

Question on Notice

No. 271

Asked on 2 March 2017

MS J PEASE ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND MINISTER FOR TRAINING AND SKILLS (HON Y D'ATH) –

QUESTION:

Will the Attorney-General advise what impact the Federal Government's planned cuts to funding for the Community Legal Sector will have on the provision of free and low cost legal services in my electorate?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Lytton for her question.

Commencing in 2017-18 Commonwealth funding to Queensland Community Legal Centres (CLCs) will drop from \$8.945 million to \$6.958 million. The "Funding Cliff", as it is now known, will see Queensland receiving close to \$2 million less per annum of total Commonwealth CLC funding.

State and Territory Attorneys-General successfully convinced the Commonwealth Attorney-General to guarantee overall national levels of CLC funding for 2015 until 2017. However from 1 July 2017 the Commonwealth will press ahead with its scheduled funding cuts to this important service delivery sector.

This Federal funding cut means that thousands of vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community will miss out on vital legal assistance services.

The cost to Queensland will be real.

Vulnerable Queenslanders, including those in the Member's electorate, may miss out on needed legal and information referral.

Despite the looming Federal funding cut every effort is being made by this Government to mitigate the situation and reduce the significant impact on Queenslanders.

On 27 March 2017, the Queensland Government announced the allocation of just over \$51.3 million of combined Queensland and Commonwealth funding for the delivery of legal assistance services across the State over 2017-20, with Queensland Government total investment in legal assistance services being \$32.3 million over 2017-20, being 60 percent of the total funding pool.

To ensure viability of the CLC sector, the allocations best promote the integration, efficiency and effectiveness of the service system, and direct funding towards priority areas in a phased and sustainable way.

Although the Queensland Government took a considered approach in allocating the funding, the Commonwealth funding cuts have still had far reaching impacts on the service system.

I am also pleased to advise that in 2017-18 the Bayside Community Legal Service Inc has received no reduction on its 2016-17 allocation in core services and will be able to continue to offer legal and referral advice to the constituents of Lytton.

While I am deeply disappointed that the Federal Government has not reversed the decision to cut funding to CLCs in 2017-18, the Palaszczuk Government has worked hard to maintain and grow its investment for these critical services as well as the broader legal assistance services sector.

The Queensland Government made a significant and far reaching commitment in the 2016-17 State Budget with the injection of \$32.4 million over four years 2016-20 directly to Legal Aid Queensland.

This funding commitment allows Legal Aid Queensland to deliver much needed civil and criminal legal assistance services across the State which support and compliment the services of Community Legal Centres.

I can assure members that I will continue to lobby the Commonwealth Government to reverse these cuts to our community legal sector, and to appropriately fund the vital work that they do in supporting vulnerable Queenslanders.