

2018 – 2023

STRATEGIC PLAN





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It is with great pleasure that I introduce the Legal Aid NSW Strategic Plan for the period 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023.

The Legal Aid NSW Board has been involved in developing the Strategic Plan. At a Planning Day held in October 2017, the Board members discussed the big challenges facing this organisation and the opportunities we have to deliver great outcomes, given:

- Our clients have increasingly complex and multifaceted needs
- Demand for our services is growing and changing
- We work within a large complex justice system
- The funding environment is constrained
- The legal services environment is changing.

Extensive consultation has been undertaken with the Legal Aid NSW Executive Team and the staff around the state. The expertise, dedication and engagement of our staff with this process has provided important perspectives and solutions on how to translate challenges into opportunities.

The five year Strategic Plan aims to put Legal Aid NSW in the best possible position to achieve our long-term vision and purpose.

I would like to thank all the Legal Aid NSW staff for participating in this process, and I look forward to working with Brendan and his Executive in its implementation.

Craig Smith
Chair, Legal Aid NSW Board

I am delighted to introduce the Legal Aid NSW Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023.

The Plan sets out our vision and purpose, as well as the strategic outcomes and initiatives that will guide our efforts and energy over the next five years.

Legal Aid NSW, like any major organisation, is facing a number of major challenges in its future including an increasing demand for services, limited resources and changing social conditions.

To deal with these challenges we require a longer term five year plan that clearly sets our direction and priorities, areas for us to invest time and resources, the services we want to provide and how we will develop and support our staff.

It was important for all staff to be involved in this process and to help shape the future of Legal Aid NSW. In developing the Plan, we held workshops with staff across the state, including in Nowra, Wagga, Sydney, Bankstown, Port Macquarie, Lismore, Parramatta and Tamworth, and with the Aboriginal Staff Network, Solicitor in Charge Network and Office Manager Network. I also acknowledge the hard work and involvement of the Legal Aid NSW Executive Team in this process.

Targeted consultation was also undertaken on the draft Plan with our key stakeholders, including the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, Community Legal Centres NSW, the Law and Justice Foundation and the Department of Justice.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved in the development of the Plan, and look forward to working together to implement these initiatives over the next five years.

Brendan Thomas
Chief Executive Officer, Legal Aid NSW

Legal Aid NSW: Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023

Our vision	To be a leader in a legal system that delivers fair outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable people				
Our purpose	We use the law to help people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, know, defend and assert their rights				
Our outcomes	1: High quality, targeted services that meet our clients' needs	2: Partnerships that deliver the best possible outcomes for our clients	3: Our work improves the legal and justice systems	4: A highly capable workforce that is flexible, developed and equipped	5: Business processes that are responsive to our business needs
Our strategic initiatives	1.1: Review our service models and develop flexible models which best meet the needs of our clients from start to finish 1.2: Develop holistic service models to effectively address the needs of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients 1.3: Review the location of our offices and outreach services to align our services to the areas of greatest and emerging need 1.4: Deliver community legal education to enhance community understanding of the legal system 1.5: Develop a clear and consistent approach to managing and supporting the quality of services provided by private legal practitioners	2.1: Implement a comprehensive approach for ongoing collaborative service planning with the legal assistance sector 2.2: Develop a consistent and coordinated approach to how we work with stakeholders across the legal and justice sector 2.3: Develop links and working partnerships across the health, community and social services system which enhance our frontline service delivery	3.1: Develop and progress a strategic law reform agenda which draws on our expertise and knowledge 3.2: Proactively work with government to influence policies and services that reduce systemic disadvantage 3.3: Work with other agencies to improve the operation of the legal and justice systems 3.4: Proactively communicate the value of the work we do	4.1: Establish a strategic workforce plan for the development of our workforce, organisational capabilities, culture and values 4.2: Establish the structures, reporting lines and resourcing that best support our service models 4.3: Develop a recruitment and retention approach which attracts and retains a highly capable and diverse workforce 4.4: Deliver professional development and career opportunities that equip our staff to succeed 4.5: Deliver health and wellbeing programs and flexible work practices to support the diversity and wellbeing of our staff	5.1: Improve our business processes in Grants, Human Resources, Finance and ICT to ensure that staff are well supported 5.2: Invest in our ICT and digital infrastructure to ensure we work efficiently and effectively 5.3: Develop and implement a new approach to information management to ensure we capture and share expertise and knowledge 5.4: Build our data capability to inform our service delivery and identify opportunities for enhancing the work we do

1

Legal Aid operates in a dynamic environment

Legal Aid NSW operates in a dynamic environment. The people we work with have diverse and multifaceted needs, and often require support in navigating the legal system. The need for legal services is also growing and resources available to meet this demand are limited. Legal Aid NSW will meet these challenges by supporting our exceptional and dedicated staff, building strong partnerships, and using technology and data to enhance the services we provide.

