

**Legal Aid NSW
Disability Inclusion
Action Plan 2024-
2028**

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Acknowledgment of Country

Legal Aid NSW acknowledges the traditional lands on which we work and live. This action plan was written on the land of the Gadigal people and developed and co-designed with people working and living on the many traditional lands of Aboriginal people across NSW. We acknowledge, pay our respects, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who contributed to the development of this plan.

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Acknowledgement of lived and living experience

Legal Aid NSW would like to acknowledge the contribution of people with lived and living experience of disability and/or mental ill health as well as their family, supporters, carers, and kin to the development of this plan and to the community of New South Wales. We respect, value, and honour the diverse experience of people with disability and their resilience in challenging discrimination to achieve inclusion and empowerment.

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CEO Foreword

I am pleased to introduce this Disability Inclusion Action Plan, a comprehensive blueprint designed to ensure accessibility and inclusivity across Legal Aid NSW.

Legal Aid NSW's overarching vision is to ensure the justice system delivers fair outcomes for people experiencing disadvantage; and our purpose is to use the law and our expertise to inform and represent clients and advocate for social justice. This vision and purpose are only achievable when we actively remove barriers that limit the participation of colleagues and clients with disability.

This Plan is not simply about removing barriers, eradicating discrimination, and recognising people's rights; it also actively promotes and ensures the inclusion and participation of people with lived experience of disability, mental ill health or carer responsibilities. Their participation is vital; we know, for example, that a more diverse and inclusive workforce enables us to better deliver our services to all clients, including those with disability.

Crucially, this Plan was developed through the lived and living experience of people with disability. It was co-designed with clients, disability organisations and staff. We acknowledge and thank the expertise provided by our external consultant, Associate Professor Lorna Hallahan. To help shape this Plan, we established an advisory group made up of people with lived and living experience of disability and mental health conditions. The contributions made by this group were invaluable, and I express my gratitude to its members. This Plan is a significant piece of work and many of our employees contributed to it. I thank all of them and, in particular, acknowledge the expertise and work of staff members Rania Saab and Jacob Orrock-Steuart.

The development and implementation of this Plan is a priority in Legal Aid NSW's organisation-wide diversity, equity and inclusion project plan, and our strategic plan.

I encourage everyone to read this Plan, provide feedback about it, and participate in the initiatives it outlines. Shaped by lived experience, it is a very practical guide that not only addresses discrimination but also makes our organisation more accessible and inclusive for clients and staff with disability, mental health conditions or carer responsibilities. Together, we can make a positive impact on the NSW community and uphold the principles of fairness and justice that define Legal Aid NSW.

Definitions

Disability

We acknowledge there are different views about the use of language for the term and definition of 'disability'. We use the term 'disability' in an inclusive way and recognise that there isn't one correct way to use disability-related language or even address people's access needs. We acknowledge that language and accessibility can differ from person to person, even for people with the same disability, so it is best to be guided by the person and what works best for them.

Throughout this document the term 'disability' encompasses all forms of apparent and non-apparent disabilities, such as sensory, physical, cognitive, neurological, developmental, and psychosocial disabilities (including mental health conditions). We recognise and respect that individuals with these conditions may not identify with or use the term 'disability' in relation to themselves.

As a legal assistance service, Legal Aid NSW is bound by the legal definition of disability in some areas of our work. However, in practice, we prefer the use of the social model of disability when addressing the needs of clients and staff with disability.

a) Legal definitions

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) set out definitions of disability that aim to protect against discrimination and help all people to understand their rights and responsibilities.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that defines persons with disabilities to include:

“those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

***Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) definition**

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* defines disability to include:

- Physical disability: Impacts mobility or dexterity
- Intellectual disability: Impacts ability to learn or process information
- Mental illness: Impacts thinking processes
- Sensory disability: Impacts the ability to hear or see
- Neurological disability: Impacts the brain and central nervous system
- Learning disability: Impacts acquisition, organisation, retention, and understanding of information
- Physical disfigurement: Impacts physical appearance
- Immunological disability: Impact due to the presence of organisms causing disease in the body.

b) Social Model

The Australian Disability Network¹ takes a broader approach and defines disability as the following:

“Disability arises from the way people with disability interact with the world. Individuals encounter physical barriers, digital barriers and barriers of attitudes and communication. These barriers impact on an individual's ability to equitably participate in society.”

This shift in perspective takes into consideration that disability can be exacerbated by an environment that creates barriers. The focus is on removing barriers and implementing adjustments that provide an equitable experience for people with disability.²

Intersectionality

We understand that the barriers people with disability and mental health conditions experience can be compounded when an individual is part of more than one underrepresented or marginalised group. Recognising that people's lives are multi-dimensional and complex, we aim to take an intersectional approach in our thinking around accessibility, which means focusing on the points of intersection that multiple identities create. Intersectionality recognises the diversity of experiences within marginalised groups and provides a framework for recognising and addressing the needs of individuals who are most disadvantaged, setting a pathway for a more just and equitable world.

We are mindful of these intersections and aim to provide access to services for people with disability from all backgrounds and lived experiences. This includes First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, women and non-binary people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people from regional and remote areas, older people, children and young people and people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Accessibility

Legal Aid NSW is committed to ensuring our organisation and our services are accessible for our clients and staff with disability. Accessibility is the term used to describe how a product, service or place can be easily accessed, used and benefited from by as many people as possible. It is about making things usable for all people on an equal basis, whatever their age, background, location, language, ability or any other factors that contribute to the diversity of our community. Accessibility should be considered at the earliest opportunity of planning when designing a product, service or place to ensure equity and inclusivity of as many people as possible.

Equity

Equity differs from equality in an important way. While equality assumes that all people should be treated the same, equity takes into consideration that we live in a disproportionate society, and equity tries to correct this imbalance by creating more opportunities for people who have less access.

¹ The [Australian Network on Disability](#) (AND) is a national, membership based, for-purpose organisation that supports organisations to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business.

² [What is disability? - Australian Disability Network](#)

Trauma-informed practice

Trauma-informed practice is when the lawyer or other professional understands the client's trauma experiences and considers those experiences when engaging with the client and adjusts their practice approach to suit the individual client's trauma experience.³ Trauma informed services are strengths based, do no harm, do not re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions, and they embrace a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible. Trauma informed practices are informed by core principles such as safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment as well as respect for diversity.⁴

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³ [The Pedagogy of Trauma-Informed Lawyering by Sarah Katz, Deeya Haldar :: SSRN](#)

⁴ [Trauma informed practice | Mental Health Australia](#)

Executive Summary

Our vision

At Legal Aid NSW, we are passionate about ensuring equity and inclusion for all people, irrespective of their identity. This is reflected in the Legal Aid NSW Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (Strategic Plan) which has a strong focus on meeting the needs of our diverse clients and embedding an inclusive and respectful workplace culture. The organisation wide strategic goals include:

- High quality, consistent services tailored to meet client and community needs
- A diverse workforce that is safe, supported and valued.

The strategic priorities, goals and actions relating to diversity, equity and inclusion are all directed towards achieving the long-term outcome of:

“A diverse and fair organisation where employees belong and are proud to work, clients are supported, and all are empowered to thrive.”

In order to materialise this long-term outcome, our Strategic Plan sets out an action to develop a Legal Aid NSW strategy for people with disability that encompasses our staff, clients and those who live in our community.

We are doing this through the development and implementation of this Disability Inclusion Action Plan. The purpose of this plan is to provide Legal Aid NSW with a blueprint, informed by lived experience, to not only eliminate discrimination but to strengthen our organisation so it is more accessible and inclusive for clients and staff with lived, and living, experience of disability and mental ill health. This Disability Inclusion Action Plan extends to carers of people with disability, in their capacity as staff members and as service users of Legal Aid NSW.

A plan led by lived experience

Our Disability Inclusion Action Plan is informed by people’s experience as clients or staff members of Legal Aid NSW. Building on this, Legal Aid NSW has taken a unique approach to developing this Disability Inclusion Action Plan by championing co-design, meaningful participation and equitable use of services by people with disability. Our process for developing the Disability Inclusion Action Plan has been entirely led by lived, and living, experience.

As the cohort most impacted by this plan, we wanted to ensure that people with disability were leading the charge and the change to strengthening inclusion and accessibility at Legal Aid NSW.

In developing this plan, we considered the legislative framework for Disability Action Plans under the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* as well as the Disability Inclusion Plan required of state government agencies under the NSW *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*. The focus under the Commonwealth Act is to encourage, recognise and promote an active commitment to eliminating disability discrimination and to promote the recognition of the rights of people with disability. NSW legislation goes further with a focus on economic and social inclusion and ensuring choice and control for people with disability. For these reasons, the Legal Aid NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan extends beyond the remit of eliminating discrimination and recognition of rights, to actively facilitating and ensuring inclusion and participation of people with a disability.

We co-designed this Disability Inclusion Action Plan with people with lived experience of disability in the following ways:

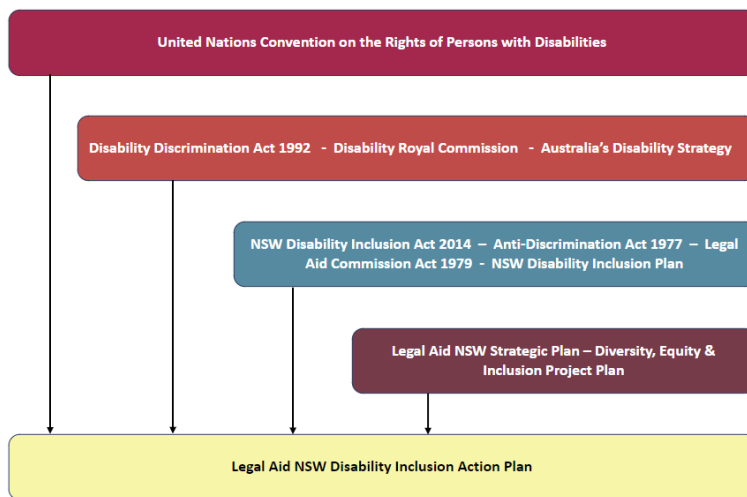
- Recruiting project officers with lived experience to develop the Disability Inclusion Action Plan

- Establishing a lived experience staff working group
- Developing a lived experience Expert Panel called the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel
- Involving the staff Disability Network
- Consulting with the disability community
- Co-designing actions for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan with the above groups

For more information, see section titled [‘A Plan led by lived experience’](#).

Legislative and policy environment

Legal Aid NSW has developed the Disability Inclusion Action Plan taking into consideration relevant international, federal and state legislation and government and organisational policies related to disability. For more information, see section titled [‘Environmental Context’](#).



Consultations

In developing this Disability Inclusion Action Plan, we reviewed the data from the Client Satisfaction Survey and the People Matter Employee Survey. We also spoke to our clients, community members, several disability organisations and staff. The purpose of these consultations was to attain qualitative data about people’s experiences accessing, and working for, Legal Aid NSW and to seek their ideas about the ways in which we can address the barriers they experienced.

We conducted 32 consultations throughout April and May 2024. Some of these consultations were conducted with groups of people or were confidential one-on-one conversations. Within these 32 consultations we spoke to:

- 27 clients and community members with disability;
- Staff from six disability organisations;
- Staff members from over 24 Legal Aid NSW teams; and
- The Legal Aid NSW staff Disability Network.

For more information about how the plan was developed, see section titled '[How we developed this plan](#)'.

Our Plan

The Legal Aid NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan includes 38 actions over six focus areas. For a full list of actions see [Appendix 1](#). The six focus areas are:

1. [Equitable Access to Legal Information](#)

Provide more accessible resources for clients and the community, ensure consistency of accessibility of our publications and improve the accessibility of our online platforms.

2. [Community and Stakeholder Relationships](#)

Build stronger relationships with our external stakeholders and wider community.

