

Justice Where We Live – policy summary

All people deserve equitable access to justice and due process, wherever we live.

October 2026

[Justice Where We Live online interactive tool](#) | [Read the full policy paper](#)

Justice in regional and remote areas

Legal need in regional, rural, remote and very remote ('regional and remote') communities is high and rising. Regional and remote communities face higher rates of financial hardship and poverty, an escalating housing crisis, and more limited access to essential services, infrastructure and government institutions. Limited access to domestic and family violence services, means women and children can face a much higher risk of harm and more barriers to safety. Poor digital connectivity and barriers to accessing ID – especially in remote and very remote areas – can make navigating complex legal, financial and housing systems extremely difficult.

Community legal centres servicing regional and remote areas

There are over 50 organisations in the community legal centres movement based in regional and remote communities. Most provide general civil and family law services across very large geographic catchments. There are also several statewide and national centres based in metropolitan areas that do a lot of work supporting people in regional and remote communities, including through regular outreach travel.

Based on the most recent Community Legal Centres Australia sector survey, community legal centres travel a combined 1.26 million kilometres a year to provide services to people in regional and remote communities. That's far enough to travel between Earth and the moon 3.3 times.

The largest area of work for the community legal sector is frontline support for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, making up 40-50% of our work nationally. This rises to 75% for community legal centres in rural and remote areas.

A different kind of lawyering

In regional and remote areas, the work done by community legal workers is often very diverse. Justice barriers like geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure, low population density, cultural differences out in the bush, and more, mean that service delivery in these places can look very different to what people would traditionally think of as "legal work".

Many clients don't have cars or phones. Often the only way they can get the help they need is by community legal centre workers driving to them. Many centres must have and maintain four-wheel-drive cars. At some centres, all workers must do special off-road driving training because the communities they serve are only accessible via unfinished roads. It's often unsafe to send one worker alone on long drives in the bush, so centres will send at least two workers on each outreach. Communications infrastructure can be patchy, so some centres have to invest in satellite phones.

The work can also be more time-intensive for other reasons. Working with people in remote communities requires time to build trust. Centres must spend a long time proving they're reliable by showing up to communities when they say they will, before people will trust them with their problems.

Regional and remote workforce crisis

Regional and remote community legal centres are facing a workforce crisis. Many are seeing roles left vacant for months at a time because of difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Housing and cost-of-living crises are contributing to this, alongside the shortage of childcare options in the regions. If our sector is unable to recruit and retain workers, people in regional and remote communities will lose their most consistent access to legal help.

Solutions

HECS-HELP forgiveness scheme

The independent review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) recommended a **HECS-HELP Forgiveness Scheme for professionals who work at regional and remote community legal centres**, modelled on the schemes in place for teachers and doctors. This recommendation has not been implemented. This is a straightforward step the Federal Government should take to address the workforce crisis and improve access to justice in regional and remote communities.

Addressing the true cost of regional and remote community legal work

Service delivery regional loading

Funding models for community legal centres don't reflect the significantly higher costs of delivering services, or heightened legal and related need, in regional and remote communities. Governments should do the work required to map legal needs and develop a funding model that reflects the true cost of delivering high quality, trauma-informed and culturally safe services to regional and remote communities. In the meantime, the Federal Government should **provide regional loading payments of at least 20% of total current funding to every regional and remote community legal centre**.

Workforce regional loading

Funding models for community legal centres don't account for the acute workforce challenges in regional and remote areas. In 2024, the Queensland Government provided a \$12.4 million funding uplift to improve wages and conditions for community legal centre workers. Community Legal Centres Queensland data from 2025 demonstrates that in the wake of the payment, worker retention, worker wellbeing, and sector capacity have all improved. To address the acute workforce crisis the Federal Government should invest **an additional \$17 million to improve wages and conditions for community legal centre staff working in regional and remote communities**.

Access to justice in the Family Court for victim-survivors in regional and remote areas

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia consistently reports that around 80% of family law matters it deals with involve family violence. Rates are similarly high in the Family Court of Western Australia. However, too many victims-survivors, especially in regional and remote areas, face the family law system without the community legal help they need.

The family law system itself is chronically under-resourced, which can heighten the risk of harm and systems abuse. Community legal centres that provide free, specialised family law advice and representation services in regional and remote areas remain significantly under-funded to meet need.

Improving access to safety and justice for victims-survivors of family violence in the Family Court requires increasing investment in the family law system itself, and in regional and remote centres' family law and family violence service capacity.

The Federal Government should **increase resourcing for the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia and the Family Court of WA** to address backlogs, implement trauma-informed processes, and improve cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Federal Government should also **invest an additional \$15.8m a year for regional and remote community legal centres to deliver family law assistance**.