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Budget cuts to legal assistance will put women and children at risk, warns National Legal Aid

National Legal Aid is deeply concerned about potential cuts to legal assistance for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in the upcoming Federal Budget, after reports in The Sydney Morning Herald today.

Any reduction in Commonwealth funding for legal assistance services will place victim-survivors at greater risk, particularly women, children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

While National Legal Aid recognises the fiscal pressures facing the Federal Government amid global instability, the evidence shows that domestic and family violence increases when household stress rises. Cutting legal assistance would not deliver savings; it would shift costs onto courts, child protection systems, crisis services and, most tragically, onto victim-survivors themselves.

National Legal Aid acknowledges the Albanese Government's strong commitment to addressing the scourge of domestic, family and sexual violence, including breaking cycles of trauma and harm for children and young people exposed to violence. Any step backwards through funding cuts would directly undermine this work at a critical moment.

Cutting Commonwealth funding for legal assistance would have a disproportionate and immediate impact on victim-survivors. More than 86 per cent of Legal Aid grants for family law matters involve a risk of domestic and family violence, underscoring the central role Legal Aid plays in supporting safe outcomes through the family law system.

Services funded under the Family Relationship Services Program are critical to the safety and wellbeing of families and children, especially during family separation. Cuts to these services, as reported today, would place women's and children's safety at risk and have serious consequences across the family law system, increasing pressure on courts and other frontline services.

"At a time when women are being killed by their partners at alarming rates, cutting legal assistance is not a budget saving – it is a risk to life and safety,"

said National Legal Aid Executive Director Yvette D'Ath.

“Legal assistance is often the only pathway to safety, stability and justice for victim-survivors and their children. We urge the Australian Government to rule out any cuts in the upcoming Budget and to continue investing in legal assistance as a core part of its response to domestic, family and sexual violence.”

The urgency of maintaining and strengthening legal assistance services is reflected in national data:

- According to the 2026 Status of Women Report Card, 28 women were killed by a current or former intimate partner in 2025.
- One in four women (23%) has experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15.
- First Nations women experience significantly higher rates of violence, with nearly one in three female victim-survivors of intimate partner homicide in 2025 identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- One in five women (22%) has experienced sexual violence, and almost half (49%) of LGBTQIA+ people have experienced sexual assault, most commonly perpetrated by cisgender men.
- National homicide data released by the Australian Institute of Criminology in February 2026 shows that of the 279 homicide victims between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, more than one third were domestic homicides. Intimate partner violence resulted in 46 deaths, most involving female victims.

For further comment, please contact NLA@nationallegalaid.org.au