



Community  
Legal Centres  
Queensland

# State Budget Investment Proposal 2024-2025

Queensland's 32 community legal centres (CLCs) play a vital role in making Queensland a safer and fairer place to live, by ensuring everyone has access to justice. CLCs have a positive impact and make a real difference.



This State Budget Investment Proposal recommends that the Queensland Government invest an additional **\$18.76 million** in 2024-2025 to stem the flow of critical CLC workers to better paid jobs and ensure the current suite of CLC services is maintained across Queensland.

## Key priorities and recommendations

<i>Recommendation 1: CLC Workforce investment</i>	<b>\$15,829,375</b>
<i>Recommendation 2: Fund CLASS Database Transition</i>	<b>\$2,269,800</b>
<i>Recommendation 3: Fund the State Peak Body for CLCs</i>	<b>\$660,000</b>

## Why investing in Queensland's community legal services is critical

CLCs need to be adequately funded to respond to people and communities experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. The rising cost of living, housing crisis and population growth are driving demand for free legal services and increasing the complexity and urgency of legal problems. However, CLCs are at a crisis point where there are real gaps in staffing and the risk of losing qualified workers - **without additional Government investment, the current suite of CLC services will not be maintained in Queensland.**

## Outcomes this investment will achieve

Our Investment Proposal outlines how Government investment in the vital social infrastructure of CLCs will:

- Maintain the current suite of CLC services to ensure Queenslanders get the services they need
- Assist to attract, retain and develop the existing CLC workforce
- Help CLCs to be competitive 'employers of choice' and ensure vacant positions are promptly filled
- Show frontline workers they are valued, and support diversity and inclusion
- Ensure regional, rural and remote communities in Queensland are not left behind
- Provide CLCs with essential assistance to transition from the current CLASS client database to a new CMS by June 2025
- Increase the capacity of the state peak body to provide effective support and sector development to a CLC sector growing in size and complexity, including advocacy on key policy issues, and coordination of disaster response and CLASS transition.

### Who is Community Legal Centres Queensland (CLCQ)?

CLCQ is the state peak body for Queensland's 32 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.

**Our Impact Report 2023** contains CLC client statistics and stories: [www.communitylegalqld.org.au](http://www.communitylegalqld.org.au)

### Supporting Government objectives

Our Investment Proposal is in line with the Queensland Government's priorities and objectives for the community including **supporting good, secure jobs and backing frontline services** to improve social outcomes across Queensland.

This investment will take CLC funding up to the end of the current National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement (NLAP) in June 2025, which is currently under review by the Commonwealth.

**Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners:** CLCQ affirms that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia and acknowledged their unique relationship with their ancestral country. In particular we acknowledge the Turrbal and Jagera peoples, the Traditional Owners of the land in and around Brisbane and pay respects to their Elders, past and present.



## Recommendation 1: CLC Workforce Investment

CLCs are independent, community-run organisations that provide free legal help to people who cannot afford a private 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 and standing up for people's rights. As well as helping individuals with quality and timely legal advice and representation, Queensland's CLCs work to prevent problems from arising or escalating through community legal education and systems advocacy. **These services cannot be provided without a committed, highly skilled and appropriately paid workforce.**

### Community legal centres are experiencing a workforce crisis

CLCs are experiencing a workforce crisis which is threatening delivery of essential legal services to Queensland. **Without urgent government investment, CLCs will lose qualified staff.** Queenslanders relying on CLCs will be negatively impacted including people living on low or no income, experiencing domestic and family violence, living with a disability or mental illness, at risk of homelessness, living in rural, regional and remote (RRR) areas, and those impacted by disasters.

At the heart of this issue is that **funding for CLCs does not meet the true cost for delivery of services**, and therefore, **CLCs cannot compete on wages for workers** when compared with other higher paying parts of the legal assistance sector including Legal Aid Queensland (LAQ) and Government agencies. In the previous two budgetary periods, LAQ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service enjoyed considerable funding boosts to address low remuneration. Consequently, CLCs have been placed in an uncompetitive position in comparison to all other parts of the legal assistance sector.

