

## WHAT IS NLAF?

The New South Wales Legal Assistance Forum is a coalition promoting collaboration and co-ordination in the development of legal services for socially and economically disadvantaged people in New South Wales . It includes the peak representative bodies with responsibility for the delivery of legal services and specialist organisations dealing with a wide range of legal issues.

## MEMBER ORGANISATIONS ARE:

- Legal Aid NSW
- Combined Community Legal Centres Group NSW
- The Law and Justice Foundation of NSW
- Aboriginal Legal Service NSW / ACT Limited
- The NSW Bar Association
- The Law Society of NSW
- The Attorney-General's Department of NSW
- LawAccess NSW
- Public Interest Law Clearing House

## THE AIMS OF NLAF ARE:

- to continuously improve service delivery to socially and economically disadvantaged people through better alignment of planning, program design and service delivery by providers of legal assistance services
- to promote co-operative arrangements and collaboration between organisations within the sector for effective service delivery
- to identify and incorporate the best available research
- to promote dialogue and debate
- to consult and respond to emerging issues, policy and law reform
- to be a channel for disseminating ideas and initiatives throughout the sector

## NLAF Key Activities for 2006/07

### Meeting Community Need

- **The Working Group on Civil Law Services for Aboriginal People** produced and launched the *Guide to Legal Services for Aboriginal People in NSW/ACT* which is distributed through the Aboriginal Legal Service. Working Group members collaborated to improve access to pro bono services for Aboriginal people. The Working Group will now focus on initiatives to improve access to civil law services for Aboriginal people in NSW.
- **The Working Group on Mental Illness and Access to Justice** aims to collect and disseminate information on best practice models to improve access to justice; develop proposals to implement best practice across public legal assistance services; identify aspects of the law that impact on legal rights; and develop links to related mental health initiatives. The Group liaised with NSW Health regarding the interface between the legal and health systems, explored models of legal assistance for people with a mental illness and developed a proposal for a pilot project. The Group also began to explore issues of client capacity and will hold a forum on this issue in late 2007.
- NLAF continues to monitor the need to increase the numbers and capacity of public assistance lawyers in rural and regional areas. NLAF explored regional models being implemented by members, and will continue to liaise with the profession and government on this issue.

### Policy/ Law Reform

- **The Working Group on Conflict of Interest** prepared NLAF's submission to the Ethics Committee of the Law Society of NSW. The submission asks the Ethics Committee to consider a proposal for managing conflict of interests in legal advice- only services provided by public legal services, and to support a change to the Law Society's Professional Conduct Rules. The aim is to ensure that legal services are available to the maximum number of clients without compromising services to individual clients.
- **The Working Group on Interpreter Services** gained an improved understanding of the limitations faced by public legal services in gaining access to interpreters for their clients, including issues such as a lack of interpreters for emerging languages and the need for legal training for interpreters. The Group is working with the NSW Community Relations Commission to improve access to and use of interpreter services in the justice system.

### Coordination of Legal Assistance

- **The Legal Information and Referral Forum (LIRF)** provides the opportunity to communicate across agencies about developments in legal information, and to strategise about improved referral pathways. LIRF undertook a project to improve legal referrals from GPs through working with the NSW Divisions of General Practice. LIRF is working with HS- Net to improve the referral capacity of *Service Link*, a database of legal and non- legal services in NSW.
- **The Training Reference Group** continued to identify training needs across the sector and share training where relevant. The group has identified and developed strategies to address unmet training needs in areas such as employment law, using interpreters and Aboriginal cultural awareness training.