



Townsville residents to miss out on legal help

In the midst of difficult economic times, Townsville residents will soon struggle to find essential legal help, local community lawyers warned today.

Attorney-General George Brandis and Member for Herbert Ewen Jones visited the Townsville Community Legal Service earlier this week to discuss the 'funding cliff' facing local community legal centres.

'The Attorney-General understands the pressures facing community legal centres, and acknowledges that a reduction in funding will have a profound impact on our services from July next year,' said Aaron Finn, Director of Townsville Community Legal Service.

'We're seeing demand for our services increase, particularly with changes in Townsville's economy, and we're incredibly concerned about the impact of a reduction in funding to community legal centres. In our case, we'll lose 21% of the Federal funding that we've relied on over the last few years to advise Townsville residents on family law and employment law issues. Where will these people go for help?' Mr Finn commented.

'North Queensland women are particularly vulnerable,' said Anne Lewis, Director of the North Queensland Women's Legal Service. 'Half of the women we help experience domestic violence, and we're just not able to provide the legal help they need. With inadequate funding, we are only able to answer 1 out of every 8 calls to our 1800 legal advice line at present from women who need help. More must be done.'

'While yesterday's LNP commitment to provide more family violence legal help is welcome, it won't even cover the funding cuts that we know are coming,' said James Farrell, Director of Community Legal Centres Queensland.

Mr Farrell is in Townsville today to discuss the impacts of a 30% federal funding cut to community legal centres. 'Last year, Queensland's community legal centres provided legal help to more than 50,000 people, but turned away another 80,000,' said Mr Farrell. 'We're only able to help two out of five people who are looking for legal help, and this will get worse with a significant funding cut for community legal centres from July next year.'

'On behalf of the vulnerable Queenslanders who need legal help every day, we call on the political parties to address this important issue, reinstate funding for free legal help before the funding cliff has an impact on the Townsville community, and across Australia' said Mr Finn.

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Community Legal Centres Queensland Inc (formerly QAILS) is the state-wide peak body representing community legal centres in Queensland. Queensland community legal centres have 40 years of service delivery experience providing free information, advice and referral, casework and representation to the community. www.communitylegalqld.org.au

MEDIA CONTACT:

Catherine Baker, Communications Manager

Email: Communications@communitylegalqld.org.au

Phone: (07) 3392 0092 / 0432 105 415