

Community Legal Centres Australia

# Annual Report

## 2022-23



Community Legal Centres  
Australia

Community Legal Centres Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognises their continuing connection to land, water, and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

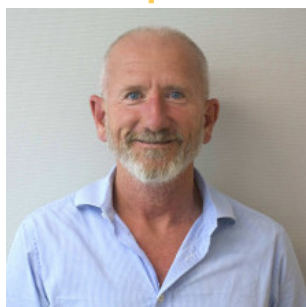
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## Chair and CEO report



*Anna Cody*  
Chair



*Tim Leach*  
Chief Executive Officer

Huge thanks to all our members, and their members – the 160-plus community legal services in our national network – for continuing to do what they do year after year. Our sector delivers excellent services that change people's lives. Collectively, we argue the case – constantly and creatively – that our country can do better to deliver this thing called justice. Our advocacy for change is grounded in the experiences of the more than 200 000 people we help every year. Community Legal Centres Australia is proud to be a part of this movement for change, and it's the work of the community legal services in our network that inspires us to do better.

In the pages that follow you can read about our great work over the past year. We won't detail it in these opening paragraphs, but instead use these lines to acknowledge the many people who have made it all possible. Our Board has done an excellent job in steering the organisation and we want to acknowledge the good work of Board members Ellie English, Vanessa Lesnie, Arlia Fleming, Cathy McMorris, Melissa Hardham, Sarah Patterson and Gerard Brody. We welcome Gerard taking on the role of Chair going forward.

Heartfelt thanks to the Members Advisory Group (MAG) which does so much to ensure we're connected to sector experiences at state and territory level. MAG members offer critically important guidance on our work and MAG is the mechanism by which we seek national consensus or ways to respectfully disagree. Membership of MAG can mean a lot of work, but this work means centres right across the country can feel confident their experiences are informing the efforts of the national peak.

We would also like to thank all the sector workers who make up our National Networks, especially those who have taken on convenor roles. Our networks are a source of unmatched expertise, pump out great submissions, provide leadership in advocacy and platform our clients' and communities' experiences.

We applaud the work of our colleagues in other legal assistance sectors – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum and National Legal Aid. We thank the Law Council of Australia for its advocacy on our behalf and we acknowledge the critical contribution to our sector of pro bono assistance, especially those firms that have so generously donated advice and resources to the national peak.

We have been supported in our efforts by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. We have warmly welcomed the enhanced engagement with the department that has been so encouraged by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, a long-term friend of our sector.

And finally, thanks to the hardworking Community Legal Centres Australia team for its efforts over this last year.

Anna Cody, Chair

Tim Leach, Chief Executive Officer

## Farewell and thank you to Anna Cody



*Photo credit: Sally Tsoutas, Western Sydney University*

In early July 2023, the Federal Government announced Dr Anna Cody's appointment as the Australian Human Rights Commission's new Sex Discrimination Commissioner. It's a great appointment by the Attorney-General, and further recognition of the expertise that is developed through a life of work in our sector.

Anna began her work in the community legal centres movement in 1989 and has continued that work for the last 34 years. Over this time, she has made an enormous contribution to the sector, including as Chair of Community Legal Centres NSW from 2011 to 2013, and more recently as Chair of Community Legal Centres Australia from 2020 to 2023.

During more than twenty years at Kingsford Legal Centre, Anna provided leadership in clinical legal education, discrimination law and human rights, with a particular focus on gender equality and women's rights. Her work has included substantial advocacy to various United Nations human rights committees when they have reviewed Australia's fulfilment of its human rights

obligations. For example, Anna led an NGO delegation to a United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) hearing in Geneva in 2018 to highlight the lack of protection for human rights and women's rights under Australian law.

Following her work at Kingsford Legal Centre, Anna spent four and a half years as Dean of the School of Law and Professor at Western Sydney University, while continuing to serve as Chair of Community Legal Centres Australia. Anna has also worked in human rights in Mexico, specialising in disability and migrant rights; in international development work in East Timor and Indonesia; and with the Centre for Economic and Social Rights in New York developing their program on the right to health, focussing on mining and human rights issues. Anna has also previously worked with First Nations women in Alice Springs establishing a domestic violence service, and in community legal education in El Salvador.

Anna has been a marvellous chair of the national peak. We are so grateful for her tireless contributions to the organisation and to the community legal sector over the years, and for her contributions to human rights and justice more broadly. We look forward to seeing what she achieves in her new role as Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

# Member network

## State and territory associations

CLCs Australia's members are the eight state and territory community legal centre associations.

