

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Community Legal Centres Across Australia



An  
investment  
worth  
protecting

Funding Submission to the Commonwealth Government 2007–2010

# A SOLID FOUNDATION

## THE OPPORTUNITY:

Funding that keeps pace with rising costs provides a solid foundation for delivering access to justice outcomes to disadvantaged people across Australia through community legal centres.

## THE CHALLENGE:

For over thirty years community legal centres have provided cutting-edge legal services, in partnership with business and government. They have delivered benefits to Australian society both tangible and intangible and they have underpinned a belief in a fair and accessible legal system.

CLC funding has not kept pace with increased costs. CLCs have experienced an 18% reduction in funding over the last 10 years in real terms. This impacts on outcomes for clients, placing unsustainable stress on the organisations' ability to deliver service. CLCs have had to cut back on staff, service hours and other expenses that support innovation and growth of services.

## THE SOLUTION:

An immediate allocation of **\$4,823,450\*** to Commonwealth Community Legal Service Programme funds for distribution to the 127 CLCs currently funded as part of the Programme.

## OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS:

- CLC services always available during business hours as well as out of hours services currently operating;
- Increased access to all forms of assistance at the centre;
- Increased ability of CLCs to attract and retain the services of qualified and experienced staff;
- Fewer resources need to be allocated to the recruitment of new staff and the supervision of inexperienced staff;
- Fewer interruptions to service delivery caused by suspension or discontinuation of activities during staff recruitment, training and orientation.

## Centres of Excellence

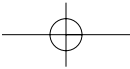
In 2006, around Australia over 20 centres and their staff received and were nominated for awards for excellence. They received awards for:

- Outstanding contributions made to the community;
- Professional excellence in legal practice;
- Queensland Emergent Women's Lawyer;
- Business awards for community organisations;
- Consumer protection awards;
- Awards for community legal education;
- NAB's volunteer award;
- Training excellence awards;
- Justice medals;
- Human Rights medals;
- Legal profession recognition awards around Australia; and
- Last year, Geraldton Resource Centre won the Prime Minister's award for Training.

The same level of public acknowledgement is received by CLCs year after year. CLCs are recognised in the legal, government, community and business sector as providers of excellence and innovation.

## OUTCOMES FOR GOVERNMENT:

- The ability to ensure that the Commonwealth's financial contribution to CLCs is an investment which enables disadvantaged people to have access to legal support provided by highly qualified staff. This is an investment which recognises that disadvantaged people are entitled to pursue their rights;
- The ability to ensure the Commonwealth's investment in CLCs is an investment that secures optimum levels of service delivery for communities from their local community legal centre.



# INVESTING IN CLC INFRASTRUCTURE

**THE OPPORTUNITY:**

With a solid organisational infrastructure – human resources and operational infrastructure – CLCs can harness a range of other resources – volunteers, pro bono, in kind and other funding support.

**THE CHALLENGE:**

Those CLCs established by the Commonwealth in the late 1990s and 2000 receive approximately half the funds required to be able to provide their communities with the full range of CLC services on a sustained and reliable basis. All resources go into keeping basic services going. There is nothing left to be able to consolidate, build and bring additional resources into the centre. This risks seriously undermining the program and impacting on client outcomes. As a priority, the Commonwealth established centres require an increase in funds to ensure that the investment already made in them is consolidated. The centres will then be able to enhance their existing services and continue to efficiently utilise the resources of the community.

**THE SOLUTION:**

Provide **\$5,502,375\*** to the Commonwealth established CLCs enabling them to be funded to the base level.

**OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS:**

- Increased service delivery because Commonwealth established services will have a full team of staff;
- Increased service delivery because Commonwealth established services will have an appropriate staff mix to carry out the necessary tasks for providing service delivery;
- Increased service delivery as a result of an increased ability to access other resources such as pro bono and volunteer support; and
- The creation of a number of new solicitor positions and the increasing of a number of positions from part-time to full-time.

**OUTCOMES FOR GOVERNMENT:**

- The ability to secure the Commonwealth’s investment in CLCs as an investment in ensuring a base level of service delivery which all communities can expect from their local community legal centre; and
- Increased value of the investment through the centre being able to draw in other resources.

