

**Embargo: June 30, 2023**

### **Regions to benefit from new family law support service**

Families impacted by domestic violence and involved in family law proceedings in the regions will have improved access to support services as part of a major project expansion.

The Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) has expanded into 14 additional family law court circuit and registry locations across NSW following an \$85 million nationwide funding boost from the Commonwealth Government.

The FASS is an integrated service that provides legal and non-legal wraparound supports to those impacted by family violence including duty lawyer services, as well as help with accommodation, safety planning, mental health, finance and drug and alcohol abuse.

Clients can access free legal help and help with their non-legal problems from dedicated social support workers for men and women. Legal Aid NSW has partnered with local Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCASs) and Relationships Australia to provide this on the ground social support.

FASS will also include a dedicated mental health support worker for the first time since launching in 2017.

The service has been successfully operating in the Sydney, Parramatta, Wollongong and Newcastle Family Court Registries since 2017, with services expanding state-wide in 2023.

Associate Director, Domestic Violence Unit, Legal Aid NSW, Anna Baltins said wraparound services focused on early intervention for both victims and perpetrators were essential to improve overall outcomes for families.

"This service fills a critical gap in frontline service provision to people experiencing family violence and with family law issues. The service takes a holistic, wrap around approach and looks at both the legal and non-legal needs of clients to achieve long lasting positive outcomes for families," she said.

"By providing clients with a one-stop shop for support, we aim to contribute to the prevention of the cycle of violence by offering support to engage in perpetrator programs while also ensuring victims have adequate social and psychological support and are able to plan for their safety."

Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia Mr David Pringle acknowledged the profound benefit that the expansion of the service will have for the many families that engage with the Courts, particularly in remote and regional locations.

“The service provided by FASS is integral in facilitating the safe resolution of family law disputes involving families and children that are, or have been, impacted by family violence. The Courts particularly welcome the expansion of the targeted support provided by FASS to several of the Courts’ regional registries and circuit locations, where historically, limited access to support services has presented a challenge for families in need,” he said.

The expansion of the FASS has been recommended by several inquiries as filling a critical gap in frontline service provision, most recently in the 2021 second interim report of the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into the Family Law System.

The service arose out of the Third Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, the Federal Government committed \$18.5 million over three years (2016-2019).

You can contact a social support worker for women by calling 1800 11 FASS (1800 11 3277).

You can contact a social support worker for men by calling 1300 00 FASS (1300 00 3277).

You can contact a duty lawyer by calling 1800 551 589.

Clients can also be referred to the Family Violence Law Help website [www.familyviolencelaw.gov.au](http://www.familyviolencelaw.gov.au) for FASS information and contact details across Australia.

The service has expanded into locations at Albury, Armidale, Broken Hill, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Lismore, Orange, Port Macquarie, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Wauchope, Gunnedah, Forster and Gosford.

**Media contact | Georgia Clark | 0438 606 092 or [media@legalaid.nsw.gov.au](mailto:media@legalaid.nsw.gov.au)**