Aged Care Justice

Advancing Rights. Delivering Justice. Driving Reform.

2025 - 2026 Annual Report

Email
info@agedcarejustice.org.au,

Phone
0417 234 415

Website
agedcarejustice.org.au/

Table of Contents

About Aged Care Justice 1

2025–26 Impact Snapshot 2

President's Message 3

Chief Executive Officer's Report 4

Delivering Justice 5

Building Knowledge 6

Driving Reform 7

Strengthening Our Organisation 8

Looking Ahead 9

Acknowledgements 10

Board, Leadership and Patrons 11

01 I About Us

Aged Care Justice (ACJ) is a specialist legal advocacy and law reform organisation focused exclusively on the rights of older Australians receiving aged care services.

Established in 2020 in response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, ACJ was created by senior legal and healthcare professionals who recognised the need for independent legal support and systemic advocacy within the aged care sector.

ACJ provides legal assistance, legal education, referral services and law reform advocacy to and for the benefit of older Australians, their families and representatives. We work to ensure thatrights are not simply recognised in legislation but are exercised in practice.

The evolution of Australia's aged care system continues to create both opportunities and challenges for consumers. A more rights-based framework promises stronger protections and accountability; however, consumers often require specialist support to understand those rights, navigate complex systems and pursue remedies when things go wrong.

ACJ's work sits at this intersection of individual advocacy and systemic reform. Our purpose is to improve aged care delivery and protect the rights of older Australians through legal assistance,education and law reform. We believe every person receiving aged care should be treated with dignity and respect, exercise choice and control, and have access to safe, high-quality care.

Importantly, behind every one of ACJ's successes is a person seeking answers, support or justice. The enquiries received by ACJ are not simply statistics. They represent older Australians,families, friends and advocates navigating difficult circumstances and seeking to ensure that the rights of people receiving aged care are respected and protected.



Impact Snapshot

Every enquiry ACJ receives is underpinned by a person attempting to navigate a complex system, advocate for a loved one or address concerns about the quality and safety of care.

The growth reflected in the following figures demonstrates more than increasing organisational reach. It reflects growing awareness among older Australians and their families that legal rightsmatter in aged care, and that independent support is available when things go wrong. It also reflects that as changes associated with the Aged Care Act 2024 and forthcoming Support at Home reforms continue to unfold, increasing numbers of Australians need to turn to ACJ for guidance, advocacy and practical assistance.

Requests for legal assistance +45%YoY

200 complaints

Legal Fact Sheet Downloads

5,195

Volunteer hours +25%YoY

2,000 +

Growing our reach

Website visits- 23, 125

50% Increase in views of Legal Service pages

31% Increase in average website engagement time

75% Increase new website users

23% increase newsletter subscribers

03 I President's Message

The 2025-26 year marked a defining chapter in the evolution of Aged Care Justice and has been one of the most significant periods in our organisation's history.

Since our establishment, ACJ has worked to ensure that older Australians and their families can understand, assert and enforce their legal rights within the aged care system. This year, we took a major step towards that vision by amending our Model Rules to expand our operations to include direct legal services. Shortly after the end of the year the in-house legal service was established on the appointment of our inaugural Community Lawyer, Lucinda Knapp.

Since 2020 ACJ has been supported by an extraordinary network of volunteer lawyers and panel firms across Australia, whose contributions remain fundamental to our work. The introduction of direct legal assistance will strengthen our ability to provide specialist support to older people and families facing some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, including neglect, restrictive practices, contract disputes, financial abuse and concerns arising from unexpected deaths in care.

The response from the community to our in-house legal service has been immediate with Lucinda dealing with many issues already. It will be exciting to watch the service grow over the coming year.

Demand for our services increased by approximately 45 per cent during the year, with ACJ responding to 200 requests for legal support and information. This growth reflects both the increasing visibility of our organisation and the substantial unmet need for independent legal assistance within the aged care sector.

Importantly, our impact is not measured solely by numbers. It is measured by the confidence people gain when they understand their rights. It is measured by families who feel heard and supported during times of uncertainty and stress. It is measured by improved accountability, better outcomes and systemic reforms informed by lived experience.

One of the most rewarding aspects of our work is hearing directly from those we have assisted:

"It was so easy to contact ACJ, and everyone was helpful, responsive and prompt. All my questions were answered, my concerns were addressed. I recommend Aged Care Justice to so many people, especially those navigating aged care and home support. It is a desperately needed service that helps older people and families understand x aged care rules."

Family member assisted by ACJ

Comments such as this capture the value of independent legal support and reinforce why our work remains so important.

2025-26 was not simply a year of growth. It was a year of influence.

