



STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

JEREMY HANSON CSC MLA (CHAIR), MARISA PATERSON MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), JO CLAY MLA

Inquiry into referred 2019–20 Annual and Financial Reports and Budget Estimates 2020-21
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Peter Cain MLA:

Ref: Budget Statements D, Legal Aid ACT, output class 1: Legal Aid Services; Legal Aid ACT Annual Report 2019-20

In relation to: Funding for Legal Aid ACT

1. Page 61 of Budget Statements D identifies that Legal Aid faces growing demand for legal assistance. Although it appears total funding has increased by \$1.376m since the previous financial year (Budget Statements D, p. 68), over one third of that is earmarked for specific programs such as the Therapeutic Care Court and the Disability Justice Strategy.
 - a. Is Legal Aid's 2020-21 budget sufficient to meet the increased demand for legal support?
2. As a result of COVID-19, it is noted on p. 6 of the Legal Aid Annual Report 2019-20 that calls to the Helpline have increased considerably. How much has demand for the Helpline increased on previous years?
3. Compared to previous years, has the proportion of callers with matters related to domestic, family, and sexual violence gone up as a cause of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. Can you confirm that the target for the number of Discrete Assistance services provided by Legal Aid ACT (which includes funding for the helpline) is lower for 2020-21 FY than the Audited Outcome for 2019-20 FY? (Page 67, Budget Statements D)
5. Page 21 of the Legal Aid 2019-20 Annual Report confirms that in March 2020 the organisation launched a Tenancy Advice Service, in addition to their other services. How much did it cost for Legal Aid ACT to provide tenancy advice in the 2019-20 FY?
6. How much is in the 2020-21 budget for Legal Aid ACT to provide tenancy advice services?
7. Noting previous questions about declining funding to Legal Aid, how will the organisation provide tenancy advice services going forward?
8. How much of the Discrete Assistance funding in the 2020-21 Budget is allocated towards Legal Aid ACT's helpline?
9. Can you provide an outline of the allocation of Discrete Assistance funding to specific programs and outputs of Legal Aid ACT?



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

QON No. 80

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10. What percentage of calls are matters relating to domestic, family and sexual violence?
11. Please provide the total number of calls relating to matters of domestic, family and sexual violence for the reporting years of:
 - a. 2017-18;
 - b. 2018-19;
 - c. 2019-20; and
 - d. the 2020-21 reporting period to date.
12. Compared to previous years, has the proportion of callers with matters related to domestic, family, and sexual violence gone up as a cause of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
13. Can you confirm that the target for the number of Discrete Assistance services provided by Legal Aid ACT (which includes funding for the helpline) is lower for 2020-21 FY than the Audited Outcome for 2019-20 FY? (Page 67, Budget Statements D)

Shane Rattenbury MLA: The answer to the Member's questions are as follows:–

1. Dr John Boersig, Chief Executive Officer of the ACT Legal Aid Commission (Legal Aid ACT), addressed this question at the estimates hearing on 19 February 2021. From paragraph three of page 61 to paragraph two of page 62 of the transcript, Dr Boersig speaks of the increased demand for legal assistance services and Legal Aid ACT optimisation of funding to provide as many services to as many individuals as possible. From paragraph 6 of page 63 to paragraph two of page 64, Dr Boersig speaks of Legal Aid ACT's response to the reduction of funding from some sources. The ACT Government will consider the funding needs of the legal assistance sector holistically in the 2021-22 ACT Budget process.
2. In 2018-2019, Legal Aid ACT's Helpline and Chatline provided services to 17,546 individuals. In 2019-2020 this increased to 21,099. As of 2 March 2021 of the 2020-2021 period, the Helpline and Chatline had provided services to 18,176 individuals. For the full year of 2020-2021, if the current trends continue it is projected that the Legal Aid ACT's Helpline and Chatline will provide services to 27,000 individuals.
3. Legal Aid ACT has provided the following information in relation to the proportion of Helpline and Chatline users with matters relating to domestic, family and sexual violence (noting that the Chatline service commenced in 2018-2019):

	Helpline and Chatline Services	Domestic violence	Family violence	Sexual violence
17-18	15,761	1.0%	1.4%	0.1%
18-19	17,546	1.6%	3.5%	0.2%
19-20	21,099	2.4%	4.2%	0.2%
20-21 (As of 02/03/21 YTD)	18,176	4.3%	5.7%	0.2%



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Comparing calendar years, Legal Aid ACT provided the following information in relation to the percentage increase of Helpline and Chatline services relating to family violence:

Calendar Year	Family Violence Matters	Increase
2019	695	
2020	1,344	93%

Legal Aid ACT provided the following information in relation to the percentage increase of Helpline and Chatline services relating to domestic and sexual violence:

Calendar Year	Domestic and Sexual Violence Matters	Increase
2019	391	
2020	943	141%

4. Legal Aid ACT has confirmed that the audited number of discrete services offered in 2019-2020, 41,618, exceeds the target of 40,000 for 2020-2021. The target for 2020-2021 was determined in consideration of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of discrete services offered by Legal Aid ACT in 2019-2020. The target for 2020-2021 exceeds the 2019-2020 period's target of 37,000.
5. The tenancy advice service (TAS) offered by Legal Aid ACT commenced on 1 March 2020. Legal Aid ACT estimates that for the period of 1 July 2019 to 29 February 2020, tenancy assistance on the Helpline/Chatline cost Legal Aid ACT approximately \$18,500. For the period 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2020 Legal Aid ACT received a total of \$156,057 to provide the TAS. Accordingly, the total costs of tenancy advice for Legal Aid ACT in the 2019-2020 fiscal year was approximately \$174,557.
6. Legal Aid ACT's 2020-2021 budget allocates a total of \$475,370 for the TAS.
7. In order to provide legal assistance services to as many members of the ACT community as possible, Legal Aid ACT will continue to optimise the funding received for the TAS. The current funding for the TAS will conclude in 2022-2023.
8. Under the 2020-2021 budget, Legal Aid ACT allocated approximately \$615,000 of its total funding pool to the Helpline and Chatline services. This employs 1 legal officer and 6 paralegals FTE.
9. Legal Aid ACT has provided the following information in relation to the allocation of discrete assistance funding to specific programs under the 2020-2021 budget and the output of these services:
 - \$475,370 is allocated for the TAS.
 - Approximately \$615,000 is allocated to the Helpline and Chatline services.
 - Approximately \$820,000 has been allocated to the Community Liaison Unit.



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All data collected by Legal Aid ACT is set out in its Annual Report. Legal Aid ACT is not required to report, nor does it currently disaggregate, the funding used in the Litigation and General practices for discrete assistance services as against all other services (such as legal education and representation services).

10. Please see the answer to question three in relation to the percentage of Helpline and Chatline users with matters relating to domestic, family and sexual violence, and note this does not include discrete services provided otherwise by Legal Aid ACT, some of which involves telephone assistance.
11. Legal Aid ACT provided information, advice and assistance either in person, by telephone or by Chatline to 41,618 individuals in 2019-2020. These figures are not included in the number Helpline and Chatline calls set out below:

	Total Discrete Services	Helpline/Chatline Services	DV	FV	SV
17-18	34,418	15,761	150	216	18
18-19	37,297	17,546	273	608	32
19-20	41,618	21,099	499	883	35
20-21 (As of 02/03/21)	29,738	18,176	787	1031	29

*Note: Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence figures derived exclusively from matters dealt with by the Helpline and Chatline services.

12. Please see the response to question three.

13. Please see the response to question four.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Signature:

Date: 24/3/21

By the Attorney-General, Shane Rattenbury MLA