



# FEDERATION

OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES VIC



50 YEARS OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

**THIS IS WHO WE ARE**





# WHAT ARE COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES?

Community Legal Centres provide free, quality legal information, advice, representation, casework and education. We focus on working with people who are experiencing disadvantage, such as financial hardship, family violence, homelessness or discrimination. We use what we learn from the experiences of the people we work with to advocate for changes to laws and policies to make Victoria a fairer place for everyone.

**THERE ARE 49 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES IN VICTORIA, WITH A WORKFORCE OF MORE THAN 4,000 STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS. WE ARE PART OF A NETWORK OF MORE THAN 170 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES ACROSS AUSTRALIA.**

Research found that Australia's Community Legal Centres deliver on average a cost-benefit ratio of 1:18. For every \$1 invested in services provided by a Community Legal Centre, \$18 worth of benefits are generated for the community (with benefits including costs avoided in the legal and other social service systems).

JUDITH STUBBS AND ASSOCIATES, 'ECONOMIC COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES,' 2012

Last year, Community Legal Centres provided more than 100,000 legal services for Victorians. A further half a million Victorians accessed self-help tools available on our websites to understand their rights and responsibilities and to help them find solutions to their legal issues.

Community Legal Centres are community driven and led, which means that we adapt and respond to the needs of our communities. This makes every Community Legal Centre different and uniquely placed to support people locally.

'Working in a Community Legal Centre you see real people with often common legal problems. It is helping people at a grassroots level, sometimes with very simple matters that have a large impact on people's lives, other times it's very complex matters and the impact of the assistance is great.'

LEGAL STAFF MEMBER AT A COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE, VICTORIA LAW FOUNDATION, 'WORKING IN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES IN VICTORIA: WORKFORCE PROFILE,' 2021

Recognising that issues in people's lives are intersecting and rarely have only a legal component, community lawyers are often integrated with other social and community service providers. You will find community lawyers embedded in places like hospitals, schools, financial counselling services and maternal and child health centres.

We also focus on providing legal education in our communities, to help Victorians understand their rights and responsibilities, and on advocating for changes to laws to make Victoria fairer, based on what we learn from the experiences of the people we assist.

## DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR ADVICE FROM A COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE?

Our services are free. We believe everyone is entitled to know their rights, understand how the law affects them and achieve fair outcomes – no matter how much money they have or what their social status is, or where they live.

Due to high demand for legal services, each Community Legal Centre has criteria in place to ensure resources are used to support those who need it most.

Community Legal Centres also provide other services, such as legal information and education programs and online self-help tools, which may be available free of charge.

We receive funding and support from a range of sources, including government, philanthropy, public donations, volunteers, pro bono and in-kind support, to do this.

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## WHAT LEGAL MATTERS CAN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES HELP WITH?

The law is part of our everyday lives – such as when we buy something, use a service, have a job, or rent a house. The law can help to protect and support families when there is violence in the home, or when there are decisions to be made about parenting arrangements for children. Sometimes we might find ourselves in contact with police and the legal system, either charged with committing a crime, or as a victim of crime. Laws affect our human rights, the rights of animals and the protection of the environment. And sometimes we need to understand the law to navigate specific government systems, like Centrelink or getting a residency visa.

For more than 50 years, Community Legal Centres have been providing community-based services to help Victorians with all these matters and more.

Because we are a network of 49 organisations across the state, we can make sure that you are linked with the Community Legal Centre best placed to help you with your legal issues.

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM A COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE?

At a Community Legal Centre, you will receive support from a team who are experts in their fields, and who provide a trauma-informed and culturally safe service. Community Legal Centres recognise that other social, emotional, health and financial issues may be affecting you, potentially exacerbating or compounding your legal issue. So, the team that supports you may include not just lawyers and paralegals, but also social workers, financial counsellors and other community services professionals from different disciplines.

Importantly, Victoria's Community Legal Centres do not operate in isolation. While individual Community Legal Centres have their own geographic and target communities, where possible, the community legal sector operates collaboratively to maximise its impact and promote best outcomes for the people we assist.

**GIVEN THEIR SUCCESS IN SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY, AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES HAVE BEEN HELD UP AS A GLOBAL EXAMPLE OF 'WHAT WORKS' IN ACCESS TO JUSTICE.**

TASK FORCE ON JUSTICE, 'JUSTICE FOR ALL,' 2019



## HOW DO COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES INFLUENCE CHANGES TO THE LAWS?

Over the years, Community Legal Centres have advocated for and helped win many legal rights for Victorians, including mandatory third-party motor vehicle insurance, and increasing awareness of and support for victim survivors of family violence and prisoners' rights.

