



Public Interest Advocacy Centre
A fair, just & democratic society
Innovative principled tenacious

Social justice Equality Accountable government Consumer rights

Projects

Strategies

People



Strategic plan for the Public Interest Advocacy Centre 2015-2018

PIAC is committed to social justice for all in the community. We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work as the first people of this country. We acknowledge with deep sorrow the past injustices, mistreatment, and the failure to understand, respect and value the cultural beliefs of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Projects – summary of desired outcomes

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) is an independent, non-profit law and policy organisation. PIAC is dedicated to obtaining social justice for disadvantaged individuals and at the broader, systemic level. Our work is concentrated on a number of key areas, including homelessness, policing and detention, discrimination, international crimes and access to energy and water for disadvantaged people.

PIAC works with people who have least access to economic, social and legal resources and opportunities. This includes people experiencing homelessness; children and young people in detention; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; people who have suffered discrimination; victims of war crimes; and, those who struggle to access essential services.

Homelessness

There is a large population, in NSW and elsewhere, of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Their rights are not adequately protected and in some cases not properly understood.

1. People experiencing or at risk of homelessness have access to free, high quality legal information, advice and representation at clinics that are located in places of need.
2. Expanded opportunities for participation and engagement for people with experience of homelessness.
3. HPLS achieves outcomes in court that respond to the particular needs of clients experiencing homelessness.
4. Ongoing improvements in policies and procedures to assist people experiencing mental illness to apply for and sustain social housing.
5. Ongoing improvements in policies and procedures to assist single women and women with children who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Policing & detention

Use of police powers

Vulnerable people, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those with mental illness or other disadvantage, are unnecessarily over-represented in the criminal justice system, including in custody.

1. PIAC's litigation and policy work lead to more reliable police records and systems, particularly regarding bail conditions.
2. Police use their power to arrest for alleged offences and breach of bail lawfully and appropriately, and only arrest as a last resort for vulnerable people, particularly children and young people.
3. Bail conditions imposed on young and other vulnerable people are reasonable, proportionate to the offence, fair and appropriately policed.
4. Proactive policing methods, such as the Suspect Target Management Plan (STMP), do not involve the unlawful exercise of police powers, do not impact disproportionately on vulnerable people and are subject to critical evaluation as to their effectiveness and impacts.
5. A reduction in the number of young people held in custody, in particular young people held on remand.

Diversion & sentencing

The prison population is growing. In part, this is due to:

- Inadequate diversionary programs for those with complex needs who end up in prisons instead of in treatment.
- A lack of realistic sentencing options for people who are homeless or have substance abuse problems and/or mental illness.

Based on evidence from the HPLS clinics and the work of the HPLS Solicitor Advocate, there is a need for an increased number and range of diversionary and sentencing options for people with complex needs.

1. A broader range of sentencing options provides realistic alternatives to jail for people with complex needs, as evidenced by PIAC's experience representing homeless and other vulnerable clients.
2. Criminal laws and policies have a proportionate impact on and do not criminalise vulnerable people.

Prisons and other detention facilities

Prisons and places of detention are not operated in accordance with human rights principles and international standards.

1. Places of detention are improved by public scrutiny and external, independent inspection.
2. Prisoners have access to the same standard of healthcare as individuals in the community.
3. The State recognises the legal rights of prisoners.

Discrimination

People with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other vulnerable groups suffer unlawful discrimination.

1. Increased compliance with Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport by industry.
2. Enhanced protection against discrimination on the basis of mental illness in provision of insurance.
3. Enhanced protection against discrimination in the area of accessible technologies, for example, online shopping and audio description in broadcast media.
4. Progress in addressing racial discrimination, with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
5. Scoping of new and emerging issues in discrimination, such as gender identity.

International crimes

Australia is home to many people who have suffered violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. There is a need for better accountability in relation to serious violations.

The International Crimes Evidence Project (ICEP) was established to conduct objective, independent investigations into serious alleged violations of international law in the Asia-Pacific region.

