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Community Legal Sector and NSW Women’s Alliance calls for halt to Victims Support changes

‘Any reform should strengthen a system, not diminish support for those who need it most’ says Arlia Fleming, Chair Community Legal Centres NSW and NSW Women’s Alliance Member.

The current way to access victims support is for a victim-survivor to lodge an application form within a time limit and Victims Services collect the evidence to support their claim. The changes will shift this burden to the victim-survivor. The victim-survivor will have to locate all the evidence needed for their claim and can only lodge a claim when they have all the evidence. This will mean many victims-survivors will miss out on the support they need and are entitled to because they will likely not be able to collect all necessary evidence on their own within the time limits.

Victims-survivors seeking counselling will also be expected to locate their own approved counsellor.

“We are particularly concerned about the impacts on victims-survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and child sexual abuse,” says Renata Field, media spokesperson for Domestic Violence NSW.

“Victims Services already struggles to deal with clients who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. We are concerned that many victim-survivors will miss out on compensation because collecting their own evidence is simply too burdensome. “

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, applicants from rural and remote areas, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse people, people on temporary visas and people without the financial resources to pay for medical evidence will be severely disadvantaged.

“We do not understand the rationale for these changes, why they are taking place without consultation and what the urgency is - these changes are commencing with less than one week’s notice. The timing of this announcement is also concerning given the additional barriers for some applicants in accessing Victims Service due to COVID-19,” says Pip Davis from Women’s Legal Service NSW.

The NSW Women’s Alliance call for the changes to be delayed and for the Commissioner Victim’s Rights to undertake proper consultation with victims-survivors and their advocates, including through mechanisms such as the Victims Advisory Board and the Victims of Crime Interagency and for alternative proposals to be explored.

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Renata Field – Media spokesperson, Domestic Violence NSW – 0457 167 339

The NSW Women's Alliance brings together a range of agencies with a variety of expertise, knowledge and experience in both responding to and working to prevent violence against women, including DVNSW.

Community Legal Centres NSW is the peak representative body for almost 40 community legal centres in NSW. Community legal centres are independent non-government organisations that provide free legal services to people and communities at times when that help is needed most, and particularly to people facing economic hardship and discrimination.

Domestic Violence NSW is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. DVNSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist services and the women, families and communities they support. Their mission is to eliminate domestic and family violence through leadership in policy, advocacy, partnerships and the promotion of best practice.