



## Media Release

25 February 2019

### Commitment on Financial Counselling welcomed

The Financial Counsellors' Association of WA (FCAWA) and The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) welcome the announcement by the Federal Opposition Leader to impose a levy on banks of \$640m over four years, with half of this used to double the number of financial counsellors.

The Financial Services Royal Commission report identified the critical role of financial counsellors and community legal centres in providing assistance to people in hardship across Australia.

"Financial Counsellors provide free, independent advice to people experiencing financial hardship but have struggled with demand against a fragmented and poorly funded service delivery model," says Ms Jowle, Executive Officer, FCAWA .

"Funding through a levy on all banks will go a long way to assist with the current demand for services. In WA in particular, financial counsellors in the National Debt Helpline are receiving 21 per cent of the national calls, despite representing only 10 per cent of the population, and agencies providing face to face services no longer operate waiting lists due to very high demand."

"A doubling of financial counsellors will require investment in training and professional development to build capacity in the financial counselling workforce, which we hope is taken into account by this funding, as we simply do not have enough trained financial counsellors to pick up this increase," Ms Jowle said.

Last year financial counsellors assisted thousands of West Australians struggling under crippling and increasingly complex debt, against a backdrop of increasing energy prices and stagnant wage growth.

FCAWA is calling for the Government to provide a similar commitment to the sector, to provide services to the people struggling in this economy.

"We welcome Labor's commitments to fund the financial counselling sector appropriately for those experiencing hardship," said Louise Giolitto, Chief Executive Officer, WACOSS.

"However in addition, we would like to see an election commitment to Raise the Rate of Newstart, Youth Allowance, and single parenting payments, all of which are woefully inadequate and fall short of covering basic living costs.

"Financial Counsellors are absolutely fundamental, but if payments aren't adequate, there is no way those living on the lowest incomes will ever afford to make ends meet," Louise concluded.

Ends.

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