1.1 Our strategic direction is informed by changing needs

Disadvantaged and vulnerable people have complex and multifaceted needs

Disadvantaged and vulnerable people require access to legal services to address their needs in family, civil and criminal law. Accessing services and navigating the justice system can be challenging, particularly where individuals have complex needs or experience multiple types of disadvantage. Legal Aid will support these clients by making our services accessible and individualised, placing clients at the centre of everything we do. We will collaborate with government and non-government services to effectively address complex needs.

Demand for our services is growing and changing

The need for legal services is growing and constantly changing. Factors such as growth in the NSW population, increasing levels of financial disadvantage, an aging population, changes in the geographic distribution of population, and reform in criminal justice all impact the nature, number and location of our services. Legal Aid will address these changes through being flexible and responsive in where and how we deliver our services, to ensure that we have the greatest impact possible for our clients and communities across NSW.

We work within a large, complex justice system with our partners

Our legal system is large and deals with a broad range of complex legal matters. This means our clients face challenges in navigating the system, and the processes we have to work within can be complex. We will address this through providing clear entry-pathways for people who need our assistance, and ensuring we are as efficient and effective as possible in the way we work within the system.

The funding environment is accountable and transparent

Government bodies have a responsibility to ensure funds are invested efficiently to achieve the best possible outcomes for communities. We will work with other service providers to ensure we can continue to provide our clients with high quality legal services within a constrained funding environment. We will continue to meet this challenge by ensuring that our service and delivery models are sustainable, and by making choices about how we prioritise the work we do to achieve our objectives.

1.2 We are well positioned to address these challenges

We will continue to build on our staff expertise and passion

We are fortunate to have exceptionally capable, highly engaged and well qualified staff. We will support our staff to grow through professional development so that they can continue to deliver exceptional legal services which meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. We will ensure that our working environment is healthy and safe for our staff, recognising that our work can be demanding and challenging.

We will be responsive to demand and client needs

We can always be more responsive to the complex and changing needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people, and their communities. We will harness this opportunity by collaborating across law types to provide holistic and coordinated services, streamlining referrals, and adopting greater flexibility in our resourcing model to enable us to quickly respond to changes. A timely and effective response to changes in demand in the community can help address issues early and prevent them from becoming wide-spread. We will be creative and flexible in hearing the views and experiences of our clients to inform service design and improvement.

We will build strong relationships with partners

We already have a range of strong and collaborative partnerships. Stronger partnerships with other legal services such as Community Legal Centres and the Aboriginal Legal Service, and government and non-government organisations will enable our client's needs to be effectively, efficiently and holistically met. There is also an opportunity to strengthen our existing partnerships with the community, and the family and health sectors in order to address the complex needs of individuals more effectively.

We will expand our use of technology where this benefits our clients and staff

The rise of technology in the court system and in legal services presents opportunities for us to provide more flexible and responsive services. We already have a number of projects underway to improve our use of technology, such as online scheduling of appointments, and our new ICT and Digital Strategy outlines a range of other opportunities we are pursuing. We can continue to grow our use of technology to ensure we are providing flexible, responsive services which meet the needs of our clients.

We will leverage data to inform our services

Our data is an asset that we can use for the benefit of our clients, to improve our operations and to enhance the justice system. We will use our data to provide an evidence base for our service design and to help us ensure that we are delivering the right services in the right places, and achieving the best possible outcomes for our clients. We will work with our partners to provide a richer picture of the legal and non-legal factors which exacerbate vulnerability and disadvantage, and to identify the opportunities to achieve meaningful and sustained change.

We are ideally placed to provide advice to government to address systemic issues

We are uniquely placed to advise government on the needs and challenges faced by clients from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds across criminal, family and civil law. We will use our knowledge and experience to provide evidence-based advice to government to help address systemic issues which have a legal dimension.

2

Our vision and purpose

OUR VISION

To be a leader in a legal system that delivers fair outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable people

We will be a leader in ensuring that the NSW legal system is just and equitable. Our vision is that people can access justice in a timely manner, regardless of their level of disadvantage and the complexity of their needs. This vision means that our clients:

- will be empowered to understand their legal issues
- are able to access the assistance they need to address their legal issues when these arise
- achieve fair outcomes.

