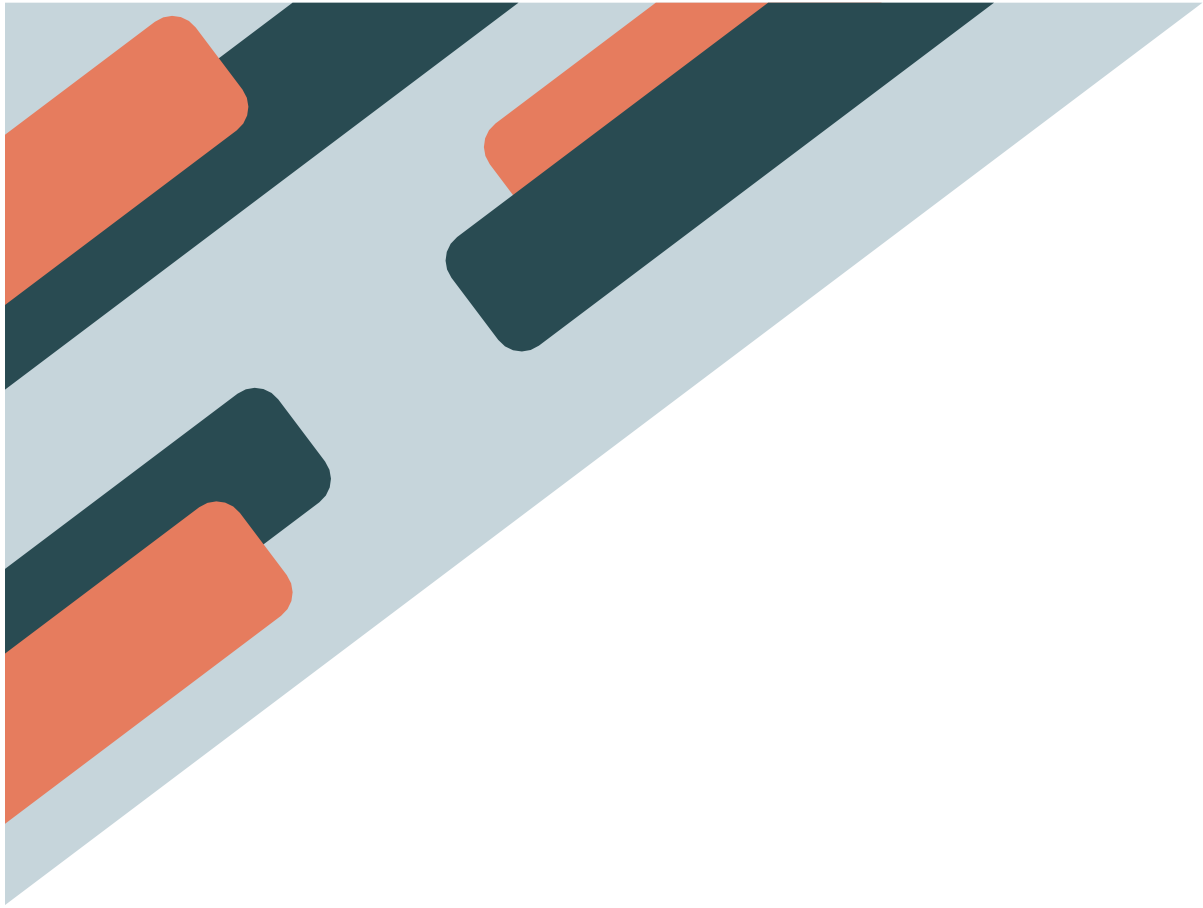




2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Aged
Care
Justice



-2024 ACHIEVEMENTS -

83 COMPLAINTS REFERRED FOR ACTION

83 COMPLAINANTS	451,550 AGED CARE RESIDENTS SERVED
8 FACT SHEETS PUBLISHED	160 NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS
COLLABORATED WITH KEY INDUSTRY PARTICIPANTS	22 LEGAL PANEL FIRMS
3 SUBMISSIONS ON AGED CARE REFORM	4 MEDIA RELEASES
REACHED OVER 39,000 PEOPLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA	5 MENTIONS IN MAJOR MEDIA OUTLETS

2024

CHAIR'S REPORT



My pride in being involved with ACJ has grown immensely this year as the organisation rallied to ensure that the government recognises the needs of our aged care community, along with their families and friends.

