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SURVIVORS VOICES HEARD:

Sexual violence legal services to roll out nationwide

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) welcomes the Federal Government's response to the Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.

Today, the Federal Attorney-General, Mark Dreyfus KC, announced that the successful sexual assault legal services pilot program will be expanded from three services to every state and territory across Australia.

This announcement is a first step towards implementing the ALRC recommendation that people affected by sexual assault have access to legal advice throughout the justice process, and legal representation in court to protect access to personal, sensitive and confidential information.

"Increasing access to independent legal advice and representation is a crucial step towards a justice system that truly respects and empowers people who have been subjected to sexual violence," said **Elena Rosenman, Chair of Women's Legal Services Australia.**

"Survivors told the ALRC they want to be informed, heard, and validated. The pilot legal services in ACT, VIC, and WA are delivering exactly that — empowering survivors with independent legal representation."

"Expanding these services nationally will ensure more women can access the justice they deserve," Elena Rosenman said.

Women's Legal Services Australia urge all governments to enact legislative reforms that ensure people impacted by sexual violence and their legal representatives have standing to appear in court in relation to personal, sensitive or confidential information in every jurisdiction, giving them a voice and agency throughout the justice process.

Proven Success Ready to Scale

The \$19.6 million expansion of sexual assault legal services will build on three successful pilot programs delivered by Women's Legal Services, Community Legal Centres, Victims' Services and Legal Aid in the ACT, Victoria, and Western Australia. These pilots have demonstrated the vital role of trauma-informed legal and social support services in helping survivors understand and participate in the justice system.

Implementing Change Nationwide

While Women's Legal Services Australia commends the Federal Government's leadership, all states and territories must implement the ALRC's recommendations, including necessary legislative reforms. Collaboration through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) will be essential to drive consistent reforms across jurisdictions.

To ensure lasting change, Women's Legal Services Australia calls for the establishment of an implementation monitoring mechanism to track progress and accountability for reform delivery.

Urgent Call for State and Territory Action

Women's Legal Services Australia urges state and territory governments to increase resourcing across the justice system to address delays that devastate complainants.

Many victim-survivors face years-long waits for their cases to be heard, leaving their lives in limbo — unable to discuss the case with loved ones, experiencing prolonged isolation, and enduring ongoing trauma.

To create a system that truly supports survivors, governments must invest in:

- **Specialist sexual assault counselling** and support services to provide ongoing care and help survivors rebuild their lives.
- **Policing and prosecution resources** to ensure investigations and cases progress without unnecessary delays.
- **Court capacity and efficiency measures** to reduce waiting times and minimise retraumatisation.
- **Community education and prevention programs** to shift attitudes and reduce future harm.

"Timely access to justice is not a luxury — it's essential for healing and recovery," said Elena Rosenman.

Women's Legal Services Australia emphasises the need for alternative justice pathways, such as restorative justice processes, to provide survivors with options beyond traditional court proceedings. For these pathways to be effective, states and territories must invest in services and introduce accompanying legislative reforms.

"We need every level of government working together to ensure survivors aren't left waiting in silence for years," Elena Rosenman said.

Acknowledging the ALRC's Survivor-Centred Approach

Women's Legal Services Australia acknowledges the Australian Law Reform Commission for conducting a thorough, survivor-centred inquiry.

The ALRC ensured the voices of people who have been subjected to sexual violence were heard and reflected in their findings, with many people courageously sharing their experiences to inform the final recommendations.

This approach has helped shape reforms that are responsive to the real needs of those impacted by sexual violence, fostering a justice system that prioritises survivor safety, dignity, and empowerment.

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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.