



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

**SENATOR THE HON GEORGE BRANDIS QC
ATTORNEY-GENERAL**

**SENATOR THE HON MICHAELIA CASH
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR WOMEN**

LEGAL AID FUNDING ASSURED TO SUPPORT THE MOST VULNERABLE IN OUR COMMUNITY

The Federal Government is providing certainty for the legal assistance sector by guaranteeing current funding levels for the next two years. The changes due to take effect on 1 July 2015 will not proceed. This means that the Federal Government will contribute over \$1.327 billion to the legal assistance sector from 2013-14 to 2016-17.

Over the past 18 months, a national conversation about domestic and family violence has grown with increasing momentum. This is an important dialogue that this Government is determined to lead.

For too many years, the issue of domestic violence remained behind closed doors – a stigmatised problem that victims were reluctant to speak about. Sadly, as a nation we were reluctant or afraid to speak about it.

With more victims speaking out about this scourge and seeking help to escape such violence, we are responding accordingly with appropriate resourcing. The Government has listened and is acting in the interests of the most vulnerable in our community including Indigenous Australians.

Today's restoration of \$25.5 million over two years to 30 June 2017, of funding for Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres and Indigenous legal service providers, builds on our significant commitment to address domestic violence, both in terms of front line services as well as policies that will lead to long term cultural change. We are committed to ensuring that we stop the violence before it happens.

This decision will restore funding of \$11.5 million for Indigenous legal assistance over two years.

Since the 2013 election, the government has carefully examined legal assistance funding to ensure that funding is directed to front line services where the need is greatest – such as services providing help to those affected by domestic and family violence.

After considerable consultation with State and Territory Governments and service providers, it has been decided there will be no reduction in Commonwealth funding to Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres (except Environmental Defenders Offices) and Indigenous legal assistance for the next two years.

The Government will honour the funding until the date on which it would have ended – 30 June 2017.

This announcement provides certainty to the sector while the process of negotiating a new funding agreement continues. The new funding agreement is due to commence on 1 July 2015. Commonwealth Government funding will be sustainable and it will match funding to demonstrated need. It will be fair and efficient.

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