

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO
2016-2017 Additional Estimates Hearings

Outcome Number: 2.1 Families and Communities

Question No: SQ17-000171

Topic: National Plan on VAW - cuts to front line legal services

Hansard page: Written

Senator Larissa Waters asked:

1. We are already hearing from the CLC sector that services supporting women fleeing domestic violence will be forced to close, or scale back their service. Have you had any engagement with the CLC sector about that?
2. Under the Third Action Plan of the National Plan To Reduce Violence Against Women And Their Children,[1] there is a general commitment to improve support services for women fleeing DV. Do you see this cut to core funding for CLCs as consistent with this commitment?
3. CLCs already turn away 160,000 people seeking help every single year – why aren't you more concerned that that number is about to get a lot bigger?
4. Also under the Third Action Plan, there is a commitment in relation to Aboriginal and TSI services to “[2.4(c)] Improve and expand on current services so they provide intensive, holistic, culturally sensitive responses.” Our understanding of the government's policy is to cut \$18m from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services from 1 July 2017. Have you had any engagement with the Attorney General's Department who are responsible for this cut?
5. Do you see it as your job to help make sure the plan is implemented? How can there be such a huge disconnect?
6. How many meetings has the Department had with AGD to discuss this?
7. Have you briefed your Minister about the likely impact of these cuts on the success of the National Plan?
8. Has your Minister or a Minister assisting met with the Attorney General about these cuts?

Answer:

1. No. The Attorney-General's Department (AGD) is responsible for funding of community legal centres (CLCs).
2. Of the \$100 million package for Commonwealth initiatives to support the Third Action Plan, \$30 million was allocated to front-line legal assistance and family law services to address family and domestic violence, including:
 - \$18.5 million for legal aid commissions to establish integrated duty lawyer and family violence support services in family law court registries.
 - \$6.2 million for selected Family Relationship Centres to deliver legally-assisted family dispute resolution to vulnerable families that are separating or have separated.
 - \$5 million to extend funding for the specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships under the Government's Women's Safety Package by an additional year until 30 June 2019.
 - \$0.3 million to improve the contribution of legal assistance data to the broader evidence base around family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia.

AGD has advised that the majority of legal assistance work relating to family law matters involving domestic violence is delivered by legal aid commissions, which will receive \$18.5 million through this funding package to deliver enhanced duty lawyer services in family law court registries. Funding legal aid commissions in targeted family law court locations will benefit clients, and relieve the pressure on the sector more broadly.

CLCs will directly receive \$4.1 million through the extension of the Women's Safety Package legal assistance pilots. Some CLCs and Indigenous legal assistance services are also likely to be involved in the delivery of legally-assisted family dispute resolution with Family Relationship Centres, and integrated duty lawyer services with legal aid commissions.

The Third Action Plan funding is in addition to the \$15 million provided under the Government's Women's Safety Package to eleven CLCs and two legal aid commissions to deliver specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships.

Further information requests about CLCs should be directed to the AGD.

3. The Department of Social Services (DSS) does not hold information on the number of clients that CLCs turn away. The AGD is responsible for managing funding to CLCs.
4. DSS, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) and the AGD worked closely together on the development of the Third Action Plan, and continue to do so on its implementation.

Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services is the responsibility of the AGD.

5. DSS has developed governance, implementation, monitoring and evaluating arrangements for the Third Action Plan. These arrangements were agreed to by Commonwealth, state and territory government senior officials (the Implementation Executive Group (ImpEG)) on 6 March 2017.

ImpEG is responsible for the implementation of the Third Action Plan reporting to Women's Safety Ministers on progress.

DSS is responsible for implementing actions and continued engagement with state and territories on progress.

The AGD is responsible for funding of CLCs.

6. DSS, PM&C and the AGD worked closely together on the development of the Third Action Plan, and continue to do so in its implementation. The Department regularly meets with the AGD to discuss issues relating to the implementation of the Third Action Plan.
7. DSS, PM&C, and the AGD worked closely together on the development of the Third Action Plan, and continue to do so in its implementation. Ministers from these and other relevant Commonwealth agencies were engaged in the development and approval of the Third Action Plan and the funding support package.
8. The Department is not aware of whether the Minister or Assistant Minister have met with the Attorney-General about this.