3. [Organisational Capability](#)

Provide staff with professional development opportunities to enhance the client experience of clients with disability. This focus area also includes actions that aim to elevate and advocate for rights of people with disability.

4. [Equitable and Accessible Legal Services](#)

Provide a more accessible legal service by proactively meeting clients' needs and adjustments, offering alternative entry points and offering tailored services.

5. [An Inclusive and Accessible Workplace](#)

Support the organisation to become a more inclusive and accessible workplace for staff with disability by elevating staff's lived experience and addressing staff's needs and adjustments.

6. [Inclusive and Accessible Employment](#)

Improve the employment experience of staff with disability in relation to recruitment, retention and career progression.

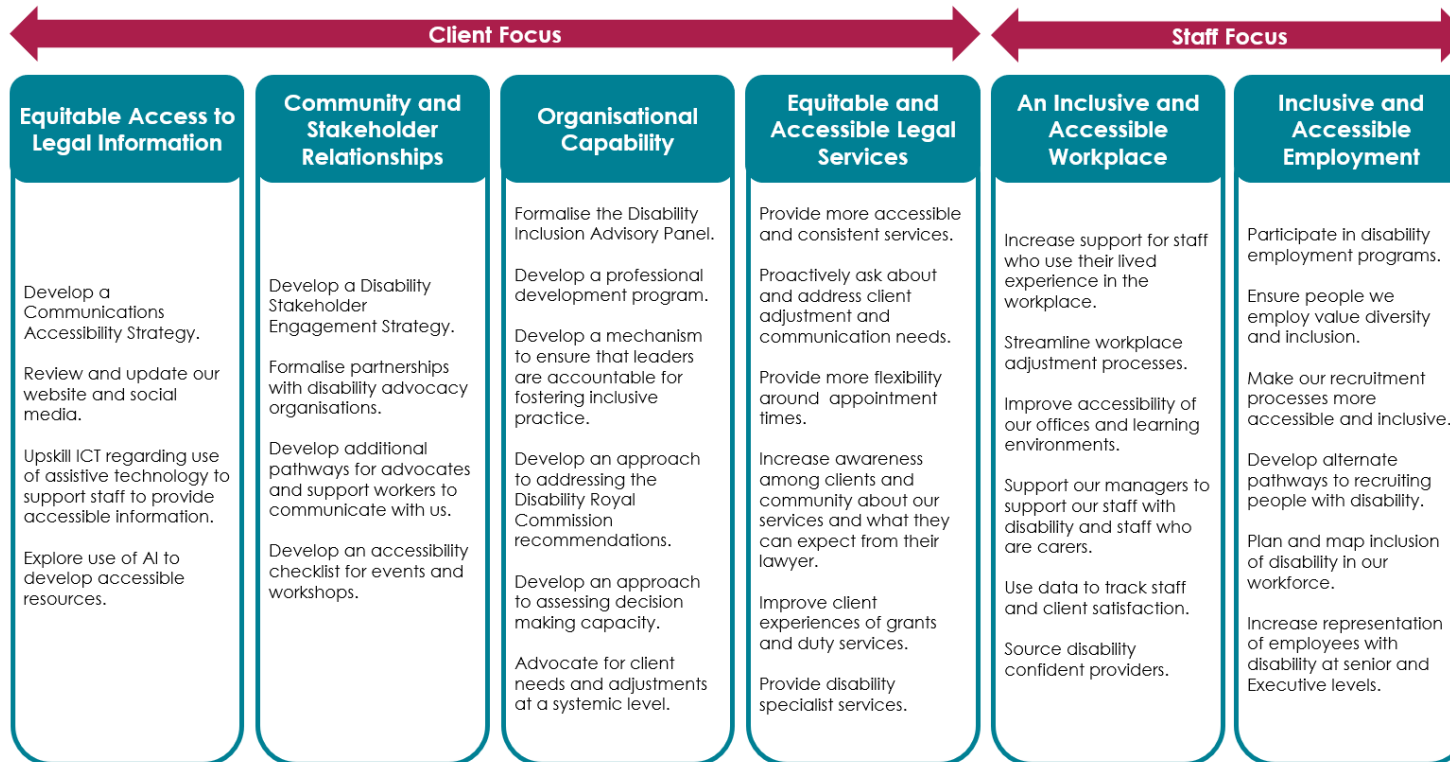
Implementation

The actions of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be monitored in accordance with an implementation plan ([Appendix 2](#)) by the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Working Group, which is made up of staff with responsibilities in the plan. Progress will be reported to the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Board, which is made up of Legal Aid NSW senior executives and leaders of the staff diversity networks. A report on progress of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be included in our annual report.

Legal Aid NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2028

Purpose:

To provide a blueprint, informed by lived experience, to not only eliminate discrimination but to strengthen our organisation so it is more accessible and inclusive for clients and staff with lived, and living, experience of disability and mental ill health. This Disability Inclusion Action Plan extends to carers of people with disability, in their capacity as staff members and as service users of Legal Aid NSW.



Our vision for diversity, equity and inclusion

At Legal Aid NSW, we are passionate about ensuring equity and inclusion for all people, irrespective of their identity. This is reflected in our Strategic Plan which has a strong focus on meeting the needs of our diverse clients and embedding an inclusive and respectful workplace culture. The organisation wide strategic goals include:

- High quality, consistent services tailored to meet client and community needs
- A diverse workforce that is safe, supported and valued.

The strategic priorities, goals and actions relating to diversity, equity and inclusion are all directed towards achieving the long-term outcome of:

“A diverse and fair organisation where employees belong and are proud to work, clients are supported, and all are empowered to thrive.”

We set out in detail below what these words mean to us:

Diversity is about the mix of unique identities, backgrounds, life experiences and beliefs that shape who we are, our perspectives, our approach and how we view the world. For the public sector, a diverse workforce should reflect that of the communities we serve.

Fairness is about equity, treating employees and clients justly and with transparency, in a way free from bias, dishonesty, or injustice.

Belonging is about employees feeling accepted, respected, heard and valued for who they are. Beyond feeling included, every employee can be authentic in the workplace and is proactively supported to contribute meaningfully.

Supported means that our clients feel that they are in the right place, accepted and heard.

Empowered means having choices and the agency, power and confidence to make one's own decisions.

Thriving means going beyond having one's basic needs met; to grow or develop and flourish. It is the ultimate state we want for our employees and clients.

Realising the vision through a Disability Inclusion Action Plan

In order to materialise this long-term outcome, our Strategic Plan sets out an action to develop a Legal Aid NSW strategy for people with disability that encompasses our staff, clients and those who live in our community.

We are doing this through the development and implementation of this Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). The purpose of this plan is to provide Legal Aid NSW with a blueprint, informed by lived experience, to not only eliminate discrimination but to strengthen our organisation so it is more accessible and inclusive for clients and staff with lived, and living, experience of disability and mental ill health.

This Disability Inclusion Action Plan extends to carers of people with disability, in their capacity as staff members and as service users of Legal Aid NSW. We use the definition of carer from the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* (Cth) which states (at Section 5) that:

A **carer** is an individual who provides personal care, support and assistance to another individual who needs it because that other individual:

- (a) has a disability; or
- (b) has a medical condition (including a terminal or chronic illness); or
- (c) has a mental illness; or
- (d) is frail and aged.⁵

We acknowledge and accept the definition of “carer” used by Carers NSW as follows:

“A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who lives with a disability, mental illness, alcohol or drug dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail due to age.”⁶

The definition by Carers NSW makes it clear that carers encompass people who provide care and support to a person with a drug or alcohol dependency. Drug and alcohol dependency falls under the definition of “mental illness” as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.

⁵ [Federal Register of Legislation - Carer Recognition Act 2010](#)

⁶ [Homepage | Carers NSW](#)

A plan led by lived experience

Our Disability Inclusion Action Plan is informed by people's experience as clients or staff members of Legal Aid NSW. Building on this, Legal Aid NSW has taken a unique approach to developing this Disability Inclusion Action Plan. We championed co-design, meaningful participation and equitable use of services by people with disability. Our process for developing the Disability Inclusion Action Plan has been entirely led by lived, and living, experience.

As the cohort most impacted by this plan, we wanted to ensure that people with disability were leading the charge and the change to strengthening inclusion and accessibility at Legal Aid NSW.

We considered the legislative framework for Disability Action Plans under the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* as well as the Disability Inclusion Plan required of state government agencies under the NSW *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*. The focus under the Commonwealth Act is to encourage, recognise and promote an active commitment to eliminating disability discrimination and to promote the recognition of the rights of people with disability. NSW legislation goes further with a focus on economic and social inclusion and ensuring choice and control for people with disability. For these reasons, the Legal Aid NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan extends beyond the remit of eliminating discrimination and recognition of rights, to actively facilitating and ensuring inclusion and participation of people with a disability.

Consultation and co-design of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan



We co-designed this Disability Inclusion Action Plan with people with lived experience of disability in the following ways:

Project officers with lived experience

The development of this plan was tasked to two project officers who both have lived experience of disability and mental ill health. One project officer (Senior Project Officer, Diversity and Inclusion, Client Service Division) led development of the plan as it pertains to clients and the other (Senior Project Officer, Strategy and Inclusion, Human Resources) as it pertains to our staff. They have guided this process with their unique perspectives based on their knowledge, life experience and their personal and professional expertise that has been a true asset to Legal Aid NSW and to the development of this plan.

Lived experience staff working group

We established an internal working group to provide advice and guidance throughout the process of consultations and development of the actions. This working group was coordinated by the Senior Project Officer, Strategy and Inclusion, Human Resources and chaired by our CEO. The group was comprised of both project officers, staff with lived experience of disability, staff with experience working with clients with disability, and a consultant with lived experience of disability, Associate Professor Lorna Hallahan. The working group was an avenue for our project officers to provide updates, present findings from consultations and seek advice and guidance on any issues regarding the plan's development and for staff to provide input and feedback on these findings.

Lived experience Expert Panel

The experiences of people with disability in NSW are diverse. To better understand the experience of Legal Aid NSW's clients with disability and to guide the plan's development, we established the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel, Legal Aid NSW's first client panel of people with lived and living experience of disability.

The panel comprises 8 people who are clients or community members with lived and living experience of disability and mental ill health and who have knowledge or experience of legal assistance services. When recruiting the panel members, we were conscious of the need for intersectional representation across underrepresented or marginalised groups. Some of the panel members are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, part of the LGBTQIA+ community, or non-binary and gender diverse. The panel also wanted to ensure that an intersectional approach was taken in the development of this plan.

The panel bring a real wealth of knowledge and diverse experiences from across NSW. The panel provided expert and independent advice to Legal Aid NSW, based on their living experience as well as their professional experience ranging across law, advocacy, mental health, government and non-government settings. The panel have been heavily involved throughout the process. They analysed data, helped form consultation and survey questions, analysed consultation findings and co-designed actions. The panel have been an integral part of the development of this plan and we thank them for their passion and expertise.

Staff Disability Network

To better understand the experiences of staff with disability, the Senior Project Officer, Strategy and Inclusion, Human Resources consulted with the Legal Aid NSW staff Disability Network. Established in 2015, the staff Disability Network acts as a strong source of peer support comprising of people with disability, carers of people with disability and allies. In the past, the Disability Network has advocated for change within the organisation and instigated changes to policies, practices, and processes to make Legal Aid NSW more inclusive of people with disability, both as employees and

as clients. It was the Disability Network's advocacy that led to the organisational commitment to develop a Disability Inclusion Action Plan. The network is a great source of knowledge and diverse lived experiences. We acknowledge the commitment and ongoing labour that members undertake in addition to their day-to-day work to drive positive change throughout the organisation. We thank them for their continuing advocacy and contributions to make Legal Aid NSW more inclusive for people with disability and carers.

Consultations with the disability community

In addition to the staff working groups and lived experience expert panel, we consulted with several external community disability organisations.