This vision is intentionally bold and ambitious, and we cannot achieve it on our own. By working effectively with our partners, we can and will be a key part of achieving a just, fair and efficient legal system.

OUR PURPOSE

We use the law to help people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, know, defend and assert their rights

The *Legal Aid Commission Act 1979* is the foundation from which we work, and clearly outlines why we exist and what we do. We fulfil our obligations by providing accessible, quality legal services to disadvantaged and vulnerable clients. Our services seek to achieve the overall vision of all people having access to justice, and to empower our clients and improve their lives. We do this by providing a range legal services and education.

3

Strategic outcomes and initiatives

Our strategic outcomes and initiatives will guide our efforts and energy over 2018-23. They have been designed to ensure we achieve our vision of being a leader in the legal system and contributing to improving outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Our outcomes and initiatives reflect extensive feedback with our staff and we are excited at what the future will hold for Legal Aid with these initiatives. We will work with our partners on implementing all aspects of this Strategic Plan where relevant.

The below table provides an overview, and the following pages provide further detail each initiative.

Outcomes	Strategic initiatives
<p>1 High quality, targeted services that meet our clients' needs</p>	<p>1.1: Review our service models and develop flexible models which best meet the needs of our clients from start to finish</p> <p>1.2: Develop holistic service models to effectively address the needs of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients</p> <p>1.3: Review the location of our offices and outreach services to align our services to the areas of greatest and emerging need</p> <p>1.4: Deliver community legal education to enhance community understanding of the legal system</p> <p>1.5: Develop a clear and consistent approach to managing and supporting the quality of services provided by private legal practitioners</p>
<p>2 Partnerships that deliver the best possible outcomes for our clients</p>	<p>2.1: Implement a comprehensive approach for ongoing collaborative service planning with the legal assistance sector</p> <p>2.2: Develop a consistent and coordinated approach to how we work with stakeholders across the legal and justice sector</p> <p>2.3: Develop links and working partnerships across the health, community and social services system which enhance our frontline service delivery</p>
<p>3 Our work improves the legal and justice systems</p>	<p>3.1: Develop and progress a strategic law reform agenda which draws on our expertise and knowledge</p> <p>3.2: Proactively work with government to influence policies and services that reduce systemic disadvantage</p> <p>3.3: Work with other agencies to improve the operation of the legal and justice systems</p> <p>3.4: Proactively communicate the value of the work we do</p>

Outcomes	Strategic initiatives
<p data-bbox="357 253 395 304">4</p> <p data-bbox="253 320 502 595">A highly capable workforce that is flexible, developed and equipped</p>	4.1: Establish a strategic workforce plan for the development of our workforce, organisational capabilities, culture and values
	4.2: Establish the structures, reporting lines and resourcing that best support our service models
	4.3: Develop a recruitment and retention approach which attracts and retains a highly capable and diverse workforce
	4.4: Deliver professional development and career opportunities that equip our staff to succeed
	4.5: Deliver health and wellbeing programs and flexible work practices to support the diversity and wellbeing of our staff
<p data-bbox="357 649 395 701">5</p> <p data-bbox="253 716 502 943">Business processes that are responsive to our business needs</p>	5.1: Improve our business processes in Grants, Human Resources, Finance and ICT to ensure that staff are well supported
	5.2: Invest in our ICT and digital infrastructure to ensure we work efficiently and effectively
	5.3: Develop and implement a new approach to information management to ensure we capture and share expertise and knowledge
	5.4: Build our data capability to inform our service delivery and identify opportunities for enhancing the work we do

