



**Aboriginal
Legal Service**
(NSW/ACT) Limited

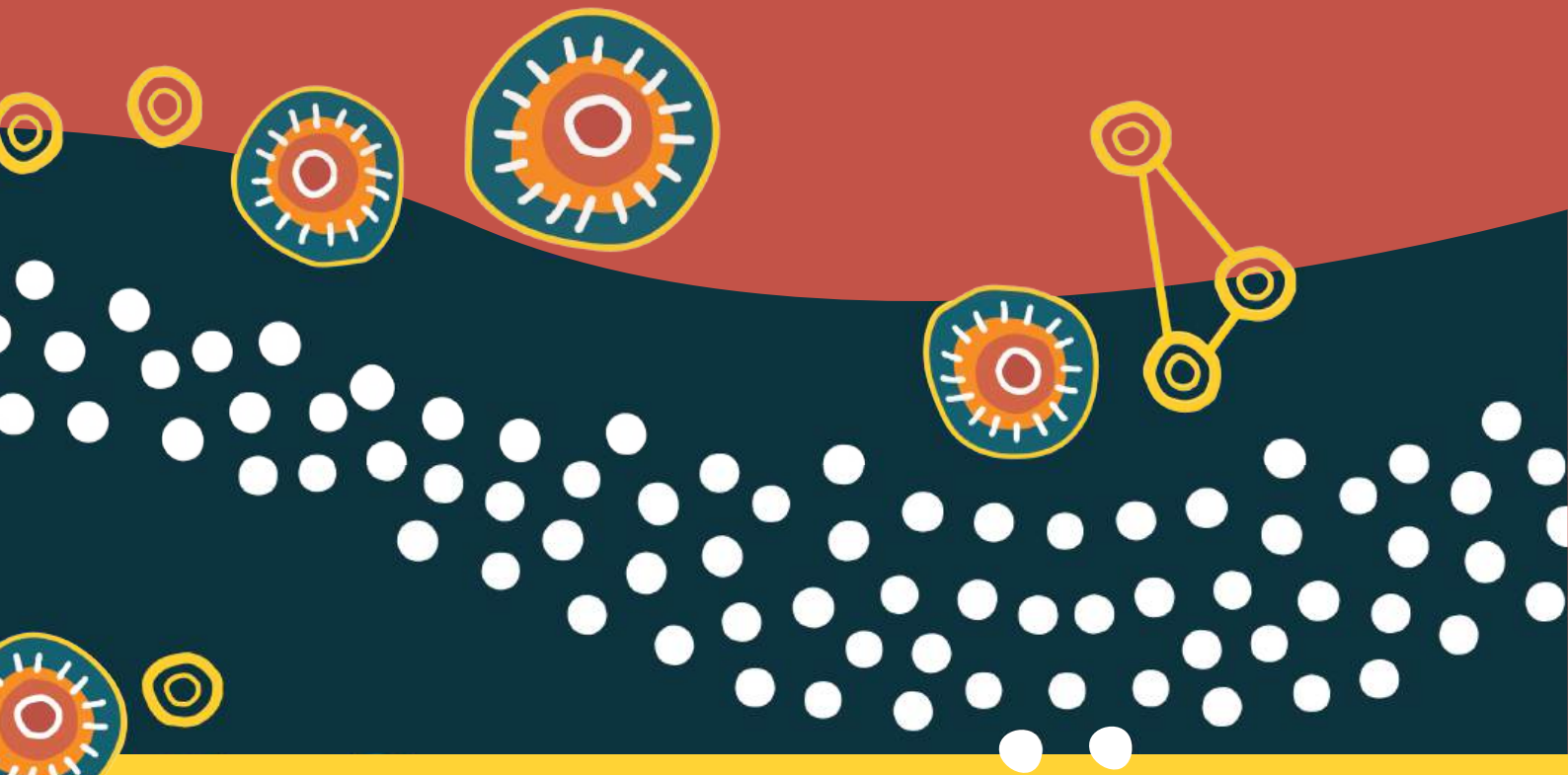


ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and travel. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present and acknowledge the contribution and sacrifices our Elders have made to better our community and future.



Cover image

ALS team members Jayarna-Dee Tighe, Duane Brown and Jody Trindall at the ALS Staff Training and Development Conference in June 2025. Photo: Shane Rozario.

Warning

This publication contains names and faces of Aboriginal people who have passed. Names of some clients have been changed to protect their privacy.

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INTRODUCTION

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

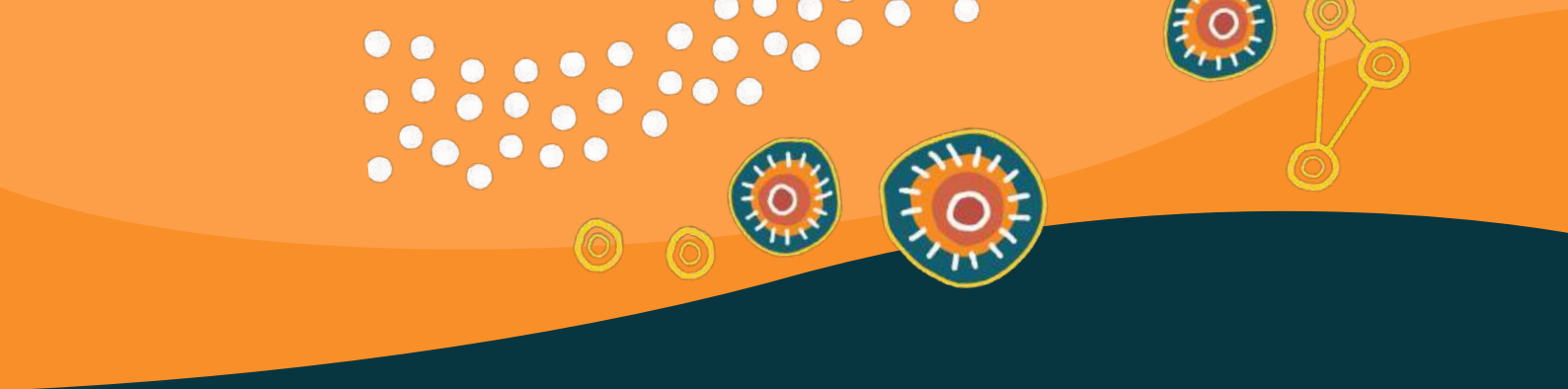
On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the work and achievements of the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited (ALS) in the 2024-25 financial year.



The organisation's output continued to grow this year, with more than 148,200 services provided in criminal law, children's care and protection, family law, civil law, and holistic allied professional services.

Following a member election in 2024 in which Aboriginal people across NSW and the ACT had the opportunity to vote for their representatives, a new board of directors was appointed in July 2024 for a three-year term. It was my honour to be appointed as Chairperson, with Patricia Laurie appointed as Deputy Chairperson.

We have continued the work of the previous board in strengthening the ALS Constitution, the foundational document for our organisation. Originally developed in 2006, parts of the Constitution are now outdated and need revision to remain fit for purpose as our organisation grows and moves into the future. Throughout this journey, the voices of our members have been front and centre. A third constitutional workshop was held in November 2024 for members to input their ideas and provide feedback on the draft Constitution, which we hope to finalise in the 2025-26 financial year.



At the end of the reporting period, the ALS wished a fond farewell to one of the longest-serving directors and allies we have ever had: Peter Stapleton. Peter retired from the board after almost 20 years of service as an honorary director, appointed in recognition of his significant contributions to the fight for justice. He was one of the first white volunteers to support the ALS in our early days in the 1970s, and, in the 2000s, he collaborated with the six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services within NSW to support their amalgamation into the united, statewide ALS that we know today. We thank Peter for his legacy of allyship; he will be missed.

A key focus for the ALS this year has been the negotiation of our new primary funding instrument, the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP), taking effect from 1 July 2025. This federal funding is administered by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and distributed by state and territory governments. After the announcement of the national funding quantum in September 2024, we have worked at a jurisdictional level with the NSW and ACT governments to determine the implications of this agreement for the ALS.

We thank the Commonwealth Government, NSW Government and ACT Government for providing the bulk of funding for our programs, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access high-quality, culturally safe legal assistance and support services.

However, we note that the current level of funding pledged under the NAJP and from the NSW and ACT Governments won't allow the ALS to expand our services to meet the known legal need in our communities. We continued our advocacy this year, both in the media and in direct conversations and correspondence with government, for needs-based funding to ensure more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access our legal services.

It is a testament to the strength of the ALS and the dedication of our staff that the organisation has continued to increase its impact despite these challenges. On behalf of the board, I sincerely thank all ALS team members and CEO Karly Warner for their hard work in 2024-25.

I also extend thanks to our non-government funders, partners, pro bono supporters and community donors for your solidarity with our mission. Last but certainly not least, I thank our communities and clients for entrusting the ALS with representing you and delivering the excellent services you deserve. The ongoing resilience and pride of our communities is remarkable and worth celebrating.

Keith Morgan | Chairperson

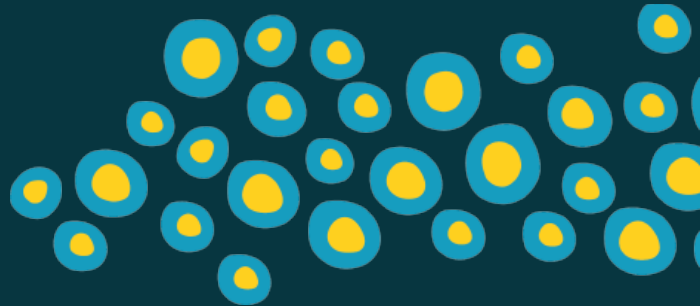
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

In 2024-25, the ALS continued doing what we do best: providing culturally safe legal support and holistic assistance of the highest quality. I am proud of the work of our teams and would like to introduce this annual report by thanking them for their impressive impact and contribution to making the ALS the legal assistance provider of choice for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW and the ACT.



An organisational review was completed this financial year and highlighted the ALS' strengths while delivering recommendations for improving our organisational structure and systems as we move into the future. We have progressed several projects that were identified in the review and will continue an ongoing journey of operationalising many the review's recommendations in 2025-26 and beyond, so far as funding will allow.

After establishing our Civil Law Practice last financial year, it has continued to grow, providing more than double the number of services that were recorded during the last reporting period. Our Care and Protection/Family Law Practice also experienced significant growth this year, while our Criminal Law Practice continues to deliver the bulk of ALS services, providing representation, assistance and referrals aiming to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people free of the quicksand of the criminal legal system.



We were forced to make some difficult decisions after our primary funding for the next five years was confirmed under the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP). It was determined that we do not have the ongoing resources necessary to extend our fixed-term pilot Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service (MHARS) and this program was discontinued at the end of the reporting period.

Our Legal Assistance for Women program, a standalone family violence and safety-focused program in the Hunter region, also came to a formal end in July 2025, however, the staff and services provided as part of this program have been absorbed into our broader Care and Protection/Family Law Practice and will enable us to provide a broader spectrum of support for clients across NSW.

This year we welcomed a new Chief Operating Officer, Samantha Abeydeera, who brings significant executive experience to the role and is capably overseeing our corporate services functions including finance, human resources, information technology, risk, property, and compliance and governance.

We expanded Aboriginal leadership of our practice areas, welcoming Barkindji woman Gemma McKinnon as Principal Solicitor, Closing the Gap; and Wiradjuri woman Shantell Bailey as Principal Solicitor of our Civil Law Practice.

With both pride and some sadness, we farewelled Shaun Mortimer, Principal Solicitor of our Criminal Law Practice, who was appointed to the bench as a magistrate of the Local Court of NSW.

It was another point of pride to see Wiradjuri woman and ALS solicitor Emma Hudson-Buhagiar take home the award for First Nations Lawyer of the Year at the 2024 Ngalaya Ball (held by the community-controlled peak body for First Nations lawyers and law students across Aboriginal lands in NSW and the ACT).


