

Fears of federal funding cuts

How \$40,000 can stop women being murdered

Sherelle Moody

Sherelle.Moody

@newsregionalmedia.com.au

WOMEN living in regional and rural Queensland may be murdered by their domestic violence abusers if the Federal Government does not back down on its plan to "cut" about \$2 million from community legal centres.

Women's Legal Service Queensland chief executive officer Angela Lynch revealed her fears as the federal funding drop means her organisation has to close its \$40,000 a year Rural, Regional and Remote Priority Line, which supports regional women in domestic violence crisis, and scale back the operating hours of its \$200,000-a-year statewide help service. Both services help about 4000 regional residents a year.

Ms Lynch on Monday was in Canberra, making a last-ditch appeal to federal politicians including Federal Attorney-General George Brandis, urging them to reverse the cuts that will also have regional community legal centres scale back – or end – family law support.

"Women (in the regions) are incredibly isolated," she said.

"Services on the ground are scarce and if there's only one lawyer in town they're often unable to get legal help (as the lawyer is helping their partner).

"You combine this with

higher gun ownership and women are in incredibly volatile and unsafe situations.

"This service means they can ring us and get legal advice and also not have the shame of walking into services in their local community."

The WLSQ helps about 11,000 women and 17,000 children a year across all of its services. About half of its clients live in regional, rural and remote areas of the state.

Mr Brandis said his government was not cutting the funding, but that the previous funding allocation was due to end in June. He said the Commonwealth was contributing \$1.2 billion to legal aid and community legal centres, but all state governments were responsible for bridging any shortfalls.

"Support for CLCs is not a matter for the Commonwealth alone. It requires the state and territory governments in each jurisdiction to pull their weight, both in terms of funding and, crucially, in terms of service delivery," he said.

Since the start of 2017, 15 women and six children have been killed in Australia. The Australian Femicide Project shows 16 of these deaths involved family members.

For 24-hour support in Queensland phone DVConnect on 1800 811 811.



FUNDING CUTS: Women's Legal Service CEO Angela Lynch says women experiencing domestic violence in regional areas are some of Australia's most isolated. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED