

26 October 2022

What's in the Federal Budget for legal assistance for women escaping violence?

Women's Legal Services Australia welcomes the Albanese Government's Federal Budget and Women's Budget Statement, which recognises the importance of advancing gender equality and ending violence against women and their children, as well as providing significant funding for childcare and paid parental leave.

WLSA supports the significant investment of \$1.7 billion in funding for women's safety initiatives, including implementation of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children, and full implementation of the recommendations of the Respect@Work Report.

WLSA National Spokesperson, Elena Rosenman said, "Women's legal services have been recognised as a core component of supporting victim-survivors experiencing gender-based violence in the National Plan. The implementation of the National Plan must include building the capacity of women's legal services to do this work, addressing the gendered impact of federal legislation, including the response to family violence in family law matters, and ensuring victim-survivors are well supported to engage with the justice system."

Support for women on temporary visa holders experiencing family violence

The Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot provides vital legal assistance for women on temporary visas who are experiencing family violence. Women's Legal Services Australia welcomes funding of \$12.6 million to continue the pilot for an additional 12 months.

WLSA National Spokesperson, Elena Rosenman said, "hundreds of women on temporary visas who are experiencing family violence will continue to have access to vital legal assistance and support to help them make the best decisions for themselves and their families."

"While this is a welcome lifeline for the pilot, we are concerned that only short-term funding has been provided, and we look forward to seeing ongoing funding for legal assistance for women on temporary visas in the next budget."

"Women on temporary visas can find themselves trapped in violent relationships because it is difficult for them to seek help or leave their partner due to the restrictive conditions of their visas."

"In just one year of the pilot, specialist women's legal services across Australia worked with more than 750 women on temporary visas to stay safe and access the legal, financial and social service supports that the rest of us take for granted."

"We work alongside a woman throughout what is a very complex, costly and bureaucratic process to ensure she has all the information she needs to make the best decisions for herself and her family."

"We were also pleased to see the National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children recognise the unique and compounding barriers to justice experienced by women on temporary visas, and we look forward to contributing to addressing these issues."

Specialised legal support for victim-survivors of sexual assault

We welcome the commitment to providing \$8.4 million over three years for victim-survivors of sexual assault to access dedicated legal services to support their recovery and engagement with the criminal justice system.

WLSA National Spokesperson, Elena Rosenman said, “victim-survivors of gender-based violence must be represented in the criminal justice system and provided with strategic and victim-survivor centred legal assistance to navigate intersecting legal processes and jurisdictions.”

“Women’s legal services are ready to provide this service.”

“The tailored support we provide to women and their families makes specialised women’s legal service best-placed to support victim-survivors throughout their entire engagement with the criminal justice system, from when they are first considering whether to make a complaint, through to applying for compensation, protecting the release of confidential records, or deciding whether to share their experience publicly.”

“Our support is trauma-informed and includes integrated social services and other supports that responds to the needs of victim-survivors of sexual violence and ensure perpetrators are held to account.”

Specialised legal support for vulnerable women

In the 2021-22 Budget, \$129 million over four years was allocated to women’s legal centres to help vulnerable women access justice. This was a historic commitment to women’s legal services, however under the previous government less than half of this funding was delivered to specialist women’s legal services.

WLSA National Spokesperson, Elena Rosenman said, “We are disappointed that less than half of the funding earmarked for women’s legal support in the previous government’s 2021-22 Budget was handed to specialist women’s legal services across the country, which continue to be underfunded.”

“The new Federal Government has an opportunity to better support women in crisis to leave violent relationships, and to support economic security, and we look forward to this being addressed in the May budget next year.”

“Additional funding for women’s legal services will be vital to ensure we can play a critical role in implementing the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and their Children.”

Media contact

Elena Rosenman, National Spokesperson, Women’s Legal Services Australia
E: erosenman@wlc.org.au | M: +61 402 972 545

About Women’s Legal Services Australia

Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA) is a national network of 13 specialist women’s legal services in each State and Territory across Australia, specifically developed to improve women’s lives through specialist legal representation, support, and advocacy. We provide trauma-informed, integrated, and wraparound legal services to women that meet a range of their legal and other support needs to improve women’s safety and recovery from violence.