

National Regional, Rural, Remote and Very Remote Community Legal Network

<https://clcs.org.au/4rs-network/>



Productivity Commission
Submitted online
15 March 2026

Dear Commissioners,

Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Determinants of Regional Airfares

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. The submission is structured as set out on the table of contents below. There are two recommendations set out at para 1.3 the background to which are in the 2. Discussion and case studies.

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1. About the 4Rs Network

The National Regional, Rural, Remote and Very Remote Community Legal Network ('**4Rs Network**') promotes access to justice in regional, rural, remote and very remote ('**4Rs**') areas. The Network's vision of **Justice where we live. Every community. Every person. Everywhere** - reflects that solutions must be present to ensure equality, wellbeing and rights wherever people are in Australia.

The Network consists of about 85 community-based legal assistance services, networks and peaks, most provide legal and related assistance in or to 4Rs areas. This includes participating Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and non-Indigenous organisations.

There are members in each Australian state and territory and while most members are in inner regional, outer regional, remote or very remote areas the membership includes city-based efforts and services with state-wide or national service areas and national peaks with city-based operations. Accordingly, the Network connects members across Very Remote, Remote, Outer and Inner Regional and Major Cities¹ and all Modified Monash Model areas.²

1.1 Legal assistance sectors

Community based legal assistance services in and/or for regional, rural, remote and very remote areas consist of three main service sectors namely:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services ('**ATSILS**'),
- Family Violence Prevention Legal Services ('**FVPLS**') and
- Aboriginal Community Controlled ('**ACCO**') and non-ACCO Community Legal Services ('**CLCs**').

These sectors strive to ensure place-based legal assistance, which includes in person assistance when needed for clients and communities to access legal assistance, as well as legal assistance by phone or using information and communication technologies ('**ICTs**') when suitable.

The other major legal assistance provider around Australia, are the Legal Aid Commissions ('**LACs**'), which are state and territory statutory bodies.

Additionally, the private legal profession contributes in many substantial ways, partnering with Legal Aid Commissions to act for people on grants of aid, and contributing as board members, volunteers and via pro bono programs in legal assistance sectors. Law Schools and law students also contribute to access to justice in Australia through legal assistance initiatives, placements, governance contributions, pro bono and volunteering.

The geographic distribution of lawyers, law schools and law students in Australia are disproportionately urban, and urban normativity plays out in many ways and is part of the backdrop about why regional airfares are so relevant to access to justice.³

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (Jul2021-Jun2026). [Remoteness Areas](#). ABS. Released 21 March 2023

² Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, [Modified Monash Model](#) (2026) (Webpage)

³ For background about urban normativity relating to access to justice see for example the 4Rs Network, '[Letter to Commonwealth, State and Territory Attorneys-General in response to the report of the independent review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement with backgrounder and attachment](#)', 2 September 2024.

Full geographic access to justice across 4Rs areas is far from being achieved, with large areas with insufficient coverage, and a national picture of vastly insufficient 4Rs access to justice safety nets, planning, funding and workforce support.⁴

1.2 Focus of the submission

Regional airfares impact access to justice in Australia in multiple ways as outlined in the submission and case studies which follow. The submission mainly focuses on the effects of high regional airfares without adequate safety nets on:

- people and communities experiencing disadvantage in 4Rs areas
- access to legal assistance by people facing disadvantage in 4Rs areas, and
- operations justice and access to justice legal assistance services in 4Rs areas.

These issues are interlinked and they intersect in multiple and often compounding ways.

1.2.1 Context of levels of disadvantage in 4Rs areas

We note the map reflecting regional airlines in the Commission's Call for Submissions (**Image 1** below).⁵ While many maps can help paint pictures of different ways regional airfares are relevant, we include two further maps at **Image 2** and **Image 3** relating to socio-economic disadvantage.

Image 1: Regional airlines map, Productivity Commission, 2025

⁴ See the 4Rs Network page at <https://clcs.org.au/4rs-network/> for an outline in multiple submissions. For background information that provides links to material about lack of geographic access to justice coverage in 4Rs areas by multiple sectors, particularly see the 4Rs Network submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into [Northern Australia Workforce Development](#), (submission no 83), which outlined roles and opportunities for stakeholders and collaborators in Northern Australia and in the rest of Australia ('ROA').

⁵ Productivity Commission, [Determinants of regional airfares: Call for submissions](#), 2 Dec 2025, p. 8



Image 2: SEIFA – Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) Quintiles for all LGAs⁶ - Ranks areas according to their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage using Census data.

