

MEDIA RELEASE

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BROAD CALLS FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING FOCUS OF LAW WEEK

As National Law Week draws to a close, the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) has called on the Federal Government to listen to the chorus of voices that have expressed support for legal assistance services and concern about looming funding cuts this week.

'This week we have seen thousands of people come out in support of legal assistance services at events and rallies across Australia' said Daniel Stubbs, NACLC National Spokesperson.

'We have heard individual clients, judges, community organisations and lawyers across Australia talking about the importance of legal assistance services, the impact of cuts, and the downstream costs to individuals, the community and governments of failing to invest in legal assistance'.

'We have seen national and local media including in a number of rural and regional areas covering the impact of funding cuts in communities'.

'Despite all this, Community Legal Centres continue to face a 30% cut nationally from 1 July next year, amounting to a \$34.83 million cut over the forward estimates. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are also facing cuts, and the underfunding of Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Legal Aid Commissions continues'.

'It is disappointing that neither major party has committed to fully reversing the funding cuts facing the sector, investing the funding the Productivity Commission recommended was necessary and urgent, or to adequate and sustainable long-term funding'.

Mr Stubbs welcomed the support of organisations like the Law Council of Australia which has launched a 'Legal Aid Matters' campaign. 'It has been heartening to see so many individuals and organisations come out in support of the sector this week, as well as more broadly. It shows just how important access to free legal help is and the strong view that the Government isn't doing enough to support the sector'.

This Law Week, NACLC reiterates its calls for:

1. Reversal of the Commonwealth funding cuts to CLCs under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance amounting to \$34.83 million from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2020
2. An immediate injection of \$200 million per year to legal assistance services, as recommended by the Productivity Commission, which should be shared between the Commonwealth (60%) and the States and Territories (40%). This should equate to at least an additional \$24 million per year allocated to CLCs (\$14.4 million p.a. Commonwealth and \$9.6 million p.a. from States/Territories)
3. A commitment by all levels of Government to implementing an appropriate process for determining adequate and sustainable longer-term funding contributions for legal assistance in consultation with the sector.

To arrange an interview or for more information please contact:

Daniel Stubbs, National Spokesperson, 0437 253 543

Amanda Alford, Director Policy and Advocacy, 0421 028 645

Jo Scard, Media Adviser, 0457 725 953