



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

everyone, everywhere, everyday

Strategic Plan 2011-2014

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Foreword



Catherine Branson QC
President
Australian Human Rights
Commission

In 2011, the Australian Human Rights Commission celebrates twenty five years of operations.

During this time, the Commission has contributed greatly to improved human rights protections in Australia. We have:

- conducted landmark national inquiries, such as into the stolen generations (*Bringing them home*), the circumstances of children in immigration detention (*A last resort?*) and sexuality discrimination (*Same-Sex Same Entitlements*)
- prepared influential reports, such as the annual Social Justice and Native Title Reports of the Social Justice Commissioner which formed the genesis of national commitments to 'close the gap' on Indigenous health inequality
- developed national standards and partnerships with industry that have improved accessibility for people with disabilities, such as through accessible public transport and bus stops, universal housing design and captioning on television and in cinemas

- led public debate on major national social reform processes, such as the development of a national paid parental leave scheme and understanding the impact of an ageing population
- maintained and delivered a best practice complaint handling service, investigating and conciliating disputes about discrimination and human rights breaches
- provided expert advice to the Parliament, the courts, and the executive government on human rights issues.

We have also played an important leadership role internationally by sharing our experience with other national human rights institutions and by contributing technical assistance to advance partnerships for human rights in other countries.

While we are proud of these achievements, we are focused on the challenges that remain to further enhance respect for human rights in Australia.

Every three years we are required under our legislation to prepare a new Strategic Plan.¹ We treat this as an opportunity to reflect on our effectiveness in undertaking our functions and duties, and to identify how we can ensure that our future work will result in tangible improvements in human rights for people in Australia.

This Strategic Plan reflects the determination and desire of our staff and statutory officers to make a difference and positively contribute to improved human rights protection for all people in Australia. It commits us to working collaboratively, with innovation, and to the highest standard of excellence.

This Strategic Plan is developed at an important time for Australia and for the Commission. The government has begun implementation of the Australian Human Rights Framework (which is in place for the duration of this Strategic Plan). This framework includes a range of significant reforms that will contribute to greater awareness and protection of human rights.

Through its participation in the Universal Periodic Review process at the United Nations, the government has also made a number of important

commitments to advance human rights protection in Australia. These and other commitments will be driven through a revamped National Action Plan on Human Rights.

We are delighted that from mid-2011 the Commission will have full time Race Discrimination, Disability Discrimination and Sex Discrimination Commissioners for the first time in many years, and we will see the inaugural appointment of an Age Discrimination Commissioner.

We see respect for human rights as the cornerstone of strong communities in which everyone, regardless of their background, can make a contribution and feel safe and included.

Ultimately, the purpose of this plan is to maximise our contribution to creating an Australian society where human rights are enjoyed by **everyone, everywhere, everyday.**



The Hon. Catherine Branson, QC
President, Australian Human Rights
Commission

June 2011

¹ Section 46AA and 46AB of the Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth) requires the Commission to prepare a corporate plan every three years. The plan must: (a) set out the general policies and strategies that the Commission intends to adopt in order to perform its duties and functions; and (b) include such performance indicators and targets as the Commission considers appropriate.

Who we are



The Australian Human Rights Commission was established in 1986 by the federal Parliament as an independent statutory organisation charged with protecting and promoting the human rights of all people in Australia.

We operate under the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth) as well as federal laws that protect people from discrimination such as on the basis of their age, disability, race or sex.² We also have specific responsibilities under the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Fair Work Act 2009*.

We work to find practical and long-term solutions to the human rights issues facing people in Australia, as well as to build greater understanding and respect for human rights in our community.

The Commission is accredited as an 'A status' national human rights institution (NHRI). This accreditation is regularly reviewed through United Nations sanctioned processes by the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs. In order to be so recognised, NHRIs must be established and operate in compliance with the United Nations *Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights* – commonly known as the 'Paris Principles'.³

Our vision is for an Australia where human rights are enjoyed by **everyone, everywhere, everyday.**

2 At June 2011, these laws are: Race Discrimination Act 1975, Sex Discrimination Act 1984, Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Age Discrimination Act 2004.

3 See further: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/parisprinciples.htm>.

How we work



As there is no simple way to solve complex human rights issues, the Commission seeks to address these issues using a range of integrated and complementary approaches.

