



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### NACLC calls on Attorney-General to review “impossible timeline” for Proposed Legal Assistance Reforms

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) has written to the Commonwealth Government, expressing major concerns about proposed reforms to funding of legal assistance services and particularly the timetable for change.

The Commonwealth Government confirmed this week that it proposes to change the funding model and process for allocating funds for Community Legal Centres (CLCs). The Commonwealth is proposing to allocate a certain amount of funding to CLCs in each jurisdiction, but then it will be the responsibility of the relevant State or Territory Government to allocate funding to individual Centres.

The Commonwealth has stated that new arrangements will take effect from 1 July 2015, but neither the amounts of funding to each state or territory, nor the terms of the proposed funding agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments will be known until the Federal Budget on 12 May 2015.

“While elements of these reforms have merit, this is really an impossible timeline to effectively deal with funding for an absolutely crucial sector,” said Michael Smith, NACLC Chair. “Community Legal Centres assist thousands of highly vulnerable and disadvantaged clients every week and these people will face huge uncertainty when they most need legal help.”

“This will mean significant uncertainty for CLCs in terms of the services they will be able to offer clients moving forward and leave only a matter of weeks for funding allocation decisions to be made, and the drafting, negotiation, and signing of funding agreements. The proposed timetable is unrealistic and is actually counterproductive to the express intent of the proposed reforms” continued Mr Smith.

NACLC and CLCs are already greatly concerned about the effect of announced funding cuts on Centres and all current Commonwealth funding agreements for CLCs are due to expire on 30 June 2015. With the proposed reforms, there is minimal infrastructure in place to transition to a new structure from 1 July.

NACLC supports the sentiments expressed by all State and Territory Attorneys-General in a letter sent to Attorney-General George Brandis last week calling for no further funding cuts to CLCs and that States and Territories be informed of funding allocations by the end of March if the reforms are to proceed.

“NACLC calls on the Commonwealth Government to defer implementation of the proposed reforms for one year to allow all legal assistance services and governments to work together to implement practical, evidence-based reform which will ensure CLC clients, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the community, receive the legal help they desperately need.”

For further information or to arrange an interview contact NACLC Chair Michael Smith on 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.*