

Community  
Legal  
Centres  
Australia  
**2023–24  
Annual  
Report**



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



*Chair*  
*Gerard Brody*



*Chief Executive Officer*  
*Tim Leach*

A big thank you from Community Legal Centres Australia to all our members and to the more than 160 community legal services that make up our national network. It's been a big year, and we couldn't have done it without your support. It is a privilege to be a part of the community legal centre movement. Our centres assisted over 180 000 people in the last year; this assistance was valued and had impact.

It's been a year shaped in large part by the review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP). The NLAP offered much, but delivered less than we'd hoped for, and the independent review completed in May 2024 was right to call out governments for their collective failure to properly resource legal assistance. We spent a lot of the year telling stories to the reviewer, to governments and to the media about our clients' needs. We also talked about the needs of the thousands of people who never get to be our clients because we don't have the resources to assist them. We made submissions to the NLAP review and to Treasury in the lead-up to the budget, and we made appeals directly to dozens of federal MPs and Senators. The next national partnership agreement, and the funding behind it, will tell us much about the success or otherwise of our efforts in 2023–24.

Another focus for the year has been the mapping of a digital future for our sector. It will be the largest data change since the inception of CLASS. We look forward to working with our sector and government supporters as we move away from reliance on CLASS towards a leaner, more modern system of data collection and utilisation. It can sound dry, but we are driven by a desire to be able to tell more effectively the story of our sector's impact, and to support centres to better use data to inform and improve their services to communities.

This year we completed our *Impact Strategy 2024–2027* to focus our work on the most critical priorities. We've set targets – in sector funding, national advocacy and law reform, data utilisation and networking – and we've invited our sector to hold us accountable for progress towards these targets. Future annual reports will use this impact strategy as our framework for reporting.

We've been pleased to again deliver our National Insurance Scheme for the sector. We've continued to deliver (and have updated) the National

Accreditation Scheme, and got most of the way through a review of the Risk Management Guide. Our CLASS and data teams have laboured hard to continue services while also driving the planning for our digital future. Our advocacy team has done an amazing job on the NLAP review and federal funding, and supported and amplified the incredible law reform work being done across our sector.

The national peak has been lucky to have strong governance, and we thank Board members Wynetta Dewis, Sarah Toovey, Simon Suttie, Melissa Hardham, Arlia Fleming and Cathy McMorrine. In particular, we acknowledge departing Board members Wynetta and Cathy. We have been grateful for the excellent advice from our hardworking Members Advisory Group, the Information Communications and Data Technology Advisory Group, the National PII Network and all our various working groups and networks.

We acknowledge the strong support of Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, whose commitment to our sector has been demonstrated over many years. We have appreciated the work of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. We have valued the collaboration of the legal assistance sector, including our colleagues at National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence, National Legal Aid and the Law Council of Australia.

We are also very grateful to our pro bono partners for their generous support.

Read on for summaries of our organisation's work, and for some terrific summaries of the work done by our sector. We are inspired every day by the work of centres across our network, and by the stories of the people and communities with whom they work.

# Member network

## State and territory associations

Community Legal Centres 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

Community Legal Centres Australia provides services and support to more than 160 organisations which are members of the eight state and territory associations. These member organisations include 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

### New South Wales

Ability Rights Centre  
Arts Law Centre of Australia  
Australian Centre for Disability Law  
Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention Legal Service  
Central Coast Community Legal Centre  
Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre  
Environmental Defenders Office  
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 and Equity Centre  
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  
Redfern Legal Centre  
Refugee Advice and Casework Service  
Seniors Rights Service  
Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre  
Tenants' Union of NSW  
Thiyama-li

University of Newcastle Legal Centre  
Welfare Rights Centre  
Western NSW Community Legal Centre  
Western Sydney Community Legal Centre

#### Northern Territory

Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal  
Unit Aboriginal Corporation (CAAFLU)  
Central Australian Women's Legal Service  
(CAWLS)  
Darwin Community 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 Community Legal Centre  
Central Queensland Community Legal Centre  
First Nations Women's Legal Services QLD  
Gold Coast Community Legal Centre and  
Advice Bureau  
HUB Community Legal  
Institute for Urban Indigenous Health  
knowmore  
LawRight  
LGBTI Legal Service  
Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre

#### South Australia

Community Justice Services SA  
Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal  
Corporation  
JusticeNet SA  
Northern Community Legal Service

#### Tasmania

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

Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal  
Centre  
Women's Legal Service (NSW)  
Youth Law Australia

Katherine Women's Information and Legal  
Service (KWILS)  
North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal  
Service (NAAFLS)  
Top End Women's Legal Service (TEWLS)

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  
Wide Bay Burnett Community Legal Service  
Women's Legal Service Queensland  
YFS Legal  
Youth Advocacy Centre

Uniting Communities Law Centre  
WestSide Lawyers  
Women's Legal Service (SA)  
Working Women's Centre SA

