



ALS

Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

50+  
YEARS STRONG

# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR OUR PEOPLE

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and travel. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present, and acknowledge the contribution and sacrifices our Elders have made to better our community and future.

We thank the many community members, partners and supporters who make our ambitious plans possible. The Board and Executive Management Team gratefully acknowledge the Australian Government, NSW Government and ACT Government as major funders of our work.

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Opposite: Arnold Williams, Lyall Munro Jnr, Cecil Patten, Ken Weldon and Dan Munro in the early days of the ALS. Photo courtesy of Elaine Pelot Syron.

## Born out of a protest movement, the ALS is the primary legal service for Aboriginal people in NSW and the ACT.

We opened our doors in 1970 on Eora country in Redfern. We were the first Aboriginal Legal Service in what we now know to be Australia, and the first free legal service in the country.

After colonisation, new laws were imposed on our communities. The legal system was a tool of oppression, used to disempower and control our peoples. In Redfern and elsewhere, Aboriginal people were subject to a racist curfew and frequent police brutality.

Our founders took a stand against this injustice when they created the ALS. They knew the importance of Aboriginal people designing and delivering services to our own communities. Their vision of self-determination and fundamental belief in justice remain at the core of our work.

Today the ALS provides help to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in criminal law, children's care and protection law, and family law. We are a strong advocate for justice and equity, speaking out for what is right. We provide expert policy advice and lead the way in law reform. We also collaborate with trusted partners to develop programs for greater community wellbeing.

As long as there is injustice against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the ALS will be there to fight it.





## FOREWORD

**The Aboriginal Legal Service recently marked a milestone: 50 years of providing free, community-controlled legal services for our people.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are smart, strong and resilient. In the face of colonisation and dispossession, we have always resisted and fought for our rights. The Aboriginal Legal Service is a product of that proud legacy and we carry it on for future generations.

The Strategic Plan 2021-2026 is an ambitious yet achievable plan to bring our communities closer to social justice and equity. It guides our service provision, as well as our expert contributions to law reform and advocacy on behalf of our people.

The challenges of COVID-19 brought out the best in the ALS. We continued to deliver our legal services while adapting to remote working and necessary changes to court procedures.

We expect the coronavirus pandemic will continue to impact the way we work, as well as the needs of our clients. As we embrace the goals of the Strategic Plan 2021-2026, we are also embracing the flexibility and agility to respond to the unique challenges of this time.

Our strategic approach targets our efforts to where we have the most expertise and can make the greatest impact. We have reflected on what our communities expect of us, and we are committed to fighting for justice on their behalf. We are – and will continue to be – fearless in our advocacy.

Many exciting initiatives will unfold over the next five years. We plan to establish a coronial unit, formalising and expanding the work we have already been doing in relation to deaths in custody. Similarly, we will form a children's advocacy unit, building on work to lift our young ones from the quicksand of the juvenile legal system.

We will better integrate our legal services with disability support services, recognising the disproportionate impact of the legal system on Aboriginal people with disability. And we will revitalise our community legal education efforts, designing a comprehensive new strategy to equip our mob with knowledge to fight for their rights.

We are focused on organisational excellence, with plans to advance the ways we measure our impact and drive constant improvement. We will focus on financial sustainability, increasing our funding from sources that enable us to be truly independent

and pursue our own agenda. We will remain true to our values and honour our past while laying strong foundations for the future.

We cannot do all this without the support of our communities as well as our partners, donors, staff and volunteers. A great many people contribute to the ALS mission. Your work and contributions are deeply valued.

I hope you will continue to stand beside us as we move closer to social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities. It's going to be a big five years.

**Mark Davies**  
ALS Director

July 2021



## OUR vision

Social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities

## OUR mission

To deliver quality and culturally appropriate legal services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout NSW and the ACT and to be recognised as the leader in this field across Australia

## OUR values

We are proudly Aboriginal

We are community focused

We are fearless in our advocacy

We are accountable

We make a difference to create better futures

We acknowledge and respect land, traditional values and cultural practices



To have an even greater impact within NSW and the ACT, the ALS' role must extend beyond individual legal assistance in order to make the justice system fair for everyone.



### CONSTRAINTS

Despite the critical role that ALS NSW/ACT plays for clients and communities, funding constraints restrict its ability to meet all legal needs and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW and the ACT.



