



Domestic violence case load leaves community legal centres 'struggling', other clients turned away

By Casey Briggs

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Queensland's community legal centres now help seven times as many people with domestic violence issues as five years ago and are not coping with the demand, the sector's peak body says.

People within the sector have expressed concern a 30 per cent federal funding cut later this year would leave an increasing number of people without publicly funded legal help.

Statistics compiled by Community Legal Centres Queensland (CLCQ) show 4,429 people received ongoing assistance with family violence matters in 2016, compared with 626 in 2011.

That assistance includes court representation and help in applying for domestic violence protection orders (DVOs).

In 2016, more than 11,000 more people received information and advice from family violence services over the phone or in person.

The increase in the use of family violence legal services occurred along with increasing demand for other services for victims of violence.

DVO applications and the number of emergency hotel rooms used by women fleeing violence have both risen sharply in recent years.

Almost 60,000 Queenslanders were provided with some form of help by community legal centres in 2015-16.

'Half the people seeking help are being locked out'

But CLCQ director James Farrell said those community services now had to turn away almost half of the people who approached them for help.

"The other half are locked out, they're falling through the safety net and they're left to deal with complex legal problems without the help that they need," he said.

Mr Farrell said the figures showed the sector was struggling to cope with demand even before the federal funding cut came into effect from July 1.

People experiencing family violence are given priority for assistance, both by community legal services and governments.

Mr Farrell said the sharp increase in family violence-related cases meant more people needing help for other issues had to be turned away.

In a statement, Attorney-General George Brandis said the Federal Government supported the work of the legal assistance sector.



PHOTO: The DV caseload had left community legal centres struggling, Mr Farrell said. (ABC)

MAP: Brisbane 4000

So far today police in Australia would have dealt with on average

309 domestic violence matters

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"Commonwealth funding for Queensland Community Legal Centres has increased significantly under the Coalition from \$6.77 million in 2013/14 to \$9.56 million this financial year," Senator Brandis said.

He said the funding cut was a result of decisions made by the previous Labor government.

"The Labor Party through then attorney-general Mark Dreyfus allocated an amount of funding, but decided it would expire on 30 June 2017," Senator Brandis said.

"This is the 'Dreyfus funding cliff' — a direct result of decisions the former attorney-general made but now, with trademark hypocrisy, criticises."

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Contact Casey Briggs