



MEDIA RELEASE

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Relief for disadvantaged communities as NACLC welcomes reversal of funding cuts to legal assistance

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) welcomes the announcement made by the Commonwealth Attorney-General today that the funding cuts to community legal centres (CLCs) included in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2013, will be reversed.

“The announcement today shows that the Abbott Government has heard the calls from the community that free legal help for people experiencing disadvantage is essential and must continue,” said Michael Smith, NACLC Chairperson.

“In particular for women and children facing family violence, the legal support from their community legal centre can be a real lifeline and prevents the violence escalating, improving safety and support. It’s also vital for people with housing and employment problems, for people with debt and consumer issues and many struggling Australians with legal problems” emphasised Mr Smith.

“This decision also represents an acknowledgement by the Government of the vital and cost-efficient work that community legal centres do in providing legal assistance to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community” said Mr Smith.

“The funding cuts were due to come into effect on 1 July 2015 and we were beginning to see their impact with reductions in frontline legal services, staff resignations and more CLCs having to turn away more clients. This announcement will bring much needed relief to many CLCs and most importantly to their clients and communities” continued Mr Smith.

NACLC also welcomes the announcement that funding cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services will also be reversed. “The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are a crucial component of the legal assistance landscape Australia can’t demonstrate true commitment to dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities without these services that help resolve the unacceptable overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system, as highlighted in the recent Close the Gap Progress and Priorities Report” said Mr Smith.

NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.

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While welcoming the funding announcements, “there is still some way to go to ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities are not turned away from receiving legal services. This can be achieved by all levels of government committing to a real partnership to provide the additional \$200 million to legal assistance services in Australia, as recommended by the Productivity Commission's Access to Justice Report” concluded Mr Smith.

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