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# MEDIA RELEASE

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**Tuesday, 14 March**

## **Council calls on Federal Government to commit CLC funding**

Yarra Ranges Council is calling for the Federal Government to commit \$240,000 in funding to keep Healesville's Eastern Legal Community Centre (ECLC) open.

Councillors unanimously resolved on Tuesday, 14 March, to write to Attorney-General George Brandis QC, Member for Casey Tony Smith and Member for La Trobe Jason Wood, requesting ongoing funding for Healesville's ECLC office.

The centre's funding agreement with the Federal Government, worth \$240,000 annually, is set to expire on 30 June, 2017.

ECLC is yet to be advised whether its funding will continue into the new financial year, raising uncertainty about its future.

Without the funding, the Healesville office will close. This would represent a tragic unravelling of a free service that has made a real difference in the Yarra Ranges.

Ryrie Ward Councillor, Fiona McAllister moved an Urgent Motion at the Council Meeting to write to the Federal Government to secure the funding.

"Two and a half years ago, Eastern Legal Community Centre, with Federal funding, funding through the Department of Justice and Legal Aid and the support of Yarra Ranges Council, established a very much-needed community legal centre in Healesville," Cr McAllister said.

"It was a small, little hidden-away presence, but it packed a powerful punch."

"Their reach has been so significant in the community, and it horrifies me to think that, potentially, we could sit around this table in three-to-four months and they might not be operating out of Healesville anymore."

O'Shannassy Ward Councillor, Jim Child said he often referred residents with legal concerns to ECLC and praised the centre's "valuable service for the vulnerable".

"The Attorney-General must take this very seriously," he said.

ECLC opened the office in February 2014 and has assisted about 500 people with free legal advice around issues such as homelessness and family violence.

Council's latest analysis of health data shows that people living in the Yarra Valley and outer areas like Healesville have significantly poorer health than others Victorians.

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In large part this is because of poor access to services. The ECLC has provided a critical link to justice and legal advice for those in need, including outreaches in Yarra Junction and Lilydale.

An independent review, published in December 2016, found that ECLC services in the Yarra Ranges achieved positive and often life-changing outcomes for its clients in its first two and a half years of operation.

The report highlighted the need for further State and Federal funding to meet local demand for the service.

Council provides \$20,000 to the ECLC annually as part of a three year Partnership Agreement, which began in 2015.

Particularly concerning is the impact that funding uncertainty and potential cuts to funding will have on the ECLC's capacity to respond to family violence - this will have wide reaching consequences.

At a time when all levels of government express a determination to change the story on family violence, cutting funds to this essential service doesn't make sense.

Council takes preventing family violence seriously, and is committed to the vision espoused by White Ribbon - to create a nation that respects women and in which every woman lives in safety, free from all forms of abuse.

This commitment is also expressed in Council's 2013-17 Health and Wellbeing Strategy – "Yarra Ranges has a culture of gender equity and respect and women live free from violence".

**ENDS**

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