Co-designing actions for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan

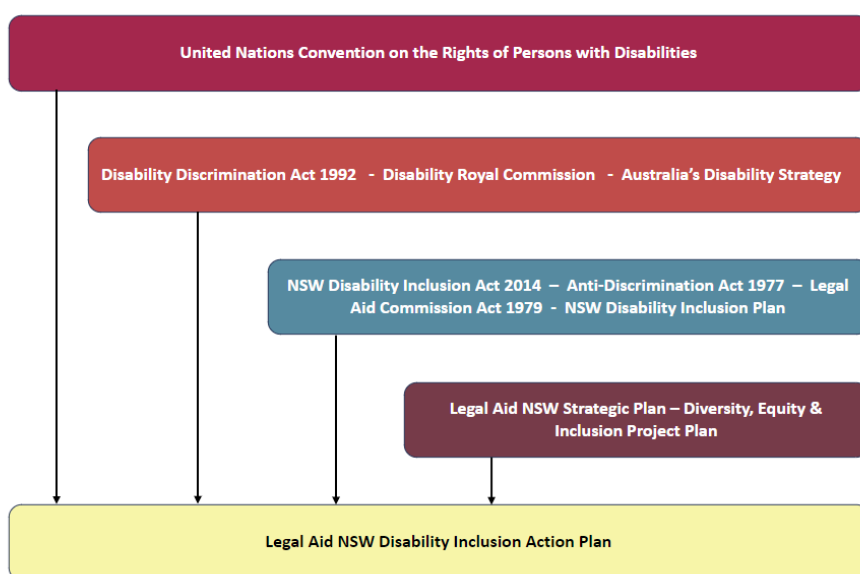
Once consultations were completed, the senior project officers presented the findings to the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel, the Disability Network and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Working Group and then sought input from them about proposed actions in response to those findings. The proposed actions put forward by those groups were incorporated into the Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

The draft Disability Inclusion Action Plan was also placed on 'exhibition' for comment and feedback more broadly from Legal Aid NSW staff and the external community disability organisations. The feedback received from the exhibition phase was brought to the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Working Group to discuss and make necessary changes as a group, prior to sign off by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Board.

Environmental Context

Legislative and policy environment

Legal Aid NSW has developed the Disability Inclusion Action Plan taking into consideration relevant international, federal and state legislation and government and organisational policies related to disability.



International

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is a human rights instrument that affirms the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with all types of disabilities. Australia ratified the UNCRPD on 17 July 2008 and implements the UNCRPD and Optional Protocol⁷ through national legislation, policy and programs.

Article 13 of the UNCRPD, 'Access to Justice' is relevant to the work of Legal Aid NSW. It provides that:

⁷ [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

States Parties shall ensure effective access to justice for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others, including through the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations, in order to facilitate their effective role as direct and indirect participants, including as witnesses, in all legal proceedings, including at investigative and other preliminary stages.

Article 13 also advises that:

State Parties shall promote appropriate training for those working in the field of administration of justice, including police and prison staff.

Legal Aid NSW is committed to ensuring the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be conducted in accordance with UNCRPD.

National

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

In 2019, Australia launched the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. This inquiry provided recommendations to government in 2023 on how to:

- prevent and better protect people with disability from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- achieve best practice reporting and investigation processes
- promote a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Legal Aid NSW is dedicated to addressing the relevant recommendations from the Royal Commission and has included a specific action in this Disability Inclusion Action Plan that prioritises this work.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 and Disability Discrimination Act 1992

The Federal Department of Social Services developed Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031⁸ (the Strategy) which is the national disability policy framework that sets out a plan for continuing to improve the lives of people with disability in Australia. The Strategy has been developed in line with Australia's commitments to the UNCRPD and is based on the social model of disability.

The Strategy also aligns with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) which is the federal legislation that makes discrimination based on disability unlawful and protects people who care for someone with a disability. The Strategy includes priorities that are reflective of the objects of the DDA to eliminate discrimination against people with disability and promote community acceptance that people with disability have the same rights as all community members. The DDA also provides the legislative framework for organisations to create their own Disability Action Plans to address discrimination. Legal Aid NSW has been guided by this framework and has taken an approach that also considers inclusion and accessibility of our services.

⁸ [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#)

New South Wales

Disability Inclusion Act 2014

New South Wales has additional legislation aimed at improving the State to be more inclusive and accessible for people with disability. The *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (DIA)⁹ ensures people with disability have the same human rights in the community and provides the legislative framework to guide state and local government in disability inclusion and access planning. The Act ensures that people with disability:

- Have the same human rights as other members of the community and government and the community have a responsibility to facilitate the exercise of those rights;
- Enjoy independence and social and economic inclusion;
- Have choice and control in the pursuit of their goals and in the planning and delivery of supports and services;
- Are supported by the purposes and principles of the UNCRPD.

The DIA demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the NSW Government to building an inclusive community and requires the government to produce a Disability Inclusion Plan. The NSW Disability Inclusion Plan (DIP) supports the DIA and provides a strategy to implement the Act's objects and principles across government and the community.

Anti-Discrimination Act 1977

Discrimination against a person with a disability is prohibited by the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*¹⁰ (ADA) in NSW. The ADA identifies what constitutes as discrimination across various areas of life, such as work, education and accommodation. This legislation binds public sector agencies, such as Legal Aid NSW, making it important legislation that we must comply with, while also influencing how we ensure our workplace is non-discriminatory. The ADA is also important to the work that we do as lawyers, when supporting clients with disability who experience discrimination.

Legal Aid Commission Act 1979

The Legal Aid NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan supports our obligations under the *Legal Aid Commission Act 1979*¹¹. The legislation states that our duty under the Act is to make "...legal aid ...readily available and easily accessible to disadvantaged people throughout NSW." Additionally, our duty is to "ascertain and keep under review community needs in relation to legal aid." The development of this plan affirms our duty to review community needs and ensure we are making legal aid more accessible to disadvantaged people.

⁹ [Disability Inclusion Act 2014 No 41 - NSW Legislation](#)

¹⁰ [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 No 48 - NSW Legislation](#)

¹¹ [Legal Aid Commission Act 1979 No 78 - NSW Legislation](#)

Legal Aid NSW and disability

People with disability in NSW

One in five Australians live with a disability according to the 2022 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, which identified that 5.5 million (21.4%) people in Australia have a disability and there are 3 million carers across the country¹². People with disability are more likely to experience legal problems across varying types of legal areas such as discrimination, housing, crime, family, injury and money. The Law and Justice Foundation of NSW developed a Legal Needs Dashboard¹³ to support planning of legal assistance services. The dashboard provides data in relation to those in the community who are vulnerable to the experience or impact of legal problems. The dashboard provided the below statistics regarding legal needs of people in NSW belonging to cohorts relevant to disability and mental health.

- 202,910 (2.5% of general population) people in NSW indicated to have severe/profound disability.
- 243,020 (3% of general population) people in NSW are on the Disability Support Pension.
- 644,840 (8% of general population) people in NSW have indicated they live with a mental health condition.
- 192,650 (2.4% of general population) people in NSW are active participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Legal Aid NSW clients with disability

Legal Aid NSW provides a high number of services to support our clients with disability address their legal problems. During the 2023-2024 financial year, Legal Aid NSW provided services to over 75,000 clients who identified as having a disability. That made up over 27% of our total client services.

Client Satisfaction Survey 2023

To ensure that we are providing high quality services to all our clients, Legal Aid NSW conducts client satisfaction surveys every two years. In the client satisfaction survey of 2023, there were 2014 clients surveyed and 16% indicated they had a disability. This survey also included a component that separately focussed on the experiences of clients with disability. A key finding of the survey was clients with disability had a lower average score of 7.4 for overall satisfaction compared to those without disability scoring 8.2.

The survey identified the drivers of satisfaction regarding lawyers, administration and reception, and grants staff. The results of this survey were considered in the development of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

The drivers that were recommended needing improvement are:

¹² [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

¹³ [Legal Needs Dashboard – Community Profiles](#)

Lawyers

- Clearly explaining what was going to happen next in the client's case
- Helpfulness of advice the client was given
- Confidence the client had in their advice
- Helping the client to understand the type of assistance available

Administration and Reception Staff

- Responsiveness to adjustments because of the client's disability

Grants Staff

- Sensitivity in responding to client's personal and cultural needs.

18% of clients with disability required an adjustment. Only 51% responded that those adjustments were met. 24% of clients that had adjustments met felt their accessibility needs were not met well.

Legal Aid NSW services

Legal Aid NSW provides many specialist services to the community of New South Wales, some of which are targeted specifically for clients with disability. The services that specifically work with clients with disability are:

a) National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Service

The NDIS service gives NDIS participants, or people who want to become participants of the NDIS, free legal help if they experience problems with the NDIS. They provide free independent advice and assistance for some NDIS problems including:

- When an application to be part of the NDIS is rejected
- There isn't enough funding to support a person's support needs.

The NDIS service also provides representation to people who are unhappy with a decision regarding their NDIS plan, and want to challenge the decision.

b) Mental Health Advocacy Service

The Mental Health Advocacy Service (MHAS) provides free legal information, advice and assistance about mental health and guardianship laws. The MHAS assist people who:

- have been involuntarily admitted to hospital
- are subject to a community treatment order
- are forensic patients
- are subject to guardianship and/or financial management orders
- are subject to orders under the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Act
- are appearing before the Guardianship Division of the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT).

The MHAS also provide representation for people who may be brought before the Mental Health Review Tribunal if they have been detained in hospital under the *Mental Health Act 2007*. They also provide representation for people appearing before the Guardianship Division of NCAT.

c) Disability Legal Support Service

Legal Aid NSW has recently established a Disability Legal Support Service in the Civil Law Division with 12 months funding received from the Public Purpose Fund.

The new service will provide accessible, holistic, trauma-informed legal support to people with disability, their families and carers. Caseworkers will provide advocacy and social support for clients with social needs that impact their ability to meaningfully engage with legal issues. The new team will also help build capacity within the Civil Law Division to provide accessible and trauma-informed services to people with disabilities, their families and carers.

Our Staff

People Matter Employee Survey

The Public Service Commission conducted the NSW Public Sector Employee Survey in 2023. Legal Aid NSW had a 98% response rate to the survey. 14% of respondents indicated that they have a disability. People with disability responded with lower satisfaction scores compared to the rest of the organisation across all areas, including:

- Wellbeing (53%)
- Role clarity and support (65%)
- Diversity and inclusion (66%)
- Teamwork and collaboration (66%)
- Learning and development (58%)
- Senior management support (58%)
- Communication and change management (60%)
- Employee voice (67%).

It is noted that demographic results have been collected via the People Matters Employee Survey since 2020. Since that time, the results have shown that at Legal Aid NSW, staff with disability are consistently and significantly the least satisfied cohort across all areas than staff from all other demographic groups. The results of the People Matters Employee Survey were taken into consideration in the development of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

Our Plan

The Legal Aid NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan has six focus areas. They are:

- 1. Equitable Access to Legal Information
- 2. Community and Stakeholder Relationships
- 3. Organisational Capability
- 4. Equitable and Accessible Legal Services
- 5. An Inclusive and Accessible Workplace
- 6. Inclusive and Accessible Employment

How we developed this plan

Consultations

In developing this Disability Inclusion Action Plan, we reviewed the data from the Client Satisfaction Survey and the People Matter Employee Survey. We also spoke to our clients, community members, several disability organisations and staff. The purpose of these consultations was to attain qualitative data about people's experiences accessing, and working for, Legal Aid NSW and to seek their ideas about the ways in which we can address the barriers they experienced.

We conducted 32 consultations throughout April and May 2024. Some of these consultations were conducted with groups of people or were confidential one-on-one conversations. Within these 32 consultations we spoke to:

- 27 clients and community members with disability;
- Staff from six disability organisations;
- Staff members from over 24 Legal Aid NSW teams; and
- The Legal Aid NSW staff Disability Network.

