

# Media Release



## **Law societies issue open letter to PM, joining chorus of voices calling for legal assistance funding**

**Friday 4 November 2016 – for immediate release**

Law societies nationally have joined the chorus of voices calling for sustainable funding for free legal assistance services.

In an open letter to Malcolm Turnbull published today, the law societies of every state and territory have called on the prime minister to reverse \$35m of cuts to community legal centres, and to boost funding to legal aid and Aboriginal legal services.

'Community legal centres are badly underfunded even before the cuts begin, turning away 160,000 people a year, so this is a vital call on the prime minister to take urgent action,' said Serina McDuff, executive officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres, today.

'Including the Federal Government cuts to begin next July and due to a lack of additional investment, community legal centres nationally are facing a shortfall of around \$100 million over the next four years, with serious consequences for the number of people we will be able to assist in the face of clearly increasing need.'

Community legal centres provide vital free legal help for women escaping family violence, and vulnerable people experiencing workplace mistreatment, tenancy issues, and consumer scams.

'In 2014 the Productivity Commission recommended an immediate \$200 million annual boost across free legal assistance services. State and Territory Attorneys-General have written twice to the Federal Government voicing concerns over funding. In Victoria, we have just had an Access to Justice Review, which again confirms a significant funding deficit. Now law societies nationally have joined the call to properly fund free legal help for vulnerable people. We welcome their support and leadership and call on the prime minister to act,' McDuff said.

McDuff said a significant boost was needed if access to justice for those in need was to be addressed.

'The impact of these cuts will be felt by vulnerable people who can't afford to pay a lawyer and who belong to the growing numbers who also aren't eligible for legal aid. They are cuts that hit people with nowhere else to go,' McDuff said.

### **For media interview and information**

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