

Friday, 8 May 2020

Funding boost will help front line legal services

The Australian Government's additional \$63.3 million injection for frontline legal services to support people impacted by COVID-19 is greatly appreciated by the Law Council.

The \$20 million earmarked for domestic violence, \$29.8 million towards tenancy disputes, insurance, credit and debt related problems, work related claims and the remaining \$13.5 million on IT upgrades is a welcome injection of funding that will help meet a rise in demand for legal services.

Law Council of Australia President, Pauline Wright, said that the pandemic has shone a spotlight on the immense value of frontline legal service providers, and the critical role they play in our society.

"The legal profession, not least those in frontline community legal services have continued to work tirelessly throughout the pandemic to ensure that the needs of the public have been met," Ms Wright said.

"This is a sector that has been chronically underfunded for years. However, despite this, it continues to serve our communities to a standard well beyond available resources and infrastructure.

"We are particularly pleased to see a recognition that greater investment is needed to address the IT capability of the legal assistance sector." Ms Wright said.

While the importance of accessible legal assistance is heightened in times of crisis, these services are continually in high demand, and without long-term and substantive funding increases, some of our most vulnerable people will continue to slip through the cracks. These funding shortfalls were a key focus of the Law Council's *Justice Project* released in 2018 which noted that due to the shortage of funds, although 14 per cent of Australians fell below the poverty line, only 8 per cent qualified for legal aid.

"These are extremely challenging times, and a properly funded legal assistance sector is an essential element of how we respond and recover from the COVID-19 crisis." Ms Wright said.

The Law Council hopes that the injection of funding by the government will be the first step towards a properly funded legal assistance sector.

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