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MEDIA RELEASE

Victims worse off under proposed support scheme changes

Victims Services is poised to rush through changes which will make it more difficult for victim-survivors of crime to access entitlements, a NSW domestic violence unit has warned.

The changes, which start on May 11, will negatively impact on the most vulnerable, including child and adult sexual abuse survivors and victims of family and domestic violence.

Western Women's Legal Support (WWLS) solicitor, Tori Mines, said: "Victim-survivors will be required to gather their evidence, and bear the costs, before lodging their application. Currently, Victims Services does this work and pays all the associated fees. This change is likely to re-traumatise victim-survivors, especially those who are making their claim many years after sexual abuse. The costs and trauma may well deter them from making a claim."

The Dubbo-based WWLS has urged people to contact their local MPs to demand that the Attorney General intervene to ensure fairness for all victim-survivors.

Ms Mines said victim-survivors unable to lodge evidence at the time of their application will have their claim rejected.

"Compounding the trauma are the time limits imposed on making claims under the scheme," she added. "If a victim-survivor is about to run out of time to make a claim, and they have not gathered their evidence, they cannot just lodge an application to protect their rights. It will not be accepted and their time may lapse. They can currently do this because Victims Services will collect the evidence."

Ms Mines said it was "extremely concerning" that Victims Services failed to consult victim-survivors or advocacy services before announcing the proposed changes, which were initially due to start on April 27.

"We have asked Victims Services why these changes are being rushed through, with only a week's notice, but failed to receive a clear answer. We want the proposed changes delayed until a full and proper consultation process is undertaken to determine what, if any, changes should be made in accessing the scheme to ensure it assists healing, not hinders it."

WWLS is a specialist domestic violence unit which provides free face-to-face legal and support services to communities in the NSW west.

Media contact: Tori Mines, Solicitor, Western Women's Legal Support (02) 6885 4531