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## Access to justice funding report welcome, implementation plan must be urgently developed

The Law Council of Australia welcomes the release today of the comprehensive review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) – fittingly recast as the Access to Justice Partnership - prepared by Dr Warren Mundy, and urges governments to partner with the legal assistance sector to develop an implementation plan as an urgent priority.

“The independent NLAP review by Dr Mundy is a thorough investigation into how we can improve access to justice in this country,” Law Council President, Mr Greg McIntyre SC said.

“We commend Dr Mundy on this report and the broad consultation undertaken. It confirms what we all knew – that Australians in need have been let down by a decade of inaction and that very substantial funding injections must now be realised to ensure fair and just outcomes for those who need them most.

“The Law Council welcomes the report’s fundamentally important recommendations, but had hoped its release would be accompanied by a government response that clearly outlines an implementation plan, developed in close partnership with the legal assistance sector.”

The NLAP funds Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS). The report also recommends that Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) be brought within the next agreement.

“These services are there for the most vulnerable members of our community during times of greatest need and hardship, albeit operating within substantial resource constraints,” Mr McIntyre said.

“The Law Council welcomes the 39 recommendations contained in the final report, especially those targeted towards a greater investment in the legal assistance sector, better justice outcomes for First Nations peoples, increases to rates paid to legal aid practitioners in the private sector, support for the long-term capabilities of those in the legal assistance workforce, and the need for improved data collection to support evidence-based decision making.

“We also applaud recommendations that reflect longstanding Law Council positions including the need for Legal Assistance Impact Assessments to accompany new policy proposals and greater access to interpreter services. We welcome the report’s recommendation for a regional, rural and remote HECS-HELP forgiveness scheme which is broadly in line with our own proposal.

“However, with the final report having been with governments for almost three months, we are concerned that the absence of government response to the recommendations means that implementation may be unduly delayed. The Commonwealth, states and territories must meaningfully partner with the legal assistance sector to urgently progress the report’s recommendations.

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# Media Release



“At the moment, confirmed Commonwealth legal assistance funding only runs until the end of June next year. This is just over 12 months. This makes it very difficult for legal assistance services to make long-term plans or recruit and retain staff.

“There is currently a sword hanging over the heads of our legal assistance services which means they are focused on staying afloat, rather than planning with the confidence of knowing their services are sustainable and supported to meet unmet demand.

“The Law Council calls upon governments to prioritise and implement these recommendations, in collaboration with the legal assistance sector, to give these vital services the stability and certainty they need and deserve.”

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