

State Budget Investment Proposal 2022-2025

Community legal centres (CLCs) play a vital role in making Queensland a safer and fairer place to live, by ensuring that everyone has access to justice. CLCs have a positive impact and make a real difference.

CLCs are independent, community-run organisations that provide free legal help to people who cannot afford a lawyer or who are unable to get legal aid. Early legal assistance is an essential service, helping people navigate the challenges they face day-to-day. As well as helping individuals with legal advice and representation, the 34 CLCs across Queensland work to prevent problems from arising or escalating through community legal education and working with government to improve unfair laws and processes.

53,000

vulnerable and disadvantaged people received free help in 2020-21

240,000

services delivered to clients and communities in 2020-21

80,500

people are turned away from CLCs each year due to lack of resources

COVID-19

increased demand, complexity and urgency of legal problems

Client case study: Living free from violence with help from trauma informed community legal centres



First Nations women are 35 times more likely to experience domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous women, according to the Queensland Government's *Not Now, Not Ever* report. When CLCs partner with community centres, it makes it easier for vulnerable women to overcome significant barriers to access timely legal help.

Sonya*, a young Aboriginal woman, went to her local community centre in distress after her ex-partner had assaulted her and taken her two young children. A regional CLC worked closely with the community centre as part of an integrated service model to ensure Sonya didn't have to re-tell her story and relive her trauma, and sought urgent assistance from the court that the children be returned to her care.

The court heard Sonya's application the same day, ordering that the children were to live with her and spend supervised time with their father. With the help of the CLC, the children were returned safely to her care the next day.

Who is Community Legal Centres Queensland?

CLCQ is the peak body for Queensland's CLCs and we work with those centres towards our vision for a fair and just Queensland. Our mission is to be a voice for the sector; to lead and support CLCs to deliver quality and accessible services to vulnerable and disadvantaged people; and to bring about change for individuals and communities.

Who are our clients?



71%

of clients are experiencing financial disadvantage



22%

of clients are living with disability or mental illness



62%

of clients are experiencing, or at risk of, domestic and family violence



6%

of clients are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness



10%

of clients identify as First Nations people



12%

of clients are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

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Queensland's community legal centres (CLCs) need to be adequately funded to respond to increased demand, complexity and urgency of legal problems, resulting from COVID-19 and population growth, for vulnerable and disadvantaged people experiencing urgent and complex needs.

This State Budget Investment Proposal includes seven recommendations across four key areas for the expansion of the Queensland Community Legal Services Program, currently funded under the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement 2020-2025.

Overall, we recommend the Queensland Government invest an additional \$18 million p.a. over three years into Queensland CLCs.

1:

Fund access to justice to meet increased demand for CLCs in Queensland

2:

Fund new integrated services to support people with urgent & complex needs

3:

Fund research & analysis to guide future planning & investment in CLCs

4:

Fund the peak body to enhance capacity to effectively support CLCs

1: Fund access to justice

Recommendation 1: Invest an additional \$5 mil p.a. to help meet increased demand for general CLC services

CLCs need to be adaptable to meet emerging demand and unmet need caused by population growth and COVID-19 by targeting services to their local communities. This includes better systems, new programs, enhanced collaboration, and early intervention and prevention, by educating communities and responding to unfair laws.

Recommendation 2: Invest an additional \$3 mil p.a. to support Queenslanders pursuing their human rights

The *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) has been in force for nearly two years, however there has been no standalone funding to support CLCs to assist clients to protect their human rights. CLCs recently identified human rights as the highest priority area for Queensland government investment.

Recommendation 3: Invest an additional \$3 mil p.a. to support the provision of domestic and family violence (DFV) assistance

DFV is the largest area of legal need in Queensland's CLCs. CLCs delivering DFV duty lawyer services provide critical assistance to respondents to keep victims and children safe. Investment by the Queensland government will help support recommendations from the *Hear Her Voice* report and ensure an appropriate funding balance following significant investment by the Commonwealth to specialist women's CLCs.

Recommendation 4: Invest an additional \$1 mil p.a. for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) to provide specialist legal assistance services to First Nations Queenslanders

Rates of DFV are the highest in the world for First Nations women yet Queensland's two FVPLS remain entirely Commonwealth government funded. Investment by the Queensland government will substantially increase FVPLS capacity to support First Nations people and communities experiencing violence.

2: Fund integrated services & partnerships

Recommendation 5: Invest an additional \$5 mil p.a. to address and prevent service delivery gaps

The urgency and complexity of legal matters for Queenslanders seeking help is continuing to increase, with many people at crisis point by the time they contact a CLC. Clients frequently experience multiple legal issues, requiring an average of four visits to resolve their legal problem. This intersectionality of needs requires a holistic and integrated approach through partnerships and referral pathways to prevent service delivery gaps and improve accessibility.

3: Fund research & analysis

Recommendation 6: Invest one-off funding of \$1.5 mil for analysis of the net economic benefit of CLCs to help guide future government planning and investment in Queensland CLCs

Current measures of the impact of investment in CLCs are substantially confined to analysis of met and unmet legal need, using demographic proxies and extrapolation of data. There is currently very little useful analysis of the net economic benefit of CLCs at the wider economic, social and justice system levels. Quantifying this benefit through structured analysis would support investment decisions by government & inform the new NLAP, including potential cost savings, by investing in the right places at the right time for greatest impact.

4: Fund the peak body

Recommendation 7: Invest an additional \$500,000 p.a. in the peak body, Community Legal Centres Queensland, to enhance capacity to effectively support the CLC sector

CLCQ seeks an additional and ongoing contribution to core funding to expand the capacity of the peak body to deliver strategic priority initiatives to grow and develop the CLC sector. This includes a First Nations sector strategy, CLC workforce strategy, tailored capacity building in leadership, integrated services and to implement recommendations from the *Hear Her Voice* report.