



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Plan for addressing crisis in legal assistance missing from Federal Budget

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) is disappointed that no increases in funding for legal assistance services were announced by the Commonwealth Government in today's Budget despite unprecedented levels of demand.

"With the introduction of a National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance from 1 July that will now include Community Legal Centres, Commonwealth leadership is essential. There is a danger that chronic underfunding of legal help for people in need will now be locked in for the next five years. We are also very concerned that the forward estimates released today show further funding reductions from mid-2017" said Michael Smith, Chair of NACLC.

"The crisis in legal help has been well documented. The Productivity Commission recently called for all levels of government to work together to provide an immediate injection of \$200 million per year for legal assistance services – across Community Legal Centres, Indigenous Legal Services and Legal Aid Commissions".

"An increase in funding to legal assistance services in this year's Budget would have been consistent with this recommendation and shown that the Commonwealth Government understands the high level of unmet legal need in Australia. Instead, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community, experiencing legal problems such as family violence, housing or debt will continue to miss out on the legal assistance they desperately need" added Mr Smith.

While NACLC welcomed the restoration in March 2015 of some earlier funding cuts, with a focus on family violence, Community Legal Centres across Australia are left 'where they were before', facing great demand and having to turn away clients needing vital legal help.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact NACLC Chairperson 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.*