

Legal Issues

Legal advice and government services complaints



Matters often arise which require a legal opinion. Brief, free and low cost assistance is available from a range of services.

Community legal services help South Australians to access legal advice and assistance when they can't afford to hire a lawyer. These services are offered through the Legal Services Commission, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement and Community Legal Centres.

Specialist legal advice services are offered for women, people requiring assistance with welfare rights and social security issues, employment, elder abuse, domestic family violence matters, or requiring mediation.

This fact sheet lists agencies and programs providing legal information, referral and advice, and also those assisting people who have a complaint about government-funded services.

Legal Services Commission of SA

The Commission offers free advice to the general public on most legal matters at any of its offices. It is also the first point of contact for people seeking community legal services. Ring the **Legal Helpline on 1300 366 424** (Monday to Friday 9am-4:30pm) for preliminary information, advice and referral, or make an appointment with any of these offices:

- **Adelaide city, tel. 8111 5555**
- **Elizabeth, tel. 8111 5400**
- **Noarlunga, tel. 8111 5340**
- **Port Adelaide, tel. 8111 5460**
- **Port Augusta, tel. 8686 2200**
- **Whyalla, tel. 8620 8500**

Online legal chat and basic legal information is available at www.lsc.sa.gov.au.

The Commission has lawyers on duty at many courts across South Australia. Call the Legal Helpline before you go to court. A duty lawyer can give you legal information and advice, and, in some cases, represent you that day. A duty lawyer can also help you apply for a grant of legal aid for another lawyer to represent you in an ongoing way. Further information about help at court can be found at

https://lsc.sa.gov.au/cb_pages/helpatcourt.php

The Commission's Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS) provides duty lawyer and social support services to people with family law matters who have been affected by family violence. Commission's duty lawyers are available at the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.

Community Legal Centres

The centres listed below provide free general legal advice, assistance and referral to people who might not otherwise get the help they need.

www.clcsa.org.au/community-legal-centres

- **Northern Community Legal Service Inc.** (servicing the northern Adelaide suburbs), **tel. 8281 6911; <http://northernlegal.org.au/>**
- **Uniting Communities Law Centre** (Adelaide CBD, inner north, inner south, eastern suburbs, and Adelaide Hills). **tel. 8202 5960 or 1300 886 220; www.unitingcommunities.org**
- **WestSide Lawyers** (Adelaide western suburbs, Mid North and Outback regions), **tel. 8340 9009** (Hindmarsh and Port Pirie offices), www.westsidelawyers.net

Community Justice Services SA

(www.communityjusticesa.org.au) operates the following centres:

- **Southern Community Legal Centre**
(Christies Beach office covering the Southern metro area), **tel. 8384 5222**
- **Limestone Coast Community Justice Centre**
(Mount Gambier office), **tel. 8723 1396**
- **Riverland Community Justice Centre** (Berri office), **tel. 8582 4998**

Women's Legal Service (SA)

Provides legal information, referral to services, specialist legal advice and representation. It helps with family law, child support, divorce, navigating support for family violence, etc. It operates at the head office (Adelaide), and several metropolitan and country outreaches **Tel. 8221 5553 (intake); 1800 816 349 (country callers); www.wlssa.org.au.**

Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc.

Provides comprehensive legal advice and assistance through its staff lawyers and, where appropriate, private lawyers, to people of Aboriginal descent.

Tel. 1800 643 222; www.alrm.org.au.
Offices located in Adelaide (**8113 3777**), Port Augusta (**8113 3788**), Port Lincoln (**0447 618 292**) and Ceduna (**8113 3799**)

Roma Mitchell Community Legal Centre

This Norwood-based volunteer-run service is involved with reconciliation and human rights projects. It also operates an evening advisory service. **Tel. 8362 1199.**

Family Violence Legal Service - Aboriginal Corporation (SA)

FVLSAC is a free community legal service assisting Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and/or sexual assault in South Australia.

Offices in Port Augusta (**1800 111 052, 8641 2195**), Port Lincoln (**1800 309 912, 8683 1896**) and Ceduna (**1800 839 059, 8625 3800**).
www.fvlsac.org.au

Mediation

Many problems with neighbours or community organisations can be resolved or avoided by maintaining clear communication. Legal action may make relations worse and should only be taken as a last resort. It is generally advisable to come to an agreement or compromise with the other party personally or with the help of an impartial mediator. **Uniting Communities Law Centre – Mediation** can help the parties to a dispute to come to a resolution without the costs of going to court.

