

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull
cc.
Attorney-General George Brandis QC MP
Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten MP
Shadow Attorney-General, Mark Dreyfus QC MP
Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Richard Di Natale
Greens Spokesperson on Justice Issues, Senator Nick McKim



14 June 2016

Dear Prime Minister,

It's time to acknowledge and act on the crisis in community legal centre funding

As the peak body for fifty community legal centres in Victoria, we write to call on the Federal Government to act urgently on the compelling evidence of a crisis in the funding of free legal help for vulnerable people through community legal centres in this State and, indeed, across Australia.

Despite the May Federal Budget, community legal centres nationally still face a 30 per cent cut from July 2017, with the Budget retaining more than \$34 million in cuts amid a broader Federal funding shortfall of \$100 million over the next four years.

As Attorney-General Brandis is aware, chronic underfunding by the Federal Government before the cuts commence already compels centres nationally to turn away at least 160,000 people each year.

As community legal centres help people who can't afford a private lawyer and who can't get help from legal aid, the people we are forced to turn away very often have nowhere else to go.

Unless funding of community legal centres is urgently addressed, yet more women will remain at risk of family violence, and the work of innovative health–justice partnerships and specialist domestic violence units [your government has supported](#) will be undermined.

However, the impacts extend well beyond family violence. Under projected funding, help with family law problems will also be further reduced, and more people will be left without help in the face of crushing debt, unfair fines, consumer scams, workplace mistreatment, discrimination, elder abuse, eviction and homelessness.

Despite the announcement of some additional family violence funding on 12 May, the broader funding picture community legal centres faced before the Federal Budget is essentially the [same bleak picture](#) they still face after it.

We call on you to reverse cuts to community legal centres, sustain funding under the Women's Safety Package through to 2019–20, and boost funding to reflect recommendation 21.4 of the Productivity Commission in its [report](#) on access to justice arrangements.

In doing so, we urge you not to divert vital funding from other free legal assistance services, or from broader services addressing violence against women and their children.

Level 3
225 Bourke Street
Melbourne
Victoria 3000

Tel: 03-9652 1500
Fax: 03-9654 5204
administration@fclc.org.au
www.communitylaw.org.au

Federation of
Community Legal Centres

We estimate that these measures would result in Federal Government funding for community legal centres nationally of \$61.6 million a year.

In April, you announced at COAG that a national summit will be held in October to tackle violence against women and their children.

On 16 March 2015, Attorney-General Brandis stated that 'community legal centres are very often the front line against domestic violence'.

On 27 August 2015, speaking at the national conference of community legal centres, the Attorney-General stated more broadly that 'The work of the community legal centres is at the heart of Australia's aspiration to be a fair society'.

Cuts and chronic underfunding of community legal centres contradict the Federal Government's claimed commitment to end violence against women and their children, and they damage what should be a shared national ambition of a fair society.

The crisis in legal assistance funding has thousands of human victims. We call on you to act.

Sincerely,



Joint Acting Executive Officer



Joint Acting Executive Officer

Supporters:

