

Women's legal services deliver action plan for incoming Federal Government

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Australia's peak network for specialist women's legal services will launch its federal election platform and action plan for the next Federal Government in Melbourne today.

The election platform seeks a commitment from the Coalition and Labor parties to take action in five key priority areas should they be successful at the May 21 poll.

These include:

1. Strengthening the family law system's legal and safety response for women and children
2. Greater economic justice to women through law reform and representation
3. Investing in specialist women's legal services' capacity to represent and protect women
4. Improving outcomes for women experiencing sexual violence and harassment
5. Creating a national framework and approach to women's safety and gender equality

The full platform is available at www.wlsa.org.au.

WLSA Spokesperson, Serina McDuff, said addressing women's safety from family and sexual violence remained one of the biggest challenges facing Australia and that the next parliament needed to act decisively.

"Every day across Australia, women's legal services work with women whose ability to live safely and securely is undermined by their precarious legal and financial positions. We see women and children trapped in violent situations, facing homelessness, left without savings and struggling to stabilise their lives after trauma."

"As specialist family violence legal services, we have been advocating for reforms to the justice system that will improve safety for women and their children. Courts need to be places where safety and recovery from family violence are prioritised, above all else.

"The Family Court's own data shows that 64% of family law cases involve family violence allegations. Testing allegations at the start of the process would make it easier to protect victim-survivors and make it much harder for perpetrators to continue abuse using the legal system to do so."

"We need our family law system to provide the opportunity for women to access their legal entitlements and fair financial outcomes. For women experiencing disadvantage, the risk of poverty and homelessness is heightened by the lack of fast, affordable pathways to resolve family law property disputes."

"We need decisive action on sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a form of gendered violence that is perpetrated in the workplace and is pervasive across all industries and all employment levels in Australia. A newly elected Federal Government must implement all remaining recommendations of the Respect@Work report in full and without delay."

“We need to recognise and resource the crucial role of specialist women’s legal services in achieving best practice across the family violence and justice systems. Access to specialist assistance is crucial to the safety and long-term wellbeing of victim-survivors, and the accountability of perpetrators.”

“The solutions are clear and we are just waiting for a federal government willing to put them in place. We are seeking commitments from both the current Federal Government and the Federal Opposition that they will lead decisive action in the next Parliament.”

“Australia has had reviews, inquiries and an extensive public debate around the causes of violence against women. Now is the time to act on what we know will make the community a safe place for women and their children.”

Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA) is a national network of specialist community legal centres working to improve the lives of women and their children through legal representation, support and advocacy. WLSA members also advocate for stronger human rights and economic justice outcomes. See www.wlsa.org.au for more information.