

Legal assistance funding

National Legal Aid welcomes the Commonwealth government's decision to provide additional funding for the legal assistance sector.

Attorney-General George Brandis QC this week announced an injection of \$55m over three years for Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

"It is encouraging to see the Commonwealth government and Attorney-General George Brandis have listened to concerns about the high level of legal need in Australia," says incoming NLA Chair Graham Hill.

"The funding announced this week will go some way towards addressing the alarming levels of legal need identified by the Productivity Commission. The Commission called for an immediate increase of \$200m per year for the legal assistance sector, with \$120m of that coming from the Commonwealth.

"As Attorney-General, Senator Brandis has worked hard to increase access to justice for the most disadvantaged in our community.

"I also acknowledge the efforts of legal centres and professional bodies which have worked hard to draw public attention to the pressing legal need facing many disadvantaged Australians. In particular, I note the efforts of the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), and the Law Council.

Makes sense

"The Productivity Commission rightly highlighted that timely and properly-funded legal assistance makes economic sense, delivers significant social benefits, and reduces the need for other publicly-funded assistance down the track. In short, it makes sense."

The Productivity Commission notes that "advocating for increases in funding in a time of fiscal tightening is challenging. However, not providing legal assistance in these instances can be a false economy as the costs of unresolved problems are often shifted to other areas of government spending such as health care, housing and child protection."

"I urge the government to continue to seek funding for the key recommendations of the Productivity Commission," says Mr Hill. "To quote former High Court Chief Justice Murray Gleeson QC, *providing legal aid is costly; so is not providing legal aid.*"

Background

National Legal Aid represents Australia's eight legal aid commissions (there is a commission in each State and Territory). It works with bodies – including NACLC, NATSILS and the Law Council – to ensure legal disadvantage is identified and addressed.

Graham Hill is available for interview. Media contact: Jeremy Boylen (M) 0421 611 856