

#LegalAidMatters

Darwin and Alice Springs practitioners joined the recent Australia-wide campaign instigated by the Law Council Australia to protest against the Federal Government's cuts to legal assistance funding.

During Law Week (16–20 May) the Society ran a social media campaign, bombarding Twitter and Facebook with comments and photos depicting the concern felt by practitioners and members of the public about the funding cuts.

Legal aid was set up by the federal government in 1973, recognising that:

"...one of the basic causes of the inequality of citizens before the laws in the absence of adequate and comprehensive legal aid arrangements throughout Australia... The ultimate object of the Government is that legal aid be readily and equally available to citizens everywhere in Australia and that aid be extended for advice and assistance of litigation as well as for litigation in all legal categories and in all courts."
(Senator the Hon Lionel Murphy AO QC, Attorney-General)

Over the last twenty years, successive federal governments have slashed the Commonwealth's contribution to legal aid funding, forcing people to have to deal with their legal problems on their own or to leave their legal problems unresolved.

This is a crisis. The federal government has failed to adequately fund legal aid services, forcing many legal assistance services to close down or cease to provide service—particularly in regional areas.

Legal aid funding cuts help no-one, least of all taxpayers, who are facing larger down-stream costs of funding courts, health services, community housing and other services, all of which are facing increased demand from people with unresolved legal problems.

Cutting legal aid has been a poor strategy and a false economy, implemented by successive governments unable to see beyond the next election or budget cycle.

By adequately investing in legal aid now and by creating a long-term and sustainable system, the government and the taxpayer saves in the future by reducing the reliance on other essential services such as social security, social services and public health.

What can we do?

Get involved. Take action.

Spread the word.

Please visit legalaidmatters.org.au to sign the petition (or contact your local MP) to help end this crisis and show your support. With the federal election due to occur on Saturday 2 July 2016—this is the opportune time to make noise and to make our leaders take notice.

We need to save legal aid.





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