

26 October 2022

The Hon. Dominic Perrottet MP
Premier
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

CC: Minister for Families and Communities; Attorney General; Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;
Minister for Health; Shadow Minister for Families and Communities

Dear Premier

Re: Reinstating funding for Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program

I write on behalf of the Forum of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA) in support of Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program and the valuable role it plays in enabling the social service sector to get on with the job of caring for vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

FONGA is convened bi-monthly by NCOSS and comprises leaders of over 60 non-government organisations and peak bodies across the social service sector in NSW, including those working in ageing, disability, health, youth, women, domestic violence, housing and justice.

Members of FONGA were greatly concerned to learn recently that the important Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program has not been provided with any further funding beyond 31 October 2022, when its one-off grant funding under the Social Sector Transformation Fund ceases.

Justice Connect's [Not-for-profit Law](#) program is a sector-led service that not-for-profits and their peak bodies trust; it is the only service of its kind in Australia. It provides practical legal education, advice and pro bono referrals to law firms and barristers. Between financial years 2020-22 it:

- provided **15,000** hours of free legal advice and information to NSW organisations
- trained **5,400** NSW board members, staff and volunteers
- developed **202** new and updated legal information resources for NSW organisations, and
- had **342,000** NSW-based visitors to its nfplaw.org.au website.

The responsive COVID-19-specific legal support delivered by Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program was vital in assisting the sector to navigate a range of complex legal issues, including transitioning to online service delivery and new ways of working, employee and volunteer-related issues, the changing nature of governance and risk management during the pandemic, and vaccinations in the workplace.

The cessation in funding on 31 October has already had an immediate and significant impact on the operation of the program. Justice Connect has had to immediately scale back its staffing and service delivery in NSW, including asking its key referral partners – the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, NSW Fair Trading, LawAccess and others – to, in large part, refrain from sending NSW organisations to Justice Connect for free legal help. It no longer has the staffing capacity to

service the demand. Organisations that before would have been able to access free, high quality and specialist legal help from Not-for-profit Law, are now being turned away, with nowhere else to go.

The ripple effect of this program being effectively shut down cannot be understated. As representatives of the social service sector across NSW, FONGA has significant concerns about the far-reaching impact this will have on the sector, which for many years has relied heavily on the expert free services provided through the Not-for-profit Law program.

At a time when the operating environment is more complex than ever and organisations are stretched to capacity, access to high quality legal advice is of benefit not just to individual NGOs, but to the people they support and to the NSW Government in its commissioning role. As the sector continues to grapple with increasing demand and the need to constantly adapt to an ever-changing environment, access to a free legal service will become even more crucial.

Many NGOs throughout NSW have benefited from the service, enabling them to concentrate limited resources on frontline service delivery. Deloitte Access Economics has estimated that over 5,700 additional client services have been delivered by NSW community organisations, over three years, as a result of efficiency gains attributable to Justice Connect input.

But a successful venture like Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program cannot continue without reliable core funding to underpin it. The NSW Government has been a strong supporter of Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program in recent years, and FONGA strongly urges that this support should continue. The economic downturn has given rise to challenges and uncertainties for many industries, including the social service sector, which will require expert advice and guidance for successful navigation.

The partnership between the NSW Government and Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program is proven, effective and needed more than ever. We urge the NSW Government to make the modest investment required (\$546,000 pa over three years) to enable this valuable service to continue, supporting the social service sector and the important work it does.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, do not hesitate to contact me on 0418 287 882.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joanna Quilty".

Joanna Quilty on behalf of the Forum of Non-Government Agencies
Chief Executive Officer
NCOSS

Members of FONGA

AbSec
Alliance for Gambling Reform
Anglicare
Association of Children's Welfare Agencies
Australian Red Cross
Barnardos Australia
Canterbury City Community Centre
Castle Personnel Services
Catholic Social Services NSW & ACT
Centacare
Central Coast Community Council
Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association
Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA)
Community Industry Group
Community Legal Centres NSW
Community Resource Network
Community Restorative Centre
Domestic Violence NSW
Faith Housing Alliance
Fams
Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW
Foodbank NSW & ACT Limited
Health Consumers NSW
Homelessness NSW
Inner Sydney Voice
Justice Connect
Life Without Barriers
Local Community Services Association NSW
Marathon Health
Mercy Foundation
Mission Australia
NCOSS
Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies
Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corporation
NSW Meals on Wheels
NSW Teachers Federation
Older Women's Network
Pathfinders
People With Disability Australia
Physical Disability Council of NSW
Playgroups NSW
Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Relationships Australia NSW
Save The Children
SDN Children's Services
Sector Connect
Settlement Services International
Shelter NSW
Social Futures
St Vincent de Paul Society
Tenants' Union NSW
The Benevolent Society
The Centre for Volunteering
The Salvation Army
Uniting
Way Ahead
Wesley Mission
Western Sydney Community Forum
WESTIR Limited
Women's Electoral Lobby
Women's Health NSW
Yfoundations
YMCA NSW
Youth Action