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

## Victoria

AED Legal Centre  
Anika Legal  
Animal Law Institute  
ARC Justice – Goulburn Valley and Loddon  
Campaspe Community Legal Centres  
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and 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  
Mortgage Stress Victoria  
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 WA  
Circle Green Community Legal  
Citizens Advice Bureau WA  
Consumer Credit Legal Service  
Fremantle Community Legal Centre  
Goldfields Community Legal Centre  
Gosnells Community Legal Centre  
Great Southern Community Legal Services  
Kimberley Community Legal Service  
Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre  
Mental Health Law Centre, Ruah Community  
Services  
Midland Information, Debt and Legal  
Advocacy Service (MIDLAS)  
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 WA  
Sussex Street Community Law Service  
Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service  
Wheatbelt Community Legal Centre  
Women's Legal Service WA  
Youth Legal Service



# National Networks

Community Legal Centres Australia supports several 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 following networks, listed here with their convenors, were active in 2023–24.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Network – Bobbi Murray, Vanessa Graf, Alex-Lee Hargy, Sammy Cooper

Community Services Network – Helen Wallace

Disability Rights Network – Mark Patrick

Disaster Resilience Legal Network – Bill Mitchell, Monica Taylor, Bronwyn Lay, Clint Westig

Employment Law Network – Gabrielle Marchetti

Human Rights Network – Rachael Pliner, Sarah Marland

Older Persons Legal Services Network – Rebecca Edwards, Nicky Mitchell

Rural, Regional, Remote and Very Remote (4Rs) Community Legal Network – Judy Harrison, Hayley McEwen, Cheryll Rosales

Student Legal Services Network – Matthew Keeley, Kim Richardson

Youth Advocacy Network – Kim Richardson

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Network

This network is made up of First Nations women working within the community legal sector, from CEOs, community workers and lawyers to intake officers, students and volunteers. The network supports, mentors and educates its members and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and staff across the wider sector. It also provides valuable guidance and advice to Community Legal Centres Australia and centres on cultural protocols and awareness and provides input to the development of policies and submissions relating to First Nations peoples and cultures.

In 2023, the network played an important role in advising Community Legal Centres Australia on its public position on the Voice to Parliament and Yes23 campaign. The network convened consultations for First Nations people across the sector to express their views on the Voice and its strong internal advocacy grounded our decision to publicly support the Voice and Yes23. Critically, the network also created a culturally safe space for First Nations workers across the country to come together online to support each other through the lead-up to and aftermath of the referendum.

In June 2024, the network collaborated with Helen Dalley-Fisher, Convenor of the Equality Rights Alliance, to contribute First Nations perspectives to a civil society shadow report to be submitted as part of Australia’s 2024 report to the United

Nations on compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

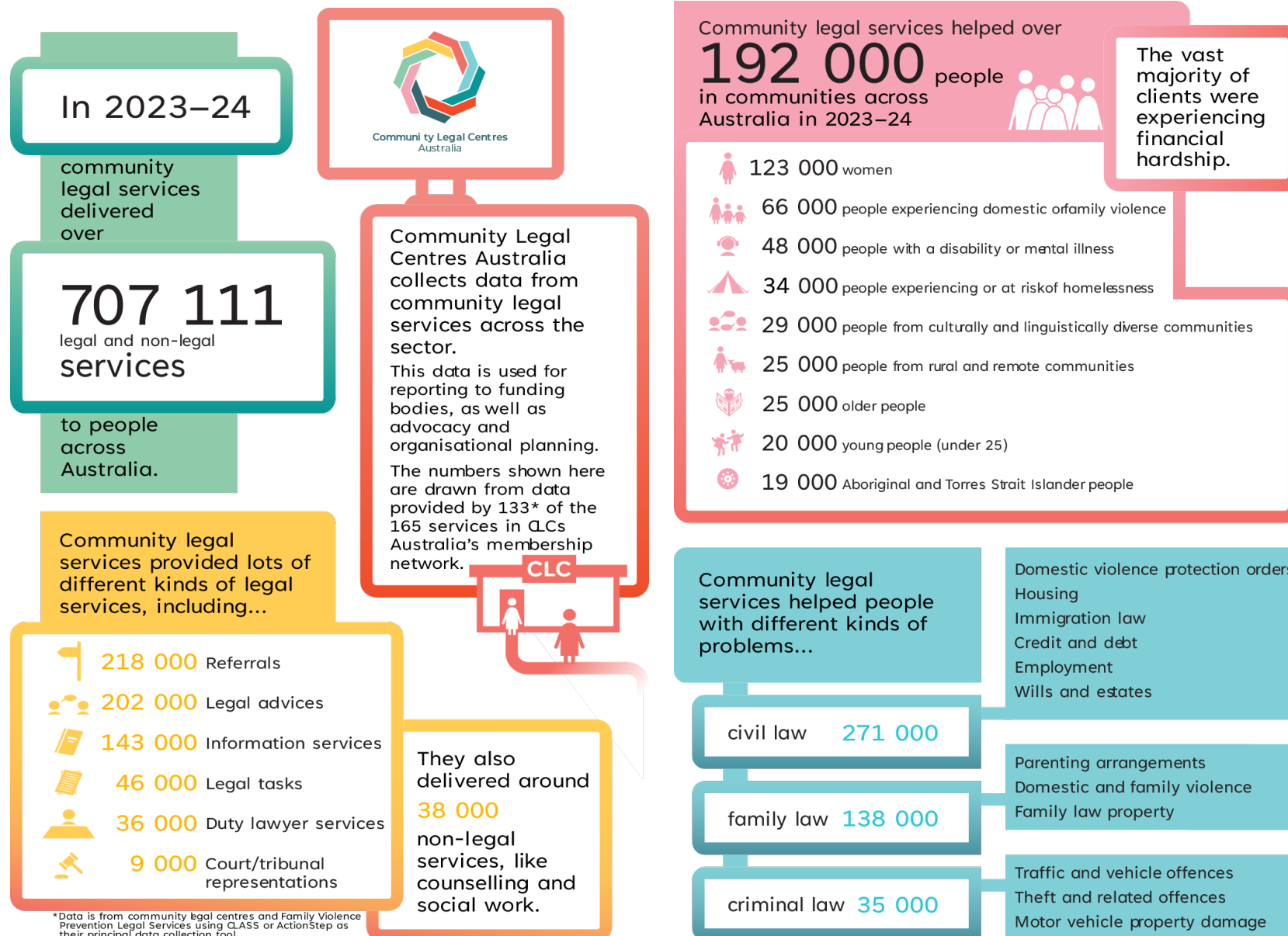
## Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) Network

