



PILBARA COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE INC.

Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP
Budget Policy Division
Treasury
Langton Cres Parkes ACT 2600

By email: PreBudgetSubmissions@treasury.gov.au

18 December 2023

Dear Treasurer

2024/25 Pre- Budget Submission

Pilbara Community Legal Centre (PCLS) is a not-for-profit, government-funded Community Legal Centre (CLC) providing a range of free services which include legal, financial counselling, tenancy advocacy and support, housing support, Redress, domestic violence advocacy and victim support and community migrant services. PCLS commenced operating in 1993 and has been providing services in the Pilbara for over 30 years. PCLS aims to reduce legal disadvantage, increase the capacity of individuals to manage their lives effectively and ensure people understand their rights and obligations.

PCLS is based in Karratha and operates offices in South Hedland, Newman and Roebourne. All PCLS services undertake regular outreach across the Pilbara Region. In-person outreach is complemented with audio-visual aids allowing online capability. PCLS receives Commonwealth funding under NLAP (National Legal Assistance Partnership), Department of Social Services for Redress Support and the Department of Home Affairs for Settlement and Transition Support for Migrants. State Government sources include funding for Family and Domestic Violence, Housing homelessness and Tenancy support and Financial Counselling. As such, PCLS is able to provide a holistic, wrap around integrated service to support clients across of range of intersecting issues.

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South Hedland Office
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Roebourne Office
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Newman Office
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Note: Please respond to the Karratha Office



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As you prepare for the 2024/25 Federal Budget, I seek your support to address the need for an increase in funding that enables PCLS to provide a multidisciplinary, sustainable place-based service response across the Pilbara. Specifically, I ask that the Government to:

1. Consider applying a regional/remote loading for services in the Pilbara.
2. Flexible use of funding to provide a multidisciplinary approach.
3. Increased funding to expand face to face place-based services in Newman and Roebourne.

Recommendation 1: Regional/remote loading to be applied to funded services in the Pilbara

The implementation of a regional/remote loading will assist PCLS to address issues that impact on our ability to provide services in the Pilbara, namely, the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff due to the cost of living, access to affordable housing, isolation, lack of resources/infrastructure. CLC's are at a disadvantage due to high salaries available in the region as a result of the mining industry and the related impact that industry has on the supply of affordable housing. Current funding is inadequate and results in insufficient salaries and conditions for regional and remote legal assistance workforce (lawyers and non-lawyers). PCLS also support an increase to the regional/remote legal assistance sector that will deliver pay parity across the legal assistance sector on a same work, same pay principle. In addition, there is a need to develop a national legal workforce plan for regional and remote service delivery which will address remuneration and entitlements, including portable leave schemes; consistent, efficient, and collaborative learning and development for all legal assistance workers, and an emphasis on the development of paralegal, non-legal advocacy, and support across regional and remote communities.

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Recommendation 2: Flexible use of funding to provide a multidisciplinary approach.

PCLS believes funding should properly consider the range of services available in the region and coordinate funding to assist clients in accessing these services in one location to avoid the trauma associated with having to re-tell their story. The PCLS model of service delivery provides a high degree of benefits to clients stemming mainly from the ability to integrate delivery of services. PCLS data indicates that the majority of clients that seek assistance have a range of intersecting issues at any one point in time. e.g.: homelessness, family and domestic violence and/or financial problems. Currently, PCLS are able to deliver an integrated service model as a result of various State and Commonwealth funding streams. The preferred NLAP funding model is a flexible approach that enables PCLS to employ a range of professionals to best meet the needs of clients in the Pilbara region. For example, the ability to employ a social worker to work alongside the legal team would ensure that clients receive a comprehensive assessment upon intake and any intersecting issues can be clearly identified and prioritised to provide the best response. A multidisciplinary approach will ensure clients are supported to address and resolve issues before they become overwhelming and problematic and start to drain resources from other services. A multi-disciplinary approach of service delivery has significant long term cost benefits to individuals and communities.

Recommendation 3: Increased funding to expand face to face, place-based services in Newman and Roebourne.

PCLS is of the view that face to face delivery of services must remain as a crucial component of any service delivery model. Whilst delivery of services can be supplemented with the use of technologies, the following issues highlight the basis as to why PCLS remains of the view that face to face is the preferred method of service delivery in regional and remote areas such as the Pilbara.

- Literacy levels of clients in remote areas.
- English as a second language, and the services of an interpreter are required.

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- Lack of access to and reliability of technology.
- The fact that many clients have suffered significant levels of trauma and dealing with them needs to be undertaken in a trauma informed and empathetic way which is not possible using remote communication methods.

Additionally, the distances to be travelled (PCLS legal outreach to Newman requires a round trip of 14 hours driving), reduction in availability of staff to deliver services due to travel time, frequency of travel, the cost of addressing travel safety (ensuring that at least 2 staff travel on each outreach event), the associated costs of accommodation (noting that due to the presence of resource and mining companies in the region, accommodation costs in the Pilbara are significant), the costs of purchasing and maintaining suitable equipment including motor vehicles, satellite phones and portable office equipment all reduce the amount of time and funding available for legal and non-legal staff to provide services to clients. PCLS advocates that increased funding to expand place based, face to face, multidisciplinary teams in each major Pilbara town should be included in the NLAP funding to effectively deliver services to the most vulnerable clients across the Pilbara.

PCLS consents to:

- This submission being published on the Review website.
- PCLS being identified in the report of the Review as having made a submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the budget process.

Joanna Collins
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Pilbara Community Legal Service

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