

Soaring SA Demand For Legal Assistance

New figures show record numbers of South Australians are seeking assistance from the Legal Services Commission.

The Commission's Annual Report has been tabled in State Parliament by Attorney-General John Rau. It shows that in 2014/15 the Commission responded to more than 100,000 enquiries and legal questions. In 2014/15 the Commission:

- **Provided 126,048 legal services - 8% more than in 2013/14.**
- **Handled a record number of telephone legal advice calls - more than 80,000. This service is free to all South Australians.**
- **Provided 25,122 legal advice appointments (free to all South Australians).**
- **Provided 16,062 grants of aid – 10% more than in 2013/14. More than 2/3 of legal aid grants were for cases handled by private legal practitioners.**
- **Delivered 16,836 duty lawyer services at Magistrates Courts, Family Law Courts and the Youth Court. There was a 15% rise in criminal duty solicitor services, and a 10% increase in family duty lawyer services.**
- Distributed 83,381 legal education publications to South Australians.
- Conducted legal education sessions for 15,632 people. These are aimed at disadvantaged groups with special legal needs.

Funding Cut

"The annual report highlights growing demand for legal assistance, albeit at a time of reducing government funding," said Commission Director Gabrielle Canny. "The Commission provided 126,000 legal services – an 8% increase on the previous financial year. That includes nearly 17,000 duty lawyer services and 25,000 legal advice appointments. These are big numbers revealing high demand for legal assistance among South Australians.

"Unfortunately, however, the Commission's future Commonwealth and State funding has been cut by \$10m over the next four years."

Family Law

In 2014/15, a total of 1,638 unrepresented clients were assisted by our Family Law Duty Lawyer program (a 10% rise). These lawyers are present at the Family Law Courts to:

- Assist unrepresented parties to manage their court appearance.
- Help with legal aid applications.
- Refer clients (who are ineligible for legal aid) to private family law practitioners or other community services.

“The Commission ran more than 800 Family Dispute Resolution conferences in 2014/15,” Ms Canny said. “These lawyer-assisted conferences often involve some of the most complex family law disputes - so it’s pleasing to note that our conferences have a 75% success rate.

“The Commission provided Independent Children’s Lawyers in 339 matters in 2014/15. These lawyers represent a child’s interests in complex parenting cases before the Family Law Courts.”

Online Legal Information

“In this period, the Commission’s online legal resources received more than **2-million** website page views,” Ms Canny said. “Plus, there was a **60%** increase in the numbers of people taking part in our legal education *webinars*. They’ve proved particularly popular in regional areas such as Port Lincoln, Mount Gambier and the Riverland.

“The webinars focus on a variety of topics such as family law and child support, as well as legal issues of particular interest to seniors, young people and migrants. Our consumer protection law sessions are also popular, as well as those covering Advance Care Directives and wills.

“During the sessions, a Commission lawyer delivers a presentation seen simultaneously by a live audience and an audience joining in by webcast. Both audiences can ask questions in real time.”

To view the annual report, go to <http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au/news.php> (if there are problems with the link, contact Jeremy).

Commission Director Gabrielle Canny is available for interview

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