

## Attachment A to Country Report Australia – Item 8. Holistic Legal Services

### Some examples of state and territory based holistic legal services

#### Legal Aid Australian Capital Territory

Legal Aid ACT's **Health Justice Partnership (HJP)** embeds specialist family violence lawyers into the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children and the Canberra Hospital. The service operates Monday to Friday and provides free legal advice to staff and patients of the hospital. The team of lawyers work with health partners including social workers, nurses, midwives and other medical staff to provide integrated legal services to enable clients to access free, safe and tailored legal advice. The HJP service reduces barriers to clients who need legal advice at critical periods, particularly during or shortly after a hospital presentation, during pregnancy or after giving birth. Lawyers are embedded in locations where patients attend health or family appointments, and where they may have already established trusting relationships with health professionals.

HJP lawyers also provide training to health staff regarding the HJP service, family violence, legal responses to incidents of violence, care and protection and referral pathways. This collaboration builds the capacity of health staff to identify and respond to family violence and other legal matters.

Legal Aid ACT's award-winning **Community Liaison Unit (CLU)** provides a holistic model of care that understands the multi-dimensional needs of clients. The CLU:

- connects clients and their families to appropriate supports and resources beyond those that can be provided by legal professionals
- provides a culturally responsive approach and continuity of care from first contact through to final hearing, utilising early intervention approaches for this purpose
- assists clients to navigate the justice system and communicate with their lawyers.

CLU staff include two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officers, two Cultural Liaison Officers (male Officer speaks Arabic, the female Officer speaks Dari and

Persian), Disability Justice Liaison Officer, Mental Health Liaison Officer, Family Violence Specialists and a Social Worker.

## Legal Aid New South Wales

The Legal Aid New South Wales (NSW) client service model, **One Legal Aid**, puts clients at the centre of everything and creates consistent access for clients regardless of where they live in NSW or which office or service they approach. Features include an integrated intake function, a triage process that matches clients to the level of service they require and prioritises clients with greater need. A State-wide Advice Team made up of experienced criminal, family and civil lawyers provides telephone advice.

The **Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities (CLSAC)** is a team dedicated to the legal needs of Aboriginal clients, predominantly those living in regional and remote areas of NSW. CLSAC is based in the Sydney, Orange, Lismore and Wollongong offices.

Advice is provided via regular outreach to Aboriginal communities or by telephone. A specialist service assists Aboriginal women leaving custody.

The CLSAC team includes lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors. A Law Check Up tool is used to help clients identify and prioritise their legal issues. Many staff are Aboriginal people who have invaluable insights into working with Aboriginal communities.

The **Family Law Service for Aboriginal Communities (FamAC)** is a state-wide, Aboriginal led service made up of lawyers and staff providing mental health and other support. The FamAC team provides advice, early intervention support, outreach and casework litigation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children currently involved in or at risk of being involved in family law or care and protection proceedings.

FamAC assists clients appearing in the Special Indigenous Lists in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA).

The Legal Aid NSW **Domestic Violence Unit (DVU)** is a state-wide service made up of lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors dedicated to assisting victims of domestic and family violence. The DVU provides duty lawyer services, casework litigation, social work assistance and financial counselling to victims who are at serious threat and/or have complex legal and social needs. The DVU was a finalist in the NSW Premier's Awards in 2024.

Cross practice partnerships have been established with the Civil Law Division's Immigration team to assist women on temporary visas experiencing domestic violence, and with the Housing and Homelessness team. A generalist civil lawyer helps clients and solicitors navigate available civil law services.

The Legal Aid NSW **Elder Abuse Service** (EAS) is a specialist interdisciplinary team which represents and supports older people at risk of or experiencing elder abuse. The EAS adopts a collaborative casework model with lawyers and social workers working together to assist older people to find appropriate remedies and supports for their circumstances. The service accepts direct referrals from police, health services and NGOs.

The EAS assists with matters such as housing, granny flats, debts and loans, guardianship and powers of attorney, and physical, psychological or financial abuse.

Legal Aid NSW has several **Health Justice Partnerships** (HJPs), collaborations which recognise that vulnerable people often seek assistance with legal problems from providers other than legal services. Resolution of legal problems can assist in improving health outcomes.

One HJP is with WHOS (We Help Ourselves), a residential drug and alcohol treatment facility, with locations in Sydney, the Hunter Valley, Newcastle and Goulburn, where civil and family law services are provided onsite and by telephone. Legal Aid NSW also has HJPs offering family or civil advice for clients at community and Aboriginal health services, general hospitals and women's and children's hospitals.