We also know that many systemic human rights challenges require sustained and focused effort.

To be as effective as possible, our work is structured around the following themes.

Setting and advancing national agendas

We have a track record of drawing national attention to pressing human rights issues, raising community awareness and encouraging positive action by governments, service providers and others.

Building human rights into Australian laws and practices

We believe that human rights protection needs to be a central part of laws, policies and practices in order to build a fairer and more inclusive Australia.

We undertake research, consult, provide advice, review laws and make submissions to parliamentary inquiries.

The partnerships we foster and the constructive approach we take helps us to positively influence laws and practices and drive other practical changes.

Resolving discrimination and human rights complaints

One of our core functions is to help people resolve complaints of discrimination and other breaches of human rights through our complaint handling service. The complaint process not only allows individuals to resolve their disputes quickly and effectively but can also include actions that address systemic problems.

We use information about trends in complaints to develop targeted education programs and suggest policy reforms to address the underlying factors that lead to discrimination. We also intervene in court cases when it is important to make a human rights argument and appear as *amicus curiae* – or ‘friend of the court’ – to provide specialist advice in discrimination cases.

Monitoring and reporting

Some people in Australia are especially vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion and unfair treatment. We have a particular responsibility to monitor the situation facing these groups, identify issues of concern and propose solutions that will improve their lives.

Sometimes we do this through holding national inquiries that examine human rights issues in detail. We also undertake regular monitoring and reporting work, such as the Social Justice Commissioner’s annual

Social Justice Report and *Native Title Report* on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Engaging regionally and internationally

We are often invited to share our knowledge and expertise with others in the region, such as through our ongoing technical cooperation programs with China and Vietnam.

As a member of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, we work in partnership with other national human rights institutions to share ‘best practice’ approaches and respond to the pressing human rights issues facing Australia and our region. This engagement helps to build our expertise and makes a positive contribution to how we work domestically.

As a NHRI, we also participate in global exchanges between Commissions through the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions. We also have an important role to play in the United Nations system. We regularly provide independent reports which describe how Australia is progressing in relation to meeting its human rights obligations.

Monitoring and evaluating our impact

Building awareness, shifting attitudes and influencing laws and policies takes time. We want to know that our efforts are contributing towards real and lasting change in Australia. That’s why we have developed a comprehensive framework to evaluate the impact of our work. This also allows us to draw valuable lessons about what works – and why – that we can apply to future initiatives.

Our Priorities

We regularly review the human rights situation in Australia to determine where we can take practical action and make a positive difference.

For the duration of this Strategic Plan, we have identified two cross cutting priorities that will be the focus of our efforts. They are:

- tackling violence, harassment and bullying
- building community understanding and respect for rights.

Why violence, harassment and bullying?

Violence, harassment and bullying profoundly affect the lives of thousands of people living in Australia – at home, work, school, online and on the street. They can shatter people's confidence, limit their opportunities and, in some cases, cause lasting physical and psychological damage.

The Commission understands that discrimination can often be a key factor behind acts of violence, harassment and bullying.

We believe that addressing this root cause is a critical element in building a safer and more inclusive Australia.

Why building community understanding and respect for rights?

We all have a responsibility to respect and protect the rights of others. To make this a reality, we aim to build greater understanding about what human rights are and how they apply to everyday life in Australia.

More needs to be done in this area. Ongoing community education was the primary recommendation of the government's recent National Human Rights Consultation, which heard from tens of thousands of people around the country.

It is also a fundamental element of the Australian Human Rights Framework, released in April 2010, which will guide the government's commitment to human rights.



Commission & Inspire Foundation national anti-bullying competition entry: Chantelle

Strategic Goals



This Strategic Plan is the ‘road map’ that guides the Commission’s work for 2011-2014. It contains goals, results and indicators.

The goals reflect our aspirations as an organisation. They are ambitious and require sustained action over time. We will need to work constructively with others in order to achieve them – including with federal Parliament, governments, non-government organisations, business, different segments of the Australian community and civil society more broadly.

The results provide a framework to enable us to take stock of progress in our mandate to achieve improved respect and protection of human rights in Australia.

The indicators form the basis for our monitoring and evaluation activities so we can measure our impact over time and assess whether we are achieving the results for which we are striving.

