

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

22 DECEMBER 2016

Yarra Ranges CLC success confirmed in Review that calls for funding rescue

An independent review of ECLC's Yarra Ranges Centre (YRCLC) has highlighted the critical impact the service has had on the region's most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, as the service faces potential closure when Commonwealth funding cuts take effect in July 2017.

In just two and a half years of operation, the part-time Community Legal Centre has supported over 500 clients, provided approximately 600 legal advices and reached a further 530 people through community legal education.

ECLC CEO Michael Smith expressed pride in the achievements but frustration that funding uncertainty would threaten the viability of the service for the second time since its 2014 launch.

"It is clear that the Yarra Ranges CLC is achieving critical and often life-changing positive outcomes with the Yarra Ranges community, but those residents are again at risk of being denied this vital service," said Mr Smith.

Local services engaged by the review were adamant that without YRCLC, the region's most under-served community members would simply not have access to legal help, including Aboriginal clients with complex needs and women living in rural isolation escaping family violence.

"Lots of organisations have a nice Reconciliation Action Plan but the ECLC actually live it and do it," said Rose Solomon, Manager of Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service.

Heidi Tucker, CEO of local housing and community service provider Anchor added: "There are no alternatives to the YRCLC service for our community".

Despite its clear success, the YRCLC remains under threat with Commonwealth funding cuts due to impact on July 1, 2017. ECLC has been notified that it will lose \$240,000 per annum, which will also impact the Centre's broader work in the Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Specifically, the Review by evaluation consultants Effective Change stated that, "Local service providers were unequivocal that without the YRCLC:

- the most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients would simply not seek legal advice, inevitably resulting in the escalation of relatively minor legal matters
- women living in rural isolation escaping family violence from partners often with access to guns would not have access to legal advice

- Aboriginal clients with complex legal needs including family violence and child protection issues would not have access to legal advice.”

In 2015-16, 55% of Yarra Ranges clients were assisted in relation to family violence or family law issues (and 60% of overall ECLC clients).

In conclusion, the review,

“strongly demonstrates that YRCLC is a critical service that requires continued ongoing funding to enable the Centre to continue to service the most vulnerable, marginalised and under-serviced members of the community and make a significant difference to the broader community.”

ECLC and its supporters in the Yarra Ranges communities and beyond will utilise the review’s findings as further evidence for both Commonwealth and State funders to support the continuation of this vital work.

Both the Executive Summary and Full Report can be read online:

- [Executive Summary](#)
- [Full Report](#)

- ENDS -

For further media information and interviews, please contact:

Abby McCarthy, Communications Coordinator, ECLC on +61 458 131 517 or abbym@eclc.org.au