



# Working with clients experiencing homelessness and specialist homelessness services

**QAILS webinar**

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# Presented by....



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and

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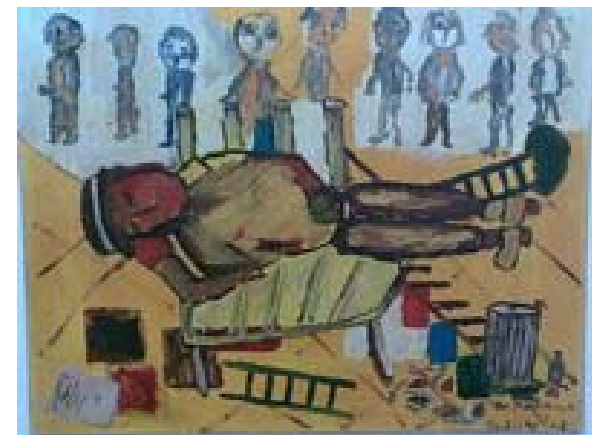
Lawyer

Outreach Legal Clinics (including  
Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic)

QPILCH

# Overview

- ❑ QPILCH/HPLC context
- ❑ Insights from the HPLC experience and research
  - ▣ Legal needs
  - ▣ Barriers to legal assistance
  - ▣ Advice-seeking behaviours
- ❑ Working effectively with clients experiencing homelessness
- ❑ Effective collaboration with community agencies
- ❑ Legal Health Check & future opportunities

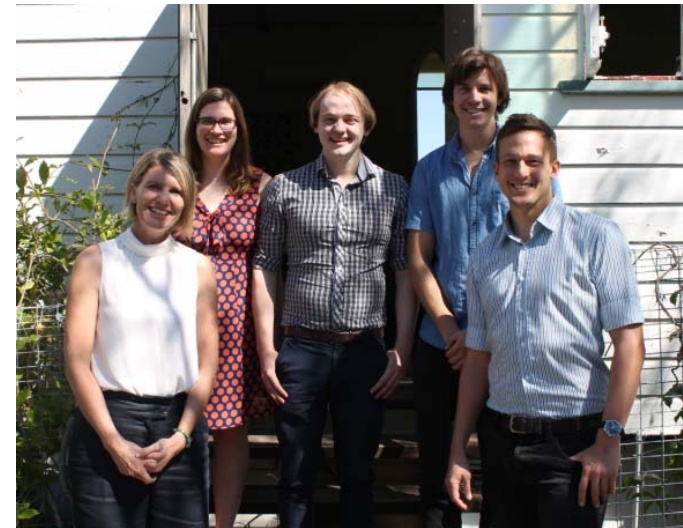


## Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House Inc

- ❑ QPILCH is a community legal centre that coordinates the provision of pro bono civil legal services for individuals and community groups
- ❑ We assess applications from the public, and refer eligible matters to law firms and barristers for pro bono legal assistance;
- ❑ We coordinate direct advice clinics:
  - ▣ Outreach Legal Clinics (Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Refugee Civil Law Clinic, Mental Health Civil Law Clinic, Outreach Legal Clinic, LegalPod)
  - ▣ Self Representation Service (State and Federal Courts, and QCAT)
  - ▣ Mental Health Law Practice
- ❑ Our work is built on partnerships with law firms, barristers, university law schools, QLS, BAQ, LAQ, other key stakeholders and CLCs