1. A regional centre providing information and analysis to support transitional justice mechanisms, promoting human rights, and accountability for the most serious international crimes.
2. Contribute to mechanisms for transitional justice and accountability in relation to the final phase of the Sri Lankan civil war.

Energy & water

Rising prices are leading to increasing inequality in access to and affordability of energy and water services. At the same time, energy markets are transforming through new technologies. The ultimate desired outcome is energy and water systems that deliver equality of access to affordable, sustainable energy and water as essential services.

1. Residential consumers, including low-income earners, have access to affordable energy and water.
2. Low-income and vulnerable consumers have access to energy services and programs that minimising disconnections and have appropriate support through concessions and hardship programs to pay for energy services.
3. Residential consumers have best practice consumer protections (e.g. from poor marketing practices).
4. A sustainable energy system that minimises energy use and maximises access to affordable renewable energy.
5. Increased effective consumer engagement in the market and in energy policy processes.

Strategies – summary of desired outcomes

PIAC seeks to promote social justice and human rights by integrating three core strategies: legal assistance; policy development and research; and community engagement. PIAC uses the law to achieve practical outcomes that protect individual dignity and the basic rights of vulnerable people. Providing legal assistance free of charge is a key way in which PIAC promotes equal access to justice.

PIAC draws on specialised knowledge of particular client communities, gained through our legal assistance work, to recognise trends or patterns that indicate systemic problems or issues. We work with government, business, the community sector and other partners to achieve lasting change.

PIAC maintains very high standards of governance and management and is accountable for its use of public resources.

Legal assistance

PIAC provides legal assistance and conducts litigation on a broad range of public interest issues, particularly where a decision or practice affects individuals who are subject to some economic or other disadvantage and has that effect on a significant number of people. Legal services include advice and representation to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and test case litigation.

1. High impact strategic litigation achieves positive outcomes for significant groups of people.
2. Risk of adverse costs orders and questions of standing do not inhibit applicants pursuing discrimination matters.
3. Test cases create legal precedents that protect human rights and promote social justice, for PIAC's target populations.
4. High quality and innovative legal advocacy has systemic impact in key program areas.

Policy & research

PIAC uses the practical experience gained through its legal work to identify where justice is being denied systemically and to propose reform. Much of PIAC's policy work responds to government and independent inquiries proposing reform, or parliamentary committees considering draft legislation, in both State and Federal jurisdictions. Because of our specialised knowledge of particular client communities, PIAC is well positioned to identify trends or patterns in legal problems that indicate a systemic issue.

1. Projects, integrated with evidence from our legal work, achieve systemic outcomes with a demonstrably positive impact for disadvantaged and vulnerable people.
2. Policy and law reform positions are based on compelling evidence from litigation and consultation.
3. PIAC furthers its goals, complements its strengths and expands its reach by collaborating with other organisations.

Community engagement

PIAC engages with the community on issues of public interest through the media and by hosting conferences, seminars and workshops; presenting conference papers; publishing newsletters, bulletins, submissions and reports; and building public interest networks and coalitions. PIAC provides education and training for not-for-profit organisations and individuals to improve advocacy on public interest issues.

1. PIAC contributes to public understanding and influences public opinion in areas in which PIAC has expertise and highlights the needs of vulnerable people.
2. Training for not-for profit organisations improves advocacy on public interest issues.
3. Participants have working understanding of the law, the justice system and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.
4. Training for law students encourages them to use the law and related advocacy skills to achieve social justice.

Good governance

PIAC maintains very high standards of governance and management and is accountable for its use of public resources.

1. A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is in place, and PIAC's commitment to reconciliation is evident in all our work.
2. A robust knowledge management system and effective communication increase the effectiveness of PIAC's work.
3. Dependable, diverse appropriate and ethical funding streams.
4. A well-organised system of management and Board oversight.
5. A skilled, motivated and engaged workforce.
6. PIAC has an excellent workplace safety record.