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MEDIA RELEASE

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NACLC welcomes the announcement by the Australian Attorney-General and the Assistant Treasurer of the establishment of a Productivity Commission inquiry into how to improve access to justice in Australia.

The community legal centre (CLC) sector has been advocating strongly for increased support from government to meet the huge demand for legal help that currently exists. With the current resources there is no way that CLCs and other publicly funded legal assistance providers are able to meet that demand.

National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc. (NACLC) National Convenor Michael Smith said, “more than half a million Australians are missing out on access to justice simply because it costs too much, this is completely unacceptable. This is why NACLC welcomes the Productivity Commission Inquiry.

“The Productivity Commission is an appropriate body to examine not only the economic value provided by these services, but also the immense differences that availability of free public legal services make to individuals – ordinary people and their families. It can also measure the contribution and value to achieving a fairer Australia and contributing to community wellbeing.

“This inquiry is a welcome and critical opportunity to make a difference for all Australians facing legal problems, especially those unable to afford legal help from private lawyers and who do not qualify for legal assistance, said Mr Smith.

Last year, NACLC released an independent Economic Cost Benefit Analysis of Community Legal Centres* that shows that CLCs are providing strong return on investment.

The study finds that, on average, CLCs have a cost benefit ratio of 1:18; that is, for every dollar spent by government on funding CLCs, they return a benefit to society that is 18 times the funding investment. To express this in dollar terms, if the average held constant for CLCs across Australia, the \$47 million spent on the CLC program nationally in 2009/10 would yield around \$846 million of benefit to Australia.

“The cost benefit ratio of 1:18 in CLCs is far more than the ratio of 1:2 or 1:3 that governments usually regard as a sufficient return for large infrastructure investments.

“We know that CLCs provide vital access, equity and community benefits, but on an economic basis alone, CLCs provide extraordinary value for money.

“NACLC welcomes the opportunity to work with the Inquiry and the Government on identifying improved ways that the legal needs of all people in Australia can be met,” concluded Mr Smith.

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For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact media officer Anaya Latter on 0432 121 636.

* [The study](#) was undertaken by independent consultants Judith Stubbs & Associates commissioned by NACLC.