Our four strategic goals, and the related results and indicators are set out in the following snapshot.

Throughout this plan, we acknowledge that to be effective we must target our work to a range of diverse audiences across society. We have a dual focus of ensuring our work is relevant and informative to the broader Australian community, while also speaking to a range of diverse audiences (that together make up the Australian community).

Examples of different identified audiences:

- the general public/community
- human rights violators
- human rights affected communities
- federal/state/territory governments
- non-government organisations
- young people
- internet-users
- older people
- workers
- families
- people with a disability
- men
- women
- people who are gay or lesbian
- people who are sex or gender diverse
- people of different races
- people of different faiths
- children at primary school
- young people at high school
- people in adult education
- voters
- business
- or any combination of these and many more

Our vision

Human rights: everyone, everywhere, everyday

Protect

Goal 1

Understanding and respect for rights

We empower people and foster change through education and awareness-raising about human rights

Goal 2

Human rights are respected and discrimination is addressed

We identify and address human rights breaches and resolve disputes about discrimination and human rights

Results

- 1a More people understand their rights and respect the rights of others.
- 1b People who are vulnerable to experiencing discrimination and other human rights breaches are more aware of their rights and how to exercise them.
- 1c There is a greater understanding of violence, harassment and bullying as serious and widespread human rights issues and how to tackle them.
- 1d Our public presence contributes to greater awareness and positive debate about human rights issues.

Results

- 2a Our complaint service is efficient and effective in responding to enquiries and resolving disputes.
- 2b Significant human rights breaches, including emerging or systemic issues, are identified and addressed through our consultation, reporting, advocacy and submission work.
- 2c Our monitoring and reporting on key human rights issues (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice and immigration detention related matters) contributes to improved human rights compliance and awareness of human rights in the community.

Indicators

- 1.1 Effective reach in the general community and identified audiences with relevant and useful information about human rights, including discrimination.
- 1.2 Increased understanding and awareness of human rights promotes action by identified audiences.
- 1.3 Increased capacity to take action by those vulnerable to, experiencing or witnessing human rights breaches and other discrimination.
- 1.4 Increased awareness and understanding of discrimination and human rights to enable people to prevent and resolve disputes.
- 1.5 Increased awareness of the Commission's complaint service as a means to voice and resolve disputes about discrimination and human rights.
- 1.6 Increased positive coverage of human rights issues in mainstream media and on the web.

Indicators

- 2.1 Our complaint service achieves performance indicators relating to timeliness, effectiveness and service user satisfaction.
- 2.2 Our views and recommendations are reflected in Parliament (including through committee inquiry reports), court judgments and in public debate.
- 2.3 Our recommendations to address systemic human rights issues identify practical steps that when implemented result in improved protection of human rights in law, policy and practice.

Respect

Goal 3

Leadership and influence

We are a respected and influential advocate for human rights

Goal 4

Organisational excellence

We have a collaborative and innovative work culture and maintain efficient and effective systems

Results

3a We are recognised as the leading authority on human rights in Australia.

3b Our work influences the development of law, policy and practice.

3c Our expertise on human rights is sought by government and parliamentarians and through our participation in technical assistance programs.

3d We foster and contribute to partnerships that advance human rights in Australia.

Results

4a We maintain our accreditation as an 'A status' NHRI, in accordance with the Paris Principles relating to the Status of national human rights institutions (UN Res: 48/134).

4b Our systems, policies and procedures are efficient and flexibly administered, while meeting all professional standards and legislative requirements.

4c We maintain a diverse and safe workplace.

4d We can demonstrate the impact of our work in improving the protection of human rights in Australia.

Indicators

3.1 Our advocacy, research and recommendations are increasingly reflected in positions on human rights issues across the community and government.

3.2 Constructive participation in technical assistance activities and in regional and global forums of NHRIs and United Nations bodies.

3.3 Effective relationships are developed and maintained with Parliament, government, and other stakeholders.

3.4 The effective partnerships that we develop or contribute to improve the quality and impact of our work.

3.5 Our activities contribute to the effectiveness of the Australian Human Rights Framework.

Indicators

4.1 Our Commission Executive maintains effective governance and strategic management and oversight of the organisation.

4.2 We exceed Australian Public Service rates for workplace diversity.

4.3 We provide effective corporate services for internal and external clients.

4.4 Our internal processes promote effective communication and coordination and, as a result, enhance the quality of our work.

