

Opposition demands funding review for legal centres helping desperate women

By **Tony Moore**

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Opposition Leader Deb Frecklington wants an urgent review of Queensland government funding to community legal services after a huge increase in phone calls from women seeking legal help.

"Many community legal services will tell you that it is about time that we review the funding models for all form of community type services, particularly in the domestic violence space," Ms Frecklington said.

"That is something that I would have hoped that Annastacia Palaszczuk have done by now after five years in government."



Opposition Leader Deb Frecklington will review funding of community legal services if the LNP wins office at the next state election. AAP

On Sunday, [News Corp](#) reported Women's Legal Service Queensland was seeking a \$900,000 increase in funds because around 6600 calls to its helpline went unanswered in 2018-19.

Women's Legal Service chief executive Angela Lynch said that was equivalent to 40 per cent of calls to the service.

Increases in calls have severely impacted the services before. The Gold Coast Community Legal Service in 2017 [reported a 14-fold increase in domestic violence phone calls.](#)

At the time, Gold Coast Legal Service director Victoria Shiel described the increase in reporting domestic violence from 60 cases in 2014 to 890 in 2017 as "staggering" and the cases themselves as "horrific".

The Women's Legal Service in 2018-19 received \$3.46 million from both the Queensland and federal governments.

Overall, the Palaszczuk Government promised to [spend \\$329 million over six years to combat domestic violence through a range of programs over six years from 2015-16](#) after Dame Quentin Bryce's *Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland* report.

Ms Frecklington, a lawyer before enetring politics, said the LNP would review state funding for community legal service centres if elected.

"If I am fortunate enough to win office then I would be looking at the funding model around this and making sure that these desperate women are not left short," she said.





Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk put the issue of resolving domestic violence on the government agenda by commissioning Dame Quentin Bryce report into domestic violence issues in Queensland in 2015. AAP IMAGE/ DARREN ENGLAND

Ms Frecklington said the Women's Legal Service scenario was not a case where money had been cut and redirected to the domestic violence-specific DV Connect service.

"No. There are two different funding streams here," Ms Frecklington said.

"We do need to make sure that all different streams are looked at sensibly.

"But in this case the Women's Legal Service has not been (financially) supported by the Palaszczuk government and I just don't think it is good enough.

"There are hundreds of women out there on a daily basis who use the women's helpline to call up to get that advice.

"It is vitally important service and one that I support totally."

Attorney General Yvette D'Ath said the federal government - not the state government - was failing to contribute its fair share of community legal service funding.

"Deb Frecklington needed to direct her efforts to convincing her federal colleagues to provide some funding certainty to the community legal services sector," Ms D'Ath said.

"Queensland has been pressuring the Morrison government for months to say how much funding is going to be provided, and we are still waiting.

She said the 2019-20 Queensland budget contained \$111 million for 206 specialist domestic and family violence support services.

"That's up from \$56 million in 2014-15, or almost double the LNP's investment when they were in government," she said.

"The federal government should significantly increase CLC, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services and Legal Aid funding so that all community legal centres can provide greater assistance to those most in need, including for domestic and family violence services."

A Department of Justice spokesman said the issue was an increase on demand for the service, not a funding cutback.

"We are interested in receiving further details from them [Women's Legal Service Queensland] on these demands," he said.

Ms Frecklington on Sunday - after the Women's Legal Service issue was reported - said Labor's priorities were "simply, all wrong."

She said Labor had wasted \$500,000 [changing the name of the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital](#) in 2018 and questioned the need to send Nudgee MP Leanne Linard to London for a three-day workshop on gender sensitive scrutiny, when the women's legal service asked for \$900,000.

Ms Frecklington, who helped implement a regional lawyers helpline for women, said the LNP had given an additional \$750,000 to the Women's Legal Service when it was last in office.



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