### ACTIVITIES

The ALS targets its efforts to deliver high-quality, culturally appropriate legal services and programs; connect with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the fight for justice; and lead justice policy and advocacy campaigns.



### OUTCOME

The ALS fulfils its mission as a fighter for our people where community know we have their backs in the fight for racial justice and that our culturally safe, professional and committed workforce is delivering sustainable impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families.



### IMPACT

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people win movements and transform the justice system to be fair for everyone, resulting in our people having less forced contact with the justice system and remaining strong in community and in culture.

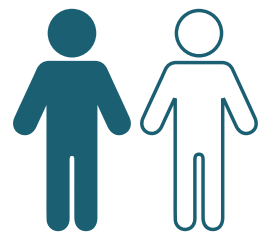
**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are strong, smart and resilient.**

But ever since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been targeted, discriminated against and disproportionately forced into contact with the legal system. Together with the dispossession of our lands and cultures, this inequitable treatment has led to ongoing disadvantage in several ways:



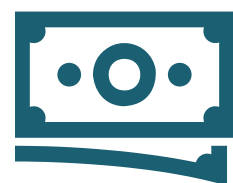
#### **LIFE EXPECTANCY**

Aboriginal men can expect to live 8.6 years fewer than non-Indigenous men, while Aboriginal women die 7.8 years earlier on average than their non-Indigenous counterparts.<sup>1</sup>



#### **RACISM**

52% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced at least one form of racial prejudice in the last 6 months.<sup>2</sup>



#### **POVERTY**

An estimated 31% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in poverty.<sup>3</sup>



#### **HEALTH**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' burden of disease rate continues to be 2.3 times higher than for non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>4</sup>



#### **DISABILITY**

An estimated 38% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live with some form of disability that restricts their everyday activities. This is 1.8 times the rate of disability experienced by non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>5</sup>



#### **HOMELESSNESS**

29% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been homeless at some time in their lives, and 1 in 5 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people live in overcrowded dwellings. We are 10 times as likely to live in social housing and 9 times as likely to access homelessness services as non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>6</sup>



#### **REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM THEIR FAMILIES**

In NSW, government authorities are 10.4 times more likely to remove Aboriginal children from their families than non-Indigenous children. In the ACT, authorities remove Aboriginal kids into out-of-home care at 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous children.<sup>7</sup>



#### **FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times as likely to be hospitalised for family violence as a non-Indigenous woman, while Aboriginal men are 27 times as likely to experience this as non-Indigenous men.<sup>8</sup>



#### **INCARCERATION RATES**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 26% of the adult prison population in both NSW and the ACT,<sup>9</sup> despite being about 3.3% of the population.<sup>10</sup> Aboriginal young people currently represent 46% of young people in custody in NSW and 36% in the ACT.<sup>11</sup>



#### **EDUCATION**

66% of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (20-24 years) attain Year 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification, compared with 90% of non-Indigenous 20-24 year olds.<sup>12</sup>



## OUR FOCUS



- 1 CONNECTING AND COLLABORATING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



We are seen by community as the legal provider of choice, part of a strong and visible network of Aboriginal peak bodies working to holistically support our people.



- 2 TELLING OUR STORY



We're celebrated as the first ALS and first free legal service in the country and clearly communicate the availability, value and impact of all our services.



- 3 DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY CULTURALLY SAFE LEGAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES



We have a culturally safe professional and committed workforce who feel valued and uphold the ALS legacy, delivering sustainable impact with and for our communities.



- 4 ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE AND ACHIEVING COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE



Community recognise the ALS as a fighter for our people and know we have their backs in the fight for justice. Together, we transform the justice system.



- 5 LAYING STRONG FUTURE FOUNDATIONS



Through diversified and sustainable income streams, innovation and a pipeline of talent, ALS services keep people strong in community and culture.

