

Funding cuts threaten future of Pine Rivers Community Legal Centre

Those people experiencing disadvantage in the Pine Rivers community will have limited access to urgent legal support within the next four months if planned cuts to funding go ahead, warns a local solicitor.

Pine Rivers Community Legal Service has been providing free legal advice and information to the local disadvantaged in the community for more than 30 years.

Community Legal Centres across the country are facing a 30 per cent drop in funding as of July this year.

Pine Rivers Community Legal Service Principal Solicitor Louise Skidmore said the planned funding cuts had already started to impact on the provision of their legal services.

“The situation is untenable because it means that “early” access to legal advice and information for those who cannot afford a Solicitor will be almost impossible” said Ms Skidmore.

“The Pine Rivers Community Legal Service is part of a network of collaborative organisations that work together to support people in the community.

“Finding out about your rights or responsibilities is an essential support for people who face hardship and stress.

“If the service has to close some days of the week and be less available, then a vital link in community support will be missing especially in the area of family and domestic violence where it has been well established that access to legal advice is essential.”

One of the small team of solicitors has already left their employment and the service has been unable to advertise for a position beyond the end of June.

“This impacts on our ability to meet the urgent demand for early legal information and to give advice to those most in need in our community,” said Ms Skidmore.

The National Association of Community Legal Centres is still hoping to convince the Federal Government to wind back the planned funding cuts.

According to Community Legal Centres Queensland Director James Farrell only half the people who contact a community legal centre will have access to the help they need.

“The remaining 50 per cent are turned away because we just don’t have the resources we need to provide help for everyone who qualifies,” he said.

‘In July this year the Commonwealth Government will cut almost 30 per cent of funding to community legal centres across Australia.

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“Our organisation is calling on Malcolm Turnbull and George Brandis to reverse this decision to ensure people in the Pine Rivers area get the legal help they need and the justice they deserve.”

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NOTES:

1. 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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