

Increased Access to Legal Services

Increased Access to Legal Services in Rural and Regional Community

The Coalition has announced today its commitment to fund six community legal services (CLSs) in rural and regional Australia.

A Coalition Government will allocate \$3.6 million over the next 3 years to develop the six CLSs, thereby increasing access to legal services available to people in rural and regional Australia.

The Commonwealth currently funds 115 community legal services Australia-wide. However, most of these services exist in and around capital cities and do not service regional and rural communities.

The Coalition's initiative will redress the imbalance of provision of services between metropolitan and regional and rural areas.

The locations for the six new community legal centres have been chosen on the basis of need. The regional and rural areas identified as those with the greatest need for community legal services are:

- Broken Hill;
- Gippsland;
- Kalgoorlie;
- Mount Gambier;
- Riverland; and
- Darwin.

These locations have been determined on the basis of area population, employment and existing access to legal aid and community legal services.

Five of the chosen areas will receive \$200,000 per annum in funding of the development of new CLSs. Darwin will receive \$100,000 in addition to existing funding so as to enable it to provide better outreach services.

The legal services provided by CLSs reflect the needs of the local community and provide a range of assistance on legal and related matters to people with low incomes and special needs.

The CLS program forms part of the Government's broader commitment to achieving equitable and improved access to legal services in the community.

This initiative will bring to 12 the number of rural and regional CLSs to be developed by the Coalition since May this year.

The Coalition had already allocated \$11.4 million for the establishment of six rural and regional CLSs in the last Budget, as well as providing capital and computer upgrades for the CLS programme as a whole.

The 11.4 million CLS initiative in the last Budget represented a 19% increase in funding for community legal services.

The six CLS established following the last Budget were located in:

- the Kimberley and South West regions in Western Australia;
- the Iron Triangle region in South Australia;
- the Centre-West region in Queensland;
- the South Coast region in New South Wales; and
- the cross-border region in New South Wales and Victoria centred on Albury Wodonga.

CLSs deliver cost effective services to the disadvantaged in the community and complement the services offered by Legal Aid Commissions.

Labor failed to address the legal service needs of people in regional and rural areas and centralised services in metropolitan cities.

The Coalition continues to strengthen CLSs and, at the same time, its commitment to regional and rural Australians.

North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service

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