

Labor's plan to restore funding to Aboriginal legal services a commendable step

Today's announcement by Federal Labor that it would, if elected, deliver \$20.4 million over three years for Aboriginal legal services is a commendable step, according to the Law Council of Australia.

Shadow Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus today announced that a Federal Labor Government would commit \$18.2m for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services members and \$2.2m for their peak representative body, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services. The announcement follows Labor's earlier welcome commitment of \$43 million to Community Legal Centres.

Law Council of Australia President Stuart Clark AM said the funding was much needed.

"The Law Council has strongly opposed cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and it would only be responsible for whichever party forms government in July to rectify this promptly," Mr Clark said.

"We have an Indigenous imprisonment crisis in this country and it will certainly not improve if we deny Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders proper access to justice. This funding announcement is a positive move, but we note the call to create specialist stand-alone family law units in each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service."

Mr Clark earlier today launched the Law Council's [2016 Federal Election Policy Platform](#), which calls for the restoration of legal aid funding that has been steadily eroded since the late 1990s.

He noted that both major parties had made commitments around the edges to legal assistance services during the election, but emphasised there was still a long way to go before Australia's legal aid crisis could be ended.

"Fixing Australia's legal aid crisis will require a whole of sector approach that extends well beyond what either of the major parties has committed to thus far," Mr Clark said.

"Fortunately, the government that is elected in July will not need to guess at what is necessary — the Productivity Commission has already recommended an immediate \$200 million funding boost and [\\$350 million is needed to address the existing crisis](#).

"The reason our [Legal Aid Matters](#) campaign has received such a huge response from the public is that Australians are generally stunned to learn just how bad the funding crisis has become. [81 per cent of Australians](#) believe legal aid should be there in times of need for those who cannot afford a lawyer. That vision of how Australia should be is nowhere near close to being a reality today."

Patrick Pantano: Public Affairs

P. 02 6246 3715

E. Patrick.Pantano@lawcouncil.asn.au

Anil Lambert: Media

P. 0416 426 722

E. anil@hortonadvisory.com.au