

MEDIA RELEASE

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COMMUNITY LAWYERS WELCOME FUNDING REPRIEVE FROM TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) and Community Legal Centres Tasmania (CLC Tas) today welcomed the announcement by the Tasmanian Government as part of last night's Budget to provide emergency top up funding to three community legal centres in Tasmania.

The State Government announced an additional \$496,000 to legal assistance services, including community legal centres and the Legal Aid Commission, in Tasmania over 2016-2017.

'We are pleased that the Tasmanian Attorney-General Vanessa Goodwin has recognised the important work that community legal centres do for some of Tasmania's most socially and financially disadvantaged people' said Jane Hutchison, Chair of CLC Tas.

'We welcome of the additional funding, some of which will be provided to three of the community legal centres funded by the Commonwealth Government under the National Partnership Agreement for Legal Assistance (NPA). The announcement means that CLCs in Tasmania funded under the NPA will be insulated from funding cuts for another year'.

'The funding will help to secure Tasmania's community legal centres and allow services to continue to be delivered to vulnerable Tasmanians. This is a particularly welcome outcome for centres facing imminent staff cuts and reduction in programs' she added.

However, CLCs are still facing a funding cliff from 1 July 2017, with a 30% cut to Commonwealth funding nationally locked into the NPA.

'We welcome the funding commitment from the Tasmanian Government that will protect CLCs over the coming financial year. It shows an important commitment to the sector and to the people of Tasmania' said Daniel Stubbs, NACLC National Spokesperson.

'However, we are extremely concerned that CLCs in Tasmania still face a looming funding cliff from 1 July 2017 unless the Commonwealth Government reverses the funding cuts. That will mean fewer Tasmanians will get the legal help they need. The Tasmanian Government has taken an important step to protect CLCs and it is time the Commonwealth Government did the same' added Mr Stubbs.

'In addition, unfortunately the State Government's announcement did not restore funding to the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO). The Commonwealth Government cut all funding from EDOs and without an immediate injection of funding, we may see the loss of these vital services' concluded Mr Stubbs.

NACLC and CLC Tas call on the Federal Government to:

1. Reverse the Commonwealth funding cuts to CLCs under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance amounting to \$34.83 million from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2020



2. Immediately inject \$200 million per year to legal assistance services, as recommended by the Productivity Commission, which should be shared between the Commonwealth (60%) and the States and Territories (40%). This should equate to at least an additional \$24 million per year allocated to CLCs (\$14.4 million p.a. Commonwealth and \$9.6 million p.a. from States/Territories)
3. Commit to implementing an appropriate process for determining adequate and sustainable longer-term funding contributions for legal assistance in consultation with the sector.

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