



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **No Money - No Lawyer: one in five Australians misses out on legal advice**

Over 48,000 of Australia's most disadvantaged and vulnerable people had to be turned away last year by not-for-profit Community Legal Centres (CLCs), traditionally the last port of call for people who can't afford to pay for a private lawyer.

'The total number is much higher than this,' said Michael Smith, National Convenor, of the National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc. (NACLC), the peak body that represents around 200 CLCs across Australia.

About 100 CLCs counted the people they couldn't help in the last financial year and reported these to NACLC's recent National CLC Census. It supports findings of a survey the previous year, of over 530 community service agencies by Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), which revealed legal services ranked second highest (63%) of frontline agencies (after housing) on their inability to meet demand.

'For many disadvantaged Australians, a CLC is their only hope of securing legal help, and it is unacceptable that so many people in need have been turned away without seeing a lawyer or being able to be referred to a suitable alternative provider.'

'Inadequate funding, under-resourced centres being forced to target their services more tightly and cut back on service hours, and potential conflict of interest with other disadvantaged clients seeking assistance, are the main reasons behind these turn away figures,' said Mr Smith.

'CLCs assist marginalised Australians in many urban, rural and remote areas to the best of their capacity, but we know these services are overstretched and we also know that there are places in Australia with no centre and sometimes no other accessible legal service.'

'A significant majority of CLCs receive funding from the Australian Government, and some from state governments, but the responses to the recent NACLC survey show that government needs to do more. As the last option for people seeking help, often there is no other service when the CLC cannot help.'

'Funding CLCs has been proven to make good economic sense. An independent economic cost benefit analysis commissioned by NACLC established that CLCs provide on average a cost benefit ratio of 1:18; that is, every dollar invested in funding CLCs has generated \$18 worth of benefit to the Australian community, particularly to governments,' said Mr Smith.

*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.*

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'For the individual involved, the 'benefit' of receiving help with seemingly overwhelming problems can often not be measured by a dollar sum: it often means so much more: a life safe from family violence, a home saved from repossession, debts renegotiated into a manageable arrangement, a job retained, and all the physical and emotional wellbeing that can come with those,' concluded Mr Smith.

Ends

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