

Media release

Violence against women: the 2016-17 Budget evades the hard challenges

The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) has expressed serious concern about the national commitment to supporting women and children facing violence.

AWAVA welcomed the small additional commitment to implementing the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (\$33 million in 2016-17), as we welcomed the Women's Safety Package last year. However, these commitments are just a tiny fraction of what is needed.

AWAVA Program Manager Merrindahl Andrew said, "After the issue was deemed a 'national priority' by the Australian Government, AWAVA together with other advocates hoped this priority would be reflected in the Budget. Once again, however, the Government has deferred the challenge to a later date. A dedicated funding stream for preventing and responding to violence, together with a major funding boost and financial security for services, are among the minimum responses needed to truly make a difference."

The previously-declared "national emergency" of domestic and family violence kills on average one woman in Australia each week, while sexual violence continues to have widespread and devastating impacts on women and children. The scale of the Budget's response is not proportionate. The Victorian Government recently recognised the scale and urgency of family violence as a problem and responded accordingly. This Budget is a missed opportunity to do the same at a national level. Fair Agenda has estimated that \$4 billion over two years is required to match the Victorian response.

For example, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services need an extra \$28 million to ensure national coverage for their legal services and supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence. This Budget leaves hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait women without access to the services they need.

"Not only is the Budget a missed opportunity; it entrenches cuts to the services that work directly with victims/survivors," Ms Andrew said. "Cuts to legal assistance, including women's legal services that support victims/survivors, are going ahead, reducing community legal centres' capacity by one third (\$34 million over the forward estimates). And homelessness service funding, including funding for women's refuges, is still due to end at June 2017. This kind of funding uncertainty is exactly what we don't need."

AWAVA calls on the Australian Government to undertake more transparent reporting that accurately represents the full picture of spending on measures to address violence against women, as well as bringing back a rigorous gender budgeting process. For example, Minister Porter recently noted that homelessness funding had a "specific focus on domestic violence", but there is no public information on how much homelessness funding is going to specialist women's services or services targeting women facing violence. If we are serious about addressing violence, such information needs to be public.

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