

Submission to the Review of Practical Legal Training – With You Training Project

The [With You Project](#) is a training package for trauma-informed, rights-based legal services to clients experiencing distress, poor mental health and/or suicidality. *With You* is the first national model of trauma-informed, rights-based lawyering, developed through co-design and consultation with over 500 people across Australia, including practitioners and people with lived experience of receiving a legal service. The Project is funded by National Legal Aid and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

We support the submissions made by other Legal Aid Commissions and Legal Assistance Sector services which recommend the inclusion of skills that support quality legal services to diverse clients, including trauma-informed practice. We consider that the ability to engage safely and effectively with clients affected by trauma is not a specialist skill, but a core professional capability that directly affects access to justice, client outcomes, ethical practice and lawyer wellbeing.

With You recommends that:

1. Trauma-informed, rights-based practice should be recognised as an essential skill for all lawyers.
2. Trauma-informed, rights-based training should be embedded throughout all stages of legal training, including:
 - a. University
 - b. Practical legal training
 - c. Supervised practice
3. Any training should be co-designed with people with lived experience of trauma and experience receiving a legal service. Where possible, training should also be co-delivered by lived experience experts.
4. The *With You* Project should be further consulted in the development of trauma-informed competencies, noting our existing resources, national networks and expertise.

Our experience implementing a national training program has demonstrated that:

- **There is consistently high demand for trauma-informed, rights-based legal services.** There is no indication that the prevalence of trauma experiences amongst the client population will decrease. This is particularly important for lawyers working with marginalised clients.
- **Trauma-informed, rights-based practice is essential to effective legal service delivery.** Lawyers cannot effectively assist clients if those clients do not feel safe, respected or able to participate in the legal process. By promoting trust, safety, choice and control, lawyers are better able to build rapport with clients, obtain accurate instructions, communicate legal advice clearly and support meaningful participation in legal processes. These practical skills are fundamental to fulfilling professional obligations and ensuring legal services are accessible, responsive and effective for all clients.
- **Trauma-informed, rights-based skills and services are essential for retaining lawyers and lawyer wellbeing.** Trauma-informed, rights-based providers support staff to ensure that they can effectively respond to increasingly

complex client needs. Trauma-informed practice also addresses staff recruitment and retention issues through mitigation of vicarious trauma risk.

- **Trauma-informed practice is increasingly recognised as best practice across multiple sectors, including the justice sector.** Services are increasingly adopting trauma-informed approaches, creating an expectation that new lawyers will enter the profession with an understanding of trauma and its impacts. However, the *With You* Project consistently receives feedback that trauma-informed practice is rarely taught in law schools, despite how useful it is in practice.

A trauma-informed approach equips lawyers to:

- Build trust and rapport with clients
- Obtain clearer and more reliable instructions
- Communicate effectively with people experiencing distress
- Recognise the impacts of trauma
- Reduce the risk of re-traumatisation through legal processes
- Uphold professional and ethical obligations
- Manage vicarious trauma and sustain professional wellbeing

Notably, the [National Practical Legal Training Research Report](#) prepared by Urbis Ltd highlighted the need to refocus PLT towards practical skills, professional ethics, client communication and engagement skills. Supervisors have also reported that interpersonal and communication skills are not consistently demonstrated by early career lawyers. Trauma-informed practice aligns closely with these reform objectives and we suggest this review presents a clear opportunity to strengthen trauma-informed capabilities within legal training.

You can learn more about the *With You* Project at <https://nationallegalaid.org.au/national-training/withyou>. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission and opportunities for consultation and collaboration further.