Australian Capital Territory Association of Community Legal Centres

Community Legal Centres New South Wales

Community Legal Centres Queensland

Community Legal Centres South Australia

Community Legal Centres Tasmania

Community Legal Western Australia

Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)

Northern Territory Association of Community Legal Centres

## Member centres

CLCs Australia provides services and support to more than 160 organisations which are members of the eight state and territory associations, including community legal centres, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

### ACT

Animal Defenders Office

ANUSA Legal Service

Canberra Community Law

Care Consumer Law

Women's Legal Centre (ACT and Region)

### New South Wales

Ability Rights Centre

Arts Law Centre of Australia

Australian Centre for Disability Law

Australian Pro Bono Centre

Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention Legal Service

Central Coast Community Legal Centre

Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre

Environmental Defenders Office (EDO)

Far West Community Legal Centre

Financial Rights Legal Centre

HIV/AIDS Legal Centre

Hunter Community Legal Centre

Illawarra Legal Centre

Immigration Advice and Rights Centre

Inner City Legal Centre

International Social Service Australia

Justice Support Centre

Kingsford Legal Centre

Macarthur Legal Centre

Marrickville Legal Centre

Mid North Coast Legal Centre

North and North West Community Legal Service

Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre

Public Interest Advocacy Centre

Redfern Legal Centre

Refugee Advice and Casework Service

Seniors Rights Service

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre

Tenants' Union of NSW

Thiyama-li Family Violence Service

University of Newcastle Legal Centre

Welfare Rights Centre

Western NSW Community Legal Centre

Western Sydney Community Legal Centre

Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre

Women's Legal Service NSW

Youth Law Australia

### Northern Territory

Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit

Central Australian Women's Legal Service

Darwin Community Legal Service

Katherine Women's Information and Legal Service

North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service

Top End Women's Legal Service

### Queensland

Aboriginal Family Legal Services Queensland

ADA Law

Basic Rights Queensland

Bayside Community Legal Service

Brisbane North Community Legal Service

Cairns Community Legal Centre

Caxton Legal Centre

Central Queensland Community Legal Centre

First Nations Women's Legal Services QLD  
 Gold Coast Community Legal Centre and Advice Bureau  
 Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre  
 HUB Community Legal Institute for Urban Indigenous Health  
 knowmore  
 LawRight  
 LGBTI Legal Service  
 Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre  
 My Community Legal Gold Coast  
 North Queensland Women's Legal Service  
 Pine Rivers Community Legal Service  
 Prisoners' Legal Service  
 Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion  
 Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service  
 Refugee and Immigration Legal Service  
 Suncoast Community Legal Service  
 TASC National  
 Tenants Queensland  
 Townsville Community Law  
 Women's Legal Service Queensland  
 YFS Legal  
 Youth Advocacy Centre

### South Australia

Community Justice Services SA  
 Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (SA)  
 JusticeNet SA  
 Northern Community Legal Service  
 Roma Mitchell Community Legal Centre  
 Uniting Communities Law Centre  
 WestSide Lawyers  
 Women's Legal Service (SA)  
 Working Women's Centre

### Tasmania

Hobart Community Legal Service  
 Launceston Community Legal Centre  
 North West Community Legal Centre

Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service  
 Tasmanian Refugee Legal Service  
 Tenants' Union of Tasmania  
 Women's Legal Service Tasmania  
 Worker Assist Tasmania

### Victoria

AED Legal Centre  
 Animal Law Institute  
 ARC Justice – Goulburn Valley and Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centres  
 Asylum Seeker Resource Centre – Human Rights Law Program  
 Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service  
 Barwon Community Legal Service  
 Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre  
 Consumer Action Law Centre  
 Disability Discrimination Legal Service  
 Djirra  
 Eastern Community Legal Centre  
 Emma House Domestic Violence Services Legal Program  
 Environmental Justice Australia  
 First Step Legal  
 Fitzroy Legal Service  
 Gippsland Community Legal Service  
 Human Rights Law Centre  
 Hume Riverina Community Legal Service  
 Inner Melbourne Community Legal  
 InTouch Legal Centre  
 JobWatch  
 Justice Connect  
 Law and Advocacy Centre for Women  
 Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre  
 Mental Health Legal Centre  
 Monash Law Clinics  
 Moonee Valley Legal Service  
 Northern Community Legal Centre  
 Peninsula Community Legal Centre  
 Refugee Legal  
 Seniors Rights Victoria  
 Social Security Rights Victoria  
 South-East Monash Legal Service  
 SouthPort Community Legal Service

Southside Justice  
 Tenants Victoria  
 University of Melbourne Student Union Legal Service  
 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service  
 Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service  
 West Heidelberg Community Legal Service  
 WEStjustice  
 Whittlesea Community Connections Community Legal Service  
 Women's Legal Service Victoria  
 Young Workers Centre  
 Youthlaw

### Western Australia

Aboriginal Family Legal Services  
 Albany Community Legal Centre  
 Circle Green Community Legal  
 Citizens Advice Bureau  
 Consumer Credit Legal Service  
 Fremantle Community Legal Centre  
 Goldfields Community Legal Centre  
 Gosnells Community Legal Centre  
 Kimberley Community Legal Service  
 Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre  
 Mental Health Law Centre  
 Midland Information, Debt and Legal Advocacy Service  
 Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre  
 Peel Community Legal Service  
 Pilbara Community Legal Service  
 Regional Alliance West  
 SCALES Community Legal Centre  
 South West Community Legal Centre  
 Southern Aboriginal Corporation Family Violence Prevention Legal Service  
 Street Law Centre  
 Sussex Street Community Law Service  
 Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service  
 Wheatbelt Community Legal Centre  
 Women's Legal Service (WA)  
 Youth Legal Service



## National data snapshot

In 2022–23

community  
legal services  
delivered  
over

**674 000**

legal and non-legal  
services

to people  
across  
Australia.

