

MEDIA RELEASE

Historic Launch of Refugee Legal NT Marks New Era of Justice and Settlement in the Northern Territory

Darwin, 6 August 2025

The Northern Territory has taken an historic step forward with the launch of **Refugee Legal NT** — the first independent specialist Community Legal Centre for people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in the Territory.

“This is the first fully-fledged, free legal service in the Northern Territory to help people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants. From little things, big things grow — and today is proof of what’s possible when community meets action,” said David Manne, CEO of Refugee Legal.

The launch of Refugee Legal NT, hosted by Melaleuca Australia on Larrakia Country, drew dignitaries, community leaders, advocates, local residents and interstate guests to witness the culmination of a three-year collaboration between Refugee Legal and Melaleuca Australia.

A Long-Awaited Vision Becomes Reality

For decades, the need for such a service has been deeply felt in the NT but remained unmet. The seed was replanted three years ago when Paul Power, CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia, introduced Melaleuca CEO, Kwame Selormey, to Refugee Legal. A shared commitment to justice reignited the idea, leading to extensive consultations with stakeholders and communities across the Territory.

The Boards of both organisations embraced a bold vision: that everyone — regardless of where they come from — deserves fair access to justice.

“This is not just a launch — it’s the beginning of justice being within reach,” said Kwame Selormey. “To the person walking these streets — longing to be seen, yet fearful of being exposed — know this: You are not invisible. You are not alone. You belong.”

A Service Grounded in Community and Integration

Refugee Legal NT co-located at Melaleuca Australia, now operates full-time, offering legal assistance with protection visas, family reunion, and other migration matters. It is embedded in a broader ecosystem of trauma counselling, youth and family programs, and settlement support — a nationally recommended model of holistic, co-located services that is rarely realised.

Reflecting on the broader significance, David Manne said:

“These endeavours are about harnessing community will and giving it expression. There is no more powerful expression of that in recent times than here in Darwin.”

National Significance and Broad Support

The initiative has secured strong backing from all levels of government, with the NT Government’s recognition and enthusiasm particularly acknowledged, alongside Federal Government support.

Attendees included: His Honour Professor the Honourable Hugh Heggie AO PSM, Administrator of the NT, and Ms Ruth Jones; The Hon. Jinson Charls, Minister for Multicultural Affairs; Mr Khoda Patel MLA; Ms Justine Davis MLA; Mr Luke Gosling OAM MP; The Hon. Justice Jenny Blokland; and Mr Jeswynn Yogaratnam, NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

A Conviction, Not a Convenience

This launch represents more than the start of a service — it is a national demonstration of fairness, inclusion, and community leadership in action. It is hoped Refugee Legal NT will inspire similar client-centred, co-located services across Australia.

In the words of Kwame Selormey:

“This service was not born from convenience. It was born from conviction.”

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