

Legal Aid ACT

*Safeguarding
access to justice.*

Strategic
Plan
2020-2023

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

A strategic plan must be a roadmap that sets out, as an organisation, where we want to go and how we want to get there. It must be a living document that speaks to our work, those who carry out our work and those on whose behalf we work. It must be flexible and capable of adaptation in light of changing needs and priorities while at the same time giving a fixed sense of purpose and a definite direction.

Our Strategic Plan 2020-23 underscores the importance of our front-line services and that a well-run organisation is fundamental to delivering high quality legal aid services to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals. However, delivering high quality legal aid services is attended by multiple challenges. Demand often outstrips supply and difficult decisions as to prioritisation of limited resources must sometimes be made in circumstances where the overall cost of providing services continues to increase. Ideally, of course, we would never have to make these tough choices because demand would be met by adequate resources. But, this is the ideal and we are committed to assisting the maximum number of people we can given the level of our capacity.

Criminal and family law litigation remain the most visible, and essential of the Commission's work. But, other priority areas – such as family violence, elder abuse and mental health – strongly call for a greater allocation of resource. Our challenge, therefore, is meeting these emerging civil law needs without a consequential service reduction in other areas of our core business. Prudent financial management and continual cost savings measures in administrative overheads and the cost of legally assisted cases are required. Making all possible efforts to resolve matters early goes some way to mitigating the increasing cost of legally aided representation, and streamlining or automating administrative processes will free up capacity and increase the productivity of staff.

We cannot overlook COVID-19 and the inevitable influence it will continue to have in shaping the legal landscape of the ACT. Many legal issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and our ability to respond to its challenges will be an ongoing factor that will shape how the Commission is structured and way in which we deliver services. The complex and diverse effects of COVID-19 emphasises the importance of an agile Commission that can meet unanticipated challenges. We have incorporated these challenges into our client-focused planning.

The Strategic Plan 2020-23 includes a specific priority covering staff and staff well-being. The Commission's work would not be possible without the commitment of our staff, both administrative and legal. It is a testament to their dedication that they undertake their important and often difficult work with compassion and good humour.

Our staff were involved in the creation of this strategic plan and I thank everyone who contributed to its development. I look forward its implementation over the coming years.

John Boersig
Chief Executive Officer
Legal Aid ACT

PART 1 IDENTITY STATEMENT

WHO WE ARE

Legal Aid ACT is an independent statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1977* (ACT) (*the Act*). The purpose of Legal Aid ACT under the Act is to promote a just society in the Australian Capital Territory by:

- ensuring that vulnerable and disadvantaged people receive the legal services they need to protect their rights and interests;
- developing an improved community understanding of the law; and
- seeking reform of laws that adversely affect those we assist.

We achieve this purpose by delivering a range of high quality legal services through our staff and professional partners in a caring manner that respects diversity and promotes confidence in the legal system.

OUR VALUES

EXCELLENCE

- We strive to deliver legal aid services of the highest standard with compassion and understanding and to continually improve ourselves and the organisation

RESPECT

- We respect the inherent dignity of those we assist and those we work with and are always culturally empathetic

INNOVATION

- We always seek new and innovative ways to improve the quality of our services and the effective use of our resources

DEDICATION

- We are dedicated to helping disadvantaged people achieve justice and to upholding the rule of law and the highest ethical standards

OUR VISION

To be a leading legal aid services provider in achieving just outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged people

PART 2 COMMISSION PRIORITIES 2020-2023

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

With a view to fulfilling our mandate, the Commission has adopted the following four broad objectives. These objectives will guide our priorities, specific initiatives and our allocation of resources for the next three years as well as helping us achieve our vision of being a leading legal aid services provider delivering just outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

1. A Client-focused Commission

Ensuring the Commission is focused on the needs of our clients is the core foundation of services. We will continue to make our services accessible and responsive to all members of the ACT community, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalised. In addition to our legal assistance services, the Commission will build upon its strong base of non-legal support services by utilising an holistic approach to client needs. This client focus will extend across all facets of the Commission, from our services, to our policies and communication. We will continue to interface with the wider community through education sessions to proactively address legal need. We will continue to respond to unexpected and emerging challenges, such as COVID-19 and their unique impacts on Commission clients and the wider ACT community.

2. Collaborative Partnerships

The Commission is committed to providing our clients an holistic service, and recognises that our clients have a diverse range of needs. We will work in collaboration with our partners locally, bilaterally, and nationally to facilitate a network of legal, social, and health services to ensure the best possible outcomes for our clients. We will use referrals to non-legal support services as a means of proactively working to address the needs of clients and divert them from the legal system.

3. A Capable and Committed Team

We want our staff to feel proud to work at the Commission, and to bring integrity, commitment, and a diverse range of insight to their roles. We commit to providing the support staff need to deliver high quality services to our clients, community and partners. We will ensure staff are provided a wide range of opportunities for personal development, and we will foster career advancement. We will encourage staff to build their skills and expertise with innovative professional education. We will implement policies to address vicarious trauma and burnout to protect staff mental wellbeing. We will promote staff participation in operational and decision-making process to facilitate a more transparent, accountable, and consultative culture.

