

# National Regional, Rural, Remote and Very Remote (4Rs) Community Legal Network

<https://clcs.org.au/4rs-network/>

Below are the top reform ideas by the National Regional, Rural, Remote and Very Remote (4Rs) Community Legal Network for the Economic Reform Roundtable. All three will improve productivity, enhance economic resilience and strengthen budget sustainability.

TOP REFORM IDEAS
<p><b>1. FAIR AND INCLUSIVE FOUNDATIONS</b></p> <p><b><i>The foundations for Economic Reform and all economic and social policy should express and advance human rights, social justice, and sustainability, inclusive of all geographic locations.</i></b></p> <p><u>Problems this will address</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inequality, disadvantage, barriers to inclusion.</li><li>• Negative effects of thin markets, market failure and market overreliance.</li></ul> <p><u>Key actions</u> – federal, state and territory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commit, educate, implement.</li><li>• Align all economic and social policy.</li><li>• Ensure geographically comprehensive safety nets.<sup>1</sup></li><li>• Optimise human rights for full, visible, geographic inclusion.<sup>2</sup></li><li>• Omnibus law reform for full, visible, geographic inclusion.<sup>3</sup></li></ul>
<p><b>2. POVERTY ELIMINATION ESPECIALLY 4RS AREAS</b></p> <p><b><i>Economic Reform and all relevant economic and social policy should apply and align with objectives of geographically comprehensive poverty elimination, fully responding to higher prevalence of poverty in many 4Rs areas.</i></b></p>

<sup>1</sup> For background on geographic patterns of disadvantage see the [4Rs Network submission in response to the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement](#) consisting of letter to Attorneys-General, Backgrounder, Report Card and Attachment (September and November 2024).

<sup>2</sup> For example, the [4Rs Network submission to the Independent Review of the Human Rights Act \(QLD\)](#), June 2024 which is equally relevant to all existing and future federal, state and territory human rights legislation.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the [4Rs Network submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Inquiry into NDIS participant experience in rural, regional and remote Australia in March and April 2024](#), which recommended that human rights of people in 4Rs areas be made visible, and (April submission) gave drafting examples regarding the proposed Disability Rights Act. Also [4Rs Network submission to the federal Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Compulsory Income Management in May 2024](#) which recommended the Social Security Act and related legislation be amended to include objectives relating to the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all people in 4Rs areas.

Problems this will address

- Economic and social exclusion related to poverty.
- Barriers to human rights and wellbeing.
- Barriers to agency and self-determination.

Key actions – federal (states and territories where applicable)<sup>4</sup>

- Comprehensive, geographically inclusive safety nets.
- Reform social security so rates don't put people in poverty.
- Increase geographical supplements and measures so 4Rs social security recipients do not face higher prices and/or geographic price penalties.
- Reform social security law, administration and implementation for geographically inclusive social security rights, especially addressing:
  - Systemic metro-normativity.
  - Using geographic criteria and punitive conditions; removing individual assessment; removing or reducing individual rights; reversing the onus.
- Overcome geographical withholding of access to social security legal help, and relatedly to review rights, by implementing a program funding principle of full geographic social security legal help coverage and inclusion.

### **3. LEGAL WORKFORCE AND 4RS AREAS**

***Address barriers to meeting legal assistance workforce needs, and all legal workforce needs, in 4Rs areas***

Problems this will address

- Multiple negative effects and diseconomies of current vacancy rates.
- Barriers to scaling up to actual and future workforce needs.
- Compounding effects of injustice and exclusion.

Key actions – federal, state and territory<sup>5</sup>

- Geographical legal workforce safety nets.
- Legal assistance workforce and legal workforce initiatives which at minimum parallel all effective measures relating to remote and rural health workforce including local sourcing and solutions.
- Minimum of equal pay and conditions to Legal Aid Commissions for non-profit legal assistance sector workers including in 4Rs areas.
- Effective, representative, resourced, structures and initiatives to propel 4Rs legal assistance workforce and 4Rs legal workforce generally - nationally, all jurisdictions, Northern Australia and other contiguous regions.

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<sup>4</sup> See all 4Rs Network submissions at: <https://clcs.org.au/4rs-network/>, all relate and respond to patterns of poverty and disadvantage in 4Rs areas and insufficient safety nets, most also discuss 4Rs social security justice issues.

<sup>5</sup> Especially see 4Rs Network submission at (n1) above and [4Rs Network federal pre-budget submissions for 2023-4, 2024-5 and 2025-6](#).