

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 4 APRIL 2020
STATEMENT FROM WESNET ABOUT FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT

WESNET welcomes yesterday's announcement from the Minister for Family and Social Services, Senator The Hon. Anne Ruston MP confirming \$560,000 in funding for WESNET to continue the Safe Phones program. We are pleased to see that the Government has recognised that the Safe Phones program is crucial to assisting survivors in Australia's pandemic response, " said Karen Bentley, National Director of WESNET.

"We are also very grateful to Telstra who committed to another three years of donating phones for the program back in January, and the many individuals, front-line services and corporations who have been speaking up in support of the program." This widespread community support for the Safe Phones program confirms the findings from an independent evaluation by Curtin University, that it keeps women and children safer and is a vital service preventing further harm.

The extension of Government funding until March 2021 will now mean WESNET can keep providing the phones for several more months to victim-survivors who desperately need to stay connected, which will be especially important during the pandemic. "It's a relief to be able to keep the program going," said Julie Oberin, National Chair of WESNET, "but we will need to find ongoing funding for the program beyond this period, as the program is also crucial in non-pandemic times as well." WESNET agrees with what former Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja has been saying for a long time, domestic and family violence is a national emergency in Australia at the moment'.

The funding announcement is a much-needed reprieve as the current funding was due to cease in just over 12 weeks time.

Ms Bentley reported that the WESNET team have been receiving around twice the usual number of requests from our network of 275 front-line agencies across Australia for more phones for women as they make the move to online service provision.

Even though the funding is only part of what was needed, WESNET will make some cuts in order to make the funding stretch as long as we possibly can. The program already runs on a tiny amount of funding for the huge impact that it achieves. The program has provided over 21,400 phones to women since it began in 2015, and is currently averaging around 600 devices to women a month. The phones are only safe because they are provided by a WESNET-trained frontline worker who works with women to ensure that their new phone is set up safely and doesn't inadvertently tip off the abuser about where she is or that she's got a new phone with which she might seek help.

Media contacts

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Using our contact form [here](#).