



Women's Domestic Violence
Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc

Media Statement

6 April 2019

for Immediate Release

Media Release – Morrison Ignores Domestic Violence Experts Putting Women and Children's Safety at Risk

Women and children's safety advocates are dismayed to learn that the \$10 mil pledged for so-called 'Specialist Family Violence Services' is to go to a select list of family relationship services to provide a range of services including couples counselling and mediation with a 'whole of family approach'.

In the grant documents released today, the services were described as "*contribut[ing] to filling the gaps in service provision for victims of domestic and family violence*". However, as WDVCS NSW Director, Hayley Foster points out, "*This flies in the face of years of consultation with women's safety experts and survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. We have set out clear guidelines for reform in this sector, and drawn attention to a number of crucial service gaps, neither of which this funding will address.*"

The services are said to fall under the twelve-year [National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children](#). Yet, fundamentally, they do not fit with the agreed-upon principles and actions of this plan. "*No-where is there the suggestion that we should be going back to the days where we are recommending couples counselling or couples mediation in the context of family violence*", says Foster. "*Except in the case of [highly specialised family dispute resolution for family law matters involving specialist legal and domestic violence services.](#)*"

The [National Action Plan](#) explicitly recognises the need for all governments to work more collaboratively, build the evidence base, share information and track performance. However, Foster believes this announcement from the Morrison Government indicates a blatant disregard for the advice of women's safety experts and domestic violence survivors, and the high-quality research of the national research body for women's safety, [ANROWS](#) which has informed the three-year Action Plans under the National Plan.

Concerns are also held that the Federal Government is not up to speed with the excellent work being done at the state and territory level to tackle domestic violence and how it can best support this work in a coordinated way. "*State and Territory Governments have listened to experts and survivors and recognise that services for women and their children who have experienced domestic violence need to be highly [specialised](#) and that [men's behaviour change programs need to be rigorous and standardised](#)*", says Foster. "*What we need is for the Federal Government to do their share and invest in the programs and initiatives we have highlighted as the crucial gaps, not go off on a limb adding new services which don't fit within the existing service system.*"

Foster notes that the Grant Guidelines for the new services do not specify any requirement for a gender-responsive approach consistent with specialist women's domestic violence services nor a

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Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc

requirement to meet standards for men's behaviour change. Indeed, **there is no requirement whatsoever that the relationship service have experience delivering specialist domestic violence services.**

*"The unfortunate truth is that **expanding services which invite families to undertake couples counselling or mediation in the context of domestic violence, outside of a highly specialised environment with the appropriate safeguards and supports, will put women and children's safety at risk**", says Foster.*

"Women's safety experts, including men's behaviour change practitioners, know this from our work with families. And we, along with domestic violence survivors, have told the Government this, so there is no excuse for this sort of policy making on the fly to have taken place."

WDVCAS NSW are calling on the Morrison Government to reconsider this funding and to go back to the sector experts and their State and Territory counterparts for advice as to the most urgent areas of need for this essential funding.

"We can't muck around", says Foster. "We're losing more than one woman a week to this scourge, and it is the single biggest preventable cause of death disability and illness in women aged 15 to 44 years."

"Funding is urgent. And it must go where it's needed most."

ABOUT:

WDVCAS NSW is the peak body for the women's safety services providing the primary response to women impacted by domestic and family violence across NSW. Member services supported 45,863 women with 40,130 accompanying children across NSW in 2018, providing 193,680 occasions of support. WDVCAS NSW advocates on the systemic issues impacting upon women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence through legislative, policy and practice reform.

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