We directly assisted 83 members of our community who had grievances regarding their care. It is disheartening to think that 83 families felt the need to reach out to us for support. However, it is gratifying to know that we were able to guide them in obtaining the appropriate advice to address their issues. Additionally, many more individuals benefited from our active reform initiatives, which aim to implement measures that protect every person in aged care. Our educational efforts have also helped ensure that our community understands what constitutes acceptable standards of care.

This year marked a significant transition for us, as we evolved from a relatively new organisation seeking a voice to being recognized as a vital participant in the industry, invited to engage in reform consultations. Notably, we were invited to testify before the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs regarding their Inquiry into the Aged Care Bill 2024. While the two aged care bills may not encompass all our demands, we made a meaningful impact in shaping them to better reflect the needs of our community.

Despite our busy schedule advocating for essential reforms, we remained focused on our core mission: educating our community about their rights and providing access to legal recourse. One of our key initiatives involved distributing fact sheets for each state and territory regarding visitor restrictions in aged care facilities. We will soon follow this up with fact sheets addressing the use of medications in aged care settings to manage residents.

We are deeply grateful to our volunteers. While it's challenging to single out individuals, I want to acknowledge the significant contributions of Rodney Lewis AM, Professor Ann O'Connell, and Elizabeth Barton this year. Thank you for your invaluable efforts. I would also like to express my appreciation for our CEO, Anna Willis, and Senior Legal Project Manager, Katrina Ryan. Your expertise, dedication, and commitment have guided ACJ toward continued success and, more importantly, ensured that those in aged care have a platform to voice their grievances.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to the Board, all of whom are volunteers. This year, we welcomed two new members, Victoria Heathcote and Danielle Hart as our new Treasurer, both of whom have made invaluable contributions to ACJ already. I also want to sincerely thank our retired Treasurer, Henry Walachowski, for his role in helping us launch ACJ.

I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished this year, and I am excited about what the future holds for ACJ.

Sue Williamson, ACJ Chair.

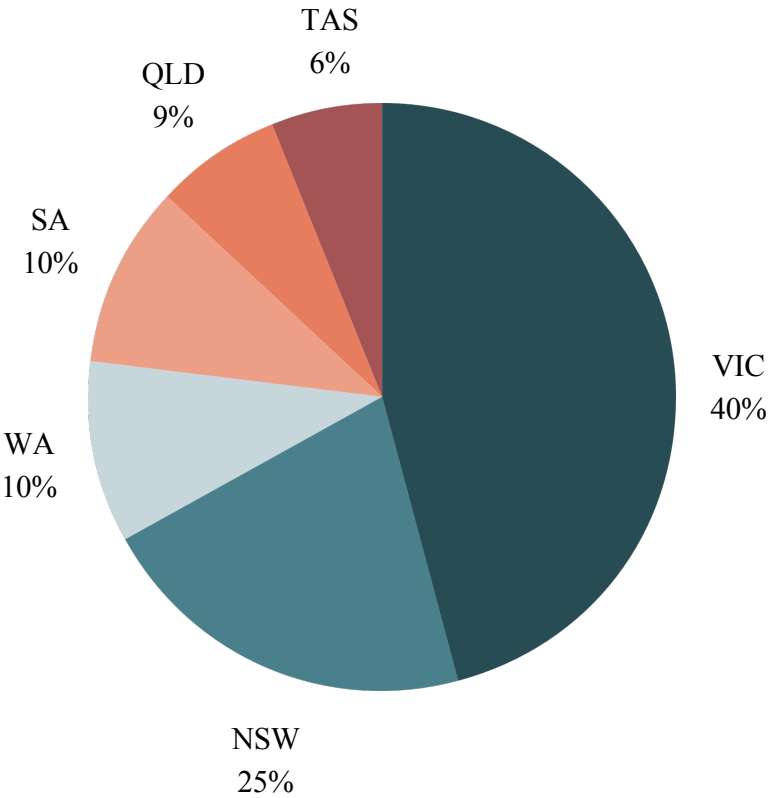


2024

HIGHLIGHTS

83
Complaints

*Complainants
by State*



Complainants Register and Legal Recourse

On average, ACJ receives 3 complaints per week with a total this year in excess of 80. We have found that the issues being presented by complainants are of an increasingly serious nature.

