

Legal Aid News - February

Vulnerable Children legislation and related changes to legal aid

The Vulnerable Children legislation received Royal Assent on 1 July 2014 and puts in place a number of reforms which are further outlined in the [Children's Action Plan](#) to provide a framework for protecting and improving the wellbeing of vulnerable New Zealand children. Several new initiatives will start being phased in later this year, including new requirements for organisations and people who work with children, and new court orders for the care and protection of children. An overview of all the changes coming into force can be found in the [Legislation](#) section of the Children's Action Plan website, and more information will be made available over the coming months.

The Legal Services Commissioner consulted on the related new legal aid activities and changes to fee schedules between 21 November to 19 December and feedback was received from the New Zealand Law Society. A paper detailing final decisions and response to consultation feedback can be found [here](#).

The new approved [Civil fee schedule](#), changes to the [Family fee schedule](#) and related [disbursements](#) are here for your information. They are expected to come into effect later this year once the commencement dates are confirmed through regulations.

External Consultation on Re-approval Policy

We're consulting with legal professionals on a proposed re-approval policy for current legal aid providers between 26 February and 27 March 2015.

By June 2017 the approvals of all legal aid providers will have expired. We'll therefore need a re-approval process and policy that is designed to handle the large number of applications we expect to get. The consultation proposes a simpler, more efficient application process for re-approvals, which also ensures lawyers continue to satisfy all the necessary criteria for approval, as set out in the Legal Services Act 2011 and Ministry regulations.

Please take the time to read through the consultation, which is available on the New Zealand Law Society website, and submit any feedback by 27 March 2015. We would be interested to hear your thoughts.

Family Court to launch new improved Care of Children Act forms

As you may be aware the Family Court is introducing new Care of Children Act 2004 approved forms from Monday 2 March 2015.

The new forms aim to simplify the process for making applications under Part 5A of the Care of Children Act and have been designed to reduce repetition, unnecessary questions and blank spaces.

Although the old forms will no longer be available on 2 March 2015, we'll continue to accept these forms until 27 March 2015 to ensure a smooth transition.

Please remember that we will no longer publish forms for ordering via the Ministry publications from that date. Instead copies may be provided via 0800 2 AGREE or the Family Court counters. The website and supporting resources will be amended to accommodate the changes.

Resources to support the new forms include:

- new information structure for accessing the correct forms
- a quick guide placed on the front of the form
- new full form guidelines
- a new quick guide to providing evidence.

For more information on the forms please check out the [Family Justice website](#).

External Customer Survey March 2015

In April and September last year we conducted a telephone survey with PDS users to gauge the overall level of client satisfaction with PDS and Legal Aid Services. Overall, the results were very positive and the great majority of legal aid customers were satisfied.

We're now planning another survey in March 2015. This time we'll be surveying criminal legal aid clients of private providers. We hope to speak to around 100 legal aid customers and all responses will be private and confidential. We will make the survey findings available through the Legal Aid News and on the 'What's new for legal aid providers' page of the Ministry's website.