**MEDIA RELEASE**

For immediate release: 26 September 2012

**‘Strengthen Victims Compensation’: 80 organisations call on the NSW Attorney-General**

Eighty leading legal, human rights, health, community and women’s organisations have called on the NSW Attorney-General to retain and strengthen the NSW compensation scheme for victims of violent crime.

In an open letter to the Attorney-General a wide range of organisations – including Community Legal Centres NSW, Unions NSW, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, People with Disability Australia and Project Kidsafe Foundation – have expressed their concerns that changes to the NSW Victims Compensation scheme may limit victims’ access to compensation.

‘Compensation is crucial to achieving justice for victims of violence. It recognises victims’ pain and suffering, and can help their rehabilitation. Lump sum compensation has practical benefits and means victims can choose how to use their compensation money’, said Anna Cody, Chair, Community Legal Centres NSW (CLCNSW).

‘Over half of NSW compensation payments are made to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. These crimes have low reporting and prosecution rates, and compensation may be the only formal recognition that what has happened is a public wrong,’ said Janet Loughman, Principal Solicitor, Women’s Legal Services NSW. ‘If the NSW Government is serious about addressing violence against women, it should be strengthening its victims compensation scheme.’

Rachael Martin, convenor of CLCNSW Victims Compensation Committee said, ‘It is no surprise that the NSW Auditor-General has identified problems in funding for victims compensation. The scheme is underfunded. There has been no increase to compensation payments, not even for inflation, in 25 years. The Victims Compensation Scheme must be adequately funded, to enable timely compensation payments.’

The organisations call on the Attorney-General to:

* retain and strengthen NSW’s victims compensation scheme
* ensure the scheme provides for voluntary and culturally appropriate counselling
* increase access to legal advice and representation
* ensure any adverse changes do not apply retrospectively
* publicly consult on any proposed changes

More information:

[www.clcnsw.org.au/cb\_pages/victims\_compensation\_review\_2012.php](http://www.clcnsw.org.au/cb_pages/victims_compensation_review_2012.php)

**About Community Legal Centres NSW Inc.**

Community Legal Centres NSW Inc. (CLCNSW) is the peak body for community legal centres (CLCs) in NSW. It has 40 member organisations including generalist and specialist CLCs. CLCs deliver legal services to economically and socially disadvantaged individuals and communities. CLCNSW’s policy work on victims compensation has been developed by its Victims Compensation Committee, which comprises CLCs that represent clients in victims compensation applications.

**Media contact:** Edwina MacDonald 0402 345 609 | Liz Snell 0488 789 159