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Community Law Australia



MEDIA RELEASE

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Barwon CLS urges candidates to reveal their plans to address legal crisis

Barwon Community Legal Service has written to its local candidates in the seats of Corangamite and Corio to ask them to outline their plans to address the access to justice crisis.

As the local community legal centre, Barwon CLS provides vital legal help to residents across the two electorates and is concerned that access to justice has not yet been addressed in the local area.

Community Law Australia commended the Barwon CLS and said that despite recent increases in funding to individual centres, there was still huge unmet demand for free legal help among Australians who can't afford to pay for a private lawyer.

Community Law Australia spokesperson Carolyn Bond said: "Access to justice is a major issue for people in the local area, which is why each candidate is being contacted to ensure that they make their position known to local residents."

Barwon CLS said that the top legal issues they encountered ranged from tenancy, family violence and Centrelink matters.

While additional funds were provided to the CLC sector this year, Barwon CLS didn't receive any increase.

Nick Hudson, Executive Officer of Barwon CLS, said that Australians should be able to access the legal help they need regardless of their financial situation, social circumstances or where they live.

"With the launch of DisabilityCare in our region we anticipate a significant level of requests for support but have no additional capacity to assist," Mr Hudson said.

Community Law Australia Spokesperson Carolyn Bond said: "Without proper access to justice, people may miss out on legal help when they need it most.

"Unresolved legal problems can often escalate, causing financial, social and health problems. CLCs can help people address these problems before it's too late.

"It saves money overall to provide access to legal help for Australians who can't afford a lawyer. It's also vital in ensuring that everyone is equal under the law.

"Legal problems can crop up at any time – but access to quality legal help shouldn't depend on your bank balance or where you live. This is why we are encouraging local candidates to make their commitment to access to justice known so that local residents can make an informed choice on Election Day," Ms Bond said.

Community legal centres provide free legal help to people who can't afford a private lawyer. They assist with problems such as housing, employment, consumer issues, debt and family violence, and are often a source of early advice and assistance to help prevent problems from escalating.

MEDIA: Spokespeople include: Carolyn Bond on 0412 032 987 and Barwon CLS Executive Officer Nick Hudson on 0411 343 722. For media inquiries, contact Anaya Latter: 0432 121 636