Development of actions

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan has been co-designed with clients, the disability community and staff. The Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel, the staff Disability Network and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Working Group all recommended draft actions that addressed the findings from the surveys and consultations. Further information about how we led from lived experience of disability can be found on pages 13-15.

Equitable Access to Legal Information

We acknowledge the barriers that people with disability face in accessing legal information. Legal Aid NSW endeavours to offer various ways to remove these barriers. One way in which people attain legal information from Legal Aid NSW is from our free information service LawAccess NSW. People can contact LawAccess over the telephone or through our webchat where our staff provide legal information and referrals for people with a legal problem in NSW. Legal Aid NSW has also developed resources in several formats to allow for choice in how people with disability receive legal information. We have printed and online resources, with several available in Easy English, as well as videos that cover different areas of the law.

Our clients and staff told us they would like to see a greater range of accessible legal resources and information available to people with disability. Our website contains a significant amount of information for a broad range of audiences (for example, private lawyers, clients and the general public) covering many legal topics. However, some of our clients with disability have advised that our website can be difficult to navigate in order to find information relevant to them.

To address these issues our staff have proposed that:

- We develop a consistent organisation wide approach to developing accessible communications.
- We upskill our staff to use a greater range of software and technology to develop accessible communication and digital products.

Actions

1. Develop and implement an organisation wide Communications Accessibility Strategy. The strategy will include a framework, guidelines and checklist for developing accessible resources and will apply to Legal Aid NSW staff, vendors and contractors.
2. Review and update the Legal Aid NSW website and social media platforms to improve accessibility for clients and the community.
3. Provide professional development opportunities for Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) staff around the use of digital assistive technology in order to support workplace adjustments processes and delivery of inclusive services to clients with disability.
4. Explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the development of accessible resources.

Please see the detailed implementation plan for this section in [Appendix 2](#).

Community and Stakeholder Relationships

Clients with disabilities often have multiple services supporting them to address their social and legal problems. Legal Aid NSW is often just one of a number of support services or government agencies that clients interact with. To work effectively with clients with disability, Legal Aid NSW also needs to work collaboratively with those support services to achieve the best outcome for our clients.

We heard from some support services involved in our clients' lives, particularly disability advocates. Some disability advocates have encountered challenges working with Legal Aid NSW lawyers and they would like to build stronger relationships with Legal Aid NSW in order to provide a holistic service. Additionally, our staff advised they would also like stronger, more formalised relationships with stakeholders to support referrals for clients with non-legal issues.

"Respect that advocates and professionals have done the heavy lifting..."

- Disability Advocate

Legal Aid NSW's Community Legal Education (CLE) and community engagement teams have undertaken a significant amount of work to build relationships with community and stakeholders. They run many events and sessions each year with over 1,700 events and sessions held for the 2023-2024 financial year, reaching over 66,000 people across NSW. The CLE team deliver information in multiple accessible formats including videos about how Legal Aid NSW can assist with audio description, Auslan interpretation and translation in other languages. They also facilitate workshops and webinars on Legal Aid NSW services for clients with disability. Our CLE team have recognised that they would like to improve and expand upon the accessibility of their outreach activities to further engage people with disability in NSW.

Our clients and stakeholders would also like to see Legal Aid NSW proactively engage with mental health and disability groups and organisations to increase trust, particularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

"Meet people where they are at... demystify legal services and the legal system."

- Client

Actions

5. Develop and implement a Disability Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. As part of the strategy, we will identify and engage with relevant stakeholders (e.g. Land Councils, mental health and disability organisations) at a state-wide and local area level.
6. Develop formal partnerships with disability advocacy organisations to improve professional relationships, communications and referrals.
7. Explore pathways for advocates and support workers to contact Legal Aid NSW when they are supporting a client with disability with a legal issue.
8. Develop and promote an accessibility checklist for events and workshops.

Please see the detailed implementation plan for this section in [Appendix 2](#).

Organisational Capability

To strengthen our organisational capability to work with, and deliver services to people with disabilities, we provide staff with professional development opportunities, involve clients in the design of services that impact them, and address barriers within the justice system. All new staff at Legal Aid NSW must complete disability awareness training for employees and managers as part of their induction. This training was developed by the Public Service Commission NSW and explains how staff can be inclusive in the workplace by understanding disability. Our lawyers are also encouraged to participate in 'With You'¹⁴, a national training program for lawyers to be able to provide trauma-informed, rights-based legal services to people experiencing distress, poor mental health and/or suicidality.

Another element of professional development that we offer our staff and private lawyers is a suite of resources 'Understanding our Clients and Serving Our Mob'¹⁵. This training provides lawyers with foundational knowledge and provides insights into working with different client cohorts including clients with disability.

However, we recognise that there is a need for further development of skills so that clients feel safe to share their lived experience and access needs. Clients discussed the need for lawyers to be empathetic, to meet individual client needs, and to empower clients to make their own decisions. Clients also discussed the importance of service providers being familiar with experience of disability and intersectionality so the burden on clients to act as 'educators' when they are seeking help is reduced.

"If I try and articulate my access needs, it might be something that they (lawyers) have not heard of before and they're actively learning, wondering how common that may be. I think if people had knowledge already there, it wouldn't be the role of the person needing support at a horrible time in their life to take on this additional role to educate."

- Client

Legal Aid NSW staff, stakeholders and clients identified the following areas for further professional development:

- Work inclusively with many types of disabilities and across age ranges
- Work with clients in a trauma informed manner by continuing to engage with the 'With You' training
- Understand the social model of disability and build empathy for the experiences of people with disability in relation to discrimination, intersectionality, disadvantage and economic poverty
- Meet client adjustments and communication needs to provide an accessible service (including sharing appointment summary notes with clients)

¹⁴ [With You - National Legal Aid](#)

¹⁵ [Understanding Our Clients and Serving Our Mob \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

- Work collaboratively with advocates and support workers, including communicating with an authorised support worker
- Advocate for clients to have their needs and adjustments met
- De-escalate and respond to clients who become dysregulated and improve staff understanding of the link between trauma, disability, and dysregulation.

Additionally, we heard that staff in leadership roles should be responsible for ensuring their teams are using inclusive practice.

Legal Aid NSW values the approach of embedding the voice of the client in the design of legal services. Legal Aid NSW has developed Client Involvement Guidelines that advise staff on how to engage our clients in design and/or feedback processes. This allows us to reach out to clients who have indicated their willingness to participate in user testing, focus groups and consultations. Additionally, as part of the development of this Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Legal Aid NSW formed the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel, made up of clients and community members with lived experience. Our clients and staff advised that we should continue to engage with lived experience to inform best practice, which will see the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel as an ongoing consultative body for the organisation.

We acknowledge that there can be considerable challenges for our clients with disability when accessing other institutions of the justice system such as courts and prisons. Legal Aid NSW has an important role in advocating for improved client accessibility in those institutions. Clients, stakeholders and Legal Aid NSW staff have identified that it would be useful to have an avenue to advocate and raise concerns when a person's needs and adjustments are not being met in those external settings.

Legal Aid NSW has an important role in elevating the rights of people with disability in NSW. Legal Aid NSW employs a team of human rights lawyers that work on matters concerning discrimination. Legal Aid NSW also supported and valued the work of Your Story Disability Legal Support, which was a service available to empower people with disability to make submissions to the Disability Royal Commission. In continuing this work, clients and staff suggested that we apply a disability rights lens to our advocacy work and all services that we offer. It was also suggested that Legal Aid NSW consider an organisational approach to assessing decision-making capacity for clients with disability, dedicate resources to addressing the Disability Royal Commission and establish a clear legal pathway for clients with disability experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Actions

9. Formalise the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel as an ongoing lived experience panel for the organisation and encourage staff to seek feedback on projects from them.
10. Develop and implement a professional development program for Legal Aid NSW frontline staff and private lawyers that includes workshops delivered by people with lived and living experience, online modules and resources covering the identified topics (as shown in [Appendix 2](#)).
11. Develop mechanisms so that managers/leaders are supported and accountable for fostering inclusive practice and disability awareness among their team.
12. Develop an approach to addressing the Disability Royal Commission and establish a clear legal pathway for clients with disability experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

13. Develop a consistent approach to assessing decision-making capacity and consider supported decision-making¹⁶ as an approach across the organisation and develop resources to support staff.
14. Advocate and elevate issues regarding client needs and adjustments at a systemic level. As part of this action, we will:
- Clarify the process for staff to raise concerns or complaints with external justice sector stakeholders (e.g. courts, prisons) about accessibility and discrimination. This includes staff raising issues:
 - on behalf of, or in support of, clients
 - on their own behalf.
 - Collect data regarding clients' unmet needs and adjustments in court and justice systems.
 - Embed a rights-based perspective to meeting clients' needs and adjustments so staff can consider if their practice ensures clients have equal access to justice.

Please see the detailed implementation plan for this section in [Appendix 2](#).

¹⁶ [Supported Decision Making Hub - Council for Intellectual Disability \(cid.org.au\)](https://www.cid.org.au)

Equitable and Accessible Legal Services

Meeting client needs and adjustments

Priority 1 of our Strategic Plan envisages high quality, consistent services tailored to meet clients and community needs. The focus on meeting client and community needs underpins several goals and actions in the strategic plan for the next 4 years that relate to streamlining client pathways and improving service delivery for frontline staff, in-house and private lawyers. We affirm our commitment to meeting the needs of clients through our Client Service Standards. The purpose of the standards is to explain to clients what level of service they can expect to receive from Legal Aid NSW when they interact with us about their legal issue. The standards apply to all our public facing roles, including private lawyers undertaking legal aid work. There are specific client service standards dedicated to considering individual needs and respecting a person's identity.

Client Service Standards
Our high quality legal services are delivered by qualified lawyers and professional staff

Consider	Respect	Listen	Respond	Inform	Act	Resolve	Refer
We will check if you have any individual needs, and we will take these into consideration when assisting you*	We will respect your identity, values and culture	We will listen and take care to understand your legal problem so we know how to help you	When you first contact us, we will get back to you within two business days	When you first contact us, we will tell you if you are eligible for legal advice and what the next steps are to get the help you need	If you are eligible for legal advice, we will try to get you an appointment to speak to a lawyer within two weeks	Your lawyer will discuss your options, including potential outcomes and if relevant, how often you can expect updates	If you are not eligible for legal advice from us, we will explain the reason and where possible will refer you to another suitable service.

*For example, we may ask if you need an interpreter, ask if it is safe to contact you, check if you have a requirement because of a disability and arrange a suitable method of appointment

Legal Aid
NEW SOUTH WALES

So that we can better meet our clients' needs and adjustments, we have dedicated intranet pages and tipsheets that our staff can refer to when working with clients who have requested an adjustment.

However, our recent Client Satisfaction Survey results, along with consultation data, inform us that there is scope to improve our capacity to address our clients' needs and adjustments. One such way is to ensure that our staff are determining clients' needs and adjustments in the first interaction and consider using supported decision-making methods when working with clients with intellectual disability. Another is to reframe the organisation's thinking about needs and adjustments to include emotional needs to support emotional regulation, build staff understanding of the link between trauma and emotion dysregulation and build their skills in de-escalation.

"The systems have already abused them and with so many people already controlling their lives they feel they have to fight. Being angry sometimes is the only way they feel they can be heard."

- Staff member

The Client Service Standards highlight what clients can expect from Legal Aid NSW. We acknowledge there is more work to do in this area as clients advised that they would like to know what service they can expect from their lawyer. We recognise the importance of empowering our clients with disability so we will work on developing a suite of resources that clients can access that will include information about what to expect from their lawyer, how to make complaints, how to make a request for adjustments and more.

Providing accessible and consistent services

Legal Aid NSW recently undertook work around improving how we ask about disability and identify the needs and adjustments required by people with a disability at the point of entry to our legal service. As a result of this work, we are beginning to build and increase the confidence of staff to ask about disability and required adjustments.

Legal Aid NSW currently uses an online system whereby we place a 'disability flag' on a client's file if they have told us they have a disability and that they have a specific support, communication or accessibility need. Some further feedback we received during our consultations was that Legal Aid NSW should consider reframing the language of 'disability flag' to being a needs and adjustments identifier. Additionally, clients and staff advised that the quality and detail of client notes needs to be improved to ensure a consistent service (particularly when there are multiple staff working on a matter), reduce the burden on clients retelling their stories and educating staff on their needs.

In addition, we have recently expanded our definition of high priority clients to include all people who identify as having a disability. Previously, this definition specifically referred to clients with cognitive impairment, intellectual disability or acute mental health condition. High priority clients are prioritised for legal advice. All these measures enable us to ensure that disadvantaged members of our community can access our services and be provided with the adjustments that they need.

Communicating with Legal Aid NSW

Legal Aid NSW offers multiple avenues for the community to get in touch with us. We have telephone, webchat, email, post, an online portal and clients can contact Legal Aid NSW in-person at our offices. However, feedback from our consultations was that sometimes legal information can be confusing and filled with jargon so when people do get in touch with us for advice or information, it can be difficult to understand. Often clients don't voice their concerns when they don't understand, or they return to Legal Aid NSW to have the information explained again. This is why a high proportion of feedback we received was in relation to the communication styles of our frontline staff.

"If I don't understand something I'm not necessarily going to speak up because of the power dynamics between me and the lawyer. It's awkward and stressful."

- Client

Clients with disability offered some of the below suggestions which we will consider and incorporate into our professional development program.

- Avoid jargon
- Adjust communication approaches
- Explain what the process is
- Offer adjustments that are available
- Send follow-up emails summarising appointments
- Be more responsive to communication, or be clearer about timeframes to expect communication
- Check for understanding
- Speak directly to them, not their support worker or carer
- Communicate in a trauma informed manner.

Appointment times

We recognise that the length of time and availability of appointments is a concern for both our staff and our clients, with clients reporting that they often feel rushed during appointments. Staff and clients advised that longer appointment times would help to address client needs, and clients would like to see more flexibility around appointment dates and times so they can appropriately arrange any supports they need for the day. To address this, we will update our processes to allow clients to request extra time for their appointment as an adjustment. We will also give staff the flexibility to book extra time slots for those appointments.

Attending court

For many of our clients, attending court can be a stressful experience. For our clients with disability, the court environment can often be particularly overwhelming and inaccessible. Clients reported it can be difficult to successfully secure adjustments at court, making it challenging to fully engage with their lawyer. Legal Aid NSW is limited by these environments when providing duty services, and with the high volume of clients (during the 2023-2024 financial year, Legal Aid NSW provided duty services to over 205,000 people), it places constraints on our staff in being able to deliver high quality services. As a result, we will be looking at ways we can support our staff which will, in turn, support our clients. We will be looking at developing resources for duty staff that can assist them when they are working with a client with a disability and Legal Aid NSW will also advocate for increased support for duty services.

Grants

During our consultations, some clients advised that they found the application forms very long and complicated, and their grant letters full of jargon that was difficult to understand. Additionally, clients want more information regarding when they can expect to be contacted by their lawyer and the level of service they should expect. Legal Aid NSW is currently working on updating and redesigning our grants management system. This will include streamlining and simplifying the application process for, and communications to, clients.

Disability Specialist Services

Legal Aid NSW has recently established a new Disability Legal Support Service in our Civil Law Division with 12 months funding received from the Public Purpose Fund. This new service will provide accessible, holistic, trauma-informed legal support to people with disability, their families and carers. Caseworkers will provide advocacy and social support for clients with social needs that

impact their ability to meaningfully engage with legal issues. The new team will also help build capacity of Legal Aid NSW to provide accessible and trauma-informed services to people with disability, their families and carers. The establishment of the Disability Legal Support Service is a timely development because staff and clients advised that it was important for Legal Aid NSW to have a clear legal service pathway for clients with disability.

Actions

15. Update client triage processes and guidelines to:
 - Expand the category of high priority clients to include all clients with disabilities and mental health conditions.
 - Ensure all clients are asked about needs and adjustments and frontline staff have the knowledge to make the appropriate adjustments.
16. Review and update appointment booking and management processes to facilitate increased accessibility, flexibility and choice for clients with disability and carers.
17. Review and update our processes, policies and procedures so that lawyers (in-house and private) ask clients about their needs and have the knowledge to make the appropriate adjustments.
18. Review and update processes around the identification of clients with disability on our online file system. Increase awareness and uptake in use and improve skills in recording client needs.
19. Develop a consistent approach to file sharing from Legal Aid NSW systems to private lawyers.
20. Increase awareness among community members and clients about the different levels of service Legal Aid NSW offers and who is eligible for those services.
21. Improve the client experience of duty services for clients with disability.
22. Improve our grants systems to be more accessible and easier to navigate for clients with disability.
23. Develop and promote specific resources for clients with disability about what to expect from their lawyer, rights and responsibilities, asking about adjustments and making complaints.
24. Develop and promote pathways for clients with disability and carers to get in touch with Legal Aid NSW.
25. Develop an ongoing disability specialist team.

Please see the detailed implementation plan for this section in [Appendix 2](#).

An Inclusive and Accessible Workplace

Our People Matter Employee Survey has consistently shown that we can do better when it comes to supporting staff with disability. Since we started collecting data on diversity groups through the People Matter Employee Survey, we know that employees with disability are the lowest scoring cohort across all areas including wellbeing, role clarity and support, diversity and inclusion, teamwork and collaboration, learning and development, senior management support, communication and change management and employee voice. We recognise that we need to build a culture of inclusivity and trust in order for staff with disability to feel safe to share their needs and speak to their lived experience of disability.

Our staff Disability Network was set up in 2015. Since that time, it has grown from strength to strength. Our staff Disability Network members are passionate about access and inclusion, not just for staff with disability and those with caring responsibilities, but also for clients with disability. We are aware of the importance of ensuring that the experiences of our staff and clients with disability is heard and considered in the work that we do. For this reason, we have staff Disability Network representation on our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Board as well as on various working groups. The Disability Network also has a role in stakeholder consultations when new policies or processes are developed within Legal Aid NSW. This is to ensure that our work matches the experiences of people with disability and carers.

We have been working hard to create an environment where carers feel supported. We have recently issued a Statement of Support of Carers to affirm our commitment to support staff and clients who are carers. We have also recently obtained Level 1: Activate accreditation through the Carers NSW Carers + Employers program. This accreditation demonstrates that Legal Aid NSW has met the Carers and Employers best practice standards for supporting staff with caring responsibilities as we are beginning to develop carer friendly workplace policies and practices. We are on track and determined to achieve Level 2: Commit and Level 3: Excel accreditation over the course of this plan.

We are committed to taking action to cultivate an inclusive and accessible workplace. We heard from our staff that they would like Legal Aid NSW to recognise the labour of staff with lived and living experience of disability who utilise their experience in their formal roles or who educate and create change throughout the organisation. We recognise the labour our staff with lived and living experience of disability undertake at Legal Aid NSW and are committed to providing them with the support that they need to continue to do the valuable work that they do.

“Staff are exhausted and frustrated at being required to shoulder the mental and emotional burden of pushing for change, being advocates for their colleagues, and taking on ad hoc responsibilities related to advocating for people with disabilities - on top of their demanding substantive role.”

- Staff member

Our staff also told us that managers across the organisation need support to foster an inclusive environment for all staff. Managers want to do more to support staff with disability and those with caring responsibilities, but do not always know how to do this. We are committed to upskilling, supporting and resourcing our leaders to improve their ability to support staff with disability and those with caring responsibilities. We have recently updated our Managers Guide to Inclusive Practice, which is a comprehensive guide for managers about how they can support people with disability and those with caring responsibilities, whether they are candidates applying for a role at Legal Aid NSW or a staff member employed in our organisation.

“Train [managers] and give them the skills and time to assist people working under them. Help them to understand disability as not something which is in the too-hard basket but a benefit. The lived experience should be valued when working with these types of clients.”

– Staff member

Staff felt that our workplace adjustments process needs to be streamlined to make it easier for employees with disability and those with caring responsibilities to seek adjustments. We heard that it was important for the dignity and privacy of our staff to be protected during this process. We have a shared goal of promoting and improving the supports provided to our staff who need a workplace adjustment so that they can perform their roles to the best of their ability and continue to feel valued in our workplace.

We have been working hard to make progress in this space. We created a Workplace Adjustment Working Group comprised of our leaders in Human Resources, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Digital Transformation and Facilities as well as staff with lived experience of disability and staff Disability Network members.

We have recently launched our new Workplace Adjustments Guidelines. We have employed a full time Workplace Adjustments Project Officer whose focus is on supporting employees and managers as they navigate the workplace adjustments process. Our Workplace Adjustments Project Officer will also provide training about workplace adjustments across the organisation and develop resources in this area.

“We need to aim for gold standard for workplace adjustments...We represent clients with all kinds of vulnerabilities and disabilities, and so that lived experience is literally relevant for the work we do.”

- Staff member

Another area that our staff have identified as an area for improvement is the accessibility of our offices. We are committed to reviewing and updating the physical accessibility of all our offices. We are currently conducting an Accessibility Audit of the following offices: Central Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Campbelltown, Blacktown and Wagga Wagga. We intend on using the information gathered through this audit to make improvements to the accessibility of those offices. We also plan on sharing information about the accessibility of our offices with our staff and clients.

We heard that there are gaps in terms of ensuring accessibility across our events, learning and meeting environments. We have recruited an Events Coordinator who will plan, lead, coordinate and manage events on behalf of Legal Aid NSW and provide assistance to the wider organisation in the organisation and implementation of events including divisional conferences, award ceremonies and community days. We will also investigate and implement guidelines about accessibility standards that need to be considered when developing training modules.

We are also committed to improving digital accessibility for our employees with disability. We will do this by implementing ICT support and prioritisation with online systems, applications and technical enquiries for employees with disability.

Our staff told us that they would like to be able to engage more disability confident providers. We are committed to reviewing our procurement processes to ensure that we are using disability confident providers. Where we identify that there is a gap in providers, we will do our part to raise this with the relevant government agency.

Our staff also felt that it was important for Legal Aid NSW to use data to track our journey towards inclusivity as this is the best way for us to monitor and track improvements in accessibility and inclusivity over time. One such way for us to measure how we are tracking is by setting targets for improvements in the responses in our annual People Matters Employee Survey and bi-annual Client Satisfaction Survey.

We are currently undertaking the Access and Inclusion Index with the Australian Network on Disability. It is the first time we have undertaken this project, which looks at our access and inclusion maturity across the following areas:

- Commitment
- Premises
- Procurement
- Workplace Adjustments
- Candidate Experience
- Employee Experience
- Customer Experience
- Communication and Marketing
- Digital Accessibility.

Participating in the Access and Inclusion Index will give Legal Aid NSW insights into our strengths and opportunities on our journey towards being more accessible and inclusive of people with disability. Upon completion of the Index, we will receive a roadmap for year-on-year progress to achieve greater disability confidence and maturity.

Actions

26. Support our staff with disability and those who are carers so that they feel valued and have a sense of belonging.
27. Support and coach our managers so that they can better support employees with disability and carers.

28. Streamline and improve our workplace adjustments process for staff with disability and carers.
29. Improve the accessibility of our offices and our learning and meeting environments.
30. Uplift our capability to provide accessible technology to staff with disability.
31. Actively source disability confident providers, as far as is practicable.
32. Use data to track, record and monitor improvements in our staff and clients' satisfaction within our organisation.

Please see the detailed implementation plan for this section in [Appendix 2](#).