The PII Network is one of our longest standing networks and is composed of one or more Principal Solicitors representing each state and territory association. It is ably chaired by Catherine Eagle from the Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service in Western Australia.

The network functions as a vital part of Community Legal Centres Australia's national insurance scheme, overseeing our professional indemnity insurance policy. As well as providing recommendations and advice to Community Legal Centres Australia as needed, network representatives support and advise member centres in many areas including notifications, the cross-check process, disciplinary actions and disputes, information barriers, and Responsible Person changes.

The network is also integrally involved in promoting a nationally consistent approach to risk management. This includes developing preventative strategies such as education and training sessions for community lawyers and monitoring the application of the Risk Management Guide (RMG) that all centres must comply with as part of their accreditation status. With the RMG review ongoing throughout 2023–24, the network contributed many hours of work to researching and reviewing updates to the guide.

# National data snapshot



# 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, the centre's clients, communities, funders and other stakeholders can be assured of high-quality service provision.

Community Legal Centres Australia coordinates a team of regional accreditation coordinators (RACs) who are employed by state peaks in Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales. The RACs assess and accredit their local member centres. Community Legal Centres Australia is responsible for accrediting centres in the ACT, Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania. Between 30 June 2023 and July 2024, Community Legal Centres Australia completed on-site visits for five centres, assessed these centres under the National Accreditation Scheme and finalised accreditation for eleven centres (most of which had been assessed in 2022–23).

Throughout 2023–24 we continued working on the third review of the NAS accreditation standards and requirements, prioritising the review of the cultural safety standard. In late 2023, we convened the Cultural Safety Review Group, comprised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers from across the sector, to assist the Community Legal Centres Australia Board with this review. To date, the group has defined cultural safety and discussed the minimum requirements centres must meet to ensure a culturally safe and inclusive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2024–25, the group will consult with other First Nations people and organisations and make recommendations to Community Legal Centres Australia about how to improve the cultural safety standard, and related documents and assessment methods, to improve service outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

This year, we continued to review available accreditation resources and guides, which aim to assist centres to meet accreditation requirements more easily and support them in focusing on continuous improvement, including example policies, template registers and other required core documents. We will complete this work once the revised Risk Management Guide and the new cultural safety standard have been finalised.

## Insurance

The National Insurance Scheme is available to organisations within Community Legal Centres Australia's membership network. It obtains group policies for professional indemnity insurance (PII), public liability insurance (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 2023–24 year, our national insurance scheme continued to provide cover for 139 member centres and some of the state and territory associations.

During the first half of 2024 we worked closely with our insurance broker to renew the scheme for 2024–25. There were no changes to the PII policy and, in a win for centres, we moved the ALI policy to a new insurer with no increase in premium and with a substantial reduction in the employment practice liability deductible, once again providing 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. We particularly want to acknowledge and thank network Chair Catherine Eagle for her incredible contribution.

## Risk Management Guide third edition

The Risk Management Guide (RMG) is a legal practice management resource produced by Community Legal Centres 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.

In 2023–24 we continued work on a major review and redrafting of the Risk Management Guide. In June 2024, we distributed a draft of the guide's third edition to the sector via the PII Network members in each state and territory and gave member centres the opportunity to provide specific feedback on the updated version. We expect the finalised third edition will be launched at the end of the 2024 calendar year. We extend thanks to the National PII Network for its continued support of this project.

