



FEDERATION

OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES VIC



ANNUAL REPORT
2021 – 2022

ABOUT US

WE WANT A COMMUNITY THAT IS FAIR, INCLUSIVE AND THRIVING, WHERE EVERY PERSON BELONGS AND CAN LEARN, GROW, HEAL, PARTICIPATE AND BE HEARD.

The Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria Inc (the Federation) is the peak body for Victoria's 46 Community Legal Centres. Our members are at the forefront of helping those facing economic, cultural or social disadvantage and whose life circumstances are severely affected by their legal problems.

For 50 years, Community Legal Centres have been part of a powerful movement for social change; reshaping how people access justice, creating stronger more equitable laws, and promoting a more accountable government and democracy.

We pursue our vision of a fair, inclusive and thriving community through challenging injustice, defending rights and building the power of our members and communities.

The Federation:

- ▼ enables a strong collective voice for justice and equality
- ▼ mobilises and leads Community Legal Centres in strategic, well-coordinated advocacy and campaigns
- ▼ works with members to continuously improve the impact of community legal services
- ▼ drives creativity and excellence in the delivery of legal services to communities
- ▼ helps make justice more accessible.

OUR PRINCIPLES:

COMMUNITY

Our priority is to be fully accountable to the communities we serve and belong to.

SOLIDARITY

With each other. Community Legal Centres are a part of a movement for justice. We must work together to be a powerful, effective voice. We practice our principles through our engagement with each other. We back each other up, make time and space for everyone's viewpoints to be heard, and act collectively, with a focus on long-term, systemic change.

With communities most affected by injustice. We recognise that people and communities most directly affected by injustice and discrimination are experts in their own lives and have their own voices. We are allies, not saviours.

STAND WITH FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES

We celebrate the strength, leadership and resilience of First Nations Peoples. We recognise the ongoing injustices perpetrated against them, and we stand with them in fighting for self-determination and equality.

RESPECT

In all of our work, we show respect. We acknowledge and celebrate differences and commonalities, and the strength that diversity brings to our communities.

LEARNING

We are inquisitive and reflective, committed to adapting and growing in response to evidence about what works, and to sharing our learning with our communities. We learn from our success and failure.

CONTENTS

In this report we reflect on a 50-year movement for justice; our work building inclusive and thriving communities, and efforts empowering Community Legal Centres

Chairperson Report	4
Chief Executive Officer Report	6
THE HEART OF A MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE	
Reforming the criminal legal system	8
Improving justice responses for victim survivors	11
Plans for a robust and connected sector	12
A shared vision to improve the lives of Victorians	14
Donations for a fairer Victoria	15
A 50-year movement for social justice	16
BUILDING INCLUSIVE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES	
Working with, for, and in the community	19
Embedding legal help into mental health systems	22
Working together for greater impact	24
Preparing for crises with communities	28
Sector data snapshot	32
EMPOWERING COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES	
Data innovation	34
Building capacity for Community Legal Centre success	38
Understanding our workforce	42
Working to exceptional standards: nationally-recognised accreditation	44
Fundraising for a just and fair Victoria	46
The heart of a strong community legal future	48
Our leadership, team	49
Our members and supporters	50
Financial Reports	52



THE FEDERATION ACKNOWLEDGES THE ORIGINAL CUSTODIANS OF COUNTRY AND WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO ELDERS PAST, PRESENT AND EMERGING. WE RECOGNISE THEIR CONTINUING CONNECTION TO LAND, WATER AND COMMUNITY. SOVEREIGNTY WAS NEVER CEDED.

CHAIRPERSON REPORT



It's been 40 years since the Federation of Community Legal Centres formed. A handful of early Community Legal Centres across the state recognised the value in collaborating together for greater impact. By sharing what we learn, the quality of our service delivery improves. By working together to advocate for law reform, our voice is stronger. By working together to promote the value of the sector, we earn the trust and support of funders and law makers alike.

These drivers for a federated model still ring true for Victoria's 46 Community Legal Centres in 2022.

They are the benchmarks by which the Federation has spent 2022 building a 10-Year Plan for the sector through consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. These consultations have provided rich stories to inform a plan that will put Victoria's Community Legal Centres in a strong place for the future.

The Federation also refreshed its governance structure this year. The membership unanimously adopted a new constitution at its Annual General Meeting in October 2021. The new constitution includes enabling changes such as transitioning from a Management Committee to a Board and opening new opportunities to strengthen governance through appointments for non-member Board members with relevant skills.

The Federation continued its flagship climate justice work, which will help ensure Community Legal Centres are adequately prepared to support their local communities through the legal issues that all too often follow climate related disasters.

The Federation continues to provide year-round support for members with accreditation and quality assurance. We have supported members to improve data collection, use and reporting. New projects included building the sector's fundraising capacity and supporting over half of our members in implementing a modern case management system.

Reflecting on what we have learned during COVID about online and hybrid approaches to convening meetings and delivering training, the Federation strived to find the right balance of person-to-person connection, alongside the inclusivity of virtual meetings, particularly for rural and regional members. This resulted in a record 795 registrations for the Federation's training and Continuing Professional Development programs.

As Chair of the Federation, I want to acknowledge the enormous range of work that our staff and volunteers undertake. You can learn more about our 4,000 strong workforce in the series of reports published by the Victoria Law Foundation this year, and read about a sample of the work that is taking place across the state in this annual report.

We thank all of the funders who support the Federation and our member Community Legal Centres. While Community Legal Centres benefit from the amazing contribution of volunteers in diverse roles, appropriate targeted funding is essential for Victorians to receive legal support and advocacy from our services.

We acknowledge the participation of the Victoria Attorney-General, Jaclyn Symes, in periodic roundtables with our member centres. These opportunities provide the platform to showcase our great work and engage the Attorney in a thorough examination of the issues impacting our communities and our centres in responding to those issues. This is also an opportunity to collectively advocate critical asks. We will continue to emphasise the importance of long-term funding being delivered in a timely fashion to meet the demand and the significant unmet and hidden need within our communities. Funding certainty is critical to ensure that Community Legal Centres can deliver their proven models of holistic, client-centred, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive services that our communities rely on.

FOR 50 YEARS, COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES HAVE PLAYED A UNIQUE ROLE IN VICTORIA. THAT'S HALF A CENTURY OF LEARNING WHAT WORKS AND INFLUENCING CHANGE THAT REALLY MATTERS. I THANK EACH AND EVERY PERSON INVOLVED WITH THE COMMUNITY LEGAL MOVEMENT FOR THE PART THEY PLAYED THIS YEAR IN THE ONGOING STORY OF THIS INCREDIBLE MOVEMENT.

KRISTEN WALLWORK
CHAIRPERSON



GOVERNOR OF VICTORIA, THE HONOURABLE LINDA DESSAU AC, SPEAKING WITH FEDERATION CHAIRPERSON KRISTEN WALLWORK AND CEO LOUISA GIBBS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT



Globally, there's been an encouraging shift in how we design and deliver community support programs. Rather than relying on people who have studied a population group from the outside, we ask the people who are part of that population. Rather than dealing with individual challenges, we recognise the interrelated nature of issues in people's lives and respond to them holistically.