Tel. 8202 5960 or 1300 886 220 (country callers);

www.unitingcommunities.org/service/legal-services/

Social security (welfare rights) issues

Operating across South Australia, **Uniting Communities Welfare Rights Service** can help with appealing a decision about the payments or pensions you receive. This may include Disability Support Pension, Family Tax Benefit or JobSeeker. It can also assist with appeals to the Administrative Review Tribunal.

The service is available to people on a government benefit, living in South Australia, aged 15 and over. **Tel. 8202 5960 (1300 886 220** for country callers);

www.unitingcommunities.org/service/legal-services/

Magistrates Court Legal Advice Service

MCLAS is a free service run by Adelaide Law School students supervised by experienced lawyers at the Adelaide Magistrates Court. The service only deals with disputes that fall within the minor civil claims jurisdiction (civil dispute with a value of up to \$12,000). The types of matters dealt with include but are not limited to: damage to your property (i.e. your car in a car accident), money you have loaned to someone and has not been paid back, being owed wages by an employer, disputes with a neighbour.

The service does NOT deal with criminal matters, major civil matters, family law or personal injury claims. **Tel. 8204 2444**,

<https://law.adelaide.edu.au/free-legal-clinics/magistrates-court-legal-advice-service>

University of Adelaide Legal Outreach Service

This free service assists clients in managing their own cases, writing letters, drafting documents, negotiating and researching the law. Legal issues covered include child support, debt recovery, fines, restraining orders, housing, formal complaints, motor vehicle accident claims, domestic violence, property matters, compensations, etc. Book an appointment by phoning **8313 7496**;

<https://law.adelaide.edu.au/free-legal-clinics/adelaide-legal-outreach-service>

UniSA Legal Advice Clinic

The University of South Australia's Legal Advice Clinic provides advice to the general public on a range of matters including criminal, family, debt claims, car accidents, tenancy, and neighbourhood disputes. It is staffed by law students under the supervision of qualified legal practitioners.

The Clinic offers free legal advice services at UniSA City West campus by appointment (**Tel. 8302 7436** to book).

<https://unisa.edu.au/legal-advice-clinic>

Flinders Legal Centre

The Centre is staffed by Flinders University Law student interns and recent graduates, who can provide legal advice and information. These interns and graduates work closely with experienced supervising solicitors. It offers free, independent, confidential, and virtual access to legal services.

It helps with understanding the relevant law, options for resolving your dispute, referring you to other relevant agencies; or managing your own claim.

Appointments are online or in person; bookings can be made through the Flinders Legal Centre webpage:

www.flinders.edu.au/engage/community/clinics/flinders-legal-centre. Tel. 7421 9985

Consumer Credit Law Centre SA

This Uniting Communities' service helps people to resolve problems with credit (loan disputes, mortgage stress or financial hardship). This may be directly with a bank or another lender. It is a free service and provides access to specialist legal advice, financial counselling and legal representation. **Tel. 8202 5960 (1300 886 220** (country callers);

www.unitingcommunities.org/service/legal-services/consumer-credit

JusticeNet SA

Independent, not-for-profit legal service which helps individuals who cannot afford a lawyer or get the help they need elsewhere.

Programs include:

- *Pro Bono Connect* – referral service that can connect you with a lawyer to help you for free. The degree of assistance that your pro bono lawyer can provide will depend on the nature of your legal problem and other factors. Application form available on line. **Tel. 8313 5005**
- *Federal Court Self-Representation Service* - provides direct legal advice and assistance to people representing themselves in Federal Courts. **Tel. 8410 2280 or 1800 283 661 (for callers outside Adelaide)**
- *Refugee and Asylum Seekers* – JusticeNet SA coordinates free legal help for refugees and asylum seekers who are applying for judicial review. Application form available on line.
- *Homeless Legal* – outreach service providing advice about the person's rights, legal options and help with resolving legal issues that may be having a negative impact on the client's life

and housing. See outreach sites and contacts on the website.

www.justicenet.org.au

Ombudsmen and other dispute resolution services

As a general rule these services advise people to first try to resolve their issues directly with the organisation, documenting all steps taken, including contacts made and copies of any letters sent. If no satisfactory resolution is achieved contact the relevant complaint service. For complaints services regarding provision of telecommunications, energy, water, building and housing services see our fact sheet *Consumer protection*.

