

Media Release



Money for mobile blackspots in Geelong as legal help blackspots worsen under Federal cuts

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As prime minister Malcolm Turnbull announces money for mobile blackspots in Corangamite, he is neglecting existing blackspots in free legal help and making them worse with more than \$34 million in cuts left in place in the Federal Budget amid a broader Federal funding shortfall of \$100m over four years.

'The cuts mean that coverage of legal help for serious legal problems including family violence will grow worse – particularly in rural areas and even in major regional centres like Geelong,' said Katie Fraser, acting executive officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres, today.

Without reversal of the cuts and a boost to funding, Barwon Community Legal Service will be forced to significantly reduce its services.

The cuts place at significant risk:

- Appointments at Corio Community Health Centre
- Appointments at Norlane Child and Family Centre
- Appointments at Colac Area Health

The service will also need to reduce appointments and casework conducted at their office.

As a proportion of funding, the service will see around 400 fewer people each year when they already turn away over 1,200 people annually.

Community legal centres receive a small fraction of total legal assistance spending. Modest additional funding announced after the Budget to be shared with other legal assistance services and family relationship centres will be swamped by the broader cuts that will come on top of chronic underfunding.

In 2016–17, community legal centres nationally will receive only \$47.2 million in Federal funding from estimated total Federal Government spending of \$450.55 billion. Cuts commencing in July next year will be sustained through to 2019–20, when community legal centres will receive just \$31 million from estimated total Federal Government spending of \$511.61 billion.

In contrast to legal assistance funding, over a similar five-year period the Federal Government will spend in excess of \$3.5 billion on its own legal advice and representation – a level of investment denied to frontline legal assistance services for vulnerable people. This is unacceptable.

'The blackspots created and made worse by the cuts will see the Federal Government denying free legal help to thousands of vulnerable people who can't afford a private lawyer and who can't get help from legal aid,' said Nick Hudson, Executive Officer of Barwon Community Legal Service.

For media interview and information

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