

# Overview

39th Annual Report 2016-17  
Legal Services Commission of South Australia

# Highlights 2016-17

Highly positive  
client survey  
results

Expanded role for the  
Commission in the triage,  
eligibility and referral of  
clients as a consequence  
of the Ernst and Young  
*SA Community Legal  
Centres Service Review*

Review of the  
Commission's  
organisational  
structure

Governance of  
the Commission  
updated through  
passage of the *Legal  
Services Commission  
(Miscellaneous)  
Amendment Act 2016*

Maintenance of  
client services  
despite the third  
consecutive year of  
reduced funding

Increased emphasis on  
technology, in particular  
the commencement  
of an online legal aid  
application form and  
the commencement of  
24Legal

Six legal practitioner  
panels, comprising  
over 650 lawyers,  
undertaking legal aid  
matters

Extra Government  
funding to enhance  
family law duty lawyer  
services through  
expansion and  
integration with social  
support services

Production of  
educational videos for  
people with disabilities,  
targeting accessibility  
of Commission services  
and elder abuse

# Summary of Services 2016-17

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Telephone information sessions	68 028	70 287	67 591
Legal Chat online sessions	—	3 289	4 788
Advice appointments	25 122	21 365	20 601
Duty lawyer services	16 836	16 234	14 249
Grants of aid for legal representation	16 062	16 509	16 727
<b>TOTAL CLIENT SERVICES</b> <i>(excl education sessions and website visits)</i>	<b>126 048</b>	<b>127 684</b>	<b>123 956</b>
Distribution of publications	83 381	87 779	67 888
Law Handbook page views	1 364 068	1 545 363	2 089 860
Commission website page views	795 411	984 352	931 234
Applications for aid received	19 254	19 562	19 612
Applications assigned in-house	5 164	5 400	5 474
Applications assigned externally	10 898	11 110	11 253
FDR conferences held	777	780	953
FDR conferences settled - percentage	75%	77%	79%
ICL appointments	339	312	334

# Director's Report 2016-17

*This year the Legal Services Commission has demonstrated its value to the State and Federal Governments through its ability to successfully deliver core services whilst introducing new initiatives.*

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A client survey commissioned this year was very positive, reporting that the vast majority of those who had accessed legal assistance through the Commission were happy with the ease of contacting the service, the level of service they received, the way they were treated and the conduct of staff.

Our Deputy Director and long term staffer, Karen Lehmann, retired in May 2017. Karen worked at the Commission for 25 years and was instrumental in her role as Manager of Grants and more recently as Deputy Director in the introduction of legal practitioner panels.

As a consequence of changes to the Commission's governance structure, Commissioners Michael Dawson, John Keen and Craig Caldicott retired from the Commission. I wish them all well for the future.

A feature of our services this year has been an emphasis on using technology to benefit clients through innovative initiatives including Legal Chat, 24Legal and online dispute resolution. By putting the client at the centre of service delivery, we are designing services to satisfy our clients' needs and quickly and economically empower users to locate legal information so as to enhance their understanding of rights and responsibilities under the law.

As a consequence of changes to the service provision model applying to community legal centres in South Australia, the Commission is now the first point of contact for people seeking legal assistance. The Commission's telephone legal helpline and online Legal Chat are the 'front doors' through which South Australians are triaged to the most appropriate legal assistance service provider.

Pursuant to the Commonwealth Government's funding packages to reduce family violence, the Commission received specific funding to enhance the provision of duty lawyer services in the Family Law Courts and at other locations. The key components of this project are to integrate social support services and increase the capacity of the existing duty lawyer services to help families affected by family violence. The service commenced on 31 March 2017 and is available at the Adelaide Registry of the Family Courts and on circuit at Mount Gambier.

The legal helpline provided by the Commission is often the first point of contact for people with legal problems. Analysis of calls has demonstrated an increasing need for assistance with issues arising from elder abuse and family violence. The Commission has produced a video explaining the State based assistance services available for the elderly as part of a public awareness

## Director's Report 2016-17

campaign by the Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and is developing education and information resources targeted at disabled South Australian women and girls at risk of family violence.

On the three year anniversary of the Commission's Legal Practitioner Panels, the system was reviewed and changes introduced including a requirement that any practitioner acting for a child must hold a DCSI *working with children* clearance. This requirement is in line with the Nyland Royal Commission recommendations. The Commission also introduced a new panel for practitioners who represent children in care and protection matters, requiring five years current experience in family law or care and protection cases. Our panel system continues to ensure that clients of the Commission receive high quality representation on all grants of aid.

There are now over 650 legal practitioners who are members of the Commission panels and provide representation on grants of aid at lower than market rates of remuneration. I express my thanks to all of these practitioners and look forward to their support in acting on grants of aid in future years.

In September 2016 the Commission delivered another successful Conference for staff and private practitioners. The plenary session was presented by Margaret Cunneen SC and Michael Abbott AO QC and there were well attended sessions on DNA evidence by Dr Jeremy Austin, terrorism laws by Bret Walker SC, fresh and compelling evidence by Marie Shaw QC and Adam Kimber SC, to name only a few.

Throughout this year Commission staff have again demonstrated their capacity for hard work and their dedication to providing access to justice. The implementation of minimum standards of legal experience for practitioners, and audit processes to ensure compliance with Commission requirements, has added to the work of the Grants team and the Panels secretariat. I thank those staff, and all staff of the Commission, for their expertise and commitment in delivering legal assistance services as required by the *Legal Services Commission Act 1977*.

I thank the Chairperson of the Commission, Michael Abbott AO QC and Commissioners Alan Herald, Cathy Nelson and Alison Lloyd-Wright for their ongoing support and good governance. I acknowledge the commitment to legal aid of the South Australian Attorney-General, the Hon John Rau SC MP and the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC.

The coming year presents many new challenges both fiscally and operationally as the Commission continues to provide legal assistance in an environment of constrained funding and evolving technological advances.

Gabrielle Canny  
**Director, Legal Services Commission**

# Financial Overview 2016-17

*The Commission ended the 2016-17 financial year with a consolidated comprehensive result of \$206 000 surplus. This compares to a consolidated comprehensive result of \$650 000 deficit for the 2015-16 financial year.*

The 2016-17 financial statements record the following:

## Income—

- Commonwealth Government funding of \$16 250 000
- State Government funding of \$21 848 000
- reimbursement from the State Government under the Expensive Criminal Cases Funding Agreement (see Appendix 2) of \$859 000
- funds from the Law Society of South Australia pursuant to the *Legal Practitioners Act 1981* of \$2 579 000
- other income of \$3 663 000
- total income of \$45 199 000

## Expenditure—

- private practitioner payments of \$19 314 000
- total expenses of \$44 993 000

The Finance section of this Report contains the detailed financial year report, the Auditor-General's Report and financial statements.