Commonwealth Ombudsman investigates complaints from people who believe they have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by an Australian Government department agency or prescribed private sector organisation, including Australia Post, Services Australia (Medicare, Centrelink, Child Support), the National Disability Insurance Agency and the private health insurance sector.

Complaints can be made online by completing the complaint form at www.ombudsman.gov.au. If unable to do so or for other information, phone **1300 362 072**

Inspector-General of Taxation (IGT) and Taxation Ombudsman - handles complaints about the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the Tax Practitioners Board (TPB). An online complaints form is available at <https://www.igt.gov.au>. Assisted telephone contact is available to non-English speakers through interpreting services and to people who have hearing or speech impairments through the National Relay Service.

Ombudsman SA investigates complaints about South Australian government departments and authorities (e.g. Housing SA; Public Trustee), local

councils and their elected members. Complaints can be about any action or inaction by an agency. Ombudsman SA may conduct investigations to determine whether the process was reasonable and fair, and that the decision is not unreasonable or unlawful.

Tel. 8226 8699, 1800 182 150 (SA country callers); www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au. It is possible to lodge a complaint by email.

Office of the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner (HCSCC) provides assistance with resolution of complaints about health and community services in South Australia, including public hospitals and community health centres. **Tel. 7117 9313 or 1800 232 007**; email info@hcscc.s.gov.au. It is also possible to lodge a complaint on line at www.hcscc.sa.gov.au.

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission - If you have a concern about a National Disability Insurance Scheme provider or worker, a complaint can be made to the Commission by phoning **1800 035 544** (free call from landlines) or **TTY 133 677**. If using the National Relay Service, ask for 1800 035 544. It is also possible to complete a complaint contact form. www.ndiscommission.gov.au

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission assesses and monitors quality of care and services against the Aged Care Quality Standards.

If you are not satisfied with a Commonwealth-funded provider of home care and support or the operator of an aged care home, you can make a complaint to the Commission, **tel. 1800 951 822; www.agedcarequality.gov.au**.

Abuse of vulnerable people

Vulnerable people affected by abuse (financial, psychological, physical, sexual, social or neglect) may benefit from contacting the relevant free services among the ones listed below.

The Adult Safeguarding Unit (part of SA Health) responds to concerns of abuse in relation to adults who may be vulnerable.

Once a report has been made to the unit, staff will assess it to determine the most appropriate action, which may include referring the matter to another more relevant service. Reports can be made over the phone on or online.

Tel **1800 372 310**; www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Uniting Communities' Elders Abuse Unit provides information, support and legal advice. This service is available to people aged 65 years or over (50 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) living in both metropolitan and regional South Australia. Tel. **8202 5960**, www.unitingcommunities.org/service/legal-services/elder-abuse

Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS) can support people over 65 (or over 50 if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island person) at risk of, or experiencing abuse from someone with whom they are in a relationship of trust, such as family or friends. An older person's nominated representative can also access the service on their behalf. Tel. **1800 700 600** or **8232 5377**; www.sa.agedrights.asn.au/abuse_prevention

Further information and legal advice

The Law Society of South Australia

The Society offers Legal Advisory Service at a small fee on Mondays 5.30pm - 7pm at level 10, 178 North Tce, Adelaide. A single 20-minute appointment can be made by ringing **8229 0200**.

The Society's website features a finder facility which allows users to locate member law firms able to provide legal advice across a range of specialist areas.

www.lawsocietysa.asn.au

Legal Services Commission of South Australia

In addition to the legal advice service mentioned on the front page, the Commission publishes information resources on a range of topics, and the comprehensive Law Handbook.

<https://lawhandbook.sa.gov.au/>

Catalyst Foundation

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can help you to identify and locate the organisations that might be able to assist with your specific complaint or legal issues, and advocacy. We can also provide access to the relevant application forms where applicable.

Refer to our fact sheets *Consumer protection*, *Home support and care options* and *Aged care homes* for information on complaints services regarding these areas.

The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as legal advice

Contact Us

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Updated January 2025

Catalyst Foundation is supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Visit the website www.health.gov.au for more information. Although funding for this publication has been provided by the Australian Government, the material contained herein does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Australian Government.