### Welfare Rights Centres: Assisting Government, Preventing Debt

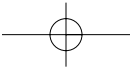
Centrelink debt recovery is a massive problem for individuals with debts and for government. There are currently over \$1billion in debts to Centrelink that are yet to be fully identified. Centrelink debts require significant resources to be spent on recovering the debt. Paying back a debt to Centrelink regularly places individuals in financial hardship and the level of debt recovery can also act as a disincentive to a person returning to work.

Each year a large proportion of the clients contacting Welfare Rights centres have debts to Centrelink. Consequently, the Welfare Rights Network decided it would be smart to try to prevent the debt from being incurred in the first place.

The Welfare Rights Network, a collaboration between community legal centres and workers who specialise in income support matters, undertook extensive research into the extent and causes of Centrelink debts. They examined trends in their individual casework data; examined Centrelink data; worked with relevant community agencies; and, met with Centrelink and staff from related government departments. A number of scenarios were identified that lead to Centrelink debts being incurred and the network then developed a series of proposals that would assist in preventing them.

Centrelink has accepted many of the Network’s proposals and is working to implement them. The Welfare Rights Network continues to provide assistance to government, families and individuals with Centrelink Debt prevention. Together they are working to ensure the integrity of the Social Security system.

\* Full costing details provided in the accompanying document *Community Legal Centres Across Australia. An Investment Worth Protecting: Funding Submission to Commonwealth Government 2007-2010*



# TARGETING DISADVANTAGE THROUGH SPECIALIST RESPONSES

### THE OPPORTUNITY:

Specialist CLCs target particular disadvantage and contribute expertise that can support generalist practice across the country.

### THE CHALLENGE:

Specialist CLCs have not had an increase in funds for their programs in over 10 years. Services have had to contract thereby impacting on outcomes for clients and reducing specialist positions that used to be able to resource generalist CLCs.

### OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS:

- Increase in the availability and quantity of services delivered by CLCs to the community in specialist areas through the creation of a number of new solicitor positions and the conversion of a number of positions from part-time to full-time;
- Increased ability to reinstate services suspended or discontinued because of previous shortfalls in funds; and
- Greater spread of specialist assistance to the community through the generalist centres because of the increased ability of specialist centres to resource the generalist centres.

### OUTCOMES FOR GOVERNMENT:

- The ability to secure the Commonwealth's contribution to specialist legal services for disadvantaged people;
- Increased ability of government to draw on the expertise of CLCs in specialist areas.

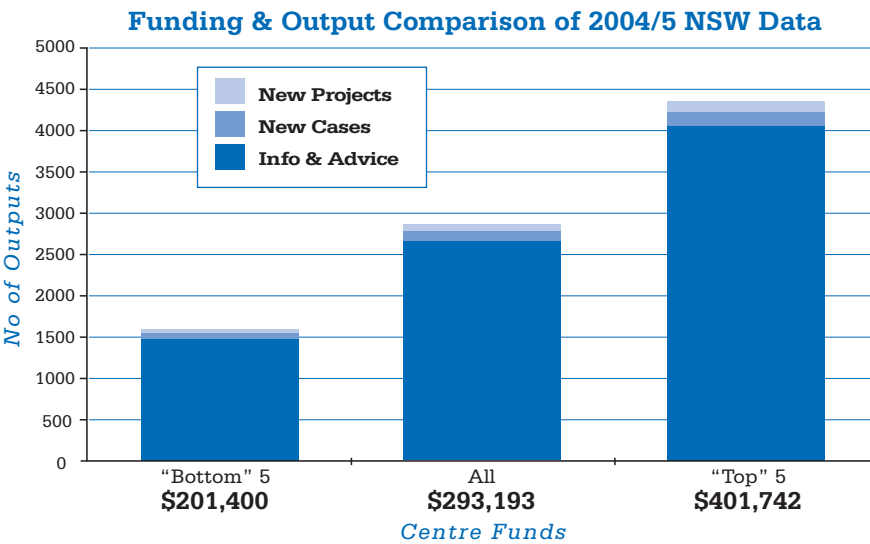
### THE SOLUTION:

Provide **\$11,690,769\*** to specialist commonwealth programmes distributed as outlined below.

