



**Women's  
Legal Service  
NSW**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**



**2016-2019**

Women's Legal Service NSW acknowledges the Wongal and Burramattagal people who are the traditional owners of the land on which we work, and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

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## VISION

- ◆ Access to justice and a just legal system for women in NSW, as all women are entitled to a society that respects their human rights.

## PURPOSE

- ◆ Women's Legal Service NSW works from a feminist perspective to promote access to justice for women in NSW. We seek to promote women's human rights, redress inequalities experienced by women and to foster legal and social change through strategic legal services, community development, community legal education and law and policy reform work. We prioritise women who are disadvantaged by their cultural, social and economic circumstances.
- ◆ We focus on areas of law that most directly have a gendered impact on women. This includes domestic violence, sexual assault, family law, care and protection, and discrimination.

## FIVE PRIORITY AREAS

The five priority areas of service delivery for Women's Legal Service NSW are:

### POLICY AND LAW REFORM

Influence reform of policy, legislation and legal processes that affect the rights and limit the lives of women, particularly those most disadvantaged in their access to justice.

### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Promote women's understanding of the legal system, their rights and avenues for the resolution of their legal problems. Undertake community development initiatives to achieve this purpose, particularly for those women most disadvantaged in their access to justice.

Develop the capacity of service providers working with women to assist their clients appropriately with legal problems.

### IMPROVING THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUAL WOMEN

Targeted and effective legal services that best meet the unmet needs of the most disadvantaged women in NSW.

Strategic casework selected within our capacity that promotes women's human rights and supports assistance for those women at greatest disadvantage.

### ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR, AND SELF-DETERMINATION BY, INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Provide a specialised and culturally appropriate Indigenous Women's Legal Program, with respect for Indigenous decision-making and a commitment to supporting community strengthening.

### INFRASTRUCTURE, SUSTAINABILITY AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

Maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of Women's Legal Service NSW infrastructure to sustain and support the service delivery priority areas.

## WHAT WE INTEND TO ACHIEVE:

### 1. WOMEN WILL BE SAFE FROM VIOLENCE.

We prioritise services for women experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault. We will practice within a domestic violence and trauma-informed framework. 25% of matters undertaken will concern domestic violence and sexual assault.

### 2. WOMEN WILL BE SUPPORTED TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR OWN LIVES.

We assist women to make decisions about their families and care for their children. 33% of matters undertaken will concern family law and child protection. We support women who have been discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, marital status and caring responsibilities, and who have experienced sexual harassment. 5% of matters undertaken will concern discrimination.

### 3. WOMEN WILL BE RESOURCED TO MAKE CHOICES.

We will work collaboratively with other services to offer holistic responses to our clients' needs. We will undertake 16 outreaches and partnerships. We will use systemic advocacy to enhance our client's' access to justice. We will undertake 100 law reform activities each year.

### 4. OUR SERVICES WILL BE INCLUSIVE OF ALL WOMEN

We will provide services in a manner that is inclusive of the needs and interests of all women, including Indigenous women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women in regional rural and remote areas, older women, young women, women in prison, women at risk of homelessness, LGBTIQ women and women with disabilities.

Our service provision will take into account the cross-cultural and intersecting issues that may compound the experience of disadvantage.

### 5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

This Strategic Plan accords with the United Nations "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" goals for gender equality, access to justice, and peaceful inclusive societies. (Goals 5,8,11,16)

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

# 1. WOMEN WILL BE SAFE FROM VIOLENCE

## AIM Protection from and redress for Domestic Violence.

### ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Phone advice: via dedicated advice line including 1800 line
- ◆ Advice and representation in apprehended domestic violence order and related matters, including representation for women defendants
- ◆ Advocacy to improve police responses to DV including women defendants and addressing unmet requests for assistance
- ◆ Legally assisted family dispute resolution
- ◆ Victims support applications for DV

### INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Working in collaboration with solicitors to provide culturally safe advice and representation
- ◆ Culturally safe support for women going through domestic violence matters
- ◆ *Our Dream* published
- ◆ Breach diary distributed
- ◆ Participation in Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service Aboriginal specialist worker network
- ◆ Engagement with community
- ◆ School visits re: healthy relationships
- ◆ Support Change the Record campaigns