4.5 Our staff feel respected and valued and are supported with a work life balance, professional development and job satisfaction.

4.6 We maintain effective systems to monitor and evaluate our work.

Goal 1

Understanding and respect for rights

We empower people and foster change through education and awareness-raising about human rights

We focus on increasing understanding and respect for human rights in our community. This includes building recognition that everyone has a responsibility to respect the rights of others.

We empower people to engage in meaningful activity on human rights and to make the connection between what human rights are and how they apply to everyday life in Australia.

In the coming years we will:

- deliver a range of innovative community engagement and human rights education programs, including an interactive online human rights portal
- focus on vulnerable groups within the community in order to provide them with the knowledge and skills to address discrimination, human rights breaches and unfair treatment
- focus education and awareness-raising actions on the rights to be free of violence, bullying and harassment, and the role of the bystander in contributing to this.

Results

1a More people understand their rights and respect the rights of others.

1b People who are vulnerable to experiencing discrimination and other human rights breaches are more aware of their rights and how to exercise them.

1c There is a greater understanding of violence, harassment and bullying as serious and widespread human rights issues and how to tackle them.

1d Our public presence contributes to greater awareness and positive debate about human rights issues.

Indicators

1.1 Effective reach in the general community and identified audiences with relevant and useful information about human rights, including discrimination.

1.2 Increased understanding and awareness of human rights promotes action by identified audiences.

1.3 Increased capacity to take action by those vulnerable to, experiencing or witnessing human rights breaches and other discrimination.

1.4 Increased awareness and understanding of discrimination and human rights to enable people to prevent and resolve disputes.

1.5 Increased awareness of the Commission's complaint service as a means to voice and resolve disputes about discrimination and human rights.

1.6 Increased positive coverage of human rights issues in mainstream media and on the web.

Goal 2

Human rights are respected and discrimination is addressed

We identify and address human rights breaches and resolve disputes about discrimination and human rights

We provide a fair and impartial complaint investigation and conciliation service. In resolving complaints we encourage systemic change that prevents discrimination and breaches of human rights.

We assess how laws, policy and practice in Australia respect and protect human rights and we identify issues of concern and propose and advocate solutions.

We promote systemic responses to human rights issues and work toward inclusion of human right protections in laws, policies and practices.

Where granted leave to appear, we provide our expertise on human rights and discrimination law in legal proceedings that raise significant human rights issues through the exercise of our legal intervention and amicus curie functions.

.....
In the coming years we will:
.....

- advocate for an effective legislative framework for addressing human rights including discrimination and promoting equality before the law
- maintain a best practice complaint information and complaint resolution service
- lay the foundations for a National Preventive Mechanism for the inspection of places of detention under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture through, for example, our work on immigration detention and Indigenous justice issues.

Results

2a Our complaint service is efficient and effective in responding to enquiries and resolving disputes.

2b Significant human rights breaches, including emerging or systemic issues, are identified and addressed through our consultation, reporting, advocacy and submission work.

2c Our monitoring and reporting on key human rights issues (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice and immigration detention related matters) contributes to improved human rights compliance and awareness of human rights in the community.

Indicators

2.1 Our complaint service achieves performance indicators relating to timeliness, effectiveness and service user satisfaction.

2.2 Our views and recommendations are reflected in Parliament (including through committee inquiry reports), court judgments and in public debate.

2.3 Our recommendations to address systemic human rights issues identify practical steps that when implemented result in improved protection of human rights in law, policy and practice.

Goal 3

Leadership and influence

We are a respected and influential advocate for human rights

We provide leadership on human rights by being credible, persuasive and evidence based in our work.

We hold government to account for its human rights performance, and encourage all sectors of society, including the corporate sector, local government and community groups, to respect and promote human rights through their actions.

We influence the development of laws, policies and practice, are collaborative and foster and contribute to partnerships for systemic change to improve the enjoyment of human rights.

We promote awareness of the Paris Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions in order to achieve greater understanding of the importance of the effective operation of robust and independent national institutions for the promotion of human rights in Australia and in our region.⁴

In the coming years we will:

- advocate for the effective recognition and legal protection of human rights in Australia's Constitution and in law, policy and practice
- contribute to the effective implementation of the Australian Human Rights Framework as well as COAG and other key national strategies
- use our expertise as a NHRI to contribute to efforts to strengthen human rights globally and in the Asia-Pacific region, including through continued cooperation with AusAid, through the Asia-Pacific Forum of NHRIs and as Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of NHRIs from 2011-13.

