Community Legal WA

State Budget Priorities 2027-2028: **Delivering Access to Justice**

Everyone deserves access to justice - but too many Western Australians are unable to get legal help when they need it.

Cost of living pressures, housing insecurity and rising family and domestic violence are increasing the need for legal help across Western Australia. At the same time, the problems people face are becoming more urgent and complex.

Community legal services, which include community legal centres and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, provide legal and social support to help people understand their rights, resolve legal problems before they escalate and move forward with their lives.

This essential work stops problems getting worse, supporting people to stay in work, families to remain in their homes and children to stay safe.

30,000

Community legal services helped almost 30,000 people in the 2025-2026 financial year.

129,000

Community legal services provided more than 129,000 legal and support services.

5,493

Community legal services helped over 5.493 people living in regional, rural and remote areas.

1 in 2

Almost 1 in 2 women seeking help from a community legal service were experiencing or at risk of family and domestic violence.

16,000

People were turned away an estimated 16,000 times because services do not have enough funding to keep up with demand.

1 in 4

1 in 4 people who received an appointment with a community legal service needed further help that the service did not have the resources to provide.

"Being faced with legal issues, often for the first time, is overwhelming and scary. To know that there are community legal services that are there to help us... we deserve the help and it's free. It's fantastic."

State Government must commit to action in seven key areas to ensure a fair WA, where everyone can access justice when and where they need it.

1. Legal help for people in need.

Community legal services need increased core funding and loading for regional, rural and remote service delivery so more Western Australians can access legal help.

i) Increased core funding for community legal services to help more people

Recommendation: An additional $13.4m per year over five years, indexed

Why this is needed: Funding has not kept pace with demand, with Western Australians being turned away from legal help nearly 1,000 times each week.

The outcome: More people will get legal help before their problems become crises, improving their safety, housing security and financial wellbeing. Resolving problems early also reduces pressure on courts, health, housing and other government services.

ii) Access to justice where we live: regional, rural and remote (RRR) loading

Recommendation: An additional $3.1m per year over five years, indexed

Why this is needed: No matter where you live you should be able to access essential services like legal help. When community legal services aren't resourced for the true cost of providing help in RRR WA, people miss out because services can't afford to go where they're needed.

The outcome: More people in RRR communities will receive timely legal help through face-to-face services and regular outreach, ensuring justice is accessible regardless of where people live.

2. Building a strong community legal workforce.

Behind every person who receives legal help is a skilled team committed to supporting them to resolve their issues. Fair pay and conditions, along with secure jobs, are essential to attracting and retaining the community legal workforce that Western Australians rely on.

i) Fairer pay

Recommendation: An additional $3.1m per year, indexed

Why this is needed: Without competitive pay and conditions community legal services struggle to attract and retain staff, reducing their capacity to provide legal help. Fairer pay is also needed to correct gender-based undervaluation in this highly feminised workforce and reduce WA's gender pay gap.

The outcome: Recognising the skill and value of the community legal workforce through fair pay and conditions will reduce vacancies and turnover, so more people can access timely and consistent legal help.

Government has committed to reducing the pay gap between community legal services and Legal Aid WA.

$12.6m ↑

is needed to increase wages across the sector, including $3.1m per year for WA Department of Justice funded positions.

ii) Fairer conditions for the regional, rural and remote (RRR) workforce

Recommendation: An additional $1.5m per year, indexed

Why this is needed: Community legal services face significant challenges attracting and retaining staff in RRR communities, with roles remaining vacant for up to a year. This investment will strengthen RRR housing and location allowances, making community legal roles more attractive and sustainable, while providing greater consistency across the sector.

The outcome: More people in RRR communities can access legal help because services can recruit and retain staff, reducing long-term vacancies, increasing service capacity and strengthening access to justice across Western Australia.

3. Delivering sustainable services.

Short-term contracts and inadequate indexation are eroding service capacity, meaning fewer people get legal help even as community need grows.

Recommendation: The State Government modernise indexation, so funding keeps pace with the real cost of delivering services, and provide contracts of at least five years through commissioning in line with NAJP expectations.

Why this is needed: When indexation does not cover actual increases in wages and service costs, existing funding buys less each year. Services are forced to reduce staff hours, leave positions vacant or cut services. Short-term contracts compound this pressure by making it harder to recruit staff and plan services for the long term.

The outcome: More stable, sustainable community legal services that can maintain legal help over the long term, so people can rely on support being there when they need it.