### LAW REFORM

- ◆ Amend Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders to better include technology-facilitated abuse and stalking
- ◆ Effective inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, CALD women, women with disabilities, women in rural, regional and remote areas, women in prison, older women, younger women and LGBTIQ communities in the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children.
- ◆ Safety in family law including vulnerable witness protection
- ◆ Death reviews in all states and territories & monitoring of implementation of recommendations
- ◆ Advocacy for stronger protections for vulnerable witnesses in domestic violence proceedings
- ◆ Advocacy within the family law system for the development of best practice guidelines to deal with sensitive records

### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Brochures and promotional materials about our services
- ◆ *Is this love?* brochure updated
- ◆ Update of the Domestic Violence and Renting Guide
- ◆ GPs toolkit distribution, promotion and training of health care workers
- ◆ Domestic violence law practice guide published
- ◆ Domestic violence and renting guide updated
- ◆ DV legal training at CLCNSW, ECAV, SHLV, FaCS, WDVCAS, Law Access
- ◆ Ask LOIS webinars and resources
- ◆ Online promotional materials about our services

### INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ Continued advocacy to ensure women with disabilities are protected from violence in NSW legislation
- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities

# AIM Reduce the risk of sexual assault and support women engaging with the legal system as a result of sexual assault.

## ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Responding to family law subpoenas
- ◆ Responding to enquiries about the Sexual Assault Communications Privilege
- ◆ Victims Support applications for sexual assault

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Culturally safe support for women going through sexual assault matters
- ◆ Collaborative engagement with communities
- ◆ Outreach to 1800 RESPECT: *Hey Sis we've got your back* project
- ◆ Advocacy for better access to rape kits and local support services for women in remote communities

## LAW REFORM

- ◆ Advocacy for better protection of vulnerable witnesses in the family law jurisdiction
- ◆ Advocacy for improved support for victims of sexual assault and domestic and family violence through the NSW Victims Support scheme
- ◆ Enhance privacy protection and protection from technology-facilitated harassment stalking and abuse

## COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Raising police awareness of appropriate responses to sexual assault
- ◆ Sexual assault seminar series for community workers, including in regional areas
- ◆ Counsellors and subpoenas guide completed, promoted and distributed
- ◆ Sexual assault booklet published and distributed
- ◆ Education on reducing exposure to on-line sexual harassment, stalking & abuse and unauthorised distribution of intimate images
- ◆ Ask LOIS webinars and resources

## INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities



## 2. WOMEN WILL BE SUPPORTED TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR OWN LIVES

**AIM** The family law system is more supportive of and responsive to women's needs for safety, economic security and independence, and respectful of women's relationships with their children, including protective behaviour.

### ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Phone advice including via 1800 number
- ◆ Evening phone advice service
- ◆ Advice and representation in family law cases and family violence
- ◆ Women's health centre health justice partnerships
- ◆ Legally Assisted Family Dispute Resolution
- ◆ Engage and build relationships with pro bono barristers and solicitors

### INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Working in collaboration with solicitors to provide culturally safe advice and representation
- ◆ Culturally safe support for women going through family law matters
- ◆ Outreach services in western Sydney
- ◆ Engaging with community

### LAW REFORM

- ◆ Improve responses by government and non government agencies to domestic violence.
- ◆ Protection for vulnerable litigants
- ◆ Highlighting and challenging the gender bias where mothers and fathers are held to different standards
- ◆ Advocacy within the family law system for the development of best practice guidelines to deal with sensitive records.

### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Women and family law book and e-book
- ◆ Family law seminar series for community workers including in regional areas
- ◆ Improve police awareness of family law and domestic violence issues
- ◆ Change of name kit
- ◆ Ask LOIS webinars and resources

### INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ CLE resources on Family law for LGBTIQ women on parenting issues
- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities



**AIM** The system of care and protection is strengthened to support early intervention to keep children with their birth mothers and extended families where it is safe to do so; Contact is retained post-removal; and Restoration is facilitated.

### ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Telephone advice service
- ◆ Advice and representation in early intervention, care contact and restoration cases
- ◆ LEAP: Women in prison are supported to maintain contact with children

### INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Working in collaboration with solicitors to provide culturally safe advice and representation
- ◆ Culturally safe support for women going through care matters, including production and distribution of information resources
- ◆ Support for extended kin especially grandmothers and aunts to stay in contact with and/or have care of children
- ◆ If resources become available, undertake community consultation and engagement about Elder abuse
- ◆ Continued advocacy about the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

### LAW REFORM

- ◆ Better integration of care, family law and domestic violence systems
- ◆ Continued advocacy to improve engagement of FaCS and NGO child protection services in facilitating contact for parents/primary caregivers.
- ◆ Highlighting and challenging the gender bias where mothers and fathers are held to different standards
- ◆ Targeted earlier intervention and engaging families
- ◆ Monitoring of the implementation of the child protection Safe Home for Life and legislative reforms.

### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Care seminar series for community workers including in regional areas
- ◆ Early intervention advice flyers
- ◆ Training for FACS and NGO child protection services staff
- ◆ Ask LOIS webinars and resources
- ◆ Education of professionals in the family law and care and protection jurisdictions to demystify contact with mothers in prison and promoting a better understanding of available programs to enable children to reside with mothers in custody

### INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities

# AIM Women are empowered to combat discrimination and supported to seek redress for its effects.

## ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Information, advice and representation is provided to women experiencing sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, marital or relationship status, pregnancy and breastfeeding or domestic violence discrimination
- ◆ Provide a Working Women's Legal Service
- ◆ Advice and representation on gender, pregnancy, carer/family responsibilities discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Practice acknowledging intersection of sex and race discrimination
- ◆ Working in collaboration with solicitors to provide culturally safe advice and representation
- ◆ Culturally safe support for women going through discrimination in matters
- ◆ Advocacy recognising the intersecting impact of gender and race discrimination
- ◆ Support for implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- ◆ Engaging with community

## LAW REFORM

- ◆ Domestic violence as a protected attribute in State and Federal anti-discrimination laws and protection against adverse action on the basis of being a victim of domestic violence in the Fair Work Act
- ◆ Advocacy for the strengthening of anti-discrimination legislation, including to address all prohibited grounds of discrimination, to promote substantive equality and to provide effective remedies
- ◆ LGBTIQ family equality

## COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Promotion of women's rights at work and Working Women's Legal Service
- ◆ Ask LOIS webinars and resources

## INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities
- ◆ Advocate for clarity of law relating to parents listed on a child's birth certificate
- ◆ Birth certificates are available for transgendered individuals

# AIM Women are empowered to take control of their own bodies and their sexual and reproductive rights are recognised and supported.

## ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Health justice partnerships with women's health centres
- ◆ Advice and representation

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Working in collaboration with solicitors to provide culturally safe advice and representation
- ◆ Culturally safe support for women going through reproductive rights matters
- ◆ Advocacy for better access to maternity and perinatal services in remote Aboriginal communities
- ◆ Engaging with community

## LAW REFORM

- ◆ Abortion law reform
- ◆ Protest-free zones around clinics
- ◆ Oppose foetal personhood

## COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Information and education on sexual and reproductive rights, reproductive coercion and reproductive options eg. where to access safe, accessible pregnancy option services
- ◆ Legal training at Family Planning NSW – minors, violence, sex and the law

## INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and offering resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities

### 3. WOMEN WILL BE RESOURCED TO MAKE CHOICES

**AIM** Agencies practice collaboratively to provide holistic services and best practice approaches. Resources are shared.

#### ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Broader case work partnerships dealing with non-legal issues
- ◆ Health Justice partnerships
- ◆ Engage in collaborative service delivery planning with the legal assistance sector
- ◆ Volunteers and PLT students
- ◆ Colin Biggers and Paisley partnership for pro bono services
- ◆ Develop and strengthen other pro bono partnerships

#### INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Engagement with urban and regional communities through outreaches, interagencies and participation in community events
- ◆ Community development and engagement with women leaders in regional rural and remote communities
- ◆ Hey Sis collaboration with 1800 RESPECT
- ◆ Participate in relevant consultations and campaigns, such as Constitutional recognition, Close the Gap and Change the Record