Throughout the year, ACJ contributed practical recommendations to key policy reforms through submissions on the Aged Care Rules and the Support at Home Program. We expanded our legal education activities, developed accessible resources explaining rights under the Aged Care Act 2024, strengthened partnerships across the sector and participated in national discussions concerning the implementation of Australia's new aged care framework.

These achievements were made possible through the dedication of our staff, volunteers, board members, legal panel firms, students, donors and supporters. Together they contributed more than 2,000 hours of volunteer effort in pursuit of better outcomes for older Australians.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere thanks to our Chief Executive Officer, Anna Willis, whose vision and determination continue to drive the organisation forward. Anna has become a leading voice in the aged care community. And, also to Katrina Ryan, our dedicated Legal Education and Communications Lead, for her expertise, compassion and commitment. My thanks goes to all members of the ACJ team whose efforts have advanced our mission throughout the year.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank our retiring Secretary, Cai Lin Tan. Cai Lin has played an invaluable role in ensuring ACJ meets its governance and regulatory obligations while providing steadfast support to the organisation's development and success. We are deeply grateful for her contribution and wish her every success in the future.

Looking ahead, the year will bring both new opportunities and new challenges. A key priority for ACJ will, of course, be bedding down our in-house legal service. An equally important priority will be securing sustainable funding to ensure that we can continue delivering independent legal assistance and advocacy to older Australians who need it most. While significant reform is underway, the need for Aged Care Justice remains clear.

With the commitment of our executive team, volunteers and supporters, I am confident ACJ will continue to grow its impact, helping older Australians access justice, understand their rights and be treated with the dignity, respect and care they deserve.

Together, we will continue to pursue justice, accountability and meaningful reform.

Sue Williamson
President



04 | CEO's Report

The aged care sector is undergoing many challenges related to issues around access to aged care, reliability of home care services, and delivery of quality care.

The recommendations of the Royal Commission continue to influence legislative and regulatory change. At the same time, consumers and families increasingly expect aged care organisations and governments to be accountable for the protection of rights and delivery of safe, quality care.

For Aged Care Justice, this environment has highlighted the importance of our mission.

Throughout 2025–26 our activities focused on three priorities:

- Expanding access to legal support
- A greater understanding of legal rights in aged care
- Influencing systemic reform

Significant progress was achieved in each of these areas.

A highlight has been being able to assist over 200 people seeking legal advice and support over the past year.

The introduction of ACJ's specialist legal service was a major milestone, with the appointment of Community Lawyer Lucinda Knapp in July, enabling ACJ to expand our services and respond to questions regarding service agreements, fees, guardianship arrangements, restrictive practices, complaints and quality of care concerns.

ACJ rolled out a series of fact sheets to assist the public and the aged care community understand the provider obligations and provisions in the aged care legislation that commenced on 1 November 2025. This included 10 fact sheets, including new consumer safeguards regarding aged care service plans, reportable incidents, and civil penalties.

Many people accessed ACJ's legal resources, building awareness of rights and legal protections.

Our submissions and reform activities ensured that consumer experiences continued to inform policy discussions and legislative developments.

Aged care continues to evolve, as the new legislative requirements are tested in practice. Access to Commonwealth funded aged care services continues to be a significant issue.

Understanding, promoting and enforcing legal rights in residential age care and home settings continues to be a challenge, and we are well placed to continue to assist the community.

We are grateful for the support provided by our legal panel, advocacy organisations too many to mention individually, volunteer lawyers and law students.

The year ahead will focus on expanding our legal services, developing greater partnerships, increasing our reach and continuing to advocate for a safer and more accountable aged care system.

Anna Willis
Chief Executive Officer

05 I Delivering Justice

Responding to Growing Demand

Throughout 2026, ACJ responded to 200 requests for legal support and information from people across Australia.

The increase in demand follows a consistent pattern observed over recent years. As public awareness of aged care rights grows, more individuals are identifying legal dimensions to issues that might previously have been viewed simply as service complaints or personal disputes.

The rise in demand reinforces the importance of specialist support and demonstrates why access to justice remains a critical issue within aged care.

"I contacted Aged Care Justice about my 67-page Service Agreement, which was written entirely in legalese. It was so easy to contact ACJ, and everyone was helpful, responsive and prompt.

All my questions were answered, my concerns were addressed, and they even explained clauses I simply could not understand.

I recommend Aged Care Justice to so many people, especially those navigating aged care and home support."

Mary, family member assisted by ACJ



Areas of Assistance

Many matters ACJ dealt with during the year at the request of affected elderly Australians and their families involved highly vulnerable individuals and families navigating complex legal frameworks while simultaneously dealing with illness, cognitive impairment, grief or family conflict. These matters included:

- Aged care contracts and service agreements
- Fees and financial disputes
- Neglect and poor quality care concerns
- Restrictive practices
- Guardianship and substitute decision-making
- Visitor restrictions
- Home care and Support at Home arrangements
- Financial abuse
- Concerns relating to unexpected deaths in aged care
- Elder abuse
- Complaints and review processes

The issues presented to ACJ continue to point towards significant unmet legal need within the aged care system. While much attention is rightly given to service delivery and regulation, families frequently struggle to access timely legal advice when navigating disputes affecting care, autonomy, finances and human rights.

The geographic spread of enquiries continued to demonstrate the national need for specialist aged care legal assistance.

- Victoria – 34.0%
- New South Wales – 22.2%
- Queensland – 21.6%
- South Australia – 11.1%
- Western Australia – 8.6%
- Tasmania – 1.9%
- ACT – 0.6%

Building A Specialist Aged Care Justice Service

A defining achievement of 2025–26 was setting up the foundations for the establishment of ACJ's first specialist legal service.

The need for independent legal assistance within aged care has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Consumers frequently encounter issues that involve multiple legal and regulatory frameworks, including contract law, guardianship law, consumer rights, health law and administrative review processes.

For families navigating these issues, obtaining specialist assistance can be difficult.
In the past we have relied on our volunteer panel. However, as numbers increased it became apparent this model was not sustainable.

Recognising this gap, ACJ modified its governing rules to enable the launch of an in-house legal service. The service launched immediately after the end of the year with the appointment of Community Lawyer Lucinda Knapp. The service provides direct legal advice and initial legal support to people experiencing aged care-related legal issues nationwide.
Since commencing in July, Lucinda has provided legal advice and support to more than 36 complainants across Australia.



The impact of accessible, specialist legal advice is best reflected in the experiences of those who sought assistance.

"It was such a relief to be referred to Lucinda for advice and support. I've made a donation in my son's name and will continue to do so when I can."

Tricia, family member assisted by ACJ

"***She took the time to understand the background of my mother's matter, provided clear and practical legal advice, and followed up our discussion with a detailed draft to assist me with my application to VCAT seeking an expedited hearing. Her assistance has been greatly appreciated during what has been a very difficult and complex matter."***

Andrew, family member assisted by ACJ

"She provided clear and practical legal advice during what has been a very difficult and complex matter."

Family member supported by ACJ

The legal service will bear the brunt of initial inquiries. However, we will continue to rely on volunteer law firms to assist those seeking help, particularly the more complex matters.

06 I Legal Education and Resources

Helping People Understand Their Rights

Access to justice begins with access to information because legal rights are only meaningful when people understand them.

One of ACJ's core objectives is to improve legal literacy and empower consumers to advocate effectively for themselves and their loved ones.

During 2026 ACJ expanded its legal education program through the development of practical resources explaining rights and obligations under the new Aged Care Act 2024.

Working with students from the University of Technology Sydney Elder Law Unit under the leadership of Dr Teresa Somes, ACJ produced seven new legal fact sheets covering topics including:

- Provider duties to prevent harm
- The Inspector-General of Aged Care
- Star Ratings
- Care and Services Plans
- Reportable Incidents
- Home care rights
- Regulatory accountability
-

During the reporting period more than 5,195 resource downloads were recorded. The most accessed resource focused on providers' duties to prevent harm, highlighting continued public interest in accountability and safety within aged care settings.
This strong level of engagement demonstrates the continuing need for practical, consumer-focused legal information.

Feedback from across the sector reinforced the value of these resources.

"I wanted to thank you all for developing these clear and very empowering resources."

Theresa Flavin, Human Rights Advisor, Dementia Alliance International



Speaking and Sector Engagement

ACJ continued to engage with consumers, professionals and advocates through webinars, presentations and public education activities.

A highlight was a Lunch & Learn webinar delivered in partnership with Elder Abuse Action Australia, which attracted 666 registrations. The session focused on new statutory duties created by the Aged Care Act 2024 and the responsibilities of providers and Responsible Persons.

This level of participation demonstrates growing interest in legal rights and consumer protections within aged care.

- 5,195 fact sheet downloads
- 1,759 legal services page views
- 50% increase in legal services page traffic

ACJ also participated in the Stand Up, Speak Out 2026 Australian Elder Abuse Conference, where CEO Anna Willis joined national discussions regarding aged care reform, stronger safeguards and legal access for older people.

These engagements ensure that legal rights remain central to broader conversations about aged care quality and reform.

University Partnerships

ACJ's work continues to be strengthened by collaboration with universities and law students. Students contributed to legal research, resource development and educational projects, while also gaining valuable insight into the challenges facing older Australians and the legal frameworks governing aged care.

07 I Driving Reform

Individual legal assistance remains important, but lasting change also requires reform.

