

Robodebt report highlights the connection between the public good and legal assistance

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National Legal Aid welcomes the final report of the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme and calls for the implementation of all 57 recommendations including a review of funding for legal assistance.

We highlight the recognition by the Royal Commission of Victoria Legal Aid's strategic litigation that resulted in \$1.76 billion in waived and refunded Robodebt issued to over 443,000 people, as well as its advocacy work in the lead up to the strategic litigation.

The report recommends the Commonwealth consider the importance of funding for legal assistance in the context of the Robodebt advocacy when it conducts the review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership, which commenced this month.

"The Commonwealth should have regard, in considering funding for legal aid commissions and community legal centres, to the importance of the public interest role played by those services as exemplified in their work during the Scheme," the report reads.

National Legal Aid acknowledges the wide ranging, detrimental impact of Robodebt on people receiving income support and their families and the effort by individuals, community advocates and our legal assistance colleagues in challenging the Robodebt scheme, culminating in the Royal Commission and its Report.

"One could have no clearer illustration of the value of legal aid services. The work Victoria Legal Aid did was not only in its clients' interests, it was for the public good. The Robodebt experience convincingly demonstrates the importance, in the public interest, of properly funded legal aid commissions," the report reads. (p 371)

Legal assistance services including legal aid commissions play a vital role in providing access to justice for people experiencing disadvantage. The public interest role is not well known or understood. The Robodebt strategic litigation highlighted the effectiveness and impact of this work at the highest level.

Differences are also made every day through advocacy such as liaising with the finance industry on credit and debt issues, working to improve the response time of the National Disability Insurance Agency on NDIS assessments, raising issues around insurance policies for people impacted by disaster or highlighting how industries can improve the ways they address workplace harassment. This work is done in partnership with, and could not be achieved without, our legal assistance and community colleagues. Most importantly, we recognise and acknowledge the effort and centrality of our clients in these matters. They must be at the centre of all that we do.

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