Community legal  
services provided lots of  
different kinds of legal  
services, including...

-  **214 000** Referrals
-  **192 000** Legal advices
-  **129 000** Information services
-  **45 000** Legal tasks
-  **34 000** Duty lawyer services
-  **9 000** Court/tribunal representations

\*Data is from community legal centres and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services using CLASS or ActionStep as their principal data collection tool.

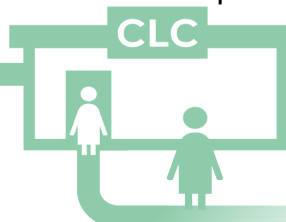


Community Legal Centres  
Australia

Community Legal  
Centres Australia  
collects data from  
community legal  
services across the  
sector.

This data is used for  
reporting to funding  
bodies, as well as  
advocacy and  
organisational planning.

The numbers shown here  
are drawn from data  
provided by 133\* of the  
164 services in CLCs  
Australia's membership  
network.



They also  
delivered around  
**37 000**  
non-legal  
services, like  
counselling and  
social work.



Community legal services helped over

**179 000** people  
in communities across  
Australia in 2022–23



The vast majority of clients were experiencing financial hardship.



**111 000** women



**60 000** people experiencing domestic or family violence



**48 000** people experiencing or at risk of homelessness



**43 000** people with a disability



**26 000** people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities



**21 000** people from rural and remote communities



**23 000** older people



**17 000** young people (under 25)



**17 000** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Community legal services helped people with different kinds of problems...

civil law **252 000**

Domestic violence protection orders  
Housing  
Immigration law  
Credit and debt  
Employment  
Wills and estates

family law **128 000**

Parenting arrangements  
Domestic and family violence  
Family law property

criminal law **32 000**

Traffic and vehicle offences  
Theft and related offences  
Motor vehicle property damage

# National Community Legal Centres Conference 2023

The National Community Legal Centre Conference, produced by CLCs Australia, has been a fixture on the community legal sector's calendar since 1979. In 2023 the conference returned, after a break of several years caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Conference logo*

In March 2023, Community Legal Centres Australia welcomed more than 500 delegates to nipaluna–Hobart for the first National Community Legal Centre Conference since 2019. Delegates from across the country joined us from legal services, government agencies, law firms, the Australian Services Union and other stakeholders.

As the national peak, it was our privilege to bring together our sector to celebrate our collective achievements and to look forward to future opportunities to bring

meaningful change to the people and communities we support and serve. After so much planning and organising, and so many emails, meetings, and calls, it was truly extraordinary to see the conference come to life and the sector be reunited after years of lockdowns and isolation.

For those who attended, it was a chance to experience the energy, excitement, and enthusiasm generated through reconnecting with friends, colleagues, and peers to share ideas and learn new skills, make new connections, celebrate wins, commiserate losses, and have some much-needed fun.

Our conference theme, *Celebrating 50 Years: Reconnecting and Reimagining*, provided a vehicle to celebrate 50 incredible years of community legal sector service, community education, advocacy, and activism to deliver access to justice for people and communities experiencing disadvantage,



*Rodney Croome's Tasmania's queer transformation walking tour*  
Photo credit: Emily Hamilton

discrimination, and violence across this country. And, together, to look to the future – of our organisations, our communities, and our vision for justice – with purpose and positivity.

Many of our program highlights were delivered by locals, giving the conference a truly Tasmanian flavour. Michael Mansell and colleagues from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre offered a generous and powerful welcome to country and a thought-provoking plenary session on First Nations justice. Bob Brown opened proceedings with a powerful call to action to protect the laws of nature against the ongoing and catastrophic destruction wrought on our planet by the laws of commerce. And Rodney Croome led us through the streets of Hobart on a walking tour that traced his – and so many others’ – struggles for LGBTIQ+ rights: from civil disobedience on the streets of Salamanca, to historic wins in the High Court of Australia and internationally.

Our first conference in almost four years was the product of a huge effort over many months from the Conference Advisory Group, Community Legal Centres Australia staff and many others across the sector. We are so grateful to everyone who contributed to and supported the conference.

We’d particularly like to acknowledge:

- The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for arranging for us to be so warmly welcomed to Country, and for designing and delivering the plenary on First Nations justice issues
- Our sponsors, partners, and supporters, whose generous financial support enabled us to subsidise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, and colleagues from RRRR (regional, rural, remote and very remote) centres to be part of the event
- Our Conference Advisory Group, whose months of hard work resulted in a diverse and engaging program and an all-round stellar event
- All our speakers and presenters who delivered two social events, four plenary sessions, twenty breakout sessions, two walking tours, three lunchtime events and three masterclasses
- The many people who volunteered to chair sessions, who helped ensure each session and the program overall ran smoothly.

## Conference sponsors

### Access and inclusion partners



### Silver sponsor



### Access and inclusion sponsors



### Supporter



## Advocacy and Communications

During 2022–23, CLCs Australia worked hard to build on our reputation as a trusted voice on access to justice issues. We launched a new website with a revamped look, more logical navigation, improved accessibility and stronger security. We refined the Sector Only News, our monthly newsletter. And we continued monthly updates to the heads of all 165 member centres.

