

Report summary

This report examines whether Legal Aid Queensland is effectively enabling access to legal representation for people in need.



What is important to know about this audit?

Legal Aid Queensland is the state's largest provider of publicly funded legal services. It aims to make legal services available to financially disadvantaged people who might otherwise be unable to access that support and promote confidence in the justice system.

To access legal representation services, people must meet Legal Aid Queensland's eligibility criteria, which encompasses a means test, an assessment of the legal merit of the case, and whether it is a priority matter. Figure 1 shows key statistics for Legal Aid Queensland.

Figure A – Key statistics for Legal Aid Queensland



\$1.17 billion total funding received for 2025–30 from the Australian and state governments



31,162 grants of aid approved out of **46,072** initial applications in 2024–25



Over 80% of cases for representation allocated to external lawyers over the past 5 years



82% of approved applications were for criminal law matters in 2024–25

Source: Queensland Audit Office using data from Legal Aid Queensland and publicly available sources.



What did we find?

Legal Aid Queensland is providing access to representation services for those who meet its eligibility criteria, but needs to improve the quality and timeliness of its assessment decisions

Legal Aid Queensland is effectively enabling access to representation services for people who meet its eligibility criteria. The criteria applied is similar to models used in other jurisdictions nationally and in other Commonwealth countries, and provides Legal Aid Queensland with a structured framework for allocating grants of aid. Despite managing current application volumes for legal representation services, it can improve the quality and timeliness of its assessment decisions. It is not processing applications within target time frames, and an increasing number of decisions to reject applications are being overturned, largely through Legal Aid Queensland's internal review processes.

Demand for legal aid services is forecast to grow. Increasing cost and delivery pressures could impact Legal Aid Queensland's ability to provide effective access into the future

Legal Aid Queensland is forecasting an increase in demand for its services and associated costs in forward periods. It is also facing growing challenges in engaging private sector law firms to undertake representation work on its behalf to meet demand. While it has implemented temporary measures to address immediate pressures, Legal Aid Queensland needs to consider alternative longer-term solutions to address future challenges.

Legal Aid Queensland plans to consider these through a business transformation project that it started in December 2025. If successful, this will allow it to better inform government of the risks and options available to meet future demand and its ability to effectively deliver services into the future.



Means test thresholds have not kept pace with economic development

The eligibility means test thresholds that Legal Aid Queensland uses to assess financial disadvantage have not kept pace with broader economic developments. As a result, there may be an increasing cohort of people who do not meet Legal Aid Queensland eligibility criteria and who are unable to afford representation.

Income thresholds have not been updated since 2018 and home equity thresholds remain at the level set by Legal Aid Queensland in 1997. Since this time, minimum wages, poverty indexes, house prices, and other measures of economic growth have all increased.



What do entities need to do?

We recommend that Legal Aid Queensland:

- analyses options and risks to meet expected growth in demand and future access to representation services
- reviews its quality and timeliness targets and processes, and addresses performance challenges.

