

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Funding for North Queensland Women's Legal Service – more needs to be done**

North Queensland Women's Legal Service welcomed yesterday's announcement by Queensland Attorney-General, Yvette D'Ath, that \$6.95 million has been allocated to their community legal centre for the 2020-2025 period.

The certainty of five-year funding will ensure that North Queensland Women's Legal Service can continue to provide free legal services to women from its offices in Townsville and Cairns. This includes women who live in all of the rural, regional and remote communities across their service region north from Mackay.

The five-year funding certainty is essential, but the COVID-19 health crisis has meant that an increased number of local women have been contacting the North Queensland Women's Legal Service to help them with legal issues. This includes domestic violence and safety at home, credit and debt, loss of employment, family contact arrangements, access to social security payments and separation issues due to family breakdown.

Anne Lewis, Director, North Queensland Women's Legal Service, said, 'Women are reaching out to our centre in increased numbers due to the COVID-19. The funding will go part-way to meeting the needs of these women but will fall short of addressing the increased need. We call on governments to do more to address this growing problem and prevent the consequences that will come from it, for the community and for families, if the response falls short.'

'We are concerned that we will not be able to provide the increasing level of legal help needed adequately. More needs to be done. We could not know at the time of tendering for this funding that COVID-19 would change things so dramatically – that even more funding and even more staff would be needed.'

'This is a daunting prospect given the rise in domestic violence, the COVID 19 challenges, as well as the continuing population growth in the north and far north of Queensland. This all adds up to more and more women needing access to the free legal services provided by North Queensland Women's Legal Service. We simply cannot match that growing need, without additional resources.'

'I have seen time and again when a woman doesn't receive the legal help needed in a prompt, professional and holistic manner, associated social and legal issues often worsen. This includes complications with family law matters such as property settlement and arrangements for children, the involvement of child protection agencies, kids in trouble with the police, increase in consumer and social security debt, increased risk of homelessness and housing instability, workplace issues and job loss.'

**Ends**

**NOTES:** North Queensland Women's Legal Service is a specialist not-for-profit community legal centre providing free legal services for women affected by domestic violence and family breakdown. Services are provided across the top half of Queensland – from Mackay to Cape York and west to the Northern Territory border - with staff based in Townsville and Cairns. [www.nqwls.com.au](http://www.nqwls.com.au)

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