1.	Indigenous Women's CLCs and services	1,624,256
2.	Welfare Rights CLCs and services	2,156,878
3.	Disability Discrimination Legal Centres and Services (DDL)	851,595
4.	Child Support Services (CSS)	603,286
5.	Youth Legal Services (CYI)	1,686,721
6.	Environmental Defenders Offices and Services	599,203
7.	Women's Legal Centres and Services:	3,183,356
	- Women's Legal Centres	2,730,556
	- Rural Women's Outreach Services	389,685
	- Satellite Women's Project	63,115
8.	Clinical Legal Education Services	169,474
9.	Pilot Program targeted to Older Australians (2 years)	816,000 /year
10.	Establish Program targeted to Older Australians (in year 3)	3,212,000

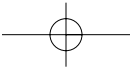
### Relationship between Amount of Funding and Level of Service Outputs

Each additional dollar of funds provided to an established CLC creates the equivalent of \$1.50's worth of extra outputs by taking advantage of existing CLC infrastructure.



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# SUPPORTING CLIENTS IN RURAL REGIONAL & REMOTE COMMUNITIES

## THE OPPORTUNITY:

Rural, regional and remote (RRR) community legal centres are strategically located throughout Australia in some of the nation's least serviced areas. The existing investment in RRR CLCs can be leveraged to better support our rural communities and provide help with their legal problems.

## THE CHALLENGE:

The cost of doing business in rural, regional and remote areas is putting increased pressure on CLCs in these locations. They never could meet all the demand for their services but they used to be able to eat into the demand more than they can now.

## THE SOLUTION:

Provide an additional **\$2,156,960\*** as a location subsidy to cover the higher costs for centres of doing business in the bush.

This includes \$250,000 per annum to establish and maintain a special needs fund to assist with specific location costs of individual centres.

## OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS:

- Increased ability of CLCs in RRR locations to reinstitute outreach services and institute outreach services in new locations;
- Increased ability of CLCs to develop and provide more extensive services by telecommunications;
- Increased ability of the centre to leverage other resources to assist with and increase service delivery;
- Increased ability of communities to access well-trained CLC staff who are able to attend training and professional development not available locally.

## OUTCOMES FOR GOVERNMENT:

- The ability to protect and enhance the Commonwealth's investment in CLCs as an investment in ensuring ongoing access by people in rural, regional and remote

### Kimberley Community Legal Services: Pulling Together in Remote Australia

Travelling by light aircraft and camping along the way, Kimberley CLS visited a number of remote communities to inform them of some recently enacted by-laws. The trip was organised in response to a request for help from police and community wardens in the area.

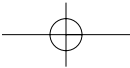
And then one thing lead to another. It became clear that school children would benefit from some sessions on their rights and responsibilities with the law. So this time, Kimberley CLS worked with the Aboriginal Legal Service. Then others wanted to know about their rights when police entered their homes. Another set of workshops were delivered and through this the centre established ongoing working relationships with the recently introduced Child Protection Warden and the staff at the new police station and court house.

In outback Australia, the distance seems endless and services are limited. CLCs throughout Australia, but especially in regional, rural and remote locations, have long established cooperative relationships with other organisations and groups also struggling to provide services. They know you have to pull together to survive in these regions. CLCs also know that you get results by working cooperatively.

Australia to high quality legal services, particularly at a time when rural Australia is hurting;

- Ability to ensure commonwealth provision of services to all people throughout Australia regardless of where they live or what their means.

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# THE SMART SERVICE MIX

## THE OPPORTUNITY:

By injecting community legal education and law reform into a mix with direct casework that helps individual clients and families across Australia, CLCs are able to learn new ways of approaching problems and help to prevent issues from arising in the first place. This is an intelligent response to the patterns that emerge from CLCs work with individual clients.

## THE CHALLENGE:

To structure CLCs so that they can maximise the outcomes from this smart service mix.