This financial year has brought a heavy focus on supporting our teams to build their skills and culturally safe practice, with the introduction of a new staff training platform tailored to the ALS and its needs. Our biennial staff conference offered an opportunity for skills development as well as team-building and getting to know our colleagues across the ALS' wide footprint (our offices are in 21 cities and towns in NSW and the ACT). Investing in our staff is investing in our communities, as they are the key to delivering the high-quality legal and support services the ALS is known for and that our communities rely on.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to everyone who made our important work possible in 2024-25, including our staff and many supporters: funders, partners, donors, and community members who share our belief in justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Karly Warner | Chief Executive Officer

2024-25 AT A GLANCE

This year we:



Saw an increase in number of clients and services provided in criminal law


Helped a young worker recover more than \$20,000 in underpaid wages and superannuation

Expanded our justice reinvestment work into two new communities (Kempsey and Nowra)



Supported community members to write-off \$1.5 million in fines

Participated in more than 30 community events



Made 925 visits to 335 young people in NSW youth detention centres

More than doubled the number of care and protection and family law services provided since last year

Expanded specialist children's legal representation to Moree, plus outreach in Armidale and Tamworth

Created two new identified Principal Solicitor roles

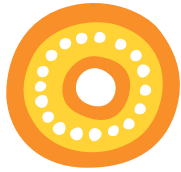
Helped prevent homelessness in 241 cases

Supported 121 family members whose loved ones died in custody

Our legal practice impact

148,247
services provided

13,085
representation
services

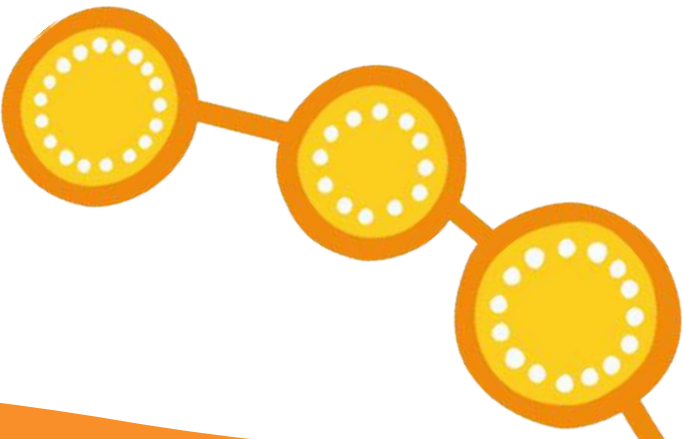
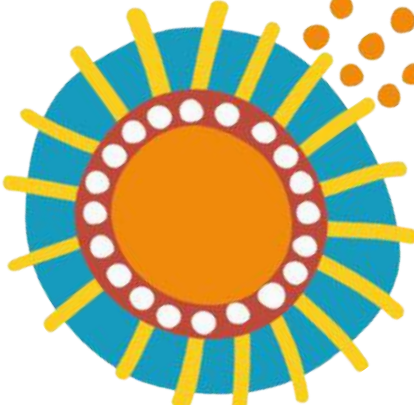


970
services to
the community

9,823
discrete
assistance

32,574
calls to the custody
notification service

91,795
duty lawyer
services



WHO WE ARE

The Aboriginal Legal Service has been fighting for justice and equity for more than 50 years.

Born out of a protest movement, we are the primary legal service for Aboriginal people in NSW and the ACT. We deliver free, culturally appropriate legal advice, representation, information and referrals for thousands of people each year.

We are more than a service provider. As a proud Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation, we speak out to combat injustice, transform unfair systems, and demand accountability from public institutions. We are recognised nationally for our strong advocacy, law reform and strategic policy work.

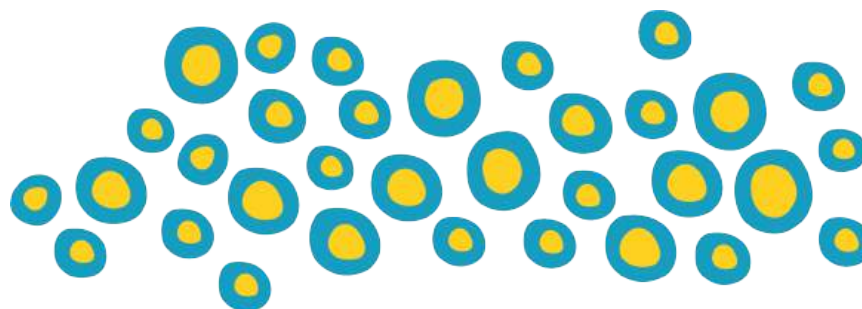
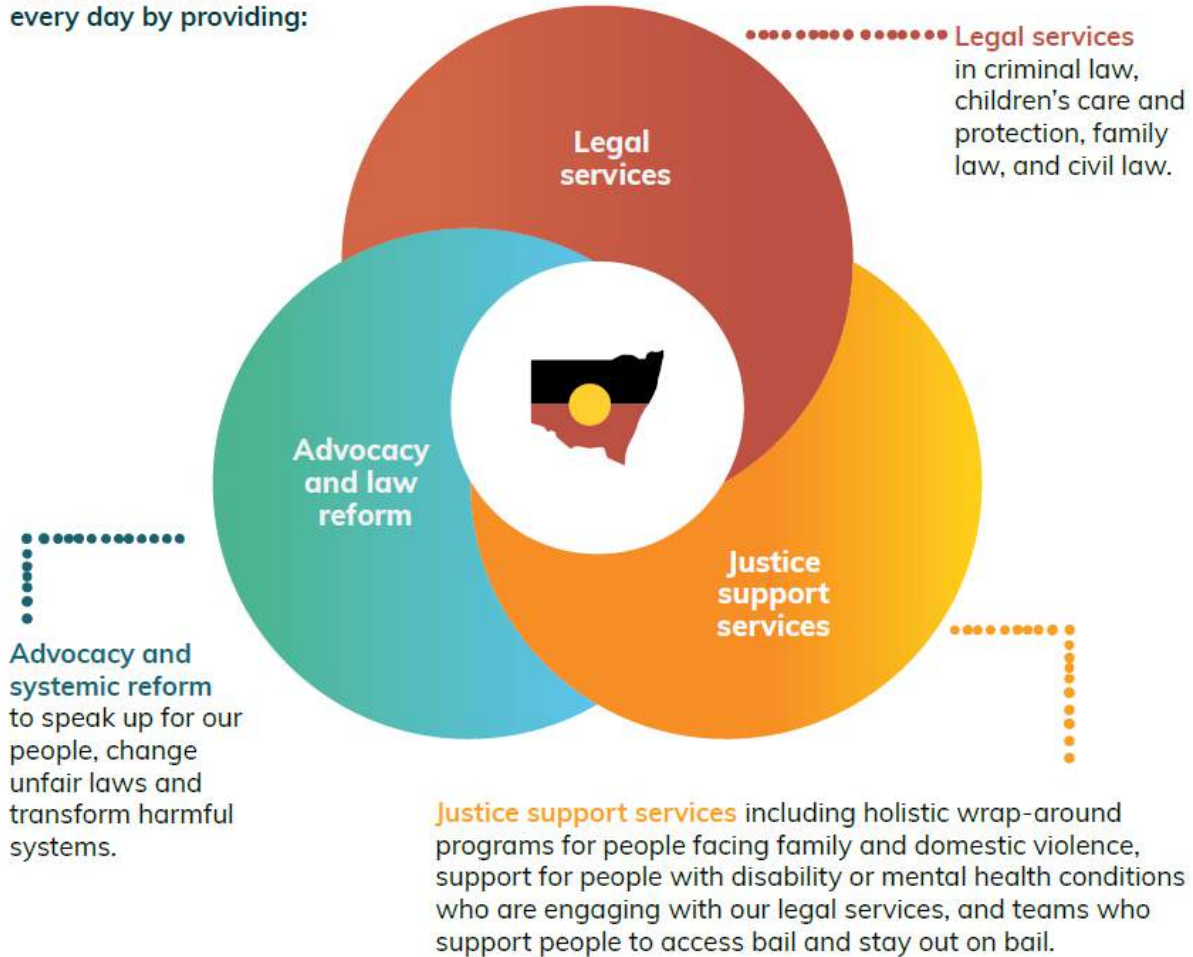


Find contact details for our offices on pages 56-57.



HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We support our mob every day by providing:



GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Our vision

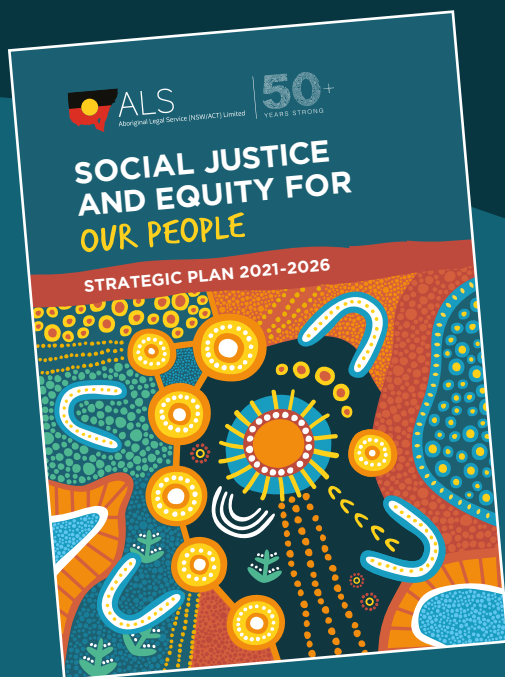
Social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.

Our mission

To deliver quality and culturally appropriate legal services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout NSW and the ACT and to be recognised as the leader in this field across Australia.

Our values

- We are proudly Aboriginal
- We are community focused
- We are fearless in our advocacy
- We are accountable
- We make a difference to create better futures
- We acknowledge and respect land, traditional values and cultural practices



View the ALS Strategic Plan online:
www.alsnswact.org.au/strategy

Our focus areas



Connecting and collaborating with our communities

We are seen by community as the legal provider of choice, part of a strong and visible network of Aboriginal peak bodies working to holistically support our people.



Telling our story

We're celebrated as the first ALS and first free legal service in the country and clearly communicate the availability, value and impact of all our services.



Delivering high quality, culturally safe legal and support services

We have a culturally safe, professional and committed workforce who feel valued and uphold the ALS legacy, delivering sustainable impact with and for our communities.



Advocating for justice and achieving community-led change

Community recognise the ALS as a fighter for our people and know we have their backs in the fight for justice. Together, we transform the justice system.



Laying strong future foundations

Through diversified and sustainable income streams, innovation and a pipeline of talent, ALS services keep people strong in community and culture.

GOVERNANCE

The ALS is a public company limited by guarantee, governed by an Aboriginal board. We are a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and a tax-deductible gift recipient.

Ever since our founding in 1970, community control has been at the heart of the ALS. We were one of Australia's first Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and are proud to be owned, governed and led by the communities we serve.

Our membership comprises up to 30 Aboriginal people from NSW and the ACT. This includes 10 from each of three regions: Northern, Western, and Central South Eastern. Company members are elected by their communities for three-year terms. In turn, the members for each region appoint up to four people among their ranks to become directors and form the ALS Board. In addition to the directors elected from each region, up to two honorary directors can be appointed to the board under the ALS Constitution.



Strengthening governance

Work to refresh the ALS Constitution continued throughout the 2024-25 financial year, with the aim of strengthening governance to better support the organisation's current activities and future direction.

Key progress during the year included a workshop held in November 2024, where members were invited to provide input on priority governance issues identified by the Constitutional Committee. Feedback from this session, along with insights gathered from previous workshops, is being used to inform the development of a draft updated constitution. A revised step-plan for constitutional reform was developed and progress will continue during the 2025-26 financial year.

Board movements

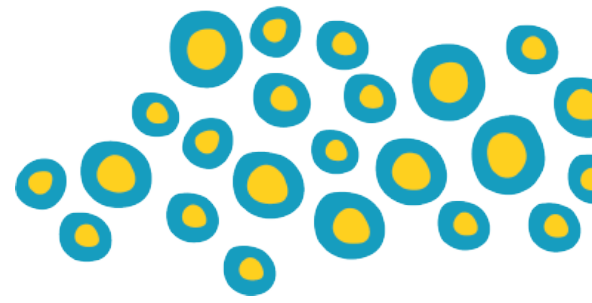
Appointments

Following the company member election held in the previous financial year, a new board was appointed for a three-year term. The incoming board officially commenced on 1 July 2024, with the exception of the following directors, who assumed office at a later date:

- Paul Morris was appointed on 10 July 2024;
- Terrence Robinson was appointed on 11 July 2024;
- Tamika Murphy was appointed on 16 July 2024;
- Lorraine Wright was appointed on 17 July 2024;
- Maxine Kirby was appointed as an alternate director for Lorraine Wright on 26 July 2024 and continued in the role since this time.

Resignations

Peter Stapleton resigned as Honorary Director on 30 June 2025.



The ALS Board at 30 June 2025

Name	Role	Region
Keith Morgan	Chair	Central South Eastern
Patricia Laurie	Deputy Chair	Northern
Robert Carroll	Director	Western
Janelle Clarke	Director	Northern
Cindy Fuller	Director	Central South Eastern
Antionette House	Director	Central South Eastern
Raymond Keed	Director	Western
Paul Morris	Director	Northern
Tamika Murphy	Director	Central South Eastern
Terrence Robinson	Director	Northern
Hewitt Whyman	Director	Western
Lorraine Wright	Director	Western
Peter Stapleton	Honorary Director	



The ALS Board pictured in 2024. Standing left to right: Peter Stapleton, Robert Carroll, Hewitt Whyman, Janelle Clarke, Terrence Robinson, Raymond Keed. Seated left to right: Maxine Kirby (alternate director), Antionette House, Keith Morgan, Patricia Laurie, Cindy Fuller. Not pictured: Paul Morris, Tamika Murphy, Lorraine Wright.

CONNECTING AND COLLABORATING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

We delivered more than 70 community legal education (CLE) activities and resources this year, covering a broad range of topics, stakeholders, and locations. We deliver legal education both for the broader Aboriginal community, and for other ACCOs and legal stakeholders to empower them in work with their own clients.

This year we again took the opportunity to deliver CLE at the Koori Knockout and NAIDOC events, sharing information about how to deal with unpaid fines. We also attended fines-specific outreach days in Moree and Walgett, and delivered fines training for other ACCOs.

