

Ombudsman Communique

Roundtable with Community Legal Centre Peak Bodies on 7 August 2024

On 7 August 2024, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Iain Anderson, held a roundtable with state and national community legal centre peak bodies (CLCs) to discuss emerging issues, share knowledge, and gain insights from one another.

The meeting was attended by Community Legal Centres Australia, and the community legal centre peak bodies of South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria.

The Ombudsman affirmed to those at the meeting his commitment to engaging in a two-way dialogue with civil society organisations:

'I am very glad to be with you here today to hear your views about the Office and the issues you face in assisting your clients, many of whom are also clients of the agencies we oversee. I hope the discussion we have today will increase transparency of the Office's role and functions and lead to fairer outcomes for the people who come to us for help.'

The Ombudsman and CLC participants held an engaging and broad ranging discussion, which centred around understanding the Ombudsman's role and independence, and gaining insights about the experiences of complainants.

Many of the clients the CLCs help also make complaints to the Office. The CLCs provide assistance to 180,000 people per year, with many more that they are unable to assist due to a lack of resources.

Social security issues represent the Office's largest area of complaint. The CLCs explained that they meet regularly with Services Australia to gain insights into prevailing issues which can help CLCs support complainants. They also meet with state and territory ombudsmen.

The participants asked questions of the Ombudsman about his role and the breadth of the functions his Office performs and explored ways in which the Office may increase its accessibility to those most at need in the community.

The roundtable provided valuable insights and connections, and the Ombudsman is keen to continue engagement with CLCs as well as other civil society organisations, including community services peak bodies. He encouraged the peak bodies to reach out to the Office about emerging concerns and issues.

The CLCs offered to assist the Ombudsman to connect with and access specialist CLC networks' expertise and distribute communications from the Ombudsman to their members.

The Ombudsman plans to hold further roundtables in the coming year with civil society organisations.

For more information about the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, visit www.ombudsman.gov.au