The idea of incorporating lived experience and working in an intersectional way to serve our communities is nothing new for Community Legal Centres. This has always been at the heart of how we work with our clients, and it means we have a true and important voice when advocating for change.

This year, Community Legal Centre clients James, Christopher and Morgan helped us to design a model for integrated legal services in the roll out of Victoria's mental health reform agenda. With their experience of mental ill health and accessing legal services, they ensured that the model delivers services that clients want, not one which other people think they need.

Indeed, we know that amplifying the experiences of clients of Community Legal Centres is a powerful way to effect law reform that makes Victoria a fairer place to live. We had the opportunity to do this at the highest level in Victoria this year, through convening three roundtables with the Attorney-General and in a private audience with the Governor General. Both these women have personal connections to and strong admiration for the work of the 4,000 staff and volunteers at Community Legal Centres through their own legal careers.

Through the advocacy of the Federation, our working groups, and individual Community Legal Centres, we saw meaningful changes to laws (such as the pandemic management legislation), recommendations based on community legal experience (such as in the report from the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System) and a funding boost to the sector (including a dedicated \$6.5 million for Community Legal Centres in the State Budget).

In this, my first year as CEO of the Federation, I have seen that we are at our very best when we gather and bring our diverse ideas to respond to a challenge. When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the ripples were felt throughout the world. Victorian Community Legal Centres came together to discuss responses, ensuring our specialist refugee and asylum seeker centres were connecting with place-based services with significant populations of Australians with Afghanistan heritage. This enabled the whole community legal sector to get behind the call for volunteers to provide legal support and the open letter to the Prime Minister calling for an additional 20,000 humanitarian visa places.

The reasons I love my job at the Federation are too many to mention, but mostly they relate to working with people who can envision change that makes our communities fairer – and then make those changes happen. Thank you to all the extraordinary staff and volunteers across the state who are, on a daily basis, making Victoria a fairer and better place to live.

LOUISA GIBBS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

FEDERATION CEO LOUISA GIBBS AND DATA SYSTEM PROJECT MANAGER
TIM MCMAHON REVIEW FITZROY LEGAL SERVICE'S LAW HANDBOOK

AS CEO OF THE FEDERATION, I HAVE SEEN THAT WE ARE AT OUR VERY BEST WHEN WE GATHER AND BRING OUR DIVERSE IDEAS TO RESPOND TO A CHALLENGE.



THE HEART OF A MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE

THE HEART OF A MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE

REFORMING
THE CRIMINAL
LEGAL
SYSTEM

© FEDERATION MANAGER, POLICY AND
ADVOCACY RACHAEL PLINER

The Federation, together with our member Community Legal Centres, has played a critical role leading advocacy and law reform to address systemic issues in Victoria and nationally. This includes drawing on the experiences of clients who come into contact with the criminal legal system to advocate for meaningful change.

Many people in prison have experienced poor mental health, substance use, family violence and homelessness. Too often, members of our community are unnecessarily caught up in the criminal legal system due to poverty and disadvantage.

The number of people in prison has more than doubled over the last 10 years. This has disproportionately affected Aboriginal people, young people and women.¹ People who come into contact with the criminal legal system include some of the most marginalised people in our community, often coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.²

Recognising the critical intersection of legal and social factors in criminalisation, the Federation partnered with the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), to convene a joint workshop ahead of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System. This supported our members and social service organisations across the State to prepare their own submissions to the Inquiry.

In addition to making its own submission that drew on the experience of our members, the Federation also presented oral evidence at the Inquiry's public hearing. This focused on the opportunities for reforms to the criminal legal system and greater investment in early intervention and community-based responses.

Encouragingly, the final report from the Inquiry adopted many of the Federation's recommendations, providing an important foundation for reform to Victoria's criminal legal system.

Together with Community Legal Centre partners, the Federation continues to advocate for a fairer criminal legal system in a range of other areas, such as the appropriate use of body worn camera footage, opposing the unnecessary expansion of police powers and strengthening police accountability.

SMART
JUSTICE

A coalition of over 60 organisations, Smart Justice is committed to shaping the agenda on criminal justice around fairness and equality. There are two committees: Smart Justice for Women and Smart Justice for Young People.

SMART JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

CONVENED BY ELENA PAPPAS (LAW AND ADVOCACY CENTRE FOR WOMEN) AND LOUISA GIBBS (THE FEDERATION). THANK YOU LARA FRIEDIN (THE FEDERATION), WHO RETIRED AS CO-CONVENOR DECEMBER 2021.

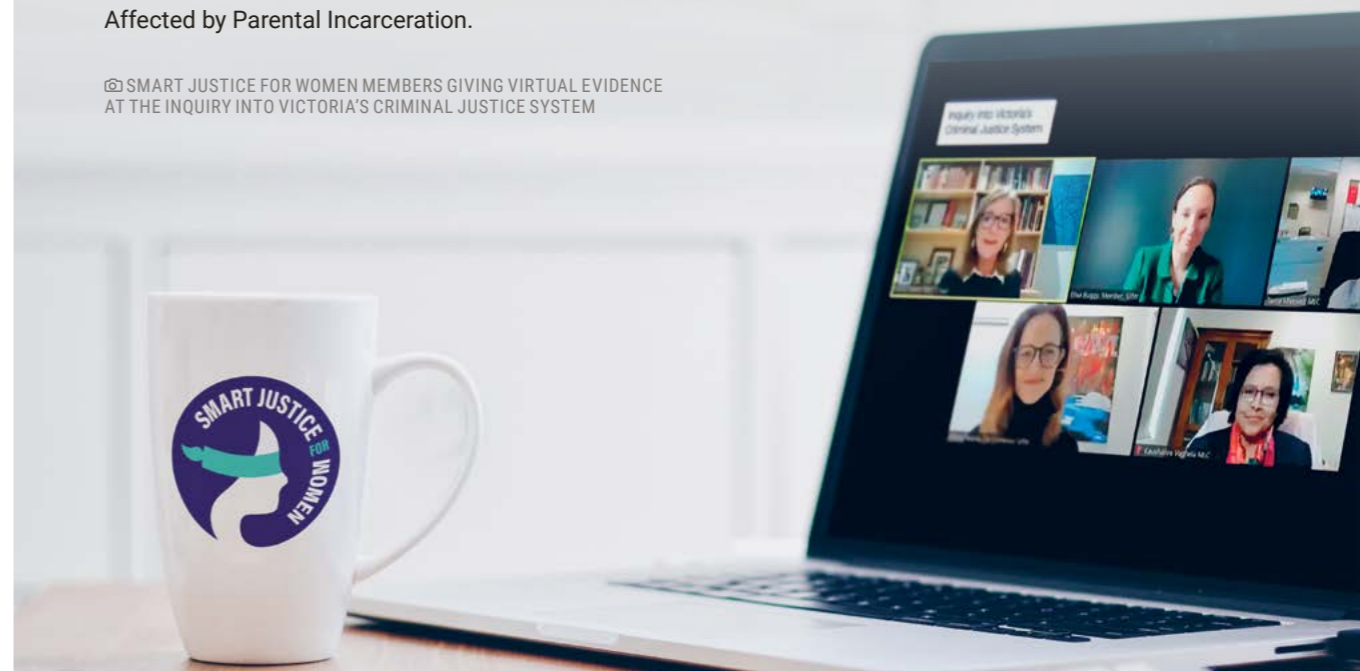
Smart Justice for Women is co-convened by the Federation and the Law and Advocacy Centre for Women. It includes a broad range of 36 members from the legal, community, health and academic sectors and focuses on reducing the criminalisation of women in Victoria.

