



**Mark Speakman**  
Attorney General  
Minister for Prevention of Domestic  
and Sexual Violence



**Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash**  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL  
MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE  
SENATOR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Thursday, 30 September 2021

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **RECORD \$95 MILLION BOOST TO LEGAL HELP SECTOR**

More people facing hardship across NSW will have access to free legal support thanks to \$95 million in additional Commonwealth legal assistance funding over four years.

Attorney General and Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Mark Speakman said the record investment will support our hardworking legal assistance sector meet the unprecedented service demand from the COVID-19 health and economic crisis.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on vulnerable people throughout NSW and highlighted the critical need for access to free legal services,” Mr Speakman said.

“I’m very thankful for the contribution of our dedicated legal assistance providers in delivering much-needed support for disadvantaged people, when so many are doing it tough.

“I encourage providers to apply for funding to support victim-survivors of domestic and sexual violence, people in need of mental health services, and other disadvantaged groups grappling with financial stress that’s often intensified by COVID-19.”

Free legal assistance services are available for socially and economically disadvantaged people facing a range of issues, including job losses, debt problems, housing insecurity, family law matters and people in need of support when they are the victim of violence.

The new funding includes:

- \$39.3 million for Legal Aid NSW, community legal centres and other service providers to assist vulnerable women, with a focus on victims of domestic and family violence;
- \$16 million to support people with mental health conditions access the justice system;
- \$12.2 million to assist workers experiencing sexual harassment or discrimination;
- \$23.5 million for Legal Aid NSW to extend Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS), including new court locations, and increased mental health supports; and
- \$2.4 million for providers to expand Domestic Violence Units (DVU) with dedicated mental health support and increased outreach to women in regional or remote areas.

This record investment in the legal assistance sector is part of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement 2020-25 (NLAP).

Commonwealth Attorney-General Michaelia Cash said the funding would assist vulnerable Australians facing disadvantage to access vital legal services.

“The Morrison Government is committed to supporting legal assistance services to ensure vulnerable Australians continue to have access to justice,” she said.

“Across Australia, we are working with states and territories through the NLAP to continually invest in these important services. We will provide more than \$2.3 billion over 5 years for legal assistance services across Australia under the NLAP.”

Legal Aid NSW CEO Brendan Thomas said demand for DVU advice had more than doubled during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, and that while the unit usually fields around 1,000 calls annually, there'd been more than 6,000 calls in the 12 months to March 2021.

“Lockdowns are about staying home to be protected from COVID-19. But for the women we work with, home is not always a safe place, a fact that may have been exacerbated due to mandatory lockdowns and other necessary health restrictions,” Mr Thomas said.

“Our DVU is critical in helping victim-survivors seek protection orders, navigate the family law system, access support and safe housing, and seek financial counselling.”

For confidential advice, support and referrals, contact: **1800 RESPECT** (1800 737 732), **The NSW Domestic Violence Line** (1800 65 64 63) or **Men's Referral Service** (1300 766 491).