

Media Release

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New report highlights need for community law salary increases

Community lawyers are significantly underpaid compared to their counterparts in the government and private sector, according to a joint submission lodged in the Fair Work Australia Community Sector Equal Pay Case. The submission, by the Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres and Community Legal Centres NSW, calls for significant increases in community legal centre (CLC) pay rates.

The submission is backed by new research, commissioned by Community Legal Centres NSW, from human resources firm Mercer. Mercer's report states that the following award pay increases are needed for CLCs to be competitive: Centre Manager 75%, Principal Solicitor 75%, Solicitor 24% and Community Worker 14%. In making these recommendations, Mercer examined award wage rates for CLC positions and compared them with wage rates for public sector positions of comparable work value.

"The base salary for a principal solicitor of a CLC in NSW is \$64,000. The equivalent role in the Australian Public Service is paid \$130,000, which is over double that of the Principal Solicitor", said Alastair McEwin, Director of Community Legal Centres NSW. "When you consider that the Principal Solicitor is responsible for the centre's entire legal practice, this wage discrepancy can hardly be considered fair. It's time for government to redress this inequality and ensure that wages paid in the community sector are on par with those paid for similar roles."

The submission to Fair Work Australia notes that the CLC sector is predominantly female. A 2011 Victorian CLC workforce survey, to which 88% of CLCs responded, showed that 73% of Victorian CLC workers are female. The latest information about the NSW CLC staffing profile is contained in the 2006 Review of the NSW Community Legal Centres Funding Program, which also identified an overwhelmingly female workforce.

"Our workforce is predominantly female and our workers are significantly underpaid compared with government sector positions of comparable work value, let alone private sector positions. We believe that gender is a factor in this disparity," said Hugh de Kretser, Executive Officer of the Victorian Federation of CLCs.

The Federation and Community Legal Centres NSW congratulate the Gillard government for committing to provide extra funding to support any phased in pay increase and called on state and territory governments to play their part in committing to fully funding any pay increases awarded for the community sector.

Copies of the submission and the 2011 Mercer Report are available on www.communitylaw.org.au or by emailing administration@fclc.org.au.

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