For a number of years, women have been the fastest growing cohort in Australian prisons. The number of women in Victorian prisons almost doubled between June 2007 and June 2019,³ and almost tripled for Aboriginal women.⁴ Women have specific, gendered pathways to criminalisation and imprisonment. Between 70 and 90 per cent of women in prison experienced trauma and abuse before entering prison. Women are more likely to be criminalised due to issues associated with drug dependence or poverty (rather than violent offences).

Smart Justice for Women advocates for key reforms to reverse the increasing incarceration and criminalisation of women and to divert investment in prisons to early intervention and community-based responses. The group has developed a Policy Platform 2022-2024: *Reducing the criminalisation of women in Victoria* which sets out its key reform priorities.

Throughout 2021-2022, the coalition played a critical role in highlighting the plight of women in prison and advancing reforms through its contributions to inquiries and reviews, including through written and oral submissions to the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System and the Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration.

© SMART JUSTICE FOR WOMEN MEMBERS GIVING VIRTUAL EVIDENCE
AT THE INQUIRY INTO VICTORIA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



SMART JUSTICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

CONVENED BY TIFFANY OVERALL (YOUTHLAW) AND ANOUSHKA JERONIMUS (WESTJUSTICE)

Smart Justice for Young People brings together 50 organisations to advocate for youth justice, particularly in the lead up to the 2022 Victorian State election. The Federation actively participates in this coalition co-chaired by two Federation members.

The coalition is advancing a number of key advocacy positions that will form part of its election platform. This includes seeking commitment to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years to at least 14; and ending the over-representation in the criminal legal system of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children and young people from multicultural backgrounds, girls and young women with complex needs, and children in residential care.

During 2021-2022, Smart Justice for Young People advocated for actions that need to take place to ensure the humane treatment of young people in youth detention. This includes prohibiting the use of solitary confinement (which can cause irreparable harm to young people), strengthening oversight of youth detention centres by implementing and monitoring the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), and ensuring young people receive the equivalent standard of healthcare to that available in the community.

Young people affected by COVID-19 fines benefited from Smart Justice for Young People’s advocacy to Fines Victoria encouraging fair reviews of COVID-19 fines, the introduction of a new concession scheme for COVID-19 fines, and a new threshold test for special circumstances. The Report on the Inquiry into Victoria’s Criminal Justice System also fully or partially adopted a range of the recommendations made by Smart Justice for Young people through its submission.



© FEDERATION STAFF SHARED
#MEAT13 IMAGES IN A SOCIAL
MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT
RAISING THE AGE OF CRIMINAL
RESPONSIBILITY

IMPROVING JUSTICE RESPONSES FOR VICTIM SURVIVORS

The Victorian Law Reform Commission report, *Improving Justice Responses to Sexual Offences*, found that people who have experienced sexual violence frequently do not get what they need or want from the legal system and are left feeling alone and invisible.⁵

Following the release of this report, the Federation and our member Community Legal Centres contributed to law reform to give effect to the recommendations, with a focus on strengthening the affirmative consent model.

The Federation has contributed to law reform in diverse areas to promote the rights of victim survivors of family violence, including:

- ▼ responding to the Victorian Government’s review of victims’ experiences in summary criminal proceedings to improve processes for victims and strengthen support mechanisms, which informed the government’s final recommendations
- ▼ advocating for key reforms to the victims of crime financial assistance scheme to ensure a fairer, more victim-centered and trauma informed process
- ▼ responding to the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s consultation on stalking to improve responses for victims of stalking
- ▼ focusing on improving integrated and holistic responses for victim survivors of family violence and increasing safety outcomes
- ▼ representing Community Legal Centres at key forums and advocating for reform priorities as a member of the Victorian Government’s family violence working groups and the Magistrate Court’s family violence committee

- ▼ contributing to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor’s reviews, consultations on the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*, Victoria Police’s Code of Conduct for the Investigation of Family Violence, and the Victorian Government’s review of the protection of pets impacted by family violence
- ▼ supporting the design and roll-out of key state-wide programs, including the Victims Legal Service, the legal services in the Orange Door project and the Pre-Court Engagement and Early Resolution Service model at Magistrates’ Courts across Victoria.

OUR IMPACT:

We delivered a workshop with Victorian Council of Social Service, which led to collaboration by the legal and social services sectors to produce persuasive submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria’s Criminal Justice System. A large number of recommendations by the Federation, member Community Legal Centres, and the Smart Justice Coalition were adopted in the Parliamentary Committee’s final report.

We represented the community legal sector in key committees, forums and meetings, which influenced amendments to laws, helping to create a fairer Victoria.

ARC JUSTICE ALL STAFF DAY

PLANS FOR A ROBUST AND CONNECTED SECTOR

THEY SAY IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO RAISE A CHILD. IF WE KNOW ANYTHING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR, IT IS THAT WE, TOO, ARE STRONGEST WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.

We know there is constant and growing need for community legal services. We know that Victorians want a healthy state in which every person feels valued, can grow and thrive despite their race, economic status, culture, sex, religious or sexual preferences. And, importantly, we know that all of us expect fair and equal access to justice.

We also know from 50 years' experience that for those things to come to fruition, we need a strong and robust community legal sector.

So, in 2021, we embarked on developing a 10-Year Plan for Victoria's Community Legal Centres that would help the sector thrive over the next decade.

To truly understand the needs of Community Legal Centres and the communities and clients they serve, we dived deep with partners, funders, stakeholders, clients and communities. To ensure everyone can access legal support and has an equal standing before the law, we need to understand where the gaps are. This is an integral part of designing the plan.

In 12 months of consultations, we spoke with a wide range of stakeholders including clients of Community Legal Centres, the Victorian Attorney-General's office, colleagues from the legal and social services sectors, government departments, universities and of course, the staff and volunteers at Community Legal Centres right across Victoria.

We also spoke with community members who would have been eligible for assistance but did not know they could – or did not want to – seek help from a Community Legal Centre.

From these consultations, we learned a lot about what works well, where there are opportunities for improvement, and perceptions of Community Legal Centres. We also heard what the community would like us to prioritise in the future.

We identified value in ensuring there is an accessible, effective, and connective service system in which all Community Legal Centres understand each other's work and where clients can easily navigate the system to get the support they need. It is a system that uses technology to support as many clients as possible and which continually adapts to meet emerging needs, and makes use of emerging technology and processes. Through amplifying the lived experience of clients to inform policy and law reform, such a system promotes a Victorian community which is fair and equitable.

Our planning has run alongside the Department of Justice and Community Safety's development of the Victorian Government's Legal Assistance Strategy and Victoria Legal Aid's launch of Strategy 26. These broader sector planning pieces have also informed the trajectory of the Community Legal Centre 10-Year Plan, and vice-versa.

