

GOVT REPORT HIGHLIGHTS VALUE OF COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre Manager and Principal Solicitor, Arlia Fleming, has welcomed the release of the Department of Justice's Cameron Review into Community and the NSW Government's response to it.

"The report emphasises the importance of community legal centres like Elizabeth Evatt in helping people and communities with their everyday problems," Arlia Fleming said.

"Without early legal assistance with domestic violence, family law and consumer matters disputes can escalate and cause serious financial, social and health problems," she said.

Some of the key recommendations of the 2017 Review of NSW Community Legal Centre Services, supported by the NSW government:

- Community legal centres should continue to provide their current broad range of legal assistance services, including direct service delivery and strategic law reform advocacy.
- A general expansion of existing state funding for community legal centres to just under \$12 million per year, to address critical areas of need and allow for funding of community legal services not currently funded by government.
- Additional funding of \$15.6 million over four years, announced in the 2018-19 NSW Budget, to implement the recommendations of the review, including supporting the sector through any changes required and developing an evidence base for future funding allocations with the Law & Justice Foundation of NSW.
- Shifting to a minimum three-year funding cycle for community legal centres, providing community legal centres with the kind of stability required to deliver quality services and respond effectively to emerging areas of need in the community.
- Government investment in the development of an outcomes measurement framework and the removal of unnecessary duplication in reporting in the legal assistance sector.

Community Legal Centres NSW Executive Director Tim Leach said:

"The NSW government clearly understands, appreciates and supports the important work done by community legal centres across NSW – both in terms of direct service delivery and strategic advocacy," he said.

"Community legal centres are independent organisations that provide free legal services to people and communities, at times when that help is needed most – and particularly to people experiencing economic, cultural and social disadvantage.

“The community law network of almost forty community legal centres across NSW provides both generalist and specialist legal services. This includes advice, representation and community education, plus strategic advocacy to help governments and policy makers reform laws so that less people have legal problems in the first place.

“The legal assistance sector in NSW is multi-faceted and highly collaborative, and the CLC Review validates this as best practice,” he said.

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre Manager and Principal Solicitor, Arlia Fleming said:

“Our organisation is already stretched beyond capacity. We need new funding not just to help people walking in the door, but also to reach out to those in the community who don’t know where to go for help.”

“We are increasingly being contacted by people in Oberon, Blayney, Black Springs and other outlying towns who require urgent assistance to make sure that themselves and their children are safe. Currently we do not have capacity to visit these towns and have to ask people to travel to Lithgow or Bathurst to see us.” she said.

According to the CLC Review:

- Community legal centres are “independent community organisations that provide free information, legal advice and related services to people and communities facing economic, social or cultural disadvantage.”
- Community legal centres “play a unique and essential role” in the NSW legal assistance sector at “very low cost to government” and are “extremely efficient.”
- “There is significant unmet demand for legal assistance services that cannot be met without additional funding.”
- Legal assistance services benefit the wider community and government through ensuring that legal matters can be enforced, preventing civil problems from escalating into criminal matters, improving the efficiency of court proceedings and avoiding costs to other government services.
- “CLCs should continue to provide the full range of legal assistance services. This includes information and advice, representation and community education, as well as strategic advocacy and law reform activities.”
- “CLCs must be adequately funded to provide legal assistance services to disadvantaged people, and to harness, co-ordinate and supervise pro bono and volunteer support.”
- “The community legal centre sector is supported by strong governance structures and delivers significant benefits to individual clients, the community and to government.”

MORE INFORMATION:

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