

MEDIA RELEASE: Thousands left speechless as Federal Government slashes interpreter services

Financial and Consumer Rights Council and Community Information & Support Victoria joint media release



4th December 2015

For immediate release

This week, some of the most marginalised and vulnerable throughout Australia were cut off from essential support services, when Federal government cut access to the national Translator and Interpreter Service [TIS] to Emergency Relief and Financial Counselling services.

The Federal Government is no longer providing free access to interpreters for thousands of people, who are unable to communicate with community service providers without their assistance. Non-profit Financial Counselling and Emergency Relief services have effectively been told that they must find the money for TIS elsewhere. This will diminish the level of support they can provide.

The Financial and Consumer Rights Council [FCRC] and Community Information and Support Victoria [CISVIC] believe that the impact this will have on clients from culturally and linguistically diverse communities is potentially devastating.

The May 2014 budget cuts to Emergency Relief funding saw cuts between 20-70%, and have already impacted on capacity of agencies to meet demand for service.

“Emergency Relief volunteers and Financial Counsellors have vulnerable people constantly turning to them, seeking support, and are unable to help them due to language barriers. Access to free interpreting services broke down those barriers and gave those clients the opportunity to access much needed services” , said Peter Gartlan, Executive Director of FCRC.

“Imagine receiving legal documents, or complicated bills and not being able to understand what is being demanded of you. Even competent English speakers struggle with comprehending the maze of legal issues and challenges that can occur when you are in financial hardship. Taking away interpreters is simply not viable, just or practical at all.” said Mr Gartlan.

Kate Wheller, Executive Officer of CISVIC said, “CISVIC and FCRC call on Minister Christian Porter to intervene and restore funding immediately. Governments know they have an obligation to ensure that language is not a barrier for people seeking help. It is deeply concerning to see the most basic right to speak to another human being, when you are in need, is now taken away from clients who are already extremely vulnerable and marginalised.”

“Emergency relief and financial counselling organisations are already cash strapped organisations who now have to fund this cost themselves.” Said Ms Wheller

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Data from South East Community Links indicates that 1 in 8 clients presenting for Commonwealth Financial Counselling or Emergency Relief require an interpreter. In the 12 month period to June 2015, the Telephone Interpreter Service was used nearly 1 500 times in the Springvale and Dandenong regions alone at a cost of \$37 000. Now, this community agency has to find this amount of funds.

FCRC is the peak body for Financial Counsellors in Victoria. Financial counsellors provide information, support and advocacy to people in financial difficulty. CISVIC is the peak body for Emergency Relief providers in Victoria.

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Media Contacts

Peter Gartlan
Executive Officer
Financial and Consumer Rights Council
0457 700 028

Kate Wheller
Executive Officer
Community Information & Support Victoria
0407 670 125