

## Select Committee on COVID-19

### Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

#### Attorney-General's Department

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**Question type:** Spoken

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#### **Rachel Siewert asked the following question:**

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. Can I ask about some of the awareness raising. The counselling and referral services are being accessed, but that's also been leading on to services like the women's legal services. Sorry, I appreciate that the line doesn't sound very good. Have you been liaising with A-G's about the increased demand for legal services? I'm aware that goes into the A-G's area. Have you been liaising with them about increased funding for women's legal services and other legal services that now have an increased demand on them?

Ms Hefren-Webb: There's a senior official from Attorney-General's who joins us when we have the senior officials meeting for the Women's Safety Council, so we do frequently get the perspective of the Attorney-General's Department, who have been monitoring the issues of demand on legal services. Again, the pattern is a bit unclear from memory. But, yes, we are liaising closely with them.

Senator SIEWERT: Is increased funding likely to be, or is it being, made available to these services, particularly those that are experiencing the increase in demand?

Ms Hefren-Webb: I'd have to take that on notice. I don't have that information here.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay. Could you take that on notice for me, please.

#### **The response to the honourable Rachel Siewert question is as follows:**

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$63.3 million in funding for legal assistance services to directly respond to additional demand caused by COVID-19. This funding is in addition to the more than \$2 billion in Commonwealth legal assistance provided to the states and territories under the *National Legal Assistance Partnership* (2020-25) which commenced on 1 July 2020.

Of the \$63.3 million, \$49.8 million is being provided for additional frontline legal assistance services and the remaining \$13.5 million will enable service providers to improve their IT capabilities to shift to virtual service delivery. Forty percent of the \$49.8 million for frontline services, approximately \$20 million, is to be directed toward domestic violence matters.

Under the Project Agreement that provides the COVID-19 legal assistance funding, states and territories had all received their first milestone payment from the Commonwealth by 7 July 2020. States and territories are responsible for determining the funding allocation to individual providers, and allocating and administering Commonwealth funding for legal assistance services. Based on reporting received to date from states and territories, women's legal services are among recipients that will receive the funding.