## LexisNexis

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

Member centres continued to enjoy access to LexisNexis products Lexis Advance and Lexis Red during 2023–24. We issued around 600 new user logins to sector personnel at 140 centres.

## Information, communications and data technology

Community Legal Centres 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. CLASS allows centres to meet their reporting obligations to governments under the National Legal Assistance Partnership agreement 2020-2025. As the sector's reporting and practice management needs have become more complex and sophisticated, the team has refocussed its energy on supporting centres to adopt modern CMSs (client management systems) and meet their reporting obligations to funding bodies, while also developing a shared national repository of data from across the sector to support advocacy and service planning.

### National Data Repository

The National Data Repository is the end state of the community legal sector's shared vision for future reporting of the sector's service provision data and telling of the national data story. Under the sector's ICDT vision, Community Legal Centres Australia will build, own and maintain the National Data Repository and act as custodian for the community legal sector's national dataset. Once built, the National Data Repository will draw select data from the several modern CMSs most used by member centres and combine it into a single database. The data will then be available to centres, the sector and governments for a range of purposes.

This year, the ICDT team undertook a range of preparatory activities to support our sector's and individual centres' transition to our shared ICDT future. Activities included conducting extensive sector-wide consultations to identify and better understand the sector's needs and concerns; developing papers, delivering presentations, and attending one-on-one meetings to explain our vision for the future and the steps centres need to take to make the transition; and researching and documenting requirements for the new National Data Repository, including in relation to data flows, real-time data visualisations, and reporting processes. The team also presented plans for the National Data Repository to state and territory community legal centres peaks, State Program Managers and Commonwealth government stakeholders.

In April 2024, Community Legal Centres Australia employed a Digital Transformation Manager, a new role, to oversee the implementation of our ICDT vision, including the National Data Repository. We are committed to delivering the National Data Repository by 1 July 2025.

### Maintaining the national dataset

By the end of 2023-24, 50% of centres in our membership network had adopted or were moving to adopt a modern CMS. As a result, a key focus for Community Legal Centres Australia's ICDT team this year was the maintenance of a high-quality national dataset, which includes key NLAP reporting data fields, from all centres using modern CMS tools as well as those still using CLASS for data collection and reporting.

Maintaining an accurate and national dataset is critical to ensuring all centres can continue to meet their reporting obligations to Commonwealth, state and territory funders, as we transition towards our shared ICDT future and the National Data Repository. It has also provided an important test environment as we scope specifications for the new repository.

To enable all centres to contribute data to the national dataset regardless of the CMS being used, the NDR will comprise a component that will transport

data from the main CMSs used by the sector to the NDR. More than 50 community legal centres and Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services use the current data pathway provided by Community Legal Centres Australia. We also automated quality assurance processes, which enabled us to identify issues and finalise data transfers for centres much more efficiently.

## Government reporting

Reporting work continued, with all jurisdictional reporting required by the National Legal Assistance Partnership delivered on schedule. New developments allowed us to provide State Program Managers with data 'dashboards' which delivered clearer and more interactive access to all data in the national dataset.

We also met the Commonwealth Government's requirement to deliver unit-level data on service provision while working with the Attorney-General's Department and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to address our members' concerns about identifiability and confidentiality. The ABS noted the high quality of data we provided on the sector's behalf through this exercise, despite tight project timelines.

Despite the increasing uptake of modern CMSs across the sector, many centres continue to use CLASS for data collection and reporting. Throughout 2023–24, the ICDT team continued to provide helpdesk support for centres still using CLASS and delivered a major upgrade that resulted in performance improvements and significant savings on hosting costs.

The team also played a key role supporting centres to extract their data from CLASS into a new CMS. As part of this work, we implemented several improvements to the data export process, which have improved overall efficiency.



# Advocacy and communications

In 2023–24, the Community Legal Centres Australia Advocacy and Communications team prioritised the funding security of the community legal sector to ensure the 160-plus organisations in our membership can continue to survive, thrive and provide crucial support to the hundreds of thousands of people who rely on them each year. In addition to funding advocacy, Community Legal Centres Australia carried out substantial work in relation to First Nations justice, climate justice and human rights and civil liberties.

## First Nations justice

### The Voice to Parliament referendum

Based on views expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working at community legal centres who participated in our national consultation process, Community Legal Centres Australia publicly supported the Voice and the Yes23 campaign.

Our support was also grounded in our commitment to the three pillars of the Uluru Statement from the Heart: Voice, Treaty, Truth. Our public statements recognised that the Voice would be just one part of our collective journey to a just future, and the diverse views held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country, and the community legal sector, about the best way to pursue justice for First Nations people.

Alongside our public advocacy, we facilitated weekly debriefing sessions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in our sector. The online sessions, facilitated by Rowena Lawrie and Yamurrah Connections with Care, offered a safe space for First Nations workers to debrief and access peer support.

