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ARC Justice backs national campaign to end funding crisis

ARC Justice – a rights-based, for-purpose organisation incorporating community legal centres in Bendigo and Shepparton – has joined a nationwide call for the Federal Government to fix the funding crisis in the sector.

ARC’s chief executive officer Damian Stock said underfunding, funding insecurity and rapidly growing need are forcing services like the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre in Bendigo and the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre in Shepparton to turn away clients.

“Already this year, we’ve had to turn away just over 400 clients; a quarter in the family law space, where we know family violence is often a factor too,” he said.

“While ARC is fortunate to have more funding security than some other community legal centres across the country, we’re absolutely seeing the real-world impact of the funding squeeze,” Stock said of ARC, which helps more than 2000 clients a year.

That’s why ARC Justice has joined the *Save Community Legal Centres* campaign, launched in Canberra this week, calling for increased, sustained investment in the national community legal sector.

“Every year, community legal centres like ours help thousands of people with legal problems in areas like family law, housing and tenancy, insurance, family violence and civil law, but we know the demand for services far outstrips the capacity of centres to help.

“We also know wages in our highly feminised sector are lower than those for similar roles in the public and private sectors, leaving our workforce struggling in the face of heightened cost-of-living and housing pressures,” Stock said.

The campaign calls on the Federal Government to take a leadership role in national funding negotiations and commit to three critical investments.

1. Immediate funding injection of \$35 million to address the workforce crisis, as recommended by the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership.
2. Additional \$135 million each year to sustainably address overall community demand.
3. Additional \$95 million each year to fully meet domestic and family violence demand.

About ARC Justice

ARC Justice is a rights-based, for-purpose organisation incorporating the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and Housing Justice based in Bendigo and the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre based in Shepparton. ARC provides legal and tenancy support services across 13 local government areas in central and northern Victoria, with a team of 58 staff working to advocate for and uphold the rights of rural and regional Victorians.

ARC Justice media contact

Erin Delahunty
ARC Justice Communications Lead
0460 778-751
erind@arcjustice.org.au