4. Improving the justice system

As the main provider of legal assistance in the ACT, we are uniquely poised to advocate for better outcomes for vulnerable and marginalised members of the ACT community, both within the justice system and more broadly. We will build our capacity to contribute to legislative and social reform by developing the research and policy skills of our staff and supporting their participation in submission writing and policy development. We are committed to using our position to support human rights and reducing disadvantage in the ACT.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our strategic objectives and our strategic priorities will guide the Commission's activities over the next three years. Innovation naturally has a place in the delivery of our priorities; however, we cannot lose sight of our commitment to our core services.

Objectives	Strategic Priorities
1. A client-focused Commission	1.1 Support and represent victims of family violence 1.2 Improve legal assistance to ATSI communities and CALD communities 1.3 Promote the early resolution of legal problems 1.4 Inform, advise and assist the ACT community 1.5 Represent disadvantaged individuals in civil, family and criminal law matters 1.6 Deliver community legal education programs to educate the wider community about their rights and increase understanding of the legal system 1.7 Provide an online service where potential clients can easily gather legal information 1.8 Identify and implement legal assistance strategies to assist responding to emerging challenges, such as COVID-19
2. Collaborative Partnerships	2.1 Provide holistic support to clients through referrals to other legal or non-legal services 2.2 Develop partnerships in the health, community and social services sector which will complement and enhance our frontline services
3. A capable and committed team	3.1 Recruit and retain dedicated staff from diverse backgrounds with appropriate skills and qualifications 3.2 Provide professional development and career advancement opportunities for staff 3.3 Facilitate staff participation in Commission decision-making and policy development 3.4 Provide mental health assistance to address vicarious trauma and burnout 3.5 Invest in and improve our ICT infrastructure to ensure greater information security and better ICT processes across the Commission
4. Improving the justice system	4.1 Communicate the value of our work 4.2 Develop staff research and policy skills to contribute to submission writing and policy development 4.3 Engage in law reform activities to improve access to justice, uphold human rights and reduce disadvantage

STRATEGIC ACTIONS: Achieving our strategic priorities

1. A client-focused Commission

Priorities	Achieving the priorities
1.1 Support and represent more victims of family violence	a. Expand our family violence order duty service at the Magistrates Court and the Federal Circuit and Family Courts and into the community
1.2 Improve legal assistance to ATSI communities and CALD communities	a. Raise the knowledge and capacity of our staff b. Consolidate our migration law service c. Provide more community legal education aimed at target groups d. Build partnerships with key services
1.3 Promote the early resolution of legal problems	a. Develop more service opportunities by collaborating with community legal centres (CLCs), the private legal profession, universities and non-legal organisations b. Expand the rate of FDR
1.4 Inform, advise and assist the ACT community	a. Empower clients utilising discrete unbundled services b. Maintain availability of one-off advice sessions
1.5 Represent disadvantaged individuals in civil family law and criminal law matters	a. Expand our family violence order duty service at the Magistrates Court b. Maintain daily duty advice services in the Magistrates and Family Court c. Continue our duty lawyer service in care matters d. Continue representing disadvantaged individuals via grants of legal aid e. Review practice processes with a view to streamlining them and maximising productivity
1.6 Deliver community legal education programs to increase understanding of the legal system	a. Provide more community legal education seminars for the wider community b. Foster social media platform that engages across the Territory's diverse community
1.7 Provide an online service where potential clients can easily gather legal information	a. Continue to invest resources into improving the Commission's existing online services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">b. Explore new avenues of providing legal assistance online through alternative platforms.c. Upgrade Commission hardware and software
1.8 Identify and implement legal assistance strategies to assist responding to emerging challenges, such as COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Provide increased resources to assist clients at services and outreachb. Continue to support specialist clinics and services, including for elder abuse, family violence and tenants.

2. Collaborative partnerships

Priorities	Achieving the priorities
2.1 Provide holistic support to clients through referrals to support or other non-legal services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase the capacity of our staff to deliver culturally appropriate services b. Renew and extend partnerships with non-legal support services
2.2 Develop partnerships in the health, community and social services sector which will complement and enhance our frontline services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maintain existing formal partnerships and investigate opportunities for new partnerships b. Maintain good working relationships with complementary community organisations, health services and social services organisations

3. A capable and committed team

Priorities	Achieving the priorities
3.1 Recruit and retain dedicated staff from diverse backgrounds with appropriate skills and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proactively recruit people with a diverse range of backgrounds b. Foster a workplace with a positive and supportive culture and that provides opportunities for skills development and career advancement c. Implement a series of health and wellbeing initiatives to promote staff wellbeing
3.2 Provide professional development and career advancement opportunities for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Implement a regular series of CLE presentations for lawyers led by staff or other members of the profession b. Implement a regular series of professional development sessions for non-legal staff to support their development and enhance our services c. Develop short, medium, and long term staff development policies d. Identify opportunities for staff secondment with other ACT organisations to build partnerships and staff capacity
3.3 Facilitate staff participation in Commission decision-making and policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conduct staff surveys to assess staff satisfaction and provide an opportunity for feedback b. Utilise staff committees to provide input on policy decisions

