Australian Government

Michelle Rowland
Attorney General

Ged Kearney
Assistant Minister for Social Services
Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence

NSW GOVERNMENT

Michael Daley
Attorney General

Jodie Harrison
Minister for Women
Minister for Seniors
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

NEW FREE LEGAL SERVICE TO SUPPORT VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Albanese and Minns Labor Governments are working to better support victim-survivors of sexual violence, with the launch of a new Sexual Assault Survivors' Legal Service (SASLS).

The $1.74 million initiative will expand Legal Aid NSW's capacity to provide free legal advice and assist victim-survivors of sexual violence navigate the justice system.

SASLS will provide support across a range of legal matters, including reporting to police, the criminal justice process, subpoenas and other issues related to sexual assault.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, about 1 in 9 women in Australia have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.

The SASLS also includes the Sexual Assault Communications Privilege Service, which helps health organisations and professionals understand how to respond to subpoenas for counselling or medical records that may be protected under NSW law.

It is part of the $6.2 million Strengthening Sexual Violence Justice Responses package.

Funded through the Federation Funding Agreement, this investment from the Commonwealth is part of ongoing work to strengthen support for victim-survivors of sexual violence, spanning crisis response, early intervention, recovery, healing and primary prevention.

The package includes $4.36 million for the Sexual Violence Justice System Navigator Pilot Program which will run in 11 locations across New South Wales.

An additional $180,000 in funding will also support research into restorative justice models.

Authorised by the Hon Jodie Harrison, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

This is part of wider work to enhance supports for victim-survivors of sexual violence, which includes a $3.35 million investment for the Sexual Violence Recovery and Healing Grant Program to boost long-term recovery and healing supports.

The Sexual Assault Survivors' Legal Service can be contacted on 9219 5888 or sasls@legalaid.nsw.gov.au.

Federal Attorney-General, Michelle Rowland MP said:

"The Albanese and Minns Labor Governments are committed to stamping out the scourge of sexual violence.

"Victim-survivors of sexual violence deserve access to tailored and appropriate legal assistance as they navigate the justice system, and that's exactly what we're delivering.

"The Sexual Assault Survivors' Legal Service will be another vital support available to victim-survivors, and builds on the Commonwealth's commitment to end family, domestic and sexual violence, including through the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032."

Federal Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence Ged Kearney said:

"I have heard from many victim-survivors of sexual violence that their experience seeking legal advice after an assault can be traumatic during what's already a very traumatic period. It can feel complex, isolating and out of reach, and this needs to change.

"Victim-survivors of sexual violence deserve a justice system that is accessible, trauma-informed and responsive to their needs. It's critical that legal support is available when and where it is needed most.

"With less than 10% of victim survivors of sexual violence making a report to police, SASLS will remove barriers to reporting through access to cost free, tailored and specialist legal support. This will make a meaningful difference to the lives of victim-survivors in New South Wales."

NSW Attorney General Michael Daley said:

"This specialist legal service will allow victim-survivors of sexual assault to access the support and advice they need, when they need it.

"We know the legal system can be challenging to navigate and this will help support complainants every step of the way.

"The Sexual Assault Survivors' Legal Service is designed to make it easier and less daunting for victim-survivors to seek justice."

NSW Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Jodie Harrison said:

"For many victim-survivors, navigating the legal system can be overwhelming.

"Accessing the right support at the right time is an important part of ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect throughout the justice process.

"The new Sexual Assault Survivors' Legal Service will play a vital role in providing free legal advice to help them understand their rights, and better navigate the system.

"This is part of the Albanese and Minns Labor Governments' continuing efforts to address sexual violence in our community, including providing reporting options, boosting crisis support and access to justice, healing and recovery, and primary prevention."

Chief Executive Officer Legal Aid NSW Monique Hitter said:

"No one should have to navigate the justice system alone after experiencing sexual assault. The launch of this new service will help ensure survivors have access to free, specialist legal advice when they need it most."

“Sexual assault can have a significant lasting impact on a person’s life and having access to this service will ensure victims feel better informed and empowered in their journey through the justice system.

Legal Aid NSW is proud to be providing this support as part of its mission to promote access to justice in NSW.”

Support:

For information on Men’s Behaviour Change Programs operating in your local area, contact the Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491.

If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, call the Police on Triple Zero / 000.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic and family violence, call the NSW Domestic Violence Line on 1800 65 64 63 for free counselling and referrals, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence, call the Sexual Violence Helpline on 1800 424 017 for free counselling and referrals, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For confidential advice, support, and referrals, contact 1800 RESPECT or 13 YARN.

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