

Distress for legal services

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COMMUNITY legal centres in Cairns face financial crisis as the Turnbull Government prepares to cut \$2 million in funding across Queensland.

Organisations stand to lose almost a quarter of their budget, with the state's share of federal funding to drop from \$8.9 million in 2015-16 to \$6.9 million next financial year.

Cairns Community Legal Centre director Giselle Negri said the organisation already had a three-week waiting list under the current arrangements.

"If the Federal Government

proceeds with the funding cuts, our centre will have to reduce staff and therefore services to the community," she said.

"We anticipate that we will have to reduce the free legal advice to an estimated 400 people each year and those

needing urgent legal advice will be heavily impacted."

Ms Negri said the centre helped people struggling with debt, family violence and employment issues.

"The most distressing part is that our centre often prevents people's legal problems from escalating," she said.

"The Federal Government will save money but if my clients don't resolve their legal

problems, there will be flow-on effects."

Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath said the North Queensland Women's Legal Service was also in the firing line.

"These people are among the most disadvantaged in our communities and we need to support them as much as possible and think about how much we can help them," she said.

Principal solicitor Hayley Grainger said up to 2000 legal services each year would have to be cut if the purse strings were tightened as planned.