MEDIA RELEASE
For Immediate Release
8 April 2019

Linkwest calls for Federal Funding for Local Digital Support Services Across WA

“But enough funding for WA grass-roots organisations in federal budget”

Linkwest, the peak body for community-led Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres in Western Australia, is calling for the elected Federal Government to allocate funding for local digital support services in WA.

Linkwest CEO, Jane Chilcott, said with the default to digital services and the associated reduction in federal agency staff, Linkwest member Centres are spending increasingly more time helping people access federal services such as MyGov, MyAgedCare, MyHealthRecord, Childcare Rebate, the ATO and Medicare.

“Many of our most vulnerable members of the community are relying on our Centre staff for support to access these Federal Government services.

“This situation is further exacerbated in rural and regional WA where there is poor internet access, no public transport and the nearest agency office can be a four hours’ drive,” she said.

Ms Chilcott said the current Federal Government’s budget handed down last week had not considered the needs of Western Australians experiencing ‘digital stress’.

“We know from recent research that one in four of the poorest households in WA do not have access to the internet.

“And many Australians, including the elderly, single parents, and the CaLD community face challenges in accessing Federal Government digital services for many reasons including low digital literacy and literacy and numeracy skills.”
“This is an equity of access issue, with vulnerable and rural people being excluded from online services. We need Federal Government to invest in local community organisations that can provide a dignified face-to-face support service to those who need it, with the dual benefit of providing local jobs in regional areas,” she said.

Currently Linkwest Centres across Western Australia receive funding from the State Government to provide support to access State Government online services and Ms Chilcott would like to see the Federal Government follow their lead by investing $10 million per annum across the network.

“The ability to provide support to help people access federal online services is already available through the Linkwest network.

“Our Centres are well placed to provide this support in 150 local communities and respectfully request the elected Federal Government match this support.”

- ENDS -

For interviews and more information contact Jane Chilcott, Linkwest CEO, jane.chilcott@linkwest.asn.au or 0404 995 944.
Lee Steel, Manager Pingelly CRC on 0409 034 540
Jo Hayes, Chairperson of Quairading CRC on 08 9646 6219

Background Information

Linkwest

Nedlands-based Linkwest is a small not-for-profit organisation that is largely funded by the State Government’s Department of Communities and the Department for Primary Industries and Regional Development. Linkwest is the peak body for Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres in Western Australia. It offers targeted and relevant training, resources, advocacy and support to those working in small community-managed not-for-profit organisations.

Linkwest, with a staff of seven, offers crucial support to more than 150 community-led organisations, including over 120 regional and remote Centres. More than 27,000 Western Australians currently use these Centres each week. The Centres provide a friendly, welcoming place where local people can meet to learn, gain new skills, make friends and feel part of their community. They also provide a safe, affordable space for playgroups, community and support groups to gather.

Former Premier of Western Australia, Professor Carmen Lawrence, is Linkwest’s official patron. She has been a patron for the past eight years.

The history behind the organisation goes back to 1978 – for many years it was known as Learning Centre Link, until it was renamed Linkwest in 2011.
Nationally, Linkwest is a member of the Australian Neighbourhood Houses & Centres Association (ANHCA). ANHCA as the national peak represents the needs of over 1000 Neighbourhood Centres, Community Resource Centres, Learning Centres, Family Centres and Community Centres across Australia. Regardless of their local name, these placed based community-led organisations provide services and activities for more than 406,000 people every week.

For more information about the national network please contact Nicole Battle, President of ANHCA, on 0414 146 075 or email nicole@nhvic.org.au.