### CLCQ's 2023 Workforce Survey showed...

In September 2023, CLCQ undertook our first comprehensive Workforce Survey of Queensland CLCs and their workers. Results showed:

- High levels of staff turnover due to low wages
- A 'juniorisation' of the workforce, requiring additional CLC resources to train and support new workers, while losing more experienced and mid-career professionals to higher paying employers
- Frequent workforce vacancies that sometimes remain unfilled for up to 12 months, particularly in RRR locations
- Additional work pressures mean many CLC staff are completing work outside ordinary hours to ensure clients receive the help they need
- Increased risk of burnout of the existing workforce, and the workplace health and safety risks, particularly regarding psychosocial hazards stemming from stress, inadequate reward and recognition and vicarious trauma.

The current NLAP review is examining the serious issues relating to the labour market in the legal assistance sector, and will have some important recommendations about ensuring CLC workforces are sustainable. However, **CLCs urgently require an interim investment to ensure workforce sustainability and services in communities across Queensland are maintained.**

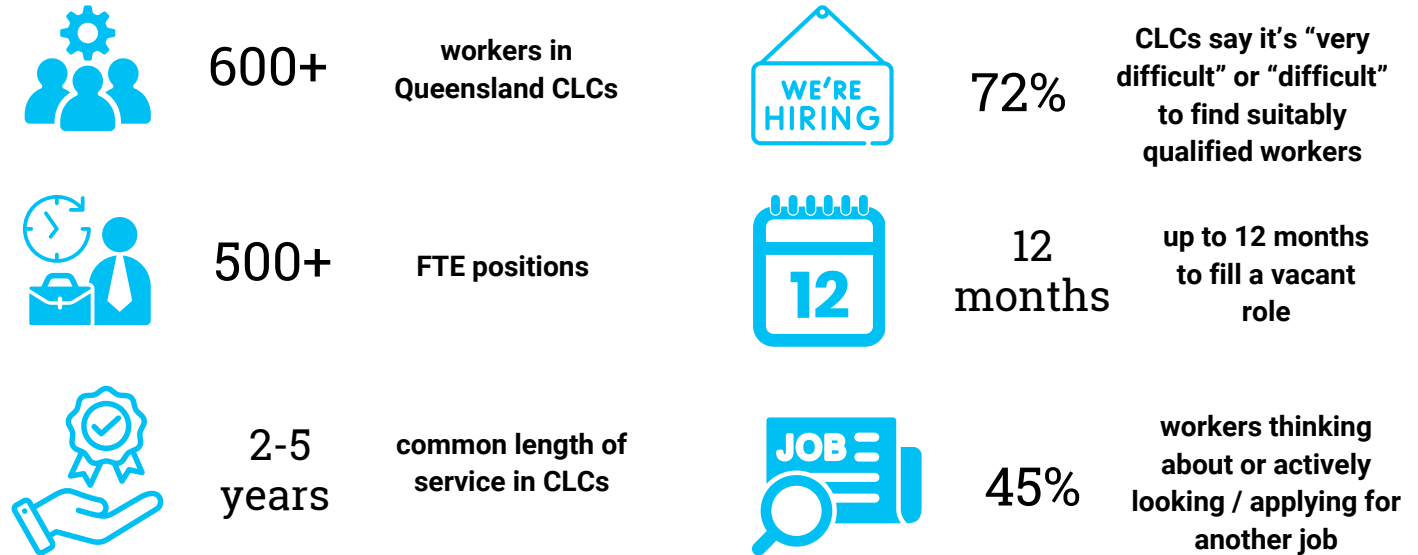
"Salary's need to be higher. I could not stay in this job financially if I did not have a partner who earns a middle-high income."

