



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 31 July 2014 – for immediate release

Budget cuts to free legal help hit vulnerable and isolated Victorians

Vulnerable people in outer-suburban and regional Victoria are less likely to get the legal help they need as Federal Government cuts to community legal centres roll out nationally.

“As the human impact of these cuts emerges, it’s becoming clear that they’re hitting vulnerable and isolated Victorians, people who are already missing out and who need help the most,” said Carolyn Bond AO, national spokesperson for Community Law Australia, today.

In addition to \$19.6 million cuts to community legal centres nationally, announced last December, there was an additional \$6 million cut in the recent Federal Budget. Ms Bond said that despite the Federal Government’s claims that the cuts would not hit frontline services, this was exactly what was happening.

“Victorian community legal centres will either need to reduce the number of lawyers available to help people, turn away more people seeking help, limit the range of problems they can address, or restrict the regional areas they can cover,” Ms Bond said.

Two of the fourteen affected organisations are in regional Victoria, seven in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, and three are statewide specialist legal services.

Services likely to be affected by the cuts include:

- Family violence lawyers helping people with intervention orders;
- Specialist legal advice for regional and remote young people;
- Legal help across high-need, complex, and culturally diverse regional areas.

Lisa Maree Stevens of the Murray Mallee Community Legal Centre, said funding cuts would likely mean that 80–100 vulnerable clients, including Aboriginal women, would miss out on legal help each year if the centre had to cut back on its intervention order assistance and outreach.

“We cover a large geographic area, and our lawyers visit a number of disadvantaged communities, as well as a number of regional courts. When we have to cut back these services next year, there are no other services to pick up this vital work,” Ms Stevens said today.

Ariel Couchman from Youthlaw said their Skype program had been very successful, delivering legal help to young people who couldn’t physically get to services in the big towns and cities.

“The disadvantaged young people we help are facing very tough times in regional and remote Victoria. They are often reluctant to seek help even with homelessness and other serious social problems. Even fewer will do so if our Skype legal advice service is reduced as a result of these cuts,” Ms Couchman said.

Peter Noble from the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre said the centre was likely to lose one of its three lawyers, who provide legal help across northern central Victoria stretching from Seymour to the Murray River, including the City of Greater Shepparton, one of Australia's most complex, needy and culturally rich communities.

“We work with other local services to help people address underlying problems, prevent further legal issues arising, and relieve pressure on the courts and legal system. The disadvantaged people we help are usually not equipped to deal with their legal problems on their own, but funding cuts will mean that some of these people will miss out,” Mr Noble said.

Michael Smith from the Eastern Community Legal Centre said funding cuts placed their new services in the Yarra Ranges, and their family violence work, at serious risk. He said both these services had been provided in response to areas of high legal need.

“Without funding, our services must be reduced and people in need will miss out,” Mr Smith said.

“Even before these damaging cuts, community legal centres were already grossly underfunded and struggled to meet increasing demand for help with serious legal problems from people unable to afford a private lawyer. These cuts will only make that situation worse,” Ms Bond said.

“We know that community legal centres are already very efficient in the help they provide, and that nationally at least 500,000 Australians miss out on legal help every year. The answer is funding community legal centres properly to meet increasing need, not cutting their funding,” Ms Bond said.

Further information

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[Brandis restrictions starting tomorrow seek to silence community legal centres speaking out](#)

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To arrange an interview

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