

## AM with Chris Uhlmann

Monday to Saturday from 8:00 am on ABC Local Radio and 7:10 am on Radio National.

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# Community legal centres condemn budget cuts

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Samantha Donovan reported this story on Saturday, May 17, 2014 08:07:00

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ELIZABETH JACKSON: Community legal centres are warning that many victims of domestic violence will be left with no legal representation if the federal budget cuts go ahead.

They say those in regional areas will be particularly vulnerable.

Samantha Donovan reports.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: Community legal centres say \$6 million has been cut from their budget for 2017/18.

Liana Buchanan is the chairwoman of Community Law Australia.

She says one in five Australians is already being denied help.

LIANA BUCHANAN: There are around 60 community legal centres across the country that have been told this week that they will face a funding cut next year. The people who will be impacted are certainly a whole range of people who have serious legal issues, and often a number of other issues and face a whole raft of disadvantage.

So we're talking about the kind of people who have employment issues, who need some help and protection from family violence, people who have serious debt and credit issues who might be facing eviction, who have relationship breakdowns. They're they kind of people who community legal centres help every day.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: Liana Buchanan says that around Australia, concern is growing about the readiness of legal advice available to victims of family violence. She says the federal budget cuts may make the situation worse.

LIANA BUCHANAN: I've spoken to community legal centres today who currently provide support lawyers at different courts to help women seeking protection orders and intervention orders. They'll simply have to stop providing that service, leaving victims of family violence on their own to face the court.

In many cases these are regional areas. There's literally no other option for free legal help, and again we're talking about people who can't afford a private lawyer. And with these cuts to legal services they'll be absolutely shut out of the justice system.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: Liana Buchanan says the work community legal centres do to change the law may also be diminished by the federal budget cuts.

LIANA BUCHANAN: Community legal centres see thousands of people every day. They're very well placed to identify laws and practices that might need to be changed to make better outcomes for community members, and especially disadvantaged community members.

So what we learned this week is that the Commonwealth plans to stop community legal centres doing this work with Commonwealth money. And essentially that means they'll have to stop providing advice to governments, they'll have to stop making the most of their unique access to client experience. And we

think that is a very, very short-sighted and thin-skinned approach.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Liana Buchanan, the chairwoman of Community Law Australia ending Samantha Donovan's report.

And, in a statement to Saturday AM, the Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, says budget savings measures apply across the government.

Senator Brandis also says the funding withdrawn was supplementary only, provided by the former government for two years, and it would have expired at the end of the financial year in any event.

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