Pre-election tracking of legal help policies

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) is keen to understand how the key political parties will ensure people will get the legal help they need when they need it most.

The legal assistance provided by ECLC is an essential service like health care and housing. However, unlike health care and housing services, there is no ongoing safety net for people who are experiencing discrimination or disadvantage and who need legal help at the time they need it most

With a population of more than 920,000 in its catchment area, ECLC responds to a very large population, approximately 15% of the State's total. In 2018-19, ECLC delivered its essential legal services to approximately 2,700 community members, while carefully prioritising those most in need, with an operating budget of less than $3m. About three times that number sought help from the Centre.

Successive reports have highlighted the rising demand for community legal centre (CLC) services and recommended additional funding, including the Productivity Commission ($120m pa of federal funding) and the Justice Project ($390m).

Michael Smith, ECLC's CEO said, "I am heartened to see the major political parties focused on the need for legal help and committing more funds to improving the access to justice for the people that need it our more vulnerable communities.

"I encourage the ECLC community to consider as they decide how to vote how the parties' election policies will assist people in need," he said.

Find out what legal help policies the major political parties have announced.

The ALP provided a comprehensive response directly to ECLC.

Some candidates also provided individual responses.

Issues	Liberal policies	Labor policies	Greens policies
Increasing resources for legal help Improving access to justice	No new policies yet. Budget commitments: • Funding certainty • Funding increases for CLCs of $7.25m over 3 years • $30.5m more for legal assistance (Legal Aid, CLCs,	Committed: • Expanding financial rights legal assistance from 40 to 240 lawyers with $120m from Banking Fairness Fund.	Committed: • $408m for CLCs • Almost $300m for legal aid commissions • $16m each for Environmental Defenders Offices (EDOs) and legal

	ATSILS, FVPLS) over 3 years • $528m to establish a Royal Commission into disability abuse, including legal advice by CLCs	• $42.5m extra for family violence legal assistance in CLCs • $20m boost for CLCs over 4 years, in addition to pledges of legal assistance • NACLC, the sector's peak body, will receive $4m for its leadership and advocacy role. • $14m over 4 years for Environment Defenders Offices. • Removing all gag clauses on CLC advocacy.	assistance peak bodies.

Prevention, early intervention and response to family violence

Regrettably, ECLC assists a huge number of people each year who are experiencing family violence. As well as providing significant legal help to people in these awful situations, the Centre is actively working across prevention, early intervention and responses to family violence. This includes an Intervention Order Support Service four days each week at Ringwood Magistrates' Court, key specialist programs and extensive support through the legal and support teams. No one, especially women and children, should be unsafe within their own homes.

While the Victorian Royal Commission provided a strong 'roadmap' for strategic action, at the national level there has been a very limited response without a comprehensive plan and commensurate resources.

Issues	Liberal policies	Labor policies	Greens policies
Family violence across Australia Integration of legal help into these reforms	Committed: • $328m for Domestic and Family Violence programs • Additional funding for family violence under the Fourth Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against	Committed: • $42.5m over 3.5 years for CLCs to provide legal and related help to people experiencing family violence • $21m over 3.5 years to double the Specialist Domestic Violence Units and HJPs that support	Committed: • $118m for Aboriginal family violence prevention legal services • Family Violence included in $408m for CLCs

	Women and their Children.	people experiencing family violence • $21.5m for FVPLS for First Nations women and families • Additional funding for refuges and emergency accommodation • $62m in FV prevention • $35m to support respectful relationships education in schools • $2m trial Integrated Safety Response model • $60m Flexible Support Packages • FV a national priority	

Elder abuse

ECLC has been actively working to prevent and respond to the emerging and tragic issue of elder abuse within the community for over ten years, where vulnerable older people experience harm carried out by someone they know and trust such as a family member or friend. This is an issue of great concern for agencies and seniors and ECLC has been active across prevention, education and response strategies in the, health, legal and community sectors, as well as with seniors groups themselves, including culturally diverse groups. ECLC has been pleased that a National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians has been developed, but this is a limited first step for a broad and challenging issue.

Issue	Liberal	Labor	Greens
Prevention of and response to elder abuse	Committed: • National Action Plan for Older Australians announced in March 2019 • Includes $18m package including $1m pa for ECLC pilot	• Progress Government Response to ALRC Elder Abuse Report	• No specific policy announced yet.

Financial services/credit and debt/consumer law (and the Banking Royal Commission)

In response to the evidence uncovered by the Banking Royal Commission and growing demand, there is a need for substantial additional investment in consumer financial legal advice and assistance services. The Royal Commission's report explicitly acknowledged the valuable work of the legal assistance sector and the need for predictable funding.

Boosting financial counselling and CLC services, through a levy on industry in addition to existing Government funding, is an effective and fair way to ensure people can access help to assert their rights, get out of debt, and protect their livelihoods. As part of this, CLCs need $26m for an additional 200 community financial service lawyers located in both specialist CLCs across Australia. This would increase the number of people that could be helped each year with these issues from 30,000 to 180,000.

Issue	Liberal	Labor	Greens
Increasing the number of financial counsellors and community legal centre financial lawyers	No specific policy announced yet.	Committed: • $120m over 4 years for 200 new specialist financial services lawyers in CLCs. • $320m for 500 new financial counsellors, including in CLCs • $10m p.a. new Small business and farming CLC • All funded through Banking Fairness Fund (financial institutions levy)	No specific policy announced yet.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services

In the Federal Budget 2019-20 announcement, the government has committed to the creation of a Single National Mechanism for Commonwealth Legal Assistance, which will be a unified administrative mechanism that provides guaranteed and quarantined funding to Legal Aid Commissions, CLCs, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) via the states and territories.

ECLC is concerned about the decision that ATSILS funding will be included in a single mechanism. This is counter to the recent review of ATSILS released by the Attorney-General in late March 2019 and potentially the independence, self-determination and community control of ATSILS. This decision must be reversed.

Issue	Liberal	Labor	Greens
Retaining the independence of Indigenous Legal Assistance Program	No – include in single mechanism. Reversal of funding cuts scheduled to hit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services	Committed to retain independence. • $107m First Nations justice package • $40m for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, and $4m for national peak body. • $21.5m for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, to protect Indigenous women.	Committed to retain independence. • $107m First Nations justice package • $97m for Indigenous legal services

Find out more about pre-election policies

Liberal

Labor

Greens

About ECLC

ECLC provides free legal help on a range of matters (family law, family violence and intervention orders, criminal law, motor vehicle accidents, debt and civil matters) to people from communities across Melbourne's eastern suburbs. It also improves community access to the legal system through education, development and partnership initiatives.

ECLC's letter to candidates