face even greater barriers due to the national cost-of-living crisis, according to Women's Legal Services Australia.

In its submission to the 2025-26 Budget, the peak body says funding is urgently needed to ensure that women in need have access to specialist legal support when and where they need it.

National data collected by Women's Legal Services Australia shows an estimated 1,000 women each week, or 52,000 women a year, are turned away from services due to a lack of capacity.

*"This is a national crisis, and the demand for our services is only growing,"* said Women's Legal Services Australia Chair, Elena Rosenman.

*"Without urgent investment, we will be forced to turn away thousands of women from legal services that could help them find safety and rebuild their lives."*

Women's Legal Services Australia is calling for an additional \$52 million over five years to help meet the demand and ensure victim-survivors of violence can access the specialist legal help they need.

In 2023-24, Women's Legal Services across Australia provided legal assistance and non-legal support to more than 26,000 women. Demand for specialist legal support continues to grow, as rates of gender-based violence continue to increase, exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and other factors.

*"Women's Legal Services across the country are reporting increasing numbers of women seeking urgent legal support,"* Ms Rosenman said.

*"Financial stress is a well-documented factor in domestic violence, and rising living costs are making it even harder for victim-survivors to leave abusive relationships."*

Alongside the cost of living crisis, Women's Legal Services Australia's 2025-26 Budget submission highlights additional factors contributing to the rising need for Women's Legal Services, including:

- The increasing frequency and severity of climate disasters like bushfires and floods exacerbate financial stress within families, which in turn escalates domestic violence.
- Digital abuse, including cyberstalking, unauthorised account access, and online harassment, is becoming a major issue for women seeking support.
- The rise of misogynistic online movements fueling anti-gender equality sentiment and contributing to an increase in abuse, particularly against young women.

Ms Rosenman also stressed the need for adequate pay for the predominantly female staff working for Women's Legal Services throughout Australia.

*“The work our staff do every day is incredibly difficult — supporting women in crisis, handling complex legal matters and ensuring victim-survivors receive justice.”*

*“Without dedicated and fairly compensated staff, women simply won’t get the support they need.”*

*“Addressing pay disparity in the community legal sector is essential to retaining skilled professionals and providing the best possible assistance to women in crisis.”*

To address these urgent needs, Women's Legal Services Australia is calling on the federal government to provide:

**\$52 million over five years** to meet increasing demand, improve pay parity for legal sector staff, and expand migration law expertise for women on temporary visas experiencing violence.

**\$15 million over three years** to expand the successful pilot program providing trauma-informed legal assistance for victim-survivors of sexual assault to all states and territories.

**\$1.436 million over five years** to support Women's Legal Services Australia as a national peak body, ensuring a strong voice on law reform and policy issues affecting women.

The National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-30 (NAJP) is due to come into effect from July 2025, delivering much-needed funding for Women’s Legal Services. While the additional and dedicated funding is welcome, it will not allow for a significant increase in services provided in many states and territories.

*“For the first time, we have a dedicated funding stream for specialist legal assistance for women, which is a major step forward,”* Ms Rosenman said.

*“The reality is that without additional funding in the 2025-26 Budget, at least a thousand women a week will be turned away from our services.”*

**ENDS**

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## **Women’s Legal Services Australia**

Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA) is the national voice for 13 specialist Women’s Legal Services in each State and Territory across Australia. Women’s Legal Services specialise in providing legal assistance and non-legal support services to women, including legal representation, support, and advocacy. In 2022-2023, Women’s Legal Services delivered legal assistance and non-legal support services to over 25,000 women nationwide.