

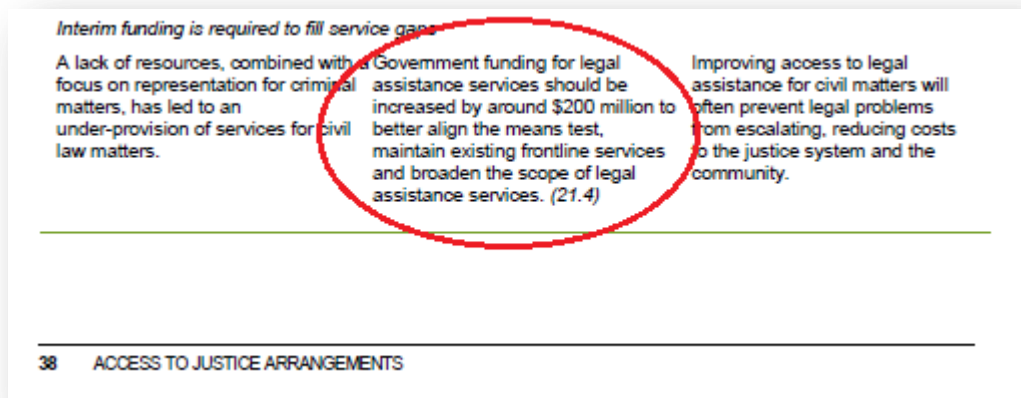


2.2 Million Services A Year For 6 Cents A Day Per Person: New Figures Reveal Massive Demand & Minimal Funding.

New figures starkly underline the Productivity Commission’s unprecedented warning about the crisis facing Australia’s legal system. The figures reveal a legal aid sector facing spiralling demand and shrinking funding.

- **2,219,374** services were provided by Australian legal aid commissions in 2013-2014.
- **6 cents a day: that’s how much governments are spending, per Australian, on legal aid commissions that ensure fair access to the judicial system for all Australians. (Full data on p2.)**

Last December, the Productivity Commission delivered its final report regarding its inquiry into Access to Justice. Its recommendation 21.4 states “government funding for legal assistance services should be increased by around \$200 million”. (Source: p38, Prod. Comm. report 02-access-justice-overview.docx)



“Australian governments spend just six cents per person per day on legal aid commissions. It’s no wonder the Productivity Commission is so alarmed,” said Gabrielle Canny, Chair of National Legal Aid. (NLA represents Australian legal aid commissions from every State and Territory; the commissions are the biggest service providers in Australia’s legal assistance sector.)

“In contrast to that minimal funding, in 2013-2014 Australian legal aid commissions provided 2.2 million services,” Ms Canny said. “This includes 130,000 grants of legal aid, as well as duty lawyer services and dispute resolution, legal advice, information and referrals.”

Domestic violence victims hit hard

In the recent Federal budget, funding for legal aid commissions remained largely static overall - but the funding “pie” has been carved up differently. As a result, States such as **NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and SA** have received

significant funding cuts. **At the legal aid coal-face, this means they will provide representation to fewer low-income earners seeking legal aid in family law cases involving children.**

“Hundreds and hundreds of legal aid applicants – who previously would have been assisted – will be turned away by legal aid commissions because of the funding cuts,” Ms Canny said.

“To make matters worse, we estimate half of those family law cases involve allegations of domestic violence.

“It means there are domestic violence victims on low incomes facing their alleged abuser – without legal representation – in acrimonious family law disputes involving children. This is the human face of the Commonwealth’s decision not to adopt the Productivity Commission’s funding recommendation.”

The Federal government has not yet issued its official response to the Productivity Commission's recommendations.

The 6 cents per person per day figure is calculated as follows for LACs (Legal Aid Commissions) in 2014/15.

\$213,601,000 + \$313,651,000 = \$527,252,000 (this is the total budgeted State and Commonwealth funding for legal aid commissions in 2014/15).

Source: <http://www.nationallegalaid.org/assets/Finance-Figures-wsite-master-from-2006-to-2014-15.pdf>)

Australia’s population at the end of the September quarter of 2014 was **23,581,000**

(source: ABS <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0>)

527,252,000 (CW and State LAC budgeted funding in 2014/15)

divided by

23,581,000 (Australia’s population in 2014)

equals \$22.36 (LAC govt funding per head of population for that fin year).

\$22.36 divided by 365 = 6.12 cents

Conclusion: budgeted Commonwealth and State government funding for legal aid commissions in 2014/15 amounted to six cents per day for each Australian.

Ms Gabrielle Canny is available for interview.

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