



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Local and community based legal help under threat

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) today expressed concern about a growing trend across Australia that is seeing State Governments preference centralised rather than local, community-based access to legal help.

The concern follows the Victorian Government's response to an "Access to Justice" Review earlier this week. The Review was carried out by the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation at the request of the Victorian Attorney-General.

"We welcome the additional community legal centre funding provided by the Commonwealth Government and some State Governments in recent weeks. It provides a much needed lifeline for the sector" said Nassim Arrage, Chief Executive Officer of NACLC.

"We also welcome several of the broader initiatives announced by the Victorian Government as part of the response aimed at enhancing access to justice".

"However, we are concerned about a growing trend towards centralising the decision-making about, and access to, legal help, including in South Australia and more recently Victoria" he added.

"Approaches to the funding and administration of CLCs vary across Australia. Importantly however, collaboration and mechanisms for drawing on the expertise of all legal assistance providers should be a core part of any service system".

"It is also clear that some State Governments are moving towards establishing a single primary entry point for legal help. We are concerned that this type of approach ignores the importance of local rather than centralised services; the unique standing and connection CLCs have in their communities and with other services; and the hesitancy or barriers some of the people we help may face in accessing services this way".

"We welcome more detailed information about how the relevant State Governments intend to implement the changes at a practical level. However, in our view a better approach would be based on the Productivity Commission's 2014 Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry".

"We will continue to work with all levels of Government and our Members to make sure that the funding and administration of the legal assistance sector is adequate and appropriate, to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of people who need help from our centres every year can get it" he concluded.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact:

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*NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.*