"We know what to do and we know how to do it, we just don't have enough money or enough staff. If we had more money, we could easily recruit more staff. And if we had more staff, we would meet the clients [needs]."

"Due to the difficulty in recruitment there is often positions vacant which leads to a longer wait time for client appointments ... There is also the added pressure put on to existing staff to have additional appointments which then impacts on staff wellbeing."

"... the pay levels are well below what is applied in government or private practice roles. The work is complex and requires significant knowledge of societal impacts upon the person and good navigation of the system to benefit the client."

## Workforce snapshot



## 22% salary gap for CLC workers

Salaries in CLCs are at least 22% lower than LAQ. The median annual salary CLCs available to workers is \$97,750 (excluding CEO salaries). The salary gap for a selection of comparable frontline roles in CLCs and LAQ is outlined below.\*

CLCQ is seeking an ongoing workforce investment of \$12,365,375 to bridge the salary gap.

Based on a 22% salary gap across 500 full time equivalent (FTE) roles of \$10,752,500 and 15% salary on costs of \$1,612,875.

Role	CLC median salary	LAQ median salary	Salary gap
Principal / Managing Lawyer	\$120,000	\$145,407	21%
Senior Lawyer (5-10 years experience)	\$103,000	\$132,416	29%
Lawyer (2-5 years experience)	\$98,000	\$118,134	21%
Junior Lawyer (0-2 years experience)	\$88,000	\$102,727	17%
Senior Social Worker	\$105,000	\$139,117	32%
Social Worker	\$98,000	\$110,477	13%

\*NOTE 1: A non-exhaustive list of roles has been provided in the table above. Due to differing service models, CLCs employ a range of unique roles which do not have a direct point of comparison with LAQ (e.g. financial counsellors). LAQ salaries are calculated from 1 July 2024, based on annualised salary set out in the State Government Entities Certified Agreement 2023 (incorporating the LAQ Employees Award - State 2015) to reflect the salary gap for the 2024-2025 budgetary period. Additional oncosts (e.g. superannuation and the portable long service levy) have not been included in the table above. CLCQ recognises that the wage gap is likely to be even higher if CLCs salaries were compared with other similar roles in Government agencies (such as Department of Public Prosecutions) or the private sector.

## Cultural load allowance

In the CLCQ Workforce Survey, **8% of CLC staff identified as First Nations people**, however, the true figure may be closer to 10% (approximately 60 workers).\*

CLCQ recognises that **First Nations staff are one of the sector's strengths**: First Nations workers enhance a CLC's capacity to provide high quality and culturally safe support for our clients. However, First Nations staff have reported they experience an additional workload due to cultural load.

First Nations should be appropriately remunerated for their contributions through a \$5,000 (+ superannuation) for cultural load allowance. This amount is consistent with the cultural load allowance rate currently being offered at OurWatch.

**CLCQ is seeking an ongoing investment of \$336,000 for a cultural load allowance to be available to all First Nations workers.**

Based on \$5,600 (includes allowance and 12% superannuation) for 60 First Nations Workers.

## Reasons workers are seeking other employment

Reasons workers are seeking other employment	% survey respondents
Better pay	59%
Advance career opportunities or prospects	52%
Better working conditions or entitlements	37%
The cost of living has exceeded my CLC income	30%

## Rural, regional and remote loading

Queensland is the second most decentralised state in Australia and due to this, CLCs operating in RRR Queensland face unique challenges. Some regional CLCs incur considerable financial and time cost in providing coverage in RRR locations. CLCs in RRR areas have struggled to keep up with demand on core services, relying more and more on volunteers to assist meet client legal need. **This places CLCs in RRR areas in a precarious financial position.**

CLCs operating in RRR areas have reported experiencing challenges with staff recruitment and staff retention which impacts capacity to meet usual client demand levels. Some CLCs have reported that a lack of affordable housing in some RRR areas further complicates recruitment of newer staff. Additionally, CLCs are unable to support relocation costs to assist with the attraction of staff from elsewhere in Queensland.