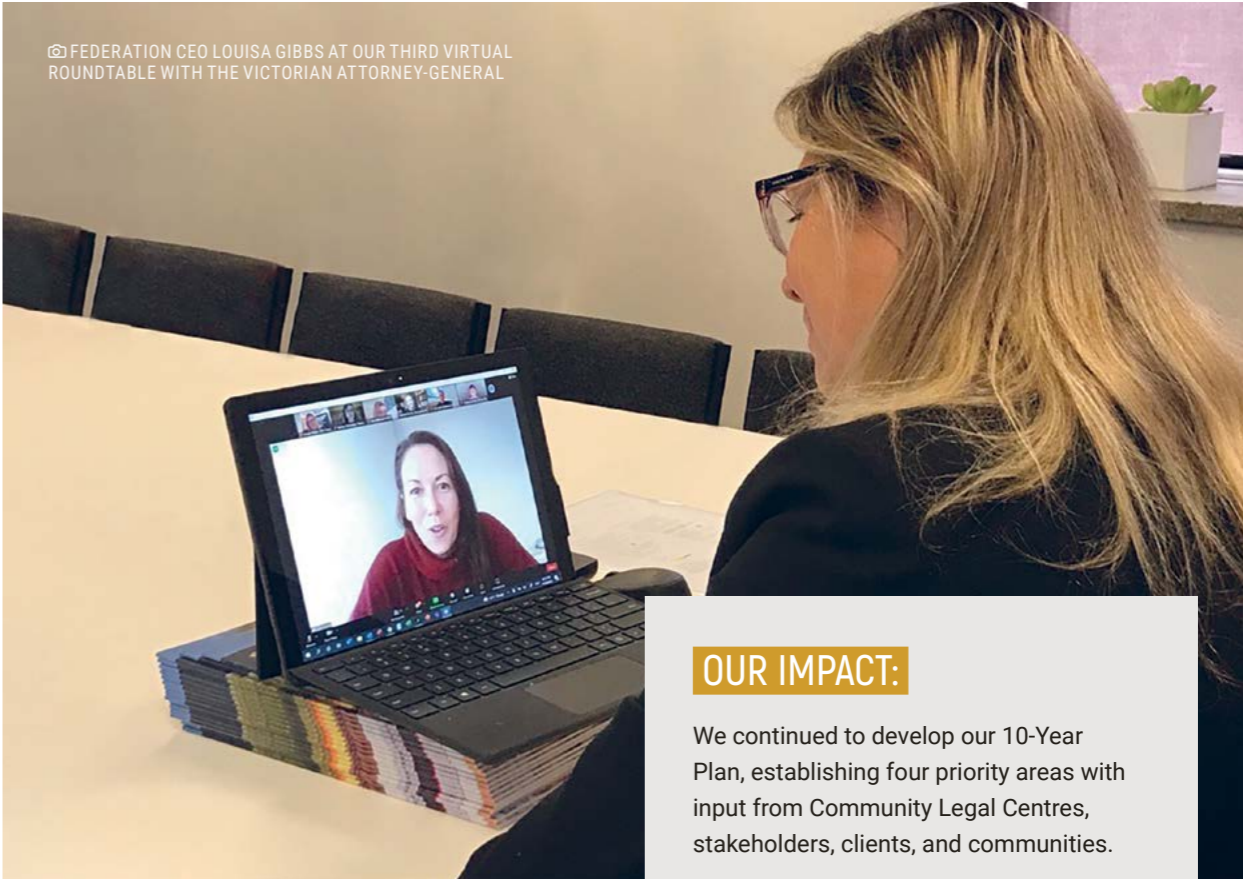
The Federation partnered with a range of consultants to ensure the right mix of expertise through the different stages of this significant process. With the support of Mark Madden, LDC Group, Golden Thread Consulting and Social Ventures Australia, the Federation has developed a set of four priority areas:

- ▼ increase access to justice
- ▼ strengthen our collective voice for change
- ▼ focus on impact
- ▼ build our future sustainability and growth

These priorities are underpinned by a commitment to enhance the skills and expertise of people who work in Community Legal Centres.

The Federation is now working with Community Legal Centres to develop the initiatives and activities needed to achieve the goals of the plan over the next decade.

FEDERATION CEO LOUISA GIBBS AT OUR THIRD VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE WITH THE VICTORIAN ATTORNEY-GENERAL



OUR IMPACT:

We continued to develop our 10-Year Plan, establishing four priority areas with input from Community Legal Centres, stakeholders, clients, and communities.

We mutually informed the development of our plan alongside similar projects from the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victoria Legal Aid.

A SHARED VISION TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF VICTORIANS

© VICTORIAN ATTORNEY-GENERAL JACLYN SYMES AT OUR THIRD VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE WITH COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

To advance access to fairer legal outcomes across Victoria, the Federation convened three roundtable meetings for the Victorian Attorney-General, the Hon Jaclyn Symes MP, with Victoria's Community Legal Centres.

At the roundtables, the Attorney-General expressed her commitment to working with the community legal sector and advancing reforms that will have a positive impact on Victorians.

The first roundtable in July 2021 involved a question and answer session between the Attorney-General and Community Legal Centres. This covered a diverse range of topics, including alternate dispute resolution mechanisms for small civil claims, police accountability, bail reform, reform to the child protection system, therapeutic justice models, climate change and disaster responses, and sustainable and long-term funding for the community legal sector.

At the second roundtable in November 2021, Community Legal Centres shared their experiences of advocating for climate justice and responding to disasters, including the importance of embedding disaster preparedness and response into practice. Centres also illustrated the critical role integrated legal services play in supporting people in the community with complex issues, and the benefits of taking a holistic approach, with examples and client stories shared.

The third roundtable in April 2022 took a deep dive into the critical role of Community Legal Centres in supporting victim survivors of family violence. Community Legal Centres presented on their experiences with the early resolution processes at the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, and the support provided at Specialist Family Violence Courts. A range of partnerships which deliver holistic and community-based support were showcased. This included maternal health clinics for women experiencing homelessness and women from migrant and refugee communities.

We thank the Attorney-General and her team for joining in such engaging and fruitful discussions at the roundtables. This has been enormously beneficial as we work together towards a shared vision to reduce inequality and improve the lives of Victorians.

OUR IMPACT:

We provided the space for ongoing, productive dialogue with the State's principal law maker about topics that matter to Victorian Community Legal Centres, and the communities they serve.

We collated and shared data and stories with the Attorney-General that demonstrate the impact of Community Legal Centres, enabling her to advance legal reforms and advance fairer legal outcomes for all Victorians, particularly those who are subject to disadvantage.



© YOUNG WORKER'S CENTRE STAFF


DONATIONS FOR A FAIRER VICTORIA

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS, WHO SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE FEDERATION AND VICTORIA'S COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES. BY SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR, YOU ARE HELPING US TO STRIVE FOR A FAIRER LEGAL SYSTEM AND A MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE VICTORIA.

Donations come in all shapes and sizes, and can be given by anyone. This year, we were delighted to receive a \$2,000 donation from Camberwell Girls Grammar School and their former student Amelia Lemanis.

In 2020, Amelia was awarded first prize in the University of Melbourne's School of Government John Button School Prize. The prize encourages young people to express their ideas about Australian politics and public policy.

