



Arafmi

Mental Health Carers & Friends Association (WA) Inc

Productivity Commission: Melbourne

Locked Bag 2, Collins St East
Melbourne VIC 8003

Productivity Commission: Canberra

Level 2, 15 Moore Street
Canberra City ACT 2600, Australia

Postal address

GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Funding Support for Mental Health Law Centre WA

Mental Health Carers Arafmi WA strongly supports federal funding consideration for Mental Health Law Centre WA which provides vital and necessary legal support services in Western Australia.

This appeal is in response to the Australian Government requesting the Productivity Commission to undertake a 15-month inquiry into Australia's system of civil dispute resolution ("with a focus on constraining costs and promoting access to justice and equality before the law").

With thanks to all donors

Since its establishment in 1996, MHLWCWA has proven its merit in dealing with a comprehensive range of mental health matters and related issues in Western Australia.

MHLWCWA was funded to represent and advocate for involuntary patients. Arafmi believes this advice and support in the changing mental health environment must continue.

Arafmi is advised that the MHLWCWA has exceeded all its current funding targets, made many law reform submissions on behalf of our clients and run important test cases in courts, the State Administrative Tribunal and the Mental Health Review Board.

As identified in the Stokes report on mental health in Western Australia there are serious governance flaws that need to be addressed.

This financial year, MHLWCWA has had to refuse over 100 calls for assistance because of lack of resources after funding cuts. Despite its important work, the MHLWCWA receives no federal funding.

The WA Mental Health Commission is cutting its annual funding of \$250,000 to the Mental Health Law Centre from December 31.

Arafmi is advised that the cut, 22% of MHLWCWA's budget, will put the Law Centre in crisis with lawyers and support staff facing the sack.

MHLWCWA is the only WA mental health group specialising in providing legal advice and representation, and community legal education for involuntary patients and mentally impaired accused people.

Free legal advice and representation to people who are involuntary patients in the Western Australian mental health system is paramount to protect citizens' rights.

With areas of law including criminal, guardianship and administration, criminal injuries compensation, equal opportunity, discrimination and other civil matters to deal with, demands on MHLWCWA are increasing with changes to WA's mental health laws.

The National Association of Community Legal Centres has identified a huge unmet demand for legal help requiring additional resources.

The NACLCLC indicates that law centres provide "a range of benefits to individuals and their immediate communities, and to equity and social policy, they also provide, and can

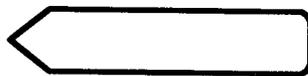
demonstrate, a clear economic cost benefit to the broader community, taxpayers and government.”

Clearly in WA, MHLCA is best-placed to continue with and expand its free, community legal services. But funding is urgently needed to assure the continued existence and growth of this important body.

We urge you to support immediate, urgent and ongoing funding for Mental Health Law Centre WA.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Fowke, President Arafmi WA



Mike Seward, Executive Director