### Respect@Work

In December 2022, the *Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022 (Respect@Work Act)* commenced. The *Respect@Work Act* legislated six recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work* report on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces, including the creation of a positive duty on employers to take reasonable steps to eliminate sexual harassment as far as possible. This was the culmination of many years of law reform and advocacy work by many people and organisations, including within the community legal sector.

Throughout 2022–23, CLCs Australia continued to be actively represented on the *Respect@Work* Council by Kingsford Legal Centre and Women's Legal Service NSW. During this period, our advocacy focussed on the Commonwealth's proposed response to the *Respect@Work* report's finding that the risk of an adverse costs order acted as a barrier for many people to pursue their matter through the courts under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (SDA)*.

The Commonwealth's draft exposure bill for the *Respect@Work Act* included a 'soft costs neutrality model' for costs orders in anti-discrimination matters brought before the courts. That is, the bill provided for a default position that parties would bear their own costs. The community legal sector, and other legal professionals, raised significant concerns that this did not go far enough to implement the costs protection provision recommended by the *Respect@Work Report* (recommendation 25).

As a result of sustained advocacy, the government removed its proposed costs provision from the draft legislation and committed to inquire into an appropriate costs model for all Commonwealth anti-discrimination laws. Through the review process, the sector, led by Kingsford Legal Centre, recommended adoption of an equal access costs model, under which each party bears its own costs but a successful applicant can recover costs from the respondent.

We also coordinated national input to Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department consultations on the Good Practice Indicators Framework for Addressing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.

### Climate justice

From July to September 2022, Wotton+Kearney secondee Renee Magee delivered the CLCs Australia Climate Justice Project. Through the project, Renee interviewed people from 22 community legal centres and state peaks across the country about their engagement in climate justice work, including environmental protection and climate justice litigation, climate mitigation and adaptation policy and advocacy and the provision of legal assistance services to extreme weather disaster-impacted people and communities.

The project's findings made clear that climate is a justice issue, and that community legal centres have an important role to play to ensure governments take strong action to reduce the impacts of climate change, and to support and protect people experiencing poverty, disadvantage, and discrimination from the impacts of climate change.

Key project outputs included:

- A map of the environmental and climate justice work community legal services are engaging in across the country
- Statements on climate as a justice issue and the community legal sector's expertise in climate justice
- Establishment of the National Disaster Legal Assistance Services Network
- A national community legal sector policy and advocacy platform on climate justice, developed in conjunction with the national network

Through the project, CLCs Australia renewed its commitment to pursuing climate justice for people experiencing poverty, disadvantage and discrimination as a key national advocacy priority.

## International advocacy

Bill Mitchell OAM from Townsville Community Law represented CLCs Australia at the thirteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Ageing in New York in April 2023. The OEWG's mandate is to assess the adequacy of the existing international human rights framework related to older persons.

CLCs Australia uses our participation in the OEWG to advocate for the creation of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, to provide holistic, international protection of older persons' human rights.

At the thirteenth session, the group examined older persons' right to health, as well as access to services and social inclusion. Participants also considered older persons' contribution to development and the right to economic security. Bill made written submissions and oral statements at meetings during the session, chaired a briefing organised by the NGO Committee on Ageing in New York, and spoke at side events on mainstreaming the human rights of older persons and developments at the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

While in New York, Bill also participated in a meeting with the Australian mission to the United Nations. At the meeting, NGO delegates urged Australia to support the OEWG's decision to establish an intersessional working group to identify possible gaps in the international protection of the rights of older persons and to strongly support the full, meaningful and effective participation of older persons in this process. The Australian mission received these submissions well and, on 7 April, the First Secretary of Australia's mission to the UN made a statement to the thirteenth session welcoming the OEWG's adoption of the decision.

As a result of the decision, the appointed co-facilitators of the intersessional working group will submit intergovernmental recommendations on gaps in the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons and options on how best to address them. These recommendations will be considered at the fourteenth session of the OEWG in 2024.

In its statement supporting adoption of the decision, the Australian mission noted that after thirteen years of discussion, there is hope that the creation of the intersessional working group "will lead to tangible recommendations that reflect the needs and lived experiences of older persons in the community, and highlight the intersectionality of older persons, including LGBTI persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, religious and ethnic minorities, and women."

CLCs Australia acknowledges and thanks Bill Mitchell for his ongoing representation and advocacy on behalf of the sector in this area.



## National law reform submissions

In 2022–23, CLCs Australia made submissions to two Commonwealth parliamentary inquiries and the Robodebt Royal Commission.

Our submission to the **Joint Committee on Law Enforcement inquiry into Australia’s illicit drug problem** highlighted the harms associated with treating drug use as a criminal legal issue rather than a health issue, particularly for people experiencing poverty, disadvantage, discrimination and trauma. Based on community legal centres daily work with people who use drugs, our submission recommends the decriminalisation of simple drug offences, for personal use and possession of all drugs, and the adoption of a health-focussed response to harmful drug use.