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Inclusive and Accessible Employment

In June 2019, the Premier's Priorities were released. Increasing the proportion of employees with disability in the NSW public sector was a Premier's Priority target for a world class public service. The priority aimed to increase the representation of people with disability in the NSW public sector to 5.6% by 2025.

As we are a government organisation, it is important that Legal Aid NSW reflects the community that we serve. By recruiting more people with disability, not only will we positively impact organisational culture, but we will also increase comfort and trust among clients when they have the opportunity to interact with staff with disability.

Since 2019, Legal Aid NSW has had a workforce diversity employment target of 6% of people with disability. We have recommitted to this workforce target from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2028. The Public Service Commission Workforce Profile indicates that as of June 2024, an estimated 9.6% of Legal Aid NSW staff identified as having a disability. Our 2024 People Matters Employee Service data indicates that this figure is much higher as 14.4% of staff stated they have a disability, while 8.9% of people elected not to answer this question. Additionally, our 2024 People Matters Employee Service results show that 23% of our staff provide care to a child or adult who needs support due to disability, chronic illness, mental illness, dementia or frail age.

We have an opportunity to focus on inclusive and accessible employment, from recruitment through to retention and career progression, and we embrace this opportunity to make a difference. We are committed to upskilling our Human Resources personnel and hiring managers on inclusive recruitment processes.

We are proud that we have entered our fifth year of maintaining our Disability Confident Recruiter status through the Australian Disability Network. Maintaining our Disability Confident Recruiter status is important to us as it demonstrates that we are committed to removing barriers to make the recruitment experience inclusive for candidates with disability.

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We will be intentional about how we recruit people with disability; we will engage in workforce planning and identify roles where staff with disability are needed. For example, when we recently set up our Disability Legal Support Service, we encouraged people with disability and carers to apply for roles in that service.

We will enhance our commitment to enabling and supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce through a range of specific programs and activities, such as by participating in programs where people with disability can be mentored, or apply for internships, at Legal Aid NSW.

Additionally, our staff feel that people with lived and living experience of disability should hold positions at all levels across Legal Aid NSW, including senior leadership positions. This is to ensure that the voice of people with disability is heard and considered across the organisation in our day-to-day work and decision making. We are looking at creating pathways for people with disability into management and leadership roles.

We recognise that a diverse workforce provides invaluable skills and lived experience that help us to deliver the most effective and appropriate legal services to our clients. This is especially important where we are delivering services to clients from diverse backgrounds, including people with disability. Our staff have told us that it is vitally important that we ensure that the people we recruit value diversity. One way to do this is by asking all prospective employees (including potential managers and leaders) in their job applications and at interview to address criteria related to working with vulnerable and diverse client cohorts as well as demonstrate their ability to foster an inclusive and safe working environment.

We acknowledge that an inclusive and diverse workforce at Legal Aid NSW requires us to effectively support staff from diverse backgrounds, including supporting career pathways and progression. We hope that our approach to supporting and enhancing workforce diversity will achieve this and allow Legal Aid NSW to grow from strength to strength as a diverse and inclusive organisation.

Actions

33. Increase our disability confidence by participating in programs that engage us in working with people with disability.
34. Ensure that the people we employ and promote value diversity and inclusion.
35. Make our recruitment processes more inclusive and accessible to candidates with disability and carers.
36. Develop alternative pathways to recruiting people with disability and encourage hiring managers to use them.
37. Consider how to meaningfully plan and map the inclusion of employees with disability in our workforce.
38. Consider how to increase the representation of employees with disability at Executive and senior levels.

Please see the detailed implementation plan for this section in [Appendix 2](#).

Monitoring and review

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be monitored in accordance with the implementation plan, found in [Appendix 2](#). The implementation plan sets out the monitoring measures and milestones for delivery on the actions.

Implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be monitored by the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel and the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Working Group, which is made up of staff with responsibilities in the plan. Progress will be reported to the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Board, which is made up of Legal Aid NSW senior executives and leaders of the staff diversity networks. A report on progress of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be included in our annual report.

Legal Aid NSW will use the results from the People Matters Employee Survey and the Client Satisfaction Survey as an indication of whether the measures outlined in this plan are leading to greater satisfaction rates of staff and clients with disability. Evaluating the effectiveness of the plan will be conducted in accordance with the organisation's evaluation framework. Certain actions will require project planning and implementation, where detailed evaluation will occur.

Conclusion

Legal Aid NSW is proud of this plan and appreciative to all people who contributed to its development. We look forward to collaborating with stakeholders, clients and staff to strengthen our organisation to be more accessible and inclusive for clients and staff with lived, and living, experience of disability and mental ill health.

Appendix 1 – Action List

Provide Equitable Access to Legal Information

1. Develop and implement an organisation wide Communications Accessibility Strategy. The strategy will include a framework, guidelines and checklist for developing accessible resources and will apply to Legal Aid NSW staff, vendors and contractors.
2. Review and update the Legal Aid NSW website and social media platforms to improve accessibility for clients and the community.
3. Provide professional development opportunities for Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) staff around the use of digital assistive technology in order to support workplace adjustments processes and delivery of inclusive services to clients with disability.
4. Explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the development of accessible resources.

Community and Stakeholder Relationships

5. Develop and implement a Disability Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. As part of the strategy, we will identify and engage with relevant stakeholders (e.g. Land Councils, mental health and disability organisations) at a state-wide and local area level.
6. Develop formal partnerships with disability advocacy organisations to improve professional relationships, communications and referrals.
7. Explore additional pathways for advocates and support workers to contact Legal Aid NSW when they are supporting a client with disability with a legal issue.
8. Develop and promote an accessibility checklist for events and workshops.

Organisational Capability

9. Formalise the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel as an ongoing lived experience panel for the organisation and encourage staff to seek feedback on projects from them.
10. Develop and implement a professional development program for Legal Aid NSW frontline staff and private lawyers that includes workshops delivered by people with lived and living experience, online modules and resources covering the identified topics (as shown in [Appendix 2](#)).
11. Develop mechanisms so that managers/leaders are supported and accountable for fostering inclusive practice and disability awareness among their team.
12. Develop an approach to addressing the Disability Royal Commission and establish a clear legal pathway for clients with disability experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
13. Develop a consistent approach to assessing decision-making capacity and consider supported decision-making as an approach across the organisation and develop resources to support staff.

14. Advocate and elevate issues regarding client needs and adjustments at a systemic level.
As part of this action, we will:
- Clarify the process for staff to raise concerns or complaints with external justice sector stakeholders (e.g. courts, prisons) about accessibility and discrimination. This includes staff raising issues:
 - on behalf of, or in support of, clients
 - on their own behalf.
 - Collect data regarding client's unmet needs and adjustments in court and justice systems.
 - Embed a rights-based perspective to meeting clients' needs and adjustments so staff can consider if their practice ensures clients have equal access to justice.

Equitable and Accessible Legal Services

15. Update client triage processes and guidelines to:
- Expand the category of high priority clients to include all clients with disabilities and mental health conditions.
 - Ensure all clients are asked about needs and adjustments and frontline staff have the knowledge to make the appropriate adjustments.
16. Review and update appointment booking and management processes to facilitate increased accessibility, flexibility and choice for clients with disability and carers.
17. Review and update our processes, policies and procedures so that lawyers (in-house and private) ask clients about their needs and have the knowledge to make the appropriate adjustments.
18. Review and update processes around the identification of clients with disability on our online file system. Increase awareness and uptake in use and improve skills in recording client needs.
19. Develop a consistent approach to file sharing from Legal Aid NSW systems to private lawyers.
20. Increase awareness among community members and clients about the different levels of service Legal Aid NSW offers and who is eligible for those services.
21. Improve the client experience of duty services for clients with disability.
22. Improve our grants systems to be more accessible and easier to navigate for clients with disability.
23. Develop and promote specific resources for clients with disability about what to expect from their lawyer, rights and responsibilities, asking about adjustments and making complaints.
24. Develop and promote pathways for clients with disability and carers to get in touch with Legal Aid NSW.
25. Develop an ongoing disability specialist team.

An Inclusive and Accessible Workplace

26. Develop a policy about provision of external supervision for employees with lived and living experience of disability who use their lived experience in the workplace.
27. Support and coach our managers so that they can better support employees with disability and carers.
28. Streamline and improve our workplace adjustments process for staff with disability and carers.
29. Improve the accessibility of our offices and our learning and meeting environments.
30. Uplift our capability to provide accessible technology to staff with disability.
31. Actively source disability confident providers, as far as is practicable.

Inclusive and Accessible Employment

32. Use data to track, record and monitor improvements in our staff and clients' satisfaction within our organisation.
33. Increase our disability confidence by participating in programs that engage us in working with people with disability.
34. Ensure that the people we employ and promote value diversity and inclusion.
35. Make our recruitment processes more inclusive and accessible to candidates with disability and carers.
36. Develop alternative pathways to recruiting people with disability and encourage hiring managers to use them.
37. Consider how to meaningfully plan and map the inclusion of employees with disability in our workforce.
38. Consider how to increase the representation of employees with disability at Executive and senior levels.

Appendix 2 – Implementation Plan

Provide Equitable Access to Legal Information

Action	Monitoring Measure ¹⁷	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
1. Develop and implement an organisation wide Communications Accessibility Strategy. The strategy will include a framework, guidelines and checklist for developing accessible resources and will apply to Legal Aid NSW staff, vendors and contractors.					
1.1 Prioritise the development of a Communications Accessibility Strategy that will guide the organisation to provide legal information in accessible formats for a range of disabilities. Ensure the strategy includes evaluation and review mechanisms.	Strategy is developed Increase # of accessible resources once strategy is implemented		✓		
1.2 Incorporate a framework, guidelines and checklist for accessible communications and publications as part of the Communications Accessibility Strategy.	Framework, guidelines and checklist developed		✓		
1.3 Ensure Legal Aid NSW staff, vendors and contractors are familiar with the Strategy.	Communications plan developed Training about the strategy developed and delivered Strategy is promoted to the organisation			✓	

¹⁷ The monitoring measures are indicators that will show us how the actions will be implemented.

Action	Monitoring Measure ¹⁷	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
	<p>Strategy is shared with vendors and private lawyers when engaged in Legal Aid NSW work</p> <p># of accessible publications developed that comply with the strategy</p>				
<p>1.4 Develop the skills of lawyers/ project officers in each practice area responsible for development of resources (client facing and internal tipsheets and guides) to ensure that those resources are written in plain English¹⁸, are accessible and user friendly for people with disabilities. Facilitate staff from the practice areas to work closely with the communications team to ensure consistency around those resources.</p>	<p># of staff in each practice area trained</p> <p>Training offered annually to account for any staff turnover</p> <p>Pre and post surveys</p>			✓	
<p>2. Review and update the Legal Aid NSW website and social media platforms to improve accessibility for clients and the community.</p>					
<p>2.1 Review and update the Legal Aid NSW website to improve accessibility for clients and the community.</p>	<p>Accessibility audit conducted annually and website updated in accordance with audit findings</p>		✓		
<p>2.2 Include information about the accessibility of Legal Aid NSW offices on the website.</p>	<p>Accessibility information of each office is included on the website</p>			✓	

¹⁸ Plain English is clear, straightforward language, using only as many words as necessary. It is language that avoids obscurity, jargon and convoluted sentences.