## Technology is not the solution

Advances in technology have increased the ability of legal services to provide assistance to people in need, however, reliance on phone or videocall appointments for legal services is not a sufficient solution to address the gaps created by Queensland's geography.

For example, providing effective legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities requires organisations to invest time and resources into building reciprocal relationships of genuine trust. This must be done in person.

CLCs operating in RRR areas require a further investment of funds to meet the unique challenges of their locations.

There are approximately 160 full time equivalent roles in CLCs located in RRR Queensland.

**CLCQ is seeking an ongoing investment of \$3,128,000 for a RRR Loading to be provided to CLCs.**

Based on the median salary of \$97,750 x 20% RRR loading (\$19,550 per role) for 160 FTE roles.

\*NOTE 2: In CLCQ's Workforce Survey, 8% of staff identified as First Nations and a further 2% chose 'Prefer not to say'.



## Recommendation 2: Fund CLASS Database Transition

The **Community Legal Assistance Service System (CLASS)** database will no longer be available to Queensland CLCs by the end of the NLAP in June 2025. CLASS is a critical piece of infrastructure for Queensland CLCs for the collection of service data, reporting government funding bodies and conflict checking. **Without urgent Government investment to resource the transition from CLASS to a replacement case management system (CMS), many CLCs will be unable to operate.**

The limited IT capability and resources within the sector mean it will be difficult for CLCs to navigate transitioning to a different CMS. CLCQ holds concerns that there may not be sufficient time for CLCs to move away from CLASS without further support and resourcing. Queensland CLCs will need to begin the CMS transition process by June 2024 to meet the June 2025 CLASS deadline.

**CLCQ is seeking a one-off investment of \$1.6 million for CMS transition costs** including CMS customisation, implementation partner fees and staff training. Based on 32 Queensland CLC receiving a one-off investment of \$50,000.

### Ongoing CMS licensing fees

CLCs require upfront and ongoing funding to cover the licensing fees of a new CMS. Without additional and ongoing investment, the majority of CLCs will struggle to fund these costs.

**Example:** the most common CMS CLCs in other States and Territories are transitioning to is ActionStep. At the already discounted rate for CLCs, ActionStep costs \$59 per user per month (\$708 per year). The first year of ActionStep must be paid upfront.

**CLCQ is seeking an ongoing investment of \$424,800 for CMS licensing fees.** Based on \$708 per year for 600 CLC staff.



## Sector-wide business transition support by CLCQ

**There is an important role for CLCQ as the peak body to provide sector-wide business transition support to Queensland CLCs to move them from CLASS to a new CMS.** CLCQ is well linked in with the national peak body, Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCA), who currently manages the CLASS database. This time-limited work would involve:

- Scope the extent of the assistance CLCs will need to source and transition to new CMS by re-running CLCQ's digital strategy survey
- Implement a communications strategy to ensure Queensland CLCs have access to clear information about the need to change to a new CMS, the timeframes for transition and the alternative CMS options available
- Develop practical sector resources to assist the change management process
- Establish a community of practice for CLCs to work on these issues collaboratively and share learnings
- Liaise with CLCA about the development of the national data set and navigating the compliance issues for Queensland CLCs to contribute data
- Provide ongoing individual CLC support to ensure all QLD CLCs are on track to meet transition deadlines
- Identify ongoing issues for CLCs that might impact CLC and provide timely advice to Government.

**CLCQ is seeking a one-off investment of \$245,000 for the peak to provide sector-wide business transition support.**

*NOTE 3: In August 2023, CLCQ sought approval from DJAG for project funds (\$245,000) to be re-purposed for business transition support. At the time of drafting this Investment Proposal, CLCQ has not received approval from DJAG for this funding re-allocation.*

## Recommendation 3: Fund the State Peak Body

Given the increase in both size and complexity of the CLC sector and workforce, and the changing environment in which it operates, **ongoing investment of \$660,000 is required to ensure CLCQ is able to effectively grow, support and build capacity for the 32 CLCs across Queensland.** This additional contribution to CLCQ's core funding will provide it with the capacity to advance priority initiatives in agreement with Government, provide certainty to the sector, and support its own workforce recruitment and retention. See breakdown for funding below.

