



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Family violence funding: How do we pick one victim over another?

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) welcomes the announcement of \$30million over three years for the legal assistance sector to confront family violence.

NATSILS' Chairperson, Mr Wayne Muir said 'Funding \$10million per year for the Legal Assistance Sector is a start and it is good to see that the Federal Government is taking these steps, but more is needed if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims are to be protected.'

The \$30 million funding is part of the \$100 million in funding over three years announced in the 2016 budget to implement the Third Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children.

NATSILS understands that the funding will, following a consultation process, be distributed across the entire legal assistance sector, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS), Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLSs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and Legal Aid Commissions. However, NATSILS is concerned that the joint media release from the Turnbull Coalition Team does not specifically mention Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

This funding comes after Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services were completely left out of the \$100 million Women's Safety Package announced in September 2015 by the Turnbull Government, which included \$15 million funding for 12 specialist domestic violence units, 10 community legal centres and 2 legal aid commissions. NATSILS notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised because of family violence than other women.

The announcement follows an 8 per cent slash to the ATSILS budgets confirmed in the Federal Budget earlier this month.

'It's an awful part of working in ATSILS – where we work to strengthen our communities and to uphold individual rights - when you have to sit down to determine which mother or child deserves the funding more than another mother or child because there is not enough to go around . Our family and civil law services have been gutted by under investment in the last two years. If the Government wants to be taken seriously when they talk about addressing violence against women and children, they need to match their rhetoric and show Australia that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives matter' Mr Muir said.

Funding of this nature must be committed to the ATSILS and the FVPLS to help confront the crisis in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around family violence. The CLCs are also in desperate need of an injection of funding to help their clients.

‘Our budgets have been cut to the bone and we are facing further cuts in 2017. At this stage any funding is welcomed, however, anything short of a reversal of the 8 per cent in cuts and an additional commitment to help us keep our heads above water in the family and civil law space is unlikely to protect existing frontline services and our vulnerable community members’ Mr Muir said.

Earlier this month NATSILS warned that cuts to funding for the ATSILS threaten frontline services to clients with complex needs, victims of family violence and those living in rural and remote areas.

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