

Group Health Check 2018

Executive Summary



The annual Group Health Check (GHC) survey provides important insight into our action groups and answers three key questions.

1. Are our action groups healthy and sustainable?

We have seen action group numbers decline over the past four years. Action group numbers steadily rose between 2009 and 2014, with substantial growth between 2013 and 2014 (37 groups). Since 2014 we have lost 25 groups.

There is a variety of reasons for this. Some of those 37 groups were unsustainable from the outset as there simply wasn't the support to sustain them. Some of our groups have formed around a campaign/campaign moment and then closed, others become unsustainable when losing key members. And for some it's a combination of the above. To sustain groups there needs to be support for them, particularly in early stages while they find their feet.

The positive shift this survey shows us is that many of our groups are becoming more organising focused! Our groups are more skilled and self reliant than in previous surveys and they are also building more local relationships with community organisations and groups.

We have 32 new group convenors this year, which is made up of people taking on the role of co-convenor, new groups starting and new convenors stepping in to ongoing groups. In 2015 we had 57 new convenors and the 2017 results suggest that many have remained in this role with over 50 respondents being in the convenor role for between 2 and 5 years. This is a great start on our Vision goal of retaining leaders for at least three years. With the appropriate supports retaining our leaders in line with our Vision is achievable, factoring in natural attrition.

About 50 percent of participating groups have at least one group member who is aged between 18 to 25.

2. Are AIA's campaigns and priorities matching action groups and activists interests and what campaigns are they working on?

Feedback on Amnesty's campaigns was mostly positive but quite varied. Our campaign priorities continue to fit with our group's interests and groups are largely happy with the balance between national and international campaigns. Convenors' views on campaign updates, communications and resources ranged from impressed and happy to frustrated and/or not aware of what resources are available.

The refugee campaign is still priority campaign amongst our groups. But some groups are feeling overwhelmed by the ongoing erosion of rights for refugees and asylum seekers and the polarisation within communities.

There is growing interest in Individuals at Risk work which stems from several factors: a desire to return to our roots, to wanting tangible wins and from trying to keep up with campaigns such as the refugee campaign, which is subject to the ever changing landscape of public policy.

There is a sense of groups being overwhelmed in trying to keep up with AIA's quarterly campaign priorities alongside being asked to grow their group, develop skills and set targets. We have aimed to reduce this feeling in 2018 by encouraging groups to plan ahead and to focus on one or two key campaigns a year.

To assist our action groups to develop meaningful local plans of action/activities for our campaigns we need to share our campaign strategies with groups. Our groups can then identify where and how they can best contribute and develop a local strategy which feeds into our human rights goals and satisfies our groups. This is a more sustainable way for some groups to work and develop their organising skills.

Another suggestion to ensure that our groups and conveners are sustainable is for the Organising and Activism Teams to work with our conveners to ensure that group members share responsibilities for campaigns, goals and events. This would require the convenor/s to delegate responsibilities and provide guidance and support to members in achieving the group goals.

About 30 percent of action groups are participating in significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days or events and over 50 per cent regularly say an Acknowledgement of Country or arrange a Welcome to Country for events. This is a 50% increase on 2015.

About 85% of groups surveyed are familiar with our 2020 Vision to varying degrees with eight per cent who incorporate in their activism. There was a 22% drop in groups who plan their work out over a period of time. Thirty percent of groups regularly set goals for their activities. Evaluating activities is undertaken by 50 percent of groups.

3. Is AIA appropriately resourcing and providing skill-developments opportunities to our action groups and activists for them to have impact and to be an effective part of a growing grassroots movement?

We asked participating groups if they would help us grow our movement by setting a growth target in 2018 - 38 groups responded positively! The Organising Team will work with those groups to ensure they have the tools and skills to grow and retain new members.

The resources and tactics groups employ to attract new members is a combination of sign up sheets and social media. Retention tactics employed are traditional tactics such as inviting members to meetings and events. We will encourage groups to try more personal methods including having one on one meetings to help build rapport and connection with new members on a more personal level.

Conveners have, as in the past, identified that they struggle with attracting and retaining members. Over the next 12 months we will incorporate workshops on how to attract and retain new members into our training agenda.

The Leader Bulletin, a resource that was born out of the 2011 early Group Health Check, is no longer one of the key resources for groups. Groups now rely on the website, campaign tool kits and their Organisers. It is worth noting that in previous years resources were housed on the Activist Portal - separate to the website. Since the

2015 GHC survey our website has upgraded and now includes our resources. This may play a part in the Leader not being as relevant as in previous years. It may also be due to people relying less on email and more on social media for updates. The Organising Team is reviewing the Leader presently to ensure it is a resource fit for purpose for our leaders.

Group participation in training continues to grow, with 75 groups participating in two workshops on average over the 12 month period. Half of the groups are interested in further skills development.

We asked groups to explain why they are not interested in skills development. Responses included being time poor and competing AIA priorities, distance, already having a skilled base, team members not interested, not relevant or lack of opportunity.

The survey indicates that 16 per cent less groups appear to be developing local relationships with other community organisations and groups. But groups that are developing relationships are expanding the number of relationships they have, with 43 per cent of groups have at least three local relationships with a variety of community organisations and groups. In 2015 only a couple of groups had a relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or groups. In 2017 22 groups surveyed hold relationships with local Indigenous groups. This is important for our Indigenous Rights work.

Engagement between groups and Branch Committees (BCs) grew by 20 per cent. The growth is around Branch Annual General meetings (BAGMs), event proposals and attending group events.

Almost 40 percent of groups had a representative at the 2017 BAGM. We asked groups that didn't attend what was the reason? Answers ranged from being unaware that it was being held, competing priorities at the time, to not feeling that it is relevant to them. We will promote BAGMs earlier this year to ensure groups are aware of so they can become members in time to nominate and also factor it into their planning and schedules.

This GHC survey unearthed some frustrations that our convenors have, including being asked to complete the survey! The GHC did clash with several key campaign moments unintentionally (Marriage Equality, Manus sit in, CIE blitz). This was on top of a challenging year for human rights activism. We are aware that we asked a lot from our groups in 2017 and while they rose to the challenge because they are dedicated human rights defenders we do want to ensure that our activism is sustainable.

Our action groups for the most part are healthy but Amnesty needs to be mindful of the expectations we place on them. We need to continue resourcing them and ensure they know how and where to access resources. Our 2018 BRAVE campaign will be a welcome addition to our suite of campaigns.

Our convenors are the backbone of our movement. Their work and dedication ensures that our campaigns are rolling out around the country and that we continue to call out human rights abuses. We appreciate them taking the time to complete this survey. The findings are an important tool that we will use to ensure we continue to support their work.

Our action groups

The table below displays the number of existing groups at the time of the survey over the past eight years.

Region	2009 groups	2011 groups	2012 groups	2013 groups	2014 groups	2015 groups	2017 groups	2017 GHC Responses
ACT/ SthNSW	3	11	11	17	24	22	15	8
NSW	38	33	31	39	50	54	46	30
QLD/ NthNS W	28	20	24	26	29	23	25	16
SA/NT	10	11	13	15	14	20	18	14
TAS	9	9	10	11	15	11	7	6
VIC	40	34	37	37	51	40	46	22
WA	10	7	19	22	21	20	22	11
Total	138	125	145	167	204	190	179	107

In 2017 we saw greater participation in the GHC survey by university groups (13.8%) and thematic groups (16.6%) than in the past years.