

**FUNDING CUTS:** Future services could be in doubt

Community legal centre future funding slashed

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ARM Newsdesk

CUTS to funding mean hundreds of Rockhampton region residents will be in legal limbo from July 1, 2017.

This is because the Federal Government cut community legal centre funding by 30% in the 2014 budget.

Unlike the nation's capital cities, there is just one free legal service for our residents to turn to when they are facing problems relating to domestic violence, divorce and separation, child protection, employment, credit, debt and consumer contract issues, disability discrimination, tenancy and neighbourhood disputes and even minor legal issues including driving offences.

Locals who do not qualify for legal aid and who do not have enough cash to hire private solicitors will often seek help at the Central Queensland Community Legal Centre.

The CQCLC helped 1153 clients last year. It provided 610 pieces of information and 1228 pieces of advice and opened 144 cases.

While it's still unclear how much the centre will lose, it was announced in the 2014 Federal Budget that \$12.1 million would be cut nationwide in 2017-18, \$11.6 million would go in 2018-19 and a further \$11.1 million would be cut in 2019-20.

CQCLC committee vice-president Wayne Jones said hundreds of central Queensland residents facing family abuse and employment worries would



KEY ADVICE: Wayne Jones speaks to student Joshua Morgan about his fears the region's only community legal service will have to cut services for local residents if the federal government's funding cuts go ahead.

PHOTO: ALLAN REINIKKA ROK160516AFAIRGOL

people with English as a second language, people who are not going to have a high level of education, we help them complete forms, we help them with court documentations and we help them to understand legal contracts," the CQU special advisor and employment law expert said.

"That takes more time than just advice over the telephone – that's something that would go because we just wouldn't have the time to provide that service."

Mr Jones urged Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, whose government announced the cuts, and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten to make sure our region gets a fair go.

suffer as the centre prepared to lose its outreach services to Gladstone, Yeppoon and Emerald and its weekly domestic violence support at the Rockhampton Magistrates Court.

Mr Jones said the centre's two full-time solicitor positions would be cut to one full-time and one part-time.

The service also provides important experience for CQUniversity law students who make up a large portion of the centre's voluntary workforce.

"We provide minor assistance for young people,

BY THE NUMBERS

Central Queensland Community Legal Centre last financial year:
Helped 1153 clients.
Provided 610 pieces of information.
Provided 1228 pieces of advice
Opened 144 cases.
Source: Central Queensland Community Legal Centre

"They need to not underestimate the value they get for a modest amount of money," Mr Jones said.

There are 198 community legal centres across Australia.

About 77% of Queensland's community legal centre services were provided to regional, rural and remote areas of the state in 2015.

Their support included 100,000 pieces of legal advice to more than 50,000 clients.

Amanda Alford from the National Association of Community Legal Centres said CLCs were often the only source of legal support for regional and rural residents, so it was vital the funding cuts were reversed.

"The impact of the cuts on centres in regional areas is likely to be greater because often there's no alternative – there is nowhere else for people to go," Ms Alford said.

Confusion over CLC funding

WHILE the Federal Coalition has pledged \$30 million over three years for family violence law services, both the Opposition and lawyers say community legal centres are still out in the cold as they try to work out how to absorb a \$34.83 million cut in funding.

Shadow attorney-general Mark Dreyfus said if Labor won the July 2 election, regional CLCs would be in line for a \$43 million boost.

"Community legal centres will fall off a cliff unless the government reverses its earlier cuts in full," Mr Dreyfus said.

"Many CLCs are struggling to keep their doors open."

In a media release, Attorney-General George Brandis and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash said a portion of the \$30 million would go to CLC domestic violence services.

"The \$30 million funding is part of the \$100 million in new funding over three years announced in the 2016 budget to implement the Third Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children," they said.

However, Daniel Stubbs from the National Association of Community Legal Centres said this did not cancel out the CLC funding cuts.

"It is difficult to understand why the government would provide CLCs with some share of \$10 million per year as part of this funding, but during the same period cut CLCs by 30% nationally," Mr Stubbs said.

"It is tantamount to paying for a new roof on a house but removing the foundations at the same time.

"It's totally inadequate amount for legal assistance services in the face of rising demand and funding cuts."

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