

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 6 September 2017

Major child protection services review highlights need to better support Aboriginal women and children



Aboriginal Family
Violence Prevention
& Legal Service Victoria
**Standing Firm Against
Family Violence**

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) has today released a review of its Child Protection Program which highlights the crucial role Aboriginal Community Controlled legal assistance services, like Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria ('FVPLS Victoria'), play in supporting Aboriginal women experiencing family violence to access justice and maintain the safe and ongoing care of their children.

"The very real risk of having children removed is one of the major barriers to Aboriginal women reporting family violence and seeking the help and support that is needed," said Antoinette Braybrook, CEO of FVPLS Victoria. "Aboriginal women experiencing family violence need to be able to access culturally safe, specialist and holistic services to keep their children safe."

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are grossly over-represented in the child protection system. The VLA report identifies that around one-third of child protection cases that go to court involve concerns that do not require the child to be immediately removed from the home.

"This report recognises that the current legal service response has failed to meet the needs of Aboriginal women and their children," said Ms Braybrook. "Most importantly, the report identifies that a client-focussed service model must prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families."

VLA has also committed to provide additional resources to the Aboriginal legal assistance services, including FVPLS Victoria, to enable them to deal with more child protection matters. The report also identifies that Aboriginal children, young people and parents should be given the choice of being represented by an Aboriginal legal service.

"A lack of resources severely limits the number of vulnerable women and their children that we can assist," said Ms Braybrook. "I commend Victoria Legal Aid for putting its money where its mouth is, and backing up the content of this important report with a much-needed funding injection to Aboriginal legal services."

"This new approach recognises that family violence is the single biggest driver of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Aboriginal children are being removed at higher rates than at any time since white settlement," said Ms Braybrook.

"If we are to turn this around, we must support Aboriginal victims/survivors of family violence to access preventative legal advice and support to understand their legal rights and put a plan in place to keep their children safe in every sense of the word. That means physically, emotionally, culturally and spiritually safe," said Ms Braybrook.

"Far too often we hear from the women we work with that they didn't understand child protection was a legal issue or that they needed to talk to a lawyer until it was too late."

"This funding will provide much needed support for our women and ultimately our children, families and communities," said Ms Braybrook. "Importantly, this new approach recognises Aboriginal

peoples' right to access culturally safe, specialist and holistic legal assistance from Aboriginal community controlled organisations.”

FVPLS Victoria operates the only Aboriginal community controlled legal assistance service in Victoria which exclusively specialises in assisting victim/survivors of family violence and sexual assault. Child protection is one of our core areas of focus.

FVPLS Victoria provides holistic, culturally safe frontline legal and non-legal supports, as well as early intervention and prevention programs to Aboriginal victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault across Victoria.

A copy of Victoria Legal Aid's report is [available here](#).

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