## Legal Aid Northern Territory

Legal Aid NT is involved in a **health justice partnership** (HJPs) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Service, Danila Dilba Health Service, in Darwin which provides assistance to First Nations peoples.

Legal Aid NT has **social support worker positions** in general and specialised areas across the service. Specialised areas include a financial counsellor to assist people experiencing or escaping from domestic, family and sexual violence, youth justice, domestic and family violence, family law and child protection and youth and adult crime. The social support workers are led and managed by the Practice Lead – Social Support, who has oversight over these roles and ensures a supportive practice framework is in place for the organisation.

## Legal Aid Queensland

Legal Aid Queensland's (LAQ's) **Farm and Rural Legal Service** works closely with financial counsellors to assist farmers and primary producers experiencing **credit and debt** issues reach the best possible outcome through the provision of financial counselling and negotiation and mediation with banks. Consumer Protection lawyers also work closely with financial counsellors, while lawyers acting for clients with National Disability Insurance Scheme issues work collaboratively with Disability Advocates, to achieve just outcomes for their clients.

LAQ's **Social Support Program** acknowledges that clients who experience legal issues often also struggle with a range of difficulties in other areas of their life and the Social Support Coordinator (social worker) provides social support to clients as required to respond to those needs. Social workers are embedded in LAQ legal assistance teams including **civil law, Child and Family Services and the Contact Centre**. The program provides:

- crisis intervention
- coping strategies, problem-solving, motivation, emotional regulation support to engage with legal assistance
- individual advocacy, case management, and the provision of information and referrals for ongoing support.

For example, LAQ's Civil Justice Services team utilises a social worker to assist clients to access services and provide client support to be able to link into court processes. These approaches provide practical and emotional support to vulnerable clients.

The Brisbane based Child and Family Services Team comprises psychologists, social workers, and mental health workers, and provides family reports, social assessment reports, referrals, safety planning, risk management, domestic and family violence application support, and family dispute resolution services. Location dependent outreach services are provided. The Townsville office has a social worker for risk management, safety planning, referrals and report preparation and family dispute resolution services. The social worker also undertakes some work in the Cairns region. The Commonwealth funded Domestic Violence Unit based at LAQ's Rockhampton Office comprises lawyers, social workers, and a mental health clinician.

LAQ's **Child Protection Early Legal Service** provides lawyers and social supports to identify families at risk of intervention including child removal before the Department of Child Safety brings an application. This service links clients with

appropriate wrap-around services to address family risks and needs, addressing the child protection issues before departmental intervention is required. The over-representation of First Nations children in the child protection jurisdiction has prompted LAQ to initiate an Early Legal Service in Cairns and surrounding areas, with wrap around services provided in collaboration and partnership with First Nations community groups, justice groups and CLCs, leveraging off the relationship and referral processes developed within the specialist domestic and family violence court model in Cairns.

LAQ's **Client Assistance Service (CAS)** provides a client focused, holistic and trauma-informed service to assist the most vulnerable of clients to access and navigate LAQ processes. CAS provides a single point of contact for a client and helps them understand their next steps, obtain court documents (with consent), arranges legal advice, and makes warm referrals to other legal and non-legal services.

### Legal Services Commission South Australia

The South Australian Legal Services Commission (LSCSA) employs six allied health workers to provide holistic services to clients accessing legal assistance. Three of these employees, a mental health support worker, a social worker and a dedicated men's support worker, are employed in the FASS program at the Adelaide registry of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Although many FASS clients receive support from both a duty lawyer and a social worker, the social support services can be accessed independently of the duty lawyer service. The dedicated men's support worker also supports male respondents in intervention order proceedings in the Adelaide Magistrates Court.

Two allied health workers are employed within the LSCSA Adelaide office. An appointment with a social support worker is available to any client accessing legal services. These social work services are free and confidential (subject to mandatory notification) and include stress management strategies, crisis counselling, referral to community organisations, assistance to apply for benefits or other services, and risk assessments.

A sixth allied health worker is employed in LSCSA's domestic violence unit, operating in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. This social worker collaborates closely with the lawyers in the unit to provide integrated assistance to women who have experienced domestic violence.

On a quarterly basis, the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia sits in the South Australian regional country town of Mt Gambier. The LSCSA provides social support workers for this service through a local non-government organisation.

