

Frequently Asked Questions Legal Clinic for People with Disabilities

1. What is a disability and who are people with disabilities?

According to the United Nations (UN), The term persons with disabilities is used to apply to *all* persons with disabilities *including* those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Some examples of common disabilities are:

- vision Impairment.
- deaf or hard of hearing.
- mental health conditions.
- intellectual disability.
- acquired brain injury.
- autism spectrum disorder.
- physical disability.

Disability Resides in the Society not in the Person

- A person in a wheelchair might have difficulties being gainfully employed not because of her condition but because there are environmental barriers such as inaccessible buses or staircases in the workplace which obstruct his or her access.
- A child with an intellectual disability might have difficulties going to school due to the attitudes of teachers, school boards and possibly parents who are unable to adapt to students with different learning capacities.
- In a society where corrective lenses are available for someone with extreme myopia (near-sightedness), this person would not be considered to have a disability, however someone with the same condition in a society where corrective lenses were not available would be considered to have a disability, especially if the level of vision prevented the person from performing tasks expected of this person such as shepherding, sewing, or farming.

2. What is the legal clinic for people with disabilities?

The legal clinic for people with disabilities (PWD) is a partnership between the Public Solicitor's Office (PSO) and People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI) to facilitate access to justice for a traditionally marginalize group. The clinic provides specific accommodations and scheduled times for members of the PWD community to receive free legal services and referrals.

3. What can people expect from this legal clinic?

The partnership between PWDSI and PSO is central to the legal clinic. PWDSI manages the operations and administration of the clinic, while the PSO has a paralegal attending the clinic on the scheduled days. They provide legal information on 1.) criminal matters, 2.) civil matters, 3.) family matters, 4.) land advisory and legal support unit (LALSU) as well as 5.) relevant referrals to see PSO lawyers and other actors within the justice sector.

4. Why is a legal clinic for people with disabilities important?

Access to justice and legal services is a fundamental right in and of itself. It is a precondition to the enjoyment of all other human rights and is particularly important for PWDs because it provides a unique tool to counter the discrimination, disrespect, lack of dignity and violence, which this community faces disproportionately.

Paradoxically, those who need effective access to justice the most are the ones most frequently encountering barriers to it. The Solomon Islands Access to Justice Study conducted by UNDP in 2019 through surveys and focus groups found that Solomon Islanders are mostly satisfied with justice services at the national level, particularly those available in the community. Solomon Islanders were more likely to be positive than negative about changes to justice services over the last two years. However, Solomon Islanders who identified as having a disability were more pessimistic about overall justice services and reported lower levels of awareness, confidence in, and accessibility to different justice institutions.

Approximately one billion people, or 15 per cent of the global population, experience some form of disability which can arise at any stage of life. Persons with disabilities face disproportionate socio-economic marginalisation, resulting in poorer health and medical treatment, lower quality of education, limited employment prospects and generally broad-ranging restrictions on their community participation. These negative outcomes are exacerbated by challenges to access to justice specifically experienced by persons with disabilities.

5. What issues can people with disabilities bring to the legal clinic?

The clinic clients are individuals with disabilities or families with children with disabilities who need legal services including information. The legal issues clinic users need support on include education, government services, employment, housing, a business, family law, court appearances or another topic. Clients who require legal advice will be directly referred to a PSO lawyer.

6. What if a person with disability cannot make it to the legal clinic?

There are other options to access the legal clinic including: calling a toll-free line on 197, or emailing in confidence to pwdslc@gmail.com. A dedicated staff member from PWDSI will book appointments for you to see the PSO legal team. Please share if you require any accommodations. Carers or family members of people with disabilities can also access this service on their behalf.

7. What happens after I visit the clinic to access the legal services?

This depends on the types of cases the team receives. Legal matters will be referred to a specific PSO lawyer to take on or referred to the appropriate justice sector agency.

8. How is this legal clinic for people with disabilities possible?

The legal clinic is a result of the partnership between the Solomon Islands Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, through PSO in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services - National Community Based Rehabilitation, Our Telekom, Solomon Islands Access to Justice Project and Solomon Islands Justice Program.

9. When can a person with disability visit the clinic?

The legal clinic is open on the second Thursday of every month from 9am to 1pm. The last time the clinic was open for walk in consultation was on Thursday 4 February, so the next opening day will be on Thursday 18 February. If your query is urgent, a toll free line is also available on 197 or send an email in confidence to pwdslc@gmail.com.

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