Following the referendum, we provided public and private spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in our sector to reflect on the process and the outcome. In [\*Reflections on the Voice: A letter to the community legal sector\*](#), Bobbi Murray, First Nations Justice Advisor to Community Legal Centres Australia and convenor of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Network, reflected on the impacts of the referendum campaign and result, and where to next for First Nations peoples' struggle for justice.

We also expressed our ongoing solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within and outside the community legal centres movement and [\*affirmed our commitment\*](#) to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led movements for justice and safety, including the ongoing work towards Treaty and Truth.

### Change the Record

Community Legal Centres Australia continues to sit on the Change the Record steering committee. In addition to attending regular steering committee meetings, in April 2024 we participated in a face-to-face steering committee meeting in Canberra.

## Human rights and civil liberties

### Right to protest

Community Legal Centres Australia supports the human right to protest as fundamental to our democracy. The community legal centres movement was born out of activism and community action in response to the justice needs of



so many marginalised communities. We recognise the crucial role protest movements play in winning justice for people, communities and the environment.

We have been concerned that recent state-based legislative initiatives will undermine the right to protest. In 2023–24 we were proud to sign the Declaration of Our Right to Protest, produced by the Human Rights Law Centre with support from the Australian Democracy Network and endorsed by over 120 civil society organisations, and to actively participate in the national protest rights campaign group convened by the Australian Democracy Network.

## **Inquiry into Australia's human rights framework**

In September 2023, Community Legal Centres Australia and the National Human Rights Network, made a [joint submission](#) to the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework. In it, we highlighted the need to establish a national human rights framework that has a legislative basis and includes the protection of civil and political rights, economic and social rights, and the right to a healthy environment.

Throughout the year we continued as an active member of the Human Rights Act Campaign Advisory Committee.

## **United Nations engagement**

Community Legal Centres Australia has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. This allows individuals to attend UN conferences and events as representatives of Community Legal Centres Australia. In 2023–24 we sent representatives – from the community legal and allied sectors – to several UN events.

## **United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing**

In May 2024, Community Legal Centres Australia attended the Fourteenth Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons. Bill Mitchell, Townsville Community Law, has been our delegate to this New York-based General Assembly process since the Fourth Session in 2013, participating in eleven sessions of the Working Group. Other community legal centres, including Caxton Legal Centre and Seniors' Rights Service have also engaged with the Working Group.

This year, a historic decision was reached after more than a decade of advocacy efforts by Community Legal Centres Australia and other non-governmental organisations, supportive member states and national human rights institutions. The Working Group recommended (A/AC.278/2024/2) that the General Assembly consider several options, including an international legally binding instrument to promote, protect and ensure the recognition and the realisation, on an equal basis, of all human rights of older persons. This option and others contained in the Chair's report will now be considered by the General Assembly.

We congratulate Bill Mitchell OAM, Principal Solicitor at Townsville Community Law, for his tireless work on our sector's behalf to achieve this outcome over the past decade.



*Bill Mitchell (centre) attends a UN session*

## United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women is the United Nations' only space dedicated to gender equality. Its annual meeting is the world's largest gathering of feminist and other Civil Society Organisation (CSO) representatives.

In March 2024, Julianna Marshall, Policy and Education Manager at the Central Australian Women's Legal Services, joined approximately 60 other Australians forming the civil society delegation to the 68th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Representing Community Legal Centres Australia, Julianna attended a broad range of official events, side events and parallel events over a ten-day period which each focused on the priority theme, 'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'.

Margaret Augerinos and Yvette Jaczina from the Centre for Non-Violence also attended under Community Legal Centres Australia's accreditation. They took part in around 50 events over two weeks exploring economic gender-based violence, pushing back on patriarchal social norms, intersectional research methods and methodologies, women's experience in conflict



*Julianna Marshall, Central Australian Women's Legal Services; Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Women; Therese Edwards, Single Mother Families Australia*

and war zones, women's leadership in non-violent protest movements and feminist approaches to justice. Reflecting on the event, they said:

*We thank Community Legal Centres Australia for the opportunity to attend the formal UN events through sponsoring UN grounds passes for us. We would recommend this experience to anyone wanting to further their understanding of international advocacy and how global instruments can influence not only global change and development, but also their use and influence at a domestic level.*

## Climate justice

Climate change and the worsening disasters it drives are justice issues. Alongside physical and psychological impacts, climate disasters create or worsen everyday legal problems with insurance, housing and homelessness, income and social security, debt, family violence, and more.

In August 2023, Community Legal Centres Australia made a submission to the National Emergency Management Agency's *Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding*. The submission highlighted the critical role community legal centres play supporting communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters, and the urgent need for adequate, ongoing and flexible funding to support this work.

We also advocated for the inclusion of people impacted by climate disasters as a priority group for legal assistance under the next legal assistance funding agreement, through our [submission](#) to the independent review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership and in other [communications](#) with decision-makers and the public.