# Outreach Legal Clinics

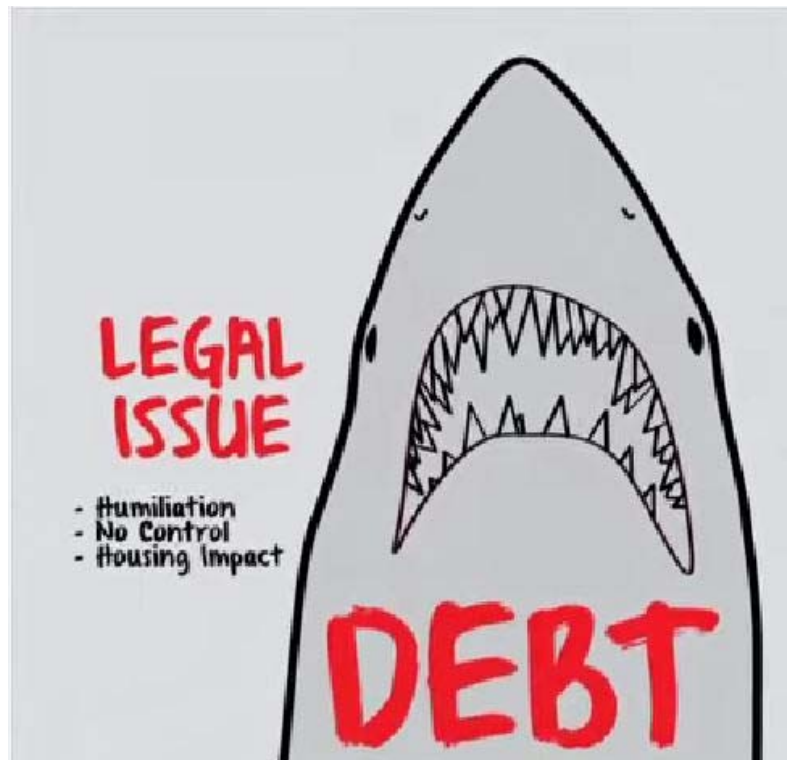
- Over 5,500 clients given assistance since 2002
- 14 Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic (**HPLC**) locations in Brisbane and Regional + Refugee Civil Law Clinic + 2 Mental Health Civil Law Clinics + LegalPod
- Co-located with essential services – accommodation, food, health, advocacy
- 1,200 new client files in 2013-2014
- Over 700 new clients in 2014-15



The Outreach Legal Clinics team at QPILCH in 2014

# Multiple and complex needs

*People experiencing homelessness or other disadvantage have a high prevalence of legal and non-legal needs...*

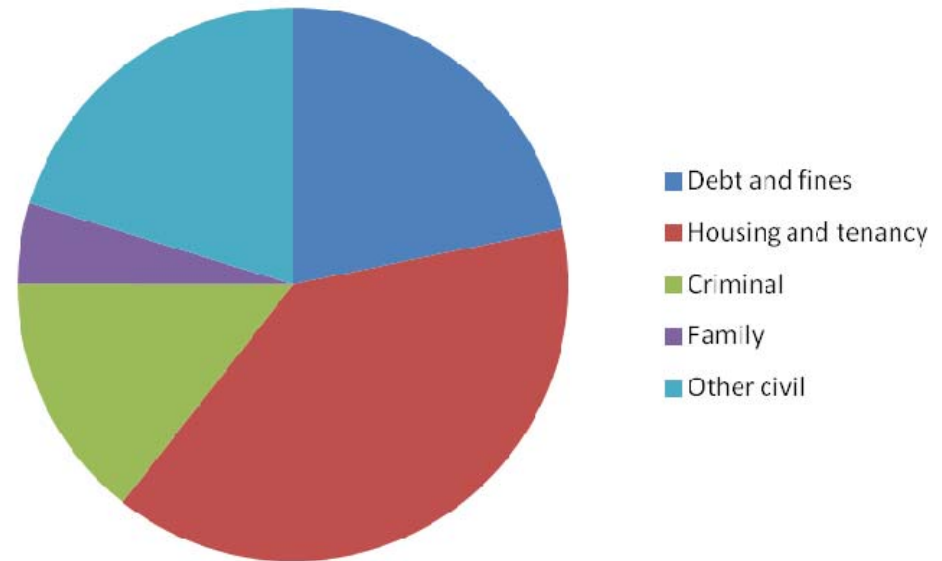


- 85.4% of people experiencing homelessness have at least one legal problem each year and 50.5% experience 3+ legal problems each year.
- Vulnerable and disadvantaged populations are more likely to experience multiple legal problems.
- Specific types of legal problems tend to “cluster” together.
- Unresolved legal problems entrench social exclusion and disadvantage.

