

Take the first steps towards a solution

Melinda Schroeder
Manager - Information & Referral Services
Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission



What is the Legal Aid Helpline?

The Legal Aid Helpline operates from a dedicated call centre at the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission's (NTLAC) Palmerston premises. The Territory wide service provides information, referral and appointments for legal advice and can be contacted between 8.00am and 4.30pm Monday to Friday. All people contacting the Commission for information or advice contact the Helpline as a first step towards a solution to their problem.

The service provides comprehensive information to callers, along with referrals to legal advice and other helpful services for a wide variety of issues. The Helpline staff are able to arrange appointments for legal advice where required, and also provide valuable information to the caller prior to that appointment. This information can assist callers to have a greater understanding of their issue prior to the advice appointment which can result in a better use of the time spent with the legal adviser.

Often people are unsure of whether they have a legal problem or not, or where they can go to get help with their specific problem. We encourage those people to call the Legal Aid Helpline. Our staff are experienced in identifying issues and the right people to help with

them. Helpline staff have a wide range of resources available to assist with information.

Background

The National Partnership Agreement on Legal Services between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth Governments was signed by the then Prime Minister of Australia and Chief Minister of the Northern Territory in 2010.

This agreement required legal aid commissions across Australia to reposition their services so that where possible, people are provided with legal help at an early stage and before problems escalate.

Early intervention and prevention legal advice, information and referral services are vital to helping people with legal problems early on.

As a result, the NTLAC put in a range of strategies to increase the focus on this area of service provision. One of these was the development of the Legal Aid Helpline.

Continuous Improvement

Helpline staff participate in regular professional development opportunities, service provider training and information sessions

to keep up to date with changes to systems and procedures. Since implementing new telephone technology and the service being resourced with full time staff, the call capture rate has increased to 100%. A significant increase in calls to the service is highlighted by the call rate from January 2011 – 2012 increasing 55% and from January 2012 - 2013 increasing 43%. From January 2011 to January 2013 this has been a 120% call increase.

How can legal practitioners use the Helpline?

Clients will often present to lawyers with a range of legal and other problems, but the lawyer is only engaged to advise and represent their client with a particular problem. Practitioners can refer clients with multiple legal and related needs to the Helpline for other matters while continuing to assist them with a particular matter.

More Details

Cards with the Legal Aid Helpline contact details are available for practitioners to provide to clients. To obtain copies of the cards please email Melinda Schroeder of the NTLAC at melinda.schroeder@ntlac.nt.gov.au.

Small employers to benefit from free clearing house for super payments

Andrew Proebstl
Chief Executive,
legalsuper



Businesses with fewer than 20 employees can save time and money with the Federal Government's introduction of a free 'clearing house' for paying superannuation contributions.

This initiative is designed to cut compliance costs for small businesses and will include legal firms with less than 20 employees.

An employee is defined as an individual who is employed on a full-time, part-time or casual basis.

On 12 May 2010, Federal Parliament passed legislation to set up a superannuation contributions clearing house for small businesses through the Medicare network.

The Government selected Medicare to act as the clearing house because its infrastructure can process large volumes of electronic transactions in a secure environment.

Under this service, employers make a single electronic payment to Medicare, covering all of their staff superannuation contributions for each pay period.

Medicare is then responsible for distributing the total amount among the various nominated funds of employees.

Smaller legal firms to gain

The new scheme offers some valuable benefits for law firms with fewer than 20 employees.

- The system is entirely electronic, which eliminates paperwork and saves even more time and money.
- Under the new legislation a firm's Superannuation Guarantee obligations will be met when it pays the correct amount to the clearing house. Medicare takes over responsibility from that point.
- The clearing house will manage employers' choice of fund obligations.

How to make contributions

Employers will need to register before they can begin making contributions.

The clearing house will be able to take contributions from 1 July and the Medicare website is taking registrations now.

Employers can register their business details online at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/super

A user ID and password will be sent to the address registered.

Once Medicare has accepted their registration, employers will be able to log back into the system and enter in details of their employees and the employees' chosen fund.

Where the employee's chosen fund is not a self-managed super fund (SMSF), Medicare will use the fund ABN to validate that it is an APRA-regulated fund and to

determine bank account details.

For SMSFs, Medicare will check that the fund is able to receive the contribution.

When the employer wishes to make super contributions, they will log into the Medicare system, select the employees they are paying for and enter the contribution amounts.

The Medicare system will then issue the employer with an electronic invoice and an amount to pay.

Once the employer has paid Medicare the correct amount, the money will be forwarded to the designated funds.

Medicare intends to run a daily process to aggregate contributions on a fund basis.

Provided the contributed amount matches the invoiced amount, it is expected that the employer contributions will be distributed to the destination funds within 24 hours of receipt by Medicare. ●

For more information, go to www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/super

Important note: This information is of a general nature and does not take into account your specific needs. You should consider your own financial position, objectives and requirements before making any financial decisions. You should also obtain and read the legalsuper Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) before making your investment decision. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.