In residential care, the issues reported have included: neglect; use of restrictive practices without consent; seclusion of the resident; lack of medical support following a fall or prolonged illness resulting in serious harm or death; banning of family and friends from visiting the resident; and guardianship matters.

In home care, issues experienced by complainants included cost of care, continuity of care, and guardianship matters.

Most complainants were able to resolve their complaint without legal action. However, for some there was no legal recourse.

ACJ continues to advocate for legal reform to improve access to justice for all complainants.

Law Reform and Advocacy

ACJ contributed significantly to the reform space in 2024 by providing legal opinion and information on complainant issues to help drive change. This year marked a historic time in Australian aged care reform, with the introduction of the Aged Care Bill 2024. ACJ was invited to attend the Department of Health and Aged Care Consultations on the Aged Care Act, and to meet with Senators and Ministers to provide legal insights on the Bill.

We penned two joint submissions in response to the Exposure Draft and the Bill, in collaboration with key aged care advocacy organisations.

In response to our Bill Submission, ACJ was invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Community Affairs to assist with their Inquiry into the legislation. The priority issues presented by ACJ focused on independence in complaint handling, increased contractual rights, and protections surrounding substitute decision making for aged care recipients.

ACJ was also invited to be a part of a focus group organised by the Department of Health and Aged Care on Star Ratings for aged care providers. The aim of the focus group was to gauge the public's perception and use of the Star Ratings system.

Education

ACJ's commitment to developing legal education projects to assist the aged care community in recognising wrongdoing and advancing the rights of older Australians, continued throughout 2024.

We received substantial national engagement in response to our fact sheets on the unlawful banning of visitors to residential aged care facilities. The decision to create this education was in response to numerous complaints from family members or friends of aged care residents, who had been banned from visiting a resident by a person alleging to have the relevant authority to do so, having devastating effects for the banned person and resident.

The fact sheets provided information on which persons have the power to ban under the relevant state or territory laws, the circumstances in which those persons may decide to ban, and the avenues available to someone who believes they have been unfairly banned.

The social media campaign for the project attracted 635 likes, 130 comments and was shared online 62 times by the public and advocacy organisations. ACJ was able to support 7 new complainants experiencing a ban, as a result of the campaign.

Alliances within the Aged Care Community

ACJ has built strong relationships within the aged care network, including aged care community advocacy groups, community legal centres and the Department of Health of Ageing.

Through our submission reform work and education projects, we have collaborated with Aged Care Reform Now (ACRN), Aged Care Crisis, Carer's Circle, Older Women's Network (OWN), Council of the Ageing (COTA), Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN), Australian Nursing and Midwifery Foundation (ANMF), Meals on Wheels,

Quality Aged Care Action Group (QACAG), Australian Independent Retirees (AIR), amongst others.

ACJ has created relationships with various legal organisations to facilitate referrals of complainants.

ACJ now receives referrals from specialist elder law community legal centres across Australia, and from a range of aged care industry stakeholders.

Media Exposure

We have experienced an increase in major media outlets approaching ACJ for legal comment on aged care issues. The ABC contacts ACJ for our insights, and Vice Chair, Elizabeth Barton was interviewed on ABC television regarding workforce and funding changes following the release of the

Aged Care Bill. CEO, Anna Willis, was interviewed for the online and print version of the Daily Telegraph on alleged preventable deaths in aged care. Anna was also recently featured in The Guardian on how ACJ complainants perceive the Star Ratings System.

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