



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Productivity Commission urges more funding for legal assistance, defends advocacy by publicly funded community legal centres**

In its final report on access to justice arrangements released today, the Productivity Commission has recommended significant additional funding to help people with a range of civil legal problems such as family violence, employment, housing and debt, which have a significant impact on the lives of many Australians.

The Commission called for better evidence on legal and unmet legal need in Australia, and for governments to report annually on the extent of any failure to meet agreed coverage and priorities.

‘This report should mark a watershed moment in legal assistance in Australia. The Productivity Commission has recognised the severe social and economic impacts of an inaccessible justice system, and it has acknowledged the system is badly underfunded.

‘The report provides strong arguments against the deep cuts inflicted on community legal sector in the last Federal Budget and indicates the immediate reversal of those cuts and a significant increase in funding are needed,’ said Community Law Australia national spokesperson, Carolyn Bond AO, today.

‘Instead of massive cuts, this report is calling for the injection of \$200 million to legal assistance services including community legal centres, Aboriginal legal services and legal aid. We support that as a starting point to ensure that access to legal help does not depend on your capacity to pay for a private lawyer,’ Ms Bond said.

The report notes that legal assistance funding in Australia is less than a third of per capita levels in the UK.

The Commission also endorsed the use of public funds by community legal centres for advocacy and law reform, with a specific recommendation that they be funded as a core activity.

This strengthens the Commission’s position expressed in its draft report, and runs counter to measures introduced by the Federal Government in July to limit law reform activities by community legal centres using Federal funds.

‘The Commission has rightly acknowledged the value of community legal centres working to resolve individual cases, and learning from those cases to argue for improvements in the law to prevent problems arising in the first place. The report clearly notes that advocacy and law reform by community legal centres can address underlying problems and reduce the demand for frontline services.

'The Federal Government should acknowledge the findings of the Commission and immediately remove restrictions on advocacy and law reform using public funds,' Ms Bond said.

Ms Bond congratulated the Commission on its detailed recommendations to improve access to justice in Australia, and urged the Federal Government to engage the community legal sector in framing its response.

The Productivity Commission's report on access to justice arrangements can be accessed here:

<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/access-justice/report>

**To arrange an interview**

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