4. Supporting renters.

For the nearly one in three Western Australians who rent, access to free, independent advice through Tenancy Advice and Education Services (TAES) keeps their homes safe, prevents homelessness, and ensures they can exercise their rights.

Recommendation: The State Government increase TAES funding and strengthen the program through appropriate indexation, longer-term funding certainty, and investment in shared network capability, co-designed with TAES providers.

Why this is needed: In a tight rental market losing a tenancy can lead to homelessness, while fear of losing their home can make renters reluctant to enforce their rights. Adequate, sustainable funding and shared network capability are needed to meet demand and provide consistent, high-quality tenancy support across WA, including access to support at court.

The outcome: More WA renters can access timely, consistent tenancy support, resolve problems early and stay safely housed, while reducing pressure on courts and more costly government services.

Housing was the top legal issue in 2025-26 across all Community Legal Services.

5. Culturally safe justice, stronger futures.

At the heart of self-determination for Aboriginal people is the choice to access services delivered by their own community. Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) are Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that provide culturally safe, trauma-informed legal assistance and non-legal supports for Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of family violence.

Recommendation: The State Government works in partnership with WA's three FVPLS to strengthen services, identify and address gaps that impact access to community-led, culturally safe legal assistance, and invest in addressing workforce pressures such as staff housing in RRR areas.

Why this is needed: Place-based, locally led Aboriginal community-controlled organisations draw on strong community connections to provide culturally safe legal assistance that responds to local needs. But geographic, workforce and service sustainability challenges mean many Aboriginal people across WA cannot access this support.

The outcome: Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of family violence have improved access to integrated, culturally safe legal and support services when and where they need them, improving access to justice, healing and safety.

Delivering access to justice delivers on Government priorities

These priorities support the State Government's vision for a fair, safe and prosperous Western Australia. Investing in community legal services helps people resolve legal problems earlier, reducing demand on more expensive court, health and social services while supporting stronger communities. These priorities align with existing WA Government commitments, including Closing the Gap and the National Access to Justice Partnership.

6. Strong peak. Strong sector.

As a peak body, CLWA works to improve access to justice. We bring together evidence, lived experience and frontline insights to shape laws and policy, while strengthening the quality, capability and collaboration of community legal services.

i) Increased core funding for Community Legal WA

Recommendation: Increase core funding to $1.2m per year for five years, indexed

Why this is needed: A strong law and justice peak helps build a justice system that responds to the needs and experiences of the community. Increased, long-term funding will strengthen Community Legal WA's capacity to influence reform, represent the sector and support community legal services across Western Australia.

The outcome: People have better access to justice through a skilled and capable community legal sector delivering quality services. Government has evidence and insights to guide policy and law reform, remove barriers to justice and deliver more effective, coordinated legal assistance across WA.

ii) Build, support, strengthen – Community Legal Workforce Project

Recommendation: $293,000 per year, indexed, from 1 July 2027

Why this is needed: A skilled, supported workforce is essential to quality legal help. Shared workforce challenges need a co-ordinated sector-wide response, using data and insights to build capability, support wellbeing and strengthen workforce development.

The outcome: Continued funding for the Community Legal Workforce Project will build a stronger, more capable community legal workforce, with services better equipped to support their staff and deliver consistent, high-quality legal help to people across WA.

7. Change the system. Change the outcome.

We are asking the State Government to deliver two practical law reforms that remove barriers to justice, make systems fairer and support better outcomes for Western Australians.

i) Fairer driver's licensing laws

Recommendation: Reform WA's driver's licence laws to provide a fair and practical pathway for people to regain their licence

Why this is needed: A driver's licence is essential for work, caring for family, accessing healthcare, and staying connected, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities. Yet too many people who have turned their lives around face years of barriers before they can legally drive again.

The outcome: A fair, practical pathway to getting a licence back that supports employment and community connection, improves justice outcomes and advances Closing the Gap commitments, while maintaining road safety.

ii) A Human Rights Act for Western Australia

Recommendation: Introduce a Human Rights Act for Western Australia in this term of government

Why this is needed: Events across the world demonstrate how easy it is for people's rights to be undermined. The need for comprehensive human rights protections for Western Australians is more urgent than ever. Every person deserves fairness, safety, freedom, and dignity. Yet our laws lack a clear, consistent framework to protect basic human rights.

The outcome: Human rights are considered earlier when laws, policies and decisions are made, helping prevent injustice, keeping people safe and providing government with a consistent framework for fairer, better decision-making.

Everyone should be able to get legal help when they need it. With the right investment and practical reforms, the State Government can make access to justice a reality for more Western Australians.