Amelia wrote the powerful and thoughtful analysis, 'Why Australia Needs to Engage in Justice Reinvestment to Reduce Indigenous Incarceration Rates and Help Close the Gap'.

 Read Amelia's essay online

When asked by the School what she would like done with the prize money, Amelia chose to donate it to the Federation because:

- ▼ the Federation's work (including that with the Smart Justice Coalition) is relevant to the essay's focus on justice reinvestment and Amelia's belief that "it's important to look beyond punitive punishment towards more reformative solutions, particularly because of the disproportionate effect it has on the Indigenous community"
- ▼ through its involvement in Smart Justice for Young People, the Federation has a priority of advocacy on behalf of young people, which Amelia "felt was important as a young person".

Thank you, Amelia – not just for the donation, which we will put towards work relevant to the ideals of the essay, but also for amplifying issues of importance in such a considered way. The future is bright with young advocates like Amelia.



Cast your mind back, if you can, to 1972.

It was a time of flared jeans, of the Vietnam war, of hippies and discos and soulful music.

Sir Henry Bolte and then Rupert Hamer were the Premiers of Victoria, Gough Whitlam became the Prime Minister of Australia, the first Labor Prime Minister since 1949, and swimmer Shane Gould was awarded Australian of the Year.

Access to legal recompense was generally reserved for those with money, those who could afford the costly expense of legal representation.

A radical program of social justice and protest, which started in the 1960s was continuing and awareness of the impact of laws on communities and access to justice for citizens often denied a voice was increasing.

BUT AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES, A MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE WAS GROWING. IN POCKETS ACROSS VICTORIA, YOUNG LAWYERS WERE GATHERING TO DISCUSS HOW THEY COULD AFFECT CHANGE AND MAKE LEGAL REPRESENTATION MORE ACCESSIBLE TO MORE PEOPLE, AND HOPED TO REALISE 'FAIR AND EQUITABLE' LEGISLATION FOR EVEN THE MOST MARGINALISED VICTORIANS.

A group of Monash University students and academics hit on the idea of offering legal assistance via a phone line to those who needed it. What started as a phone advice line became the Springvale Monash Legal Service, now providing legal services and social justice advocacy across the south-east of Melbourne under the name South-East Monash Legal Service.

Across town, a group of lawyers took it upon themselves to do the unthinkable. They started providing free legal advice to those seeking legal recourse in the basement of the Fitzroy Town Hall. Fitzroy Legal Service opened its doors just weeks after Gough Whitlam was sworn in as Prime Minister.

In St Kilda, a similar service was beginning to evolve. Almost half a century after the first advice session, St Kilda Legal Service has recently launched a fresh new identity as Southside Justice.

The three organisations were the first non-Aboriginal Legal Services operating in Australia, following Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service which opened its doors in 1970. The first Aboriginal Legal Service in Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS) was also established as a community-controlled Co-operative Society in 1973.

Beyond providing legal support for those who needed it, those first Community Legal Centres shared a desire for social justice and early advocacy focused on greater rights and equality for all Victorians.

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

More recently, Community Legal Centres have advocated for the rights of tenants in public housing caught in snap lockdowns in Melbourne, for better protection for Victorians against scams, for better tenancy arrangements for renters, and for waiving COVID-19 fines issued to young people.

Justice for All, A History of the Victorian Community Legal Centre movement, written to celebrate 40 years of Community Legal Centres, states that while “success is hard to measure and injustice still abounds, there is no doubt that over the past 40 years Community Legal Centres have expanded possibilities for justice and recognised the legal needs of people previously excluded from the benefits of the law”.

© 50 YEAR COLLAGE IMAGES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES AND SOURCED FROM JUSTICE FOR ALL, A HISTORY OF THE VICTORIAN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE MOVEMENT



“Poor people; young people victimised and criminalised by police; people with mental health issues; people with disabilities; migrants; refugees; prisoners; and women routinely positioned outside the circle of the law’s protection: all of these have an important place in the CLC story.”

And 10 years later, as we start celebrations for 50 years of Community Legal Centres in Victoria and Australia, those words are as relevant now as they were back then.

There are now more than 170 Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Legal Services operating across Australia, including 46 in Victoria.

Today, you can find Community Legal Centres that are place-based, providing services across a range of legal issues to a geographic community, and specialist legal centres that focus on specific areas of law (such as tenancy, consumer action or employment) or cohorts of people (such as women, young people, asylum seekers or people with disability).

But the cornerstone of social justice continues to define the sector. Community Legal Centres continue to work together and with social and health sector partners to champion justice and equality for all Victorians, while pushing for more equitable laws and more accountable government and democracy.

From those humble beginnings, 4,000 staff and volunteers at Community Legal Centres across Victoria now provide more than 100,000 legal services every year for Victorians who face economic and social disadvantage, who cannot afford legal representation and are not eligible for legal aid. This year and next, we will be celebrating the sector’s 50-year anniversary.

It is a significant milestone and one that the Federation is proud to champion. From celebrations across Community Legal Centres for staff and volunteers, to outlining a timeline of our collective achievements, from celebrating with partner organisations to national industry events, we are working on a calendar of activities and celebrations to highlight the work of the sector.

We hope you will join us in recognising this important achievement.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES

WORKING WITH, FOR, AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Most people don’t go to a health service expecting to walk away with legal support, or to a financial counsellor expecting to have their legal issues explained, but sometimes insurmountable and unseen legal challenges can manifest as problems in other areas of people’s lives.

That’s why Integrated Services are so important. We know that people rarely experience legal challenges in a vacuum and that life events can both mask and compound legal issues.

Seeking support for a general life issue, such as a health or financial problem, can sometimes reveal underlying legal problems. To be truly responsive to individuals’ needs, Community Legal Centres work alongside the community, health and education sectors to help address the complex and intersecting needs of clients. They work with partner organisations to identify legal issues that might be leading to other life issues. This is what we mean when we talk about Integrated Services.

During the 2021-22 financial year, the Federation was delighted to take on funding administration of seven new Integrated Services programs, with a focus on health-justice partnerships, adding to the nine Integrated Services that the Federation already administers.

The newly supported programs focus on youth and family violence, support for Aboriginal communities, and elder abuse.



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The Federation not only administers the funding for these Integrated Services on behalf of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, but also convenes outcomes and reporting from the programs to help support their funding and reporting to government. The Federation convenes a Community of Practice for Community Legal Centres. The Community of Practice is open to any Victorian Community Legal Centre that delivers Integrated Services, and their partner organisations, to share knowledge and expertise and to learn from other legal and community professionals working in these settings.

SOUTH-EAST MONASH LEGAL SERVICE'S
SPORTING CHANGE PROGRAM

SCHOOL LAWYERS AT WORK

Guyan had seen a school lawyer to get advice about his tenancy agreement a few years earlier, so he knew the service was confidential and helped young people.

When he was fined by police, Guyan reached out again for help. At his appointment, he told the school lawyer he had a hearing in three weeks' time for driving through a red light on his motorbike. He was a learner driver, driving in wet weather, and did not think he could stop safely.

