



Mark Speakman
Attorney General

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW LAWS IMPROVE VICTIMS SUPPORT

New laws introduced today will make it faster and easier for victims of crime and their families to access financial assistance and counselling, particularly those impacted by domestic violence and homicide.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said a statutory review recommended 17 amendments to the Victims Rights and Support Act 2013 and Regulation, including more counselling for victims in rural NSW and improving recognition for families of homicide victims.

“These changes will provide greater clarity and ensure more victims and families get the support they need to recover from the trauma of being victims of violent crimes,” he said.

Amendments include:

- Making it easier for some victims to claim financial assistance, particularly victims of domestic violence who may face barriers reporting crimes to police;
- Facilitating faster and better access to counselling, particularly in rural and regional areas;
- Providing greater support for family members of homicide victims by increasing the maximum amount payable for funeral expenses from \$8,000 to \$9,500; and
- Ensuring immediate family members of homicide victims are given recognition under the Act, by ensuring spouses, partners and children (under the age of 18) of homicide victims are eligible for recognition payments even when they weren't financially dependent on the deceased at the time of death.

The Victims Support Scheme provides free counselling, financial assistance for things such as medical bills, relocation costs, loss of earnings and funeral expenses, as well as recognition payments to support victims getting back on their feet. Survivors of child sex abuse in NSW institutions are eligible for unlimited counselling.

Although crime rates are falling, the demand for victims support has increased with a record 118,927 calls to Victims Services and 19,573 applications for counselling and financial assistance in 2016-17, an increase of 16 per cent since 2015-16.

Despite the huge demand, it took an average of 49 days for victims of crime and their families to receive financial assistance in the financial year 2016-17 compared with 31 months to access support under the previous scheme.

In June 2017, Mr Speakman asked the Sentencing Council to review victims' involvement in sentencing. The NSW Government will respond to this Report in the coming months.

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