



NATSILS

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

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NATSILS call for reinstatement of direct funding to Family Violence Prevention Legal Services

Today the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) strongly support calls by the National Family Violence and Prevention Legal Services Forum (National FVPLS Forum) to have direct funding reinstated.

After the election the Commonwealth Government transferred the FVPLS program out of the Attorney-General's Department, whose portfolio is responsible for all other legal assistance services, to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C). On 8 August 2014, PM&C released the new funding guidelines for the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*. These guidelines would see FVPLS no longer recognised as a stand-alone program for the delivery of legal assistance services to victims and survivors of domestic violence.

NATSILS Chairperson, Shane Duffy, said that there is a critical need for culturally competent legal assistance services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and men affected by domestic violence and that FVPLS are essential to meeting such demand.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 31 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of violence and 15 times more likely to seek support from homelessness services to escape family violence," Mr Duffy said.

"Defunding FVPLS will have a devastating impact upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children's access to justice whilst they are trying to escape violence."

Mr Duffy said that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) continue to provide legal assistance services to individuals impacted by domestic violence, they do not have the capacity to pick up the extra demand that is expected should FVPLS direct funding cease, due to limited funding across the legal assistance sector as a whole.

"ATSILS are already critically underfunded and are currently facing a further funding cut of \$13.34m over the coming years which will require us to cut back on current service levels, we simply don't have the resources to pick up the anticipated extra demand," Mr Duffy said.

"Furthermore, in many regional and remote areas it is essential that there is more than one legal assistance option available to people impacted by domestic violence to manage conflict of interest issues and ensure access to representation".

NATSILS call on the Prime Minister to work with the National FVPLS Forum to rectify this situation immediately.

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