

MEDIA RELEASE

15 JUNE 2016

COMMUNITY LAWYERS VITAL IN ASSISTING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING ELDER ABUSE

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) today acknowledged the importance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in raising awareness of the abuses - physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual, which older people may experience.

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) provide free legal advice to all Australians including assisting older people who are experiencing all forms of elder abuse.

Seniors Rights Victoria is a specialist CLC that helps prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older people. "Our clients include older people facing financial ruin and homelessness resulting from the abuse of power of attorney by family members, older people hit by drug-affected family members and women abused by their husbands all their lives now being abused by their children," said Jenny Blakey, Manager of Seniors Rights Victoria.

"The need for CLCs like Seniors Rights Victoria to address elder abuse in our community is great – the problem is only going to increase as our population ages," she said.

Bill Mitchell, Principal Solicitor at Townsville Community Legal Service said "it is time that the Commonwealth developed a National Framework on Elder Abuse, leading the work of the states and territories to combat elder abuse."

The Director of Brisbane's Caxton Legal Centre, Scott McDougall, highlighted the vital role of CLCs in combatting the growth of this peculiar form of domestic violence. "CLCs, with their strong ties to communities, are best placed to respond to the special needs of socially isolated elderly Australians – yet our ability to service these highly vulnerable clients is about to be severely curtailed by debilitating funding cuts," Mr McDougall said.

The Senior Rights Service, assist older people across New South Wales. From July next year they are facing a 25 percent funding cut. "This would mean the organisation would have to reduce the working hours of its solicitors. If these cuts pass, 1400 vulnerable and marginalised older people in NSW will not have access to justice" said Craig Gear, President of Seniors Rights Service.

As a result, this World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, NACLC reiterates its call to all political parties for:

1. The reversal of 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. An immediate injection of \$200 million per year into the broader legal assistance service system, 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 and Territories); and
3. A commitment by all levels of Government 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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