

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Federal Budget 2023: Focus on gender equality welcome but vital legal support for women experiencing violence missing**

Women's Legal Services Australia welcomes the budget's strong focus on structural change to build gender equality, however these measures must be matched with resourcing for services on the ground in local communities.

Women's Legal Services Australia spokesperson, Elena Rosenman, said "investments that are designed to unlock women's economic participation and support women with cost-of-living pressures demonstrate this Government is committed to putting equality and respect at the heart of economic growth".

"However, it is imperative that when women seek help, from Launceston to Katherine, the doors of frontline services are open to welcome and support them," she said.

Despite significant investment to address violence against women, Women's Legal Services across Australia, vital to the safety and recovery of women and children experiencing violence, will continue to be underfunded.

"The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 recognises that Women's Legal Services are key to enhancing access to equitable justice outcomes for victim-survivors, but the budget does not match this.

"We are disappointed the government has not taken the opportunity to fix the broken promise of the previous Government, who allocated \$129 million to Women's Legal Services in the 2021-22 Budget but delivered less than half to our services.

"The budget does not include an increase in funding for Women's Legal Services which means we will now be forced to reduce staff and turn away hundreds of women from receiving legal assistance.

"We welcome the significant investment in First Nations women's safety. However, two First Nations Women's Legal Services, Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre and First Nations Women's Legal Service Queensland, did not receive any additional funding. These services are already having to regularly turn away First Nations women who need their help."

### ***Making the family law system safer and simpler***

We welcome the allocation of \$71 million to making the family law system safer and simpler for parents and children, including support for property settlements, increased legal representation and alternative dispute resolution for Hague Convention cases, and increased access to mediation.

Women's Legal Services Australia spokesperson, Yvette Cehtel, said "we are pleased the budget includes additional funding for legal representation and alternative dispute resolution in Hague Convention matters – this will address a significant inequality in access to justice".

“It is currently only the parent remaining in Australia who has access to free legal assistance, so this funding will enable women who have taken a child overseas to receive the support they need to leave a violent relationship,” she said.

### ***Legal assistance for women on temporary visas experiencing violence***

We welcome funding to extend the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot for an additional 7 months until January 2025.

Women’s Legal Services Australia spokesperson, Elena Rosenman, said “this is a welcome lifeline, but the pilot has already been extended multiple times and the lack of funding certainty makes it difficult for our services to plan for the future”.

“If the government is committed to supporting women on temporary visas to escape and recover from violence, there needs to be an ongoing commitment to investing in Women’s Legal Services to provide this vital assistance to women.

“In just one year of the pilot, specialist women’s legal services across Australia worked with more than 750 women on temporary visas to stay safe and access the legal, financial and social service supports.”

### **Media contact**

Elena Rosenman, National Spokesperson, Women’s Legal Services Australia  
E: [erosenman@wlc.org.au](mailto:erosenman@wlc.org.au) | M: +61 402 972 545

Yvette Cehtel, National Spokesperson, Women’s Legal Services Australia  
E: [yvette@womenslegaltas.org.au](mailto:yvette@womenslegaltas.org.au) | M: +61 438 112 703

### **About Women’s Legal Services Australia**

Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA) is a national network of 13 specialist women’s legal services in each State and Territory across Australia, specifically developed to improve women’s lives through specialist legal representation, support, and advocacy. We provide trauma-informed, integrated, and wraparound legal services to women that meet a range of their legal and other support needs to improve women’s safety and recovery from violence.