

## Quarterly Highlights Report April to June 2022

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*This Quarterly Highlights Report provides a summary of the work of the New South Wales Legal Assistance Forum (NLAF) from April to June 2022.*

*The NLAF Plenary Group Meeting was held on 15 June 2022. It was chaired by Karly Warner, Chair of the Forum and CEO of the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), and was attended by representatives of the NLAF Plenary Group.*

### Business of Plenary

We ran a special plenary session focusing on the NLAF Survey, which was the first survey to review the operation of NLAF since 2011.

### Special Session discussing the NLAF Survey results

Kerryn Butler from the NSW Law and Justice Foundation presented the results of the survey to the forum:

- The response rate to the 2022 NLAF Member Survey has been good, and participation has significantly increased from the 2011 survey.
- There were 25 completed surveys: 64% of respondents were from the legal assistance sector, and 28% from government.
- Most think the NLAF meets its stated aim moderately well (68%).
- They support a review of NLAF aims, objectives and strategies (96%).
- They support advocacy as an activity to achieve its aim (92%).
- Most would support including collaborative service planning (84%).
- Most would welcome a review of membership appointment (72%) although views on the intention of such a review were highly diverse.
- Respondent views on the operation of the NLAF Plenary rated all functions of the plenary and working group above 5, with particular strengths coming from the Plenary itself, the Fines and Traffic Working Group and the Prisoners Forum.
- The NLAF aim to continuously improve service delivery to socially and economically disadvantaged people through improved alignment of planning, program design, and service delivery by providers of legal assistance services. Most indicated it does this moderately well.

- Benefits of a review:
  - Could reinvigorate purpose and genuine buy-in;
  - Focus what we are trying to achieve and how to measure progress;
  - Help to sense check participants' expectations about the forum's purpose and objectives;
  - Important to reflect, review and update to ensure NLAF is fit for purpose and impactful
- There was strong agreement that NLAF should include advocacy in its aims;
- Some benefits of advocacy:
  - Improving service delivery to disadvantaged people necessitates engagement with advocacy
  - Advocacy is an effective and efficient approach to delivering on the NLAF aim.
  - We are an authoritative voice with considerable collective influence.
- Strong agreement on collaborative service planning.
- Strong agreement on reviewing the appointment of members.
- Overall support for the functions of the plenary, including: collaboration & networking, identifying & incorporating the best available research, promotion of dialogue & debate, consultation, recognising & responding to emerging issues, policy, & law reform, promotion of co-operative arrangements for effective service delivery, and administration.

Next steps: the Plenary agreed at least one half day workshop should be conducted to discuss the implications and future directions of NLAF.

## Snapshot of the work of groups reporting to NLAF

The NLAF quarterly working group reports are posted on our website, so please visit [nlaf.org.au](http://nlaf.org.au) and visit the [Our Work](#) page, to read in detail about the work of these groups from April to June 2022. The following is a snapshot of some of the issues raised and work done by the NLAF working groups in this quarter:

The [Doli incapax Working Group](#) reviewed the working group's objectives and also invited new representatives for the NSWBA, LANSW and ALS to join the working group.. Working group members provided feedback on the draft doli incapax checklist developed by the sub-group. The Law Society of NSW CPD on doli incapax, organised by the working group, was delivered by Matthew Johnston SC on 17 March 2022. The CPD was well attended, with participants across the legal sector including the judiciary, ALS, legal aid commissions, and community legal centres, and received positive feedback. Johnston's paper entitled *Doli Incapax – The Criminal Responsibility of Children*, which accompanied the CPD and was co-developed with the NSWBA representative on the working group, will be included in the information hub.

The [Fines & Traffic Law Working Group](#) had Christie Allan and Megan Smith from the NSW Ombudsman provide an overview of the report, *The new machinery of government: using machine*

*technology in administrative decision-making*, tabled last year on machine learning, including in the area of fines debt. Finally it was advised that the WDO Guidelines are likely to be pulled back due to legislative changes that have been made to the Fines Act 1996 to allow social workers to be approved as sponsors in their own right.

The [Prisoners](#) Forum was addressed by Inspector of Custodial Services, who spoke to the *Health services in NSW correctional facilities report*, tabled in March 2021 as to the state of health for detainees. A second presentation was also provided by Kelly Austin, the Acting Principal Advisor Women's Services in the Department of Communities and Justice. Finally, the health subgroup also reported on its continuing discussions regarding health matters for people in detention.

The [Cooperative Legal Services Delivery Program \(CLSD\) Unit](#) also reports to NLAf and advised us that Legal Aid NSW and the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages signed a memorandum of understanding in February 2022 providing greater certainty around the availability of fee free birth certificates for CLSD Program events. Separately, we were notified that the Program is working with our colleagues in the Work and Development Order Service and at Advocacy Law Alliance (the Hunter CLSD regional coordination service) to pilot a specialist 3rd party work and development order service.

*The next Plenary Group meeting is on 14 September 2022 and remote participation will be available.*

If you have any questions about this Quarterly Highlights Report, or the work of NLAf, please email:

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**NLAf, 9 September 2022**