

## MEDIA RELEASE

19 May 2022

### RE: REMOTE AND RURAL LEGAL SERVICES HIGHLIGHT INEQUALITY AND BIAS IN FEDERAL 'ACCESS TO JUSTICE'

The Rural, Regional and Remote Legal Services Network is calling for a reset to codesign a major, realistic ***National RRRR Access to Legal Help Plan***.

The Network, which is a collaboration supported by Community Legal Centres Australia, aims to raise the awareness of all successful candidates and parties, in the upcoming federal election.

"The RRRR Network believes that it is important to improve access to legal help in rural, regional, remote, and very remote ('RRRR') communities across Australia," said Bill Mitchell OAM, Principal Solicitor at Townsville Community Law.

"It's hard to see the crisis about lack of access to legal help for people in RRRR communities, if you don't know the communities themselves. I have watched this get worse over 30 years of community legal practice. Up close, there is crisis. People can't get legal help, things spiral and get so much worse"

"Access to justice isn't just a city thing. For RRRR communities, so many inequities are covered up with poor and untenable excuses. Really, we must be able to see that it's a metro perspective that RRRR communities are 'too far away', 'too small' and 'too expensive to service'"

Judy Harrison, Principal Solicitor with Darwin Community Legal Service agreed, "We need to turn this around, and deal with the unconscious bias that is operating to block legal help to people in RRRR communities. It means denying peoples' rights and inclusion. It impacts on health and wellbeing."

The Network calls for Members, Senators and political parties that make up the new Federal Parliament to commit to ensuring proper planning for RRRR access to legal help in the first year of the new federal government, with a corresponding injection of new funding in the new Government's first budget.

"The Community Legal Centres Australia national 'Hands Up for Justice' calls for proper access to legal help, based on needs and rights of people and communities in RRRR Australia," said Ms Harrison.

#### Contacts for media comment:

Bill Mitchell OAM, Principal Solicitor, Townsville Community Law ph. 07 4721 5511

Judy Harrison, Principal Solicitor, Darwin Community Legal Service ph. 08 89 111 120

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