



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Budget misses opportunity to address crisis in legal help

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) has expressed disappointment that tonight's Commonwealth Budget failed to address the ongoing crisis for Australians needing legal assistance.

"When people have legal problems, it can impact their health, housing or safety dramatically. The Budget is a missed opportunity to take the urgent action required to address the needs of people who cannot afford private lawyers." said NACLC National Convenor, Michael Smith.

"The Commonwealth Government announced funding cuts to Community Legal Centres of \$19.6 million over four years in December 2013 in their MYEFO statement. Despite strong evidence and increasing demand, this Budget has not reversed these cuts. These cuts will impact on Australians needing legal help when they most need it.

"Community Legal Centres are responding to people every day with legal problems such as family violence, employment issues, debt, consumer problems and tenancy disputes. These are problems that cannot wait and delays just make the problems more difficult, stressful and expensive.

"Community Legal Centres know that unresolved legal problems can escalate, leading to added strain on the justice system and on government services, and further legal, financial, social, and health problems for the individual. It saves money all round to provide early access to legal help for Australians who can't afford a lawyer.

"Major research has repeatedly outlined the unmet legal need in the community and the need to expand legal assistance services. Failing to address these needs will ultimately be a poor economic choice as well as leading to poorer social outcomes." Mr Smith said.

Ends

For further information or to arrange an interview contact National Convenor Michael Smith 0421 437 883.

*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.*