Our Youth Bail Advocacy Program team delivered tailored CLE sessions for children and young people, including sessions on children's rights and court processes with young people in KARI's out-of-home-care program. The team also delivered CLE in

partnership with Redfern Youth Connect (an Aboriginal youth hub) and for children in detention. We also developed a basic and accessible 'know your rights' pocketbook for young people to increase legal education at statewide level. This resource was very well received and our first order of 200 copies quickly needed to be replenished.

Our Family Violence Prevention Unit (FVPU) delivered a CLE series aimed at increasing awareness of different forms of domestic and family violence in partnership with staff from South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation (Waminda). In response to strong participant engagement, the FVPU team has now established a monthly women's group. This group provides ongoing opportunities for yarning, art therapy, and wellness-based practices, creating a sustainable platform for community connection and support.



In an example of CLE for legal stakeholders, we partnered with Legal Aid NSW and the Children’s Court of NSW to develop a bench guide to assist judicial officers in making appropriate decisions about bail for children in out-of-home care, particularly where their chosen residence conflicts with their care orders.

We continue to use our website and social media to deliver CLE to community (see page 18 for more information on how we use these digital and public platforms). This year, we partnered with Murrawarri and Filipino rapper DOBBY to produce two informational videos for social media, explaining what to do if stopped and questioned by police, and what to do if arrested and taken to a police station.

ALS solicitor Eleanor Holden (back right) at a community fines help day in Walgett in April 2025.



Our ‘know your legal rights’ resource for young people fits easily in a wallet or pocket.



Watch our community legal education videos with DOBBY:





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

This year the ALS participated in more than 30 community events including the Koori Knockout, Yabun festival, and, for the first time, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day. We placed a strong focus on participating in local NAIDOC events and community service 'hub' days. Engagement with community at local events provides avenues for people to seek support, referrals, legal education and quick advice from our lawyers in a safe and accessible environment and importantly, provides our staff with an opportunity to connect with the community we serve.

We also expanded our engagement and continued building connections with a number of vital services, such as

The Glen for Women residential rehabilitation centre, to share information about the services provided by the ALS and build mutual referral pathways. We continued our successful collaboration with Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) in Walgett, providing drop-in clinics and legal advice as well as training for DEG staff to support Walgett community members to deal with fines (see more about this partnership on page 32); and our partnership with Waminda in Nowra, wherein their Aboriginal family and domestic violence caseworker provides intensive case management for our clients, enabling the ALS to focus on legal service provision while ensuring that holistic family needs are addressed concurrently.



ALS staff and OneMob Radio team members held a joint breakfast for community at our Coffs Harbour office in September 2024.

We continue to collaborate with other ACCOs and communities through our membership on the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations, which led more than 50 community consultations this year to inform key Closing the Gap initiatives.

Additionally, we partnered with Aboriginal consultants Kowa Collaboration to evaluate and conduct community consultations to inform the design and implementation of our bail advocacy and child and family advocacy and support pilot programs. These evaluations ensure we are getting a true community perspective on the efficacy of our service delivery while ensuring communities have a voice in shaping the way we deliver place-based services.



Paralegal Sarah Chia with Women's Advocacy Officer Shauna McKellar and her son at the Eora NAIDOC Family Fun Day.



TELLING OUR STORY

OUR PUBLIC PROFILE AND MEDIA ADVOCACY

The ALS uses public channels including the news media, our website, and social media to grow awareness of our services, deliver legal information and advocate on behalf of the communities we serve.

This year, we continued to speak out against the NSW Government's 2024 punitive bail laws for children, which were extended for a further three years and continue to make it harder for children to access bail than adults charged with the same offences.

We also spoke out calling for police accountability, child protection reform, and government action on record imprisonment of Aboriginal people in NSW. Additionally, we continued public advocacy on the need for sustainable, needs-based funding to enable our organisation to meet the legal needs of our communities. See more on our policy and advocacy work on pages 44-46.

In August 2024, we echoed a call from the Advocate for Children and Young People to discontinue the use of so-called 'alternative care arrangements', which see some children removed from their families and placed in hotels and motels, serviced apartments, and short-term rentals including caravan parks. The NSW Government banned the use of alternative care arrangements in September 2024 and as of April 2025, no children in NSW were being placed in these emergency accommodations.

In addition to advocacy on behalf of our communities, we used our platforms to directly inform community about their rights. Through our website and social media, we shared information about new police knife-scanning powers introduced in December 2024, providing an accessible explanation of how these powers work and what they mean for community members who may be stopped and scanned. This was our most viewed Facebook post of the year.

Our digital footprint



www.alsnswact.org.au
109k visitors



Instagram followers
8k accounts
Instagram reach
103k accounts (▲ 106%)



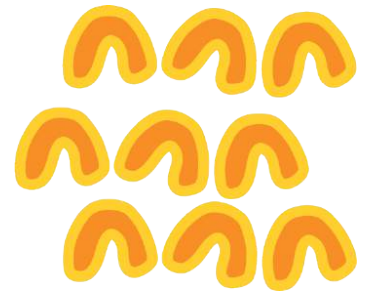
Facebook followers
26k accounts
Facebook reach
107k accounts



LinkedIn followers
15k accounts
LinkedIn reach
4.5k accounts



Our views were covered by the media this year in outlets including The Canberra Times, ABC, Sydney Morning Herald, NITV and National Indigenous Times.



Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

NSW Bail Laws Report Card

Fail: More children in jail. No drop in crime.

The NSW Government's 'tougher' approach to bail for children has been in operation for 12 months.

The Premier and Attorney-General say the laws are working, pointing to the fact that there are more children in jail, and the NSW Government has extended the laws to 2028 without waiting for a promised 12-month review.

The Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited (ALS) says there is no evidence that crime has been reduced.

Instead, the laws are causing more harm to children and communities in NSW.

The younger a child is at first contact with the justice system, the more likely they are to have ongoing justice system contact and more serious offending as an adult

Laws introduced in response to fearmongering tabloid campaigns are criminalising social need and imprisoning Aboriginal children across NSW, with Aboriginal children making up 85-90% of the children refused bail under the laws	(F)
The laws have prevented Aboriginal children represented by the ALS from accessing therapeutic supports and services that actually work to address offending	(F)
Children are being locked out of diversion and programs that work	(F)
Otherwise eligible children have been forced to withdraw from culturally appropriate options like the Youth Koori Court and community-based therapeutic support and treatment due to the new 'high degree of confidence' bail test	(F)
Children offered beds in residential alcohol and other drug programs have been kept in custody instead of receiving support, education and treatment to address the factors forcing them into contact with the justice system in the first place	(F)
Children are being jailed for crimes that will never attract a jail sentence	(F)
Many are refused bail on charges that are later withdrawn by police or dismissed	(F)
Many are captured by existing bail provisions – meaning the new law (section 22C of the Bail Act) was unnecessary to secure their remand	(F)

Any evidence that locking children up decreases crime?	
Evidence indicates that the younger a child first comes into contact with the justice system, the more likely they are to have ongoing justice system contact and more serious offending as an adult	(F)
The NSW government is making communities more dangerous – there is evidence that more children are in jail with no impact on reducing negative behaviours	(F)
Locking children up doesn't stop crime – it makes it worse	(F)
Bail laws are not capable of 'reducing crime'. They are just a tool for warehousing people in prisons instead of dealing with the issues that bring them into contact with police in the first place	(F)
What the evidence shows	
Time in custody increases the risk of future offending. It disconnects kids from family, education and culture	(F)
The interests of both children and the community are best served by responses which prioritise therapeutic, needs-based services that address the underlying causes of concerning behaviour	(F)
Diversion and reducing contact with the criminal justice system reduces reoffending in comparison to charging and proceeding to court	(F)
Imprisonment entrenches cycles of poverty, trauma and harm – especially for Aboriginal children	(F)
What actually works	
Needs-based therapeutic responses which address underlying causes of offending deliver long-term safety and wellbeing of children and communities in a more effective and cost-efficient manner than policing and imprisonment	(F)
Prevention-focused support – like secure housing, educational engagement, family support, after-hours activities and culturally safe, community-controlled services – makes communities safer	(F)
Therapeutic and community-led diversionary responses actually work to address the reasons behind children being forced into contact with police and prevent future contact	(F)
For children already in contact with the courts, evaluated initiatives like the Youth Koori Court are proven to reduce incarceration without increasing offending, and reduce crime by effectively addressing the root drivers of contact with the courts	(F)



View our report card on the NSW Government's bail laws

STORIES OF 2024-25

Names have been changed to protect the privacy of our clients.

Helping a young woman avoid jail and keep her baby

Lucy* was just 18 when she was arrested for an alleged assault against a much older man with a known history of violence towards her. Despite being the victim of ongoing domestic abuse, police decided to charge Lucy with a serious offence.

Lucy was unable to access bail. Just before going into custody on remand, she found out she was pregnant. Our Women's Bail Advocacy Program (WBAP) team was able to secure bail for Lucy, with a plan to connect her to vital services and supports. Our social worker made sure she had fresh clothes and an Opal card to support her transition from remand to the community.

Lucy was forced to wait almost two years from the time of her first arrest to sentencing. In this time, she mended relationships with her family and strengthened her resolve to become a great mum, supported along the way by one of our specialist Women's Advocacy Officers.

Lucy's sentencing hearing earlier this year was attended by the WBAP team and multiple relatives. She had been facing a prison sentence of up to 14 years, but in the end she was given a 20-month order to be served in the community because of the extensive supporting documentation about her progress and high-quality legal advocacy provided by the ALS.

"It was amazing. I couldn't get the smile off my face, I was so happy. I couldn't believe it, honestly. I was so surprised," Lucy said.

After spending much of her teens experiencing homelessness, Lucy finally has stable housing. Both she and her baby are happy and healthy.

Read more about our Women's Bail Advocacy Program and other allied professional services on pages 34-35.

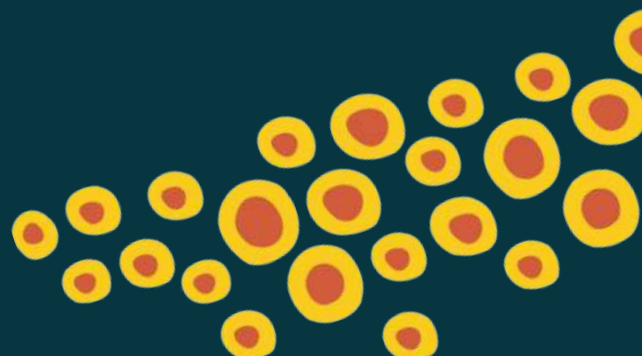
Exposing serious police misconduct

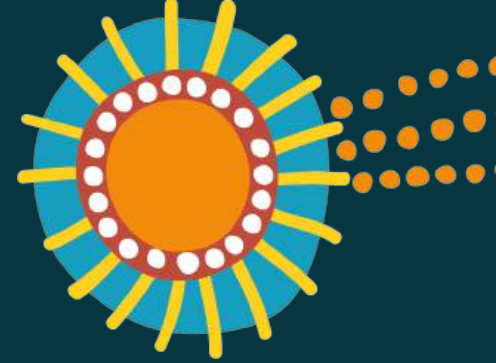
We acted for Pedro*, a 17-year-old boy with a background of profound disadvantage who was facing several serious driving charges and aggravated robberies. He was the first young person to participate in the pilot circle sentencing program in the ACT Supreme Court - a program that the ALS advocated for and was actively involved in establishing.

Pedro was subjected to dehumanising treatment by police during and after his arrest, including excessive use of force while he was restrained, insults and ridicule. He was left handcuffed in his cell for approximately 45 minutes, and senior police were recorded joking about suicide and self-harm during Pedro's time in custody.

We were able to expose this police conduct in Pedro's circle sentencing conversation, which led to significant media attention. We advocated for the court to find that Pedro was subject to extra-curial punishment because of the police officers' conduct. Not only did the court agree that this treatment was cruel, but the judge at the conclusion of the sentencing conversation directed that the police conduct be referred to the Chief Police Officer for investigation. Pedro was released from custody into a community-based order.

Read more about our criminal law services on pages 22-24.





Returning a child to his family's care

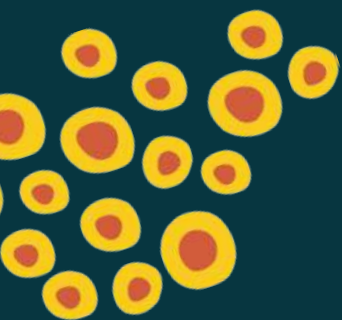
The ALS represented Robert* in care proceedings in relation to his infant son Malakai*. The proceedings were commenced in a court the ALS does not regularly appear in, and in a location six hours' drive away from where the family lived. We successfully advocated to move proceedings to a court closer to home.

Robert and Malakai's mother were seeking restoration of their son to their care. This was not supported by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), which sought for him to be placed under the long-term care of the Minister. Malakai was placed in a non-Aboriginal extended family placement.

Robert and his partner welcomed a baby some weeks before the final hearing. DCJ supported this child remaining in the home but did not support the return of Malakai, much to the family's distress.

