

Release of legal assistance data good first step in better understanding access to justice

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National Legal Aid welcomes the first ever release of national legal assistance data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as an important first step in providing the full picture of access to justice in Australia.

The data is an outline of 2022-2023 legal assistance services provided and funded via the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP). For Legal Aid Commissions, this outlines all legal advice, tasks and non-legal support regardless of law type but is limited to family law and commonwealth funded criminal and civil law duty lawyer and legal representation services.

Given the key role LACS have in providing duty lawyer and legal representation services in criminal, domestic and family violence, child protection and state civil law areas not funded via the NLAP this data set is only a proportion of Legal Aid service delivery and is by no means a complete representation.

Ongoing work also needs to be undertaken to improve data quality and this first release is an undercount of Legal Aid national service delivery¹.

However, the 2022-2023 data does provide some useful broad insights regarding NLAP funded service delivery:

- Over 246,000 people received a service;
- Over 15,000 family law duty lawyer representations were provided, with over 9,000 of these being for parenting arrangements;
- Over 32,000 family law representations were provided, with over 21,000 of these being for parenting arrangements;
- Over 6,000 Independent Children's Lawyer representations were provided;

- 9% of clients are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- 51% of clients are women, receiving over 64% of duty lawyer services and over 54% of legal representations;
- 11% of clients are over 55 years of age;
- 13% of clients are under 25 years of age;

The NLAP has recently been independently reviewed and one of the key priorities was to assess data collection and reporting. National Legal Aid, as part of its submission to the independent review, recommended that the ABS data collection be expanded to include all legal assistance service delivery funded by Commonwealth and State governments to better understand the whole contribution of legal assistance providers in supporting access to justice.

National Legal Aid will continue to work with the ABS and the Attorney-General's Department to improve the data set for future releases.

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¹ Victoria Legal Aid changed its data collection management system during 2022-2023 and this has contributed to an undercount of its services during this period. The Legal Services Commission of South Australia was unable to provide demographic characteristics for all clients so this information has been excluded from the national client profile.