Our submission to the **Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia:**

- examines poverty and intersectional disadvantage as drivers of legal need, particularly in relation to civil and family law problems, and the significant barriers to accessing justice faced by people experiencing poverty and intersectional disadvantage
- explores the ways in which our criminal laws and legal systems criminalise and perpetuate poverty and intersectional disadvantage and prevent rehabilitation, recovery, and community integration.

Recommendations focus on addressing the social and economic drivers of poverty and intersectional disadvantage that create barriers to accessing justice and lead to harmful contact with the criminal justice system (for example by raising the rate of social security payments and building more social housing, and increasing investment in community based, trauma-informed early support services), repealing ‘status offences’ that criminalise poverty and homelessness (like offensive language and begging), raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least fourteen across all Australian jurisdictions, reforming strict bail laws to reduce the numbers of people held in prison on remand for low-level offending and abolishing short-term prison sentences for minor offences.

Our submission to the **Robodebt Royal Commission** notes the significant harms caused to people experiencing poverty and disadvantage by the unlawful Robodebt scheme. It also highlights the important role of advocacy by specialist social security legal services and their peak body, Economic Justice Australia, in bringing the scheme down. It recommends significant additional Commonwealth funding for specialist social security legal services to support people to challenge Centrelink decisions in relation to their social security entitlements and debts.

## Supporting access to justice through sustainable funding

**Supporting people and communities impacted by extreme weather disasters to manage legal problems.**

Climate change continues to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather disasters. People experiencing poverty and disadvantage are amongst those first and worst affected. Events like the catastrophic floods that impacted Australia’s east and west coasts in 2022 cause ongoing, complex and compounding legal problems for people in areas such as tenancy, social security, insurance, debt, employment and domestic and family violence. Timely access to high-quality legal support from local, community-embedded organisations is critical to helping people find safety, and to recover and rebuild.

We welcomed the additional funding the Commonwealth delivered to community legal centres in 2022–23 to help impacted people and communities manage their legal problems. However, inadequate funding for preparedness and resilience building and significant state and territory

delays in allocating much-needed resources for response and recovery efforts seriously hampered centres' capacity to deliver timely, responsive services.

Throughout 2022–23 we continued to advocate for reforms to funding mechanisms to ensure:

- adequate funding for community legal centres to engage in prevention, preparedness and resilience building work as part of core business
- timely provision of flexible surge capacity funding to enable community legal centres to support disaster response and recovery efforts across impacted communities

### Disaster legal assistance response and recovery package.

A key component of this was our work to influence the Legal Assistance Response and Recovery package. Developed by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department and the National Emergency Management Agency, the package aims to deliver a joined-up approach between the Commonwealth and states and territories for distributing disaster legal assistance funding so that legal assistance providers can participate effectively in disaster response and recovery efforts.

Together with the National Disaster Legal Assistance Services Network, we advocated for:

- long-term, sustainable funding for community legal centres to engage in prevention, preparedness and community and organisational resilience building
- timely and flexible funding for surge capacity, with a minimal additional reporting burden
- recognition of the importance of place-based coordination of disaster response and recovery efforts and the critical contribution of services with specialist expertise, including in insurance, tenancy, and social security law

### Supporting community legal services to meet people's needs in the face of rising inflation, wages costs, and inadequate indexation on funding contracts.

In its 2022 and 2023 federal budgets, the Commonwealth government recognised that many government-funded health, community, and social services were struggling to meet people's needs in the face of rising inflation and operational costs (including wage increases driven by welcome but costly increases to the SCHADS Award and increases to mandatory superannuation contributions.) Despite our sustained and collective advocacy to government, on both occasions, most community legal centres were excluded from budget measures designed to ease these pressures and support ongoing service delivery.

Securing increased long-term funding and adequate indexation for community legal centres will form a key part of our advocacy around the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement 2020–2025, to start 2023–24.

To prepare for the review, in 2022–23 we conducted early consultations with state and territory peaks and centres across the country to identify critical reform issues. From September to December, we heard directly from representatives from centres in all states and territories in ten online consultation sessions and written feedback on our briefing paper. The feedback provided informed our advocacy strategy for the review and key priorities, including:

- significantly increased and properly indexed funding
- transparency over funding decisions and allocations, and increased government accountability for meeting legal needs and achieving outcomes for people and communities
- a commitment to properly resourcing the community legal sector's systemic advocacy work



# Member services

## Accreditation

The National Accreditation Scheme (NAS) is a quality assurance process that supports and recognises good practice in the delivery of community legal services through assessing and accrediting member centres in every state and territory. Participation in the scheme is compulsory for all member centres, and a requirement of most centres' funding agreements. When a centre is accredited, it is meeting minimum key performance standards. Consequently, clients, communities, funders, and other stakeholders can be assured of high-quality service provision from an accredited centre.

CLCs Australia coordinates a team of regional accreditation coordinators who are employed by state peaks in Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales, and who assess and accredit their members. CLCs Australia is responsible for accrediting centres in ACT, Northern Territory, South Australia, and Tasmania. Between 30 June 2022 and July 2023, CLCs Australia completed on-site visits to eight centres, assessed all eight under the scheme, and finalised accreditation for six centres.