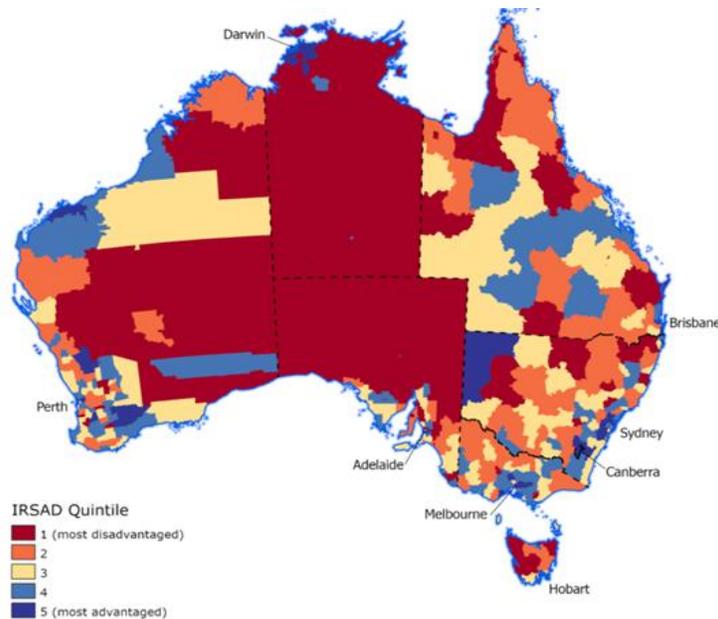
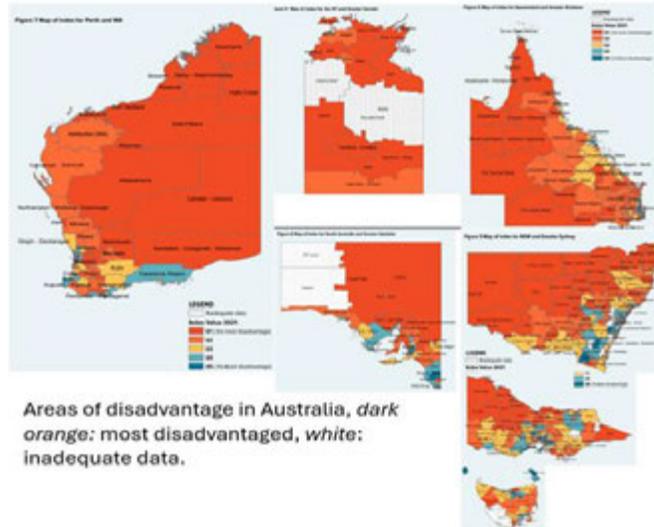


Image 3: Areas of disadvantage – Compilation from *Dropping off the Edge 2021: Persistent & multilayered disadvantage in Australia*⁷

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, '[Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia](#)', People and Communities, Released 27 April 2023.

⁷ Robert Tanton et al, '[Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia](#)', *DOTE2021* (Report, 19 November 2021).



1.2.2 Determinants of regional airfares and relevance of safety-nets

The focus of the inquiry on the *determinants* of regional airfare provides great scope for the inquiry to undertake wide-ranging root cause analysis. The whole inquiry connects with what can and should be done. The answer to these questions should ensure that human rights, wellbeing, equity and social inclusion are centrally addressed.

It is submitted that a determinants approach should include whether the causes of high regional airfares, which often result in greatest penalties to the most disadvantaged in 4Rs areas, include lack of sufficient ameliorating measures including subsidies and safety nets.

As reflected in the terms of reference there are many issues associated with high regional airfares and operations which are relevant to Closing the Gap. Some serious issues are highlighted in this submission. Non-Indigenous people facing disadvantage in 4Rs areas are impacted in different ways. An intersectional approach in relation to First Nations and non-Indigenous people, reflecting all relevant dimensions, is strongly supported. For background regarding intersectionality and non-urban areas, the 4Rs Network submission to the inquiry into reform of the Disability Discrimination Act,⁸ contains discussion and diagrams which may assist.

Many community based legal assistance services lack the spread of office locations that are required. For example First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence, which is the peak for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services ('FVPLS') in Australia, [calls for capital funding for FVPLS's](#) to include increasing housing for FVPLS staff in remote and rural areas, including local staff who lose their means tested housing due to their employment.

⁸ 4Rs Network, '[Submission Disability Discrimination Act \(Cth\) Review](#)' 28 November 2025.

All community based legal assistance sectors in and for 4Rs areas press the need for resources to reflect community needs and actual costs of service delivery however all are impacted by insufficient resources, including for the actual costs of air and other travel.

1.3 Recommendations

For reasons which will be apparent from the discussion and case studies which follow, the recommendations of this submission are:

1. The Commonwealth take a leadership role in committing, and seeking commitments from states and territories, to fully subsidise and fund required air travel and make other improvements to achieve:
 - Effective standards of access to essential services, human rights, wellbeing, equity and inclusion in regional, rural, remote and very remote communities.
 - Fair and effective access to essential travel by people travelling from or to these communities.
 - Effectiveness and productivity of essential services, amenities and opportunities by, with and for these regional, rural, remote and very remote communities.
2. The Commonwealth Government, States and Territories address funding shortfalls for community based non-profit services - including community based legal assistance services - in and/or for regional, rural, remote and very remote areas. This should ensure safety-net coverage of higher airfare, travel and related costs and affordable travel for people facing disadvantage. The objective should be to overcome geographic penalisation of:
 - people and communities in regional, rural, remote and very remote areas,
 - budgets and operations of services due to the location of regional, rural, remote and very remote locations of the communities and clients they aim to serve.

2. Discussion and case studies

The discussion which follows is set out under headings, however the issues are inter-related and case studies under one heading may also be applicable to others.

2.1 Grossly insufficient safety-nets for clients and communities

Community based legal assistance services in many 4Rs areas are frequently involved in trying to source assistance for urgent air travel by clients and community members. This is a systemic issue due to grossly insufficient safety-nets.

Case study 1: No financial assistance for travel

An Aboriginal woman from a Central Australian community who was on a Centrelink parenting payment wanted to travel to Mt Isa in Queensland to see her dying family member and wanted to know if there was any financial assistance available as the cost of flights were too expensive. There was no assistance for this request available, and her family member died before she was able to take the trip as she was unable to pay the huge costs of domestic travel.

Case study 2: Legal matter, urgency, safety of women and children

A client in a regional centre in the NT secured an urgent recovery order from the Federal Circuit Court and Family Court of Australia for a young child who was removed by force by a family member from their home in the NT and taken to a regional community in WA. Due to urgent safety concerns for the child, the police recovered the child immediately: the child then had to remain at the Police Station in WA and wait for the client to travel from the regional centre to Darwin to the regional centre in WA. Ideally, this would have been by plane there and back but instead, due to the very high cost, the travel was bus to Darwin, plane to regional centre in WA, then bus to regional community. The client and child then had to make the same return journey, terrified that the other party would follow them. There was no financial assistance available, particularly with such urgency, so the legal service representing the client paid for the travel to ensure the safe recovery of the child.

Case study 3: Financial, locational and racial barriers to equality and justice

JP (pseudonym), a client of a Family Violence Prevention Legal Service ('FVPLS') in a very remote area, has a final hearing listed for one whole week (five hearing days) in the Children's Court about her 10-year-old daughter, who has been in provisional protection and care for several years. JP is an Aboriginal woman who lives in the community where the FVPLS is located. The hearing is in the capital city over 2000km away. JP is required to attend in person. JP asks that the social worker with our service go with her, she has never been there before and needs support. Our service recognises the importance of JP having support, particularly noting the historical and ongoing trauma for Aboriginal people subjected to legal processes involving child protection. Our service arranged for the Social Worker to travel with her and be with her. This involved large practical and financial commitments. The flights were almost \$2,500 and in addition it was 700km to and from the regional airport (fuel about \$350) plus accommodation and allowances for the week. These expenses were not financially supported by the Department responsible for child protection and no other sources to cover.

The hearing was only partially completed in the scheduled week and was relisted. JP and her Social Worker returned to the community but had to repeat the same journey on short notice 6 weeks later. Due to the short notice those flights were significantly more expensive than the first.

This case highlights the substantial financial barriers that Aboriginal people living remotely face in accessing justice. For people living in remote communities, attending court can require thousands of dollars in travel and accommodation costs. Expenditure of this kind is not ancillary to legal representation; it is often necessary to ensure that women are able to meaningfully participate in proceedings that have a direct impact on themselves and their family. Where there isn't funding to meet these costs, many women face the choice of attending court alone, without cultural or emotional support, or not participating fully in the process at all.

The regional airfares and travel are impacting the rights of many children in 4Rs areas, especially the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Case study 4: Aboriginal children in out of home care in metro area

Child Protection will often try to bring Aboriginal children who are in out-of-home care in metro areas back to their regions to help maintain connections with their families, communities and culture. The high airfares to regional areas mean this involves substantial cost and budgets can be a limiting factor. Due to the high costs of air travel, even with any reduction for residents, many families cannot afford to travel to the metro area without specific financial assistance to increase direct contact. If family members do manage the airfare, they may not have access to accommodation to be there.

Travel assistance funding can sometimes be accessed by community members and clients in 4Rs areas, in specific eligibility circumstances. This includes funding administered as brokerage by some non-profit organisations as well as state and territory programs including Patient Assisted Travel (PATs) and federal programs including the Leaving Violence Program.

While every one of these initiatives makes critical contributions, available assistance often falls short due to limited funding and/or limited assistance amounts compared to regional airfare and other travel costs.

Case study 5: Leaving Violence Program (Cth)

An Aboriginal woman from a remote Community and her children were escaping family violence and wanted to relocate interstate where she had the support of her family. She originally wanted to fly as her youngest child was a very young baby as well as several children under 10 years. As the cost of flights would have taken most of her Leaving Violence Program payment she opted to travel by bus for 24 hours instead.

2.2 Regional airfare & travel: funding of community legal assistance services

Community legal assistance services in and/or for 4Rs areas are typically facing overheads for travel which are not reflected in their funding allocations under funding programs and funding models. This relates to all forms of travel and the overheads which go with it.

Lack of funding for travel and other higher overheads involved in providing legal assistance in 4Rs areas, penalises 4Rs areas by effectively shifting the higher overheads and travel costs onto services who must meet costs from their existing budgets. This reduces service provision compared to similar funding to similar services without these costs such as many with metro-only service areas.

Case study 6: The number of vehicles says a lot

With the road trip to remote communities we drive, the costs of air travel are so much higher, and the limited number and times of flights and the costs of charters make those very unfavorable. For a staff group of only 25-28 FTE, we have 12 vehicles, 5 of which are 4WD. We have had to purchase off-road tyres, two-way radios, safety packs for cars, GPS and have spent a lot of time developing policies and procedures for safe travel across the Pilbara. Driving distances impacts fatigue and the amount of hours driving reduces the amount of service delivery hours we can provide. Meal allowances for travelling staff and cost of accommodation (and standard of accommodation is also problematic). For the financial year, we have allocated \$100k just in meal allowances for travelling staff.

Very high costs and air market practices, including non-refundability, increase the stakes for travel plans among community based legal assistance services in and for 4Rs areas. High costs and market practices are often at odds with the needs of communities and services for flexibility.

Case study 7: Way outside our budget

Rain in Central Australia can result in road closures causing havoc with plans for road travel to remote communities. Our community legal service recently got a quote for an air charter which came in at over \$12,000 for a return trip which is way outside our budget. We try to share flight costs with another organisation but that is not always possible.

Case study 8: So much riding on booked trips

Booked trips often have a lot riding on them. If staff become unavailable or other things happen, cancelled trips often incur additional financial penalties such as non-refundable travel and accommodation bookings. Very importantly, cancelled trips can damage the service's reputation and the community's trust in the service.

Case study 9: LGBTQIA+ people in non-urban areas

Our non-profit legal service is inner city, but we have a state-wide catchment, even though we do not have proper state-wide funding. LGBTQIA+ in non-urban areas often experience multiple and intersecting barriers and marginalisation. Our legal service is often the service of choice. Often, we are approached because there are few services, especially in regional and non-urban areas, with LGBTQIA+ specific expertise.

The cost of regional airfares for lawyers to travel to regional centres to represent clients in Court are a big cost factor for us which we generally can't afford. The higher the airfares the less feasible this becomes as our service does not receive funding to cover. This isn't limited to us; this pattern happens for access to specialist non-profit legal assistance by LGBTQIA+ people in regional areas throughout Australia.

The unreliability of flights from some regional centres is systemic to the point of unsuitability as an option when arriving by a certain time is essential.

Case study 10: Fly/drive decision - when airline unreliability removes the choice

As a regional NFP, every travel decision involves weighing client and community needs, staff capacity, and cost. When airlines work, flying is often right. Since the collapse of REX, it isn't an option for time-sensitive travel in our region. Cancellations are frequent enough that we now default to driving, which consumes hours of staff time that should go to service delivery and reduces our presence in the capital for peer engagement and advocacy.

Airline unreliability doesn't just change how we travel — it changes what we can do. We are effective stewards of constrained budgets, but we shouldn't have to spend organisational energy navigating around infrastructure that doesn't work. That energy belongs to our communities.

Courts, court services, prosecutions, child protection, other government justice agencies, other justice related agencies and justice related programs are all impacted by regional airfare costs and logistics in 4Rs areas. Resources used for high airfare costs, are resources which are not available for greater responsiveness by these agencies in many other respects in 4Rs areas.

Access to resources for air travel and other travel is often very uneven between agencies and services, and community based legal assistance services are often struggling.

Case Study 11: Legal representation struggling not to be left behind in 4Rs areas

Services who work within and around other systems, such as remote court circuits, can have decisions taken out of their hands: for example, a remote Circuit continued with its planned dates to sit in 2 communities one week despite road access being cut. Legal services were required to charter flights to ensure representation in Court, despite the significant financial burden. Whilst in Community 1, the airstrip in Community 2 flooded: the Court secured a helicopter to that second community to continue with Court sittings.

Case Study 12: No seat on the plane

In our area, Legal Aid can travel with the Magistrate on their flight charter for court circuit. The Police have a plane that ferries the police around. We [Community Legal Service] don't get a berth on anything!

Air travel by staff in 4Rs legal assistance services in 4Rs areas to capital cities or other central locations for meetings, training, projects, essential events and the like often involve costs which are unprecedented for those in metro areas when travel is metro based including flying to other large metro areas.

2.3 Subsidies or other solutions are missing

While market failure is a determinant of the vast gaps between the availability of regional air travel and the cost, another determinant is the absence of sufficient subsidies and solutions for the needs of individuals, communities, services, agencies and other stakeholders.

Generally, community legal services in and/or for 4Rs areas do not receive group discounts from airlines.

Case study 13: We applied to QANTAS but weren't successful

The QANTAS Regional Grants program is an excellent initiative, our Community Legal Service is eligible on the guidelines, we applied last year but were not successful. A lot of others must have missed out too. The total pool reflects an effort, not a solution.

2.4 Essential services in 4Rs areas must be protected

High regional airfares, airline operations and practices are taking a toll on service provision operations on community based legal assistance services, and many other essential services, in and for 4Rs areas.

Community based legal assistance services with two or more office locations, and / or large service areas often face regional airfares which are equivalent to some international airfare costs from Australian capital cities. This often has multiplier effects for services and for their 4Rs communities and service areas. It has many effects on staff and workforce.

Case study 14: Staff movements for service provision

Providing services in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek involves sending staff between both offices travelling either by vehicle or plane. Flights between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek can vary from \$700 - \$1300 one way and there are not flights available every day. Flight costs are weighed up against saving of 3 hours travel time and cost of fuel and wear on vehicles. Availability of fuel and increase fuel costs are also causing increasing concern for remote travel planning.

Case study 15: Financially unsustainable for some staff: recruitment & retention

[Staff with 4Rs community legal services who are a long way from family and home]
..we have had staff members leave 4Rs community legal assistance services where they were required to travel home more regularly (e.g. due to family illness, or own well-

being) and it was no longer financially sustainable to live in a 4Rs area and travel home frequently. Below par pay parity and non-competitive salaries, which result from insufficient funding, are adding to this. 4Rs community based legal assistance services do not have the ability to subsidise flights home for all staff and need to think through equity issues with how 'local' or 'long-term' employees who call the 4Rs place home can be offered an equivalent benefit.

Case study 16: Senior positions and flying

As with many workforce challenges for 4Rs community legal assistance services, recruitment can be exacerbated when it comes to more senior positions. These services in 4Rs areas often receive expressions of interest or applications from interested and skilled lawyers and others for senior or management roles, however applicants often ask to work remotely with costs covered for regular travel to the service, or for regular trips home. Either way generally involves expensive regional airfares.

Case study 17: FIFO failure - airline unreliability hitting service delivery

With fly-in-fly-out arrangements — both our own workforce backfill and visiting professionals like city-based lawyers — we've had Court matters fail due to flight cancellations, and backfill arrangements collapse at short notice. Each failure has real cost to clients and communities.

When we plan a FIFO arrangement, we've already weighed flying against the alternatives. When airlines fail, that decision is undone without warning and we bear the consequence. Funding for regional services is already tighter than it should be — airline ineffectiveness compounds that directly. We would deliver more, more reliably, with air services that work and with funders who account for the true cost of regional service delivery.

Among the potentially 'unseen' consequences of high regional airfares and logistics are the effects on the capacity of services in and/or for 4Rs areas to attract (1) law students for placements, training and programs and (2) law student, legal and other volunteers. Travel costs, often equivalent to going overseas to undertake a law course or volunteer but without the financial support which may be available in those cases, are a substantial barrier.

Case study 18: Law students, volunteers and pro bono

Community based legal assistance services in 4Rs areas often have extreme difficulty attracting law students, volunteers and on-site pro bono assistance, due in large part to travel and accommodation costs and lack of access to funds and lack of programs to cover or subsidise these costs.

Australian law students can apply to undertake law courses involving placements and community service in the Asia Pacific under the New Colombo Scheme but there is no

domestic equivalent in Australia in support of 4Rs areas. For 4Rs legal assistance sectors, despite workforce shortages, there is no HELP fee relief or any rural and remote workforce initiatives like those in health, schools etc. There isn't financial assistance for volunteers or for firms to extend pro bono assistance-on-site with community legal services in 4Rs areas. The patterns of law student, volunteer and pro bono involvement in access to justice greatly favours the major cities, and this has multiplier effects on legal assistance workforce, justice and access to justice in 4Rs areas.

2.5 Flight costs, logistics and productivity

Flight costs and logistics for flights in, from and to 4Rs areas are a major productivity issue.

Flight availability is often a controlling, intrusive and limiting factor on service provision. Currently, flight availability must be accommodated by people, communities, and services in 4Rs areas, rather than the other way around. Flights to remote communities are often sporadic and insufficient.

Market forces and high prices are often dictating rather than facilitating productivity and effectiveness of service provision in 4Rs areas. As outlined above, human resources is one of the areas in which many 4Rs community based legal services are impacted. This can include conditions for staff, which involve travel days in leave provision.

Case study 19: Flight logistics

A challenge to recruiting staff to work in remote locations is assisting them to go on leave. Additional travel days are required to align flights or road travel from remote locations to regional centres to catch flights to cities.

2.6 Infrastructure, airstrips, access and safety

Very poor road infrastructure in many remote, very remote and some other parts of Australia, contributes to the need for flight options, including charters.

Poor roads, including unsealed and poorly maintained roads, and poor access to public and affordable transport affect travel from and to many communities throughout the year, at certain times of the year or during climatic and other events.

Substantial time and resources often go into planning and undertaking road trips.

Case study 20: So much goes into planning

4Rs community legal assistance services often face complex work health and safety considerations when determining whether a particular remote trip by road is safe to proceed.

If it's a trip to an isolated location, before setting out, there is a significant financial outlay in ensuring that there are multiple, 4WD trained, drivers attending the trip; that the vehicle, including tyres, is appropriately serviced and equipped with safety gear including satellite phones, 2 spare tyres, comprehensive first aid kits and first aid trained staff, and equipment including snatch straps and maxtrax.

Weather and road conditions must be carefully assessed prior to a trip commencing and monitored closely during the trip's duration in case. Available chartered aircraft are usually in limited supply, with upfront confirmation and payment required.

Other considerations such as community unrest, particularly where police or other services are unavailable or already stretched, may cause concern about staff safety.

Finally, the team's comfort and confidence to undertake a trip given all the circumstances must be considered every time: this includes looking at fatigue, burn-out, workload, and exposure to potential trauma.

For air travel, airstrips are part of the matrix of compounded logistics, travel and travel safety issues affecting many communities and provision of services by multiple essential services and agencies including community based legal assistance services.

Case study 21: How's the airstrip?

Flights are only possible to locations that have a safe and functioning airstrip: these are often damaged or are inaccessible during the wet season due to flooding or can be rendered unsafe if fencing is damaged, allowing wildlife to be on the airstrip. Even where a flight is possible, many remote communities have surrounding populations that are not able to be visited due to a lack of cars/transport once on the ground (e.g. outstations, cattle properties, or other settlements cut off by flood water), contributing to unequal access to justice.

Facilities at regional and remote area airports for people with disability require continuing efforts, transparency and resources. It appears that a high number of airports in regional and remote areas are yet to establish a [Disability Access Facilitation Plan](#). Disability access standards are not fully implemented by airports in many 4Rs areas resulting in safety risks and experiences of humiliation. It is also noteworthy that Disability Discrimination Legal Services in Australia are mainly located in metro areas with state-wide service areas. Funding models for these services generally do not correspond with state-wide in-person legal assistance when required in a 4Rs area. Funding for projects relating to 4Rs areas is often absent as well. For example, projects relating to patterns of disability discrimination in 4Rs areas, including by regional airlines.

Case study 22: Is there an airport disability lift?

In October 2023 Darwin Community Legal Service and its Seniors' Rights and Disability Service celebrated a win with the approval of a \$63,000 Community Support Grant for the installation of a wheelchair lift at Maningrida Airport. Before this the airport didn't

have one, and people couldn't use planes without their own lifts or were physically carried onto planes. The approval of funding for the wheelchair lift, followed two years of advocacy by the SDRS team with the Maningrida community. A petition signed by over 85 Maningrida concerned citizens underscored the urgency. SDRS Project Lead, Ramnik Walia was led or attended numerous meetings with NT Government Ministers including the Chief Minister highlighting the lack of accessibility at Maningrida Airport.

Image 4: [Koori Mail Instagram 2 Nov 23](#) Stephen Dennis "Having lift will make it easy for people with disability and old people... for everyone in Maningrida."



During weather events, fires, cyclones, natural and other disasters community based legal assistance services in 4Rs areas can be cut off from surrounding areas, with workers unable to travel in or out, except, potentially by air when safe to do so. Responding to disruptions to services and community needs during these times, often requires funding injections as standing provisions for surge capacity, including covering higher costs of travel by air. However, surge capacity funding and funding for increased costs including air travel, is often absent.