## National funding advocacy

In 2023–24, a key focus for our advocacy was to deliver increased, secure funding and a smooth transition from the current National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020–25 agreement to the next for the community legal sector. Our strategy involved:

- Engaging Federal politicians via written submissions, meetings and events at Parliament House
- Generating national media coverage of our sector's funding and workforce crisis
- Activating organisations in our membership to support national advocacy efforts, through engagement with their local politicians and media, and on social media

## Independent review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) 2020–25

The Federal Government announced the *Independent Review of the NLAP 2020–2025* (Independent Review) in August 2023. Community Legal Centres Australia wrote a comprehensive [submission](#) to the review on behalf of the community legal sector. To inform our recommendations, we held fourteen consultation



Graham Perrett MP, Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre CEO Arlia Fleming, Peninsula Community Legal Centre CEO Jackie Galloway, Mulleun Mura Managing Solicitor Vanessa Graf, Gerard Brody

meetings with centres in every jurisdiction as well as thematic sessions to discuss critical topics like issues for rural, regional, remote and very remote centres and national and non-NLAP funded centres, disaster-related legal services, and First Nations perspectives.

In November 2023, we travelled to Parliament House with colleagues from member centres and the Australian Legal Assistance Forum to encourage MPs and Senators to support our recommendations on the future of legal assistance funding.

From January to May 2024, we coordinated sector-wide advocacy [calling on the Commonwealth, state and territory Attorneys-General](#) to release the final report from the Independent Review immediately and commence negotiations on a new legal assistance partnership agreement.

## State of the Sector survey: *A sector in crisis*



Community Legal Centres Australia prepared a pre-budget submission in January 2024 which called on the Commonwealth Government to use the 2024–25 Federal Budget to:

- deliver an urgent funding injection for the community legal sector in 2024–25
- commit to five years' funding for the next legal assistance partnership agreement via the forward estimates.

At the same time, we wrote directly to the members of the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) and the Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus urging them to support any additional budgetary recommendations arising from the Independent Review report.

To support our pre-budget advocacy, in March 2024, we launched the final report of the 2022–23 State of the Sector survey, *A sector in crisis*, at Parliament House, Canberra, with a keynote address by the Commonwealth Attorney-General.

The report's stark findings made clear the scope of the crisis impacting community legal centres and the people and communities they support. In 2022–23:

- Community legal centres turned away 1000 people who requested assistance every day.
- Nine out of ten centres experienced an increase in demand for assistance.
- The sector needed an extra 2000 full-time workers to meet demand, but low wages and high staff burnout and turnover contributed to a worsening workforce crisis.



Gerard Brody at Parliament House

While in Canberra, we met with 29 MPs and Senators from all political parties, or their advisors, including advisors to the Prime Minister, Assistant Treasurer, and ministers for Finance, Women, and Families and Social Services). We also secured several online meetings with parliamentarians in the weeks following the trip. Many agreed to write to ERC members to support our budget asks.



The report launch, and associated delegation to Canberra, attracted significant media coverage across multiple news outlets, including ABC TV and radio, [The Guardian Australia](#), and the AAP.

## Telling the sector's stories in the media and on social media

Throughout 2023–24 Community Legal Centres Australia increased its public profile and raised the plight of community legal centres to a national issue through sustained and strategic media and social engagement. Between January and May 2024, we issued six [media releases](#), highlighting the impacts of inadequate funding on people and communities who rely on community legal centres to address their everyday legal problems.

At the same time, we worked with member centres to pitch stories about the sector's invaluable contribution to community wellbeing and social justice and the potential impacts of the funding and workforce crisis risking its future viability to local and national outlets.

We also developed and maintained a national advocacy and messaging pack for centres, template letters, and social media assets, as well as bespoke resources for centres on engaging with the media and on meeting with local MPs. This equipped centres with advocacy and communications staff and experience to support the campaign independently using nationally consistent messaging.

As a result, in the second half of 2023–24, Community Legal Centres Australia generated consistent national media coverage of our sector and funding campaign, in addition to regular local media coverage secured by centres. From January to June 2024, the campaign generated 59 online articles, 46 radio appearances or mentions and 14 television appearances or mentions across local and national outlets (including The Australian, Guardian Australia, The Saturday Paper, Radio National, ABC local radio, Triple J Hack, ABC TV Sydney, Melbourne and Breakfast).

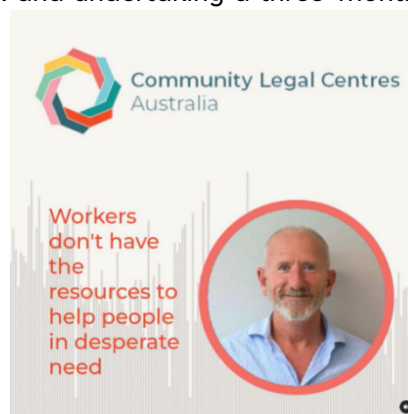
Our [LinkTree](#) includes links to all the national media coverage generated throughout the funding campaign available online, as well as some of the local stories featuring member centres.

