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NSW government decides disadvantaged people deserve equal justice

NSW Attorney General Mark Speakman today announced over \$6 million over two years in additional state funding for community legal centres in NSW, stepping in to fill the void created by a pending reduction in funding by the federal government of 23 per cent in NSW due to commence on 1 July. This is important news for Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre and the CLC sector as a whole.

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre's Managing Principal Solicitor, Arlia Fleming, said: "We thank the NSW Attorney General for recognising the importance of legal services to the communities of Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Oberon, Bathurst and beyond. This means that most people will be able to get timely legal advice and assistance to prevent issues from escalating.

"We help people with a wide range of issues including consumer disputes where rural people are at risk of losing their homes due to predatory lending practices and ruthless litigation. People in rural areas also find it more difficult to access services who don't visit their towns on a regular basis."

Ms Fleming also said, "We remain concerned about the increasing numbers of people we have to turn away, particularly as the awareness of the wide-ranging impacts of domestic violence increases."

Community Legal Centres NSW Chair Dr Linda Tucker said:

"The NSW government has effectively increased its contribution to our sector by 50 per cent, the largest annual increase from the state government for two decades. We thank the NSW Attorney General for recognising the essential work done by community legal centres and stepping in to fill this gap.

"In 2014 the Productivity Commission recommended an immediate injection of \$200 million into the legal assistance sector nationwide, simply to meet existing demand for services. Instead, the Commonwealth Government has refused to extend funding to the sector, amounting to a 30 per cent cut nationwide.

"This funding announcement will be welcomed across the NSW legal community. Now we need the federal government to chip in their fair share, so CLCs can meet existing demand and ensure that everyone has access to justice."

Other community legal centres (CLCs) in NSW particularly impacted by this announcement are: Women's Legal Service NSW, Kingsford Legal Centre, Redfern Legal Centre, Immigration Advice & Rights Centre (IARC), Western Sydney CLC, Environmental Defender's Office NSW (EDO NSW), Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), Illawarra Legal Centre, Elizabeth Evatt CLC in Katoomba, and Northern Rivers CLC.

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