Guyan had previously lost demerit points, so he had elected to go to court because he thought he could explain his reason for not stopping. However, Guyan wasn't aware of the serious consequences of a court appearance. His migration agent had warned him that as an international student, a conviction could affect his visa and permanent residency application.

First, the school lawyer successfully applied for an adjournment so Guyan could attend his VCE exam.

Then, the school lawyer prepared a guilty plea and arranged for the hearing to take place via Webex so they could be at the school together during the hearing.

The outcome was a non-conviction, an adjourned undertaking of good behaviour for six months, and a \$75 fine. Guyan was thrilled and was able to complete his studies without stress or anxiety. He described the process as the best experience of his life.

"I can't believe I was able to get so much help for this issue, and it didn't affect my studies one bit," he said.

Guyan is about to visit his family before starting his dream automotive course. He said without the help, he would not have got through this, and may have lost his visa and his ability to study.

INTEGRATED SERVICE SUMMARIES

BALLARAT AND GRAMPIANS COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE

Providing family law and family violence services for parents and carers who visit Parent Place and the Sebastopol, Lucas and Ballan Maternal and Child Health Centres.

CONSUMER ACTION LAW CENTRE

A partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service to deliver integrated consumer, credit and debt legal services to Aboriginal communities.

FITZROY LEGAL SERVICE – DAREBIN DRUG OUTREACH LAWYER PROGRAM

Assisting individuals with legal problems related to alcohol and drug use through partnerships with YSAS (Youth Support and Advocacy Service), Living Room, Inner Space, North Richmond Community Health, Odyssey House Victoria and Uniting Care ReGen.

GOULBURN VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

A partnership with Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative to support local Aboriginal community members with complex legal and health issues.

HUME RIVERINA COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE – INVISIBLE HURDLES

A youth and family violence program that identifies systemic issues affecting young people, advocates to address these issues and provides legal services.

INNER MELBOURNE COMMUNITY LEGAL

- ▼ Beyond Survival – Policing Family Violence Project: A partnership with Flat Out responding to police accountability issues.
- ▼ Health Justice Partnership with Royal Melbourne Hospital: Providing advice and casework for patients, delivering community legal education and undertaking strategic policy work.
- ▼ Acting on Warning Signs: a partnership with the Royal Women's Hospital to provide legal assistance to patients in weekly legal clinics, by telephone or in-person.

INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTRE AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE

A partnership with Monash Health to provide legal advice for migrant and refugee women experiencing family violence, and secondary consultations for Monash Health staff.

JUSTICE CONNECT SENIORS LAW

A partnership with cohealth and St Vincent's Hospital to increase access to legal support and help progress social justice for people who are experiencing or at risk of elder abuse.

LAW AND ADVOCACY CENTRE FOR WOMEN

Providing pathways out of the justice system for socially and economically disadvantaged women through specialist, gender-informed legal advice and representation alongside in-house social work and case management assistance.

LODDON CAMPASPE COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

- ▼ Health Justice Partnership with Maryborough District Health Service: Providing integrated legal-health service to clients with complex needs, and enabling early intervention support for those at risk of encountering the criminal legal system.
- ▼ Health Justice Partnership with Bendigo Community Health Service: Increasing safety and access to justice for women experiencing family violence.

SENIORS RIGHTS VICTORIA (COUNCIL ON THE AGEING)

Supporting people with dementia to plan and make informed choices about future financial, health or care arrangements, and document them in an appropriate legal format.

SOCIAL SECURITY RIGHTS VICTORIA

Providing legal and financial counselling services for people experiencing difficulties with Centrelink and associated non-legal matters.

SOUTH-EAST MONASH LEGAL SERVICE – SPORTING CHANGE

Supporting young people from diverse backgrounds to engage constructively in their local communities and learn about the legal system; and increasing young people's access to justice through integrated school lawyers at Hampton Park Secondary College and Dandenong High School.

EMBEDDING LEGAL HELP INTO MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

Victorians who experience mental health problems and psychological distress are a key client group for Community Legal Centres, which provide a safe place to access trauma-informed, culturally sensitive legal information, advice and representation.

We know this because data from a sample of 31 of Victoria’s 46 Community Legal Centres revealed 20 per cent of clients self-identified as living with mental health problems. We believe this is an underestimation. A study of legal needs in Australia found that of the respondents who had at least six legal problems, over 60 per cent were living with a mental illness.⁶

People living with mental health problems and psychological distress benefit when legal support is part of a responsive and integrated mental health system. Despite this, many people experiencing mental health problems are not able to access the legal services they need. So, Community Legal Centres are devising new and innovative ways to connect with these members of our community to help identify and alleviate their legal problems and set them on a path to holistic recovery.

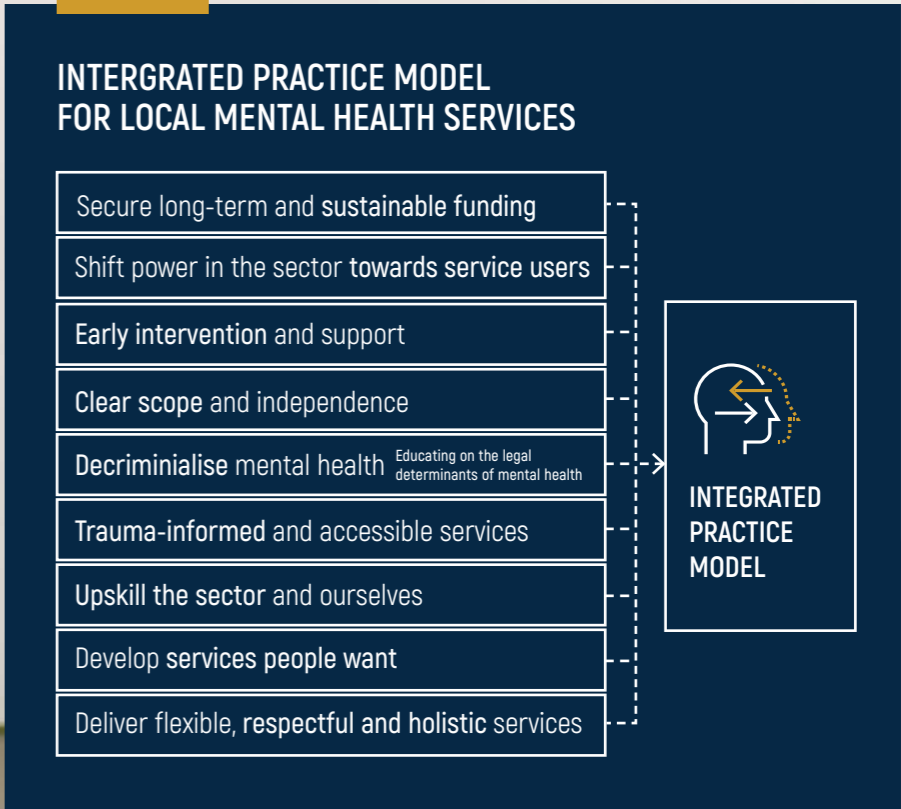
The escalation and compounding of legal issues without legal support results in further harm and distress – but the tide is turning. The mental health reforms flowing from the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System are providing an important opportunity to increase access to timely legal assistance and holistic support for people living with mental health problems.

