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Closing the Gap: additional funding a step in the right direction

A new funding package worth over \$1 billion and announced by the government as part of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, is a good start but still does not address the level of need within the community, says the Law Council of Australia.

Law Council President, Dr Jacoba Brasch QC said, “While the commitment by the government provides a sorely needed injection of funds, so much more is needed.”

“The Government’s investment in Indigenous justice, includes \$9.3 million over four years to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) for complex cases; and an additional \$8.3 million over three years to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to provide culturally safe and appropriate family dispute resolution.

“However, compared to other ACCO sectors, such as the health, the additional funding for the ACCO-legal sector is nominal and is not enough to address the level of need.

“This includes need amongst young people who are unlikely to benefit from the additional ATSILS funding given the nature of their cases. Family Violence Prevention Legal Services funding, while increased in the Federal Budget, also remains well below what is needed given urgent demand. Aboriginal justice should be placed on par with Aboriginal health.

“The investment of \$7.6 million over three years for the Justice Policy Partnership, which will bring together Commonwealth, state and territory governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives aimed at identifying ways to achieve the justice targets is welcomed.

“This partnership should focus on ensuring that key recommendations in the Australian Law Reform Commission’s Pathways to Justice report, including but not limited to, bail and parole reforms and the removal of mandatory sentencing, are implemented by all governments.

“The Law Council acknowledges and supports the Commonwealth’s emphasis in the plan to address the drivers of incarceration, through preventative and rehabilitative responses – such as through alcohol and drug rehabilitation, health and early childhood measures.

“However, the absence of justice reinvestment in the implementation plan is an unfortunate oversight, with specific funding needed to be set aside for such approaches through the expansion of the new Outcomes and Evidence Fund.

“The Law Council also hopes that the government’s commitment to spending \$378.6 million over five years for a financial and wellbeing redress scheme for living Stolen Generations survivors in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, prior to their respective self-government, and the Jervis Bay Territory, can be replicated for survivors across the country.”

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