

Bringing it all together

A partnership in legal service delivery

What is the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program?

The Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program is a regionally-based approach to legal service delivery in NSW that aims to improve outcomes for economically and socially disadvantaged people by building cooperative and strategic networks of key legal services and community organisations.

CLSD is based on the theory that better coordination and cooperation in the planning and delivery of legal services will enhance the efficient and effective use of scarce resources and improve access to justice for disadvantaged people.

CLSD Program objectives

The Program's three main objectives are to ensure that:

- economically and socially disadvantaged people are able to efficiently and effectively access legal services which can help them to understand, protect and enforce their legal rights and interests;
- consideration is given to legal need and equity in the provision of legal services and resources; and
- planning and delivery of legal services is approached in a coordinated and cooperative manner between service providers.

Where does the CLSD Program operate?

The CLSD Program has been operating in the Northern Rivers and Central West regions since the initial pilot in 2004. An independent evaluation in 2005 strongly endorsed the model and recommended a staged roll out of two new regions each year across NSW. In 2006 CLSD was rolled out to the Albury/Wagga Wagga and Hunter regions and in 2007 to Katoomba/Orange and the Central Coast. CLSD will be rolled out to a total of 10 regions by 2010.

Features of CLSD

The CLSD Program is centred around the following elements:

Regional coalitions of legal service providers and community organisations

Each year, two legal service delivery regions in New South Wales are identified on the basis of factors such as agency catchment areas, location and accessibility of services, socio-demographic profiles, transport considerations and identified legal needs.

Each region then establishes a regional coalition or partnership made up of representatives from key legal services and community organisations in the area – see Participants panel on back page.

Regional coalitions meet quarterly to exchange information, identify service delivery priorities for their region and to develop and implement strategic plans to address them. Regional coalitions may also undertake projects and community legal education and outreach activities or organise training to increase capacity to deliver services more effectively.

While the CLSD Program Unit provides central coordination, each CLSD region is largely autonomous and outputs are responsive to locally identified issues. In 2007, part-time Regional Coordinators were appointed in four regions to facilitate day-to-day coordination at the local level. Regional Coordinators will be appointed for the new regions in early 2008.

Mechanisms to improve referrals to and between key legal service providers

One of CLSD's aims is to get disadvantaged people off the "referral merry-go-round". It does this by increasing awareness and exchange of information about services and by developing mechanisms and strategies to improve referrals (such as front-line staff training and outreach calendars). CLSD is also working with other justice agencies to improve referrals from non-legal service providers (such as doctors) to the most appropriate service provider.

CLSD also works with and aims to build on the free legal information, referral and advice services provided by LawAccess NSW, whose personnel regularly attend regional coalition meetings.

Improved access to pro bono legal services

A major (generally Sydney based) law firm is allocated to each regional CLSD partnership to receive pro bono referrals that cannot be placed locally. If the firm is unable to accept the referral, it will liaise with other firms or pro bono referral schemes to place the matter. The firm participates in CLSD meetings ensuring pro bono resources are responsive to unmet legal needs of the region. Firms may also provide valuable in-kind assistance to CLSD partners, such as administrative support, training and community legal education workshops.

The use of evidence-based planning of legal services

Regional coalitions use a range of data including individual service, jurisdictional and anecdotal data to extend their services to new geographical areas, develop services to meet emerging legal needs, coordinate more effective and collaborative outreach services, improve client referrals between agencies, develop new client resources and identify systemic legal issues.

Regional data from State-wide and national agencies such as the ABS, LawAccess NSW and Local Courts is analysed centrally by the CLSD Program Unit with assistance from Legal Aid NSW's Corporate Reporting Unit, and the results are fed back to the CLSD regions at their regional coalition meetings. This information is used to inform local and state-wide strategic planning and service delivery.

The CLSD Program Unit also works closely with the Law & Justice Foundation of NSW and LawAccess NSW to explore and implement service planning and delivery strategies within CLSD regions based on the increasing body of empirical research on pathways to legal services by disadvantaged and marginalised people in NSW.

Central coordination through Legal Aid NSW

Central coordination of the Program is provided by Legal Aid NSW. The CLSD Program Unit, which consists of a Manager and Coordinator assists with the administrative needs of the Program, maintains and enhances the referral databases and website, and assists regional coalitions to develop and monitor strategic plans. The Program Unit also provides empirical information on legal needs and new service initiatives and facilitates capacity-building and training opportunities in each of the CLSD regions.

Information on identified gaps in services and emerging issues from CLSD regions is also fed back to Legal Aid NSW Head Office, the NSW Legal Assistance Forum, the Law & Justice Foundation and LawAccess NSW. This valuable information is used to inform access to justice initiatives and state-wide strategic planning.



Outcomes to date

The CLSD Program has resulted in a number of positive outcomes. CLSD regions have attracted additional resources and extended services in new regions to meet emerging legal needs. They have also coordinated more effective and collaborative community legal education and outreach services, improved client referrals between agencies, developed new resources, provided training and capacity-building initiatives and identified systemic legal issues. CLSD partners are also working together on cooperative projects such as legal advice and information "road-shows" to less well-served regional areas.

Over the next year, CLSD regions will be exploring new service delivery models and strengthening client referral pathways between their agencies and non-legal service providers such as doctors and Centrelink.

Participants

CLSD is guided by a Steering Committee which provides advice on the Program and is made up of key agencies in the legal assistance sector in NSW.

CLSD participants include:

Legal Aid NSW

Community Legal Centres in NSW

Local Courts

LawAccess NSW

Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Ltd

Law & Justice Foundation of NSW

NSW Legal Assistance Forum

Community Justice Centres

Regional Law Societies

Tenancy Services

Women's Domestic Violence

Court Assistance Schemes

Disability advocacy agencies

Migrant community groups/ resource centres

State Library of NSW and Legal Information Access Centres

Financial Counselling agencies

Family Relationship Centres

Neighbourhood Centres

Blake Dawson

Henry Davis York

DLA Phillips Fox

Gilbert+Tobin

Clayton Utz

Sparke Helmore

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