



Mark Speakman
Attorney General

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday, 1 August 2018

RECORD INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Free legal help for the state's most vulnerable people has been secured after the NSW Liberals and Nationals Government unveiled a \$44 million 'future fund', the interest from which will further strengthen the state's Community Legal Centres (CLCs).

Attorney General Mark Speakman announced the innovative plan today as part of a significant funding boost to the legal assistance sector. The package is designed to address areas of greatest legal need using a stable and accountable funding model for CLCs.

In September 2017, the Attorney General commissioned Mr Alan Cameron AO to review the way the NSW Government supports CLCs in NSW in order to improve access to justice. Mr Speakman has confirmed that the government will implement the overwhelming majority of recommendations made by Mr Cameron, including increased funding for CLCs.

"Last year the NSW Government acted to save CLCs from a threatened cut in Commonwealth funding with a \$6 million rescue package. Now the government is further strengthening access to justice for those who need it most, including domestic violence survivors and our seniors," Mr Speakman said

"More than 50,000 vulnerable people across NSW rely on CLCs for help on myriad issues including domestic violence, debt, tenancy disputes and the care and protection of children".

From 2019-20, CLCs will receive almost \$12 million per annum in state funding (including from the 'future fund') – an increase of more than 85 per cent from 2015-16. This is in addition to discretionary payments from the Public Purpose Fund (PPF) for CLCs, which in 2018-19 totalled \$2.4 million.

Mr Speakman said the new evidence-based funding model recommended by Mr Cameron will ensure those most in need of help from CLCs will be more readily able to access it.

"This reform will result in transparent and targeted funding to CLCs based on evidence of legal need, allowing critical gaps in legal assistance to be addressed. The new arrangements will also bring certainty and stability to CLCs," Mr Speakman said.

“We have listened to CLCs’ concerns about the current year-to-year funding method which affects their ability to plan ahead. A new three year funding cycle commencing in 2019-20 will enable CLCs to provide certainty to the communities they serve and to their dedicated lawyers and staff.”

After talks with the NSW Law Society Council, the government will introduce legislation to repurpose the surplus of a fund previously used to pay negligence claims against solicitors in the aftermath of the 2001 collapse of insurance giant HIH.

The fund has fulfilled its purpose after the final claim was closed in 2014. The new laws will require the interest from half of that fund to be directed to CLCs via a dedicated account in the PPF. The other half of the funds will be returned to the reserves of Lawcover Pty Ltd, the NSW legal profession’s insurer.

“I’m delighted that the Law Society is joining with the government in delivering this innovative solution to improve access to justice in NSW. In combination with the implementation of the Cameron Review recommendations, CLCs are in a strong position to continue their vital work,” Mr Speakman said.

Executive Director of Community Legal Centres NSW Tim Leach welcomed the reforms as ushering in a new era for the legal assistance sector.

“The significant increase in funding announced today will provide more vulnerable people with solutions to complex legal problems which have the potential to derail their lives. This is a landmark moment that will change thousands of lives for the better,” Mr Leach said.

The *Review of NSW Community Legal Centre Services* by Mr Cameron, and the government response, is available at:

https://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/justicepolicy/Pages/lpclrd/lpclrd_consultation/community-legal-centre-services-review.aspx

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