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Specialist legal funding boost will support thousands of women to safely escape violence

A \$129 million funding injection specialised women's legal services in the Federal Budget will support thousands of women and children to safely escape violent relationships, Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) says.

WLSA is also welcoming broader women's safety reforms as promising steps forward in the national effort to end gendered violence.

Angela Lynch, CEO of Women's Legal Service Queensland and WLSA spokesperson, congratulated the many advocates and survivors who made this possible.

"Yesterday's budget investment is significant and acknowledges the scale of the issue of gendered violence. It's thanks to the tireless work of survivors and advocates that we can celebrate this step forward – it didn't happen by accident," Ms Lynch said.

"I'm heartened at the government's acknowledgement of the crucial role women's legal services play in responding to violence against women.

"For many women and children at risk the justice system and courts are the only pathway to find safety, and specialised legal support is essential to keeping them safe through that process.

"Women's legal services also provide a range of wraparound specialised services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, including women in regional and remote areas where support is often scarce. Without that extra support like financial counselling and social work, many women feel they're unable to leave their partner safely and keep their children safe and supported.

"Our services are so chronically under-resourced that there are so many women we haven't been able to help. This ongoing support over four years gives us hope that more women and children will get the help they need.

"We also welcome the additional funds for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family legal services, which provide the culturally sensitive support needed to tackle violence in indigenous communities."

However, Ms Lynch warned the \$60.8 million to improve family law case management will not create a 'safe, child-centred' system without urgent law reform that puts safety first.

"We note the government's focus on family law reform, but women and children will only be safe in the system if changes are made to make it the priority. For example, the assumption of shared parental responsibility, which gives violent men an incentive to litigate and puts children at risk," says Ms Lynch.

"This dangerous presumption routinely gives violent perpetrators continued access to their victims and has already caused preventable deaths. Survivors have been clear: it must go.

"Hopefully this budget will kickstart a system-wide strategy to end violence against women. WLSA looks forward to having a seat at the table at the July National Women's Safety Summit and seeing commitments ensure the safety of women and children in our legal and justice systems."

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