



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Commonwealth stalls on funding agreement for Community Legal Centres as deadline looms

Commonwealth Funding Agreements with Community Legal Centres (CLCs) end next Tuesday and the new National Partnership Agreement for Legal Assistance Services (NPA), which is due to replace them still hasn't been signed, said leading CLC representatives today.

"We have ongoing concerns about the NPA and associated funding. For example we already know that there will be funding cuts to CLCs in South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, but the delay by the Prime Minister in signing the NPA will put further pressure on the CLC sector, that could see more clients turned away," said Michael Smith, National Association of Community Legal Centre (NACLC) Chair.

"CLCs in Western Australia are facing immediate funding cuts and the ongoing uncertainty about funding is exacerbating an already difficult situation," added Helen Creed, Executive Director at Community Legal Centres Association of Western Australia.

"This year, half of all the people in Queensland will have a legal problem. Most won't be able to access or afford legal help; tens of thousands rely on CLCs to get the help they need. If the NPA isn't signed in time, where will people with legal problems go if they're confronted with a 'closed' sign at their local CLC?" said James Farrell, Director at Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services (QAILS).

"The Prime Minister and State and Territory leaders must ensure there is funding for CLCs on 1 July so they can continue to help clients such as women escaping domestic violence and people with housing or debt issues," added Alastair McEwin, Executive Director of Community Legal Centres NSW.

"We need the NPA signed to ensure certainty for CLCs across Australia, but it is by no means perfect. The NPA includes immediate funding cuts in some jurisdictions, a 30% cut to CLC funding nationally from 2017-2018, and rationing of free legal help by narrowing who can get free legal help and what counts as legal need," commented Liana Buchanan, Executive Officer at the Federation of Community Legal Centres in Victoria.

"Signing the NPA is urgent and is the first step, but the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments must also address the serious underfunding of CLCs moving forward," concluded Mr Smith.

For further information contact NACLC Chair, 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.*