

# Frequently asked questions

## Community legal services

### What are community legal services?

Community legal services help South Australians to access legal advice and assistance when they can't afford to hire a lawyer.

In South Australia, these services are offered through three main providers:

- The Legal Services Commission of SA, which provides the service commonly known as 'legal aid';
- The Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, which provides legal assistance to Aboriginal Communities across South Australia; and
- Community Legal Centres (CLCs), which provide free legal assistance to people who have a significant legal issue but aren't eligible for legal aid and can't afford a private lawyer.

There are also three specialist services that operate in South Australia – offering women's legal services, welfare rights services and mediation services across the state.

Across the state, community legal services are available through a combination of shop fronts, outreach services, video and phone conferencing services and smart phone apps.

Community Legal Centres can provide eligible South Australians with legal advice and assistance, including court representation, and community legal education.

Information on ways to access legal assistance is available on [www.agd.sa.gov.au](http://www.agd.sa.gov.au) or [www.lsc.sa.gov.au](http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au)

### Why are community legal services changing?

South Australia faced the largest cut of any jurisdiction to Commonwealth funding for community legal services - stripping almost \$2 million per annum in funding compared to 2014-15 levels.

In response to these funding cuts, the South Australian Government commissioned an independent review of Community Legal Centres, to ensure the most equitable access to legal assistance.

The review informed the Government's improved service delivery model. The new model is designed to deliver better value for money, mitigate the impact of any Commonwealth funding cuts on services, and enhance the way the sector works together.

Read the full review at [www.agd.sa.gov.au](http://www.agd.sa.gov.au)

### How will the new model work?

From 1 July 2017, the Legal Services Commission will act as the first point of contact for South Australians seeking community legal services and advice and will refer matters to the most appropriate service as required. Basic legal information will be more accessible online and there will be an increase in call centre staff at the Legal Services Commission to ensure anyone can get simple legal information on the phone.

At the same time, all Community Legal Centres will continue their 'no wrong door' policy – ensuring that anyone who seeks help, regardless of which service they approach, will be directed to the service most appropriate for their needs.

Community Legal Centres will continue to provide outreach services to areas that have been identified as having a high legal need. These are areas where there are many people who cannot afford private legal services.

Community Legal Centres will also work in partnership with the non-government sector to help meet the non-legal needs of clients, for example housing and mental health.

Community Legal Centres will be investing in technological enhancements that can increase accessibility and access to services particularly for regional areas – including online video conference and smart phone apps.

A dedicated and state-wide legal service for women will continue, as well as a state-wide mediation service to assist in managing legal matters without having to go to court.



## Who will be providing services?

From July 1 2017, generalist community legal services will be delivered in:

- Adelaide Central & Hills by **Uniting Communities**;
- Adelaide South by **Southern Community Justice Centre**;
- Adelaide West by **Westside Lawyers**;
- Adelaide North by **Northern Community Legal Centre**;
- SA Southern, South East & Riverland by **Southern Community Justice Centre**;
- SA Mid-North & Outback by **Westside Lawyers**.

From July 1 2017, specialist state-wide community legal services will continue to be delivered:

- Women's Legal Services will be provided by the **Women's Legal Service of SA**;
- Welfare Rights Services will be provided by **Uniting Communities**; and
- Mediation Services will be provided by **Uniting Communities**.

## Will there be changes to accessing services from Community Legal Centres?

Services provided by Community Legal Centres and the specialised services will remain in place, however some providers will be changing under the new model.

In the South East, the services that have been provided by the South East Community Legal Centre will be provided by the Southern Community Justice Centre.

In the Riverland, services provided by the Riverland Community Legal Centre will also be provided by the Southern Community Justice Centre.

In addition, welfare rights services (currently available through the Welfare Rights Centre) and mediation services (currently available through the Southern Community Justice Centre) will be provided by Uniting Communities.

## Is my local Community Legal Centre closing?

Some Community Legal Centres will no longer receive funding through the new model. Each of the services previously provided by these Centres will be replaced from 1 July 2017 with services from the providers listed above.

Centres no longer receiving funding from 1 July 2017 are:

- South East Community Legal Centre
- Riverland Community Legal Centre
- The Welfare Rights Centre.

Services currently provided by the Welfare Rights Centre will now be provided by Uniting Communities. In the South East, services will be provided by the Southern

Community Justice Centre through a shop front service in Mount Gambier and a combination of outreach activity and remote service delivery, such as videoconferencing.

The Southern Community Justice Centre will also provide services in the Riverland, through a combination of outreach activity and remote service delivery.

## What will happen to matters with a community legal service that will continue beyond 1 July 2017?

Current clients that will be affected by the changes will receive a letter from the relevant Community Legal Centre advising of any changes, the impacts and options available to that client.

## Hasn't the Commonwealth provided additional funding?

In late April 2017, the Commonwealth announced it would provide additional funding for Community Legal Centres across Australia.

Information about how much funding would be made available to South Australia, and some funding conditions became available just prior to the expiration of the State Government's current agreements with Community Legal Centres and as the procurement process was being finalised.

The funding does not reverse the original funding cuts and there are restrictions on how this funding can be used. It must be used to assist in family law and family violence matters, so cannot be used to fund general legal assistance. As such, the State Government proceeded with the procurement process to ensure services would continue beyond 1 July 2017. From November 2017, the family law/family violence funding is provided for additional services delivered in:

- Adelaide Central & Hills by **Uniting Communities**
- Adelaide South and SA Southern/Riverland & South East by **Southern Community Justice Centre**
- Adelaide West and SA Mid North & Outback by **Westside Lawyers**
- Adelaide North by **Northern Community Legal Service**
- Women's legal service by the **Women's Legal Service of SA**.

## Who should I contact if I need legal assistance?

The Legal Services Commission should always be your starting point if you need legal assistance.

The LSC operates a Legal Helpline from 9am – 4.30pm Monday to Friday that can be reached on 1300 366 424.

You can also chat to a lawyer online at the LSC's website at [www.lsc.sa.gov.au](http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au)