Action	Monitoring Measure ¹⁷	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
2.3 Improve the accessibility of our social media platforms.	Social media posts comply with Legal Aid NSW accessibility guidelines Increased engagement on social media posts		✓		
3. Provide professional development opportunities for Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) staff around the use of digital assistive technology to support workplace adjustments processes and delivery of inclusive services to clients with disability.					
3. Provide professional development opportunities for Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) staff around use of digital assistive technology to support workplace adjustment processes and delivery of inclusive services to clients with disability.	Training is provided # of ICT staff trained Assistive technology is considered in all future ICT project plans Training offered annually to account for any staff turnover Pre and post surveys	✓	✓		
4. Explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the development of accessible resources.					
4. Explore the use of AI in the development of accessible resources.	NSW Government AI Assurance Framework is applied Pilot use of AI for development of resources is conducted Insights report and recommendations developed from pilot				✓

Community and Stakeholder Relationships

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
5. Develop and implement a Disability Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. As part of the strategy, we will identify and engage with relevant stakeholders (e.g. Land Councils, mental health and disability organisations) at a state-wide and local area level.					
5.1 Develop a stakeholder engagement strategy that identifies relevant stakeholders (such as Land Councils, mental health and disability organisations), common legal matters and methods of engagement to improve relationships with community.	Strategy is developed # of stakeholders identified and engaged			✓	
5.2 Identify and engage with existing outreach programs and activities in areas with low engagement to connect with local communities as part of the stakeholder engagement strategy.	Existing outreach programs identified as part of the stakeholder engagement strategy # of stakeholders engaged			✓	
5.3 Legal Aid NSW Offices conduct stakeholder mapping and engage with relevant disability and mental health organisations to build stronger relationships for referrals.	Stakeholders identified			✓	
6. Develop formal partnerships with disability advocacy organisations to improve professional relationships, communication and referrals.					
6.1 Map and identify relevant disability advocacy organisations.	Organisations are identified			✓	
6.2 Develop and strengthen relationships with disability advocacy organisations.	Actions to improve relationships identified and reported			✓	

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
6.3 Develop formal partnerships with disability advocacy organisations to improve professional relationships, communication and referrals.	# of MOUs finalised			✓	
7. Explore pathways for advocates and support workers to contact Legal Aid NSW when they are supporting a client with disability with a legal matter.					
7. Explore pathways for advocates and support workers to contact Legal Aid NSW when they are supporting a client with disability with a legal matter.	Pathways and process identified and promoted			✓	
8. Develop and promote an accessibility checklist for events and workshops.					
8. Develop and promote an accessibility checklist for events and workshops.	Checklist is developed Events are organised in accordance with checklist		✓		

Organisational Capability

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
9. Formalise the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel as an ongoing lived experience panel for the organisation and encourage staff to seek feedback on projects from them.					
9.1 Formalise the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel as an ongoing lived experience panel.	Approval from DEI Board that the Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel continues as an ongoing panel # of projects that panel have provided advice on	✓			
9.2 Disability Inclusion Advisory Panel is promoted to the organisation to encourage staff to seek feedback on projects.	# and type of communications/interactions with the organisation	✓			
10. Develop and implement a professional development program for Legal Aid NSW frontline staff and private lawyers that includes workshops delivered by people with lived and living experience, online modules and resources covering the identified topics.					
10.1 Develop a professional development program for Legal Aid NSW staff and private lawyers that includes workshops delivered by people with lived and living experience, online modules and resources covering the following areas: - Working inclusively with many types of disabilities and across age ranges - Working with clients in a trauma informed manner by engaging with the 'With You' training - Understand the social model of disability and build empathy for the experiences of people with	Program is developed for each of the identified areas # of staff participate in professional development Staff confidence, knowledge, attitude, skill and motivation measured through pre and post training surveys		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
<p>disability in relation to discrimination, intersectionality, disadvantage and economic poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet client adjustments and communication needs (such as using plain English) to provide an accessible service (including sharing appointment summary notes with clients) - Working collaboratively with advocates and support workers, including communicating with an authorised support worker - Advocating for clients to have their needs and adjustments met - De-escalation and responding to clients who become dysregulated and improve staff understanding of the link between trauma, disability, and dysregulation. 					
10.2 Develop an implementation plan for the professional development program.	Implementation plan is developed		✓		
10.3 Offer opportunities for staff to seek external and/or formal professional development to support their work with clients with disability if relevant to their role.	<p>Opportunities are sourced and promoted to staff</p> <p># of staff engaged in external professional development opportunities</p>			✓	
10.4 Identify Legal Aid NSW staff who would be willing to voluntarily provide advice and support to other staff members	# of staff in each area trained and identified				✓

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
about working with clients with disability.					
11. Develop mechanisms so that managers/leaders are supported and accountable for fostering inclusive practice and disability awareness among their team.					
11.1 Develop mechanisms where managers/leaders are supported and accountable for fostering inclusive practice among their team.	<p>Range of options are identified for fostering inclusive practice</p> <p>Options are promoted to staff</p> <p>Managers' inclusive practice is reported on</p> <p>Resources developed and made available to managers'</p>				✓
11.2 Find ways to regularly promote discussions throughout the organisation about disability and carers to raise awareness and challenge biases and assumptions e.g. at team meetings, manager meetings, etc.	<p>Methods of promotion and discussions are determined</p> <p># and description of communications and events about disability and carers</p>				✓
11.3 Given significant proportion of clients with disability, promote and encourage the inclusion of disability representation at all Legal Aid NSW conferences.	<p># of meetings with professional development staff</p> <p>Agenda at conferences include representation of disability</p>				✓
12. Develop an approach to addressing the Disability Royal Commission and establish a clear legal pathway for clients with disability experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation.					
12.1 Develop an approach to the Disability Royal Commission.	Approach is developed		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
12.2 Establish a clear legal pathway for clients with disability experiencing abuse, neglect, and exploitation.	A legal pathway is developed		✓		
13. Develop a consistent approach to assessing decision-making capacity and consider supported decision-making as an approach across the organisation and develop resources to support staff.					
13. Develop a consistent approach to assessing decision-making capacity and consider supported decision-making as an approach across the organisation and develop resources to support staff.	<p>Research conducted with practice areas</p> <p>Briefing paper with proposal prepared</p> <p>Proposal considered by the Executive</p> <p>Approach and resources are developed</p>				✓
14. Advocate and elevate issues regarding client needs and adjustments at a systemic level.					
14.1 Clarify the process for staff to raise concerns or complaints with external justice sector stakeholders (e.g. courts, prisons) about accessibility and discrimination. This includes staff raising issues: - on behalf of, or in support of, clients - on their own behalf.	<p>Justice sector stakeholders engaged</p> <p>Process is developed with stakeholders</p> <p>Process is promoted to staff</p>			✓	
14.2 Collect data regarding client's unmet needs and adjustments in court and justice systems to advocate for change	Process is developed for data collection			✓	

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
	Report template developed in order to share data with stakeholders				
14.3 Embed a rights-based perspective to meeting clients' needs and adjustments so staff can consider if their practice ensures clients have equal access to justice.	Resources, checklists and professional development program include a focus on the rights of people with disability Practice manuals updated			✓	

Equitable and Accessible Legal Services

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
15. Update client triage processes and guidelines to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the category of high priority clients to include all clients with disabilities and mental health conditions. Ensure all clients are asked about needs and adjustments and frontline staff have the knowledge to make the appropriate adjustments. 					
15.1 Ensure triage processes continue to include asking about needs and adjustments at intake and build knowledge among Legal Aid NSW staff on what adjustments are available.	Triage framework is updated to ensure needs and adjustments are continued to be asked at intake Needs and adjustments tip sheets are shared and promoted among staff	✓			
15.2 Update triage process so that clients are still being asked about their supports and adjustments, even if they answer no to having a disability.	High priority client triage guidelines are updated Information on website regarding high priority client guidelines are updated	✓			
15.3 Expand high priority client triage guidelines to include all disabilities and mental health conditions.	High priority client triage guidelines are updated Information on website regarding high priority client guidelines are updated	✓			
16. Review and update appointment booking and management processes to facilitate increased accessibility, flexibility and choice for clients with disability and carers.					
16.1 Promote awareness and encourage use of options for flexible appointments in Client Appointment Booking System (CABS).	Communications are developed and distributed that explain extra bookings in CABS are available for clients with disability			✓	

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
	# of additional CABS sessions booked				
16.2 Update intake processes to include flexible options for appointments where extra time is an adjustment for clients with disability.	Communications are developed and distributed to staff that extra time for appointments to be included as a need and adjustment Needs and adjustments tip sheet is updated to include extra time			✓	
16.3 Legal Aid NSW staff inform clients about the length of time of their appointment.	Triage guidelines updated to ensure clients are informed about the appointment length			✓	
16.4 Provide transparency on appointment availability so clients with disability and carers have choice and can make any necessary arrangements for support.	Appointment booking process adapted to allow for clients with disability to provide appointment time preferences New process is communicated to staff			✓	
16.5 Explore the possibility of recording appointments so clients have access to review information later.	Options are identified		✓		
17. Review and update our processes, policies and procedures so that lawyers (in-house and private) ask clients about their needs and have the knowledge to make the appropriate adjustments.					
17.1 Promote awareness and facilitate compliance with the Quality Standards (Client Service Standards 2.5 and 2.6) by developing and distributing resources and training for Legal	# of resources developed Resources are promoted to private lawyers			✓	

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
Aid NSW in-house and private lawyers.	Process developed to respond to accessibility complaints that involves additional professional development				
17.2 Update policies and procedures regarding unreasonable client conduct to account for client trauma, disability, and dysregulation.	<p>Policies and procedures are updated</p> <p>Updated policies and procedures are communicated to staff</p>			✓	
17.3 Review and update policy and procedures in relation to meeting with clients in person.	<p>Policies and procedures are updated</p> <p>Updated policies and procedures are communicated to staff</p>			✓	
17.4 Update practice manuals to include meeting clients' needs and adjustments and working with clients with disability.	<p>Consultation with practice areas</p> <p>Practice manuals are updated</p> <p>Updated practice manuals are communicated to staff</p>		✓		
17.5 Update practice manuals regarding communication for clients with disability and where to seek support.	<p>Consultation with practice areas</p> <p>Practice manuals are updated</p> <p>Updated practice manuals are communicated to staff</p>		✓		
17.6 Develop tips sheets and guides on working with specific	Tip sheets and resources are developed and promoted		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
disability types, in consultation with those groups.					
17.7 Raise awareness among staff of where to seek information and who to contact when needing to seek advice regarding adjustments.	'Working with clients with disability' intranet page is promoted to staff Webpage visits are monitored	✓			
18. Review and update processes around the identification of clients with disability on our online file system. Increase awareness and uptake in use and improve skills in recording client needs.					
18.1 Review and update practice manuals about recording client access needs, handovers and using the disability flag on Client and Case Management System (CCMS).	Consultation with practice areas Practice manuals are updated Updated practice manuals are communicated to staff		✓		
18.2 Increase awareness among staff regarding the use of the disability flag for mental health conditions.	Update disability flag processes to be clearer about the inclusion of mental health conditions Increase # of use of disability flag		✓		
18.3 Update language regarding the 'disability flag' to focus on client needs and adjustments.	Consultation with ICT and practice areas Update language in CCMS about the disability flag to needs and adjustments Update existing process with new language and communicate change to staff		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
19. Develop a consistent approach to file sharing from Legal Aid NSW systems to private lawyers.					
19. Ensure there is a consistent approach of file sharing from Legal Aid NSW systems to private lawyers.	Consistent approach is developed Issues raised through development of new grants management system		✓		
20. Increase awareness among community members and clients about the different levels of service Legal Aid NSW offers and who is eligible for those services.					
20. Increase awareness among community members and clients about the different levels of service Legal Aid NSW offers and who is eligible for those services.	Accessible resources and webpages developed that clearly identifies how Legal Aid NSW services differ		✓		
21. Improve the client experience of duty services for clients with disability.					
21.1 Share tips sheets and guides about providing accessible services to duty lawyers.	Tip sheets for duty lawyers are developed and communicated with staff		✓		
21.2 Collaborate with Legal Aid NSW staff and provide input and insight into the project on the strategic plan addressing well-being of staff undertaking duty services.	Findings are shared Client Service Unit engaged on project		✓		
21.3 Advocate for more support for clients with disabilities in the court environment from other government departments and agencies such as NSW Health.	# of briefings or submissions to other government agencies # of interagency relationships established			✓	

