

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2016



National Legal Aid

ABOUT NATIONAL LEGAL AID (NLA)

There are eight independent legal aid commissions (commissions) in Australia, one in each of the states and territories. The Directors/Chief Executive Officers of the commissions combine at a national level to form National Legal Aid (NLA), and one of their number is, on a rotation basis, elected as Chair.

There is a strong alliance between NLA and Legal Aid Services New Zealand. This alliance reflects the similarities between Australia and New Zealand, and facilitates the sharing of information, the showcasing of initiatives, and contributes to the development of best practice. A representative of Legal Aid Services NZ attends NLA meetings to discuss matters of mutual interest.

NLA, through the Australian Legal Assistance Forum (ALAF), works closely with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), the Law Council of Australia (LCA), and the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (NFVPLSF) to pursue our shared vision for access to justice. NLA is a member of the Australian Legal Assistance Forum (ALAF) and is a signatory to the ALAF Statement of Co-operation.

NLA WORKING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

NLA is supported by Working Groups and Networks, each of which comprises a representative from each of the commissions, an NLA Director with the Working Group/Network, and the NLA Executive Officer. Working Groups are established in areas of legal aid practice such as family law, dispute resolution, civil law, community legal education and criminal law. Working Groups and Networks are also established in legal aid business areas such as grants, statistics, finance, human resources and information technology.

Working Groups and Networks have Terms of Reference and operate in accordance with the [NLA Roles and Responsibilities Statement](#). Working Groups develop Action Plans as appropriate to their respective work areas.

SECRETARIAT OF NLA

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THIS PLAN

This plan was developed by NLA through a workshop of NLA Directors and the General Manager of Legal Aid Services NZ.

VISION

For Australia to continue to be an international leader in legal assistance service delivery providing equitable access to people to meet their legal needs.

PURPOSE

To lead and encourage a national system of legal aid which allows economically disadvantaged people to obtain access to justice, and

To provide a forum for engagement at a national level with government/s, stakeholders, community and each other about best practice of legal aid and related issues.

STRATEGIES

1. Work collaboratively to improve legal assistance service delivery

The National Partnership Agreement for Legal Assistance Services has been signed by the Commonwealth and by each State and Territory and is a significant influence on legal assistance service delivery throughout the life of the Agreement.

NLA seeks to work with other legal and non-legal service providers to pursue the development of an integrated system of legal assistance services, ensure good practice, and address access to justice issues as efficiently and effectively as possible.

1.1 Working with each other

ACTIONS

Each Working Group to work collaboratively to achieve improved practices.

- FAMILY LAW WORKING GROUP - enhance the quality of practice and the recognition and understanding of the role of Independent Children's Lawyers (ICLs) through development of a suite of national resources and engagement with stakeholders.
- DISPUTE RESOLUTION WORKING GROUP - share initiatives for developing and expanding dispute resolution services such as family law low asset property conferencing, duty mediation services, child protection mediation and Hague child abduction mediation.
- GRANTS AND NATIONAL STATISTICS WORKING GROUP - refine definitions, methodologies and mechanisms to support consistent service delivery, benchmarks,

outcomes and data, which support comparative analysis and informed decision making by commissions.

- COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION WORKING GROUP - development of the co-ordinated provision of community legal education and information to ensure efficient and effective use of resources.
- CIVIL LAW WORKING GROUP - extend the understanding of the role of legal aid services in assisting the most disadvantaged people in our communities by the development of Commonwealth civil law training opportunities Australia wide, supported by a calendar of training opportunities across commissions.
- CRIMINAL LAW WORKING GROUP - share information and/or initiatives in relation to the effective management of criminal law matters, including in relation to case conferencing, technology, and the use of experts and counsel.

1.2 Working with governments

ACTIONS

NLA will;

- i) Prioritise and respond to reviews of national importance such as;
 - the Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services (NPA)
 - the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Access to Justice Arrangements, and
 - negotiations for new funding agreements.
- ii) Liaise with representatives of the Commonwealth and invite representatives to attend each NLA general meeting.
- iii) Maintain a close working relationship with offices of Attorneys-General, and seek to work with Ministers with portfolio responsibilities that affect legal aid.

1.3 Working with other legal, and non-legal, service providers

ACTIONS

- i) Chair of NLA and immediate past Chair to participate in all ALAF meetings.
- ii) NLA to work closely with NATSILS, NACLC, LCA and NFVPLSF on issues of shared interest.
- iii) NLA to provide Secretariat support to ALAF.
- iv) At state and territory level each commission to support and participate in the local Legal Assistance Forum (LAF), and respective Jurisdictional Forums (JF), pursuant to the National Partnership Agreement.
- v) NLA Working Groups to engage with peak bodies in relevant sectors to identify opportunities for joint policy work and the development of integrated service delivery models.

2. Research to inform legal assistance service delivery and social policy design

NLA funded the *Legal Australia-Wide Survey: Legal Need in Australia 2012* (LAW Survey), as a substantial contribution to the knowledge base in relation to legal needs.

There is a need for research on legal and related needs, as well as evaluation of approaches to providing access to justice, so as to inform improvements to the delivery of legal assistance to disadvantaged people.

NLA will endeavour to assist researchers who seek access to data on the services provided by commissions, where NLA is satisfied about the quality and integrity of the research.

ACTIONS

NLA and Working Group representatives will;

- i) Utilise the LAW Survey to develop service delivery to disadvantaged people.
- ii) Ensure appropriate distribution of information and research relevant to legal assistance service delivery.
- iii) Identify and undertake further research relevant to improving legal assistance service delivery as appropriate.

3. Strengthening the Australian model of legal assistance service delivery and the role of NLA

There is a need to lift brand profile so that the community understands and values legal aid, and so politicians seek NLA's views when taking advice about improved service delivery to disadvantaged people.

ACTIONS

NLA and Working Group representatives to;

- i) Engage with policy makers nationally and collaboratively within jurisdictions in relation to issues common across the country.
- ii) Engage with inter/national legal assistance service providers in relation to improving legal assistance service delivery, including by exchanging information, and assistance as appropriate to develop and/or improve legal assistance service delivery, and by presenting at international conferences under the NLA banner.
- iii) Commit resources to the development of the NLA website which is to be a main point of reference.

End.