Results

3a We are recognised as the leading authority on human rights in Australia.

3b Our work influences the development of law, policy and practice.

3c Our expertise on human rights is sought by government and parliamentarians and through our participation in technical assistance programs.

3d We foster and contribute to partnerships that advance human rights in Australia.

Indicators

3.1 Our advocacy, research and recommendations are increasingly reflected in positions on human rights issues across the community and government.

3.2 Constructive participation in technical assistance activities and in regional and global forums of NHRIs and United Nations bodies.

3.3 Effective relationships are developed and maintained with Parliament, government, and other stakeholders.

3.4 The effective partnerships that we develop or contribute to improve the quality and impact of our work.

3.5 Our activities contribute to the effectiveness of the Australian Human Rights Framework.

4 UN General Assembly Resolution 48/134, 1992, The Paris Principles require a national human rights institution to have:

- a clearly defined and broad-based mandate, based on universal human rights standards
- independence guaranteed by legislation or the constitution
- autonomy from government
- pluralism, including membership that broadly reflects the society
- adequate powers of investigation; and
- sufficient resources.

Goal 4

Organisational excellence

We have a collaborative and innovative work culture and maintain efficient and effective systems

We are a collaborative, innovative and flexible workplace that fosters excellence and expertise in our staff and in how we operate. Staff working at the Commission feel valued and supported.

In accordance with the Paris Principles, we maintain a diverse workplace that reflects and respects the diversity of the Australian community. We work in a coordinated and holistic manner that recognises the universal and indivisible nature of human rights.

We lead by example, by being transparent and accountable, and by operating in accordance with the human rights standards that we expect of others. We seek to minimise our environmental footprint and to practice and inspire sound corporate social responsibility.

.....
In the coming years we will:
.....

- further our monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure that our work is making a positive difference
- strengthen our information management systems, particularly in light of new information publication requirements and government 2.0 internet requirements
- maintain effective performance management and provide learning and development opportunities that advance the skills of our staff.

Results

4a We maintain our accreditation as an 'A status' NHRI, in accordance with the Paris Principles relating to the Status of national human rights institutions (UN Res: 48/134).

4b Our systems, policies and procedures are efficient and flexibly administered, while meeting all professional standards and legislative requirements.

4c We maintain a diverse and safe workplace.

4d We can demonstrate the impact of our work in improving the protection of human rights in Australia.

Indicators

4.1 Our Commission Executive maintains effective governance and strategic management and oversight of the organisation.

4.2 We exceed Australian Public Service rates for workplace diversity.

4.3 We provide effective corporate services for internal and external clients.

4.4 Our internal processes promote effective communication and coordination and, as a result, enhance the quality of our work.

4.5 Our staff feel respected and valued and are supported with a work life balance, professional development and job satisfaction.

4.6 We maintain effective systems to monitor and evaluate our work.

Integrating our strategic goals into our day to day work



Painting by immigration detainee at Sydney Immigration Residential Housing.

Our annual planning processes, as well as our monitoring and evaluation activities, are aligned with this Strategic Plan. This enables us to tell, over time, what impact we are making in achieving our mandate and goals.

The Commission aims to achieve a 'line of sight' between individual staff work plans, the distinct projects conducted by their teams or conducted collaboratively across the whole Commission, through to the goals, results and indicators contained in this Strategic Plan.

What if our environment changes over the next three years?

