

Joint Statement in response to the announcement of Changes to Victims Support proceeding

1 July 2020

Dear Commissioner,

We, the undersigned, are deeply disappointed by the announcement that Victims Services will proceed with changes to the Victims Support Scheme from 1 July 2020.

We remain of the view that the changes will significantly impede victim-survivors' access to the support to which they are entitled and need. This will particularly impact on those who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and child sexual abuse.

You have acknowledged the difficulties Victims Services have in collecting evidence on behalf of victim-survivors in a timely manner. Shifting the burden from Victims Services onto victim-survivors to collect their own evidence and imposing a 12-month timeframe from the date of lodging an application in which to collect evidence are fundamental changes to the system. This is contrary to the cornerstone of the scheme which has been its accessibility.

We do not have confidence in a 6 month review.

We continue to hold the view these changes should not proceed and a comprehensive victim-survivor led review commence immediately.

If the changes proceed in the face of continued strong opposition by victim-survivors and their advocates, it would be our hope and expectation that the comprehensive statutory review be the proper place to review the changes. We call on the Department of Communities and Justice to release baseline data relating to the areas of impact that have been raised.

Yours faithfully,

Helen Campbell OAM, Executive Officer, Women's Legal Service NSW

Tim Leach, Executive Director, Community Legal Centres NSW

Arlia Fleming, Managing Principal Solicitor / Rebecca Frost, Supervising Solicitor,

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre (or Central Tablelands & Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre)

Christine Robinson, Coordinator, Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre

Patrick O'Callaghan, Principal Solicitor, Western NSW Community Legal Centre

Rachael Robertson, Senior Solicitor, Western Women's Legal Support

Ken Beilby, Principal Solicitor, Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre

Joanna Schulman, CEO, Redfern Legal Centre

Ryan Flippance, Principal Solicitor, Central Coast Community Legal Centre

Jane Titterington, Principal Solicitor, Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre

Yvette Vignando, CEO, South-West Sydney Community Legal Centre

Jonathon Hunyor, CEO, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

Sarah Rodgers, Manager & Principal Lawyer, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service

Bronwyn Ambrogetti, Managing Solicitor, Hunter Community Legal Centre

Louise Coady, CEO, Western Sydney Community Legal Centre

Justine O'Reilly, Principal Solicitor / Liz Dunlop, Solicitor/CLSD Coordinator, Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre
Phillip Dicalfas, Principal Solicitor, Illawarra Legal Centre
Janene Cootes, Executive Officer, Intellectual Disability Rights Service
Lauren Hancock, Law Reform & Advocacy Officer, knowmore
Jane Sanders, Principal Solicitor / Jacki Maxton, Senior Associate, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre
Katherine McKenzie, Executive Officer, Women Lawyers' Association of NSW
Anna Kerr, Principal Solicitor, Feminist Legal Clinic
Delia Donovan, Interim CEO/Monique Dam, Advocacy & Prevention Manager, Domestic Violence NSW
Kelly Lamb, CEO, Liberty Domestic & Family Violence Specialist Services
Catherine Gander, CEO, West Connect Domestic Violence Services Inc.
Saibre Johnstone, Specialist Domestic Violence Support Worker/Jemmica Marshall, Case Worker Outreach Support, Jenny's Place Inc.
Denele Crozier, CEO, Women's Health NSW
Sally Stevenson AM, General Manager / Susan Brown & Christine Donayre, Board Members / Jen Ridge, Young Women's Program Coordinator/Kim Sattler, Domestic Violence & Disability Project Officer – Breaking the Silence / Denika Thomas, Social Worker, Illawarra Women's Health Centre
Catherine White, Executive Officer, Women's Activities & Self Help (WASH) Inc.
Katherine McKernan, CEO, Homelessness NSW
Bobbie Trower, Senior Manager Advocacy, YWCA Australia
Justine O'Neill, CEO, Council for Intellectual Disability
Romola Hollywood, Director Policy & Advocacy, People with Disability Australia
Susan Laguna, Specialist Advocate/Alicia Rodriguez, Systemic Advocate & Policy Officer, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW
Jane Brock, Executive Officer, Immigrant Women's Speakout
Nemat Kharbouti, Manager – Strategic Support, Muslim Women Australia
Naarah Rodwell, CEO, CASPA
Trish Malone, Trauma & Bereavement Counsellor, Homicide Victims Support Group Inc.
Kris Newton, Manager, Mountains Community Resource Network
Tatiana Lozano, Manager / Liz Smith, Children's Community Development Worker, Mountains Outreach Community Service
Kath Harrison, CEO, Belong Blue Mountains Inc.
Lyn Ainsworth, Executive Director, CatholicCare Diocese of Broken Bay
Gloria Larman, CEO, Women's Justice Network
Emma Golledge, Director, Kingsford Legal Centre
Kerry Weste, President, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights