Access to justice goes beyond access to courts and lawyers. It’s also about access to information, support and opportunities, and about having a fair and equitable experience in everyday life. This publication shares some recent highlights of our work to help people access justice in their daily lives.

**Australia’s Human Rights Framework – CONSOLIDATING ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS**

The Attorney-General's Department is working to simplify Commonwealth anti-discrimination law to make it easier for individuals, organisations and businesses to understand their rights and obligations.

Anti-discrimination law has become quite complex in Australia, with five different Commonwealth anti-discrimination acts. This project will replace the five different acts with a single comprehensive anti-discrimination law. This will:

- make Commonwealth anti-discrimination law more user-friendly by reducing inconsistencies and overlap between the existing laws
- clarify protections and obligations
- ensure there are simple, cost-effective ways to resolve complaints.

The new law will continue to protect people against discrimination, and will introduce new protections against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination.

The consolidation of anti-discrimination laws project is part of *Australia’s Human Rights Framework*, which was launched in April 2010 to further protect and promote human rights in Australia. We recently concluded a four-month consultation period to seek community views on the reforms, with further consultation to occur on detailed proposals later this year.
Everyday justice for everyone: the story so far from the Attorney-General’s Department

Regional, rural and remote areas using the NBN. The program provides grants to legal aid commissions, family violence prevention legal services, Indigenous legal services and community legal services to trial NBN-based initiatives that seek to strengthen and increase legal assistance delivery in regional or remote areas by using the NBN. The program also aims to use the NBN to improve collaboration between legal assistance and other service providers.

We provided $1.13 million in one-off funding for a National Association of Community Legal Centres project to help attract and retain lawyers in regional, rural and remote Australia. We created an information website to support the project, which highlights the benefits of practising law in regional, rural and remote Australia.

We also administer the Community Legal Services Program, which provides funding to community-based organisations to provide legal assistance services. Additional funding was allocated in the May 2010 Budget to enhance community legal services in more than 50 regional, rural and remote areas.

Access to Justice Website

We have created the website www.accesstojustice.gov.au to provide members of the public with information and services to prevent and resolve disputes quickly and efficiently.

The website is intended to be a starting point for users with a dispute or a possible legal issue. The website provides information on access to justice and alternative dispute resolution, including a search function to locate relevant services by postcode or location.

The website is currently being enhanced to provide more information on a broader range of disputes, including fact sheets on different types of disputes and where to go for assistance.

Australia’s Human Rights Framework – EDUCATION GRANTS PROGRAM

The Attorney-General’s Department administers the Australia’s Human Rights Framework – Education Grants program. The program provides small grants to non-government organisations to deliver practical, grassroots human rights education projects for the community and vulnerable groups. Some examples of education projects that received grants are:

- Self-advocacy training packages in human rights for people with disability, supporters and the broader community.
- Human rights and advocacy training for women from newly arrived communities to strengthen their capacity to exercise leadership.
- Education and training for the Sikh community in Sydney addressing domestic violence as a human rights issue within the community.
- Human rights education and skills-development workshops for Aboriginal women in Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett.

The program is part of Australia’s Human Rights Framework. The Australian Government has announced funding of $2.068 million over four years for the program.

Legal services to regional, rural and remote Australia

The Attorney-General’s Department developed the National Broadband Network Regional Legal Assistance Program to improve access to legal assistance in regional, rural and remote areas using the NBN. The program provides grants to legal assistance providers (legal aid commissions, family violence prevention legal services, Indigenous legal services and community legal services) to trial NBN-based initiatives that seek to strengthen and increase legal assistance delivery in regional or remote areas by using the NBN. The program also aims to use the NBN to improve collaboration between legal assistance and other service providers.

We provided $1.13 million in one-off funding for a National Association of Community Legal Centres project to help attract and retain lawyers in regional, rural and remote Australia. We created an information website to support the project, which highlights the benefits of practising law in regional, rural and remote Australia.

We also administer the Community Legal Services Program, which provides funding to community-based organisations to provide legal assistance services. Additional funding was allocated in the May 2010 Budget to enhance community legal services in more than 50 regional, rural and remote areas.

Access to Justice Website

We have created the website www.accesstojustice.gov.au to provide members of the public with information and services to prevent and resolve disputes quickly and efficiently.

The website is intended to be a starting point for users with a dispute or a possible legal issue. The website provides information on access to justice and alternative dispute resolution, including a search function to locate relevant services by postcode or location.

The website is currently being enhanced to provide more information on a broader range of disputes, including fact sheets on different types of disputes and where to go for assistance.

People across Australia can use the website to research a particular issue, understand their options and locate services that can assist them.

The website was established as part of the Strategic Framework for Access to Justice, which the Australian Government adopted in 2009.

Reducing complexity in our laws & legal system – CLEAVER LAWS

Laws that are clear and easy to understand are essential to an accessible justice system.

We have developed a package of measures to encourage clearer laws, including:

- the Quick Reference Guide for Developing Clearer Laws, which provides an overview of key principles for developing clearer laws, along with some helpful tips for people involved in developing laws
- a system for identifying and addressing complexity in draft laws, which is administered by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel

We also maintain a website with tips on making clearer laws and links to relevant information and training courses. Together, these measures will help to make Australian laws more accessible so that people can find, understand and comply with laws that apply to them.

Mutual Recognition of Domestic Violence Orders

The Attorney-General’s Department is leading work on a national domestic violence scheme, which will mean that people protected by a domestic or family violence order will be able to move across State and Territory borders and keep their protection without needing to register the order in the new State or Territory.

The scheme will be underpinned by legislation in each state and territory that will enable domestic and family violence orders to be automatically recognised throughout Australia. CrimTrac’s National Police Reference System will serve as an information sharing capability to support the scheme. States and Territories are aiming to introduce legislation to allow the scheme to commence in early 2013.

The Standing Council on Law and Justice (previously the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General) is developing the scheme, with support from the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management. The project is a commitment in the Council of Australian Governments’ National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

The international aspects of recognition were raised with the Hague Conference on Private International Law in 2011. Possible future work on this is being considered by Member States.

Personal Property Securities Register

Personal property securities reform is an example of the Department’s work to improve everyday justice by improving the laws and infrastructure that support everyday social and business dealings.

We have developed a single, user-friendly Personal Property Security Register where details of security interests in personal property can be registered and searched. The single national register replaces a number of different registers that previously dealt with different types of interests, such as interests in motor vehicles.

This means that individuals or businesses planning to buy personal property can easily check whether the property is subject to other security interests. The same register will be used for all kinds of property, including cars, boats, works of art, valuable second-hand property, and shares, making it easy for individuals or businesses to check before they buy.

www.ag.gov.au
The Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia administers the Personal Property Securities Register. It was launched on 30 January 2012 and processed over 238,000 transactions in its first 48 hours of operation.

Enhancing Family Law Services

The Attorney-General’s Department works to build links between legal assistance and other support services, so that people can seek assistance that addresses their whole issue, not just the legal aspects. Two initiatives that achieve this are Family Relationship Centre Legal Assistance Partnerships and Family Law Pathways Networks.

Family Relationship Centre Legal Assistance Partnerships provides funding for legal service organisations to partner with Family Relationship Centres. This enables clients to access legal assistance together with services such as counselling and relationship education. The partnerships also support Family Relationship Centres to focus on providing family dispute resolution to help separating families achieve workable parenting arrangements outside the court system.

Family Law Pathways Networks are coordinated networks for professionals working within the family law system. The networks focus on information-sharing within a local area, as well as cross sector training to help build stronger working relationships across the family law system. There are over 30 networks across Australia.

The Department also works to improve access to family dispute resolution, including by funding an Online Family Dispute Resolution (OFDR) program delivered by Relationships Australia Queensland. OFDR enables separating or separated people to get assistance to resolve their dispute via their own computer, without needing to travel or attend a potentially stressful meeting.

Addressing Family Violence

We are taking a multi-pronged approach to improve community responsiveness to family violence. In 2011, legislative reforms were introduced to provide better protection for children and families at risk of violence and abuse. These reforms are supported by a number of projects, including the AVERT training package and a South Australian pilot project to improve links between the family law system and child welfare authorities.

The AVERT training package on family violence was launched in early 2011. The training aims to provide workers in the family law system with a sound and practical understanding of family violence, its impact and the appropriate strategies for responding, which promotes safety for all involved.

The South Australian pilot project aims to build stronger links between the federal family law system and South Australia’s child welfare authorities. The pilot is trialling initiatives to improve information sharing, case management, relationship building and risk identification and assessment. There has been strong support for the pilot across both the federal and state systems.