

The Hon. Dr Anne Aly MP, Minister for Youth  
The Hon. Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care  
The Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers MP, Treasurer  
Senator the Hon. Katy Gallagher, Minister for Women  
Senator the Hon. Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Australians  
The Hon. Clare O'Neil MP, Minister for Homelessness  
The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services

5 September 2024

Dear Ministers,

**Increased investment in the legal assistance sector is critical to the health and wellbeing of our communities.**

**Many individuals and families face complex issues in their lives that hold them in disadvantage.** In our day-to-day work, we see how issues like credit and debt, fines, social security, insecure housing, domestic and family violence, and discrimination contribute to, compound, and escalate health and life problems. These intersecting issues affect the physical and mental health of our patients and clients, and the wellbeing of their families.

Many of these issues have a legal aspect. **As health and social sector leaders, we recognise the role that legal assistance plays in improving health and wellbeing outcomes**, through person-centred, integrated care that seeks to address the complexity of intersecting issues in people's lives.<sup>1</sup>

**However, these outcomes rest on a well-funded and sustainable legal assistance sector.**<sup>2</sup>

In May 2024, the Final Report of the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP Final Report) was released, its findings depicting a **legal assistance sector in crisis**: investment in legal assistance in Australia has been decreasing and the sector is severely under-funded. Aboriginal community-controlled legal services, and services in regional, rural and remote areas have been particularly affected.

**The consequences of this are profound.** As broader socio-economic conditions contribute to an increase in legal need, legal assistance services are having to turn away clients who are often in real positions of crisis. **This in turn has detrimental effects on the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals and families.**

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<sup>1</sup> Hear more about how legal assistance provides an important tool for health services to address the complex needs of their patients/clients via this [short video](#) (3:10min runtime)

<sup>2</sup> Community legal centres, legal aid commissions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services, and family violence prevention legal services.

A new funding agreement for legal assistance is being negotiated now. This agreement must deliver a significant increase in investment from all governments, ensuring that the recommendations in the NLAP Final Report can be meaningfully progressed.

**A strong and sustainable legal assistance sector also contributes to reforms in health and social sectors.** This includes key cross-government priorities to improve the safety of women and children, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, commitments to improve the lives of people with disability, and the whole-of-government approach to improving mental health and reducing Australia's suicide rates.

**The new legal assistance agreement needs to be supported with a significant increase in investment in the sector from 2025. As health and social sector leaders, we strongly urge you to endorse this investment** in improving access to justice, and consequently the health and wellbeing outcomes of the most vulnerable in our community.

Signed

**Sheree Limbrick**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Health Justice Australia



**Paul McDonald**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Anglicare Victoria



**Melanie Walker**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Alcohol & Other Drugs Council



**Maree Walk**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Children's Welfare Agencies



**Professor Daryl Higgins**  
Director  
ACU – Institute of Child Protection Studies



**Edwina MacDonald**  
Acting Chief Executive Officer  
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**Prue Warrilow**  
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**Deb Tsorbaris**  
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**Dr Elizabeth Deveny**  
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**Rob McPhee**  
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**Hayley Stone**  
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