



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

3 December 2014

### **NACLC Welcomes Productivity Commission Report Conclusion: \$200 Million Needed for Legal Assistance Services**

The National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc (NACLC) welcomes the Productivity Commission's Access to Justice Arrangements Report tabled in Parliament today.

The Productivity Commission recognised the important role of and work done by legal assistance providers in Australia, including Community Legal Centres (CLCs), the major level of unmet legal need, and that there is a need for more resources to meet the legal needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Australia. The Commission identified and quantified the level of funding required, recommending an immediate injection of \$200 million from Commonwealth, state and territory governments to adequately meet legal need of disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Australia.

"NACLC calls on all levels of government to consider the Report and commit the additional \$200 million required to adequately fund legal assistance services in Australia, particularly in light of announced funding cuts to CLCs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and the uncertainty around Family Violence Prevention Legal Services" said Michael Smith, NACLC National Convenor.

NACLC also welcomes the Commission's recognition of the important role of CLCs in undertaking law reform and policy advocacy work in improving ineffective or unfair laws, policies and practices, and by doing so, preventing legal problems from occurring in the future. The Commission recommended that, "Governments should provide funding for strategic advocacy and law reform activities that seek to identify and remedy systemic issues and so reduce demand for frontline services."

"The Commission recognised that law reform and advocacy is a core activity of CLCs, that such work is an efficient way to use limited taxpayer dollars, and that the Government should support it being undertaken. In light of this, the Government's restriction on CLCs undertaking this work with Commonwealth funding doesn't make sense" continued Mr Smith.

The Commission also recognised the need for, and importance of, specialised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal assistance services, while also recognising the importance of CLCs continuing to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

*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.*



Mr Smith said, “NACLC has consistently advocated that the most appropriate, culturally safe and effective legal service providers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are dedicated services, managed and as far as possible staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and is therefore pleased to see this recognised by the Commission. In light of the Commission’s finding, NACLC calls on the Commonwealth Government to ensure that ATSILS and FVPLS continue to receive direct and adequate levels of Commonwealth funding.”

Mr Smith also noted that NACLC has concerns about the correctness or practicality of some of the Commission’s conclusions, for example about supporting consistent eligibility principles across legal assistance providers; and the Commission’s failure to consider existing efforts of CLCs to measure and respond to legal need, both in terms of targeted service delivery and location.

Mr Smith said, “Further, NACLC questions the basis for the Productivity Commission’s comments about the perceived high administration costs at some CLCs. We think that the Commission may have failed to appreciate that the ‘administrative’ costs they measured in CLCs may be being used, in addition to supporting small numbers of employed lawyers, to provide staff to attract, train and supervise large numbers of volunteers and/or pro bono lawyers to provide legal services – services that were not counted in this analysis by the Productivity Commission.”

Finally, the Report expressed the view that the current National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services is ‘not working’ and “provides a useful blueprint for reform in some respects, including in guiding the negotiation of a new NPA-type agreement on legal assistance and the development of new funding models for legal assistance services in Australia. It also recognised the important role that state and territory governments must play in funding CLCs,” concluded Mr Smith.

Ends

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

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