## Review of the National Accreditation Scheme

The National Accreditation Scheme is administered under a three-year cycle and is reviewed at the end of each cycle to ensure it continues to be effective.

The most recent review began during 2022–23, under the governance of the NAS Review Working Group. This group included regional accreditation coordinators and other sector stakeholders from across the country. The review recommended several changes to the scheme (including the option to grant high-performance centres accreditation for four rather than three years). CLCs Australia's Members Advisory Group supported these changes which were subsequently approved by the Board.

In 2023–24, CLCs Australia will:

- review the scheme's Cultural Safety Standard
- review all NAS Accreditation Standards against the revised Risk Management Guide
- finalise updates to the Guidelines and other resources supporting the NAS

CLCs Australia will release all revised Accreditation Standards, Guidelines, and supporting documents to centres on their final approval by the Board.

The result will be a more clear, consistent and transparent approach to the accreditation process.

## Insurance

The National Insurance Scheme is available to organisations within CLCs Australia's membership network. It obtains group policies for professional indemnity (PII), public liability (PLI) and association liability insurance (ALI), which hugely lowers the costs of these essential policies for participating organisations. The scheme also provides information and education to centres about insurance and risk.

Over the 2022–23 year, our national insurance scheme continued to provide cover for 140 member centres and some state and territory associations.

During the first half of 2023, we worked closely with our insurance broker to renew the scheme for 2023–24. While there were some minor changes to the PII policy wording and an increase in the ALI deductible, we were still able to deliver excellent coverage for the sector at a competitive price.

We would not be able to deliver the National Insurance Scheme without the valued assistance of our broker, Gallagher, as well as the work of the National PII Network, whose members oversee the scheme. In particular, we thank network Chair Catherine Eagle for her incredible contribution.

## Risk Management Guide

The Risk Management Guide (RMG) is a legal practice management resource produced by CLCs Australia to help community legal centres identify and mitigate risks. The Guide's Mandatory Standards form a set of baseline requirements to ensure consistent quality assurance across the community legal sector and form part of the National Accreditation Scheme. Compliance with the RMG is assessed annually and informs centres' eligibility for the National Insurance Scheme and the accreditation certification process. The second edition was published in 2017. Work on the third edition commenced in late 2021.

CLCs Australia continued work on the third edition of the Risk Management Guide throughout 2022–23. We conducted an extensive consultation process with the National Professional Indemnity Insurance Network, the project's primary stakeholder, and other stakeholders across the sector.

We made available redrafted Mandatory Standards in October 2022, which form the basis for a clearer and more streamlined structure for the updated RMG. We revised these again in June 2023.

Consultation and revisions on the draft third edition will continue throughout 2023, with the launch of the third edition planned for 2024.

## LexisNexis

LexisNexis is a subscription-based online legal reference library. Through a sponsorship agreement with LexisNexis, CLCs Australia provides free access for all member centres to LexisNexis products.

Use of LexisNexis products Lexis Advance and Lexis Red continued to grow during 2022–23. We issued more than 1000 logins to personnel from 109 member centres. We also facilitated a well-attended series of training webinars in the second half of 2022 to help users develop their research skills and get the most out of LexisNexis.

## Information, Communications and Data Technology

CLCs Australia's Information, Communications and Data Technology (ICDT) team was originally formed to develop and support CLASS (Community Legal Assistance Sector System), a data collection and reporting tool used by most centres in the sector. As the sector's data needs have become more complex, the team has pivoted toward more sophisticated services and solutions.

Throughout 2022–23 the community legal sector continued to recognise the need for, and to embrace, digital transformation. More centres adopted legal practice client management systems (CMS) and looked to gather and use data in more sophisticated ways to support service delivery and advocacy.

To respond to centres' changing needs, the ICDT team started to develop a collective vision for the community legal sector's ICDT future, and to build a National Data Repository capable of receiving and storing the sector's national data.

As usual, the team worked hard throughout the year to support centres to meet mandated reporting obligations to funding bodies in a complex and constantly changing ICDT landscape.

### A collective vision for the community legal sector's ICDT future.

CLCs Australia's vision for the community legal sector's ICDT future is one in which:

- all community legal centres have the skills and resources to adopt a modern, sophisticated CMS that meets their unique service delivery and advocacy needs
- the national peak:
  - supports all centres to transition to our data future, ensuring no centre is left behind
  - owns and manages a new National Data Repository, and acts as custodian of the community legal sector's national dataset, ensuring the sector's data is available for mandatory reporting to funding bodies and for local and national advocacy
  - provides streamlined and simplified data reporting for centres and governments, including self-service reporting and data visualisation tools.

In 2022–23, CLCs Australia established an ICDT Advisory Group, with representatives from most states and territories. The group's purpose is to help shape the national peak's ICDT vision and ensure our initiatives reflect the sector's needs and priorities.

### Building a national dataset for the community legal sector

During 2022–23, CLCs Australia's ICDT team started to build a new national data 'warehouse' that can receive centres' data from CLASS and several modern CMS tools in use across the sector. Building the warehouse is an important step towards ensuring all centres can meet their reporting obligations to funding bodies regardless of which CMS they use. This work has involved complex vendor management, stakeholder liaison and consultation and project planning.