Throughout the year, we also used the national funding campaign to increase our presence on social media, including by phasing out our presence on X and undertaking a three-month pilot on Instagram. In 2023–24, we achieved a 162% increase in followers on LinkedIn (up from 1906 to 4985 over the twelve months) and a 100% increase in content interactions on Facebook compared to 2022–23. Within three months, we built a solid base of Instagram followers (143 new followers in February to June 2024) and received 623 content interactions demonstrating a high conversion rate of followers to content engagement.

This year our advocacy work was greatly enhanced through our collaboration with Social Change Projects. Special thanks to Daniel Scoullar and Eleanor Pallet for their advice and guidance, especially in helping us tell our sector's stories more effectively.



*Tim Leach in the Canberra ABC Radio National studio*



*Tim Leach speaks on ABC Radio*

# Reconciliation Action Plan

This year saw the re-formation of our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group as we began work on our third RAP.

The development of this RAP has evolved over several years, building on the foundations laid down by earlier iterations of the working group and established by our first two RAPs.

This RAP will see a continued focus on supporting and seeking advice from our First Nations networks and advisory bodies. It will also see a continued focus on building the strength of our relationships through greater collaboration and engagement with First Nations bodies and service providers, both within the community legal sector and outside of it.

We are also committed to encouraging and supporting our sector to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development, and in further embedding cultural safety into our work, attitudes, policies and activities.

During 2023–24, under the guidance of Reconciliation Australia, we moved towards finalising the text of our new RAP. We expect to launch the new RAP in early 2025. We will then focus on implementing its provisions and translating our commitments into real action.

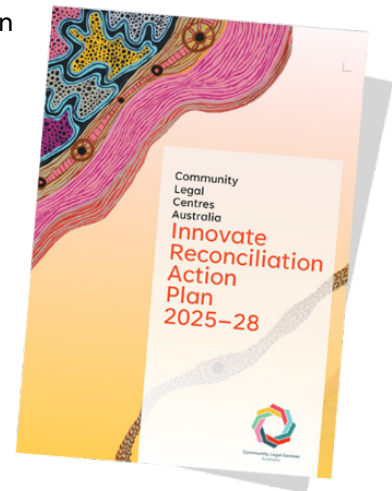
Our new RAP commits us to acknowledging our relationships with the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations with whom we connect and work, and the strength, leadership and expertise that they contribute.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the national Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations with which we worked in 2023–24:

- Change the Record
- First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV; formerly the National Forum for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services)
- Indigenuity Lab
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)

We also acknowledge all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in our membership network, the services they deliver to their communities and their contributions to the wider community legal sector:

- Institute of Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) Legal Service
- First Nations Women's Legal Service Queensland
- Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre
- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Queensland
- Aboriginal Family Legal Services WA
- Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention Legal Service
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation
- Djirra
- Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation SA



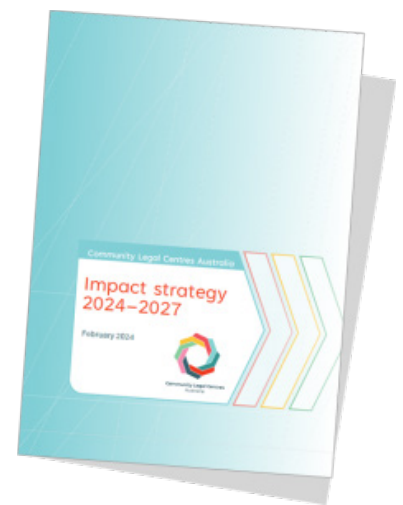
- Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
- North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (NAAFLS)
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service
- Southern Aboriginal Corporation Family Violence Prevention
- Thiyama-li Family Violence Service Indigenous Corporation
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service (TALS)
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS)

## Impact strategy

In February 2024, the Community Legal Centres Australia Board approved a new [impact strategy](#), which will guide management of the organisation over three years from 2024 to 2027. We'll continue to deliver on our business as usual, but we have also set ourselves some specific goals in key areas. These are all areas where our organisation can make a big difference for our sector. If we achieve these goals, we can make the sector stronger and more effective. The strategy commits us to deliver on four impact priorities for the community legal sector.

- Funding for community legal centres increases by 50% – Distribution is fairer and faster
- Centres can better access, manage and use data to benefit their communities and the sector
- Community legal centres influence national law and policy reform to better protect people and communities' rights
- Centres are better connected and work more collaboratively with each other.

From 2024–25, our annual reports will track progress and achievements against these priorities.



## Pro bono and partnerships

Community Legal Centres 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 Community Legal Centres Australia's trademarks and National Accreditation Scheme documentation.
- **Banki Haddock Fiora** provided pro bono advice on contract matters for our CLASS operations.
- **Carroll & O'Dea Lawyers** provided guidance on renewing the Community Legal Centres Australia office lease.
- **HWL Ebsworth** provided graduate lawyers to work with Community Legal Centres Australia on secondment, greatly increasing Community Legal Centres Australia capacity in key program areas. Assistance was also provided in relation to various issues in connection with privacy laws.
- **Wotton + Kearney** provided expertise with a webinar on AI.
- **Holding Redlich** assisted with issues in relation to our insurance prospectus.
- **LexisNexis** provides a corporate partnership that allows Community Legal Centres Australia to give centres free access to various LexisNexis products and training.

