



LawAccess NSW



Access to Justice >>

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1. Introduction

The Communication Strategy aims to ensure that socially and economically disadvantaged people are aware of the availability of free legal assistance and how to contact LawAccess NSW.

2. Background

LawAccess NSW was launched in July 2002, the result of a partnership between the Attorney General's Department of NSW, Legal Aid Commission of NSW, Law Society of NSW and NSW Bar Association. Acting as the 'first port of call' for legal assistance LawAccess NSW:

- Provides legal information, managed referrals and legal advice to members of the public who have a legal problem in NSW.
- Works with other legal assistance services to streamline the provision of services to customers.
- Collects data on legal problems in the community.

LawAccess NSW provides its services via a centralised contact centre facility located at Parramatta and via its website, LawAccess Online (www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au).

LawAccess NSW through its call centre model provides effective high volume legal assistance to the community. LawAccess prioritises groups traditionally disadvantaged in accessing free legal services:

- people from rural, regional and remote areas
- Aboriginal communities
- people from a non english speaking background
- people with a disability
- people at risk (domestic violence, people in custody, homeless,)

LawAccess NSW has assisted over 531,000 customers and provided over 63,600 legal advice sessions since it commenced in September 2001¹. In 2006 LawAccess NSW assisted over 117,500 customers, provided 13,838 advice sessions and received 202,900 visitors to LawAccess Online.

3. Need for a communication program

The findings of the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW' report *Justice Made to Measure: NSW legal needs survey in disadvantaged areas, March 2006*² demonstrate that there remains a high level of unmet legal need, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Awareness of free legal assistance services appears to be very low, with a strong trend towards the use of family and friends as advisors³ or to ignore legal issues⁴.

The challenge for LawAccess NSW is to raise awareness of the service as a source of legal assistance whilst meeting the resulting increase in demand⁵.

¹ Data to March 2007

² The survey of 2,431 participants found over two thirds had experienced one or more legal event/s in the previous 12 months suggesting a high level of legal need across the 6 disadvantaged areas

³ When faced with a legal problem there was widespread use of non-legal advisors including professionals in health, counselling, welfare, government and schools.

⁴ The Survey found that a common response to a legal event was to do nothing in one third of legal events. This rises to 43.3% for criminal events. Of the 50% that sought assistance only 12% sought assistance from traditional legal services and only 0.2% from LawAccess NSW.

⁵ Justice Made to Measure: NSW legal needs survey in disadvantaged areas, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, March 2006. Barriers to seeking assistance included: 18.4% difficulty getting through on the telephone (time in queue), 17% delay in getting a response, 11% difficulty getting a local appointment.

The Law and Justice Foundation's study confirmed that legal problems are less likely to be resolved if people take no action. Improving knowledge of available assistance has the potential to:

- minimise the chances of legal problems escalating or triggering further legal problems
- reduce the risk of legal problems causing or exacerbating stress or ill-health
- increase people's satisfaction with the outcomes of their legal problems
- improve access to justice

'Wide advertising and dissemination of the LawAccess NSW telephone number has the potential to provide a simple and effective gateway to legal services' Justice Made to Measure: NSW legal needs survey in disadvantaged areas, March 2006 pg. xxv

Aboriginal communities tend to be particularly disadvantaged. Data from the LawAccess NSW Customer Satisfaction Survey reveals that the percentage of Aboriginal customers has dropped from 5% in 2004 to 3% in the 2007 indicating the need to raise awareness of the service within Aboriginal communities.

4. Previous communication activity

LawAccess NSW is promoted through internal and external communication activities:

- White pages listings, including a listing in the Community Services section throughout NSW.
- LawAccess Online.
- LawAccess posters in local courts, local libraries and legal aid commission offices.
- Links from LawLink, Legal Aid Commission, Law Society and Bar Association websites.
- LawAccess walletcards in local libraries, local courts and legal aid commission offices.
- Inclusion in the Department of Education and Training 'Next: Life after school' magazine which is distributed to 70,000 school leavers each year.
- Joint initiatives with professional bodies and stakeholders, for example the College of General Practitioners, Co-operative Legal Service Delivery Model and Aboriginal Legal Service.
- Presentations to Local Courts, Legal Aid, Office of Industrial Relations, Office of Fair Trading and Centrelink staff.

Past communication programs have targeted local assistance services and have included regional outreach, mail-out to assistance services, presentations and training sessions, agricultural fairs and Law Week events.

The 2007 Customer Satisfaction Survey reveals that customers found out about LawAccess through:

- White Pages (16.4%)
- Internet (13.9%)⁶
- Legal Aid Commission offices (12.1%)
- Local Courts (10.9%)

LawAccess NSW will continue to promote the service through these methods.

⁶ The Internet as a source of referral has increased from 3.3% in 2004 to 13.9% in 2007.