## THE SOLUTION:

Provide **\$14,981,744\*** to CLCs over the next 3 years to enable them to build their capacity and to maximise the benefit from the smart mix of service delivery to the community.

## OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS:

- Increased service delivery because centres will have an appropriate staff mix to carry out the smart mix of service delivery;
- Increased service delivery because centres will have a full team of staff;
- Fewer disruptions to service delivery; and
- The creation of a number of new solicitor positions and the conversion of a number of positions from part-time to full-time.

## Illawarra Legal Centre: Resourcing Other Service Providers, Maximising the Effect

The heads of 5 Ombudsman schemes from around Australia travelled to the Illawarra to participate in the forum “Know your rights ... Solve your problems” organised by Illawarra Legal Centre. Community workers, government employees and members of the public attended. They learnt about the ombudsman schemes, legal rights and how to make a complaint effectively.

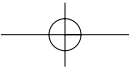
By helping those who help others, CLCs' maximise the effect and deepen the impact of its resources.

## OUTCOMES FOR GOVERNMENT:

- A better return on government investment;
- Ability to ensure prudent government expenditure of taxes; and
- Through better funding of the CLC service delivery mix, government enhances the ability of CLCs to work with other government schemes that also promote collaborative, diversionary and preventative outcomes.

## Springvale Monash Legal Service: Working with Police around Australia, Doing it Smarter

A young man with a mental illness was shot and killed by police in Melbourne. There had been other shootings in similar circumstances. The parents of the young man killed approached Springvale Monash LS and together they worked on a project aimed at preventing this tragedy occurring again. They found an alternate way of dealing with mentally ill people used by the police in Memphis USA. A report titled *Police Training and Mental Illness – A Time for Change* was produced. The report was referred to by the Coroner investigating the young man's death. The recommendations have been discussed with police all over Australia. The flexible and creative approach to service delivery at Springvale Monash LS allowed it to respond to this unusual request for help. Springvale Monash LS drew on its 30 years of experience providing education and training and on its long established relationship with the police to achieve this outcome. Some sense has been made of a son's death. Perhaps another son will not die in similar circumstances.



# COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES : GOOD VALUE

## For each dollar invested in CLCs, around \$100 may be saved

“Work by CLCs provides clear private benefits to individuals. The clients of CLCs are most likely to be people who live in disadvantaged circumstances and have legal problems that are typically part of a number of interlinked problems. CLCs play a crucial role in untangling these legal problems and assisting individuals to move on without being penalised by their inability to access other forms of legal assistance. What is less well recognised are the broader public benefits provided to society as a result of the work of CLCs. Such recognition is critical to identifying that total economic value generated by CLCs’ services.”

“It is also important to emphasise that the value of this preventative work is far greater than the reactive costs that would be incurred in the absence of such services. It is indeed a truism that the fence at the top of the cliff not only saves lives, but it is also much cheaper than the ambulance at the bottom.”

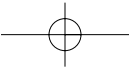
“If we only consider the quantitative values, it is clear that CLCs are providing significant value for money. If we take into account the far greater qualitative benefits, particularly those that accrue to the broader society and into the future, then the total economic value of CLCs is shown to be very high indeed.”

