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## Funding for family law and family violence legal assistance welcomed

National Legal Aid, representing Legal Aid Commissions across Australia has welcomed the announcement of additional funding for legal assistance to support reforms in the family law system.

National Legal Aid Chair Louise Glanville said, ‘We all have a responsibility to keep women and children safe from harm – and this includes having a safe, accessible and inclusive family law system.’

‘Too many women leaving violent and controlling relationships have been left to navigate the legal system on their own because the demand for legal aid continues to grow. This funding for legal assistance will improve both the experience and safety of victim-survivors in the family law system.’

The case management transition funding announced in the budget is critical to support the reform work following the merger of the Family Court and Federal Circuit Court into one court – the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. These reforms aim to move cases through the family law system quickly and fairly and with as little detrimental impact on families and children as possible, improving safety outcomes for litigants and reducing cost.

‘This funding allows Legal Aid Commissions to represent clients through the new case management pathway, supporting people experiencing disadvantage including protracted conflict between parents.’

Through effective legal assistance and a whole of system approach with the courts we can contribute to the immediate safety of parents and the wellbeing of their children, leading to better social, health and economic outcomes,’ said Ms Glanville.

Early assessment and determination of family violence allegations and early access to legal assistance is particularly important in reducing family violence, given the high prevalence of family violence in family law cases.

‘Additional funding to provide representation for people identified as being at high-risk through the Lighthouse Project extension and expansion will assist families who have experienced family violence or other safety concerns to navigate the family law system,’ said Ms Glanville.

Since 2019, Legal Aid Commissions have been providing representation to people in family law proceedings where there is an allegation of family violence and a ban on personal cross examination has been made.

This Budget provides a four-year funding extension of the scheme and will ensure we can continue to deliver this vital service.

Legal aid provides a crucial safety net for people who can’t afford a lawyer, are struggling or facing hardship, particularly those affected by family violence, addressing issues early on and helping people understand their rights and options.

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