Two health justice partnerships are operated by the Legal Services Commission at major public hospitals - the Women and Children's hospital and a large hospital in the northern metropolitan region. In collaboration with the medical and social support services at the hospitals, LSCSA lawyers are available to provide legal advice to patients experiencing, or at risk of, domestic violence.

Similarly, LSCSA domestic violence lawyers attend at the Northern Multiagency Hub, a space where services are co-located to assist clients holistically who are experiencing domestic violence. In addition to legal assistance, clients can receive assistance from Women's Safety Services, the police, Centrelink and other support services.

The LSCSA is in the process of engaging a financial counsellor in its Adelaide office to assist clients receiving a legal service, who would benefit from financial advice.

## Legal Aid Western Australia

Legal Aid Western Australia has entered into **Health Justice Partnerships** with several hospitals in the Perth metropolitan area, including Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Armadale Hospital and Bentley Hospital. A civil lawyer from Legal Aid attends the hospitals on a weekly basis to provide face-to-face legal advice appointments to those in vulnerable positions. Our civil lawyers are faced with a variety of legal questions from family law, civil and criminal matters. The lawyers work closely with the hospitals' social work departments, which refer patients into Legal Aid.

**Elder Rights** WA is a holistic service which provides legal and social support services through Legal Aid Western Australia's in-house lawyers and social workers. The social workers provide support to the client before, during and after the legal advice appointment, as well as connect the client with necessary social support services such as housing/crisis accommodation.

**Disability Legal WA** (DLWA) provides a single point of entry for any client with a disability wanting to access Legal Aid WA services. With centralised triaging, case management and information sharing across relevant programs, DLWA provides a holistic and streamlined approach to service delivery for people with disabilities. Disability Legal WA also has dedicated lawyers for clients with a grant of aid who have experience working with individuals with disabilities.



The **Disability Advocacy and Remand Diversion Service for Young People** (DARDY) provides a holistic, therapeutic, and trauma-informed service to support young people under 25 with a disability or suspected disability who are in contact with the justice system. DARDY works in partnership with state-wide agencies and young people who may be experiencing difficulties due to disability to develop positive pathways to necessary supports. DARDY aims to improve outcomes and create better, stronger futures.

Legal Aid WA's [Bail Support Service](#) assists people charged with criminal offences to deal with the personal, social and health issues that affect their ability to get bail or to comply with their bail conditions. The Service assists clients in custody to access supports that will make them better candidates for bail, such as housing and healthcare, and develops a bail plan.

Once on bail, the Service also helps people to comply with their bail conditions, by providing reminders about upcoming court dates, transport assistance to court and appointments, help with finding accommodation, and facilitating referrals to a range of support agencies. The goal of the Bail Support Service is to reduce the overall number of people that are remanded in custody. It specifically aims to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in remand custody, as well as people with disability, mental health difficulties and those experiencing homelessness.

## Tasmania Legal Aid

Tasmania Legal Aid's **Legal Help Case Management** program offers a case management service. The service is available without appointment, to people presenting with social or non-legal issues, which are often intertwined with their legal matters. Our case manager assists with follow up for clients, warm referrals to appropriate support services and to date has assisted clients with issues including family/relationship breakdowns, alcohol and other drug, housing, financial concerns, mental health and general health.

TLA provides a **Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) Support Service** program which is a legally assisted model of mediation for parties to meet and discuss their parenting matters. In 2024/25 TLA is piloting a social support service within the FDR program to provide social support and assistance to clients alongside the legal assistance. This service is provided by Relationships Australia.

This provides a holistic approach to the parenting matter, to ensure that non-legal needs can be addressed which then allows the client to focus on their legal needs. This support may be prior to the conference being scheduled, during and after the

conference and includes emotional and/or situational support, safety planning and referrals and pathways for the client. TLA and RA are committed to working together to ensure that the client's legal and social needs are met and that the best outcomes are achieved for the client and the family.

**Just Healthy Families (JHF)** is a Health Justice Partnership that has embedded free legal help into health and social service settings across Tasmania. JHF is a collaboration between Tasmania Legal Aid and the Women's Legal Service Tasmania, three health and community partner organisations - Child Health and Parenting Services, Child and Family Learning Centers and the Hobart Women's Shelter.

JHF leverages on trusting relationships built in existing community spaces to provide legal advice and support to those who might not otherwise access legal support. It aims to sort out legal issues before they spiral out of control, become insurmountable and cost more to resolve. They help identify and respond to family violence early, keeping women and children safe.

