



Women's Domestic Violence
Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc

Media Statement

16 April 2019

for Immediate Release

Media Release – Government Commissioned Evaluation Finds Family Violence Program Effective – So Why are the Regions Missing Out?

A [Federal Government commissioned evaluation](#) into the effectiveness of one of its key family violence initiatives has just been released, but again domestic and family violence sector experts are left scratching their heads as to why [the Morrison Government has ignored its recommendations to expand the program to regional areas](#).

The initiative, called the [Family Advocacy Support Service \(FASS\)](#), was funded under the [Third Action Plan 2016-19](#) of the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#), and aimed to deliver holistic legal and social support services to victims and perpetrators of family violence in the family law system [“across Australia”](#). In practical terms, this means ensuring physical options for safety when accessing the family law system, as well as the provision of specialist legal and domestic violence support services.

Most victims of domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote Australia, however, were not to see a dime of this \$18.5 mil investment in women and children's safety, with funds going to legal aid commissions to deliver services in family court registries in just 23 select locations, mostly in metropolitan areas.

Three years on, and the FASS has been found by independent evaluator, [Inside Policy](#), to be a [“critical”](#) and [“necessary”](#) program [“which fills a gap in both legal and social service provision to family law clients with family violence matters.”](#) In the report, which was prepared for the Attorney General's Department in October 2018, but has only now become publicly available, the Evaluator makes a number of [recommendations](#) for the continuation and expansion of the program, including to regional areas.

Notwithstanding these recommendations, the Federal Government chose not to expand the FASS, [instead committing a mere \\$22.6 million to extend the existing program from 2019-2022](#), with the only enhancement to the service being for [more male workers in existing sites](#).

Domestic and family violence sector experts in the regions are aghast that the Federal Government has left regional, rural and remote women and children out in the cold.

“It's really quite disturbing that we have been kept in the dark about this independent report which was recommending this essential service be extended to families in the regions,” says Hayley Foster, Director of the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW (WDVCAS NSW).

“We know from our experience in effectively delivering the FASS in Sydney, Parramatta, Newcastle and Wollongong that this is a vital program which saves lives,” says Foster *“It is simply unacceptable that*

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women and children who are at risk of domestic and family violence accessing the family law system in places such as Albury, Coffs, Lismore and Dubbo are being left to fend for themselves."

WDVCAS NSW is calling on all political parties in this Federal Election to commit to a safer family law system, where domestic and family violence victims in all family court registries are provided with physical safety and specialist legal and social supports in accordance with the positively evaluated FASS program.

ABOUT:

WDVCAS NSW is the peak body for the women's safety services providing the primary response to women impacted by domestic and family violence across NSW. Member services supported 45,863 women with 40,130 accompanying children across NSW in 2018, providing 193,680 occasions of support. WDVCAS NSW advocates on the systemic issues impacting upon women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence through legislative, policy and practice reform.

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