In the second half of 2022–23, we also started a data visualisation collaboration with the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) that will extend our data integration and reporting work into a program of work that will positively enhance data services through increased data access, data visualisation and self-service reporting.

### Supporting centres to meet reporting obligations to funding bodies

CLCs Australia continued to support 117 centres to deliver reports on services delivered, which are required by Commonwealth, state, and territory governments under the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement (NLAP). Despite the challenges presented by the changing landscape, ageing sector infrastructure (CLASS) and the rapid uptake of new CMS tools in some parts of the sector, we successfully delivered accurate data and reports to centres and to governments on time.

## Pro bono and partnerships

CLCs Australia's pro bono and corporate partners enable us to increase the capacity of our organisation and the sector in key areas and to enjoy the benefits of specialised legal advice. Special thanks to the following firms and institutions for their ongoing support.

**Ashurst** provided ongoing advice on CLCs Australia's trademarks.

**Banki Haddock Fiora** provided pro bono advice on contract matters for our CLASS operations.

**Carroll & O'Dea Lawyers** provided guidance on renewing the CLCs Australia office lease.

**HWL Ebsworth** provided graduate lawyers to work with CLCs Australia on secondment, greatly increasing CLCs Australia capacity in key program areas.

**LexisNexis** provides a corporate partnership that allows CLCs Australia to give centres free access to various LexisNexis products and training.

**Western Sydney University** provided legal interns who gained professional experience working alongside our Operations and Policy and Advocacy teams.

**Wotton + Kearney** provided expertise in the area of climate justice.

The logo for Ashurst, featuring the word "ashurst" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.The logo for Banki Haddock Fiora, with the words "BANKI", "HADDOCK", and "FIORA" stacked vertically in a blue, sans-serif font.The logo for Carroll & O'Dea Lawyers, with the words "CARROLL", "& O'DEA", and "LAWYERS" stacked vertically in a green, sans-serif font.The logo for HWL Ebsworth Lawyers, with "HWL" in green and "EBSWORTH" in grey, and "LAWYERS" in a smaller green font below.The LexisNexis logo, featuring a red circular icon with white curved lines to the left of the text "LexisNexis" in a black, sans-serif font.The logo for Western Sydney University, with "WESTERN SYDNEY" in red above "UNIVERSITY" in black, and a red shield with a white "W" below.The logo for Wotton + Kearney, with "wotton" and "kearney" in blue, lowercase, sans-serif font, separated by a vertical line and a plus sign.

# National Networks

CLCs Australia supports a number of National Networks, which are a critical part of the national community legal centres movement. They bring together expertise and enthusiasm from across the national membership, enabling centres to learn from each other, coordinate action and maximise use of limited resources. Networks facilitate multi-state collaborations and undertake critical advocacy.

The networks listed here, with their convenors, were active in 2022–23.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Network	Bobbi Murray, Vanessa Graf, Alex-Lee Hargy
Community Services Network	Helen Wallace
Disability Rights Network	Mark Patrick
Employment Law Network	Gabrielle Marchetti
Human Rights Network	Rachael Pliner Sarah Marland
National Association of Tenant Organisations (NATO)	Penny Carr, Alice Thompson
National Disaster Legal Assistance Services Network	Renee Magee, Bill Mitchell, Bronwyn Lay
National Professional Indemnity Insurance Network	Catherine Eagle
Older Persons' Legal Services Network	Rebecca Edwards, Nicky Mitchell
Rural, Regional, Remote and Very Remote (RRRR) Network	Judy Harrison, Hayley McEwan
Student Legal Services Network	Kim Richardson
Youth Advocacy Network	Matthew Keeley, Kim Richardson

This year, we highlight the work and achievements of three of these networks.

## National Disaster Legal Assistance Services Network

The National Disaster Legal Assistance Services Network was established in November 2022 as a key outcome of the CLCs Australia Climate Justice Project 2022. It brings together workers in the sector to foster collaboration and support, promote best practice in service delivery in disaster response, and share resources and knowledge.

During 2022–23, the network:

- developed a national climate justice policy platform and advocacy strategy for the community legal sector
- delivered a full-day masterclass, *Embedding climate justice in community legal sector operations and practice*, at the National Community Legal Centres Conference; convened by the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic), the masterclass focussed on equitable responses to climate disasters and enabled centres from across the country to contribute and share lessons learned from recent climate disasters

- contributed to the national peak’s sector-wide submission to the Commonwealth Attorney General’s consultations on the National Legal Assistance Relief and Recovery Package, which aims to deliver a joined-up approach between the Commonwealth and states and territories to ensure that legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are able to access funding to provide trauma-informed legal assistance in the aftermath of a natural disaster
- attended the newly established Disaster Legal Assistance Group convened by National Emergency Management Australia and the Commonwealth Attorney General’s department

## RRRR Network

The National Rural, Regional, Remote and Very Remote Community Legal Network (RRRR Network) is a network of non-profit legal assistance services. The services are based in – or offer services to people who live in – Australian Bureau of Statistics statistical areas of Inner, Outer, Regional, Remote and Very Remote Australia. Services’ methods and programs often reflect deep understanding of, and long-term efforts to, address unique RRRR communities’ needs. Their advocacy often reflects involvement in RRRR community issues that have not been addressed by other means, including by local, state, or federal governments.