#### LAW REFORM

- ◆ Work with FaCS, NGO child protection services and legal assistance services to foster early intervention in child protection matters
- ◆ Further develop links with educational and other institutions including:
  - ◆ universities
  - ◆ ANROWS
- ◆ Participate in appropriate interagency committees, such as:
  - ◆ NSW and National Women's Alliances
  - ◆ Women's Legal Services Australia

#### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Engage with tertiary students through guest lecturing at university and TAFE courses
- ◆ GPs toolkit and training health workers
- ◆ Contribute to plain language law publications such as Law Handbook, Lawyer's Practice Manual
- ◆ Publish joint publication with Legal Aid NSW on Sexual Assault Communications Privilege
- ◆ Connect with like services through social media
- ◆ Attend and contribute to the Legal Information and Referral Forum
- ◆ Attend and contribute to the CLE Workers committee through CLCNSW
- ◆ Engage with women's health centres for provision of CLE

**AIM** Women in prison or who have been in prison are supported to exercise their rights to residency, contact with and care for family and children, reproductive rights, victim support and safe housing.

### ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Provide advice and representation to women in correctional and detention facilities by telephone and by outreach
- ◆ Assist women who have visa cancellation issues
- ◆ Provide representation at conciliation and mediation in family law and care and protection proceedings
- ◆ Support women to maintain contact with children
- ◆ Provide early intervention services for pregnant prisoners
- ◆ Contribute to diversionary and post-release support

### INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Provide support for Indigenous women in prison, including young women in juvenile detention facilities
- ◆ Advocate for reduction in incarceration of Indigenous women

### LAW REFORM


- ◆ Increase awareness about the pathways into prison and alternatives to incarceration
- ◆ Advocate to include women in prison in the National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children
- ◆ Continued advocacy for the roll out of counselling in all NSW prisons for women in prison who choose to access counselling
- ◆ Continued advocacy to improve engagement of FaCS and NGO child protection services in facilitating contact for parents/primary caregivers
- ◆ Alternatives to imprisonment for pregnant women and primary caregivers, particularly in the context of a non-violent offence

### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Participate in legal literacy in prison programs when resources are available

### INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities



# AIM

Women are enabled to access safe, stable and affordable accommodation suitable to their needs, including access to emergency and refuge accommodation.

## ADVICE & CASEWORK

- ◆ Assist with housing applications and appeals
- ◆ Advocate re: priority housing eligibility
- ◆ Represent women at risk of homelessness in NCAT tenancy and domestic violence matters

## INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEGAL PROGRAM

- ◆ Promote the right to culturally safe and appropriate accommodation options
- ◆ Advocate for accommodation priority to be given to young women coming out of detention
- ◆ Support the development of housing and refuge facilities in regional, rural and remote communities

## LAW REFORM

- ◆ Advocate for stronger protections for victims/survivors of domestic violence in the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* (NSW)
- ◆ Advocate for expansion of Staying Home Leaving Violence
- ◆ Advocate for safe and affordable housing for victims/survivors of domestic violence
- ◆ Contribute to the work of the Equality Rights Alliance Housing Working Group, including about older women at risk of homelessness

## COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Develop and distribute resources on domestic violence and renting
- ◆ Provide training for staff of the Staying Home Leaving Violence program

## INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

- ◆ Ensure that homelessness is no barrier to accessing our services by liaising with women's refuges and other emergency accommodation providers
- ◆ Trauma-informed practice that recognises the impact of domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness
- ◆ Enable access to services for CALD women, including by providing guidance to working with interpreters and resource materials in translation
- ◆ Practice in accordance with access and equity policy for women with disabilities

## 4. OUR SERVICES WILL BE INCLUSIVE OF ALL WOMEN

*In all our service provision we provide inclusive access to our services, recognising the particular needs of women who are disadvantaged by location, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, sexuality, disability or Indigenous status. This commitment is expressed throughout this strategic plan by addressing these needs in each area of our work.*

## 5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

This Strategic Plan accords with the United Nations “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” goals for gender equality, access to justice, and peaceful inclusive societies. (Goals 5,8,11,16)

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

- Goal 5.* Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 8.* Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 11.* Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 16.* Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