1: High quality, targeted services that meet our clients' needs

Initiatives	Description
<p>1.1: Review our service models and develop flexible models which best meet the needs of our clients from start to finish</p>	<p>We will undertake comprehensive reviews of our service models which will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entry pathways to our services; • eligibility criteria and means tests for our services; • the types of services we deliver to clients; • our processes and models for delivering these services, including the use of generalist and specialist lawyers and in-house non-legal services; • our approach to determining which clients we service in-house and which clients we refer to private legal practitioners; • our contribution policies; • our ways of working together across practice groups • our ways of working on cases with other bodies such as Community Legal Centres and the Aboriginal Legal Service; • the outcomes we achieve for our clients and ensuring we are always delivering value-for-money. <p>We will use the findings of the reviews to make changes to our service models and introduce new service models to ensure our services are accessible, effective and targeted to the clients who need them most.</p> <p>We will embed continuous service improvement through systematic review of complaints, incidents and other client and staff feedback.</p>
<p>1.2: Develop holistic service models to effectively address the needs of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients</p>	<p>To supplement 1.1 above, we will identify the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups for whom we will provide more holistic, resource intensive services.</p> <p>We will work proactively to identify these clients, and remove barriers for them to access our services.</p> <p>We will provide these clients with a holistic service designed around the complexity of their needs, which may include tailored case management, access to a broader range of social supports, and clear referral pathways to non-legal services.</p>
<p>1.3: Review the location of our offices and outreach services to align our services to the areas of greatest and emerging need</p>	<p>We will ensure that our office locations, outreach locations and resourcing aligns with the communities and geographies of greatest need for our services.</p> <p>We will use our data and data from other sources, such as from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, to assess potential demand for our services across NSW. We will also consider how the locations of courts and correctional facilities impact the demand for our services.</p> <p>We will continuously review our service locations as demographics and social needs change.</p>

Initiatives	Description
1.4 Deliver community legal education to enhance community understanding of the legal system	<p>We will provide community legal education to address areas of emerging need, and identify and address legal issues in the community before they escalate or become widespread.</p> <p>Our community legal education will be guided by our CLE Strategic Framework and best practice principles.</p>
1.5: Develop a clear and consistent approach to managing and supporting the quality of services provided by private legal practitioners	<p>We will ensure that our processes and administration in working with private legal practitioners are streamlined and efficient. We will work with private legal practitioners to support them to deliver high quality services.</p> <p>We will establish a quality assurance framework for the private legal practitioners that we work with, and actively manage performance against the framework.</p> <p>We will use multiple factors, including evidence of quality and feedback from local offices, for decisions on panel appointments.</p>

2: Partnerships that deliver the best possible outcomes for our clients

Initiatives	Description
2.1: Implement a comprehensive approach for ongoing collaborative service planning with the legal assistance sector	<p>We will develop and implement a comprehensive framework for ongoing collaborative service planning, working with other legal service providers such as Community Legal Centres and the Aboriginal Legal Service.</p>
2.2: Develop a consistent and coordinated approach to how we work with stakeholders across the legal and justice sector	<p>We will identify key stakeholders across the legal and justice sectors who we will work with. We will develop a consistent and coordinated framework for how we engage with these stakeholders.</p> <p>We will gather insights from our staff and data on where there are issues that we can work on with these stakeholders to improve the outcomes for our clients.</p>
2.3: Develop links and working partnerships across the health, community and social services system which enhance our frontline service delivery	<p>We will draw on existing resources to provide our staff with guidance on the services available in their local areas, to assist them in referring clients for their non-legal needs.</p> <p>We will identify key contacts in community, social services and health services so our staff know who to contact to support clients with complex needs.</p> <p>We will ensure that stakeholders across the community, social services and health systems understand the work we do and our role in addressing disadvantage.</p>

3: Our work improves the legal and justice systems

Initiatives	Description
3.1: Develop and progress a strategic law reform agenda which draws on our expertise and knowledge	<p>We will develop a strategic law reform agenda for Legal Aid NSW, and will progress it through both formal and informal mechanisms.</p> <p>We will draw on the knowledge and expertise of our staff, including in regional areas, by seeking their input into our law reform agenda and all of our law reform activities.</p>
3.2: Proactively work with government to influence policies and services that reduce systemic disadvantage	<p>We will use our data and staff expertise to identify improvement opportunities to broader social, health and community policies and services, such as policies to address homelessness and family violence.</p> <p>We will contribute to government reviews and other processes to improve policies and services that affect our clients.</p>
3.3: Work with other agencies to improve the operation of the legal and justice systems	<p>We will work with other agencies to improve the operation of the legal and justice systems. This will involve identifying issues where we can contribute to improvements, and working with these partners on specific reforms.</p>
3.4: Proactively communicate the value of the work we do	<p>We will proactively seek opportunities to communicate the value of our work to the general public and across government to enhance our ability to have a positive impact in the community.</p> <p>We will promote and explain the work of our staff to improve the confidence in and perception of public lawyers by the community.</p>