The network was propelled into existence in early 2022 through leadership from community legal services in South Australia.

During 2022–23, the network’s advocacy effort focused on calling for:

- a National RRRR Access to Justice Strategy and Action Plan, since currently none exists
- increased funding for acceptable levels of access to legal help across RRRR Australia
- addressing ‘metro-normativity’ across multiple areas including laws, government policies, programs and higher education which are impeding justice and access to justice in RRRR areas
- resources for a national gathering of RRRR community legal services and stakeholders to share, learn and plan, plus resources for Community Legal Centres Australia to help strengthen the network

## Employment Network

The Employment Law Network is open to community legal sector lawyers working and interested in employment and discrimination law. In 2022–23, the network:

- provided a forum to discuss employment law issues, both during quarterly network meetings, and over email
- coordinated law reform efforts, such as submissions to the government’s white paper following the Jobs and Skills Summit, and advocacy before the summit calling for the attendees to consider reforms to reduce the exploitation of vulnerable workers and migrant workers
- provided updates on Respect@Work and the *Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill* at the face-to-face network meeting at the National Conference in March. After so many years, it was wonderful to collaborate and share in person.

The employment law space has been incredibly dynamic in the past year, and with the *Closing Loopholes Bill* and ongoing discussions about sexual harassment law reform, next year will be equally busy.

# People

## Board

Anna Cody – Chair

Ellie English – Deputy Chair

Gerard Brody

Wynetta Dewis

Arlia Fleming

Melissa Hardham (from Nov 22)

Vanessa Lesnie (to Nov 22)

Cathy McMorrine

Sarah Patterson

## Staff

Tim Leach Chief Executive Officer

Michelle Cutler Chief Operating Officer  
(to Sep 22)

Bobbi Murray First Nations Advisor

## Capacity Building

Meg Houston Capacity Building Manager

Liz Wells Capacity Building Coordinator,  
Pro Bono Advisor

Olivia Conte Capacity Building Officer  
(to Nov 22)

Kim Hunter Capacity Building Coordinator

Alice Jones-Rabbitt Locum Capacity Building  
Coordinator (Nov 22 to Mar 23)

## Operations

Charlotte Maung Finance and Operations  
Manager

David Herrero Operations Officer

Laura Barter Operations Officer

## Advocacy

Emily Hamilton Advocacy and Communications  
Manager

Kelley Temple Advocacy Manager  
(to May 2023)

## ICDT

Meghan Kemp ICT Delivery Manager

Suzanne Slegers Data Manager

Reuben Johnson ICT User Support Officer

Rhys Ambler ICT User Support Officer

Samuel Martin ICT User Support Officer

Allain Woodsford ICT User Support Officer

Alex Huang ICT User Support Officer  
(to Aug 22)

Upama Shrestha Data Officer

Eric Rottger Data Officer (from Mar 23)



## Financial statements

### Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2023

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
<b>Revenue</b>	3 314 092	3 422 795
<b>Less: expenses</b>		
Depreciation and amortisation expense	–	(556 692)
Employee benefits expense	(1 960 875)	(1 939 910)
Occupancy expense	(132 229)	(33 056)
Finance costs	–	(40 632)
Conference expense	(375 945)	(3 150)
Operating expense	(179 312)	(215 530)
Project expense	(7 102)	(6 420)
Consultants	(612 124)	(604 357)
Recruitment	(3 975)	(28 240)
Travel	(46 061)	(2 998)
Settlement on de-merger	–	(1 070 409)
Other expenses	(44 187)	(39 913)
	<u>(3 361 811)</u>	<u>(4 541 307)</u>
<b>Deficit from operations</b>	(47 719)	(1 118 512)
<b>Other comprehensive income for the year</b>	<u>–</u>	<u>–</u>
<b>Total comprehensive income</b>	<u>(47 719)</u>	<u>(1 118 512)</u>

## Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	2 021 056	1 572 366
Receivables	267 119	608 924
Financial assets	480 884	479 446
Other assets	–	17 784
<b>Total current assets</b>	<u>2 769 059</u>	<u>2 678 520</u>
Financial assets	605 235	501 534
Lease assets	–	321 129
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<u>605 235</u>	<u>822 663</u>
<b>Total assets</b>	<u>3 374 294</u>	<u>3 501 183</u>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Payables	307 630	264 825
Lease liability	–	352 543
Provisions	190 697	195 500
Other liabilities	309 136	87 322
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<u>807 463</u>	<u>900 190</u>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	90 752	77 195
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<u>90 752</u>	<u>77 195</u>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<u>898 215</u>	<u>977 385</u>
<b>Net assets</b>	<u>2 476 079</u>	<u>2 523 798</u>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	137 500	137 500
Accumulated surplus	2 338 579	2 386 298
<b>Total equity</b>	<u>2 476 079</u>	<u>2 523 798</u>

