



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CLCs Australia welcomes Federal Budget allocations for community legal centres

Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCs Australia) warmly welcomes the announcements made in the 2021-22 Federal Budget which include funding for community legal centres. In particular the announcement of \$129 million for women's legal services gives hope that more women and children will get the help they need over the next four years. Broader provisions to address gender inequality including discrimination and violence against women, mental health, and aged-care are also significant.

Community legal centres provide services that are essential to healthy communities and keeping people safe. "These Budget provisions will enhance the capacity of services that are already stretched to their limit," said Nassim Arrage, CLCs Australia CEO. "Demand for community legal centre services skyrocketed over the past 12 months with people presenting with higher levels of distress and more complex and more urgent issues. In response, community legal centres worked hard to support people experiencing extreme hardship, particularly women and children experiencing family violence, older people, people losing their jobs, people receiving social security payments, people with disability and mental health conditions and people with rising debt."

"Successive disasters have produced shockwaves across our communities – bushfires, COVID-19, floods and more bushfires, the social and economic impacts of which will continue to devastate the lives of people and communities across Australia. The work of community legal centres is vital in rebuilding the lives of many, especially those who experience discrimination and disadvantage, as we look forward to a recovery from this crisis. It is fantastic that the Government is beginning to provide the resources needed to enable community legal centres to meet the growing demand for legal services".

"The new measures in the Budget will take time to implement resulting in an unfortunate service gap at a time when we are anticipating a sharp rise in legal need and demand for services – a result of a range of COVID-19 measures coming to an end in March 2021. We would welcome an extension of the COVID-19 legal assistance funding provided in mid-2020, as otherwise, in the next six weeks, community legal centres will be forced to wind down the services they established utilising these funds".

"This Budget is a welcome step forward. The Government however will need to provide more for legal assistance to keep communities healthy and safe until we see our way out of this crisis. A key part to addressing the resources gap is a thorough assessment of legal need and determining the social and economic costs of addressing unmet and hidden need. Another opportunity is for the Government to build on the success of the domestic violence units and health justice partnerships initiated under the Women's Safety Package so that there is enough funding to provide services to people all over Australia".



Community Legal Centres
Australia

“Addressing the discrimination and disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience in the family violence, child protection and justice systems is critical to the success of the Close the Gap campaign. We strongly support the calls made by Change the Record, in particular those around the need to address the mass incarceration of First Nations peoples, end Black deaths in custody and Raise the Age so that it is no longer possible to arrest or convict a child as young as ten. We also join with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) and National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services in calling on the Government to make additional allocations so that more people can access culturally safe front line services at the times that they need it most”.

“We know that economic and social factors like poverty and homelessness are drivers of legal need and increased demand for legal assistance. This is why we join with the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and others in calling on the Government to raise social security payments above the poverty line and to address the severe shortage of social housing”.

“CLCs Australia looks forward to working with the Attorney-General and others in Government to build on this Budget to ensure healthy communities and keeping people safe from now and into the future”.

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Further information or interviews

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Note to Editors

Community Legal Centres Australia is the national peak body for the community legal sector, in particular community legal centres across Australia. We are an independent, non-profit organisation established to support the community legal sector and ensure provision of free and accessible legal and related services to everyday people, including people experiencing discrimination and disadvantage.

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