In 2004 and 2005 LawAccess NSW conducted presentations to local assistance services including Centrelink and Office of Fair Trading staff in Broken Hill, Dubbo, Orange, Bathurst, Lismore and Tweed Heads. The percentage of regional and rural customers contacting LawAccess increased by 7.8% between 2003 and 2005.

LawAccess has found that mail-outs to local government and non-government organisations did not translate to requests for further promotional materials.

5. Key issues

The communication program will be developed:

- to be culturally and linguistically appropriate
- in consultation with specialist units such as the Aboriginal Programs Unit and Diversity Services
- in consultation with key stakeholders to enable utilisation of existing local networks and co-ordination of activities
- to target non government organisations
- to assist non-legal assistance services to identify a legal issue
- to manage expectations of the services provided by LawAccess and the potential demand for legal representation

6. Communication aim

The aim of the Communication Strategy is to respond to unmet legal need by:

- informing services assisting targeted communities about the availability of free legal assistance, including what may constitute a legal problem
- ensuring that services trust LawAccess NSW and therefore refer clients
- encouraging the services to contact or refer clients to LawAccess NSW for legal assistance

7. Target audience

Primary Target Audience

The primary target audience are people in NSW who are experiencing a legal problem. In particular:

- people from rural, regional and remote areas
- Aboriginal communities
- people from a non english speaking background
- people with a disability
- people at risk (domestic violence, people in custody, homeless,)

Stakeholders

The Communication Strategy targets the government and non-government services used by the primary target audience, to raise awareness of free legal assistance and what constitutes a legal problem.

8. Proposed communication program

Rural, regional and remote communities

- Regional outreach in 6 rural and regional areas targeting local assistance services including Police (domestic violence liaison officers), youth workers, counselling services, charities, rural financial counsellors, school counsellors, doctors, Local Courts, Local Councils and NCOSS Regional Forum members.
- Promotion through local radio, newspapers and newsletters in rural and regional areas.
- Training sessions with government assistance services including CentreLink and Fair Trading.
- Expansion of the GP Communication Pilot.

Aboriginal communities

- Development of a factsheet for Aboriginal communities in consultation with the Aboriginal Programs Unit.
- Training and consultation with Aboriginal Client Service Specialists, Circle Sentencing Project Officers and CJC Aboriginal Mediators - July 2007.
- Participation by Indigenous customer service officers in the Aboriginal Community Justice Groups Conference June – 2007.

People from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community

- Development of a targeted Communication Strategy in consultation with the Diversity Service Unit.

People with a disability

- Development of a Communication Strategy in consultation with NCOSS, focusing on older people.

People at risk

- Development of a referral protocol with the NSW Police for victims of domestic violence.

Use of alternative channels

- Develop the 2nd edition of Guide to the Law on the Internet to promote LawZone.

9. Evaluation

Strategy	Evaluation
Rural, regional and remote communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage increase of customers from outside metropolitan Sydney ■ Percentage increase of customers from a regional area following the outreach ■ Feedback from non legal assistance services
Aboriginal communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage increase of customers identifying as Aboriginal in the Customer Satisfaction Survey
People from a CALD background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage increase of customers from a CALD background ■ Percentage increase of customers using Telephone Interpreter Service
People with a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage increase of customers with a disability and older people from the Customer Satisfaction Survey
People at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage increase of customers with a domestic violence matter
Use of Alternative channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percentage increase in visits to LawZone

10. Project Management

The following officers are responsible for the implementation of the Communication Strategy.

Role	Responsibility
Service Development Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ manage the communication program ▪ organise and conduct regional outreaches ▪ conduct training sessions with regional government agencies ▪ develop the Communication Strategy with Diversity Services ▪ develop the Communication Strategy with disability groups
Director, LawAccess NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ manage the development of communication strategies with the Aboriginal Programs Unit ▪ manage the development of the referral protocol with NSW Police
Project Officer – Service Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop factsheet for Aboriginal communities

11. Budget

REVENUE	2007-2008	2008-2009
Budget	LawAccess NSW	LawAccess NSW
Advertising and Publicity	12,331	12,331
Travel	5,000	5,000
Design and Printing	5,654	5,654
TOTAL REVENUE	22,985	22,985
EXPENSES		
Marketing strategy		
Regional outreach - 6 regional centres		
Travel	5,400	5,562
Car Hire	1,260	1,298
Accommodation/ meals and incidentals	3,000	3,090
Other initiatives		
White pages advertising	16,465	16,958
Design and printing costs	5,654	5,654
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	31,779	32,562
NET POSITION	-8,794	-9,577
PPF Funding	8,794	9,577

12. Timeframes

The Communication Strategy will be implemented over 2007-2008. Six regional outreaches are planned for 2007-2008 with a further six in 2008-2009, which will ensure coverage of the state.