Logistics once the crisis is underway, and during recovery, often involve air transport needs however communities, and community based legal assistance services in and for 4Rs areas often experience layer upon layer of difficulties.

Case study 23: January 2023 flooding in Fitzroy Crossing, WA

During the initial emergency response when Fitzroy Crossing was flooded in January 2023, and during the long recovery, Marninwarntikura Women's Resources Centre, which includes the Marin Family Violence Legal Unit, was a critical community hub for women and families. Among many other things, Marin was centrally involved in coordinating other assistance as Marin was the only legal service in Fitzroy Crossing. The images below are from web sites of a range of legal services extending assistance, with roads initially impassable⁹ Top left: Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service - a state-wide with one

⁹ 4Rs Network, '[National Regional Rural Remote and Very Remote Community Legal Network Submission to the Robodebt Royal Commission ANO.9999.0001.0010](#)', Submission, 3 Feb 2023, 10.

office in Perth and without recurrent state-wide travel funding; middle left: Aboriginal Family Legal Service, with closest offices in Broome and Kununurra; middle right: Kimberley Community Legal Service, with closest offices in Broome and Kununurra; Aboriginal Legal Service WA, with closest offices in Broome and Kununurra. None had funds on hand for disaster legal assistance surge capacity.

New factsheets
for people affected by the **2023 Kimberley Floods**

- Disaster Recovery Payment
- Disaster Recovery Allowance
- Pausing your debts
- Pausing your mutual obligations

Welfare Rights & Advocacy Service WA
NEW FACTSHEETS
Are you impacted by the 2023 Kimberley Floods and having trouble with Centrelink?
We have produced 4 factsheets to help you understand which payments may be available to you and how to solve common Centrelink issues.
You can find the factsheets on our website here - wra.wa.gov.au/resources/
... See more

All AFLS Offices are now accepting donations to help the victims of West Kimberley flooding.

We are accepting

- ☑ Clothes (men, women, kids)
- ☑ Non perishable food
- ☑ Hygiene items
- ☑ Baby supplies (nappies, wipes, formula etc)

Aboriginal Legal Service of WA Limited
8 January at 01:09

THE PEOPLE OF THE FITZROY VALLEY NEED YOUR SUPPORT

The communities in the Kimberley region have experienced a humanitarian crisis from the largest flood on record in the area. [Marra Worra Worra](https://www.marrawarra.com.au/)

Kimberley Community Legal Services Inc.
12 January at 09:33

FINANCIAL HELP AVAILABLE

DISASTER RECOVERY ALLOWANCE

SUPPORT IF YOU'VE LOST INCOME AS A DIRECT RESULT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA EX-TROPICAL CYCLONE ELLIE THAT STARTED IN DECEMBER 2022. THIS IS AN ALLOWANCE THAT DEPENDS ON THE NUMBER OF DAYS AND HOURS YOU WORK

- To claim online, you need a myGov account linked to Centrelink.
- You can use a nominee for this process.
- If you can't use your Centrelink online account, you can call them on 180 22 66 for help claiming this payment.
- They will ask you to give evidence of your loss of income. If you earn a salary or wage, they may ask you for documents that show your income for the 4 weeks before the ex-tropical cyclone. If your income changes each week, they may ask you to show your income for the 8 weeks before the ex-tropical cyclone.
- Evidence can include any of the following:
 - pay slips from your employer
 - bank statements showing previous bank deposits from your employer
 - a letter from your employer

WA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES IMMEDIATE CRISIS PAYMENTS

A ONE OFF PAYMENT FOR IMMEDIATE CRISIS
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO CLAIM CALL
DEPT OF COMMUNITIES HOTLINE 1800 932 965

Marra Worra Worra
10 January at 11:57

• We have updated info about financial help for Kimberley Flood victims. One is a one off lump sum payment avail through Dept of Communities WA, the other is if ... See more

2.7 Access to justice in 4Rs areas: air and other travel

This section contains two case studies highlighting the many layers in how regional airfares, and insufficient safety nets, are impacting access to justice, justice, equality and human rights.

The first case study by Kimberley Community Legal Service relates to the Kimberly region and shows the kinds of problems to be addressed applying a determinants approach to regional airfares.

Case study 24: Kimberley Community Legal Service ('KCLS')

Remote Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley such as Balgo, Kalumburu and Fitzroy Crossing depend on air travel for essential services, particularly during the wet season when roads may be closed for up to three months. For legal matters such as family violence, tenancy and child protection, face-to-face assistance is often essential to ensure cultural safety and effective communication.

