



NATSILS
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES



MEDIA RELEASE
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PILLARS OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE SECTOR WELCOME BUDGET LIFELINE BUT MORE WORK TO DO

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (NFVPLS) and National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) today joined together to respond to Federal Budget 2017-2018.

The three peaks jointly welcomed the additional funding in the Budget of \$39 million for Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and \$16.7 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS).

“The additional funding for CLCs provides a critical lifeline for all those people who rely on the help of CLCs every day and for our centres and communities across Australia,” said NACLC Chief Executive Officer Nassim Arrage.

“The decision to reverse funding cuts to ATSILS is one step toward ensuring our communities have access to justice and diversionary services” added Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

“However, this Budget is a missed opportunity to invest in putting an end to family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women” said Antoinette Braybrook, National Convenor of the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum.

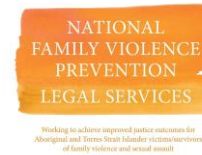
“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are still 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and 10 times more likely to die of violent assault than other women,” she added.

“While we welcome the additional \$9 million for FVPLSs announced last year, we continue our calls for increased funding to ensure national coverage and long-term funding to create certainty for our services across the country. This would be a tangible commitment to ensuring safety for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, regardless of their geographical location.”

“This Budget addresses the immediate funding crisis for most CLCs, but there is more work to do” continued Mr Arrage.

“There is more work to do in ensuring increased, secure and long-term funding for the legal assistance sector. There is more work to do with Government towards a fairer society where anyone can receive legal help when they need it, not just when they can afford it”.

Ms Axleby agreed, “commitments to justice should not stop there. The Government must take further action aimed directly toward ensuring incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not continue to soar as they have done”.



All three peaks joined in calling for a long-term vision for the legal assistance sector that includes adequate, sustainable and predictable funding, building on the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission.

“Our services require funding stability and certainty to ensure the ongoing delivery of essential front line services to our people” said Ms Axleby

“We urge the Government to treat today as the beginning of the next chapter for the legal assistance sector to engage with us to develop a vision for a sector that can meet the significant demand for our services across Australia” concluded Mr Arrage.

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