



 Women's Legal Centre's Helen Campbell says the service is funded at "starvation levels". Picture: Supplied

Support services say demand for legal support for victims of domestic violence in Wagga has soared under COVID-19, and some are calling for more funding.

In Wagga survivors of domestic violence needing free advice are referred to the Women's Legal Service's phone line, to some of the city's law firms that provide advice or to the Legal Aid office.

Women's Legal Service NSW Executive Officer Helen Campbell said demand for their services across NSW has jumped "significantly" with demand in the Southern NSW area climbing by 48 per cent in 2020.

"NSW has seen a 30 per cent increase in clients contacting us since COVID started as well as an increase in the legal complexity of the cases," Ms Campbell said.

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"Currently we get funded at starvation levels and it's been such a struggle and it wouldn't actually cost that much to increase it."

Emille Thomas, the acting senior solicitor for family law at the Wagga Legal Aid office, said they have seen a significant increase in clients.


"Legal Aid has seen a massive increase in calls for help and advice since the beginning of COVID," she said.

"In Wagga we have clients that we act for in really complex matters."

Legal Aid also refers victims to a specialist domestic violence unit that provides more holistic care, where referrals have almost tripled from 1000 calls a year in 2019 to 2900 between 2020 and 2021.

Ms Thomas says while volume has increased, the Legal Aid centre is able to meet the need.



 Helen Bromham of the Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service says referrals are consistently high, and legal advice is key. Picture: Emma Hillier

Other support services echoed the importance of legal advice when it comes to supporting victims.

The Riverina Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service helps more than 200 women referred by police every month, and manager Emma Bromham said access to legal support is vital.

"There is a need for that sort of legal support definitely," Ms Bromham said. "I do believe more funding is needed for legal advice for women."

Ms Bromham says she could easily do with "double" the resources when it comes to staffing and that brokerage - immediate needs like emergency shelter, food and clothing - are also in need of a funding boost.

Claire Kendall, from the Wagga Women's Health Centre said access to financial and legal support was important for victims.

"In almost all cases of domestic violence, if not all, financial abuse is an element and access to mainstream legal services can be cost prohibitive," she said.

"Without access to legal advice, many won't get the support they need."

The Department of Communities and Justice said the government is committed to responding to the rising rates of domestic violence, with funding for services increased by 85 per cent since 2016.

"The NSW Government is committed to preventing the scourge of domestic and family violence (DFV) and supporting victim-survivors," a spokesperson said.

"It is investing a record \$538 million over four years (2017-2021) to reduce DFV reoffending and support victim safety through prevention and early intervention initiatives, victim support and perpetrator interventions."

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