

For immediate release
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Funding crisis means more legal information via Twitter and Skype

Recently published results from the National Association of Community Legal Centres' census showed that community lawyers in Queensland are increasingly using technology to deliver free legal information, as they prepare for a federal funding cut of 30% from July.

The NACLC Census revealed that 43% of Queensland's community legal centres provided legal advice using Skype; 14% used Twitter, 33% used Facebook and 9% are using YouTube.

James Farrell, Director of Community Legal Centres Queensland, commented, 'Our centres are only able to see three out of seven people looking for legal advice. Community legal centres have had to look at creative ways to address this unmet need. Increasingly we are using technology to provide free legal information.'

The census also showed community legal centres' reliance on volunteers, with 1,750 volunteers giving 96,000 hours of their time to help provide services through the 28 community legal centres that participated in the survey. These volunteers included commercial lawyers, migration agents, students, law graduates, and counsellors. 48% of the centres had set up a formal arrangement with a university to offer clinical legal education to students.

'These census results show that centres are facing funding cuts over the next twelve months which will see a reduction in services and outreach, closure of branch offices and telephone advice lines, and loss of staff. As a result of this we have had to rely on volunteers to deliver these vital services,' Mr Farrell said.

Increasingly centres are working to generate independent funding, with 25% relying on philanthropic contributions and 40% of centres bringing in income from fundraising and sponsorship.

'Our census showed that community legal centres are also being forced to spend more and more time on searching for funding to maintain crucial services. The Census revealed that 28 community legal centres spent 247 hours per week in 2014/15 financial year on funding-related activities. This means less time is available to provide legal assistance to clients,' concluded Mr Farrell.

The national survey looked at the work undertaken by Queensland community legal centres over a twelve month period. To view the results: <http://www.nacclc.org.au/resources/NACLC%20Census%20-%20National%20Report%202015%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

Funding crisis means more legal advice via Twitter and Skype page 2

In summary, the Census revealed that in 2014-15:

- The top 3 specialist areas or client groups for community legal centres were domestic/family violence (46.0%), homelessness (41.1%) and family law (40.3%)
- 15.3% of community legal centres' client identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders, and more than a quarter of community legal centre clients say they have a disability. 15% of clients are from a cultural and linguistically diverse background.
- 28 Community Legal Centres in Queensland report turning away 58,000 people.
- Pro bono partners contributed 25,210 hours of assistance to 28 CLCs.

Ends

NOTES:

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

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