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## **MEDIA RELEASE** **For Immediate Release**

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### **NACLC deeply concerned over Coalition's asylum seeker policy**

The National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc (NACLC) is greatly concerned by the Federal Opposition's promise to stop funding immigration advice for asylum seekers if it wins this weekend's election.

The Coalition plans to save \$100 million over 4 years by removing funding of legal assistance for asylum seekers claiming protection. The legal assistance scheme would be replaced with 'information' kits to help asylum seekers apply for protection.

NACLC believes that this policy would severely impact on people's right to a fair consideration of their refugee status. The proposed policy is likely to prevent protection being granted in cases where the applicant had a genuine claim but was ill-equipped to present it.

The policy would contravene Australia's international obligations under the Refugee convention.

"The removal of funded legal assistance for asylum seekers would be a denial of social justice to a very vulnerable group of people," said Michael Smith, National Convenor of NACLC, the peak national organisation representing community legal centres in Australia.

"This legal assistance helps to ensure that protection claims are examined fairly. The lawyers provide a critical service for asylum seekers in helping them to understand their options and navigate the complex protection visa application process," said Mr Smith.

Asylum seekers helped by community legal centres generally have no experience negotiating Australia's legal system. They do not understand complex immigration and refugee law matters. Many have difficulties reading or writing in their own language, let alone English.

Community lawyers assist the Department of Immigration & Citizenship by helping asylum seekers present their claims clearly. They support asylum seekers through the confronting and complex application process and help to keep cases out of the Courts.

"We know that funding these specific legal services actually saves government departments and the Courts significant amounts of money. These funding cuts are unlikely to provide real savings in the overall system and will cause problems right through the immigration process."

"The asylum seekers who come to community legal centres are often survivors of torture and trauma," said Mr Smith. "Without access to advice, the trauma may well be extended and people unfairly be returned to the persecution they fled from," he concluded.

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