### Investing in sector support and coordinating responses to emerging needs

CLCQ has a strong track record in working constructively with Government on key issues impacting CLCs and their clients. However, CLCQ has limited capacity to coordinate sector responses to key policy and legislative initiatives of Government, despite being invited to do so on a regular basis. In addition, emerging needs in disaster legal responses and CLASS database transition for Queensland's CLCs necessitate additional support and centralised coordination by the peak body.

Additional funding of **\$500,000** would:

- Enhance and grow the CLCQ staff team, enabling effective support and sector development and capacity building including workforce development and training, supporting best practice in CLCs, assisting with service design and evaluation
- Support and contribute to strategic policy and advocacy initiatives, including coordinating CLCs and pro bono resources to provide responses to Government requests for policy and legislative reform, communications plans and liaising with key policy stakeholders including involvement of clients with lived experience
- Responding effectively to emerging developments requiring CLC support and assistance across Queensland.

### Disaster response coordination

**Despite Queensland being the most disaster-prone state in Australia, there is no funding to coordinate legal assistance services when disasters strike.** This contrasts with other states and territories, such as Victoria, where core funding enables coordinated disaster legal assistance across six agencies. Disaster Legal Help Victoria is a jointly funded initiative led by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and Emergency Management Victoria.

Recent bushfires in Tara and surrounding areas during late October – early November 2023 highlighted the lack of a coordinated sector communications strategy for disaster legal help. **There is now a crucial window of opportunity for CLCQ to coordinate disaster legal assistance** in anticipation of more intense, frequent and compounding disaster events across Queensland.

CLCQ seeks funding of **\$160,000** to lead interagency communication, development of the *Disaster Legal Help Queensland* website, and a communications plan rollout in 2024-25.

The benefits of coordinated disaster legal assistance are vast, and include:

- A single online entry point for legal information and assistance, with simple information about disaster and legal problems, and where to get help
- Agreed triage frameworks between legal assistance sector agencies resulting in smoother and trauma-informed referral pathways for clients
- Deep legal assistance sector preparation and better monitoring of anticipated legal needs; a sector that is better equipped to assist when disasters strike
- Increased profile of legal assistance services in disaster preparedness, response and recovery, resulting in broadened community awareness of legal needs in disaster.

## Summary of our Investment Proposal

Key priorities and recommendations	Investment by Queensland Government 2024-2025
<b>Recommendation 1: CLC Workforce Investment</b>	<b>\$15,829,375</b>
1.1 Salary increase 22% x 500 FTEs (+ 15% salary on costs) (ongoing)	\$12,365,375
1.2 Cultural Load Allowance of \$5600 x 60 First Nations staff (including 12% superannuation) (ongoing)	\$336,000
1.3 RRR loading 20% (x 160 FTEs) (ongoing)	\$3,128,000
<b>Recommendation 2: Fund CLASS Database Transition</b>	<b>\$2,269,800</b>
2.1 CLCs CMS transition costs (one off investment of \$50,000 x 32 CLCs)	\$1,600,000
2.2 CMS Licensing fees (ongoing investment \$708 per year x 600 staff)	\$424,800
2.3 Sector-wide business transition support by CLCQ (one off investment)	\$245,000
<b>Recommendation 3: Fund the Peak Body</b>	<b>\$660,000</b>
3.1 Sector advocacy, development and capacity building (ongoing investment)	\$500,000
3.2 Disaster response coordination (ongoing investment)	\$160,000
<b>TOTAL INVESTMENT FOR 2024-2025</b>	<b>\$18,759,175</b>