

Dear Candidate,

Support for Legal Needs and Justice in Melbourne's East

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) is a multidisciplinary legal service that works to prevent problems, progress fair outcomes and support the wellbeing and resilience of communities and community members in Melbourne's East.

ECLC provides a broad range of free legal assistance to community members across the East, including a series of programs tailored to specific needs, using sophisticated multidisciplinary and partnership approaches. In the last year, almost 2,000 local residents received direct legal support and over 3,500 external referrals were provided by the skilled intake team.

With a clear vision of Human Rights, Fairness and Justice, ECLC works with communities and community members across Melbourne's East providing:

- information, advice and assistance across a range of legal and related issues
- advocacy to resolve problems at the earliest opportunity
- referrals to community agency partners
- integrated legal services, including through Health Justice Partnerships
- community development and education programs with a focus on rights, responsibilities and options
- primary prevention activities, using broad partnership approaches
- strategic advocacy to change unfair laws and improve systems and practices.

For more details, see our Strategic Plan and other details at: www.eclc.org.au

ECLC has a team of about 60 staff and a large number of volunteers, with offices in Boronia, Box Hill and Healesville. While open to all, most people seeking assistance are on low incomes and a large number are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CaLD).

The legal assistance provided by the team of professional staff and volunteers are essential services like health care and housing. However, unlike health care and housing services, there is no ongoing safety net for those experiencing discrimination or disadvantage who need legal help when it is most essential.

Your Support

ECLC services the needs of six municipalities across the Eastern Metropolitan Region, including the electorate of [electorate].

The Centre is keen to understand how you will ensure people in your electorate get the legal help they need when they need it most. Some questions and issues below relate to the national Hands Up for Justice campaign (by Community Legal Centres across Australia) while most focus on the priority communities and concerns specific to ECLC.

ECLC requests your response to the questions below by Wednesday 4th May 2022. ECLC will publish your response on its website and in its May e-newsletter so that people and communities in the area can consider your response as they prepare to vote.

1. Hands Up for Justice

With Community Legal Centres across Australia, ECLC is concerned about demand for legal help continuing to greatly surpass our capacity to respond. At this time, the [Hands Up for Justice](#) campaign has both specific funding requests, as well as policy proposals for a fairer community:

- **Hands Up for Sustainable Funding** – seeks more legal support, wraparound client support, disaster response and improved evidence of legal need (see attached)
- **Hands Up for a Fairer Society** – seeks improved responses for financial rights, gender equality, First Nations people, climate action and refugees.

Question 1: What commitments and plans do you have to respond to the Sustainable Funding and Fairer Society proposals?

2. Access to legal help in the electorate of [electorate]

At the local level, ECLC often has to ‘turn away’ potential clients due to capacity constraints, despite the team’s best efforts. As we emerge from the impact of the pandemic, clients have additional needs, arising from the additional economic, social, mental health and family violence impacts.

The impacts of unresolved, escalating legal problems on individuals, our communities and the government are significant; but they can be avoided via adequate and ongoing funding to ensure community members have access to the holistic legal support that they need. There is a very real need for a higher level of investment to allow ECLC to manage the increasingly complex and interconnected workload arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent crises.

Question 2: What commitments will you make to increase resources and provide long-term funding for legal help in the Eastern region for the residents of [electorate]?

3. Prevention, early intervention and response to family violence

Tragically, ECLC assists a huge number of people each year who are experiencing family violence. No-one, especially women and children, should be unsafe within their own homes. The highest volume of this work is with Intervention Orders at the Ringwood Magistrates’ Court, while the SAGE, WELS and Mabels programs target specific needs using partnership approaches. The Centre actively works to both improve service response systems and to intervene early as possible where violence occurs.

Beyond responding, more primary prevention work is needed to change the culture that leads to violence. ECLC is a prominent partner in the East and has been particularly strong in supporting CaLD communities to engage with these challenges.

Question 3: What commitments including funding commitments will you make to addressing family violence across Australia? How will you ensure prevention and early intervention are included and prioritised?

4. Elder abuse

ECLC has been a leader in work to prevent and respond to the tragic issue of elder abuse for almost 15 years, where vulnerable older people experience harm carried out by someone they know and trust such as a family member or friend. The recent AIFS National Prevalence Study found that 1 in 6 older Australians experience elder abuse – an alarming figure.

Under the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians, ECLC has been implementing two Elder Abuse Service Trials (of just twelve nationally). The ROSE and ELSA programs have proven highly successful, but again the tragic demand for these services is beyond their capacity.

ECLC and its many partners, particularly through the renowned Eastern Elder Abuse Network are highly active and committed to preventing as well as responding to elder abuse, through addressing ageism, discrimination and other key issues.

Question 4: What commitments, plans and proposals do you have to prevent and respond to elder abuse?

5. Homelessness and Mental Health

Homelessness is an ever-increasing problem within the community and may either play a causal role or be the unfortunate result of a number of legal problems. ECLC engages with community members both experiencing and at risk of homelessness through a range of services. Similarly people experiencing mental illness or ill-health face significant barriers to social inclusion and the full and free participation in the community.

ECLC recognises the need to deliver accessible, high quality and appropriate legal assistance despite the sometimes significant social and financial barriers facing these community members. Unfortunately, a significant cohort of clients have both these challenges compounding each other, often linked to their experience of violence or trauma,

Question 5: What commitments, plans and proposals do you have to address housing, homelessness and mental health issues? How will legal supports be included in these plans?

6. Storms and climate justice

ECLC has a strong tradition of providing legal support to community members struggling with climate and community emergencies. Common legal needs arising include insurance, family law, family violence, tenancy and housing, and social security. Most recently the devastating June 2021 extreme storm that caused major interruptions to water, electricity and communications supply and ECLC continues to support local residents.

We know that such disasters are linked with climate change and are on the rise, with local communities increasingly concerned about their impact.

Question 6: How will you support CLCs to respond to climate-based disasters? What commitments, plans and proposals do you have to address climate change and its impacts?

ECLC respectfully invites your response outlining the actions that you will take to address the issues and questions above in this letter by Wednesday 4th May.

It will publish your response on its website and in its May e-newsletter so that people and communities in its catchment area can consider these responses as they prepare to vote.

If you have any questions or would like to speak or meet with us, we would be very happy to do so. Please feel free to contact me directly or via comms@eclc.org.au

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Michael B. Smith
Chief Executive Officer