

## **\$30m family violence commitment puts dent in legal aid crisis**

The Coalition announcement today that it will provide \$30 million for legal assistance services, as part of its National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children, is a commendable first step in addressing the funding crisis in legal aid.

The commitment, by the Attorney-General, Minister for Women and Minister for Social Services, will support commissions, community legal centres and selected family relationship centres.

The President of the Law Council of Australia, Stuart Clark AM, said that domestic violence is a blight on Australia's national conscience and the funding will be welcomed by services at the forefront.

"As we know, family violence doesn't just ruin lives, it can end lives. This desperately needed funding will go part of the way in helping combat the devastating impact that family violence has on the community," Mr Clark said.

"Legal aid services are a key part of the crucial frontline defence against family violence. They are the ones who can stand between an abusive and abused partner in a courtroom.

"For example, without legal aid a woman trying to escape domestic violence could be cross-examined by their abusive partner, with no lawyer to defend them."

Mr Clark said that while the funding today was welcomed, with successive federal governments cutting hundreds of millions of dollars from legal aid, there is a long way to go to end the crisis once and for all.

"Unfortunately, decades of cuts to legal aid from both parties has effectively crippled this vital justice safety net," Mr Clark said.

"The system is now at a point where most Australians who can't afford a lawyer simply won't get one. It is for this reason that the legal profession will next week – Law Week – launch a major campaign to call on the winner of the election to end the funding crisis once and for all.

"The Government's \$30 million commitment today, and the Opposition's earlier promise to provide additional funds to Community Legal Centres, shows that both parties are starting to act on the pleas from everyday Australians about the effects of the crisis on the community.

"With many more days of the election remaining, and with the Productivity Commission calling for an immediate \$200 million injection, we hope that this first step is followed by many more."

*There will be rallies and events around the country next week as part of the national launch of the legal aid campaign. Event details can be accessed [here](#).*

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