



MEDIA RELEASE

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Released review shows legal services need funding boost, not Federal Budget cuts or further “efficiencies”

A recently released review by independent consultants has identified the need for a funding boost to meet the legal needs of disadvantaged Australians. The review strengthens the case for the current Productivity Commission [Inquiry into Access to Justice Arrangements](#) to recommend a funding increase when it publishes its final report in September.

The [Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services](#) by the Allen Consulting Group (NPA Review), commissioned by the Federal Government, also undermines the basis of significant cuts imposed on community legal centres and other free legal assistance services through MYEFO and the May Federal Budget.

“The evidence is clear that a substantial funding boost is what community legal centres need, not the cuts we have seen or further efficiencies to redirect inadequate funding in the current system. Cuts and the search for ‘efficiencies’ are putting legal help for ordinary people further out of reach when they have no other options and can’t afford a private lawyer,” said Community Law Australia national spokesperson, Carolyn Bond, today.

The NPA Review noted specific service shortages for people with a mental illness, people with a disability and people experiencing homelessness; and service gaps for legal problems such as employment, equal opportunity and discrimination law, migration and refugee law and guardianship law.

“Community legal centres are struggling to meet demand, so it is no surprise to us that resources are inadequate,” Ms Bond said.

“We see first-hand how, if these problems aren’t addressed, they can escalate and lead to further problems such as poor health and homelessness. This means there is a high social and financial cost if legal problems aren’t addressed early.

“The report findings support our calls for increased resources for community legal centres – and the legal assistance sector as a whole. While the Government recently announced some small one-off grants, these are far outweighed by the cuts announced for 2015 and beyond. The Budget papers showed the Government plans to cut over 25 per cent of annual federal CLC funding by 2017–18,” Ms Bond said.

She said there would need to be broad consultation with, and participation, by all legal assistance providers (including community legal centres) about some of the system reforms proposed by the report, including clearer specification of service eligibility and streamlining of services.

However, she welcomed the report's note of caution on the question of contracting out services and adopting systems from overseas, which the report said could be more expensive, and provide less "holistic" services than in Australia. The report found that Australia's per capita spend on legal assistance was much lower than in countries such as the UK, where contracting out of services occurs.

"The NPA Review offers important insights into the funding of legal assistance services, and we are pleased that it has been made available to inform the public debate around these vital issues, including the current Productivity Commission inquiry," Ms Bond concluded.

Australia's 200 community legal centres give free legal help on issues such as employment, family violence, tenancy, discrimination, and debts.

Background

[Economic cost benefit analysis of community legal centres](#)

To arrange an interview

Darren Lewin-Hill on 0488 773 535