

20 November 2018

HESTA welcomes Government announcement providing early access to super for family violence victims and survivors

HESTA CEO Debby Blakey welcomed the Government's announcement today that victims and survivors of family violence will be able to receive early access to their superannuation.

"HESTA has strongly advocated to extend compassionate access to super for victims and survivors of family violence and we welcome this step as it will provide a vital financial lifeline to those seeking safety from violence and abuse," Ms Blakey said.

"On average at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner. Given the prevalence of family violence in Australia, it's entirely appropriate early access to super has been extended to victims and survivors."

Ms Blakey said it is encouraging the Government had also heeded ongoing advice from specialist legal and family violence service providers to improve the visibility of super assets in property settlements.

"Women often escape a violent situation with limited assets and serious debt, as financial abuse is almost always present where there is family violence."

"Superannuation is often the only remaining shared asset in a relationship breakdown and it can be very difficult for people to locate their partner's funds, especially without legal assistance, which can be costly."

"These changes will help women more fairly split super assets, as well as support themselves as they seek a fair property split."

Ms Blakey said, while the Government's proposal to streamline the property settlement process would give women faster access to much needed income, it was just the start of the conversation.

"Women already experience much lower superannuation balances than men, and greater vulnerability to poverty as they age, and they should not be further financially penalised in situations of family violence."

"It's vitally important that any discussion of early access to super for victims and survivors of family violence is also coupled with consideration of how they could then access the perpetrator's super as part of victims of crime compensation."

In February 2018, HESTA called for further exploration of victim compensation related to family violence as part of a review of the early release of superannuation being conducted by Treasury.

Ms Blakey said it is important that super accessed early by victims and survivors of family violence is not considered income by Centrelink and that it is not taxed.

HESTA has sought that money released from the system early in the cases of genuine need not carry an extra tax burden as tax has already been paid on super contributions. These payments are currently assessed as income, which can impact someone's ability to access social security.

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Super released as part of terminal illness payments are currently not taxed and this should apply across all early release grounds.

Ms Blakey said the Government needed to consult broadly with the community sector before implementing these proposed changes.

"It's vital that the Government seek the views of expert service providers regarding implementation as this money needs to be provided in the context of family violence victims and survivors receiving appropriate, specialist financial counselling and support," Ms Blakey said.

Ms Blakey said the Government needed to also adequately fund already stretched front-line family violence service providers so they are appropriately resourced to deal with this package of changes.

Ms Blakey also welcomed changes to paid parental leave, to provide greater flexibility and extension of access to the self-employed.

"While these changes will provide more choices to women returning to work, it's still a glaring omission that paid parental leave is the only type of leave that does not attract superannuation contributions."

"This is perpetuating the persistent gender super gap and is a crucial step towards making our super system fairer for women."

Ends.

HESTA

*HESTA is an industry superannuation fund dedicated to those working in the Health and Community Services Sector. HESTA has over **860,000** members and manages more than **\$47 billion** of members' assets.*

Reporting family violence

In keeping with [media guidelines](#) on reporting family violence, the following tagline should be included in any stories:

If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800RESPECT.org.au – in an emergency, call 000.

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