

CHARTER

Membership

National Legal Aid (NLA) represents the directors of the eight state and territory legal aid commissions (LACs) in Australia.

The LACs are independent statutory bodies that provide legal assistance services to the public, with a particular focus on the needs of people who are economically and/or socially disadvantaged. LACs provide in excess of 2.3 million legal services each year.

One of the NLA directors, on a rotation basis, is the Chair and primary spokesperson for NLA.

Purpose

NLA's purpose is to:

- lead and encourage a national system of legal aid which allows economically disadvantaged people to obtain access to justice, and
- provide a forum for engagement at a national level with government/s, stakeholders, community; and for the individual LACs to engage with each other about best practice of legal aid and related issues.

Beliefs

NLA is guided by belief in the rule of law and the importance of an effective, efficient, independent justice system which is accessible to everyone. These are the cornerstones of a civil and democratic society.

Priorities

In 2019-2020 key priorities for NLA include:

- Achieving an increase in core funding to legal assistance service providers with that funding to be adjusted each year in accordance with the Consumer Price Index, so that more services can be delivered to people in need.
- Responding to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.
- Working with government and service providers to ensure the most appropriate response following the release of the report of the Australian Law Reform Commission's Review of Family Law.
- Support for adequate funding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services as the 'specialised legal assistance services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.ⁱ

Strategies

NLA:

- maintains a set of policies which provide the basis for our work in advocating for equitable access to justice;
- is supported by a secretariat and by a number of working groups and networks including a representative of each of the LACs with expertise in the respective area of legal aid business; and
- meets regularly for strategic planning purposes.

Co-operation

There are four main government funded legal assistance service providers in Australia, including the LACs, community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.

NLA is a member of the Australian Legal Assistance Forum (ALAF), comprised by representatives of the above legal assistance service providers and the Law Council of Australia representing Australian lawyers and their state and territory representative bodies, a signatory to the ALAF Statement of Co-operation, and provides the ALAF Secretariat.

New Zealand

There is a strong alliance between NLA and Legal Aid Services New Zealand. The legal aid alliance 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.

Further information

Further information about NLA and the work that we do, can be found at

<http://www.nationallegalaid.org/>

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ⁱ Productivity Commission 2014, *Access to Justice Arrangements: Overview*, Inquiry Report No. 72, Canberra, 767.