In recent times, Community Legal Centres have advocated for waiving the fines issued to young people during the COVID-19 pandemic, successfully advocated for better wage rights for people living with disabilities, established the 'Do Not Knock' campaign to deter pestering salespeople, prompted Bunnings to ban the sale of native timbers, and forced governments to end logging in Victoria's old-growth forests.

'Legal assistance providers are superbly well placed to provide advice on law reform and legal assistance... Community Legal Centres, legal aid commissions, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services play a crucial role in ensuring that all Australians can access our justice systems. They understand better than most the challenges in their sector and the impacts of unmet need on vulnerable Australians.'

THE HON MARK DREYFUS, KC, MP, ATTORNEY-GENERAL, MEDIA RELEASE, 29 NOVEMBER 2022

## ARE COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES THE SAME AS LEGAL AID?

Community Legal Centres are different from Victoria Legal Aid – but we work closely together.

Victoria Legal Aid is a Victorian Government statutory authority established by legislation. Victoria Legal Aid plays a crucial role in providing free advice and representation for people dealing with certain legal matters when they meet the Legal Aid eligibility criteria.

Separately, Community Legal Centres have grown out of needs identified in communities and have evolved through grassroots support. Each Community Legal Centre is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that is separate from government. We provide services that respond to the needs of our specific communities. Community Legal Centres can be place-based, providing services across a range of legal issues to a geographic community; or specialist, focusing on specific areas of law (such as tenancy, consumer action or employment) or cohorts of people (such as women, young people, people with disability or asylum seekers). In Victoria, this includes two specialist Aboriginal Legal Services.

Community Legal Centres and Victoria Legal Aid have a close relationship and make referrals to each other to ensure that you receive legal services from the organisation best placed to help you.

**'SUPPORTING PRACTICAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE MEANS PROVIDING THE RIGHT SERVICES, IN THE RIGHT PLACES, AT THE RIGHT TIME, AND IN THE RIGHT WAY.'**

VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND REGULATION, 'ACCESS TO JUSTICE REVIEW - OVERVIEW,' 2016



# COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES VICTORIA

## ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES

**Djirra** (Statewide specialist Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) providing holistic, wrap-around family violence services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, predominantly women and their children)

**Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service** (Statewide ACCO providing services in criminal, civil and family law for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people)

## SPECIALIST COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

**AED Legal Centre** (Statewide service for people with disability who experience discrimination in the areas of education or employment or who seek to review decisions about their NDIS plans)

**Anika Legal** (Statewide service providing legal support for renters, and advocating for a fair housing system)

**Animal Law Institute** (Statewide provider of legal advice and representation for Victorian residents on issues relating to the purchase of animals from a breeder or supplier)

**Asylum Seeker Resource Centre** (Human rights organisation providing support for people seeking asylum)

**Consumer Action Law Centre** (Statewide service providing legal assistance on consumer and debt issues, financial counselling and policy, and law reform to make consumer markets fair)

**Disability Discrimination Legal Service** (Statewide service specialising in disability discrimination legal matters, and sexual harassment of women with disabilities in the workplace)

**Emma House Domestic Violence Services** (Specialist domestic and family violence service operating in South West Victoria)

**Environmental Justice Australia** (Nationwide organisation that uses the law to empower communities seeking environmental justice and defend and safeguard the climate)

**First Step Legal Service** (Statewide service which is co-located in a health service and provides integrated legal and health support for people living with addiction and mental health issues)

**Human Rights Law Centre** (Nationwide organisation using strategic legal action, policy solutions and advocacy to support communities to eliminate inequality and injustice)

**inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence** (Statewide specialist family violence service that provides support to migrant and refugee women, their families and communities)

**Jobwatch** (Employment rights service supporting workers in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania on issues regarding their rights at work)

**Justice Connect** (Nationwide service working to increase access to legal support, and progress social justice for those who struggle to navigate the law)

**knowmore** (Nationwide service providing legal advice and support services to survivors of child sexual abuse)

**Law and Advocacy Centre for Women** (Statewide service providing legal advice and representation with holistic support for women in or at risk of entering the criminal legal system)

**Mental Health Legal Centre** (Statewide provider of legal services for people living with mental illness or who are involved with the mental health system)

