



STATEMENT

9 May 2018

Budget 2018- A Missed Opportunity to Guarantee Essential Services

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), the peak body for community legal centres in Australia, has expressed concern that this year's Federal Budget is a missed opportunity to guarantee essential services.

"On the whole, this Budget prioritised company tax cuts for big business and personal tax cuts ahead of properly funding essential services, including legal help. This will have a real impact on the hundreds of thousands of people our centres work with every day," NACLC's Acting CEO Amanda Alford said.

"For the community legal sector, which provides that help, this Budget is a missed opportunity to provide funding certainty ahead of expiration of National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services in 2020. There is no additional core funding for the sector in this Budget.

"That means next year's Federal Budget is the Government's last chance to provide funding certainty and a guarantee of ongoing help for the people and communities we work with every day.

"We do however welcome a number of specific measures in the Budget, including the already announced funding for knowmore, a project of NACLC, to provide legal support services for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse that are engaging with the Commonwealth Redress Scheme.

We also welcome measures including for example the \$22 million provided to address elder abuse, including specialist elder abuse units located in legal services and health justice partnerships and the development of a National Plan to address elder abuse.

"Community legal centres are at the frontline of responses to elder abuse and we look forward to discussing with the Government ways we can assist people through delivery of legal services and development of the National Plan.

"However, there are significant areas of concern that were missing in the Budget papers last night- areas that were left unfunded and unaddressed. For example, we are concerned about the failure to provide investment in the Closing the Gap Refresh or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations providing legal services.

We are also surprised there was very limited funding for family and domestic services despite the Government's stated commitment to addressing family violence."

"This Federal Budget was a missed opportunity to ensure we have sustainable funding for essential services like legal assistance, which provide a critical safety net for people who need it most.

"We look forward to working with the Government moving forward to strike a better balance and ensure our communities have access to the services that they need, including access to legal help," Ms Alford said.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact:

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Additional Information:

The specific measures NACLC welcomes include:

- \$22 million over five years from 2017-18 to address elder abuse, including specialist elder abuse units located in legal services and health justice partnerships and the development of a National Plan
- Funding to support the development of a national consistent legal framework and establishing a National Register of Enduring Powers of Attorney
- \$1.6 million over two years from 2017- 18 to develop and deliver a national apology to the survivors of institutional child sexual abuse
- Ongoing funding for implementation of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- \$1.2 million over four years to support the Commonwealth Ombudsman's work as the National Preventive Mechanism Coordinator to provide oversight of places of detention under the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)

NACLC also expressed disappointment about the following areas left unfunded in the Budget, including:

- Failure to provide funding for Closing the Gap Refresh processes or justice-related measures despite the recent release of the Australian Law Reform Commission's Indigenous Incarceration Report which provides another clear pathway for reform
- No additional core funding for legal assistance services
- No additional funding for other core justice system initiatives or bodies
- No increases to social security payment rates, for example Newstart and concerning social security changes included forcing newly-arrived migrants to wait four years to access social security
- No funding for frontline family/domestic violence services and less than \$20 million total for specific family violence-related measures
- Additional focus on punitive measures as part of Department of Human Services 'debt recovery' measures