

# ACT HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW – REPORT SUMMARY

## HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE ACT

The ACT Health Justice Partnerships (HJP) started in 2018 with a partnership between the Office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety (OCGFS) and members from the health, community services, legal, and government sectors.

Research shows that women who are pregnant, or have very young children, are at a higher risk of experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV). The HJP services were set up to make it easier for women to access legal and other wraparound supports. The HJP provides free, specialised community law services at hospitals and health care centres.

The HJP was set up in three locations:

- Centenary Hospital for Women and Children (Centenary Hospital), with lawyers from Legal Aid ACT (Legal Aid)
- Calvary Public Hospital Bruce (Calvary Hospital) with lawyers from Women’s Legal Centre ACT (Women’s Legal Centre)
- Gungahlin Child and Family Centre (GCFC) with lawyers from the Women’s Legal Centre.

## PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The HJP was reviewed to find out about:

- the outcomes of the HJP for the people who use it
- the impact the HJP has on the Legal and Health partners
- the contribution HJP makes to the broader service system.

## METHODS

The reviewers spoke to:

- medical and administrative staff from each of the hospitals (17 people)
- legal staff from the HJPs (7 people)
- people who had used the services (28 people).

The reviewers also looked at reports about how many people were using the services in each location and did a survey with the people who work with the HJP.

## FINDINGS

The review found that the HJP’s are:

- Providing legal support for women who may be experiencing DFV. In total, the HJPs have delivered approximately 1,205 occasions of service to clients.

- Delivering training to employees in the hospitals and child and family centres where HJP is being delivered. This is to equip staff with the skills to respond effectively if they suspect someone might be experiencing DFV.
- Increasing lawyers' awareness of the health system and how they can intervene in DFV.

The review found that the HJP helps people (mostly women) by providing:

- a new and easier pathway to gain legal information and support
- support without fear of a police or child protection response (because lawyers don't have the same mandatory reporting requirement as hospital staff)
- connections to other support services to address their wellbeing needs
- advice so that women could feel empowered and confident about options available to them
- legal protections such as assisting with Domestic Violence Orders
- connections with crisis support services so women can leave, or remove from the home, a violent partner.

## WHAT HJP USERS SAID

They would understand everything and try to resolve everything immediately – I didn't have to wait for anything. My lawyer was very humble and understood my situation very well – particularly as a mother, as a woman and as someone who could speak my language. She understood me properly – I was so happy and satisfied. I have received a lot. I've got my children back, I've got my house back and whatever misunderstandings there were, they have been resolved. - Client



Legal Aid understood my problems 100%. They understood my worries and were actually able to help me with what I wanted them to do. They had a really high level of understanding of me and my issues and demonstrated zero judgement. - Client

**Validated and understood**

She was wonderful, she actually seemed to get where I was coming from. There was no having to reclarify or reexplain this. They had the understanding of the domestic violence thing, they were one of the organisations that really helped me, get myself back on track...she was really good, she was like a doctor with a good bedside manner. - Client

**Got the help they needed**

When I am not feeling safe I need somebody to stand up for me. Not just talking to me but to understand what I need, you know. Support me through and she did that. She was asking me what I am feeling? What is new? It was really good actually. I have somebody next to me. - Client



**Empowered and confident**

My mental health has been improving. Now I have someone I can get information from. Before that I was not sure what I was going to do with the kids and custody, especially with the property settlement. Now I know even though our house is not in my name, I am still entitled to get my share... I have confidence, I can negotiate with him with confidence. - Client



She gave me confidence, total confidence where I didn't have trust in myself at all. I was planning on going back to my country, but she supported me to stay here and bring all my kids. She let me know I have rights here. I didn't know that I had any rights here. I was under control, I thought at the beginning I thought I would be under his control forever. - Client

