

# Legal centres struggle with DV victims

— Sherele Moody

DOMESTIC violence victims across regional Queensland are falling through the cracks as community legal centres record a massive spike in calls for help.

A Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services report released on Thursday shows DV-related calls to the state's community legal centres have doubled over the past five years.

QAILS, the Queensland Women's Legal Service, the Australian Greens and Queensland's Minister for Women, Shannon Fentiman, have called on the Federal Government to continue supporting community legal centres that are due to lose some Commonwealth funding in 2017.

Advocates and MPs say former PM Tony Abbott slashed legal centre funding by 30% – or \$30m – and that cut is to come into effect in July next year.

The QAILS report shows general DV inquiries jumped from 1593 in 2011 to 3482 last year.

The number of calls where



legal advice was given climbed from 4711 to 7863 over the five years.

The amount of case work, where lawyers provided ongoing assistance in domestic violence matters, nearly quadrupled from 626 to 2222 cases.

In 2013–14, CLCs turned away 80,000 vulnerable Queenslanders because they did not have enough resources to help them.

In the same period, the centres helped just 50,000 people.

Women's Legal Service coordinator Rosslyn Monroe said CLCs and her own organisation were the only legal resources available for many vulnerable regional Queenslanders who did not

qualify for legal aid.

“Unfortunately there are not too many options – if they are not eligible for legal aid and they can't afford private legal assistance, then a community legal centre is the last port of call for those people.”

QAILS director James Farrell said the government needed to take action now.

Ms Fentiman said she had been calling on the Federal Government to reverse its cuts for more than a year.

Australian Greens leader Senator Richard Di Natale said if Malcolm Turnbull was serious about ending domestic violence, his government would re-instate the support and add an extra \$200 million to the kitty.

Attorney-General George Brandis's office was unable to respond to ARM Newsdesk's request for comment in time for publication.

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➤ **For 24-hour DV support in Queensland, phone DVConnect on 1800 811 811, Mensline on 1800 600 636 or the national hotline, 1800 RESPECT, on 1800 737 732.**