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Legal Aid funding will help keep women and children escaping family violence safe

National Legal Aid, representing legal aid commissions across Australia, has welcomed the confirmation of ongoing additional funding for legal assistance within the family law system. The October Budget includes \$76.6 million to legal aid commissions for key projects that aim to support women and children who have experienced family violence to navigate the family law system.

National Legal Aid Chair Louise Glanville said, '80% of all family law applications include allegations of family violence¹.

The commitment of ongoing funding for family law legal assistance will help ensure that legal aid commissions can continue to assist victim-survivors in a safe and supportive environment.

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.'

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. This has been demonstrated via the world leading Lighthouse Project, which provides legal representation to families at risk of and experiencing family violence. When matters are screened for family violence via this project 62% are categorised as high risk².

'Confirmation of \$24.2 million to extend and expand the Lighthouse project will assist families who have experienced family violence or other safety concerns to navigate the family law system and is very much welcomed,' said Ms Glanville.

Legal aid commissions have been providing representation to people in family law proceedings where a ban on people cross examining their ex-partner has been made due to an allegation of family violence.

This Budget provides confirmation of \$52.4 million to continue the scheme and will ensure we can continue to deliver this vital service that protects victim survivors from ongoing harassment from perpetrators of abuse.

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, and support Australia's vision of ending violence in one generation,' said Ms Glanville.

'Too many victim-survivors have been left to manage the legal system on their own because the demand for legal aid continues to grow.

The confirmation of funding for family law legal assistance in the Budget is a good first step towards helping ensure that all women and children experiencing disadvantage are able to access the legal information, advice and representation they need to remain safe.

Media contact: Katherine McKernan, Executive Director NLA

Tel: 0425 288 446 **email:** katherine.mckernan@legalaid.nsw.gov.au

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¹ National Plan to End Violence Against Women, p 62

² Federal Circuit Court (2021), *Annual Report 2020-21*, p. 4