

Free Legal Services at the Downing Centre Court

Attending court for a criminal case can be a nerve wracking experience – particularly if you cannot afford to hire a lawyer.

The good news is there is a range of free legal services at the Downing Centre which may be able to assist you on the day.

Here are a few of those services:

Legal Aid

The Legal Aid office is located on Level 4, opposite Courtroom 4.6.

Legal Aid offers free legal services in a range of criminal cases. [Duty lawyers](#) are available on all court days to assist those who have a matter in court, but are not legally represented.

Duty lawyers can offer advice and assistance to anyone, regardless of whether they meet the eligibility criteria or not – but if a person requires ongoing representation in court (e.g. for a more serious case or a hearing/trial) they will need to satisfy a means and merit test.

In certain cases, Legal Aid duty lawyers can seek an adjournment for defendants to obtain proper legal advice.

Duty Solicitor / Barrister

[Duty solicitors](#) and barristers are located on Level 5, near Courtroom 5.1.

They are fully qualified members of the legal profession who have volunteered their time to help members of the public free

of charge.

Duty solicitors and barristers are able to assist people who are due to appear in court by providing free legal advice – and sometimes representation – for a range of criminal cases.

While you do not need to book an appointment to see a duty lawyer, it is best to arrive early as they can get very busy, and may not be able to assist everyone.

Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT

The [Aboriginal Legal Service \(ALS\)](#) office is also located on Level 4, near Legal Aid.

It operates similarly to Legal Aid in so far as it provides free legal advice on a wide range of criminal cases, but it is targeted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ALS lawyers are well known within the Indigenous community, and will often be able to make a judgment as to a person's Aboriginal status in a culturally sensitive manner.

ALS lawyers are able to provide assistance to Indigenous people on the day of court without a prior appointment.

Those who have a court case simply need to show up at the ALS office before entering the courtroom. The ALS lawyer will be able to provide them with advice before dealing with the case in court.

In more complex or serious cases, they may seek an adjournment to obtain further information or undertake preparations.

Women's Domestic Violence Advocacy Service

The [Women's Domestic Violence Advocacy Service](#) (WDVAS) is an initiative of the Legal Aid Commission which offers assistance to women seeking protection from domestic violence.

While they are not able to provide legal advice, they can

refer women to Legal Aid lawyers – including those who are affiliated with the Domestic Violence Practitioner Scheme.

The WDVAS is able to provide emotional support, information about the court process and a safe area where they can await their turn in court without seeing the alleged perpetrator.

The Service is also able to refer women to other community support services, including those offering safe housing, income support and counselling services.

Salvation Army Court Services

The [Salvation Army](#) has an office on Level 5.

It offers counselling, advice and emotional support to those who are due to appear in court, especially complainants and other witnesses. While they are not able to provide legal advice or representation, they can outline the court process and refer cases to a duty lawyer.

The Salvation Army also runs prison services to assist those in custody and their families, as well as post-release services to help former inmates reintegrate into the community.