The ALS represented Robert at a final hearing and after two days of cross-examination and some comments from the bench, DCJ agreed to prepare a care plan supporting restoration of Malakai to his family. Final orders were made for him to return home within the next year.

Read more about our care and protection and family law services on pages 25-28.



Creating a new start, free of fine debt

When we first contacted Jenny*, she was living in temporary accommodation because she had been forced to relinquish her previous housing when she fled domestic violence. Jenny had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, severe anxiety and depression, and said she felt "lucky to be alive".

Jenny had recently been in prison for the first time and said it was a wake-up call to get her life back on track. Since her time in prison, she had stopped using drugs and began working towards regaining care of her children. She had moved away from people who she said had been a bad influence on her. However, in her new town she did not have any friends and family and was struggling to find services to assist her.

We supported Jenny to successfully apply to Revenue NSW to write off her entire fine debt of over \$7,000. We also supported her to get her driver's licence back and referred her to a specialist homelessness legal service who assisted her to resolve her significant housing debt as the first step towards obtaining permanent housing. Jenny said she had been waiting over two years for help with her housing debt and it was not until the ALS connected her to a homelessness legal service that she received the assistance she needed.

Following this support, Jenny is continuing to build a more stable and positive future and is focused on regaining care of her children.

Read more about our civil law services on pages 31-33.

DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY, CULTURALLY SAFE LEGAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES

CRIMINAL LAW

Our criminal law practices in NSW and the ACT defend the rights of Aboriginal people and aim to minimise their contact with the legal system.



19.800+
clients supported



Almost 104,900
services provided

Providing high quality legal services

This year saw an increase in the number of clients supported and services provided by our criminal law practices in NSW and the ACT.

Our high-quality and culturally safe legal support was vital in securing appropriate outcomes for clients, including avoiding imprisonment through successful advocacy for community-based orders, and increasing access to justice by advocating for adjustments to make court processes more accessible for our clients.

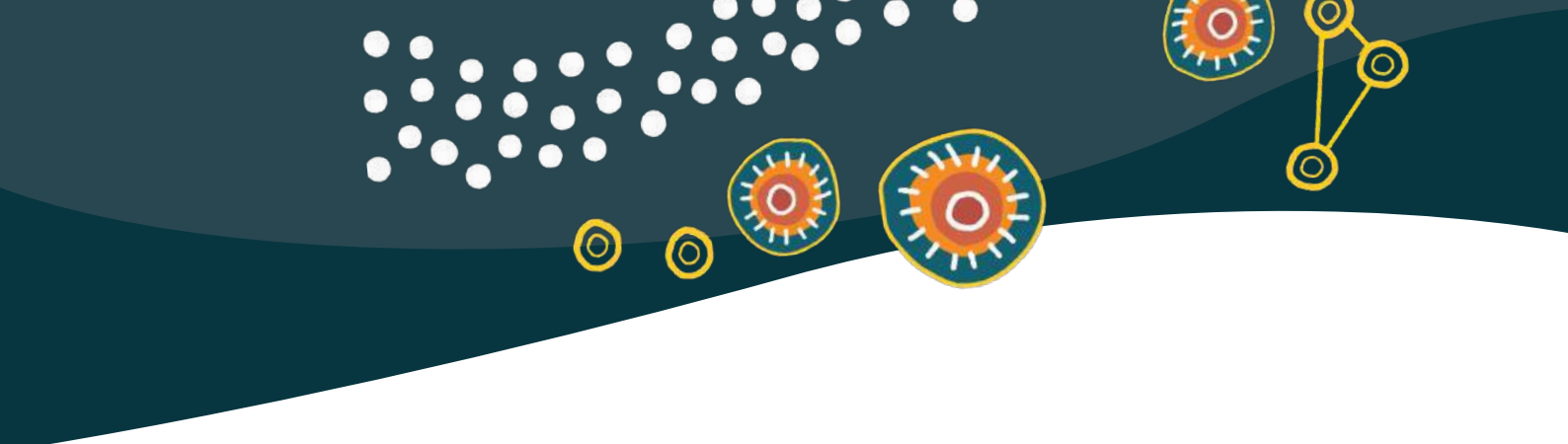
Since our founding days, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander field officers have been central to our model of service delivery, ensuring our legal services are culturally safe and accessible for Aboriginal people. Following the recommendations of our independent organisational review, we have begun the process of identifying opportunities to increase support and strengthen management structures for field officers in 2025-26 and beyond.

Standing up for children

At the end of 2024, our Children's Criminal Law Practice expanded to Moree with a specialist children's solicitor and Aboriginal youth officer. We are now providing specialist legal advice and wrap-around support to children in Moree, plus outreach legal representation to children in Armidale and Tamworth. While we have always represented young people in these communities, this is the first time we have been able to offer dedicated, specialist children's services.

We began participating in the Youth Justice NSW Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Advisory Group, which focuses on working with Aboriginal young people with a disability in the youth justice system. The group involves ACCOs as well as Youth Justice NSW and FASD experts working collaboratively to improve the criminal justice system response to children who have FASD.

The Youth Koori Court marked its 10th year of operation in 2025, with the ALS joining other stakeholders to organise anniversary celebrations in Parramatta. The event was attended by heads of all NSW court jurisdictions, the Attorney General, and most importantly, graduates of the Youth Koori Court over the past 10 years. The event was capably emceed by an ALS client



and recent graduate of the Dubbo Youth Koori Court. The ALS has been a key stakeholder in developing and implementing the Youth Koori Court, which has been shown to reduce imprisonment of Aboriginal young people without any negative impact on re-offending rates.

Bail support programs

We continued offering targeted pilot programs in several regions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access bail, ensure their bail conditions are appropriate and assist them to comply with these conditions.

These include the Ngurrumbai Bail Support program in the ACT, which this year supported 253 bail applications of which 85% were successful. We also offer holistic, wrap-around bail support for women at two pilot sites in Newcastle and Redfern, with lawyers working closely with specialist social workers and women's advocacy officers to support clients to meet their legal and non-legal needs.

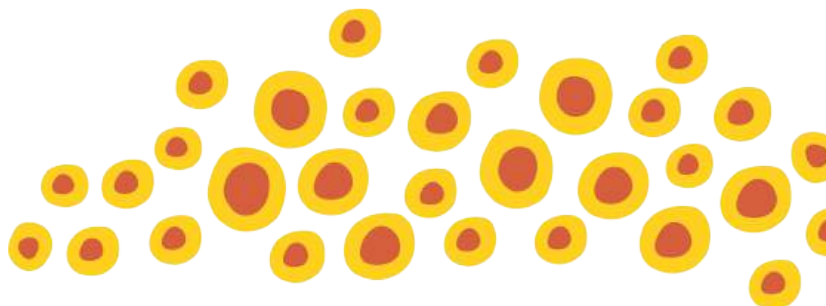
In NSW, we continued to deliver our Bail Advocacy Program for young people in Wagga Wagga, Penrith and Redfern/South Sydney who are appearing before the Children's Court. This program had numerous successes throughout the year in demonstrating the power of inter-agency and socio-legal collaboration in connecting children with appropriate support services and enabling them to meet bail requirements to avoid spending time in police custody. This is despite the introduction of restrictions on bail for children by the NSW Government in 2024. We have adjusted our processes to mitigate the impact of these laws by preparing more intensive bail support documentation, adjusting our legal advocacy for relevant charges, and filing bail applications to the Supreme Court.

Our model received recognition from a Supreme Court Justice speaking in a national forum as an approach to address the impacts of the new bail restrictions and similar laws.

Helping people 'front-up' to court

Our Front-Up program in the ACT supports people who have outstanding warrants or have breached bail conditions to appear before the court and have these matters resolved in a safe and de-escalated setting. This year, we facilitated 50 'front-ups' and were successful on every occasion in getting warrants withdrawn or bail continued.

We work closely with the courts and with ACT Policing to ensure the success of the program. Over the past year, we have worked to optimise engagement from police to ensure that the ALS is made aware of clients in need of support to 'front-up' as early as possible, and we now receive a daily list of outstanding warrants and alleged bail breaches from police.



Supporting people in custody

Calls to our Custody Notification Service increased again this year in tandem with the unacceptable increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody in NSW. In 2024-25, we received 32,574 notifications to this vital service, which provides access to prompt legal help for people who are arrested, as well as a wellbeing check and practical assistance such as notifying their families.

We also supported people in custody through our Inmate Referral and Advice Service, which was established last year. This service takes phone calls from incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, connecting clients with the ALS staff working on their matters and providing legal information, referrals and advice. This can mean helping clients with tasks as varied as navigating the workings of the State Parole Authority, or with power of attorney applications where a client needs help to access funds for 'buy-up'. Since the establishment of this service, we have answered more than 50,000 calls from prisons across NSW. This year, we made improvements to the way we operate this service which have resulted in calls being answered more quickly and more consistency for clients in who they speak to. When we received an influx of calls from clients and family members raising wellbeing concerns after prolonged lock-ins at one particular prison, we were able to bring a systemic approach to the problem, advocating on behalf of all of these clients.

For children in custody in NSW, our Visiting Legal Service made regular visits to all six youth detention centres in NSW, tallying 925 visits to 355 individual children and young people. This service provides an essential safeguard to ensure that young people are informed and aware of their legal matters, have applied for bail where appropriate, are provided referrals for unmet civil law needs,

and have an avenue for welfare concerns and complaints. This year we formed a new collaboration with Legal Aid NSW, ensuring that in instances where the ALS is not resourced to provide civil law support to children, smooth referrals can be made to Legal Aid as an alternative.

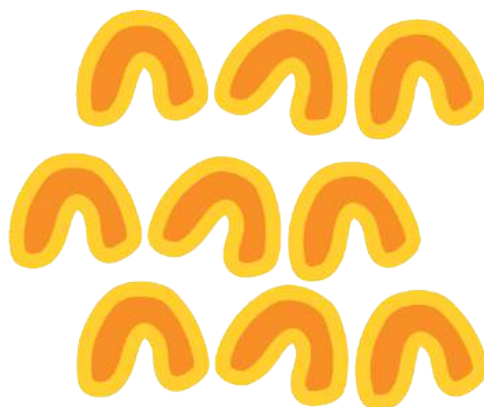
Disability support in the ACT

Discrete funding from the ACT Government enabled us to employ a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO), whose role included providing tailored support to ALS clients with disability, making referrals to external services, and ensuring ALS information is accessible to people with disability.

One of the clients supported by the DLO was Matt*, a 15-year-old Aboriginal boy who showed signs of an undiagnosed mental illness. He was charged at court for multiple offences including assaults, theft and breaches of bail.

The DLO worked with Matt and his parents to connect him to mental health support and to obtain a diagnosis for his condition. She also assisted with preparing a bail plan, helping Matt to understand his bail conditions, and linking him in with specialist educational support. The DLO supported Matt to obtain specialist trade certificates which enabled him to apply for traineeships while finishing school.

Matt's parents report that he is now thriving and engaged in his education, with no outstanding court matters.



CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY LAW

Our Care and Protection/Family Law Practice supports Aboriginal families to keep themselves and their children safe while resolving family relationship matters. Our goal is to keep children safe at home and prevent removals into out-of-home care.



1,160+
clients supported



Almost 3,800
services provided

NSW Care and Protection Practice

It has been a busy year for the NSW Care and Protection team, with a significant increase in clients supported and services provided since the previous reporting period. We continue to be motivated towards the goal of being the legal provider of choice for the communities we assist.

Even though the NSW Government has committed to the Closing the Gap target of reducing the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031, in practice we see that progress is not on track and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be overrepresented in the care and protection court system.

Litigation

Along with assisting families and children in the metropolitan Children's Courts at Surry Hills, Parramatta and Campbelltown, we continued to service areas including the western region (Dubbo, Bathurst and Orange), Mid North Coast (Taree and Kempsey), and New England (Moree and Tamworth). We also assisted community members in more remote areas such as Narrabri and Broken Hill.

We continued to maintain a presence at the Winha-nga-nha List in Dubbo, a court process designed to be approachable and culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved in care and protection proceedings. The Winha-nga-nha List resulted from a recommendation of the landmark 2019 Family Is Culture Review into Aboriginal children in the NSW out-of-home care system.

Early intervention

The Legal Assistance for Families Partnership Agreement (LAFPA) between the ALS, DCJ and Legal Aid NSW has become embedded in our practice. LAFPA arose out of another Family Is Culture recommendation and involves an agreement ensuring all families, particularly Aboriginal families, are guided towards early legal advice where there is a risk of a child being removed from their care.

This year we took on 484 matters through LAFPA referrals. Through LAFPA we have been able to give advice to clients about how to divert a child protection legal issue through family law pathways or other less intrusive interventions such as registered care plans. The aim of LAFPA is to avoid DCJ intervention and removal into out-of-home care through early advice and assistance.

Community and sector outreach

Since November 2023, DCJ has been legally required to show evidence of active efforts taken to prevent children from entering out-of-home care and restore children to family. This financial year, we have worked with community service providers to increase their knowledge of active efforts legislation and the rights of their clients when dealing with DCJ.

