

Tuesday, 8 May 2018

Budget boost to counter elder abuse welcome, but greater funding required to end justice crisis

The Law Council welcomes the \$22m Federal Budget commitment to protect vulnerable Australians from elder abuse, however reiterates funding for the courts, and significant new funding for legal aid, are still required to ensure that Australians receive the access to justice they deserve.

The Government's elder abuse commitment includes; the creation of an Elder Abuse Knowledge Hub, a National Prevalence Research scoping study, and development of a National Plan.

Law Council President, Morry Bailes said the protecting older Australians measures are valuable steps to help stamp out the scourge of elder abuse in our communities.

"The Law Council has long urged the Government to move swiftly towards the development of a National Plan to combat elder abuse, as well as a National Prevalence Study," Mr Bailes said.

Other Budget measures supported by the Law Council include:

- \$3.6m over four years for the establishment of an Anti-Slavery Unit to manage the implementation of a Modern Slavery Reporting Requirement;
- \$1.2m over four years for the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and
- \$1.6m over two years to develop and deliver a national apology to the victims of institutional child sexual abuse.

However, Mr Bailes said the crisis in our justice system remains.

"The situation in the federal courts is such that, in some cases, families are facing up to a three-year wait before final hearing," he said.

"In the last sitting fortnight before the Budget, the Senate passed by an overwhelming majority, [a motion](#) calling for urgent action to address the court funding crisis.

"We look forward to continuing our work with the Government, and Parliament, to develop a sustainable long-term funding model for the federal courts."

Mr Bailes also highlighted the need for a significant boost in federal funding for legal aid.

"The legal assistance sector remains critically underfunded," Mr Bailes said.

"Through the Law Council's [Justice Project](#), we estimate that an additional \$390m per annum is required to get the legal assistance system back on its feet. This includes \$200m as recommended by the Productivity Commission for civil legal assistance alone.

"The preventative, everyday role of timely legal assistance stops simple problems from escalating into more serious matters at great cost to the taxpayer and community. It's time this was recognised and funded adequately.

"The Law Council will continue to advocate to end the underfunding of the courts and legal aid that is causing untold damage to the lives of many Australians."

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