

Media Release

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MYEFO fails to halt funding cliff for Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

The Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) announced today represents another missed opportunity by the Federal Government to guarantee access to vital legal help for vulnerable and disadvantaged people across Australia says the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).

Between 2017-2018 and 2019-2020, Community Legal Centres (CLCs) will lose almost \$35 million and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) will lose close to \$18 million.

“Community Legal Centres help over 215,000 clients every year and conservative numbers tell us that we turn away over 160,000 other vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Despite this, CLCs are facing a 30% funding cliff nationally from 1 July next year and there was nothing in MYEFO today to stop the funding cliff” said Dan Stubbs, NACLC National Spokesperson.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services provide vital legal help to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2017, the ATSILS will be forced to withdraw frontline services from towns, remote and regional locations, courts and tribunals” said Wayne Muir, Co-Chair of NATSILS.

“The ATSILS will be required to make critical staff members redundant, will be prevented from offering after hours assistance to those with emergencies and will have no choice but to turn away Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeking help from culturally competent legal assistance providers” he said.

“The hard truth is that ATSILS will be so severely impacted by these cuts that they will be unable to fundamentally help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people uphold their right to the natural justice that all Australian citizens deserve” added Mr Muir.

“The funding cuts will have a huge impact across Australia. We understand there are significant budget pressures, however we urge the Government to remember that investing in legal assistance services actually saves the Government and community money in the long term” said Mr Stubbs.

“No announcement today means time is almost up for these services and their clients. We can only hope that in the new year and in the course of preparing the next Federal Budget the Government listens to the voices across the community that have come out in support of the sector, including most recently pro bono firms, law societies and churches, and reverses the funding cliff facing CLCs and ATSILS” Mr Stubbs added.

“As we approach Christmas and there is a further spike in demand for legal assistance, we remind the Government that we are here to help the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community, we are already forced to turn people away, and that the situation is only getting worse” Mr Stubbs concluded.

To arrange an interview or for more information contact:

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