4: A highly capable workforce that is flexible, developed and equipped

Initiatives	Description
4.1: Establish a strategic workforce plan for the development of our workforce, organisational capabilities, culture and values	<p>We will develop a strategic workforce plan which will guide our workforce decision making, aligning this to the demand for services and specific types and location of this demand.</p> <p>The strategic workforce plan will consider the capabilities we need, how we will ensure that we maintain and enhance these over time, and how we will deliver on our culture and values. It will also consider how we can introduce multi-disciplinary approaches and new roles, such as paralegals, social workers and other allied professional staff to ensure that our solicitors can focus on where they can best deliver value.</p>
4.2: Establish the structures, reporting lines and resourcing that best support our service models	<p>We will review our organisational structure to ensure it fully aligns with and supports our service models, is fit-for-purpose and best enables us to meet our client needs.</p> <p>We will ensure that our reporting lines are clear and that we are investing in people with the right capabilities in the right locations.</p>

Initiatives	Description
<p>4.3: Develop a recruitment and retention approach which attracts and retains a highly capable and diverse workforce</p>	<p>Where we have capability gaps as an organisation, we will proactively develop and recruit the capabilities we need to deliver exceptional quality services for our client.</p> <p>We will adopt a proactive approach to recruiting people from a diverse range of backgrounds that are best placed to enable our delivery to client needs.</p> <p>We will ensure we retain our staff through providing them with a desirable workplace that is underpinned by career pathways, opportunities and development suited to the different needs and expectations of each role.</p>
<p>4.4: Deliver professional development and career opportunities that equip our staff to succeed</p>	<p>We will support professional development opportunities for solicitors, including in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specialist law areas; • areas of growing client demand; and • justice strategy and law reform. <p>We will provide access to specialist legal career paths for solicitors, including in regional areas, which offer rotation opportunities to develop knowledge across law types and opportunities to become specialists in their areas.</p> <p>We will provide professional development opportunities for our non-legal staff to support development, including working with clients with complex needs (including mental illness, cognitive impairment and addiction) and identifying domestic and family violence.</p> <p>We will create multiple pathways and opportunities for administrative staff to continue their growth and career development, including through supporting opportunities to work in other offices and opportunities to move into paralegal roles.</p> <p>We will provide management and leadership development opportunities for both legal and non-legal staff that enable career development and ensure we have strong leadership across all areas.</p>
<p>4.5: Deliver health and wellbeing programs and flexible work practices to support the diversity and wellbeing of our staff</p>	<p>We will provide comprehensive support to our staff to maintain their health and wellbeing, recognising our work can often be demanding and stressful.</p> <p>We will proactively support staff to access flexible work practices and ensure that this enables us to attract and retain a diverse workforce.</p>

5: Business processes that are responsive to our business needs

Initiatives	Description
<p>5.1: Improve our business processes in Grants, Human Resources, Finance and ICT to ensure that staff are well supported</p>	<p>Our corporate services will regularly collect feedback from staff to ensure our services are meeting their needs.</p> <p>We will review the delivery of corporate support to ensure staff receive the support they need to be successful.</p> <p>We will review how we can streamline processes or reassign administrative tasks to reduce the burden on our legal staff and free up capacity for them to focus on servicing our clients.</p> <p>We will also reform the grants process and function to ensure it is efficient and enables our staff and offices to deliver services to those most in needs. This will include considering where and how there could be decentralisation of decision making on grants, and developing fit-for-purpose guidelines, processes and business rules to support decision making on grants.</p>
<p>5.2: Invest in our ICT and digital infrastructure to ensure we work efficiently and effectively</p>	<p>We will implement our new ICT and Digital Strategy and make targeted technology investments to increase the efficiency of our processes and reduce administration for our staff. This will include implementing a new HR SAP system and our new Client and Case Management System.</p> <p>We will also expand and target our digital channels to provide clients with improved digital access to information and services.</p>
<p>5.3: Develop and implement a new approach to information management to ensure we capture and share expertise and knowledge</p>	<p>We will review our intranet and implement a comprehensive approach to information and knowledge management.</p> <p>We will proactively seek feedback on the new information management approach so that it continues to meet the needs of our staff.</p>
<p>5.4: Build our data capability to inform our service delivery and identify opportunities for enhancing the work we do</p>	<p>We will investigate and adopt the best tools required to build our data capability and to use data to inform our service planning.</p> <p>We will proactively seek to expand the breadth, depth and value we can draw from our data assets.</p> <p>We will build our in-house data capabilities to extract insights from our data and to ensure our service planning meets demand.</p>

