

NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICES

WORKING TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 4 December 2014

Productivity Commission confirms FVPLS essential

The National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (NFVPLS) welcome the release of the *Productivity Commission's Access to Justice Arrangements* Final Report, which finds that Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) have a unique and critical role providing access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence.

"FVPLSs play a vital role in ensuring the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and it is encouraging to see the report recognises this," said Antoinette Braybrook, Convenor of the NFVPLS. "The report confirms what we have long been saying – that the defunding of the National FVPLS Program is very concerning. It is not based on the evidence, it will increase the costs to government and it needs to be reconsidered."

In the 2014-15 budget FVPLSs were rationalised into the Prime Minister's *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* and required to enter a competitive tender process for funding. Our members called immediately for a direct allocation of funding to the national program but our request was refused.

The Commission's findings are at odds with this decision. "We have been cut off from the other legal assistance service providers and the National FVPLS program effectively abolished," continued Ms Braybrook. "Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, it is not just a question of whether our member organisations will continue to provide FVPLS services, it is a question of whether FVPLS services will exist at all."

The report shows that unmet legal needs can escalate to serious legal problems, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including victims/survivors of family violence. "We may not see eye to eye on every detail in the report," said Ms Braybrook, "But it is without doubt that increased funding is required".

"The Commission supports the ongoing demand for FVPLSs. The government sat on the release of this report as the open tender for IAS was announced, which meant we had to tender without regard to the important findings. The FVPLS Program over 16 years has built community trust through our frontline legal services to ensure the safety of Aboriginal women and children," said Ms Braybrook. "In this context we urgently call for the direct allocation of funding to the National Program."

FVPLSs provides critical frontline legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence, in areas including intervention orders, victims of crime assistance, child protection and family law. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 31 times more likely to be hospitalised and 10 times more likely to die from violent assault than other women. A commitment from our Federal Government to ensure the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is essential.

Media Contact: Antoinette Braybrook, National FVPLS Convenor 0457 544 591

<http://www.nationalfvpls.org/>

Media Release