**Monash Law Clinics** (Group of clinics that are part of the Faculty of Law at Monash University providing access to justice to members of the Victorian community)

**Mortgage Stress Victoria** (Statewide service providing legal, financial counselling and social work support for people experiencing mortgage stress)

**Refugee Legal** (Specialist service providing legal assistance to people seeking asylum, refugees and disadvantaged migrants)

**Seniors Rights Victoria** (Statewide service that is part of the Council of the Ageing (COTA) and is dedicated to advancing the rights of older people and the early intervention into, or prevention of, elder abuse in our community)

**Social Security Rights Victoria** (Statewide service that provides legal assistance on social security and Centrelink matters)

**Tenants Victoria** (Statewide service to promote and protect the rights of renters and advocate for a fair housing system)

**University of Melbourne Student Union Legal Service** (Provider of legal assistance and financial counselling services to all students who are currently enrolled at the University of Melbourne)

**Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service** (Statewide provider of legal support and justice for people with disability)

**Women's Legal Service Victoria** (Statewide service providing women with legal assistance, with a focus on addressing issues arising from relationship breakdown or violence)

**Young Workers Centre** (Statewide service providing workers aged 30 and under with legal advice on their rights at work)

**Youthlaw** (Statewide service providing legal advice and support for people under 25)

## PLACE-BASED COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

Place-based Community Legal Centres provide a range of free legal services to members of their geographic community. Typically, these centres provide legal services on issues as such family violence, family law, tenancy, employment, fines, neighbourhood disputes, consumer issues, discrimination, Centrelink, police complaints, victims of crime compensation, motor vehicle accidents, debt, migration, criminal law, elder abuse and child protection interventions.

**Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service** (Local provider of legal advice, information and community legal education to people who live, work or study in the Central Highlands and Wimmera regions)

**Barwon Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal information, advice, and casework to members of the community in Greater Geelong, Bellarine Peninsula, Surf Coast and Colac Otway)

**Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal services for people who live, work or study in the Brimbank, Melton and Bacchus Marsh communities)

**Eastern Community Legal Centre** (Multidisciplinary legal service that works to prevent problems, progress fair outcomes and support the wellbeing and resilience of communities and community members in Melbourne's East)

**Fitzroy Legal Service** (Local organisation providing legal advice to anyone who needs it)

**Gippsland Community Legal Service** (Local provider of legal services, including legal advice, legal education, law reform advocacy and duty lawyer assistance in family violence intervention order matters, to the Gippsland community)

**ARC Justice's Goulbourn Valley Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal information, advice and representation services to people across Northern and North East Victoria in a range of legal areas)

**Hume Riverina Community Legal Service** (Local provider of legal assistance including family and generalist civil law in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales)

**Inner Melbourne Community Legal** (Local provider of legal help to people on low incomes in the inner Melbourne area, and runs the Police Accountability Project)

**ARC Justice's Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal information, advice and representation services to people across Central Victoria in a range of legal areas)

**Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal advice, information, referral and case work for communities in the Mallee)

**Moonee Valley Legal Service** (Local provider of legal advice, information, education, referrals and ongoing casework assistance to anyone who lives, works or studies within the City of Moonee Valley)

**Northern Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal services, community legal education and law reform advocacy in Melbourne's North-West)

**Peninsula Community Legal Centre** (Local provider of legal advice to people who live, work or study in the municipalities of Frankston, Casey, Cardinia, Glen Eira, Kingston and Mornington Peninsula on issues including family law, family violence, fines, tenancy and rooming house advocacy)

**South-East Monash Legal Service** (Local provider of legal services across the south-east including the City of Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia)

**Southport Community Legal Service** (Local provider of legal advice on a range of legal issues to the community of City of Port Phillip)

**Southside Justice** (Local provider of legal services for people on low incomes in the cities of Port Phillip, Stonnington and Bayside, and statewide provider of services for sex workers)

**West Heidelberg Community Legal Service** (Local provider of legal supports and advice in West Heidelberg)

**WEstjustice** (Local provider of legal advice, representation, education, community development, advocacy, and systemic reform in the Western suburbs of Melbourne)

**Whittlesea Community Connections** (Provider of legal assistance to people who live, work or study in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding communities)

To learn more about the work of Community Legal Centres, or to find a Community Legal Centre to assist you, visit [www.fclc.org.au](http://www.fclc.org.au)



**Federation of Community  
Legal Centres Victoria**

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*A fair and equitable Community*



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