

# Media Release



## What's the future of free legal help in Victoria?

Thursday 13 October 2016 – embargoed until 12.00am Friday 14 October 2016

The future of free legal help in Victoria will be the focus of a symposium at Melbourne Town Hall tomorrow. [Achieving Justice](#) will bring together community legal centres, Victoria Legal Aid, the Victorian Council of Social Service, Domestic Violence Victoria and key not-for-profit organisations working for social justice.

'With the release of the Victorian Government's [Access to Justice Review](#) amid extraordinary pressures on community legal centres facing imminent Federal Government cuts, this symposium is a vital opportunity to look at the serious challenges to accessible free legal help, but also the opportunities to strengthen how we assist vulnerable people,' said Serina McDuff, executive officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres, today.

The review acknowledged under-funding across legal help services, calling for increased State and Federal investment, echoing the 2014 [Productivity Commission](#), which recommended an immediate boost to community legal centres, legal aid commissions and Aboriginal legal services of at least \$200 million a year.

'The advocates brought together at this symposium will show that meeting the legal and broader needs of the most vulnerable people is a collaborative effort that needs to be sustainably funded.

'The review also acknowledged the value and importance of integrated service delivery, which is how community legal centres have been working for decades to ensure vulnerable Victorians facing complex social, financial and legal issues receive the help they need.

'The symposium will also show how advocates are working to drive positive change and innovate through technology to address serious problems like family violence,' McDuff said.

Domestic Violence Victoria CEO Fiona McCormack will address the Federation's annual general meeting (12.30–1.30pm), and the symposium will conclude with a family violence panel of leading community legal centres.

In 2015–16, Victorian community legal centres saw a 19 per cent spike in demand for free legal advice for family violence, and there was a 12 per cent increase in the number of family violence cases opened. Family violence intervention orders are the top legal problem type for Victorian community legal centres.

*Achieving Justice* will be held at Melbourne Town Hall from 9.00am on Friday 14 October 2016. The event is open to media. The Federation of Community Legal Centres is the peak body for 49 community legal centres in Victoria.

### For media interview and information

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