

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

Access to Justice Review confirms the value of legal help, need for increased funding

Tuesday 4 October 2016 – for immediate release

The Federation of Community Legal Centres has welcomed today's release of the Victorian Government's Access to Justice Review.

Undertaken by the Department of Justice and Regulation, the review was tasked with identifying ways to improve access to justice for Victorians to ensure the most vulnerable and disadvantaged receive the support they need when they have a legal problem.

In making 60 recommendations that will now be considered by government, the report acknowledges the importance of integrated service delivery.

'Community legal centres have led the way in integrated service delivery, from Health-Justice Partnerships providing legal assistance in health settings to working alongside financial counsellors. We're glad to see the report has noted the effectiveness of this approach,' said Serina McDuff, executive officer of the Federation, today.

The report also highlights the significant funding shortfall for legal assistance services, again confirming the drastic levels of underfunding of the legal assistance sector and recommending funding increases at both State and Federal levels.

'Despite demonstrated demand, community legal centres are facing Federal cuts of 30 per cent from July next year, cuts that will have a devastating impact on the ability of community legal centres to provide free legal assistance to those most in need, such as people facing consumer scams and residential tenancy issues.

'This is another report which confirms the extraordinary levels of unmet legal need already identified by the Productivity Commission in 2014, yet the Federal Government seems determined to proceed with the cuts.

'At a State level, we urge the Victorian Government to increase funding to community legal centres and the broader legal assistance sector. In particular the report notes there is high demand for duty lawyer services, family violence related legal services, Aboriginal legal services and integrated service provision partnerships,' McDuff said.

She welcomed the review's recommendation that the Victorian Government provide longer-term funding.

'Community legal centres have at times faced short-term funding arrangements, making it extremely difficult to not only retain experienced staff, but also to plan for future demand.

'We commend the Department of Justice and Regulation on a thorough consultation process and a comprehensive report, and look forward to working with our members and partners in considering the report in detail,' McDuff concluded.

For media interview and information

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