However, airfares within the Kimberley are frequently prohibitively high. Many routes are serviced by a single carrier, with Airnorth monopolising the Broome–Kununurra route and Aviair being the only provider to several smaller towns and communities. Typical one-way fares include:

- Broome–Halls Creek–Fitzroy Crossing: ~\$610
- Kununurra–Kalumburu: ~\$479
- Kununurra–Halls Creek–Balgo: \$409–\$625
- Broome–Kununurra: ~\$620

For urgent or last-minute travel which is common in family violence and child protection matters, fares can exceed \$1,000–\$1,200.

While the WA Government has capped fares on Perth–regional routes, no similar support exists for intra-Kimberley travel. Without caps or subsidies, community legal services must absorb rapidly fluctuating and often extreme airfare costs. As a result:

- outreach visits are reduced or delayed,
- clients receive less face-to-face legal advice,
- urgent matters are slowed due to travel constraints,
- staff face long, fatiguing road travel when flights are unaffordable, and
- already limited budgets are quickly exhausted.

Community members also face significant barriers. Travel to Broome or Kununurra for court, mediation, ID checks, or mandatory meetings is often impossible due to cost. This leads to missed court dates, delays in representation, disengagement from legal processes, and heightened risk in family violence or safeguarding cases.

These challenges create a clear inequity: remote Aboriginal clients face far greater barriers to justice than people in regional centres or Perth.

While government initiatives such as subsidised routes and airfare caps offer some support, they do not address the affordability issues on the routes most relied upon by essential service providers. Extending fare caps to intra-Kimberley flights, establishing travel grants for legal services, and increasing route reliability would significantly improve access to justice.

High airfares are not just a transport problem; they are an access to justice problem. Ensuring people in Balgo, Kalumburu and Fitzroy Crossing and other remote communities can access timely, culturally appropriate legal help requires an aviation system that is affordable, predictable, and designed with remote communities in mind.

The next case study from national research report by Economic Justice Australia,¹⁰ highlights how lack of routine and timely access to air travel by (i) by people in very remote areas, (ii) Government functions and (iii) non-profit legal services - can interact with laws and procedures to penalise people in very remote communities.

Case study 25: Margaret - First Nations woman, living on a very remote island

Case study – Margaret

Margaret, a middle-aged First Nations woman, lives on a very remote island. She has been receiving JobSeeker payment for many years despite having a significant disability. Margaret struggled to fulfil mutual obligations requirements, including job applications and appointments with job service providers. Access to government services was particularly difficult for Margaret, as the nearest Services Australia Service Centre was located on mainland Australia and required air travel for her to reach it.

A turning point came when a Remote Servicing Team (RST) and EJA member legal service visited Margaret's community through a drop-in clinic. Margaret met with a Services Australia worker who helped her initiate a claim for Disability Support Pension (DSP). The legal service then assisted by requesting copies of Margaret's medical records from healthcare practitioners on her behalf.

Once the legal service received Margaret's medical records, they coordinated with the RST to ensure the documentation was lodged in support of her DSP claim. The RST then planned their next community visit, bringing along a Job Capacity Assessor. During this visit, Margaret completed her Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) with this assessor in her home community. Margaret was granted DSP.

¹⁰ Economic Justice Australia, '[Social Security for Women Outside Our Cities - Part 1: Service Delivery Barriers](#)', Report, May 2025), 23.

First Nations people are most of the population in many remote areas, and this case study also serves to highlight how air travel shortfalls playing out across multiple sectors are contributing to injustice.

This example is also notable for the involvement of an EJA member legal service because service provision by these services is federally funded and the funding model does not provide for assistance in person in communities which Margaret needed and received in this case. Additionally, no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services receive funding to specifically provide social security legal assistance, nor do any of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, or the two Aboriginal Community Controlled Community Legal Services (First Nations Women's Legal Service Queensland and Wirringa Baiya in NSW). Only two generalist community legal services in regional locations (Townsville Community Law and Barwon Community Legal Service) have historically received funding. The patterns of funding are historical and have not expanded to reflect Closing the Gap efforts, or policy efforts on multiple fronts including the rights of women and health justice to achieve more holistic, culturally accessible, trauma informed, place-based services.¹¹

This case study also highlights that regional airfares interlink with other major issues when it comes to essential services, including access to justice for First Nations and non-Indigenous people experiencing disadvantage in 4Rs areas.

¹¹ See for example Chapter 6, Access to Social Security Legal Assistance in Economic Justice Australia, '[Social Security for Women Outside Our Cities - Part 1: Service Delivery Barriers](#)', Report, May 2025) and 4Rs Network, '[Letter to Commonwealth, State and Territory Attorneys-General in response to the Report of the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement with Background and Attachment](#)' (2 September 2024), in the Attachment especially at 4.1.1, 15.3, 17.4 including Table 4, 20.2, 20.3.2, 23.4, 24.9.5, 24.9.6, Attachment 1B.