

# Media Release



Federation of  
Community Legal Centres  
VICTORIA

## Demand for legal help mirrors national justice gap

Wednesday 10 October 2012 – for immediate release

On the eve of the release of a national legal needs survey, Victorian figures show rising demand for free legal help provided by the State's 50 community legal centres. The past five years have seen a 20 per cent increase in the demand for legal information, advice and casework provided by the centres, with family violence prevention work a significant driver of the 41 per cent of CLC work comprised by family law matters.

"Family violence prevention work has increased by nearly 70 per cent over the past five years, and is the most common issue community legal centres help with. In many cases women have nowhere else to go," said Hugh de Kretser, Executive Officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic).

The rise in demand will be a key theme when de Kretser addresses the Federation's Annual General Meeting to be held today (1pm) at Melbourne Town Hall.

"There's a growing gap between the most disadvantaged who qualify for some publicly funded legal assistance and those who can afford a private lawyer.

He said tomorrow's Australia-wide legal needs survey was likely to bear out the Victorian picture at a national level, showing that funding for community legal centres had failed to keep pace with growing demand.

"We're not talking about free legal help in criminal matters, which in Victoria comprises only 7 per cent of CLC work – we're talking about family law and family violence, and everyday civil law matters such as credit and debt, housing, and employment law. These are issues that can affect anyone, but many simply can't afford the legal help they need," de Kretser said.

Peter Noble, Coordinator of the Bendigo-based Loddon-Campaspe Community Legal Centre will also speak at the AGM on the vital contribution CLCs make to local communities. Noble played a leading role in the recently announced pilot funding for a new CLC in the Goulburn Valley.

"The problem we're facing in Victoria is that CLCs are a vital part of the legal safety-net for ordinary people, but it's stretched too far. It's time for the Victorian and Federal Governments to invest according to need to prevent and intervene early on legal problems that have severe impacts if left unaddressed," de Kretser concluded.

A national review of legal assistance services is currently underway, with the Federation contributing to the national access to justice campaign, Community Law Australia ([www.communitylawaustralia.org.au](http://www.communitylawaustralia.org.au)).

The AGM will be held from 1pm in the Supper Room, Level 3, Melbourne Town Hall. Media are welcome, but are encouraged to RSVP to Darren Lewin-Hill, the Federation's Communications Manager, on 0488 773 535.

### Media contacts

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