

PRESS RELEASE 4 APRIL 2015: RESPONSE TO THE 2016-2017 BUDGET

The 2016-2017 Budget shows no vision for the arts or its role in relation to jobs, growth and innovation – the PM's key themes. With no changes or reversals to the devastating funding cuts suffered by the Australian arts and screen communities in the two previous budgets, there is little cause for optimism in the arts community which has been cut to the bone. In addition there was no commitment to invest in Community Legal Centres or reverse the looming 30% cut in funding to these centres in 2017. Arts Law, as both an arts organisation funded by the Australia Council, and a Community Legal Centre, fully understands the impact of these cuts to the arts community and our clients' access to justice.

We have already had to suspend taking legal enquiries from clients three days of the week as the funding cuts have forced us to reduce staff. This can have devastating impact on artists who need access to specialised legal advice on a huge range of complicated issues which threaten their livelihood. We foresee only growing demand for our services as artists work hard to build a sustainable life out of their artistic practice but are operating in an increasingly precarious environment.

Community Legal Centres are also now heading towards a funding cliff in 2017. Between 2017-2018 and 2019-2020, CLCs are facing a funding cut of \$34.83 million nationally. In stark contrast, the Productivity Commission recommended \$200 million additional funding per year to legal assistance services to meet existing unmet legal need.

Our Artists in the Black service would be seriously affected by this impending reduction in CLC funding. Artists in the Black supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators. We provide direct legal assistance to Indigenous clients around the country, especially in regional and remote parts of Australia. From face-to-face outreach in communities, to writing wills for artists and educating everyone generally on the importance of protecting Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, our service enables Indigenous artists and their organisations to flourish. We cannot afford to let Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists be exposed to exploitation, appropriation and financial losses because of a lack of understanding of arts law in our country.

As both an arts organisation and a Community Legal Centre, Arts Law faces a unique problem where the two areas we operate in are seriously underfunded. The Budget has fundamentally ignored the need for increased arts funding to create a society where we can all enjoy the arts, as well as rejecting the calls to support and value Community Legal Centres, one of the most efficient, effective sectors in the law which helps the most vulnerable people in Australia. The Budget delivers a message about how little these services are valued.

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