# HPLC legal casework

## □ HPLC 'top 4'

- Debt & Fines
- Housing & tenancy
- Criminal
- Family



- ## □ Other civil: guardianship & administration, mental health law (ITOs), criminal compensation, reviewing government decisions (eg Centrelink), employment, child protection, succession

# Barriers to legal assistance



- Lack of awareness of rights and available assistance
- Beliefs about, and past experience with, the law/legal system
  - ▣ Distrust
  - ▣ Apathy
  - ▣ Fear
- Geographic/physical isolation from services
- Reluctance to 'complicate' issues
- Capability – disability, poor health, addiction, low literacy



# Advice-seeking behaviour



- ❑ People prioritise immediate needs over legal issues and often “do nothing” to resolve the issue
- ❑ When people contact a legal service, the issue has generally reached crisis point
  - ❑ “I have to go to court tomorrow.”
  - ❑ “I’m being evicted at the end of the week.”
- ❑ Many people turn to a non-legal services for help when they have a legal problem
  - ❑ Community workers play a vital role in assisting people to identify their legal issues, obtain legal assistance, engage in legal processes and manage their legal outcomes

# In summary...

*How do we build a bridge between lived disadvantage and legal assistance services?*

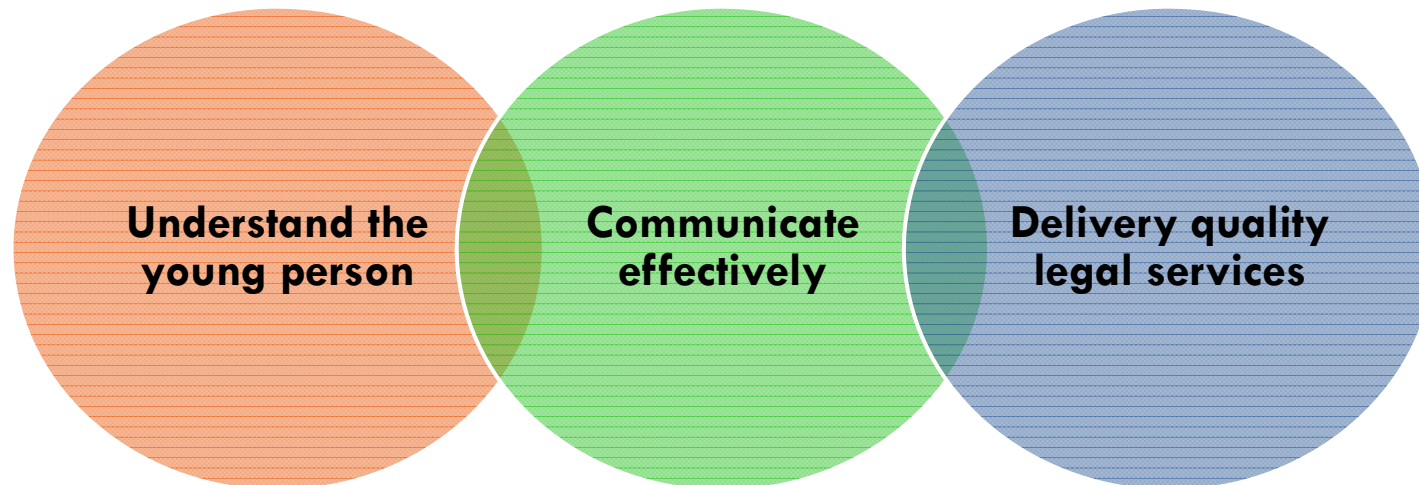


# Working effectively with clients experiencing homelessness

- ❑ “Go to the people...” – outreach services
- ❑ Leave time for the client to tell their story – multiple appointments may be required
- ❑ Recognise and respect the client’s skills, capabilities and lived experiences
- ❑ As appropriate, help the client identify and prioritise issues
  - ▣ Consider using the Legal Health Check
- ❑ Write things down (but recognise literacy issues)
- ❑ As appropriate, involve community workers/support people
- ❑ Where possible, make a plan for how to stay in touch – consider which options will work best for the client

# Connecting with vulnerable young people

- 'Best practice framework for working with young people'  
(Legal Aid Queensland, 2015)



# Connecting with vulnerable young people

## 1. Understand the young person

*Specific issues & experiences can impact ability to trust adults and/or engage with the legal process:*



- Respectfully ask questions to help you understand anything that may impact the young person's interaction with you