## Hope Pro Bono Legal study tour

In late April, two lawyers from Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea, attended a study tour of five Queensland community legal centres. The tour was arranged by way of partnership between Community Legal Centres Australia, global law firm Ashurst, and Hope Pro Bono Legal.

Hope Pro Bono Legal is an emerging community legal centre in the highlands of PNG which seeks to provide legal services to women facing domestic and family violence or violence relating to accusations of sorcery. The study tour took in three centres in Brisbane – Caxton Legal Centre, Women's Legal Service QLD and Refugee and Immigration Legal Service – and two regional centres – Cairns Community Legal Centre and North Queensland Women's Legal Service.

Our sector has incredible experience and skills, and it was wonderful that these could be harnessed and shared with the two visiting lawyers as they develop a new community legal centre in PNG. The study tour also provided the opportunity for Hope Pro Bono Legal to create new professional networks and contacts. The centres that hosted the delegates were



*Study tour delegates at Caxton Community Legal Centre*

also enriched through valuable cultural exchange, technical knowledge and insights and cross-cultural learning. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the centres that participated in the study tour.



# People

## Board

Anna Cody     Chair (to Aug 2023)  
Ellen English     Deputy Chair (to Nov 2023)  
Gerard Brody     Chair (from Sept 2023)  
Arlia Fleming     Deputy Chair (from Mar 2024)  
Sarah Patterson (to Nov 2023)

Wynetta Dewis (to March 2024)  
Cathy McMorrine  
Melissa Hardham  
Sarah Toovey (from Nov 2023)  
Simon Suttie (from Nov 2023)

## Staff

Tim Leach     Chief Executive Officer  
Emily Hamilton     Advocacy and Communications Manager  
Riley Brooke     Policy and Communications Coordinator (from Jul 2023)  
Bobbi Murray     First Nations Justice Advisor (casual to Dec 2023)  
Kim Hunter     Capacity Building Coordinator  
Liz Wells     National Capacity Building Coordinator, Pro Bono Advisor  
Ingrid Rikkert     National Accreditation Coordinator (from Sep 2023)  
Meg Houston     National Accreditation Coordinator (casual to Dec 2023)  
Charlotte Maung     Finance and Operations Manager  
David Herrero     Operations and Design Officer  
Imogen Brackin     Projects Officer/Research and Conference Coordinator (from Oct 2023)

Meghan Kemp     ICT Delivery Manager (to Feb 2024)  
Suzanne Slegers     Data Manager  
Neil Graham     Digital Transformation Manager (from Apr 2024)  
Chris Dubrow     ICT Team Leader (from Mar 2024)  
Reuben Johnson     ICT User Support Officer  
Rhys Ambler     ICT User Support Officer (to Jan 2024)  
Samuel Martin     ICT User Support Officer (to Dec 2023)  
Allan Woodsford     ICT User Support Officer (to Apr 2024)  
Manuel Martinez     ICT Application Support Officer (from May 2024)  
Eric Rottger     Data Officer  
Upama Shrestha     Data Officer  
Anjana Shrestha     Data Officer (from April 2024)

# Financial statements

## Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
<b>Revenue</b>	2 958 047	3 314 092
<b>Less: expenses</b>		
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(9 816)	
Employee benefits expense	(1 916 287)	(1 960 373)
Occupancy expense	(120 396)	(132 229)
Finance costs – right of use asset	(761)	–
Conference expense	(10 775)	(375 945)
Operating expense	(185 756)	(179 312)
Project expense	(12 060)	(7 102)
Consultants	(701 030)	(612 124)
Recruitment	(2 926)	(3 975)
Travel	(51 470)	(46 061)
Other expenses	(77)	(44 689)
	<u>(3 011 354)</u>	<u>(3 361 810)</u>
<b>Deficit from operations</b>	(53 307)	(47 718)
<b>Other comprehensive income for the year</b>	–	–
<b>Total comprehensive income</b>	<u>(53 307)</u>	<u>(47 718)</u>

## Statement of financial position at 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	1 830 281	2 021 056
Receivables	556 420	267 119
Financial assets	486 639	480 884
Other assets	111 836	
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>2 985 176</b>	<b>2 769 059</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Financial assets	595 511	605 235
Lease assets	103 278	–
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>698 789</b>	<b>605 235</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>3 683 965</b>	<b>3 374 294</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Payables	340 639	307 629
Lease liability	102 162	–
Provisions	240 213	190 697
Other liabilities	534 136	309 136
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>1 217 170</b>	<b>807 462</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	44 021	90 751
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>44 021</b>	<b>90 751</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>1 261 191</b>	<b>898 213</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>2 422 774</b>	<b>2 476 081</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	137 500	137 500
Accumulated surplus	2 285 274	2 338 581
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>2 422 774</b>	<b>2 476 081</b>



Community Legal Centres  
Australia