

Mercy Law Resource Centre Strategy 2024 - 2029



Mercy Law
Resource Centre
*Free legal advice for
people who are homeless
or at risk of homelessness*

Our strategic framework

PURPOSE

OUR PURPOSE PROVIDES THE REASON
THAT WE EXIST

MISSION

OUR MISSION STATEMENTS DETAIL WHAT
WE WILL DO, AND FOR WHOM

ENABLED BY

KEY ENABLERS WILL ALLOW US TO DELIVER
ON OUR MISSION AND PURPOSE

Our strategy on a page

PURPOSE

TO PROTECT AND VINDICATE THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

MISSION

PROVIDE FREE, ACCESSIBLE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION TO THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

We will provide free, accessible legal services to those in or at risk of homelessness.

We will remain 'low threshold' to access, providing some level of assistance to all callers in line with our agreed prioritisation principles.

We will treat all callers with respect and compassion. Where we cannot provide support, we will endeavour to refer callers to appropriate services.

DRIVE LEGAL AND POLICY CHANGE TO ADDRESS INJUSTICES IN SOCIAL HOUSING AND HOMELESS LAW

We will draw from our casework to develop policy and law reform positions.

We will work collaboratively and in partnership to effect legal and policy change.

We will use our expertise and unique perspective to shine a light on injustices experienced by our clients.

BUILD SOCIAL HOUSING AND HOMELESS LAW EXPERTISE ACROSS THE SECTOR

We will provide regular training sessions to increase capability across the social housing and homeless law sector, including on request in local authorities.

We will help to equip peer organisations with the expertise to identify sub-standard decision making in housing matters and to know where legal support should be sought.

We will increase awareness of the rights of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through informative publications.

ENABLED BY

FUNDING

Maintain long-term relationships with funders

Diversify to new funding sources that sit with our unique offering and respect our independence

Focus on 'natural partners' in the legal sector

OPERATIONS AND GOVERNANCE

Deliver high quality legal advice and representation, publications & training

Constantly monitor intake of new work to ensure best use of resources

Improve administrative procedures to maximise efficiencies and reduce risk

Maintain high standard of governance and compliance

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Monitor the volume and success of case work

Understand the impact of our policy work

Ensure financial sustainability

Our Mission (1/3) | Provide free, accessible legal advice and representation to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

PROVIDE FREE, ACCESSIBLE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION TO THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

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Implications

We will define our casework priorities based on the following principles:

- Matter relates to social housing or homeless law;
- MLRC's input is most impactful (e.g., there is a clear legal issue);
- Areas of highest individual need (e.g., rough sleeping, imminent homelessness, medically unsuitable housing);
- Where no / few other service providers deal with the issue (e.g., excluding private rented, matters covered by legal aid).

Referrals and pro bono clinics are important tools in ensuring MLRC's specialist skills are used where most impactful while not turning callers away with no assistance.

Where we identify a need for services outside our skill, we should refer clients to other appropriate supports.

Given volume of work, in the absence of limiting our remit we accept that when demand exceeds our capacity we will have to temporarily shut to new cases.

Our Mission (2/3) | Drive legal and policy change to address injustices in social housing and homeless law

DRIVE LEGAL AND POLICY CHANGE TO ADDRESS INJUSTICES IN SOCIAL HOUSING AND HOMELESS LAW

We will draw from our casework to develop policy and law reform positions.

We will work collaboratively and in partnership to effect legal and policy change.

We will use our expertise and unique perspective to shine a light on injustices experienced by our clients.

Implications

While individual casework remains at the core of our purpose, drawing on that casework experience and MLRC's unique perspective to produce policy and law reform positions is an important tool to achieving our purpose.

Where appropriate, opportunities should be sought to highlight in the public domain injustices experienced by our clients.

The Board Policy & Communications Sub-Committee will support our policy and law reform agenda and amplify the impact of publications through soft advocacy and networking. Often this will have a non-adversarial focus.

We will work collaboratively and in partnership to effect legal and policy change.

We will welcome and leverage volunteer and pro bono support to increase our capacity to produce impactful research and publications.

Our Mission (3/3) | Build social housing and homeless law expertise across the sector

BUILD SOCIAL HOUSING AND HOMELESS LAW EXPERTISE ACROSS THE SECTOR

We will provide regular training sessions to increase capability across the social housing and homeless law sector, including on request in local authorities.

We will help to equip peer organisations with the expertise to identify sub-standard decision making in housing matters and to know where legal support should be sought.

We will increase awareness of the rights of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through informative publications.

Implications

Building capacity in peer organisations through legal training and support is a key tool in working toward our purpose.

By increasing the legal expertise and awareness of relevant rights among decision makers in local authorities we will decrease the instances of unfair and unlawful decisions made.

Early intervention is a core priority in order to address urgent challenges and avert unnecessary hardship. Sharing knowledge with peer organisations allows for the early identification of situations where legal support is required.

We should maintain a focus on ensuring that the value provided to peer organisations and the social housing and homeless sector generally is recognised in an appropriate manner.

Enabled by | Funding

Strategic Objectives

Maintain long-term relationships with funders

Diversify to new funding sources that sit with our unique offering and respect our independence

Focus on 'natural partners' in the legal sector

Implications

Our first focus is on maintaining our excellent relationship with existing funders.

We must expand our funding pool and there is an immediate requirement for a fundraising strategy.

We must pursue new funding sources while focusing on those that naturally sit with our unique offering (e.g., 'natural partners' such as the legal sector) and protect the value of our independence, without which we cannot be effective.

Enabled by | Operations And Governance

Strategic Objectives

Deliver high quality legal advice and representation, publications & training

Constantly monitor intake of new work to ensure best use of resources

Improve administrative procedures to maximise efficiencies and reduce risk

Maintain high standard of governance and compliance

Implications

Looking after our staff and volunteers, and ensuring their wellbeing in the course of their work for MLRC, are primary concerns.

We need to embrace the technology and practices needed to help us manage a significant workload, starting with the adoption of a case management tool in 2025. This requires a holistic review of our administrative practices.

Capacity issues must be addressed by careful workload management including:

- regularly refreshing our casework priorities to ensure we respond to the areas of most need, where other services do not operate effectively and where MLRC's unique offering add most value; and,
- tightly monitoring engagement terms / scope of work to retain focus on these areas and avoid 'mission creep'.

Enabled by | Measuring Our Success

Strategic Objectives

Monitor the volume and success of case work

Understand the impact of our policy work

Ensure financial sustainability

Implications

We will continually seek ways to effectively measure our success and look to leverage technology to make this easier to track.

Our immediate financial goal is to secure sufficient stable funding to deliver our core services year on year. Our priority is to address current financial challenges, and to future-proof our finances with a focus on multi-year funding sources.

Our first goal for policy work is amplifying the impact of materials published. We will work to develop better systems to measure the reach of our materials, the engagement created and the systemic impact made, leveraging technology.