

# 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

8 March 2016

## Access to justice for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on International Women's Day

International Women's Day is a time to celebrate the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The National Family Violence Forum Prevention Legal Service Forum (National FVPLS Forum) recognises the tireless efforts of women leaders, advocates and supporters in defending the rights and wellbeing of women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is also a time to reflect on the many barriers which our women continue to face, and reminds us of the need to redouble our efforts to end violence.

National figures show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and 10 times more likely to die of violent assault than other women. The true extent of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may be even higher, as studies indicate that violence may not be disclosed in up to 90% of cases.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women escaping family violence are placed in highly vulnerable positions. Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Australia, with Aboriginal women being 15 times more likely than other Australian women to seek help from specialist homelessness organisations. It devastates our communities and destroys our families. Some women tell our services that they choose violence over homelessness.

In too many cases, family violence is also a major factor in women having their children removed. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children now account for almost 35% of all children in care despite comprising only 4.4% of the nation's child population. This is a national crisis, in which women and children are doubly victimised: once by their abuser, and once by a system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been recognised as one of the most legally disadvantaged groups in Australia. Evidence shows that where culturally safe legal services are available Aboriginal women will access legal support. Members of the National FVPLS Forum provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence in communities around Australia, but limited resources and a lack of long-term, secure funding means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in many areas are unable to access our services.

The National FVPLS Forum therefore calls on the Federal Government to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women regardless of their geographic location have access to our specialist, culturally safe services. The National FVPLS Forum also calls for the government to commit to long-term funding for all our members in order to give certainty to our communities, families and clients that FVPLS will be there to support them in their time of need.

The National FVPLS Forum's [pre-budget submission](#) contains more detail on these positions.

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Media Release