



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY

MEDIA RELEASE

FRIDAY 16 DECEMBER 2016

UNITING CHURCH PLEA FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) has today welcomed an open letter from the Uniting Church in Australia to the Prime Minister highlighting the devastating impact looming funding cuts will have on legal assistance services and calling for an immediate reversal.

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS), which provide free legal advice to vulnerable and disadvantaged people across Australia, face significant funding cuts from 1 July next year.

The Uniting Church, in its letter signed by President Stuart McMillan and Rev Dennis Corowa, Chair of the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, said:

“Right across the Uniting Church—from congregations in capital cities to very remote communities, those engaged in ministry, policy advisers and the many church community support agencies across Australia—there is deep concern that Commonwealth funding for the legal assistance sector is insufficient. We are concerned that Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) are facing national funding cuts”

“We are extremely concerned about proposed cuts that would affect people in our society who are already experiencing considerable disadvantage.”

In relation to CLCs, the letter added: *“It is shocking to contemplate that a funding cut of \$34.8 million is planned to CLCs over the next three years”*

NACLC National Spokesperson Dan Stubbs welcomed the letter. “We welcome the support of the Uniting Church for the vital work of the legal assistance sector, in particular CLCs and ATSILS, and their concern about the 30% funding cliff facing CLCs from 1 July next year”.

“We have now seen open letters and support from private law firms, all law societies, other community organisations and churches expressing their extreme concern about the funding cliff and the impact it will have on people in our communities”.

“It is time for the Attorney-General and Prime Minister to listen, to reverse the funding cliff, and to provide the necessary additional funding to the legal assistance sector. The Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) to be announced on Monday provides a perfect opportunity to do so” he added.

The Uniting Church in Australia joined NACLC in calling for the Commonwealth Government to:

1. reverse the Commonwealth funding cuts to Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services;
2. immediately inject additional funding of \$120 million per year into the legal assistance sector, in line with the Productivity Commission’s recommendation in 2014; and
3. commit to developing a process for determining adequate and sustainable long-term funding contributions to the legal assistance sector, working with the State and Territory Governments, in consultation with the sector and informed by robust data and research.



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A full copy of the letter is available here:

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/2542-uniting-church-plea-for-legal-assistance-funding>

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