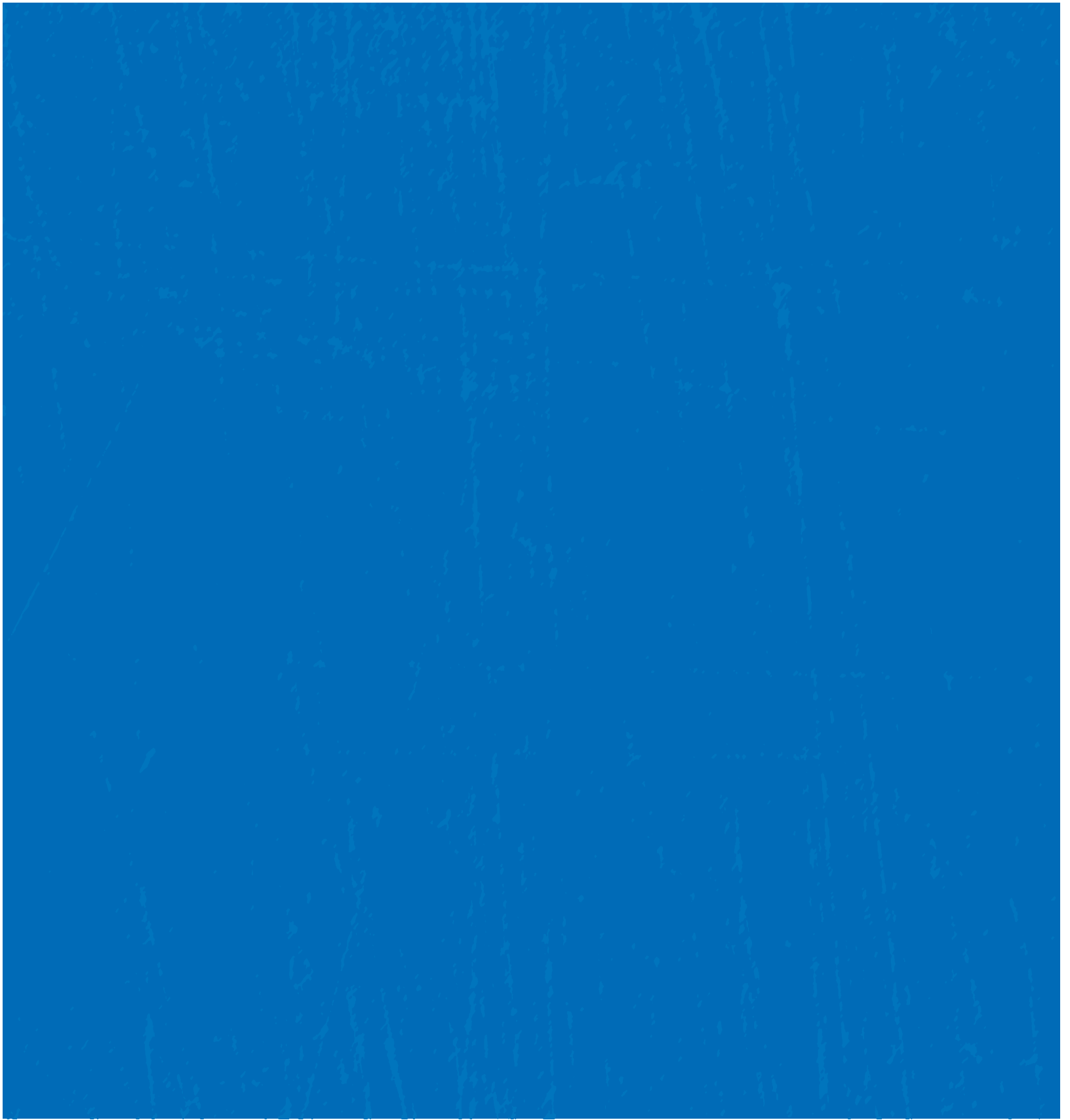
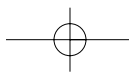
– *Economic Value of Community Legal Centres*, Emma Partridge,  
Institute of Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney. Feb 2006.

## SUMMARY OF REQUESTS

Measure #	Description	Total for Measure
1	A Solid Foundation – <i>Keeping pace with rising costs</i>	\$4,823,450
2	Investing in CLC Infrastructure – <i>Enabling CLCs to harness additional voluntary, pro-bono and other funding resources</i>	\$5,502,375
3	Targeting Disadvantage – <i>Allowing CLCs to contribute specialist expertise to other CLCs and Government agencies</i>	\$11,690,769
4	Supporting Clients in RRR Communities – <i>CLC investment can be leveraged to better support rural and remote communities</i>	\$2,156,960
5	Smart Service Mix – <i>Allows CLCs to approach problems in innovative ways and to prevent problems arising in the first place</i>	\$14,981,744
TOTAL OF ALL MEASURES		\$39,155,298

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With thanks to Merran Lawler and Pauline Spencer. Designed by Justin Archer Design. Printed by Snap Printing, Ultimo.