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
21.4 As far as is practicable, Legal Aid NSW duty lawyers prioritise delivering services in a physical environment that meets the needs of clients who have identified they have a disability.	Consultation undertaken with practice areas				✓
21.5 Develop resources that inform clients about what to expect when they attend duty.	Practice areas consulted Resources are developed and promoted Webpage is created			✓	
22. Improve our grants systems to be more accessible and easier to navigate for clients with disability.					
22.1 Approach the development and uplift of the new grants management system with an accessibility lens.	Accessibility of grants processes is included in new grants system		✓		
22.2 Consider use of client centred terminology when referring to grants of aid.	Review of language regarding grant applications is undertaken		✓		
23. Develop and promote specific resources for clients with disability about what to expect from their lawyer, rights and responsibilities, asking about adjustments and making complaints.					
23.1 Develop a resource pack that includes information about making complaints, what to expect from their lawyer, their rights and responsibilities and asking about adjustments.	Information pack is developed		✓		
23.2 Distribute resource pack to all clients who receive legal aid.	Process created where a pack is sent to every client receiving legal aid			✓	

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
24. Develop and promote pathways for clients with disability and carers to get in touch with Legal Aid NSW.					
24.1 Develop referral pathways for clients with disability and carers by strengthening relationships with local stakeholders in accordance with the stakeholder engagement plan.	Alternative referral pathways are developed for local stakeholders			✓	
24.2 Promote additional channels for people to contact Legal Aid NSW other than telephone.	Alternative methods to contact Legal Aid NSW other than phone are created and promoted		✓		
25. Develop an ongoing disability specialist team.					
25. Develop an ongoing disability specialist team.	A specialist team is created	✓			

An Inclusive and Accessible Workplace

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
26. Support our staff with disability and those who are carers so that they feel valued and have a sense of belonging.					
26.1 Develop a policy about provision of external supervision for employees with lived and living experience of disability who use their lived experience in the workplace.	A policy is developed	✓			
26.2 Obtain accreditation with Carers NSW	Level 1 - Activate Level 2 - Commit Level 3 - Excel	✓	✓	✓	✓
26.3 Create a statement of support for carers and publish it on the intranet.	Statement of support is developed and published	✓			
26.4 Create a disability and carers page on the intranet under "employees".	Intranet page created	✓			
26.5 Negotiate access to specialist services for staff via Converge for staff who would prefer to use a counsellor with lived experience.	Specialist services are established Usage is monitored	✓			
26.6 Include disability and carers perspective as part of DEI policy review.	All relevant policies are reviewed and updated	✓	✓		
27. Support and coach our managers so that they can better support employees with disability and carers.					
27.1 All HR personnel be upskilled to provide coaching,	HR Business Partners, Talent Acquisition Business Partners,	✓			

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
advice and support to managers.	Recruitment staff are developed to provide coaching				
27.2 Provide and promote contact points within the Human Resources division to support, coach and advise managers	Intranet page is updated with contact information Communications campaign about coaching service		✓		
27.3 Provide resources, coaching and training for managers to help them support and provide adjustments for staff with disability and carers.	Resources and training have been developed and made available to managers Completion of participant feedback forms and action on feedback		✓	✓	✓
28. Streamline and improve our workplace adjustments process for staff with disability and carers.					
28.1 Have a dedicated and permanent Workplace Adjustment Project Officer role at Legal Aid NSW.	Permanent role established		✓		
28.2 Continue adding resources such as guides and training modules to the workplace adjustments intranet page.	Biannual review of the workplace adjustments page	✓	✓	✓	✓
28.3 Implement a centralised workplace adjustment budget.	Budget established		✓		
28.4 Develop a menu of pre-approved workplace adjustments.	Menu developed	✓			
28.5 Develop a list of common adjustments based on different disabilities.	Adjustments list developed	✓			

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
28.6 Measure performance in implementing workplace adjustments against service level agreements.	Report on performance against service level agreements to the Workplace Adjustments Working Group bimonthly Annual report to the DEI Board and Executive	✓	✓	✓	✓
28.7 Track the number and types of workplace adjustments being requested, the length of time it takes for workplace adjustments to be implemented and employees' satisfaction with the process.	Reporting framework developed Included in annual report to the DEI Board and Executive	✓			
28.8 Develop a guideline that explains how workplace adjustments and the flexible working policy intersect as they relate to people with disability and carers.	Guideline developed		✓		
28.9 Deliver and promote the Workplace Adjustment Passport.	Passport developed and promoted across the organisation Passport updated with whole of sector system, once available	✓	✓		
28.10 Encourage managers to regularly ask about workplace adjustments in fortnightly meetings with staff.	Increase in number of workplace adjustments received Custom PMES question about workplace adjustments conversations		✓		
29. Improve the accessibility of our offices and our learning and meeting environments.					

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
29.1 Conduct an Accessibility Audit of our offices and implement the recommendations from the audit, where budget permits.	<p>Audit completed</p> <p>Report shared with the DEI Board and the Executive</p> <p>Audit recommendations implementation plan developed</p>	✓			
<p>29.2 Develop a set of guidelines, co-designed with people with disability, that set out what the expectation is for accessibility when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing e-learning and training resources; - Organising events and conferences; and - Hosting meetings (whether in person or virtual). 	Guidelines developed		✓		
29.3 Ensure the guidelines include information about working with providers that are disability confident and can meet accessibility standards.	Information included in guidelines		✓		
29.4 Promote the guidelines throughout Legal Aid NSW and ensure that they are being used.	Guidelines promoted		✓		
29.5 Develop a group of subject matter experts that can provide support with organising conferences, events, learning and e-learning.	<p>List of subject matter experts developed</p> <p>The subject matter experts are added to the guidelines</p>		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
	Publish the names of the subject matter experts on the intranet				
30. Uplift our capability to provide accessible technology to staff with disability.					
30.1 Consult the staff Disability Network to explore opportunities for digital applications or software that address accessibility needs.	Staff Disability Network consulted biannually Updated menu of pre-approved workplace adjustments to include new applications and software recommended by the staff Disability Network	✓			
30.2 Establish a process within ICT to prioritise the needs of staff with disability.	Priority line established		✓		
30.3 Undertake the Access and Inclusion Index with the Australian Disability Network and implement the recommendations from the Index, where budget permits.	Access & Inclusion Index completed Report shared with the DEI Board and the Executive Index recommendations implementation plan developed	✓			
31. Actively source disability confident providers, as far as is practicable.					
31.1 Actively source disability confident providers as part of our procurement processes. We will do this by: (a) Updating our procurement checklist so that it includes disability confident capacity of providers. (b) Consider higher weighting of disability confidence providers.	Checklist is updated Weighting is considered Annually report on number of providers that we engage that meet the disability confident provider criteria		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
31.2 If we identify a gap in disability confident providers on the Buy NSW Prequalification list, we commit to raise this with the relevant government department.	Record of issues raised to Buy NSW	✓	✓	✓	✓
31.3 Create guidelines to ensure that we work with providers who are disability confident and can exceed accessibility standards.	Guidelines created		✓		
32. Use data to track, record and monitor improvements in our staff and clients' satisfaction within our organisation.					
32.1 Explore what datasets are going to be most informative to help us evaluate whether what we're doing is making a difference in terms of influencing behavioural change.	Analysis completed and datasets agreed to by the DEI Board		✓		
32.2 Set targets around the improvement in responses in our annual People Matters Employee Survey and bi-annual Client Satisfaction Survey to measure our success.	Targets agreed to by the DEI Board		✓		
32.3 Monitor and report on the number of people who identify as having lived and living experience of disability and those who are carers through self-reporting and through the People Matters Employee Survey.	Annual reporting to the DEI Board and to the Executive		✓	✓	✓
32.4 Monitor and report on the number of Legal Aid NSW staff	Annual reporting to the DEI Board and to the Executive		✓	✓	✓

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
who require workplace adjustments.					
32.5 Monitor and report on the number of people with disability employed at Legal Aid NSW by grade and office.	Annual reporting to the DEI Board and to the Executive		✓	✓	✓
32.6 Monitor and report on the feedback received through People Matters Employee Survey and Client Satisfaction Survey.	Annual reporting to the DEI Board and to the Executive		✓	✓	✓

Inclusive and Accessible Employment

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
33. Increase our disability confidence by participating in programs that engage us in working with people with disability.					
33.1 Participate in the Stepping Into Program through the Australian Disability Network, where budget permits.	One Stepping Into Program placement per year, where budget permits	✓	✓	✓	✓
33.2 Participate in the Positive Action Towards Career Engagement program through the Australian Disability Network, where budget permits.	One PACE placement per year, where budget permits	✓	✓	✓	✓
33.3 Participate in NSW Public Service Commission targeted recruitment and development programs, where budget permits.	Number of recruitment and development programs entered into	✓	✓	✓	✓
33.4 Participate in the Public Service Commission's Board Observership Program.	One placement per program	✓	✓	✓	✓
34. Ensure that the people we employ and promote value diversity and inclusion.					
34.1 Update role descriptions to include criteria where staff are required to have knowledge or experience working with clients with disability, or clients specific to the cohort their service targets.	Percentage of total relevant role descriptions reviewed Update role descriptions to include diversity as a focus capability	✓			
34.2 When interviewing candidates for management and leadership roles, have an interview question about diversity to assess candidates' willingness and ability to foster a	Diversity question added as a requirement to the recruitment compliance checklist	✓			

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
safe and inclusive working environment.					
35. Make our recruitment processes more inclusive and accessible to candidates with disability and carers.					
35.1 Create a separate disability employment section on Legal Aid NSW website which includes information about our commitment to recruit people with disability and carers and adjustments that can be made during the recruitment process.	Legal Aid NSW website updated	✓			
35.2 Update our diversity statement on all job advertisements to include carers.	Job advertisements updated	✓			
35.3 Add a direct link to the Careers page on the home page of the Legal Aid NSW website.	Legal Aid NSW website updated	✓			
35.4 Develop guidelines around the provision of job advertisements and position descriptions in alternative formats, including hard copy, audio, large print and Easy Read.	Guidelines developed		✓		
35.5 Review all role descriptions before they are advertised to ensure that the inherent requirements of the role are fit for purpose.	Number of role descriptions reviewed		✓	✓	✓
35.6 Add the following resources to the hiring suite on intranet:	Resources added		✓		

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
- Disability awareness training; - Coaching resources; - Information about different types of disability and adjustments that can be made during the recruitment process; and - Information about carers.					
36. Develop alternative pathways to recruiting people with disability and encourage hiring managers to use them.					
36.1 Establish links with Disability Employment Service (DES) providers and promote roles through DES providers.	Number of providers engaged Number of roles promoted with DES providers	✓			
36.2 Employ people through disability talent agencies such as Specialisterne.	Annual reporting on number of positions recruited through disability talent agencies	✓	✓	✓	✓
36.3 Develop alternate pathways for internal recruitment that focusses on a person's capability without requiring them to go through typical recruitment processes.	Number of employees recruited using alternate pathways	✓	✓	✓	✓
37. Consider how to meaningfully plan and map the inclusion of employees with disability in our workforce.					
37.1 Create a Workforce Planning Working Group with representation of people with lived and living experience of disability and carers and develop terms of reference.	Workforce Planning Working Group created Terms of reference created		✓		
37.2 Use our people data to recommend roles for people	Increase in recruitment of people with disability		✓	✓	✓

Action	Monitoring Measure	Timeline (financial year)			
		24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
with disability early in the recruitment process.	Number of roles recommended be filled by people with disability				
38. Consider how to increase the representation of employees with disability at Executive and senior levels.					
38.1 Explore setting targets for staff with disability at Executive and senior levels (Grade IV and above).	A paper is prepared for Executive's decision		✓		
38.2 Create a pathway for people with disability into management and leadership roles.	This action is included in Terms of Reference Pathway is determined Increase in numbers of people with disability in senior and Executive roles		✓	✓	✓



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