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## Australia's access to justice crisis laid bare: national Justice Project releases papers, starts listening tour

The Law Council of Australia has today said that countless Australians are being denied access to justice as its national Justice Project moves into the [consultation phase](#).

[The Justice Project](#), announced earlier this year by President Fiona McLeod SC, is a comprehensive national review into the state of access to justice in Australia; focusing on challenges for the most vulnerable.

[Consultation papers](#), overseen by a Steering Committee of eminent lawyers, academics and jurists including former High Court Chief Justice, the Hon. Robert French AC, have been released today for feedback.

The papers relate to 13 groups identified in the terms of reference as facing significant social and economic disadvantage:

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; people with disability; older persons; people experiencing economic disadvantage; homeless persons; children and young people; prisoners and detainees; people who have been trafficked and exploited; LGBTI people; recent arrivals to Australia; asylum seekers; people who experience family violence; and people in regional and remote areas of Australia.*

The consultation will also involve a listening tour as dozens of discussions are scheduled Australia-wide over the next two months.

Contributions will be incorporated into the final report, resulting in the most comprehensive examination of the access to justice needs of vulnerable Australians in recent decades.

Ms McLeod said Australia's access to justice problem is acute and people experiencing significant disadvantage are falling through the cracks.

"All Australians have, under the law, the right to seek justice. But this right doesn't count for much if it cannot be exercised. We know that legal issues compound other social and economic challenges creating a dire situation for those in need of assistance," Ms McLeod said.

"More than 13 per cent of Australians live under the poverty line, while legal aid is available to just eight per cent. Many impoverished people are considered too wealthy to get basic legal help."

Ms McLeod said The Justice Project would reveal the human face of this crisis, highlighting the research with stories of hardship and hope.

"We want to take the reporting of this crisis out of realm of numbers and into the realm of lived experience.

"The aim is to allow those affected to share their stories of interacting with the justice system."

The Justice Project will also tell the stories of the 'unsung heroes' of the legal assistance community, many of whom are finding innovative ways to assist their clients.

"We are also identifying what is working well and demonstrating the considerable innovation that exists within the justice sector, despite the resource pressures that it is under," Ms McLeod said.

"The eventual recommendations will support an evidence-based policy approach which seeks to improve social outcomes rather than further entrenching disadvantage and cost to the community."

[To share your story, or write a formal submission](#) by 30 September, visit [www.justiceproject.com.au](http://www.justiceproject.com.au) – [plain English](#) and audio-assisted materials are available. Select infographics also available.