

LEGAL AID MATTERS

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Eight out of ten believe legal aid should be there in times of need

Australians are overwhelmingly in favour of universal legal aid availability, according to an independent national poll commissioned by the [Legal Aid Matters](#) campaign.

1019 Australians, demographically weighted to reflect the national population, were asked:

How much do you agree or disagree with the following proposition? 'In Australia, anyone who encounters a serious legal issue, but cannot afford a lawyer, should be able to rely on legal representation being provided through legal aid.'

81.4 per cent of respondents of the *I-view* poll said they either strongly agreed (47.6 per cent) or agreed (33.8 per cent) with only 3.1 per cent disagreeing. 11.7 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 3.8 per cent did not know.

Legal Aid Matters campaign spokesperson, Law Council of Australia President Stuart Clark AM, said the result should cause both major parties to drastically reassess their priorities.

"This election, we need all political parties to support the eight of ten Australia's who rightly believe that legal aid should be there for them if they need it," Mr Clark said.

"Unfortunately, the overwhelmingly majority of Australians believe they have a right to something they simply cannot access in the vast majority of cases.

"Due to the cuts, only eight per cent qualify for legal aid under the current means test. Can you imagine if Medicare only covered eight per cent of the population?"

"It's well known that Australians believe passionately in the right to a Medicare safety net. This data clearly shows that we strongly believe in a legal safety net as well.

"Unfortunately, legal aid funding is so scarce that even if you're living below the poverty line, you're unlikely to qualify. People are being forced to represent themselves in court and it's destroying lives."

Mr Clark said that every way you look at it; there is a compelling reason to end the legal aid crisis.

"The legal profession has made the access to justice case. The Productivity Commission has made the economic case. And now the public has made the popular case," Mr Clark said.

"Access to justice is a basic human right and it is one that Australians rightly feel entitled to. Legal representation should not be exclusively for those wealthy enough to afford it. We know that due to the cuts, around 10,000 people per year are being forced to front the courts alone."

The Legal Aid Matters campaign is calling on the next Federal Government to [inject \\$350 million](#) into legal aid to end the current funding crisis.

"As the Productivity Commission has clearly outlined, investing in legal aid will lead to major savings in the court system, the welfare system, and the health system. Properly funding legal aid isn't a cost, it's an investment." Mr Clark said.

Australians can get involved in the campaign by visiting legalaidmatters.org.au – where they learn more about the crisis, sign a petition, and even directly contact their local MP.

The polling data (conducted 18-22 May 2016) can be accessed [here](#). Margin of error: 3.2 per cent.

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