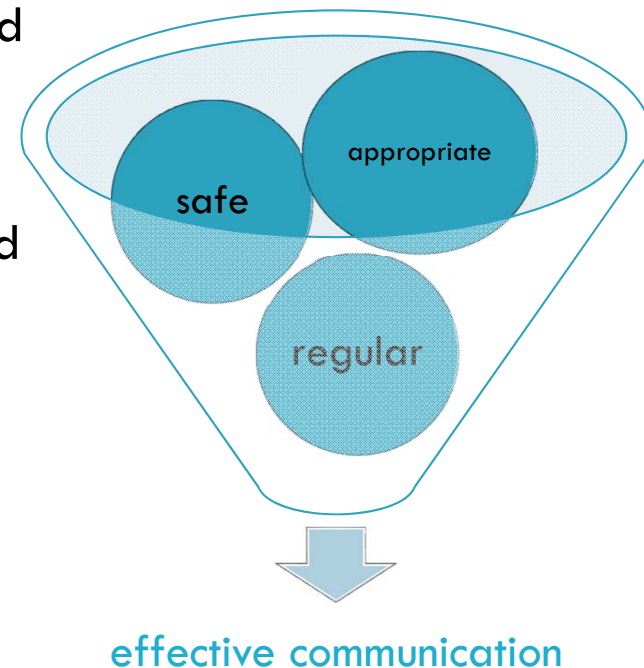
**Practice tip**

# Connecting with vulnerable young people

## 2. Communicate effectively

*Manage regular communication:*

- ▣ Ask the young person about their preferred method of communication
  - ▣ Can they access it regularly? Is it safe?
- ▣ If sending material, provide self-addressed envelopes & clear instructions for returning documents (eg signed Client Authorities)
- ▣ Let the young person know you will be calling on a 'private number' & provide time frames about when to expect your calls



# Connecting with vulnerable young people

## 2. Communicate effectively

*Building rapport and trust – communication tips:*

- Before meetings, develop a plan for how you will manage communication:
  - ▣ Clearly establish the purpose of meeting
  - ▣ Consider the information that is necessary to share and to obtain
  - ▣ Consider how you will explain key legal information (plain language & examples)
  - ▣ Ensure you are fully prepared – this will build the young person's confidence that you are dependable
- At meetings, always:
  - ▣ Introduce yourself and explain purpose of meeting
  - ▣ Check the young person understands your information
  - ▣ Ask whether the young person has any questions or concerns about the process

# Connecting with vulnerable young people

## 3. Deliver quality legal services

*Maintain professional standards and boundaries:*

- ▣ Prepare for and manage ongoing interactions as you would an adult
  - Always advise the client of available options
  - Provide appropriate written information to support their understanding
- ▣ Be clear about your role and how you can help
  - Provide information about the client/lawyer relationship, including how confidentiality applies and how it will be managed with caseworkers involved
  - Explain tasks that must be done and who is responsible for doing them
  - Always explain what happens next and what to expect
- ▣ Make appropriate referrals (legal and non-legal)
  - Provide information about services that could address other needs



# Effective collaboration with community agencies

- Get to know the agency and its clients/service users
  - ▣ Identify the legal needs of service users
  - ▣ Understand how the agency works (assessment frameworks, constraints etc)
- Establish common goals and clear processes for sustainable service delivery
  - ▣ Consider the type of legal services clients need and the resources available to provide these services.
  - ▣ Agencies can sometimes assist with transport, host an interview, receive mail and read correspondence
  - ▣ Agencies may be referral point for non-legal need
- Provide effective training
  - ▣ Consider using the Legal Health Check
- Be accessible and work on the relationship

# Legal Health Check

- ☐ The right issues
- ☐ The right questions
- ☐ At the right time
- ☐ By the right person



