

Community legal sector funding asks

CURRENT 6 MARCH 2019

\$2.9m to expand the general CLSP pool

There is no shortage of legal need in NSW, and community legal centres are well-recognised as effective, efficient and crucial for delivering the kind of early legal support that people need to stop their everyday problems spiraling out of control. Whether it's turning potential clients away or struggling to retain staff because of low sector wages and burnout, with more funding every community legal centre in NSW could help more people with some of the key challenges facing NSW today – including parenting arrangements, housing insecurity, credit and debt, and family violence.

\$10.3m for Community Care and Protection teams

When it comes to child protection, keeping families together and children safe is a matter of connecting them to the services they need which are already available. Once a child enters the out of home care system, it is extremely hard to get the child restored to their families. The current system doesn't provide parents and families the support they need to stay together. The first time a parent has access to a legal advocate shouldn't be when they're in the courtroom.

Based on the successful *knowmore* model, where a person has access to both a lawyer and a community support worker, Community Care and Protection teams in community legal centres across NSW will support families to connect to services, understand the process they are going through, and most importantly, keep children safe and families strong.

\$5.7m for the Aboriginal Legal Access Program

To be effective, access to justice for Aboriginal people must be culturally safe and ideally provided by someone from a community-controlled organisation. In a small number of community legal centres across NSW, Aboriginal Legal Access Workers work to build the connections and trust between Aboriginal communities and the key services that are available to them, including legal assistance. To truly have an impact across NSW, the program needs to be expanded beyond a handful of part-time staff to full-time teams helping Aboriginal people with core issues such as housing, child protection and family violence.

\$5.2m for an expanded Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Program

Funded by the Department of Innovation and Better Regulation, demand for the Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Program, closely connected to community legal centres across NSW, is exceeding available capacity – with one third of people needed help unable to get it. Providing support for tenants of public and community housing, boarding houses, residential and caravan parks as well as private rentals, this effective early support service increases housing security and prevents homelessness for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Total of funding requests: \$24.1m per annum

Raise the volume on justice

ELEVEN KEY LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY REFORMS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN NSW

1. **Launch a public and community education campaign around consent:** Tinkering with the legal system is not enough to address this driver of sexual and family violence and general inequality for women. We need government-led cultural change in the community, police, judiciary and beyond.
2. **Guarantee legal help for families in the child protection system:** the system relies too heavily on the discretion of overworked FACS caseworkers. Families need guaranteed legal and community support as soon as they enter the system, to keep families together and children safe.
3. **Address punitive and unfair justice system practices:** at present these disproportionately impact Aboriginal communities and people with disabilities. Bail practices, remand and overly complicated orders punish rather than support vulnerable populations. More oversight of police and increased community support programs can ensure people understand their conditions and that people have adequate housing and financial support to avoid being remanded unnecessarily.
4. **Reform the Victims Support Scheme:** long delays in reviews and payments are just the tip of the iceberg with this unfair scheme. Increased resources, increased payments for survivors and better recognition of the impact of long-term abuse are required.
5. **Remove abortion from the *Crimes Act*:** complement safe access zone legislation by scrapping this little used law, sending a signal of support to women across NSW.
6. **Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility to 14 (minimum):** troubled children need support and better services, not incarceration which is well established to lead to poor social outcomes.
7. **Make renting fair:** Address the power imbalance between landlords and tenants by scrapping 'no grounds evictions'; ensure community housing providers have high standards of accountability.
8. **Support justice reinvestment:** the solutions to problems facing communities need to be community-led, place-based and data-driven. Government needs to resource an independent NSW justice reinvestment body and fund communities who want to lead justice reinvestment initiatives.
9. **Review the impact of fines and penalty notices:** the current system criminalises poverty and disadvantage. A thorough examination of the purpose and impact of policies such as garnishees, offensive language provisions, and the role of police is urgently required.
10. **Champion a strong community sector:** Focussing on secure, ongoing funding, genuine engagement in the policy development process, and protection of government and community services from corporate, for-profit and discriminatory providers.
11. **Conduct a public inquiry into a NSW Human Rights Act:** a community-led public discussion on the role and function of a legislated human rights mechanism. NSW is lagging behind the rest of the country.