

MEDIA RELEASE

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NACLC ACKNOWLEDGES VOLUNTEERS FOR IMPORTANT ROLE THEY PLAY IN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

As National Volunteer Week comes to a close the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) acknowledges the tremendous contributions volunteers make to Community Legal Centres (CLCs).

CLCs were assisted by 6,500 volunteers who contributed a total of over 776,000 hours, representing a total return on investment of \$8.47 million over the year according to the *2014 National Census of Community Legal Centres*. The majority of CLC volunteers are lawyers and law students, but also social workers and social work students, administrative assistants, migration agents and community legal educators.

‘These figures reflect the tremendous contributions volunteers make to CLCs and show how vital volunteers are in helping CLCs to meet ever increasing demand for legal help,’ said Daniel Stubbs, NACLC National Spokesperson’.

‘Volunteers expand the capacity of CLCs to deliver frontline services and assist with law reform and policy work, aimed at achieving systemic changes to the law which benefit people across the community’ he said.

‘Many CLCs just wouldn’t be able to see the number of clients they do without the support of volunteers’ he added.

Jane Timmermanis, General Manager of Sussex Street Community Law Service in Western Australia said ‘we could not deliver the breadth and quality of legal services we do without the valuable skills of our volunteer lawyers and students’.

‘Our 170 lawyer and paralegal volunteers bring great skill, energy and compassion to their roles as they support our clients and strengthen our organisation’s ability to service our local communities. Last financial year our volunteers delivered over 2000 free legal advices’ said Andrea Staunton, Manager of Volunteers and Education at Peninsula Community Legal Centre in Victoria.

Caitlin Perry, Executive Director of Darwin Community Legal Service in the Northern Territory added ‘our centre is very fortunate to have one of the largest volunteer programs for legal assistance services in the Northern Territory and those volunteers are a really crucial cog in our centre’s wheel. However, we can’t use volunteers alone so our case work is limited by our lack of capacity to provide help to people in need’.

‘While it is important to acknowledge the contributions volunteers make to CLCs, it is equally important to point out that this is not a substitute for adequately funded legal assistance services’ concluded Mr Stubbs.

This National Volunteer Week, NACLC reiterates its call for the Federal Government to:

1. Reverse the \$12.1 million funding cut to Community Legal Centres nationally in 2017-2018, the \$11.6 million cut in 2018-2019 and the \$11.13 million cut in 2019-2020 (amounting to a \$34.83 million cut over the period 2017-18 to 2019-2020) under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services.
2. Implement the Productivity Commission's recommendation from its Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry and provide an immediate injection of \$200 million per year into the legal assistance service sector, 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)
3. Commit to implementing an appropriate process for determining adequate and sustainable longer-term funding contributions to the legal assistance sector by both Federal and State and Territory Governments, in consultation with the sector.

To arrange an interview or for more information please contact:

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Note to editors:

More information about volunteers in Community Legal Centres, including statistics and individual profiles is available in the NACLC 'Working Collaboratively: Community Legal Centres and Volunteers' publication, available here: http://www.naclc.org.au/resources/NACLC_VOUNTEER2014_WEB.pdf