Tasmania Legal Aid and the Women's Legal Service of Tasmania established the partnership with the other three organisations to meet unmet legal need in community settings, in places where women were already attending, engaged and safe. JHF meets and sees women where they are in their community - many women don't realise they have a legal problem and would not seek out legal services.

The partnership had generous in-kind contributions from the University of Tasmania which evaluated the project, and Law and Development Partners which analysed service data to tell a story of impact.

Just Healthy Families won the inaugural, national ANZ-PBA Partnering Award which celebrates cross-sector partnerships and demonstrates excellence in the management of collaborations between organisations which address a social or environmental issue.

Tasmania Legal Aid provides an integrated response to elder abuse with its **Senior Assist Elder Abuse Prevention Unit**. Tasmania Legal Aid's team of case managers (social workers) work alongside Tasmania Legal Aid lawyers to provide a wraparound response to elder abuse through counselling, safety planning and referrals to services. The service supports people to recognise and avoid elder abuse, and to address psychological and emotional abuse, recover property and funds, and to remove abusive family members from the client's home.

Tasmania Legal Aid is piloting an early intervention outreach clinic at Hobart's new **Mental Health Integration Hub** at the Peacock Centre. The Hub is a welcoming



place providing short term, practical mental health support, information, advice and assistance to people experiencing mental health issues and distress. The provision of holistic social services aims to help keep people out of hospital and to live well. Tasmania Legal Aid lawyers attend the service weekly to give free legal advice and referrals to people who walk in or make an appointment. There are other service providers on site and virtually available to provide other supports including housing, employment, addiction treatment, financial counselling, laundry services, counselling, day supports and Centrelink.

As well as the Hub, the Peacock Centre also includes:

- intensive onsite mental health accommodation as a 12 bedroom unit that is designed like a home to be open and welcoming, and provides services to help people return to satisfying and meaningful lives
- a Recovery College which is a dedicated space providing opportunities for people to improve their mental health, wellbeing, and personal recovery through education, and a
- Safe Haven providing care and support to people in suicidal or situational distress and their families, friends or support networks in a safe and therapeutic environment.

## Victoria Legal Aid

The **Youth Crime Prevention & Early Intervention Program** is jointly lead by West Justice Community Legal Centre, Victoria Legal Aid and Victoria Police and is supported by other community services in the western suburbs. It aims to divert children and young people away from the criminal justice system and reduce re-offending rates. It focusses on improving access to, and consistency in the use of, police cautions and diversions for children and young people, including children and young people from diverse backgrounds for whom English may not be a first language, and/or who may be in residential care and and/or have complex needs.

**Independent Mental Health Advocacy** is a non-legal representational mental health advocacy service at Victoria Legal Aid that supports and assists people to make, and be involved in, decisions about their mental health assessment, treatment, and recovery. This is achieved through assisting in supported decision-making by providing consumers information on the mental health system and their rights, building capacity for self-advocacy, directly engaging with a person's treating team and linking consumers to other legal and non-legal services.

**Independent Family Advocacy and Support** provides non-legal advocacy and support to parents and primary carers who are involved in the child protection system, following notification to the child protection authority and prior to the initiation of proceedings. Independent Family Advocacy and Support gives people the information and support that they need to understand their rights, responsibilities and options, and connects them with services such as housing, family violence and drug and alcohol services.

**Aboriginal community engagement (ACE) officers** are located across Victoria. They are specialist non-legal roles that focus on client support, community engagement and empowering people through knowledge. ACE officers help First Nations people access Victoria Legal Aid's legal assistance services, contribute to building and supporting relationships with community-controlled organisations and other service providers, and build greater knowledge of legal problems and assistance available through community legal education and engagement.

**The Youth Citizenship in the West service** is jointly lead by Victoria Legal Aid, West Justice, and community partners in the Western suburbs. It provides citizenship services to young people with refugee backgrounds and their families. The service reduces the risks of visa cancellation and deportation for young people who come into contact with the justice system.

**Information referral officers** provide non-legal support to people going to court for a family violence matter. They provide information about court processes and referrals to family violence support services and counselling services. They are based at the following Specialist Family Violence Courts: Ballarat, Bendigo, Frankston, Heidelberg, Melbourne and Moorabbin.

**Remand Support Service** is a pilot program that will have lawyers and allied professionals working together to address legal and non-legal needs of people on remand appearing at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court. The pilot program will run for two years from June 2025.