Another example of community outreach undertaken by the practice this year is monthly appearances at a community forum at Marrin Weejali in Western Sydney. Here, community members can speak with our solicitors to receive preliminary advice on their legal issue, as well as complete intakes for further advice or receive referrals to other appropriate services in the community.

Team members have also been involved in several sector education and speaking opportunities, including making a presentation on active efforts at the DCJ annual conference, presenting at AbSec's quarterly sector forum, and appearing on a panel for a 'children and the law' information session for law students at the University of New South Wales.

Supporting our team

We continue to be committed to the delivery of high-quality legal services and internally participated in a 12-week training program for care and protection staff. The program, developed and presented by ALS senior solicitors, covered the life of care and protection matters from the first court date to a final determination. Care and protection law is a discrete area of legal practice. Too many training opportunities, when offered, are generic. This program was bespoke and specific to the communities we serve.

ACT Care and Protection Legal Assistance Service

In 2023, we received funding for the first time to deliver care and protection services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ACT. As the program continues to grow and take shape, it is important in providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT with a choice between legal providers, supporting self-determination.

We provide safe, relevant, accessible and responsive services to empower our clients. We use plain language and ensure that clients have agency in all parts of the legal process. We also recognise that while clients present with legal issues, they are often simultaneously dealing with non-legal issues that impact on their legal problems and vice versa. We respond to non-legal needs through holistic and appropriate referral pathways.

The core of this service is providing support in ongoing care and protection proceedings before the ACT Children's Court and ACT Magistrates Court. Our caseload has grown, with 93 clients supported and 107 legal services provided in 2024-25. A number of these services were for challenging cases with respect to enduring parental responsibility orders.

In addition to litigation, the team has also delivered community legal education and sector stakeholder engagement. These initiatives include meeting with Yerrabi Yurwang Aboriginal Corporation to discuss the implications of proposed legislative changes in the ACT to the Children and Young People Act; participating in consultations with Lorana Bartles from the Australian National University regarding research into restorative justice for victims of sexual violence within an Indigenous context; discussions with the ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate with respect to the introduction of a LAFPA-like scheme in the ACT; and more.

We continued to provide information sessions to Aboriginal detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (Canberra's prison), providing an overview of the family law and care and protection systems, and empowering people to maintain contact with their children while incarcerated.

Family Law Practice

We provide family law support for Aboriginal families and children in NSW and the ACT. Development of the Family Law Practice has been a key focus this year. This includes upskilling all team members in the Care & Protection/Family Law Practice in family law.

There are many overlaps in care and protection law and family law. Significantly, family law offers an alternative legal avenue for families in the early stages when DCJ is seeking to intervene in their lives. With our team increasingly possessing skills in both areas of law, we can offer clients alternatives and agency in decisions around their children.

Litigation

We have continued to assist adults and children in the Specialist Indigenous Lists (SILs) in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) as well as FCFCOA applications brought in regional and remote areas.

Our SIL presence is consolidated in Lismore, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, Newcastle, Sydney, and now also New England. We are also assisting in a duty service for clients in Lismore, Coffs Harbour and New England SILs. Clients are most vulnerable at this first court event and duty representation triages legal need, delivers immediate legal assistance and navigates a pathway forward for the client.

The family law team have also been assisting with LAFPA referrals received from DCJ. Where the opportunity presents itself, we have filed applications in the FCFCOA for parenting orders for safe and practical arrangements for children, allowing them to remain with family and outside of the child protection system.



Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support

The Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support (ACFAS) program is an ALS pilot initiative, designed to provide holistic, early support to Aboriginal families at risk of child removal.

Developed in response to a recommendation of the Family Is Culture review, ACFAS aims to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by offering a culturally grounded, preventative alternative to statutory intervention, keeping families safe and together through early action.

The program model integrates legal and social advocacy through a multidisciplinary team including advocates, lawyers and social workers. The program is delivered in Dubbo, Moree and surrounding areas.

This financial year we provided 89 clients with legal assistance and 98 clients with non-legal, holistic support (noting that these numbers are not exclusive of one another).

The program was designed to be supported by early referrals from DCJ and most of our referrals are from them. However, we are continuing to work in partnership to ensure that this referral relationship becomes more seamless.

We also continue to undertake community and stakeholder outreach, including designing and delivering 'legal training for community workers' sessions; participating in Cooperative Legal Service Delivery partnership meetings each quarter in Dubbo and Moree; and participating in a DCJ-led weekly action meeting (a confidential forum for local services, Aboriginal organisations, and community representatives to triage families that DCJ mechanisms identify as 'at risk').

Members of the ACFAS team at a program open day in May 2025.



FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

We continued to promote safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence (DFSV) through two place-based programs: the Family Violence Prevention Unit and Legal Assistance for Women.



580+
clients supported



2,050+
services provided

Family Violence Prevention Unit

Now in its third year, the Family Violence Prevention Unit (FVPU) continues to deliver culturally safe, trauma-informed, and holistic support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors of DFSV across the ACT and NSW South Coast.

In 2024-25, the FVPU supported 244 clients and families, delivering over 900 legal and non-legal services from our offices in Canberra and Nowra. Our approach remains client-centred, addressing a broad range of legal, practical, and emotional needs.

We have deepened our community partnerships to enhance practical supports. Through Thread Together, we provide clients with new, designer clothing; our in-house store has grown into a welcoming, community-driven space. A new partnership with SALT also enables us to stock essential grocery items. We continue to offer escape bags and mobile phones for clients in crisis. Clients often drop in to browse, have a cuppa, and connect in a safe, culturally supportive space. This informal access helps build trust and ensures support is there when it's needed most.

Our commitment to community legal education (CLE) has also deepened. In Nowra, we delivered Love, Power and Safety, a five-week CLE series exploring coercive control through the lens of a fictional case study. Each session focused on a legal topic and included a wellbeing activity.

The program was so well received we reached capacity and generated a waitlist, demonstrating strong community demand and engagement.

We received the following feedback for our CLE activities: "You guys are doing so much for community, you don't know what a difference you're making"; "Wished it was longer - info provided was amazing".

Client feedback:

"I would most definitely, would go straight to you fullas. Appreciate everything I was assisted with over last couple of years, it's been awesome. Everyone there was amazing, from the front desk to the back."

"I'm just so grateful. I had so many issues, and their input and support made it possible for me to have my kids back for Christmas, I'm just so grateful."

"You guys were lifesavers!"





The Legal Assistance for Women office in Newcastle.

Legal Assistance for Women

The standalone Legal Assistance for Women program came to a formal end in July 2025, with the decision taken to amalgamate its function into the broader ALS Care and Protection/Family Law Practice.

The program made a significant impact in the Newcastle and Hunter region, having directly assisted more than 336 clients in 2024-25 with 1,156 legal services provided.

Its mission was to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as victim-survivors of DFSV. Our team provided a 'wrap-around' service to address the commonly overlapping legal and social needs that exacerbate clients' vulnerability to violence. We did this through criminal, family and civil law advice and advocacy, utilising our team's legal expertise as well as the skills of a social worker.

We had consistent success in advocating for clients who were reluctant to report DFSV to the police due to past system failures. The combination of providing expert legal advice on the nature of the violence, with the in-person advocacy of our social worker, resulted in consistent action being taken that would not have occurred without advocacy from the ALS.

We also advocated for several women who had been misidentified by police as primary perpetrators of violence – an issue that disproportionately disadvantages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Our advocacy resulted in proceedings being dismissed against our clients on several occasions, and action being taken against the real primary perpetrators.

The team ran on the philosophy that it should not be up to the community to reach out to the legal system to address their needs, but for the team as part of the legal system, to reach out to the community. We achieved this by regularly attending eight domestic violence court lists and seven legal advice clinics throughout the region every month. Collaboration with ACCOs and other stakeholders was also key to identifying those most in need and providing assistance.

Although the standalone program has come to an end, the successful strategy of addressing DFSV by combining multi-practice advice with legal and social advocacy will continue with the amalgamation into the broader ALS Care and Protection/Family Law Practice.

CIVIL LAW

The Civil Law Practice continued to grow in its second year of operation, offering support with fines, workplace sexual harassment and discrimination, tenancy issues, and other discrete matters.



1,300+
clients supported



4,900+
services provided

Employment Law Service

Our Employment Law Service is the only specialist employment and discrimination law service in NSW that's for Aboriginal workers and run by an ACCO. This service has been operating since October 2023.

Despite being a small team, the Employment Law Service has achieved some great outcomes over the last financial year including:

- Provided 611 instances of legal advice, discrete tasks, ongoing legal support, legal representation and other services.
- Recovered \$276,720 in compensation for clients for underpayment of wages, unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment, unfair dismissal and general workplace rights cases.

The team also delivered community legal education sessions on unlawful discrimination in the workplace to community workers on Country in Grafton and Coffs Harbour.

Civil law Community Engagement Officer, Promise Laupepa attending The Glen for Women on an outreach visit.



Fines Clinic

Since the ALS began providing legal assistance with fines in 2020, we have helped community secure write-offs for over \$3.4 million worth of fines, with over \$1.6 million written-off for clients referred to us in the last year alone.

As well as securing write-offs, we support our clients to manage fines by accessing payment plans, debt reductions, and other hardship options. We assisted more than 1,000 clients (both adults and children) referred to us this financial year, helping them manage around 8,700 fines.

We continued our partnership with Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) in Walgett, strengthening our mutual referral pathways, holding drop-in clinics, offering legal advice, and providing training for DEG staff to support locals with fines. As a result of the

partnership, this year DEG supported 51 community members to access our legal advice, leading to the resolution of over \$111,000 of fine debt in Walgett.

As well as directly supporting clients, we continued to advocate for systemic reform of the NSW fines system, including participating in the audit of Revenue NSW's administration of hardship assistance. We successfully advocated for a recommendation in the audit report that Revenue NSW provide reasons for their decisions (including when rejecting write-off applications).

Unfortunately, we needed to pause new referrals to the Fines Clinic from May 2025 due to increased demand and funding constraints. This program has been funded to date with ad-hoc government funding, and predominantly with generous support from community donations.

ALS staff member Jane Spencer (standing, second from left) at a multi-agency fines outreach day in Tamworth in February 2025.



Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service

The Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service (GSATS) provides advice and advocacy to Aboriginal renters across Greater Sydney from the Blue Mountains to the Central Coast.

We assist and advocate for clients in complex housing matters where the tenancy is unstable or the tenant is at significant risk of homelessness. We provide support over the phone and face-to-face; advocate for our clients at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT); assist with requests for landlords and housing providers to undertake repairs and maintenance; and help with Housing Appeals Committee reviews. We also provide community education and duty representation through the Aboriginal Tenancy List at NCAT.

In the last financial year, the GSATS team assisted 461 clients with more than 680 cases, including almost 150 cases where the client was experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence. We helped to prevent homelessness in 241 cases and assisted clients to obtain payments, or have debts reduced or removed in 51 cases.

This year, we partnered with several housing providers and ACCOs on initiatives including:

- An early intervention and informal conciliation pilot program with Bridge Housing to discuss clients that are at risk of NCAT involvement, for the purpose of helping them keep their housing;
- Outreach at Mudgin-Gal Women's Aboriginal Corporation, supporting 42 Mudgin-Gal clients with tenancy matters in the last six months of the financial year;
- Training for Homes NSW about the use and function of the Aboriginal Tenancy List at NCAT, building rapport between our organisations and working together to reduce matters going to NCAT;
- Working with the Aboriginal Housing Office and conducting property visits together to achieve better outcomes for tenants.

Other civil law services

We provide place-based civil law services for clients in key locations, offering assistance with housing, victims' compensation, police complaints, fines, Apprehended Violence Orders, and other discrete issues.

We continued supporting women and girls in the Illawarra with civil law matters, assisting 90 clients with 184 discrete legal problems. Our local civil law solicitor made weekly visits to a women's group at the Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service, providing legal advice and community legal education.

We also continued working with Aboriginal children and young people in Surry Hills, Wagga Wagga and Parramatta, and Aboriginal women in Newcastle and Redfern through our bail advocacy programs. In addition to providing direct legal support, the team ran community legal education sessions for children in out-of-home care and staff at a local community organisation.

In 2025, we began providing civil law services for clients of our Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support program in the Moree and Dubbo regions. We held consultations with local stakeholders to determine what areas of civil law they would like to know more about, which resulted in us designing and co-delivering free, targeted legal training for community workers. Participants reported higher levels of confidence in understanding the law and knowing where to get help for their clients.





SERVICE INNOVATION AND REFORM

In its second year, the Service Innovation and Reform team continued to lead organisational change, support the growth of new services, and improve service delivery across the ALS. The team leads cross-organisational projects to embed best practice and cultural safety, develop systems and infrastructure that support new programs, and respond to the emerging needs of a rapidly growing organisation. It is also responsible for monitoring and evaluation of five ALS initiatives funded under Closing the Gap.



Allied professional services

The ALS embeds allied professional services (APS) staff in various teams throughout the organisation to ensure we are delivering holistic, culturally safe and trauma-informed services. This year the network was comprised of more than 25 Aboriginal staff—including social workers, youth workers, mental health workers and advocates.

