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MEDIA RELEASE

The fight for regional justice

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service is calling on the Federal Government to address the national funding crisis affecting the community legal sector and invest in justice for regional communities.

“We partner with health, education and community service organisations across North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales to provide legal assistance to people experiencing disadvantage, and barriers to justice,” said Hume Riverina Community Legal Service Manager and Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers.

“In 2022-23 we assisted over 1,300 clients experiencing intersecting disadvantage who would not otherwise have been able to access legal assistance.”

“Nationally, the sector assisted 179,000 people to manage everyday legal problems with their housing, employment, health, finances, and personal safety, and to better understand and exercise their legal rights.”

Community legal centres play a critical role in providing access to justice through the provision of legal assistance to clients, community education, and law reform advocacy where unfair laws exist.

Chronic underfunding and inflationary pressures combined with inadequate indexation, and a lack of long-term funding security, are putting at risk the community legal sector’s unique service model and contribution to increasing individual and community wellbeing.

Funding uncertainty and shortages, coupled with overwhelming demand are forcing centres to turn away people in need. The Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCA) annual State of the Sector Report states over 350,000 people were turned away from community legal centres in 2022-23.

“Hume Riverina Community Legal Centre turned away almost as many people seeking legal assistance as we were able to help,” said Ms Rodgers.

“We have called on the Commonwealth Government to increase funding for the community legal sector by at least \$125 million in the 2024 Federal Budget, and a commitment to long-term funding security for the sector.”


“Access to justice is essential to the wellbeing of individuals and communities and should be based on need, not postcode or the size of your bank balance.”

Media contact: Felicity Hartridge 0461 561 915 | fhartridge@umfc.com.au


 (02) 6055 8090

 cls@umfc.com.au

 Level 1, 9 Stanley Street, Wodonga 3690

 (02) 6055 8079

 www.hrds.org.au

 PO Box 31, Wodonga VIC 3689


Upper Murray Family Care