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# Community Law Australia



## MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 26 November 2013

### **Innovative community legal service in women's hospital helps to stop family violence**

Community Law Australia today commended the work being done to address family violence by North Melbourne Legal Service and the Royal Women's Hospital (the Women's) through their innovative legal assistance outreach project *Acting on the Warning Signs*.

The project, funded by the Legal Services Board major grants program as well as in-kind support from Herbert Smith Freehills, aims to build the capacity and willingness of health professionals to identify family violence and provide basic information to patients who require it.

Since December 2012, training has been provided to over 125 staff including 27 doctors to empower them to identify signs of family violence and offer referral and assistance.

Between 1 August 2012 and 1 November 2013 legal advice was given to 73 patients on site at the Women's by lawyers from North Melbourne Legal Service.

Dr Fleur Llewelyn, Manager of Clinical Education at the Royal Women's Hospital said she was proud of the achievements made by the pilot program thus far.

"By having a lawyer available on-site, women are able to access information about their rights and entitlements within the safety of the hospital," she said.

"Women who are in situations where they may be experiencing chronic abuse and violence are able to attend the hospital for an antenatal appointment and see a lawyer who can provide them with advice about their rights and entitlements, including information about intervention orders and family law.

"This is a powerful opportunity to empower women to take steps to escape a violent situation."

Community Law Australia spokesperson Carolyn Bond said the success of the program indicated that there may be scope for similar partnerships between community legal centres and health providers.

"Legal problems often occur in conjunction with social, economic or health problems, so it makes sense for legal and non-legal services to work together – particularly in helping deal with complex issues like family violence.

"This is just one example of CLCs working well with other service providers to help solve connected legal, social, health and financial problems. This work is taking quality legal

assistance one step further by delivering our legal services in partnerships and in locations which work best for the people who need our help.

“A recent survey of Victorian CLCs found that the vast majority of CLCs delivered legal services alongside other community services. Whether it is at a rural community health service, in conjunction with financial counselling services or at drug and alcohol clinic, this innovative CLC work is about early intervention and prevention and helping people holistically. Access to justice research strongly suggests this is the way to go,” Ms Bond said.

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