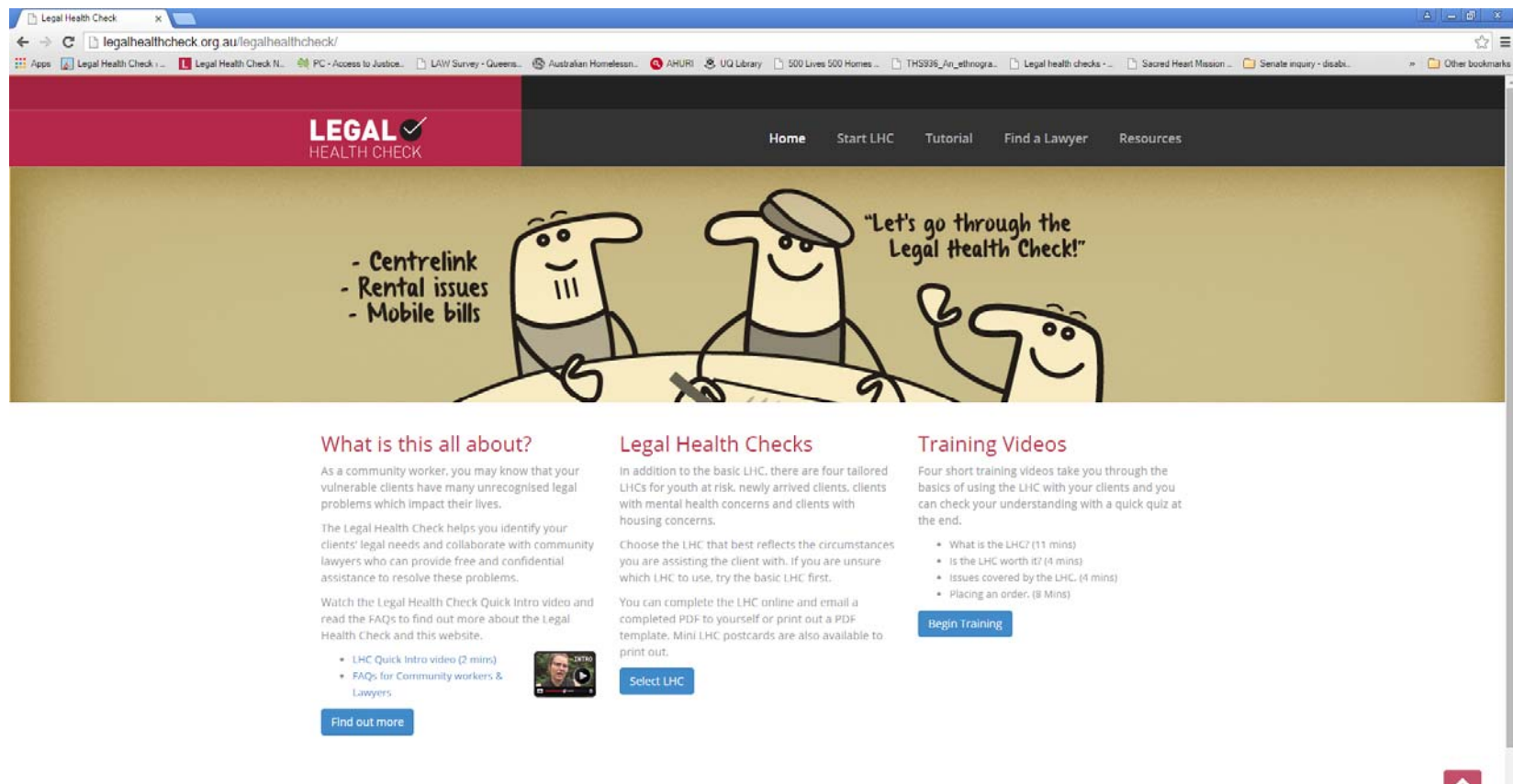
The Legal Health Check is not a self-help tool.

It is a case-collaboration resource.

# NACLC Project

## Legal Health Check website for community workers

[www.legalhealthcheck.org.au](http://www.legalhealthcheck.org.au)



# New Basic Legal Health Check

**LEGAL**  
HEALTH CHECK

Please note: The Legal Health Check identifies potential legal need. Please complete the training module at [www.legalhealthcheck.org.au](http://www.legalhealthcheck.org.au) before using this resource. Completing this document does not create any legal obligation between a community worker, the client or any legal service.

