

**DEAR
MINISTERS,**

The Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers MP, Treasurer
Senator the Hon. Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance and Minister for Women
The Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP, Attorney-General
State and Territory Attorneys-General

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

FUND JUSTICE | EMPOWER COMMUNITIES

Our legal assistance sector - Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services - is designed to be there for members of our community during times of life when they experience significant vulnerability, need, hardship and stress.

On a daily basis, these services are relied upon by people who may be experiencing family violence, elder abuse or are at risk of homelessness. They are critical supports for those faced with unfair social security decisions or discrimination in the workplace, and provide essential sources of advice for people, whether they are addressing a consumer law dispute or tenancy matter.

But, to this nation's great shame, our legal assistance sector is chronically underfunded and unable to meet an ever-increasing demand. Services have no choice but to turn desperate clients away, with far-reaching implications for individuals, their families, and their communities. This is a sector in crisis.

On 28 May 2024, the [Final Report of the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership](#) was released. This Report is a thorough investigation into the legal assistance landscape and provides clear guidance for how access to justice in Australia can be dramatically improved. We welcome key recommendations contained in the Report, including those targeted towards a greater investment in the legal assistance sector, better justice outcomes for First Nations peoples, support for the long-term capabilities of those in the legal assistance workforce, and the need for improved data collection to support evidence-based decision making.

Legal assistance services are at the frontline of some of our nation's biggest challenges and are underpinned by the private legal profession which takes on approximately 72 percent of approved legal aid cases, despite receiving appallingly low rates of compensation for this difficult and complex work. This cannot be expected to continue.

Urgent action is needed as confirmed Commonwealth funding ends in less than 12 months. There is currently a sword hanging over the heads of Australia's legal assistance services which are unable to confidently plan for the future without knowing whether their services are sustainable and supported to meet demand.

The Law Council and its Constituent Bodies call on the Commonwealth, states and territories to meaningfully partner with the legal assistance sector to progress the Report's recommendations. The next partnership agreement cannot simply paper over the cracks in our system. This Report is the starting point for the transformational change that is required to give these vital services the stability and certainty they need and deserve, and to ensure that access to justice is facilitated for all.

SIGNED,



Law Council
OF AUSTRALIA



THE LAW SOCIETY
OF NEW SOUTH WALES



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BAR ASSOCIATION

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