

# State Budget Investment Proposal 2023-2025

*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 32 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.*

**51,000**

vulnerable and disadvantaged people received free help in 2021-22

**241,000**

services delivered to clients and communities in 2021-22

**90,000+**

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

**Indexation**

transparent & appropriate indexation to reflect the real cost of service delivery

## Client case study: Regional CLC helps older person receive essential health care to save his eyesight



Access to health care is a fundamental human right for all Queenslanders.

Johannes\*, a 70 year old migrant living in regional Queensland, was experiencing difficulties with his eyesight due to significantly worsening bilateral cataracts. Over a four year period, Johannes' appointments with his local hospital's ophthalmology clinic were continuously cancelled or re-scheduled. This caused him great concern about suffering permanent damage to his eyesight and going blind.

Johannes visited his local community legal centre for free legal assistance. The community lawyer wrote to the local hospital on Johannes's behalf raising a complaint about Johannes' right to health services under the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*, seeking an urgent appointment and ongoing treatment.

Within one day of receiving the letter, the local hospital contacted Johannes to provide an urgent appointment. Because of help he received from the community lawyer, Johannes is feeling less stressed and hopeful he will get the surgery he needs to save his eyesight.

### 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 people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage; and to bring about change for individuals and communities.

### Who are our clients?



73%

are experiencing financial disadvantage



1 in 4

live with disability or mental illness



1 in 2

are experiencing domestic and family violence



7%

are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness



11%

identify as First Nations people



13%

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 vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. The rising cost of living, housing crisis and population growth is driving demand for free legal services, and increasing complexity and urgency of legal problems.*

*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 (NLAP) 2020-2025.*

*Overall, we recommend an investment of an additional \$18 million p.a. plus indexation over two 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 meet increased demand by targeting services to their local communities who are experiencing the rising cost of living, the housing crisis and population growth. Funding access to justice includes enhanced services, collaboration, early intervention and prevention, 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 three years, however there has been no standalone funding to support CLCs to assist clients to protect their human rights. CLCs have consistently identify human rights as a key 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 *Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce* and the *Call for Change* Queensland Police Service Commission of Inquiry report and ensure an appropriate funding balance between State and Commonwealth.

**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 *Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce*.