

Turnbull Government: Please don't put more women in danger

To the Turnbull Government,

As experts who work for people affected by family violence every day, we implore you to urgently reverse the planned Commonwealth funding cuts to Community Legal Centres.

We know that access to legal assistance changes lives. It helps women and children stay safe, and helps give them the power to make informed decisions so they can feel more in control of their lives. In many cases it's the reason someone can finally escape an abusive partner.

A woman affected by family violence – whether that abuse is physical, emotional or financial – faces overwhelming legal obstacles to finding safety for herself, and any children she may have. She will often rely on Community Legal Centres for help with her urgent safety needs, as well as the legal information, advice and representation she needs to be safe in the future. This includes things like:

- Help securing a family violence order – to prevent a perpetrator from continuing to abuse or threaten her,
- Help making sure she isn't rendered homeless by any legal or financial issues created by her abuser,
- Assistance to address financial abuse, including debts and fines that may have been accrued in her name to make her feel trapped and unable to escape, and
- Access to financial counselling and social work services - to ensure she has the support she needs to re-establish her independence.

Too often we hear from women affected by abuse that dealing with the courts and justice system is overwhelming, intimidating, and re-traumatising. We believe that Community Legal Centres also bring vital and unique expertise to the law reform process needed to improve our legal systems.

As family violence specialists we work with Community Legal Centres because we know their services help keep women and children safe.

But already Community Legal Centres and other services that people affected by family violence rely on don't have the resources they need to be able to adequately help everyone who reaches out to them for assistance.

We're very concerned that the planned 30% cut to Commonwealth funding for Community Legal Centres will have devastating consequences. We believe the cuts will put more women in danger.

Your Government has previously recognised that “adequate investment in frontline services is critical to save lives.” We couldn't agree more. We implore you to urgently reverse the cuts and appropriately resource all family violence services to ensure everyone reaching out has the support they need to be safe.

Signed,