To realise the Royal Commission’s vision of a responsive and integrated mental health system, we believe it is crucial that clients at the new Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services (Local Services) can access legal help.

Recognising the special role Community Legal Centres play in the mental health space, during 2021-2022 the Federation engaged Simon Katterl, a mental health advocate and consultant, to facilitate workshops with member Community Legal Centres to consider what would be best practice to deliver integrated legal services in the Local Services setting. We partnered with people with lived experience of mental ill health who have accessed legal services to create this design with us. Following these workshops, we developed an integrated legal practice model intended to ensure appropriate legal support is available at the new Local Services as they are rolled out across Victoria.

Integrated legal practice models are built on a core belief that access to timely legal services is essential. Partnerships between community legal services and health providers allow access to legal help at the earliest time and most convenient settings for people. The model we developed aims to provide an accessible, trauma-informed and respectful service to clients. It also recognises the importance of centering people with lived experiences in its design, implementation, and evaluation.

The Federation has presented the model to the Victorian Government and is advocating for funding to support the roll-out of the model state-wide. The Federation will continue to work with Community Legal Centres to advocate to both government and mental health services providers for the inclusion of community lawyers in the roll-out of the Local Services.



© FEDERATION OFFICE
COORDINATOR ROSANNA DI GRAZIA

OUR IMPACT:

We enabled Community Legal Centres, people with lived experience of mental health problems, and a technical expert to collaborate on a model for legal services to be integrated into Victoria’s 60 Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services.

We raised awareness within government of the importance of including legal services in the design of Victoria’s 60 Local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Services.



WORKING TOGETHER FOR GREATER IMPACT

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

CONVENED BY TANIA MCKENNA (NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE) AND ANDREA STAUNTON (VICTORIA LEGAL AID). THANKS SOPHIE L'ESTRANGE (FITZROY LEGAL SERVICE), RETIRED DECEMBER 2021

During 2021-2022, the Community Development and Community Legal Education Working Group gained momentum as the number of participating Agencies grew. This provided even greater opportunity for workers to share innovative project ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and learn from each other's collective wisdom and experience.

The annual forum held in March with support from King & Wood Mallesons (who generously arranged the venue and catering) provided an opportunity for the sector to come together in person and online after a long COVID-19 hiatus.

The forum included presentations from the Victorian Ombudsman (complaints processes), the Victorian Law Foundation (legal capability), Victoria Legal Aid (inclusivity for the LGBTQI+ community and incorporating lived experience into our work), and Dr Liz Curran and Hume Riverina Community Legal Service on the Invisible Hurdles Evaluation.

The forum also included a showcase featuring projects from Eastern Community Legal Centre (engaging communities in democracy) and Peninsula Community Legal Centre (strengthening legal pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse women).

FAMILY VIOLENCE WORKING GROUP

CONVENED BY RACHAEL PLINER (FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES)

The Family Violence Working Group has continued to play an important role in advocating for key family violence reforms over the past year.

The working group contributed to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor consultations on the progress of key family violence reforms in Victoria. The Monitor holds the government and its agencies to account following the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Members fed into the Monitor's report on Accurate Identification of the Predominant Aggressor and contributed to important recommendations for reform. Following the release of this report, the working group has focused on strategies to reduce misidentification of victim survivors as perpetrators of family violence and have been involved in developing key recommendations in this area.

InTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence provided insights on the intersection between migration law and family violence for women on temporary visas who are experiencing family violence. The working group collaborated with the Federation's Visa Cancellations Working Group to advocate against proposed legislation to strengthen the visa cancellation tests which would negatively impact victim survivors of family violence. Following concerted advocacy led by the Visa Cancellations Working Group, the proposed reforms did not go ahead.

Due to the pandemic, there were significant changes to the court process for family violence matters. The working group has contributed to reforms to the family violence intervention order system and advocated for court processes which are client-centered, focus on safety outcomes and harness the benefits of hybrid delivery models.

SUPPORTING COLLABORATION

The Federation plays a leading, convening or support role as needed for Federation working groups, networks and communities of practice whenever there is a desire from our member Community Legal Centres to collaborate together (and in broader coalitions) on issues of practice or policy. During 2021-2022, this comprised support for 23 working groups, including:

- ▼ instigating and leading two new working groups, bringing interested centres together on the issues of Victoria's mental health reforms and the design of a Victim's Legal Service
- ▼ facilitating and leading practice working groups such as the Communications Network and Professional Standards and Support Committee where the Federation staff have the technical expertise to guide the group
- ▼ actively participating in working groups led by member Community Legal Centre staff who are subject matter experts
- ▼ providing logistical or secretarial support as appropriate to ensure all interested Community Legal Centres can participate in those working groups in which they are interested in
- ▼ amplifying the impact of working groups through the Federation's advocacy channels with government; and through information sharing with all members through forums such as Members Meetings and our fortnightly newsletter Community Law News.

INFRINGEMENTS WORKING GROUP

CONVENED BY HANNAH LEWIS (JUSTICE CONNECT), SHIFRAH BLUSTEIN (WESTJUSTICE), JOANNE PARKIN (UNITING REGEN), SAM LEVY (NEIGHBOURHOOD JUSTICE CENTRE)

The Infringements Working Group is a joint working group of the Federation, Victoria Legal Aid and Financial Counselling Victoria. It has 37 Community Legal Centres and financial counselling members based across Victoria.

During 2021-2022, the Infringements Working Group worked collaboratively to call for the implementation of the Fines Reform Advisory Board's recommendations to improve fairness and efficiency in the fines system, including through calling for binding enforcement review, improvements to the work and development permit scheme and for concessional COVID-19 fines to be implemented.



THE INTEGRATED LEGAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

CONVENED BY RACHEL TEAL AND ADO BARKER (JUSTICE CONNECT HOMELESS LAW)

The Integrated Legal and Social Support Network (ILSSN) is a collaborative forum that supports and enhances integrated practice within the Victorian community legal sector. Membership of the ILSSN during 2021-2022 grew to 24 Community Legal Centres, bringing together metropolitan, regional, and state-wide services, and reflecting a wide range of program interests and specialisations.

The ILSSN met quarterly to share successes, challenges and learnings from the development and delivery of integrated legal assistance to Victorians. In the last year, it was particularly valuable to hear insights from multi-disciplinary Community Legal Centre staff about their client-centred, innovative work in responding to increased need during COVID-19. The Federation's Integrated Practice Toolkit, which was developed by the ILSSN, also continued to be a key resource that was promoted throughout the year.

Engagement with several new or expanded integrated programs, which have brought on staff social work professionals for the first time, also demonstrated the ILSSN's ongoing role in helping to improve the provision of holistic community legal services across Victoria.



TENANTS WORKING GROUP

CONVENED BY AGATA WIERZBOWSKI (TENANTS VICTORIA)

The Tenants Working Group is a group of Community Legal Centres with rental law practices, which aims to promote and improve the status of tenants and residents in all forms of tenancy.

During 2021-2022 the Tenants Working Group met at least bi-monthly to discuss current issues in tenancy law, share advocacy opportunities and updates, and gather evidence and case studies for shared advocacy.