3.4 Provide mental health assistance to address vicarious trauma and burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engage mental health providers to provide services to staff to address trauma. b. Provide resources on mental health and wellness strategies
3.5 Invest in and improve our ICT resources to ensure greater information security and better ICT processes across the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Review how we can streamline and automate processes and administrative tasks to free up capacity b. Carry out process audits to identify how the Commission is utilising present ICT resources c. Implement ongoing ICT upgrades d. Create a 'Knowledgebase' on legal topics for use by lawyers

4. Improving the justice system

Priorities	Achieving the priorities
4.1 Communicate the value of our work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maintain an active social media presence to showcase our services and our work b. Publish in practice journals such as <i>Hearsay</i> and the <i>Bar Bulletin</i> c. Promote our value to governments at the Territory and Commonwealth level d. Maintain strategic involvement in local and national committees and working groups
4.2 Develop staff research and policy skills to contribute to submission writing and policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide junior staff with feedback and mentoring on policy writing b. Provide writing and researching education resources
4.3 Engage in law reform activities to improve access to justice, uphold human rights and reduce disadvantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engage with government on issues that adversely affect those we assist b. Continue to provide feedback on cabinet submissions c. Provide input into legislative inquiries relating to our work

PART 3 MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Part 3 outlines the priority areas with the key performance indicators (measurements) that the Commission might undertake as the method or means to deliver the outcomes.

Priority	Measurement
1.1 Support and represent victims of family violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of family violence related services provided annually • Number of referrals to legal and non-legal services providers • Number of non-legal support services
1.2 Improve legal assistance to ATSI communities and CALD communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of services provided to ATSI and CALD persons annually • Number of non-legal support services provided to ATSI and CALD persons annually • Number of CLE activities provided to ATSI and CALD persons annually
1.3 Promote the early resolution of legal problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of outreach sites and people assisted (by priority group) annually • Number of CLE activities annually • Number of communications through website, online chat and helpline
1.4 Inform, advise and assist the ACT community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Helpline, OPAL and tenancy telephone and internet chat services provided annually • Number of advice and minor assistance services provided annually
1.5 Represent disadvantaged individuals in civil, criminal and family law matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people assisted through duty services, FDR and representation annually • Number of referrals to other legal service providers annually • Number of non-legal support services provided annually • Number of grants of aid in family law and criminal law matters provided annually • Number of duty services in family and criminal law provided annually • Number of information and advice services provided annually
1.6 Deliver community legal education programs to educate the wider community about their rights and increase understanding of the legal system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of CLE activities provided annually • Attendance at CLE activities annually
1.7 Provide an online service where potential clients can easily gather legal information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of website page views annually • Number of new electronic resources posted annually • Virtual attendance of webinars and online presentations annually

1.8 Identify and implement legal assistance strategies to assist in COVID-19 response and recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of COVID-19 related projects administered annually • Number of family violence, elder abuse, and tenancy services provided annually
2.1 Provide holistic support to clients through referrals to other legal or non-legal services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of referrals to legal and non-legal service providers annually • Number of non-legal support services provided annually
2.2 Develop partnerships in the health, community and social services sector which will complement and enhance our frontline services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of partnerships created or renewed by 2023
3.1 Recruit and retain dedicated and diverse staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of women, ATSI, CALD or people with disabilities employed • Key relationship and client satisfaction with professionalism, skills and commitment of staff
3.2 Provide professional development and career advancement opportunities for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of training seminars for legal and non-legal staff • Completion of short, medium, and long term planning policies • Number of staff seconded
3.3 Facilitate staff participation in Commission decision-making and policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of staff surveys conducted annually • Number of responses to surveys annually • Number of meetings of staff committees
3.4 Provide mental health assistance to address vicarious trauma and burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of mental health sessions conducted annually • Number of mental health resources engaged with annually • Staff satisfaction and retention
3.5 Invest in and improve our ICT infrastructure to ensure greater information security and better ICT processes across the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced frequency and duration of breakdowns in IT services • Number of OPC requests for assistance per quarter • Number of security breaches • Staff satisfaction with current ICT processes • Number of hardware and software upgrades • Number of process audits carried out
4.1 Engage in law reform activities to improve access to justice, uphold human rights and reduce disadvantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of law reform submissions • Number of cabinet submissions responded to • Number of appearances or instruments at parliamentary inquiries or similar



4.2 Develop staff research and policy skills to contribute to submission writing and policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of resources provided to staff• Number of submissions contributed to by staff members
4.3 Communicate the value of our work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of website hits• Social media engagement on Commission posts• Number of publications