



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Over 150,000 people turned away from Community Legal Centres each year

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) today released its latest National Census Report. The report reveals the capacity, priorities and trends in the work of Community Legal Centres (CLCs) across Australia.

CLCs are often the last port of call for people who can't afford to pay for a private lawyer. However the Census shows that over 150,000 of Australia's most disadvantaged and vulnerable people had to be turned away by CLCs in the previous financial year 2013-2014.

Michael Smith, NACLC Chair, said "the total figure for turnaways is actually much higher than this, as only about 75% of our member centres were able to provide details of their turnaways. It is extremely concerning that so many people who can't otherwise access the legal system are being turned away."

"The most concerning issue was that two-thirds of centres responding, reported turning clients away due to insufficient resources. Given that CLC's are often the last resort, options for these clients are very limited" continued Mr Smith.

24 centres (30% of respondents) reported turning away over 1,000 people in the year. "These are not just statistics, but real people, often highly vulnerable, who cannot receive the help they need. It's also very difficult for staff and volunteers to have to keep telling people we can't assist them," said Mr Smith.

"We know CLCs assist the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community. The Census showed that 13.3% of CLC clients, identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person, and 25.4% identified as a person with disability," added Mr Smith.

"Given the high level of turnaways, it is vital that all legal assistance providers, including CLCs receive an immediate cash injection of \$200 million per year by all levels of government, as recommended by the Productivity Commission" concluded Mr Smith.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact NACLC Chairperson Michael Smith 0421 437 883

\*These figures only reflect the combined responses from those CLCs that responded to the Census, rather than the whole CLC sector. To see the full report open the link:

[http://www.naclc.org.au/resources/NACLC\\_NationalCensusofCLCs\\_2014\\_COMBINED.pdf](http://www.naclc.org.au/resources/NACLC_NationalCensusofCLCs_2014_COMBINED.pdf)

*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.*