This network builds on the ALS legacy of collaboration between field officers and solicitors at the heart of our service model, and has developed the foundations of fully integrated socio-legal partnerships, which we hope to further embed through sustainable funding sources over time. APS staff provide wrap-around services that complement legal advocacy, supporting clients to engage with court processes, access services, and stay strong in community.

We continue to support our APS staff to further develop their skills and expertise, including through training on strong socio-legal collaborations and managing vicarious trauma. We are also focused on supporting our staff through robust systems; this year we introduced a new client and case management system for allied professional services staff which is supporting social workers, advocates, youth workers and others to record and manage their work, and collect data about our service delivery.

In November 2024, two multidisciplinary programs – the Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service, and Women’s Bail Advocacy Program – moved from management under the Criminal Law Practice to the Service Innovation and Reform team. This structural change reflected the growing importance of allied professional roles across the ALS and ensured these services receive consistent support, supervision and integration within our broader practice.

Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service

The Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service (MHARS) was an Aboriginal-led, trauma-informed pilot program that supported Aboriginal clients in the criminal legal system who are living with mental health conditions or cognitive impairments. Mental health officers worked closely with clients to connect them to cultural and clinical support services, provide crisis support and advocacy, and develop tailored treatment plans for section 14 diversion applications (diverting people from the criminal legal system under the Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act). The program achieved a 63% success rate for section 14 applications, with a further 10 clients receiving community-based sentencing orders with treatment conditions.

Launched as a pilot in 2023, MHARS concluded at the end of the 2024–25 financial year. MHARS demonstrated the value of culturally safe, integrated mental health support within the legal system, and the importance of Aboriginal-led responses to complex trauma and disadvantage. We are deeply grateful to the staff, clients and community partners who shaped the pilot and brought it to life.

We will continue to provide culturally safe, holistic services to clients living with mental health challenges and disability through all areas of our service delivery under the NAJP, and will do so with the significant benefit of the learnings from the MHARS pilot to inform our service delivery models and ongoing service optimisation.

Women’s Bail Advocacy Program

Through the Women’s Bail Advocacy Program (WBAP), we have continued to support Aboriginal women to access and remain on bail, reducing avoidable remand through holistic, trauma-informed casework and high-quality legal advocacy. Operating in Redfern and Newcastle, the program supported 139 women this financial year. The team is made up of Aboriginal social workers and women’s advocates who work alongside dedicated solicitors in the Criminal Law Practice to prepare strong bail applications, connect clients to community-based services, and promote safety and wellbeing.

The intensive and client-centred approach is creating powerful outcomes for women. Many clients have been granted bail in situations where they otherwise would have remained in custody, and judicial officers frequently cite the support available from the WBAP as an influential factor in granting bail. Clients have also reconnected with children, accessed stable housing, and re-engaged with employment, training and health support services.

We continue to support the WBAP team to grow their capacity to assist clients, with several team members studying towards related tertiary certificates or degrees and other training.

See page 20 for a story about how we helped transform the life of one WBAP client.

Service innovation projects

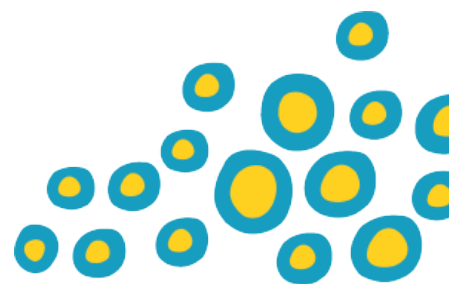
The team led several strategic projects this year laying the foundation to grow sustainably, deliver high-quality multidisciplinary services, and support staff in their day-to-day work.

We undertook a whole-of-organisation review, examining the ALS’ structure, capabilities, culture and systems – see page 51 for more on this project.

This year also saw the development and roll-out of key new policies and protocols which together strengthen ethical practice, and help staff respond safely and consistently when a client is in crisis or distress.

Monitoring and evaluation

Service Innovation and Reform works closely with our strategic data team and program leads to coordinate evaluation projects, and develop our monitoring, evaluation and learning expertise. This includes ongoing partnerships with Aboriginal businesses and experts in the field, Kowa Collaboration and Yulang. This work strengthens our ability to understand what’s working, advocate for what communities need, support our advocacy for ongoing sustainable funding, and ensure ALS programs remain accountable to our funders and the communities we serve.



SUPPORTING FAMILIES THROUGH CORONIAL INQUESTS

The ALS provides legal representation and advice for Aboriginal families who have lost loved ones, supporting them through the coronial inquest process. This year we supported 121 family members in 32 inquests.

At the end of the reporting period, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had died in NSW Corrective Services custody so far in 2025 was equal to the highest number ever recorded, underscoring the unacceptable state of NSW prisons, the over-incarceration of our people, and the importance of our work.

With confirmation of continued funding, our coronial team has been able to assist in a broader range of matters than in previous years. As well as our core coronial work relating to deaths in custody and deaths occurring in police operations, these included deaths occurring in hospitals and cases of missing persons.

The coronial team is currently comprised of four experienced legal advocates and our Community Coronial Advocate, a proud Wiradjuri man who performs the invaluable role of providing wellbeing and cultural support

to families throughout the lengthy coronial process.

We continued to represent Uncle Don Craigie in the inquest into the death of his nephew, Mark Haines, a young Gomeroi man who was found deceased on train tracks outside of Tamworth in 1988. The initial police investigation found that Mark died by suicide after being struck by a train, but his family have always contested this conclusion. After an initial inquest concluded with open findings, Mark's family were successful in advocating for a new inquest into his death. The inquest began in April 2024 and continued throughout the reporting period, extending into the 2025-26 financial year to accommodate a large volume of evidence.

Uncle Don Craigie performing a Smoking Ceremony on the train tracks where his nephew, Mark Haines' body was found.





ALS trial advocate Emma Parker (left) and solicitor Tia Caldwell (right) with our client, Michael Brown, outside Dubbo Courthouse.

Our team held police to account in an inquest into the death of 47-year-old Tammy Shipley. Tammy died in prison shortly after being arrested and refused bail by police in circumstances where they held information about her mental illness. When NSW Police applied to the Supreme Court seeking to exclude information about Tammy's police interactions from the inquest, we partnered with specialist counsel to defeat their appeal. The inquest will now be relisted to hear evidence regarding the circumstances of Tammy's arrest and entry into custody.

This year we also represented Michael Brown, father of Lathan Brown. Lathan was a Kamilaroi and Barkindji man who passed away in early 2024 after being

found unconscious and unresponsive at Wellington Correctional Centre. He was 28 years old. Tragically, deficiencies in Corrective Services NSW communication with Lathan's family contributed to him passing away without his family beside him. While findings in this inquest were handed down in August 2025, the submissions and hearings took place during the reporting period. Deputy Coroner Devine issued a recommendation for Corrective Services NSW to ensure there is ongoing communication with families of people in custody in circumstances where the death of their loved one may be imminent and they are transferred to hospital. This was a change that had been advocated for by the ALS and our client.

COOPERATIVE LEGAL SERVICE DELIVERY

The Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) program is made up of a series of regional justice partnerships across NSW.

Under this program, government agencies, community organisations and legal assistance providers work together to support people experiencing social and economic disadvantage.

In addition to participating in each of the 12 CLSD groups, the ALS is funded by Legal Aid NSW to coordinate the Dubbo and Moree partnerships. We host four meetings per year in each region to bring lawyers and other agencies together to make plans to address the needs of the local community.

When community in Moree asked for help to access support with wills and estates, the ALS worked with North & North West Community Legal Centre and pro bono partners from private law firm Gilbert + Tobin to arrange a working day. Lawyers came to Moree and met with clients, taking instructions so they could draft documents overnight. Wills and enduring guardianship documents were developed for free,

providing reassurance and protection for clients and families. Other priority areas of work in Moree this year have included addressing school exclusions and bringing information together about different family and domestic violence services. The high level of fine debt in and around Moree also remains a key concern, and this year we continued to promote the availability of free legal help with fines from both the ALS and Legal Aid NSW.

CLSD meetings in Dubbo this year focused on sharing information throughout the partnership network about local programs, including those that can support clients who might otherwise fall through the gaps in services. In quarterly group meetings, participants benefited from insights from guest speakers including Children's Magistrates Funston and Hopgood. We also updated 'Staying Connected', the Dubbo legal and community services directory.




Attendees at the wills working day in Moree.



BUGMY BAR BOOK

The *Bugmy Bar Book* is a free, online resource comprised of accessible summaries of research about the impacts of different forms of social and economic disadvantage, disability, health conditions and trauma, as well as commissioned research about the benefits of culturally safe, strengths-based support and rehabilitation.

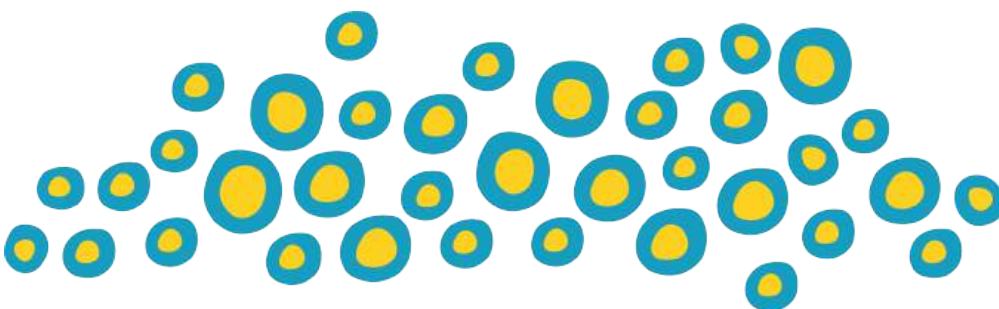


A key aim of the project is to support just outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people, and people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are in contact with the legal system, by promoting improved understanding of the experiences of people who are brought into contact with the legal system.

Key developments in 2024-25 included commissioning new expert research; embedding *Bugmy Bar Book* publications into university syllabi; and expanding legal education for the judiciary and legal profession about *Bugmy Bar Book* publications and how to use them.

The *Bugmy Bar Book* was auspiced by the ALS from April 2022 until June 2025, when the project moved to the Justice and Equity Centre as it looks to expand to a more national focus. We are proud to have supported the project to grow to the point where *Bugmy Bar Book* publications are now widely referred to in court proceedings in a range of jurisdictions. Nearly 100 published judgments have cited *Bugmy Bar Book* publications.

The ALS thanks the Paul Ramsay Foundation for its financial support of the *Bugmy Bar Book* and looks forward to continuing to engage with the next chapter of the project under the auspices of the Justice and Equity Centre. The ALS remains a supporter of the project, and is represented on the *Bugmy Bar Book* Project Committee, as well as its First Nations Sub-Committee and Strategy Sub-Committee.



ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE AND ACHIEVING COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE

CLOSING THE GAP IN NSW

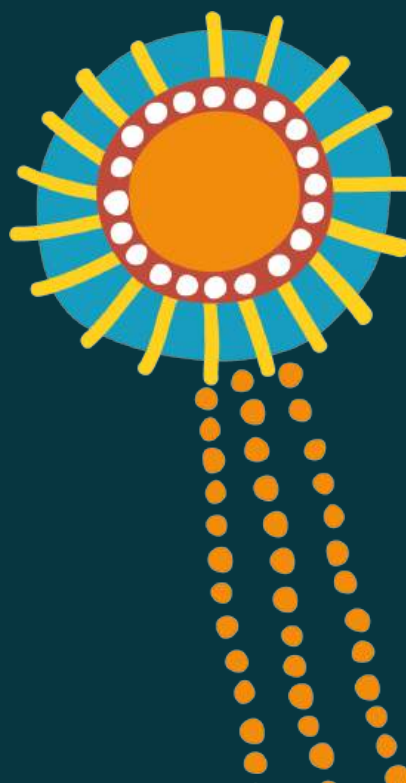
One of the ways in which we drive the transformation of harmful systems is through building strategic partnerships and bolstering power in our communities.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is a commitment by all Australian governments to a fundamentally new way of developing and implementing policies and programs that impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in order to improve life outcomes. By signing the agreement, governments have committed to work in genuine partnership and share decision-making with Aboriginal communities and ACCOs.

Through our participation in Closing the Gap in NSW, the ALS strives to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, build power in communities and support self-determination.

In 2024, the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) and the NSW Government renewed their shared commitment to work in partnership to implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in NSW. As the justice Peak on NSW CAPO, the ALS has responsibility for co-leading with government the implementation of the Closing the Gap priority reforms in the NSW justice sector and delivering initiatives under the NSW Closing The Gap Implementation Plan which aim to progress socioeconomic targets and outcomes 10, 11 and 13. The ALS also works with AbSec to progress initiatives which contribute to progress towards socioeconomic target and outcome 12.

Responsibility for delivering funded initiatives under the Closing The Gap Implementation Plan is distributed throughout all areas of the ALS, including wrap-around service delivery pilot programs embedded in the legal practice; strategic policy development projects led by the Justice Projects, Policy and Practice division; and a project to develop foundational initiatives required to implement the Closing the Gap justice targets and all priority reforms in the NSW justice system, the Aboriginal Justice Partnership, led by the new ALS Closing the Gap practice area.



