

Help for the vulnerable at risk over funds lack

Legal service appeals to MPs for urgent cash

Satria Dyer-Darmawan

A local legal service helping victims of family violence could have to cut back staff and services if it does not receive additional funding.

The Barwon Community Legal Service has sent letters to federal MPs requesting "urgent" funding.

The local campaign follows a national push by Community Legal Centres to address an issue of indexation not keeping pace with real wage growth.

According to BCLS, CLCs have only had their federal government funding increase by 1.5 per cent year-on-year, but wages have increased by up to 5.75 per cent each year, creating a significant, cumulative shortfall.

BCLS chief executive Bryanna Connell said it had diversified the way it could fund certain programs, however, this money would not last forever.

"Whilst wage growth is essential for our staff who work incredibly hard in very challenging roles, it is paramount to acknowledge that the continuation of some of our services is now at risk due to this funding shortfall," Ms Connell said. "If we don't get extra funding, then we're turning people away."

"The government has a duty to enable vulnerable people in society to have access to legal representation, but we won't be able to deliver our current level of help without fair funding."

"We've got lawyers who really want to do this work, but they're not able to help the people who need it most."

Ms Connell also said a number of frontline staff were experiencing vicarious trauma and burnout.

"People are stressed," she said. "We have a family law team who act purely for clients who have experienced family violence and (those cases) can go on for a long time and can be difficult."



Barwon Community Legal Services chief executive Bryanna Connell at their offices in Belmont. Picture: Brad Fleet

A letter from BCLS to local federal MPs Libby Coker and Richard Marles asks them to write to the attorney-general, treasurer and finance minister to receive an urgent injection of at least \$50m funding for CLCs.

They are also seeking an additional injection of at least

\$75m to enable CLCs to start to address high, increasing levels of unmet legal need and a clear commitment to ongoing National Legal Assistance Partnership funding for all legal assistance providers beyond June 2025.

Federal MP for Corangamite Libby Coker said she

would continue to advocate for BCLS.

"They offer much-needed support for individuals and families navigating often complex legal matters and ensure equal access to justice, particularly for our most vulnerable community members," Ms Coker said.

A spokesman for Mr Marles said community legal centres provided legal assistance to some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

The federal government provides funding for community legal centres through the NLAP with the states and territories.

Mum dodges bullets in home

Genevieve Holding

A mother hid in a pantry after a bullet hit her kitchen as about 20 gunshots were unleashed in a targeted attack on a man in Melbourne's northwest.

The terrifying incident happened after two men dressed in black exited a blue Audi S3 and tried to shoot another man as he walked his dog on parkland on Monticiano Rd in Fraser Rise about 7pm on Wednesday.

The woman, a resident of nearby Hawking Crescent, had just said goodbye to two of her adult daughters and begun cooking dinner when the gunfire began.

"I thought at first it was fireworks, they were so loud and sharp," the woman, who did not wish to be named, said.

"But then I realised there was far too many pops for it to be fireworks."

The mother said someone banging on her front door also made her realise something far more sinister than fireworks was at play.

"There was someone pounding with all their might in the front door and I knew someone was shooting," she said.

"I ducked below my kitchen cabinets because I thought the bullets would come through the windows and they would shatter any second."

The woman crawled along her living room floor to her dining table, grabbed her phone and called for help before retreating inside her pantry for shelter.

"I called my daughters to come back and get me and told them someone was shooting at the house because that's what I believed was happening," she said. "I didn't leave the pantry for ages after the gunshots because I was so scared. I was in tears and probably sat in there for five to seven minutes."

After the shooting stopped, the woman emerged from her pantry to find a bullet hole in her ceiling and a bullet that had landed only a metre away from where she had been hiding.

The shooters fled the scene. The Audi was found on fire a short time later in Viridian Drive in the nearby suburb of Hillside.

Police believe another burnt-out car, a red Holden Commodore, found on Parsley St in Caroline Springs, is also likely involved in the attack.

New plastic recycling

UNSW researchers have developed a new low-energy technique to recycle plastic.

The process can transform many forms of waste plastic into their respective polymer nanoparticles dispersed in water. They can then either be extracted for reuse in new consumer products or used still in the aqueous dispersion in applications such as asphalt and waterproof coatings.

The innovative technique also removes dyes from the original plastic waste, which currently requires separate treatment, thus reducing the time and cost of recycling and expanding the waste source.

The new method can be used on a wide range of common materials, such as bags, bottles made from polyethylene, polypropylene, polystyrene and PE.

Today host in cheeky Socceroos sledge

Jessica Wang

Ahead of the Socceroos' all-important World Cup qualifier against Lebanon on Thursday night, Today's Sarah Abo unleashed a cheeky sledge on Australia's national men's football team.

Interviewing Matildas vice-captain Emily van Egmond on Thursday morning, Abo brought up the men's team.

"The Socceroos are obvious-

ly playing tonight, but people are sort of asking, the Soccerwhos?" joked Abo, eliciting a subtle laugh from van Egmond.

"Look, all the best Socceroos. I mean, they've got a big game against Lebanon as well. So, you know, we're here to support them as much as we can. And yeah, they're doing a terrific job," van Egmond responded.

"I'm joking of course. We love the Socceroos almost as

much as we love the Matildas," Abo said.

However, Today co-host Karl Stefanovic interjected, adding: "I don't think that's true at all."

The Matildas' pool B draw for the Olympics has been announced with Australia alongside the US, Germany, and either Zambia or Morocco, pending results of the African qualifier in April.

Van Egmond said she was

excited but cautious about the Paris Games in July. "The Olympics is a super competitive tournament," she said.

"You saw how hard it was for all the European teams to qualify, with England and Sweden missing out in particular"

"We're obviously used to these kinds of things. We did well in Tokyo, and now in Paris we have a new challenge and one that we'll be excited for," she said.