What makes ACJ's advocacy distinctive is its foundation in lived experience. Issues identified through enquiries and legal assistance help inform reform priorities and provide practical insights into how reforms affect consumers in reality.

During 2026 ACJ continued its partnership with Aged Care Reform Now, contributing two major national submissions which drew directly from the experiences of complainants and families engaging with ACJ.

Senate Review of the Aged Care Rules

ACJ raised concerns regarding:

- Consumer protections
- Restrictive practices
- Transparency
- Worker regulation
- Funding arrangements
- Safeguards
-

Support at Home Inquiry

ACJ led a joint submission containing ten recommendations addressing:

- Service access delays
- Pricing transparency
- Workforce shortages
- Dementia capability
- Consumer review rights
- Access to specialist legal assistance

08 I Strengthening our Organisation

Partnerships

Strong partnerships remain essential to ACJ's impact.

The organisation continues to collaborate with legal practitioners, consumer advocates, universities, community organisations and sector stakeholders to strengthen services and maximise impact.

Legal Referral Panel

The ACJ Legal Panel continued to serve as a cornerstone of our service model.
During 2026 we welcomed two new Victorian member firms:

- Kara Legal
- Commercial Advocacy Law

Together they bring expertise across elder law, administrative law, guardianship, aged care contracts and consumer protection.

Recognising the increasingly complex legal issues emerging from complaints, ACJ also established a Legal Committee comprising experienced volunteer solicitors. The committee supports strategic legal projects, emerging issues analysis and law reform activities.
Our thanks go to our panel lawyers who, again and again, agree to assist those in need at our request. Thank you!

Volunteers

Volunteers remain central to ACJ's success.

During the year, volunteer solicitors and law students contributed more than 1,700 hours across legal research, administration, policy development and educational initiatives.

Students from the University of Adelaide and University of Technology Sydney made important contributions to legal research and community education projects throughout the year.

This contribution represents an extraordinary investment of expertise and time.

Their work significantly increased ACJ's capacity and reach

09 I Future Outlook

ACJ will remain committed to ensuring that every older Australian can understand and enforce their legal rights.

Australia's aged care system will continue to evolve throughout 2026–27. ACJ expects demand for specialist legal support to continue increasing as consumers become more aware of their rights and as reforms begin to mature.

During 2026, the Restrictive Practices webpage received more than 1,500 views, making it one of the most visited areas of the ACJ website. We expect that restrictive practices will remain one of the most significant human rights issues confronting Australia's aged care sector.

At the same time, ACJ saw growing numbers of enquiries involving unexpected deaths and concerns about care provided immediately before death. These matters raised complex legal and systemic questions regarding accountability, investigation pathways and available remedies. We expect that enquiries in this area will continue to increase over the coming years.

ACJ will continue to focus on these two areas.

Strategic priorities for the coming year include:

- Expanding direct legal assistance through the ACJ new legal service
- Growing the Legal Panel network
- Strengthening law reform capability
- Increasing community legal education
- Monitoring implementation of reforms
- Strengthening organisational sustainability
- Continuing work on restrictive practices and emerging rights issues
- Advocating for stronger accountability and consumer protections

Our vision remains unchanged: a future where every older Australian can receive safe, dignified and rights-based care, and where access to justice is available when those rights are not respected.



10 I Acknowledgements



The achievements outlined in this report have been made possible through the dedication and generosity of many people and organisations.
We thank our volunteers, legal panel members, donors, partner organisations, student volunteers, donors, supporters and pro bono contributors for their extraordinary commitment. Their contribution continues to strengthen our impact and support our mission.

Most importantly, we thank the older Australians, families and carers who trusted ACJ with their experiences throughout the year. Their courage in sharing their stories continues to drive our work and strengthen our resolve to improve aged care across Australia.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our work is undertaken and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

11 I BOARD, LEADERSHIP AND PATRONS



Board Members

Sue Williamson: President
Victoria Heathcote: Vice President
Anastasia (Anna) Willis: Chief Executive Officer
Cai Lin Tan: Secretary
Danielle Hart : Treasurer
Elizabeth Barton
Diane (Di) McDonald OAM
Andrew Tregear
Ann O'Connell

Executive Team

Anastasia (Anna) Willis: Chief Executive Officer
Katrina Ryan: Legal Education and Communications Lead
Lucinda Knapp: Community Lawyer

Co-Patrons

The Honourable Tony Pagone KC
Retired Judge and Former Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

Dr Bryan Keon-Cohen AM KC
Co-founder of ACJ and leading human rights advocate

ACJ wishes to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which our work takes place, and pays respect to Elders past and present.

Aged Care Justice

info@agedcarejustice.org.au
0417 234 415
agedcarejustice.org.au/