Closing the Gap socio-economic outcomes and targets



Reducing adult imprisonment

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

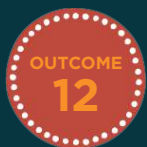
Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent.



Reducing children's imprisonment

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

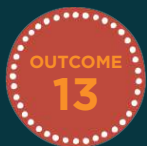
Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent.



Reducing the number of children in out-of-home care

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent.



Reducing violence against women and children

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe.

Target: By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced by at least 50%, as progress towards zero.

A new Closing the Gap practice area

This year, we created a new Closing the Gap practice area led by Principal Solicitor Gemma McKinnon, a proud Barkindji woman and experienced lawyer. This practice area is leading ALS participation in NSW CAPO and NSW Closing the Gap governance, and delivering the foundational community-facing Closing the Gap justice initiative – the Aboriginal Justice Partnership – in tandem with the ALS’s funded commitments to justice reinvestment.

The Closing the Gap Planning and Coordination team ensures the effective participation of the ALS in NSW CAPO, and coordinates across all areas of the ALS which deliver funded initiatives on the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan to inform the development of the Closing the Gap governance model and progress reporting.

As we approached the conclusion of the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2022-24, the ALS supported the delivery of more than 50 community engagement sessions led by NSW CAPO. These were designed to inform communities of progress towards Closing the Gap and give them a voice on its implementation. These sessions enabled us to connect with mob and develop a practical understanding of how they are affected by legal systems ‘on the ground’.

Most recently, we have been focused on finalising the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan for 2025-28 and working with government partners to bring new Closing the Gap governance arrangements to fruition. These new arrangements aim to ensure that the NSW Government and NSW CAPO are working together at all levels to monitor and maintain progress on implementing Closing the Gap.



L-R: Members of Dharriwaa Elders Group with Theresa Lake (Manager, Community Partnerships & Programs), Gemma McKinnon (Principal Solicitor, Closing the Gap) and Gemma’s children – an opportunity to start teaching the next generation.

The Community Partnerships and Programs team leads delivery of the Aboriginal Justice Partnership project in partnership with DCJ, other CAPO members, ACCOs, local communities and government stakeholders. In 2024-25, building on priorities expressed by communities in consultations, we continued development of options for an Aboriginal justice partnership for NSW; completed research and jurisdictional scans to inform the development of shared decision-making models; and undertook mapping and analysis of the NSW justice sector, including services provided by ACCOs, to inform the development of an Aboriginal community-controlled justice sector strengthening plan.

ELDERS GROUP

gett's Aboriginal culture and identity



Justice reinvestment

Justice reinvestment is a data-driven, community-led approach to reducing interactions with the legal system. It aims to redirect funding away from policing and prisons towards community-led solutions that work to address the causes of contact with the system.

As part of our work to develop an Aboriginal Justice Partnership, the ALS is supporting the development of local justice plans. In 2024-25, our focus was to strengthen our ALS justice reinvestment team to support this work and build strong and trusted relationships with our community partners. Since the previous reporting period, this vital work has expanded to five communities, now including Kempsey and Nowra along with the original three communities of Bourke, Moree and Mt Druitt. Our justice reinvestment team now includes a program manager and five regionally based staff who work alongside local ALS legal teams as well as community-based organisations such as Just Reinvest NSW (which was auspiced by the ALS up until 2022). Together, they are engaging with Aboriginal communities and justice stakeholders to develop and implement local justice plans, with the aim of identifying short-term 'circuit breakers' reducing long-term contact with the criminal legal system.

We continue to work closely with DCJ and Just Reinvest NSW in various forums to expand the justice reinvestment approach across NSW. As the peak legal services provider for Aboriginal people in NSW, the ALS is a leading expert on the impacts of justice systems on the communities we serve, and is uniquely placed to support place-based justice reinvestment and drive sustainable systemic change.



STRATEGIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The Justice Projects, Policy and Practice team continued delivery of strategic policy development projects aimed at transforming justice systems and reforming government policies which unfairly impact Aboriginal communities in NSW and the ACT.

We also collaborated with other peaks, ACCOs and government partners to inform the development of strategic national and state policy frameworks and initiatives, ensuring that the experiences of the clients and communities we serve are centred in the development and implementation of policies and programs that impact our communities.

Therapeutic Pathways for Children and the Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy

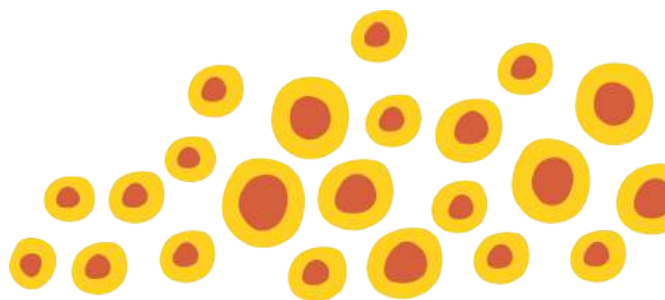
In December 2024, we successfully delivered two key policy development initiatives on the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan responding directly to community determined priorities: the Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy and Therapeutic Pathways for Children. These strategies will provide blueprints for change which will:

- Deliver more culturally strong services for Aboriginal people leaving prison to support reintegration into the community following release, with a particular focus increasing the involvement of ACCOs in the design and delivery of throughcare services; and
- Expand access to therapeutic pathways children at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system, including through increased diversion from court, community-led alternative responses, ACCO sector strengthening, and ensuring young people are present and represented in decision-making about them.

Funding for early implementation of these strategies from FY26 was recently secured by NSW CAPO and the NSW Government. Independent evaluators, Yulang Indigenous Evaluation conducted process reviews of these initiatives which highlighted the immense value of these projects, and the need for further work to fully realise the partnership between ACCOs and government that is envisioned under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Aboriginal DFSV Plan

The ALS is working with the NSW Government to develop the first NSW Aboriginal Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Plan in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders including ACCOs, Peaks, government representatives and mainstream DFSV services. The Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network (AWAN) are an expert advisory group providing oversight and significant input into the development of the plan. The plan will provide a blueprint for implementing the Closing the Gap priority reforms in the DFSV sector and ensuring future investment directly supports the needs of Aboriginal women, children and communities impacted by DFSV.





Family Is Culture and Child Protection Assessment Partnership

In May, the ALS signed a formal partnership agreement with AbSec and DCJ which is a shared commitment to reduce the unacceptable overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in NSW through two significant policy reform projects. The Child Protection Assessment Project

will develop an overarching, co-designed child protection assessment and decision-making policy framework to address racial bias in government decisions about child removals. The Family Is Culture (FIC) Project will support transparent and shared decision-making for significant child protection and system reform decisions, align FIC recommendations with broader child protection and out-of-home care system reforms, and support ACCO-led involvement in the monitoring, review and evaluation of the implementation of FIC recommendations.

LAW REFORM AND ADVOCACY

Advocacy priorities in 2024-25

As the peak legal services provider to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW and the ACT, the ALS is uniquely placed to platform the voices and experiences of the clients and communities we serve in our advocacy for fairer and more effective laws and justice systems.

In 2024-25, a key focus for ALS advocacy was influencing decision-makers to move away from recent punitive trends in youth justice and building support for therapeutic alternatives which support children and divert them away from the criminal legal system.

We engaged directly with politicians and members of parliament, gave evidence to parliamentary inquiries and worked to build alliances and support for our positions within the legal, NGO and ACCO sectors. This included working closely with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services' national campaign to hold governments accountable for the punitive national trend towards locking up more children, and call for policies that promote true community safety by supporting children to thrive.

The most recent focus of our advocacy has been on informing an independent review into *doli incapax* - a critical legal safeguard for our youngest and most vulnerable children dragged into the quicksand of the legal system. The findings of the review are expected to be announced in the second half of 2025 and we will be watching the NSW Government's response with interest.

Expert advice to reviews and inquiries

This year, we made written submissions and gave evidence in more than 80 parliamentary inquiries, law reform processes and reviews, consultations and roundtables in NSW, the ACT and the federal jurisdiction, including major submissions to the following reviews and inquiries:

- Review into Over-representation of First Nations People in the ACT Justice System
- Inquiry into Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System (Commonwealth, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee)
- Inquiry into Family Violence Orders (Commonwealth, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs)
- Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Investigation into Bail Compliance Checks in NSW
- NSW Sentencing Council Review of Good Character in Sentencing
- Review of the Operation of *Doli Incapax* in NSW for Children under 14

We also continued our focus on reforming child protection systems through collaboration and development of the Active Efforts Practice Rules and Guidelines; partnering with AbSec and UNSW on advancing the Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children, a community- and Aboriginal-led restoration practice framework; worked with other ACCOs to develop the Know Your Rights guides, a parent resource for Aboriginal families who have contact with DCJ; and established a partnership with AbSec and DCJ to review and reform key child protection policies over the next two years, under the Child Protection Assessment Partnership.





AUSPICE OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is the peak body and national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS). NATSILS advocates at the national and international level for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within legal systems, striving to ensure equitable access to justice for all communities.

Upholding the principle of self-determination, NATSILS supports ATSILS in exercising their independence as they advocate for their communities and has operated under the auspices of the ALS since 2023.

In 2024-25, NATSILS' key priorities continued to be strengthening ATSILS; transforming justice systems and Closing the Gap; and advocating for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Another focus for NATSILS was building its own capacity through expanding and strengthening its team, and working towards independent incorporation at a future stage to enhance the sustainability of the organisation.

NATSILS is funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Myer Foundation and Reichstein Foundation. NATSILS also was also supported this year by a secondee from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

Working in partnership to transform systems

In 2024-25, NATSILS advanced major reform initiatives through the national Justice Policy Partnership (JPP), National Access to Justice Partnership and other forums.

NATSILS co-chairs the JPP with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. The JPP brings together senior leaders from all state and territory governments, members of the Coalition of Peaks, and independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts to drive national reform to reduce incarceration and transform justice systems under Closing the Gap. In 2024-25, NATSILS focused on strengthening accountability, building sector capacity, and advancing urgent reform in bail, remand, and youth justice:

- We established a new Justice Impact Assessment reporting to the National Joint Council on Closing the Gap – to hold governments accountable by assessing the impact of new laws and policies on the Closing the Gap justice targets;
- We progressed a sector strengthening plan to build a sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled justice sector;
- We commenced work on a disability justice partnership to address systemic barriers for people with disability in the justice system;
- We commenced work on an anti-racism assessment tool to help governments identify and address systemic racism across their justice systems.

NATSILS also co-chaired a national bail and remand reform working group reporting directly to the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG), ensuring the voices of ATSILS and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts shaped recommendations on law reform, bail support, and data governance. The final report and recommendations from the working group will be considered by SCAG in the second half of 2025.

NATSILS continues to work with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and our legal assistance sector partners on long-term reforms under the new National Access to Justice Partnership which will commence on 1 July 2025.

NATSILS is also an active member of the Australian Legal Assistance Forum alongside legal assistance sector peaks First Nations Advocates for Family Violence, Community Legal Centres Australia, National Legal Aid and the Law Council of Australia.

Advocating for justice

NATSILS advocated publicly on issues including accountability for deaths in custody, mass incarceration and youth justice reform, appearing in media including the ABC and the National Indigenous Times.

In April 2025, NATSILS endorsed an early warning and urgent action complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination co-authored by Associate Professor Hannah McGlade with the support of the Human Rights Law Centre, focusing on racial discrimination and human rights violations against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. NATSILS and ATSILS additionally participated in the development of the NGO Coalition Report to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review on Australia's human rights record.

In late May, in response to increasingly punitive legislative reforms across Australia that violate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights and liberty, NATSILS convened a 'Reckoning on Youth Justice' online town hall. It was attended by almost 600 individuals and organisations from across the continent and featured a number of speakers with expert knowledge and lived experience.

NATSILS made submissions and gave evidence to the Commonwealth Legal and Constitutional Affairs Senate Committee Inquiry into Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration System and the Commonwealth Senate Select Committee Inquiry on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations Communities.

NATSILS also continued to advocate for sustainable, needs-based funding for the ATSILS sector, including in its pre-budget submission for the 2025-26 Federal Budget.

ABC NEWS
INTERVIEW
Justice system 'spiralling'
Watch 8m

Watch 8m

LAYING STRONG FUTURE FOUNDATIONS

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF AND SERVICES TO MAXIMISE THEIR IMPACT

Staff learning and development

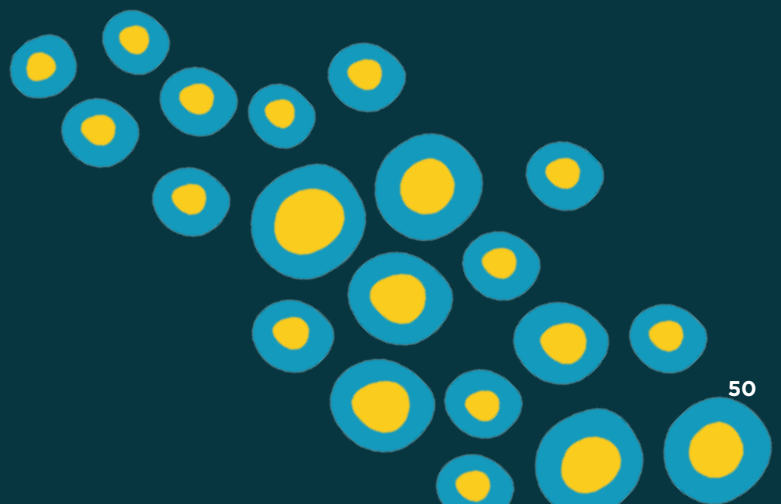
The ALS has made important progress in strengthening how we support our people and build organisational capability.

