

Factsheet

Building
Great
Communities

For a fairer NSW

Community Legal Centres NSW – the peak representative body for almost 40 community legal centres in NSW

Policy area

Access to justice.

Introduction

Good functioning and safe communities support people in their times of need. Everyone needs access to justice in times of need – legal advice, help, support and representation – to help them navigate any issues they are facing and stopping these problems from spiralling out of control and causing further harm.

Problem/Issue

Each year, over half of Australian adults will experience at least one legal problem – and First Nations people, and people who are unemployed or have a disability, are even more likely to need legal help. Yet the legal system is expensive, adversarial and overly complicated. The balance of power is unfairly tilted towards wealthy individuals, corporations and large public bureaucracies.

According to the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, almost 1-million people in NSW require assistance from community legal assistance organisations each year, based on their income and education levels. 45% of NSW residents live in households with an income equivalent to under \$52,000 a year.

Government-identified priority client groups are people experiencing economic hardship, children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people in custody, people in rural or remote areas, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, people with a disability and mental illness, people over 65 years, people with low education levels, single parents, and people experiencing, or at risk of, family violence, homelessness.

Without early legal assistance, families can break down and health problems can escalate; people can be unnecessarily evicted, can lose their jobs and can be placed at risk of violence

Solution

Community legal assistance services provide crucial help and support to the people and communities who need it most, free of charge. These community-run organisations

help people navigate tough times and steer away from escalating problems.

Areas of law reform which would improve access to justice across NSW include decriminalisation of abortion, fairer laws for people with fines and debts, an improved victims support scheme for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, increased housing affordability and rights for renters, a human rights framework for NSW, a reformed child protection system, a justice reinvestment approach to reducing incarceration rates and injustices faced by Aboriginal people, and improved laws regarding people with disability and the justice system.

Increased support for the legal assistance sector should include funding for all specialist and generalist community legal centres, the Aboriginal Legal Service, family violence prevention legal services, and court advocacy schemes. For community legal centres this includes an additional \$10.34 million per year to embed care and protection teams consisting of solicitors and community support workers and an additional \$5.72 million per year for the Aboriginal Legal Access Program to employ Aboriginal legal access workers across the state.

For additional information – key contact:

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