

Health justice partnership

**An insight into
the change
we're driving**

A quiet revolution is taking place across Australia that is transforming the way some of the most vulnerable in our community access legal services.

In a practitioner-led movement, community lawyers have been moving out of their offices and into the most unlikely of places – hospitals and community health settings – to collaborate with health services and their patients to address unmet, health-harming legal need.

Known as health justice partnerships, these collaborations work by embedding legal help into healthcare services and teams. They have formed in response to a growing body of evidence that shows there are groups of people who are vulnerable to intersecting legal and health problems, but who are unlikely to turn to legal services for solutions.

Health justice partnerships support collaboration between lawyers and health workers to better identify and respond to the legal needs that can undermine people's health.

The evidence driving collaboration

Over one-fifth of people in Australia experience three or more legal problems in a given year (Legal Australia Wide survey 2012). People often report multiple legal problems and these problems tend to cluster – such as family breakdown and money issues or problems centred around poor-quality housing.

One in five of the most disadvantaged in our community take no action in response to their legal problems, for reasons including not recognising the issue as a legal problem, stress, time, cost, fear of damaging relationships and having bigger problems to deal with. When people do seek advice, they are more likely to ask a non-legal advisor, such as a health professional, than a lawyer. That's why health justice partnerships make so much sense.

What are health justice partnerships?

Health justice partnerships embed legal help into healthcare services and teams to improve health and wellbeing for:

- **Individuals**, through direct service provision in places that they access
- **People and communities** vulnerable to complex need, by supporting services to integrate their responses and redesign systems around client needs and capability
- **Vulnerable populations** through advocacy for systemic change to policies which affect the social determinants of health.

Only by working together can we make sure everyone in Australia has access to good health, justice and wellbeing.

Helping Marnie return home safely

Marnie was only 15 when she was diagnosed with cancer. The good news was that it was treatable – the bad, that the treatment would be long and invasive.

So Marnie and her mum packed their things to leave their remote community while Marnie underwent treatment at a major hospital in the city.

After six months, Marnie had made great progress and her care team was ready to discharge her, but there was one thing stopping them. Marnie's family home was badly affected by mould. It was so bad that her doctors were concerned her suppressed immune system couldn't take it.

Marnie's family had been trying to get the mould fixed for months but their community housing provider never got around to it. Marnie was ready to leave hospital, but she couldn't go home.

Luckily for Marnie, the hospital had a health justice partnership, so she and her mum were able to access free legal advice about their rights as tenants. The health justice lawyer wrote to the housing corporation that owned Marnie's home, setting out its legal responsibility to provide safe and hygienic housing. As a result, the mould was fixed – and Marnie and her mum could go home.

The health justice landscape in Australia



Health justice partnerships are currently operating in almost every state and territory in Australia. In 2019, Health Justice Australia's analysis of these partnerships put the total number at 73.

What do health justice partnerships do?

Health justice partnerships support populations that are particularly at risk of poor health and unmet legal need, like people experiencing family violence, people at risk of elder abuse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people experiencing poverty.

Health justice partnerships provide legal support across a wide range of needs, such as:

- Advocating for public housing tenants needing repairs to address untreated mould, or having handrails and other aids installed so that people with mobility impairments can continue living independently in their own homes
- Assisting people with accumulated fines or debt that cause stress or act as a barrier to meeting health costs like filling prescriptions
- Advising on options for people experiencing family violence or elder abuse; and supporting their healthcare professionals to respond appropriately when they identify these needs among their patients

About Health Justice Australia

Health Justice Australia is a national charity and centre of excellence for health justice partnership. Health Justice Australia supports the expansion and effectiveness of health justice partnerships and works to change service systems to improve health and justice outcomes through:

Research: Developing and translating knowledge that is valued by practitioners, researchers, policy-makers and funders

Practice: Building the capability of health, legal and other practitioners to work collaboratively, including through brokering, mentoring and facilitating partnerships

Policy advocacy: Working to reform policy settings, service design and funding, informed by the experience of people coming through health justice partnerships, and their practitioners.

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Health Justice Australia ABN 55 613 990 186