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MEDIA RELEASE

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FREE ONLINE PATHWAYS TO SOLVE LEGAL PROBLEMS

The NSW Government has launched a free online legal service to help people overcome mortgage pressure and settle rates debts with local councils without the stress of court proceedings, Attorney General Mark Speakman announced today.

The LawAccess NSW website now provides two interactive guided pathways to match people with the information they need to resolve their issues before they spiral out of control, with another four pathways on other topics to come in 2019.

“This service is arriving at a crucial time for families facing mortgage stress. The online pathways are convenient and easy to use, with users only needing to answer a few simple questions to get reliable legal information and practical solutions tailored to address their situation,” Mr Speakman said.

“For example, the mortgage stress pathways provide information on budgeting, seeking a ‘hardship variation’ to a loan and tips on avoiding ‘quick fix’ pitfalls that could ultimately cause greater financial pain.”

LawAccess’ guided pathways also cover legal issues arising from unpaid council rates.

The new online resource is part of the NSW Government’s \$24 million Civil Justice Action Plan, which is harnessing technology and innovation to make it faster and easier for people to navigate courts and resolve legal problems.

Other key aspects of the Civil Justice Action Plan include:

- Creating a \$1 million Access to Justice Innovation Fund to encourage legal professionals, digital experts and community groups to develop ideas to improve the way legal problems are solved, particularly for vulnerable people and small business owners. Starting in 2019, the fund will provide up to \$250,000 in grants annually for the next four years.
- Almost \$20 million in new funds for community legal centres over the next four years.
- Expanding online court services to allow more people to finalise their cases from the convenience of their computer. This will make the court process more accessible, especially for people in rural and regional areas, and small business owners who can’t afford to shut up shop to go to court.

- Increasing the jurisdiction of the Local Court's Small Claims Division to hear disputes valued up to \$20,000 from \$10,000. This reform, to take effect in March 2019, will give more people access to simpler court procedures, helping small businesses avoid drawn-out legal battles.
- Introducing online guidelines to encourage state and local government to resolve unpaid debts early, including by negotiating time to pay arrangements.

"The Civil Justice Action Plan has huge potential to reduce stressful and costly legal headaches – particularly for small businesses that are the engine room of the NSW economy," Mr Speakman said.

"While criminal matters tend to dominate the media news cycle, 85 per cent of legal problems in NSW relate to civil law. So, it's vital we address these civil issues faced by almost 2.4 million people in this state every year."

To explore LawAccess' guided pathways, visit: www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au.