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MEDIA RELEASE

Cutting funding to family violence services costs lives and money

Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) is in Canberra this week lobbying MPs and Senators from across the aisles to reverse upcoming funding cuts to the service. Victoria's only specialist women's family violence legal service, WLSV will receive a funding cut of \$200,000 from the federal government from 01 July 2017. The cut will force the organisation to stop vital family violence services including a state wide advice line and duty lawyer services affecting approximately 600 women every year.

Joanna Fletcher, WLSV's CEO will be making the case to number of MPs and Senators that these cuts might sound minor but they will have huge costs to both women in Victoria and the government.

"Family violence legal assistance saves the government money by providing clients with services that can prevent them utilising more costly services such as homelessness services, health services and refuge housing. Family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness in Australia and cutting services that allow women and children to be safe in their own home through the justice system will only increase these numbers," said Ms Fletcher.

The PwC, OurWatch and VicHealth report, "[A high price to pay: The economic case for preventing violence against women](#)" estimates the annual cost of violence against women in 2014-2015 as \$21.7 billion and found that this could rise to \$323.4 billion over a thirty-year period unless stronger action is taken.

In addition to the saved costs of ending violence, WLSV services also save costs in the justice system. In their report, "[Economic value of legal aid: analysis in relation to Commonwealth funded matters with a focus on family law](#)", PwC found that due to the inefficiencies and delays that are created by people navigating the complicated legal system alone, funding legal assistance saves the government \$160 to \$2.25 for every \$1 invested.

Former Chief Justice Gleeson is quoted on this issue in the Productivity Commission's [Access to Justice Arrangements final report](#) that recommended an immediate injection of an extra \$200 million dollars to the legal assistance sector, "The expense which governments incur in funding legal aid is obvious and measurable. What is not so obvious, and not so easily measurable, but what is real and substantial, is the cost of the delay, disruption and inefficiency, which results from absence or denial of legal representation. Much of that cost is also borne, directly or indirectly, by governments. Providing legal aid is costly. So is not providing legal aid."

"The economic modelling makes it clear that services that assist women to get out of violent relationships and have economic independence are great net value for money for government, Conversely, cutting these services will create much greater cost government than it saves" said Ms Fletcher.

"We hope that the Turnbull Government will reverse the funding cuts to our service and others like it as it will save lives and money in the long run," said Ms Fletcher.

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