

Community Lawyers Welcome Turnbull Support for Family Violence Victims at Hospitals

24 September 2015

“The PM’s announcement today of support for this Health-Justice Partnership is welcome relief for a service that was facing closure next year without ongoing support” said Mr Dan Stubbs, CEO of Inner Melbourne Community Legal (IMCL).

Inner Melbourne Community Legal’s ***Acting on the Warning Signs*** project, supported by the Victorian Legal Services Board, provides community lawyers who provide legal services for women escaping/surviving family violence through partnerships with inner city Hospitals.

Acting on the Warning Signs enables health professionals to identify and respond to family violence and to provide crucial legal advice and information to patients on family violence complemented by legal, health and social work assistance at the hospital.

Mr Dan Stubbs said “increased funding and resources are required in order to further develop this highly effective type of service delivery across Australia”.

Mr Stubbs said, “this partnership is crucial because the use of health-care services increases with intimate partner violence. We know that health professionals are the major professional group to whom women disclose violence and, incredibly, pregnancy is a very high-risk time for women experiencing violence and control. We also know that people only turn to legal advisors with their legal needs in about 16% of cases, whereas they consult health/welfare advisors for their legal issues in almost 30% of cases. In services like this we can provide legal assistance so the most vulnerable women in our community will be safer”.

“We want to avoid women experiencing violence from being put on a referral-roundabout by providing a holistic model of care at the hospital. The funding for our main Health-Justice Partnership will run out in the middle of 2016. If we had to stop providing this service at the hospital, a large number of very disenfranchised Victorian women may miss out on receiving much-needed legal assistance”, Mr Stubbs said.

Mr Stubbs is pleased that Senator Cash recognises that addressing gender inequality is key to tackling family violence. Since 2013, IMCL has been delivering targeted primary prevention programs to high school students. “We welcome the opportunity to work with Governments in rolling out respectful relationships education in 2016” Mr Stubbs said.

“Family violence related legal issues are a rapidly increasing portion of the casework - growing by over 200 per cent from 2011/2012 to 2013/2014” said Mr Stubbs.

Mr Stubbs explained that “we provide free, legal advice on-site at some hospitals several times a week. So women who may be victim/survivors don’t have to Google the name of a legal service or tell their difficult story in an unfamiliar new environment. They can access free legal advice at the same time as their appointment with a clinician, giving clients wraparound care by working in a multi-disciplinary environment with other key professionals”.

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