We implemented a new training platform, giving staff greater access to learning in areas such as cultural competence, trauma-informed practice, youth mental health, and psychosocial risk management. These resources are now embedded into onboarding and continuing development, helping staff to work in culturally safe and client-centred ways.

The 2025 ALS Staff Training and Development Conference brought the whole organisation together for three days of cultural learning, legal education, and professional development. As part of the conference, we introduced our first employee recognition awards to celebrate the contributions of colleagues across ALS. We were honoured to welcome keynote speaker Isaiah Dawe, founder and CEO of ID Know Yourself, who shared his journey growing up in out-of-home care and spoke about supporting children in contact with the child protection and justice systems.

This year we also released a protocol on how to respond to clients in crisis, tailored for our organisation and the needs of our clients, and supporting staff to deal with these sensitive situations. A new mandatory reporting guideline and app is also ensuring staff know what to do when they are concerned about the welfare of a child. Additionally, we introduced the role of Wellbeing and Safety Coordinator, demonstrating our commitment to supporting our staff.

We invested in leadership capability through the Leadership with Carfi program, supporting managers to strengthen engagement, communication, and performance; and partnered with Ashurst to deliver employment law fundamentals training to managers across the ALS.



Organisational review

In late 2023, we commenced an organisational review to determine the best operating structure to enable the ALS to deliver culturally safe services for our communities into the future. Leading the review was Karen Cooper, a proud Kamilaroi woman and Principal Management Consultant at Cooper Consulting. All staff had an opportunity to contribute to the review through surveys and focus groups.

The final report was delivered in late 2024, including findings and recommendations about structures, systems, strategy, processes, staffing, and staff development and culture.

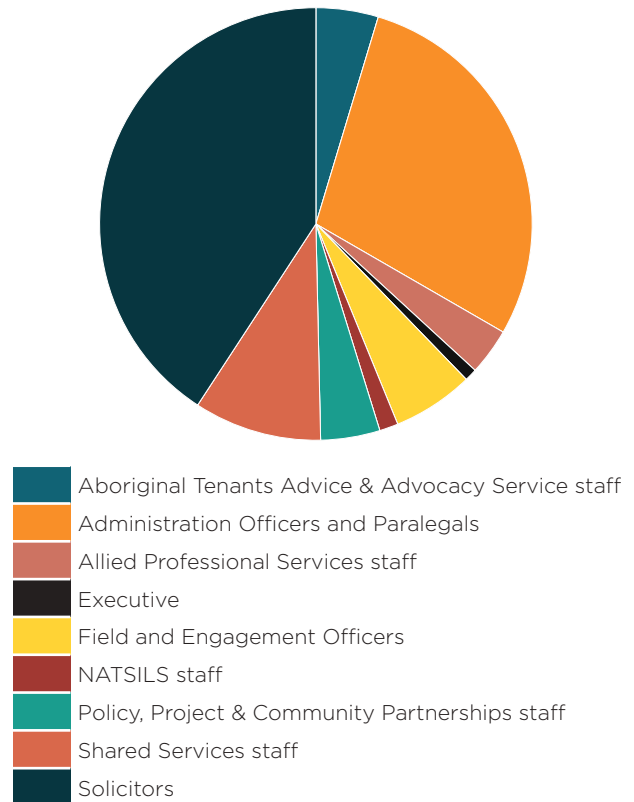
The report points to a workforce that is attracted to the organisation's values and mission and who demonstrate a strong commitment to achieve better outcomes for clients and communities. Staff talked to Karen of their pride and responsibility in protecting the legacy and history of the ALS, and recognised the critical policy, justice and law reform advocacy work of the organisation.

The recommendations range in size, complexity and cost, and many rely on a significant increase in funding, which we are working hard to advocate for. We have been able to implement some projects identified in the review in 2024-25, including increasing the number of Aboriginal people in senior roles; increasing internal communication; revising salary scales; refreshing our organisational policies; strengthening HR, IT, and facilities and fleet teams; and more.

We are committed to continuous improvement of the ALS for our staff, clients and community.

Our team at 30 June 2025

Employee roles



Aboriginality of employees



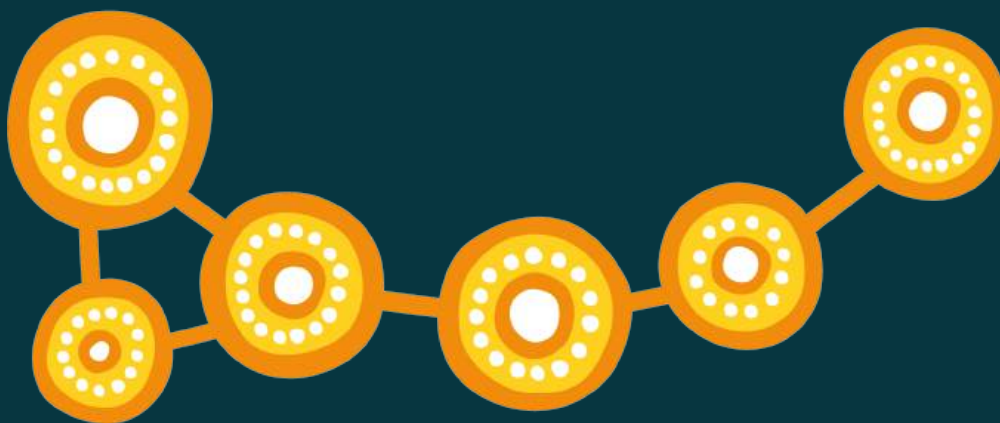
FUNDING OUR WORK

Funding under the National Legal Assistance Partnership

The majority of ALS funding is through the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP), funded by the Australian Government and administered by the NSW Government and ACT Government. The agreement provided funding until 30 June 2025 (succeeded by the National Access to Justice Partnership from 1 July 2025).

The NLAP agreement funded our core legal services in criminal law, care and protection and family law. Additionally, the funding supported the following programs:

- Justice Policy Partnership: to increase our data capability and capacity to participate in this Closing the Gap initiative;
- Coronial inquiries and expensive and complex cases: for the provision of legal assistance in coronial inquiries to families of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the provision of legal assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients involved in complex and/or expensive cases;
- Supporting people with mental health conditions to access the justice system: funding for the Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Unit to provide advocacy and referrals for Aboriginal clients with mental health conditions who are in contact with the criminal justice system;
- Legal assistance for vulnerable women: funding for the delivery of a dedicated legal assistance service to women, with a focus on women experiencing, or at risk of, family, domestic and sexual violence;
- Employment Law Service: a branch of the Civil Law Practice that provides culturally appropriate legal support to Aboriginal people experiencing sexual harassment, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment at work.



Other government and private funding

The ALS received funding from other sources for a range of key legal service and support programs including:

- Funding from the NSW Government through DCJ to support:
 - the Visiting Legal Service and Youth Bail Advocacy Program;
 - ALS work at the Youth Koori Courts in Surry Hills, Parramatta and Dubbo;
 - ALS work to meet increased demand associated with additional judicial resources allocated to the Local and Children’s Court jurisdictions in Moree;
 - the following Closing the Gap programs:
 - Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support
 - Bail Advocacy Program for Women and Children
 - NSW Aboriginal Justice Partnership
 - Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy
 - Therapeutic Pathways for Children
- Funding from the NSW Government through the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (and auspiced via the NSW Aboriginal Land Council to allocate funding to members of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations) for work that includes the ALS’ involvement in Closing the Gap meetings and working groups;
- Funding from the NSW Government through the Department of Fair Trading to support the activities of the Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service (GSATS);
- ACT Government funding for the following programs: Ngurrambai Bail Support, Front-Up, Duty Lawyer, Frontline Service Delivery, and Care & Protection Legal Advocacy Service; and funding for a Disability Liaison Officer and paralegal support;
- Funding from Legal Aid NSW for ALS participation in the Early Appropriate Guilty Plea scheme; care and protection services in regional locations; and the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery program;
- Commonwealth funding through the National Indigenous Australians Agency for our Custody Notification Service and Family Violence Prevention Legal Service based in Nowra and Canberra;
- Funding from the Paul Ramsay Foundation allowing the ALS to auspice the grant for the Bugmy Bar Book Project, and to support the ALS justice reinvestment program.

Fundraising

The ALS received \$900,000 in community donations and foundation grants in 2024-25, representing 1.5% of our total income.

We are sincerely grateful to the many individuals, businesses and foundations who contribute to our work, including people who donate monthly in support of our mission.

Donations and philanthropic contributions play a vital role in extending the reach of our core legal and community programs. In 2024-25, community donations helped sustain critical services such as the Custody Notification Service, the Early Appropriate Guilty Plea scheme, and other frontline legal assistance programs. These funds ensured Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could continue accessing legal support when and where it was needed most.

Join the fight for justice with a monthly donation: www.alsnswact.org.au/monthly

Thank you to every individual,
business, foundation and
government agency that
funded our work in 2024-25.

FINANCIALS

We are pleased to present an overview of the ALS financial performance and financial position for 30 June 2025.

Notes to financial statements

1. The financial statements on pages 54-55 include transactions from the following auspiced service: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).
2. The Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income and Statement of Financial Position are an extract from the full Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2025. The extracted Statements should be read in conjunction with the notes to financial statements. The full Financial Statements are available upon request.

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income

For the year ended 30 June 2025	2025	2024
	\$	\$
REVENUE AND INCOME		
Revenue from operations	57,618,661	46,320,514
Donations & charitable funding	908,951	807,808
Other income	1,567,285	1,408,619
	60,094,897	48,536,941
EXPENSES		
Employee benefit expense	(45,561,648)	(35,709,570)
Professional expenses	(2,717,814)	(2,643,409)
Occupancy expenses	(1,988,763)	(1,166,964)
IT & Telecommunications	(2,153,155)	(1,664,582)
Administration expense	(529,994)	(512,642)
Governance & finance expenses	(346,621)	(393,723)
Travel & accommodation expenses	(1,090,385)	(830,408)
Motor vehicle expenses	(740,980)	(579,708)
Depreciation expense	(1,728,595)	(1,796,614)
Interest expenses	(372,906)	(385,273)
Other expenses	(3,017,320)	(2,479,400)
	(60,248,181)	(48,162,293)
(Deficit)/surplus for the year	(153,284)	374,648
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	(153,284)	374,648

Statement of financial position

For the year ended 30 June 2025	2025	2024
	\$	\$
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	13,003,293	20,385,415
Trade and other receivables	2,325,008	1,297,756
Other financial assets	24,107,120	25,609,135
Other current assets	1,956,131	688,111
	41,391,552	47,980,417
Non-current assets classified as held for sale	359,707	359,707
Total current assets	41,751,259	48,340,124
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	1,150,299	1,171,357
Right-of-use assets	5,417,256	4,956,308
Total non-current assets	6,567,555	6,127,665
Total assets	48,318,814	54,467,789
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Payables and accruals	2,905,112	2,597,678
Contract liabilities	18,848,553	26,215,631
Lease liabilities	1,772,880	1,440,914
Employee benefits	4,716,569	4,331,803
Provisions	863,000	863,000
Total current liabilities	29,106,114	35,449,026
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities	4,034,547	3,769,729
Employee benefits	304,108	248,472
Provisions	512,886	486,119
Total non-current liabilities	4,851,541	4,504,320
Total liabilities	33,957,655	39,953,346
Net assets	14,361,159	14,514,443
FUNDS		
Initial contribution for members	1,280,271	1,280,271
Assets reserve	1,533,228	1,533,228
Accumulated funds	11,547,660	11,700,944
Total funds	14,361,159	14,514,443

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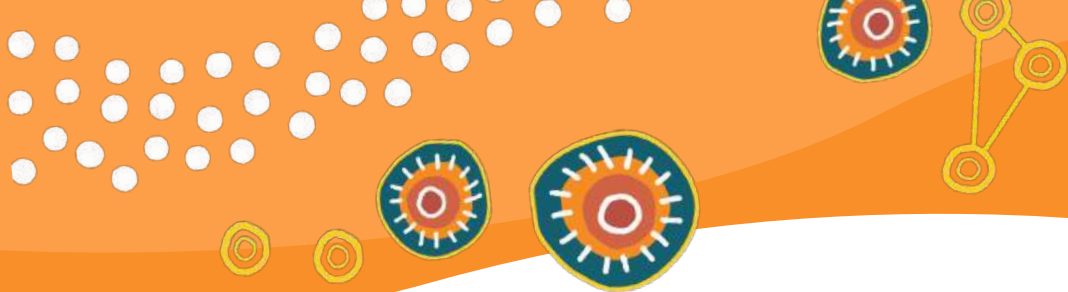
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**Aboriginal
Legal Service**
(NSW/ACT) Limited



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