Basic  
v1.0

CLIENT NAME	
COMMUNITY AGENCY	
WORKER NAME	
DATE	
LEGAL SERVICE	
ADDRESS	
APPOINTMENT DETAILS	


**1. Money Troubles (Debt)** Yes No Unsure

Is anyone chasing you for money? ☐ ☐ ☐

Do you have payments due or unpaid accounts?  
E.g. phone // Centrelink // Cash converters // electricity // car loan  
Complete the table below for each debt, where possible.

Would you like to access your superannuation or insurance cover? ☐ ☐ ☐

Debt	Creditor (who you owe \$ to)	Amount owed (approx)	Instalment Payment amount and frequency	Contact Are you being contacted by phoner E.g. by debt collectors?
e.g.	Telco	\$2500.00	\$100pfn	yes
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

 Please attach copy of client's Centrelink and/or bank statement if possible

**2. Unpaid Fines** Yes No Unsure

Do you have any unpaid fines (e.g. SPER/ SDR/ CCV)? ☐ ☐ ☐

Would you like to explore your options? E.g. smaller instalments// Work orders// Waivers? ☐ ☐ ☐

DETAILS

**3. Housing Concerns** Yes No Unsure

Have you recently been evicted? ☐ ☐ ☐

Was your tenancy bond lodged and returned? ☐ ☐ ☐

Did you leave any belongings left behind at recent accommodation? ☐ ☐ ☐

Do you have any unpaid rent? ☐ ☐ ☐

Are you or do you want to apply for government or community housing? ☐ ☐ ☐

Are you on any tenancy blacklists e.g. TICA ☐ ☐ ☐

DETAILS

**4. Crime** Yes No Unsure

Do you have a Notice to Appear, or are you due in Court? ☐ ☐ ☐

Do you want to deal with any outstanding Warrants? ☐ ☐ ☐

DETAILS

**5. Centrelink and Decision-making** Yes No Unsure

Are you receiving the appropriate Centrelink benefits? ☐ ☐ ☐

Are you under a Forensic or Involuntary Treatment Order? ☐ ☐ ☐

Does the Adult Guardian look after your personal or health affairs? ☐ ☐ ☐

Does the Public Trustee make decisions about your money? ☐ ☐ ☐

Would you like to change or review any of these arrangements? ☐ ☐ ☐

DETAILS

**6. Relationships** Would you like to discuss...? Yes No Unsure

Domestic violence orders you want, have or are subject to? ☐ ☐ ☐

Arrangements, plans or orders about children? (e.g. who the child/ren live with, spend time with, or your involvement in major long-term issues) ☐ ☐ ☐

State child protection orders or concerns about you or any children? ☐ ☐ ☐

Your rights in any personal relationship, including divorce or separation? ☐ ☐ ☐

Concerns about your experiences as a child, while you were in the care of adults or institutions? ☐ ☐ ☐

DETAILS

**7. Other** Yes No Unsure

Do you have any other concerns that you would like to raise with a lawyer? ☐ ☐ ☐

**Please forward this form to your community lawyer.**  
For a list of local community lawyers check [www.legalhealthcheck.org.au](http://www.legalhealthcheck.org.au) for details.  
**Privacy:** If you keep a copy of a completed Legal Health Check, it is subject to your organisation's privacy obligations.

There are also Legal Health Checks for youth at risk, new arrivals, people with mental health concerns and people with housing concerns.

# New Mini Legal Health Check postcard

## How can community lawyers help?

- ☐ Is anyone chasing you for money?
- ☐ Do you have unpaid fines?
- ☐ Do you have hassles with rent/bond arrears?
- ☐ Who decides about your income and health?
- ☐ Are you due in Court?

*Legal Service Name / Address / Contact Details.*

**Connect to lawyers:**



# Future opportunities



## ☐ **NACLC conference**

- ❖ New Legal Health Check resources

## ☐ **DJAG Legal Health Check Project 2014-16**

- ❖ Evaluate Legal Health Check – where and how might it work best?
- ❖ Steering Committee – ATSILS/LAQ/QAILS/QCOSS/DJAG/QPILCH
- ❖ Pilot sites for Legal Health Check Pathways
- ❖ Training materials for Qld legal assistance service providers

## ☐ **Experimentation**

Which client group do you want to better connect to your legal service by leveraging their “problem noticers”?

# Any questions?



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