

Media Release



Community legal peak supports law reform and advocacy with new guide

Tuesday 17 February 2015 – for immediate release

The peak for Victoria's 49 community legal centres has launched a guide supporting community legal centres' law reform and policy work, showing centres how they can advocate effectively to change unfair laws, policies and practices.

'We're launching this guide today because we recognise – together with the [Productivity Commission](#) – that policy advocacy and law reform are an essential and irreplaceable part of the work of community legal centres.

'People who can't afford a private lawyer need access to free legal help, but they also need a fairer system in which legal problems are not needlessly repeated because unfair laws, policies and practices are allowed to stand,' said Federation Executive Officer, Liana Buchanan, today.

Advocacy restrictions introduced into funding agreements on 1 July last year by the Federal Attorney-General prevent the use of Federal funds for policy advocacy and law reform. Victoria's community legal centres are still permitted to use state funding for this work.

'Daily contact with clients means community lawyers are often the only ones to see how a law, or a part of the system, is affecting people's lives. Community legal centres have a responsibility to make sure that information gets through to government, and to work to change the policies or practices affecting our clients. *The Change Toolkit* shows how to do it through stories of community legal centres creating change that has direct benefits for frontline services.

'In the context of Federal [funding cuts](#) to community legal centres nationally, it is crucial that centres identify and advocate on serious legal problems – including those related to family violence, homelessness and poor consumer practices – that will go unaddressed if we do not have a strong community legal sector standing up on the issues and working for change,' Ms Buchanan said.

'Not only is law reform a more efficient use of scarce resources – as it is often the only way to stop hundreds of clients requiring legal help with the same problem in the future – it leads to better public policy, policy informed by the experiences of those affected by family violence, the homeless, and other disadvantaged and marginalised people assisted by community legal centres,' she concluded.

A successful campaign to expunge historic gay sex convictions in Victoria will be the subject of a launch presentation by Anna Brown, Director of Advocacy and Strategic Litigation at the Human Rights Law Centre.

The Change Toolkit will be launched at 5.00pm at Russell Kennedy Lawyers, Level 12, 469 Latrobe Street, Melbourne, on Tuesday 17 February 2015.

The toolkit can be accessed at www.thechangetoolkit.org.au

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