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Reversal of Community Legal Centre funding cuts important for the Northern Territory

Law Society Northern Territory (“Society”) welcomes the Attorney-General’s announcement today that the federal government will no longer cut \$35 million, or 30%, out of funding to community legal centres (“CLC”) from 1 July 2017.

Society president Mr Tass Liveris said, “Territory CLCs have been under-resourced for far too long and are in increasingly high demand. Every year, a growing number of Territorians facing legal disputes have been unable to access legal assistance, leading to significant social and financial consequences affecting the whole community. The federal government’s 1 July cuts would have been crippling for Territory CLCs and had devastating consequences here, especially for families, women and children and remote and Indigenous Territorians.”

The announcement today means that CLCs are no longer facing dramatic reductions in service delivery. This is an extremely important outcome, but legal assistance sector funding as a whole remains at insufficient levels. In 2014, the Productivity Commission recommended that an interim funding injection of \$200 million (with 60% to be contributed by the federal government) was required to maintain existing frontline services and broaden the scope of legal assistance services.

The government is yet to implement the Productivity Commission’s recommendations and the federal government’s contribution to legal aid funding has reduced from \$11.22 per capita in 1997 to around \$7.84 today. Mr Liveris said, “The government’s announcement today is wonderful, but there is still evidence of a wider resourcing problem that must be addressed to ensure that the entire community is able to enjoy the social and economic benefits that come from a sustainable and properly funded justice system.”

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