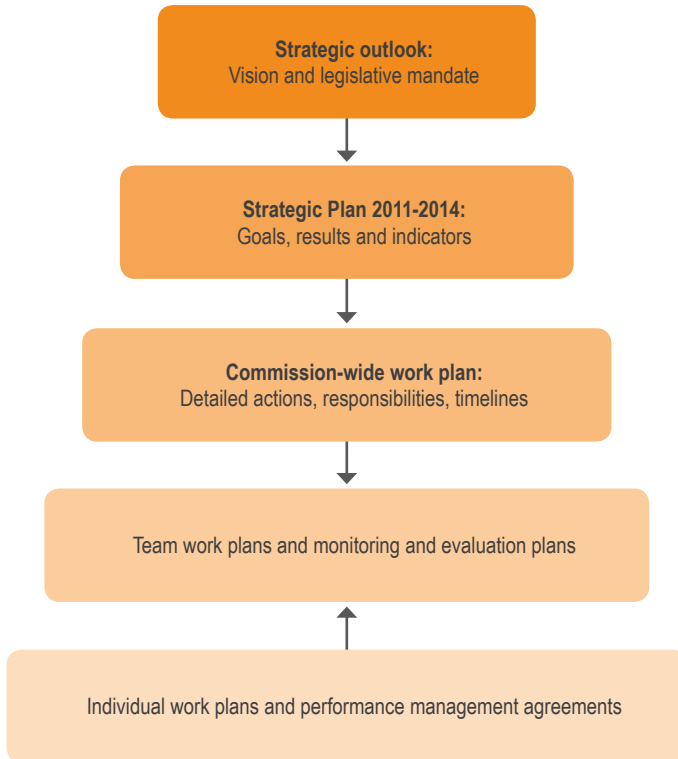
This strategic plan is intended to be a dynamic, living document that changes to reflect what we learn and achieve over time and to adapt to our changing internal and external environment.

We will assess our progress every year and update the plan based on the results of our review and evaluation.

Annual work plan

The Commission develops annually a Commission-wide work plan to guide our day to day work. This outlines the projects and activities conducted across the Commission and in turn informs how we allocate our limited resources. We make public a summary of this work plan on an annual basis.

This diagram illustrates the relationship between team, annual and strategic plans.



Monitoring and evaluation

We conduct our activities within a learning framework, so we can know what we are contributing towards improved protection of human rights in Australia. We implement a monitoring and evaluation framework that is aligned with and appropriate to our strategic plan. It helps us to answer the questions:

How much did we do?

How well did we do it?

What difference did we make?

Our evaluation framework not only provides this accountability but it also assists us to:

- assess implementation methods and process
- guide program development

- assist decision making
- add to existing knowledge and promote best practice
- identify gaps in knowledge, and research.

We acknowledge that assessing the impact of our work is a complex task, as our efforts are often linked to longer term goals, multiple activities, collaborative approaches and result in incremental change. This means it is not always possible to directly attribute outcomes solely or predominately to our efforts.

Linking the evaluation of our projects to our strategic goals.



Integration matrix

This matrix identifies the main actions we will take across the Commission to ensure the strategic plan is integrated into our work.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility
A Commission-wide work plan is developed annually to guide our work activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A work plan for the entire Commission is approved by the Commission Executive at the beginning of each financial year. It identifies key priorities, milestones and peak workload periods across the Commission for the year. All projects and activities are linked to the goals, results and indicators in our Strategic Plan. 	All staff, led by team managers and coordinated by the Director – Policy & Programs
Team work plans are designed to advance our strategic goals, results and indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team activities are agreed by the Commission on an annual basis following a planning and peer review process that identifies the best projects to advance the key objectives of our Strategic Plan. Each team draws on their evaluation and evidence to identify how the coming year's activities can deliver the main outcomes identified in the strategic plan. 	All staff, led by team managers
Performance management scheme integrates the strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff have a performance agreement that indicates their role in conducting activities and projects. These projects and activities have a 'line of sight' to the strategic goals, results and indicators. 	Commission managers All staff are responsible for meeting performance measures
Monitoring and evaluation framework ensures project evaluations are congruent with the strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All projects and activities incorporate a monitoring and evaluation component designed to assess impact against our strategic goals. We document our progress towards achieving our strategic goals. 	Executive Director; Director – Policy & Programs; Director – Complaint Handling Service; and team Managers All staff are responsible for conducting relevant monitoring and evaluation activities
Learning and development framework supports capacity of staff to implement the strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning and development framework identifies staff capacity building needed to achieve strategic goals. Framework includes opportunities to learn from internal and external expertise. Staff participate in training and feedback reflects strong professional and personal value. 	Personnel Services to coordinate in consultation with Director – Policy & Programs; Director – Complaint Handling Service; and team managers All staff to participate in delivery of and attendance in learning opportunities



Photographer: Retale Holtmann-Schaefer

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