



Advice on CLASS data and reporting

SUMMARY: Data and reports from CLASS for periods before June 2018 are not an accurate count of actual services delivered by individual organisations, and cannot be usefully compared to reports for previous years.

This is a summary of advice to community legal centres (CLCs), Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) and government funding bodies about understanding data reports from CLASS, in particular for the first three years of the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services (NPA).¹ A longer paper providing more information about CLASS data and reporting issues will be available from NACLC in July 2018.

For the 20 years until 2017, most CLCs used CLSIS as their client database. In 2015, the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department advised they were looking to decommission CLSIS. NACLC was provided with development funding to build a new client database ('CLASS'), on the proviso that the database was built around the 2015 *National Data Standards for Legal Assistance Services*² (national data standards). In March 2017, NACLC migrated 165 CLCs and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) from CLSIS to CLASS, and these organisations now use CLASS as their main client database.

There are three key reasons why CLASS data from 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 needs to be treated with caution, and cannot be used to accurately assess the actual service delivery of CLCs during this period. These three issues are:

1. Change in Data Standards: Mapping and Migration of CLSIS data to CLASS: The 2015 national data standards differed in some crucial ways to the 20-year old data definitions of CLSIS. Critical differences between some CLASS data fields and their CLSIS counterparts include:

- Financial Disadvantage Indicator – no similar field in CLSIS, but a field critical in CLASS due to the NPA Performance Benchmark and Performance Indicator requirements
- Referral – in CLSIS this was not a separate Service Category but was considered an Information Activity
- Legal Task – no similar category in CLSIS
- Facilitated Resolution Process – no similar category in CLSIS
- Duty Lawyer – in CLSIS was a sub-category introduced in 2015, could be selected when Case was closed
- Representation - Dispute Resolution – CLSIS equivalent was a voluntary check-box in Casework Activity
- Representation - Court/ Tribunal – CLSIS equivalent was a voluntary check-box in Casework Activity
- Other Representation – CLSIS simply had Legal Advice and Casework, so if a client service was not Legal Advice, it was a Case. In migration, all minor, medium and major cases that were not Duty Lawyer or were not identified as Dispute Resolution or Court/Tribunal came across as Other Representation.

In mapping and migrating data from CLSIS to CLASS, NACLC used the CLSIS proxies developed for NPA reporting³ and made decisions based on the best possible fit with the 2015 national data standards. However, the result of the change in data definitions means that reports from CLASS – particularly those using new service categories such as Legal Task or Representation Service – are drawing from data which in fact does not fit the definition of the service type in CLASS data fields or the national data standards. This also means that reports of CLC service provision generated by CLASS in relation to services provided *before April 2017* are at best only a rough guide as to the actual services provided. To get a better picture of the quantum of services delivered for any period prior to April 2017, and to compare a CLC's service delivery over a number of reporting periods, it may be useful to look at *the sum* of Legal Advice + Legal Task + Duty Lawyer + all Representation Services, rather than analysing numbers in each individual service category.

2. Change in Data Standards: Unfamiliar service categories and new counting rules: Given that CLSIS had been in use for 20 years, it is taking time to train all CLC staff and volunteers, as well as state program managers and

¹ <https://www.ag.gov.au/LegalSystem/Legalaidprogrammes/Pages/National-Partnership-Agreement-on-Legal-Assistance-Services.aspx>

² <https://www.ag.gov.au/LegalSystem/Legalaidprogrammes/Pages/National-Legal-Assistance-Data-Standards.aspx>

³ Further details of these proxies are set out in more detailed advice from NACLC by emailing naclc@naclc.org.au.

staff in CLC state peak associations, about how to characterise or count certain activities, in particular Legal Advices, Legal Tasks, and the various types of Representation Services. There is also some variation between CLCs, and between state program managers, state and territory governments, and CLC peak bodies, about how the national data standards should be interpreted. The following example sets out how different interpretations of service types and counting rules could lead to different results:

- A client attends the CLC and seeks advice about a tenancy dispute, family law, and a car insurance issue. The CLC provides advice about family law, gives the client some template letters in relation to insurance, and then refers the client to the tenants advocate, who conducts further research and provides written advice to the client a few days later.
- Different CLCs might record this in CLASS as one advice with three subject areas; or three advices; or two advices and one legal task, or even as two advices and one representation service.

NACLCL is now developing additional resources and stepping up training to address inconsistent interpretation of the service types and counting rules across the sector.

3. **System issues:** CLASS has been designed as a real-time database, with users encouraged to enter data at the time of providing a service or as quickly after the provision of the service as possible. Unfortunately, due to insufficient funding and the tight timeframe set for the decommissioning of CLSIS, the first version of CLASS that came online in March/April 2017 was “buggy” and had performance issues in relation to lag/ speed. While many bugs have been remedied, and lag time for most CLCs has improved, there are ongoing issues. In addition, some system design issues have slowed down CLC data entry, and may have led to some CLCs completing only basic data entry between April 2017 and December 2017. These include:

- Client Intake is a cumbersome process, requiring moving through a series of screens – alternative, quicker methods to create New Clients were made available, but it is possible that some data relating to New Clients was not accurately recorded in 2017.
- It is not yet possible to duplicate Services, meaning that users have to re-enter the same data including funding categories for each individual Service. Duplicate Services functionality is prioritised for development, but it is possible that CLASS users may be missing some information on Services (such as funding categories) that are needed for accurate reporting, including NPA reports.
- Bulk Information and Referral Services cannot easily be entered the way they could in CLSIS, so numbers of Information Services and Referral Services appear lower in CLASS than in CLSIS.

These system issues are likely to have led to an under-recording of actual Services being delivered by CLCs. For example, a CLC struggling with the new system might have created a new client and recorded initial Legal Advice, but then not recorded Referrals, additional Advices, or subsequent Legal Tasks.

As a result of the issues set out above, NACLCL urges caution about relying on CLC service data generated from CLASS for the three financial years 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18. Any report generated from CLASS using CLASS service categories for data that had originally been entered into CLSIS – that is, all pre-April 2017 data – is simply not an accurate reflection of the services actually performed by the CLCs. In addition, a report of CLASS data entered in the first 18 months - from April 2017 to June 2018 - is also likely to be an undercount of actual services provided during that period, and/or have some service types mischaracterised or miscounted. NACLCL strongly recommends that CLCs and government funders therefore include a note / caveat to all CLASS reports for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 periods, along the following lines:

The National Association of Community Legal Centres has advised that the transition from the CLSIS database to the CLASS database in April 2017, coupled with the introduction of new data definitions and categories of service provision, has meant that CLASS data and reports for 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18:

- *May not be an accurate count of actual services delivered by each individual organisation, and*
- *Cannot be usefully compared to reports for previous years.*

It is expected that CLASS data and reports from 2018-19 onwards will more accurately capture the work of each individual organisation. It is therefore recommended that 2018-19 be considered the “baseline” year for monitoring of service trends. See http://www.naclc.org.au/cb_pages/class.php for more information.

Thanks to funding provided in June 2018 by the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department and some state governments, as well as work being undertaken by CLC state associations, NACLCL is developing a 2018-19 Data Standards Action Plan to train and support CLCs, CLC associations, and governments to use consistent interpretations of new data definitions and counting rules, and to better understand CLASS reporting. For more information, contact us naclc@naclc.org.au.