

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

One community legal centre wins back funding, but free legal help for vulnerable uncertain nationwide

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Reinstatement of two-year funding to a single community legal centre by the Federal Government has been welcomed, but leaves 13 centres in Victoria and nearly 60 centres nationally with cuts commencing on 1 July and ongoing funding uncertainty, according to the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria).

'Yarra Ranges Community Legal Centre is a great example of why free legal help in local communities is vitally important, especially given the prevalence of family violence, and we commend the Federal Government for acknowledging that cutting this service would have a devastating impact. However, centres throughout Victoria and Australia are still facing cuts that will leave vulnerable people with no options for legal help. For the sake of these centres and their clients, we hope to see similar announcements made in coming weeks,' said Federation Executive Officer, Liana Buchanan, today.

Cuts announced in the 2014-15 [Budget](#) will see a 25 per cent reduction in funding of community legal centres by the Federal Government by 2017-18 (\$44.6m in 2013-14 to \$32.7m in 2017-18).

'The Government should acknowledge the scale of legal need against just \$32.6 million coming to community legal centres from the Federal Government in 2017-18. And that's without considering the question of further cuts that may be revealed through the May Federal Budget,' Ms Buchanan said.

'These cuts not only need to be reversed as a matter of urgency, community legal centres need to be funded to address already overwhelming demand.

'We're far from the only voice calling for a reversal of the cuts – the [Productivity Commission](#) has recommended an injection of \$200 million into legal assistance services, and State and Territory Attorneys-General last week wrote to Federal Attorney-General George Brandis warning that legal assistance funding is in crisis.

'A further disturbing contrast is provided by the Federal Government's expenditure on its own legal services, at \$688.6 million in 2013-14 according to the [latest available report](#) from the Attorney-General's Department.

'While the Federal Government spends \$688.6 million on its own legal services, it contributes less than seven per cent of that sum to community legal centres nationally. Community legal centre funding is used to make victims of family violence safer, and help low-income disadvantaged people with common but often serious legal problems related to homelessness, credit and debt, and employment,' Ms Buchanan said.

She said it was also unacceptable that community legal centres nationally are being asked to wait until the May Federal Budget to know what funding they will receive beyond 30 June.

'Lawyers are already being lost, outreach programs are being scaled back, and centres are at risk of closure,' Ms Buchanan concluded.

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