**Invaluable work of volunteers providing access to justice across Western Australia**

Volunteers across WA are contributing almost 80,000 unpaid hours[[1]](#footnote-1) annually to Community Legal Centres (CLCs).

Thank a Volunteer Day is an opportunity to acknowledge how this vital contribution allows many low-income and disadvantaged individuals to access the justice system.

“Half of our volunteers are lawyers and law students. Without their contribution, it would be difficult for our CLCs to continue assisting approximately 30,000 clients each year,” Helen Creed, CLCA (WA) Executive Director said.

“Our volunteer migration agents, social work students and administrative assistants further increase our capacity to provide frontline services, policy work and provide community legal education.

However, Ms Creed cautioned that whilst the work of volunteers and pro bono lawyers is essential, their work should not be a substitute for adequately funded legal assistance services.

“With increasing demand for legal services, the Productivity Commission recommended an immediate injection of $200 million per year into the legal assistance sector nationally, from both the State and Federal government.[[2]](#footnote-2)

But, as State Attorney-General, Hon. Michael Mischin MLC noted in correspondence to WACOSS

*“At this stage, Western Australia has no plans to … increase funding for community legal centres in line with the Productivity Commission recommendations.[[3]](#footnote-3)”*

Indeed, CLCs in WA face a massive funding reduction of 32.2% from July 2017,” under the new National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services.

“Unless our CLCs are properly resourced, there won’t be any centres for people to volunteer in,” Ms Creed warned.

***Quotes from CLCs regarding the importance of volunteers for their services are on page 2.***

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*‘Citizens Advice Bureau of WA (CAB) has operated for over 50 years with a model that focuses on professional volunteers – including lawyers and mediators. CAB has ten branches and operates with nine paid staff and over 280 volunteers, all of whom play an extremely important role in service provision. … [W]e … provided legal advice appointments to 5000 people and mediation services to over 1000 couples… We would not exist without our volunteers.’*

**Kathryn Lawrence, CEO, Citizens Advice Bureau of WA**

*‘Peel Community Legal Services … is enriched and extended through the work of volunteer board members, lawyers, educators, students, advocates and administrators. Most recently we have been able to respond to the high level of evictions to homelessness in our region through a housing mentor programme, which is coordinated and run by volunteer mentors. Peel Community Legal Services is grateful for the depth and breadth of volunteer contribution to our service.’*

**Lisa Craig, Manager, Peel Community Legal Services**

1. 10 out of 28 CLCs in WA provided information to the NACLC National Census of Community Legal Centres 2014/15. The data shows these 10 CLCs were assisted by 433 volunteers who contributed a total of over 1,536 hours per week – approx 79,872 hours per year. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Access to Justice Arrangements, Productivity Commission, 2014. A copy of the report can be viewed at <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/access-justice/report> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Letter from WA Attorney-General Hon. Michael Mischin MLC to WACOSS President, 24 November 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)