## OUR GOAL



# Our plan for 2021-2026



OUR FOCUS	1 CONNECTING AND COLLABORATING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES	2 TELLING OUR STORY	3 DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY CULTURALLY SAFE LEGAL & SUPPORT SERVICES	4 ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE AND ACHIEVING COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE	5 LAYING STRONG FUTURE FOUNDATIONS
OUR GOAL	We are seen by community as the legal provider of choice, part of a strong and visible network of Aboriginal peak bodies working to holistically support our people	We are celebrated as the first ALS and first free legal service in the country and clearly communicate the availability, value and impact of all our services	We have a culturally safe professional and committed workforce who feel valued and uphold the ALS legacy, delivering sustainable impact with and for our communities	Community recognise the ALS as a fighter for our people and know we have their backs in the fight for justice. Together, we transform the justice system	Through diversified and sustainable income streams, innovation and a pipeline of talent, ALS services keep people strong in community and culture
OUR ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring community know and understand their rights</li> <li>Supporting community in their fight for justice</li> <li>Ensuring we have strong relationships with other organisations who can work alongside us to help our communities</li> <li>Partnering with communities to hold forums and deliver training</li> <li>Engaging in collaborative service planning and developing MOUs with key partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capturing, analysing and translating data to help us and our stakeholders understand community needs and how we are addressing them</li> <li>Celebrating the ALS' history and ongoing legacy, ensuring community know who we are and how we can help them</li> <li>Maintaining relationships with our supporters, sharing our story and keeping them alongside us on the journey</li> <li>Ensuring compliance with our funders' data and reporting requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly evaluating our services and how they are meeting demand, and working with community and allies to have an even greater impact</li> <li>Ensuring all ALS employees undertake foundational and annual cultural safety training</li> <li>Supporting our team to achieve their training and professional development goals</li> <li>Ensuring our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members have clear and identified career pathway options</li> <li>Innovating service delivery models that work to reduce community contact with the legal system, incarceration, child removal and deaths in custody</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finding alternative income sources to fund advocacy activities, and then make visible this support for communities, both to the communities themselves, and the wider justice sector/public</li> <li>Platforming community voices in advocacy to reduce community contact with the legal system, incarceration, child removal and deaths in custody</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing and delivering a refreshed ALS Constitution that reflects the governance needs and choices of the organisation for the present and mid-term future</li> <li>Reviewing governance and risk management frameworks</li> <li>Ensuring the ALS operating structure is fit for purpose to achieve our strategic goals</li> <li>Investing in shared services to support the impact of the entire ALS team</li> </ul>
OUR KEY INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Legal Education Strategy</li> <li>Health Justice Partnership</li> <li>Co-location of Disability Support Workers</li> <li>Partnership and Program Strategy</li> <li>ALS Closing the Gap Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measurement and Evaluation Framework</li> <li>Celebrating ALS 50-year milestone</li> <li>Information, Communication and Technology Strategy</li> <li>Data Training Platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Litigation and Movement Lawyering Strategy</li> <li>Performance and Professional Development Framework</li> <li>Cultural Safety Training Workforce Strategy</li> <li>Digital Employee Induction Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Organising Model</li> <li>Funding Advocacy Strategy</li> <li>ALS Justice Reinvestment Officers</li> <li>ALS Coronial Unit</li> <li>Children's Advocacy Unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future Service Strategy</li> <li>ALS Governance Framework</li> <li>Risk Management Framework</li> <li>Funding Agreement Platform</li> <li>Employee Relations Framework</li> <li>Care &amp; Protection and Family Law Impact Strategy</li> <li>Civil Law Practice</li> </ul>



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## GET INVOLVED

### FOR OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY

- Call **1800 765 767** for support with police charges and court matters
- Call **1800 733 233** for support with child protection and family matters
- Visit [www.alsnswact.org.au/jobs](http://www.alsnswact.org.au/jobs) for exciting opportunities to join our team

### FOR OUR ALLIES AND SUPPORTERS

- Visit [www.alsnswact.org.au/donate](http://www.alsnswact.org.au/donate) to make a one-off or monthly contribution to the fight for justice
- Make an impact by partnering your business with the ALS. Email us at [community@alsnswact.org.au](mailto:community@alsnswact.org.au) to find out how.
- Visit [www.alsnswact.org.au](http://www.alsnswact.org.au) to sign up for email updates and find more information



### Cover art and graphic design: Charmaine Mumbulla

Charmaine Mumbulla is Sydney-based artist and Kurna/Narrungga woman. Her artwork creatively depicts the Aboriginal Legal Service as a shooting star illuminating the night sky over the coastal communities, mountains and plains of NSW and the ACT. "Since its inception, the ALS has been a guiding light in challenging times and a symbol of hope for Aboriginal people seeking systemic change" said the artist.



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