Members of the Tenants Working Group contributed to consultations and inquiries in the following areas:

- ▼ Social Housing Regulation Review
- ▼ Victorian Ombudsman Investigation into Social Housing Complaints Handling
- ▼ Rooming House Lived Experience Project.

The working group shared tenancy law resources and expertise, improved service coordination through its working group network, and provided support to the coordinated advocacy of its member organisations and the Tenancy Coordination Group on tenancy issues.

PREPARING FOR CRISES WITH COMMUNITIES

Disaster response and climate justice are critical areas for community lawyers to address – not just on behalf of their communities and clients, but also to safeguard their own centres. Over the past year, the Federation has helped increase the literacy, capacity, and preparedness of the community legal sector to ensure it is ready for the impacts of climate change.

No matter who we are or where we live, we all deserve to feel safe and well in our homes and communities. We all want to protect our communities from floods, fires and heatwaves. And we all want to be treated with respect and have a say on decisions that impact us. As the impacts of climate change increase and the effects on local communities worsen, the Federation is striving to ensure all Victorians can access climate justice and are protected and supported to respond and recover from legal issues relating to disasters.

Our work in climate justice and disaster response falls across three main areas:

- ▼ facilitating and leading the Federation’s Disaster and Climate Justice Working Group
- ▼ partnering with Environmental Justice Australia and Climate Council in the Climate Justice Legal Project
- ▼ working with legal sector partners in Disaster Legal Help Victoria.

Climate change will affect individuals and communities differently depending on age, location and legal problem. Direct impacts include extreme weather events, such as an increased frequency of cyclones, floods, heatwaves or bushfires. Indirect impacts may result in more ‘hidden’ legal problems, including:

- ▼ insurance and consumer law problems fuelled by uninsurable goods and properties
- ▼ tenancy law problems arising from disputes about heating and cooling, and habitability during times of extreme heat or flooding
- ▼ employment law problems, especially for low-paid workers in high heat environments, pay and conditions, workplace injuries
- ▼ family violence law problems, which all too often spike during disasters and extreme heat
- ▼ mental health law problems which can be exacerbated during crises.

Community legal education needs to help people understand the laws and policies that will affect them in terms of local climate risk and provide strategies to help them adapt.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Federation acknowledges the support of the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation and Bushfire Recovery Victoria for our climate and disaster related work.

WORKING TOGETHER MAKES US STRONGER

The Federation’s Disaster and Climate Justice Working Group provides ongoing support to member Community Legal Centres working in disaster response and climate justice. Convened by the Federation’s Climate Justice and Disaster Response Lead, Dr Bronwyn Lay, the work of this group is key both in our partnership with Disaster Legal Help Victoria and in building the Climate Justice Legal Project.

The Disaster and Climate Justice Working Group supports and enables Community Legal Centres who are:

- ▼ engaged in resilient responses to disaster and climate change impacts
- ▼ contributing to joint disaster preparation, response, or recovery
- ▼ working on climate justice projects and initiatives
- ▼ interested in expanding community legal knowledge and engagement with disaster and climate justice.

Within the group, our member Community Legal Centres are creating a blueprint for good practice in this area. Gippsland Community Legal Service, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service and Eastern Community Legal Centre have continued to respond to and support people in their communities affected by flood and fire disasters. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service has also been active in outreach across Victoria, particularly in Gippsland. Recovery has a long tail, and people still have legal needs even 12 to 18 months after an event.

During 2021-2022 the Disaster and Climate Justice Working Group helped to ensure Community Legal Centres have the skills they need by supporting and enabling community legal education in disaster response, as well as building knowledge in planning law, building contracts, insurance and social security rights in disaster. The working group has also explored issues such as discrimination in recovery services and inadequate data privacy for survivors of family violence in impacted areas.

DISASTER LEGAL HELP VICTORIA

Disaster Legal Help Victoria is a partnership between the Victorian community, public, and private legal service providers. The partnership came about following the 2009 bushfires to coordinate and support the legal sector’s response to Victorians affected by disaster. Disaster Legal Help Victoria builds Victorians’ disaster resilience by leading and coordinating legal responses and support services.

The partners are:

- ▼ Federation of Community Legal Centres
- ▼ Justice Connect
- ▼ Law Institute of Victoria
- ▼ Victoria Legal Aid
- ▼ Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- ▼ Victorian Bar

ACTIVELY PRIORITISING FIRST NATIONS EXPERTISE

DISASTER LAW AND RESPONSE WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

We sat down with Tali Rechtman, a Senior Lawyer from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) to discuss her recent work in disaster law and response with Aboriginal communities.

“We know that trauma suffered by damage to Country is unique to Aboriginal people,” says Tali.

“That is one of the reasons why it is critical that there are Aboriginal voices and representation in the emerging disaster lawyering sector - to recognise the specific and harmful ways climate change and environmental disasters affect Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are leading disaster preparedness and response efforts for Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Aboriginal people and communities have been doing this for thousands of years. This work and expertise need to be recognised.

Building trusting relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, who know their communities best, is critical to ensuring that action taken will meet the needs of community.”

Recently, the Federation worked with VALS to promote them as a partner within Disaster Legal Help Victoria.

“We hope that the work we do now, including the work that we do as a Disaster Legal Help Victoria partner, will help to embed Self-Determination in the emerging disaster lawyering sector.

“Services must be culturally safe and trauma-informed. They should also be community-led, as we know this is key to their success.”

Holistically, Tali describes VALS’ work in disaster preparedness and response as:

- ▼ supporting clients who are disaster-affected or vulnerable to the impacts of disasters across their five legal teams and community justice program
- ▼ working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to strengthen referral pathways, provide training and community legal education, and distribute resources
- ▼ participating in working groups such as the Federation’s Climate Change and Disaster Working Group and Disaster Legal Help Victoria, and sharing the experiences and perspectives of First Nations people where appropriate
- ▼ working closely with others in the community legal and legal assistance sectors to provide referrals and advice, build plans and processes for extreme weather events, and integrate First Nations voices into all disaster preparedness and response efforts.

“We are taking a place-based approach that is rooted in Self-Determination. This starts by asking each community what they would like from us, knowing every community is different.”

Tali and VALS hope to continue work to ensure the needs of each community are met. However, Tali notes that there are still many systemic barriers to overcome, including discrimination against Aboriginal people in mainstream disaster response services.

VALS is spearheading an approach to disaster response that is regarded as best practice. Its new disaster legal help checklist for Aboriginal people and community organisations has been widely praised. The Federation will continue to prioritise and support VALS’ work as a partner in this space.

SPECIALISED TRAINING BUILDS OUR CAPACITY

Sharing lessons and providing skills to member Community Legal Centres are central to the Federation’s commitment to building community legal sector resilience and capacity. During 2021-2022, the Federation delivered a series of intensive training sessions for Community Legal Centres. So far, 17 centres have completed training sessions.

The training focused on the importance of community lawyering for climate justice, and featured insights from the work of the Climate Justice Legal Project. Community Legal Centres shared their experiences during the Black Summer fires and the July 2021 storms, and explored building resilience and embedding climate justice into Community Legal Centre work as key focus areas.

OUR IMPACT:

We enabled Community Legal Centres to share best practice learnings through convening the Disaster and Climate Justice Working Group.

We upskilled 17 member Community Legal Centres in resilience and capacity to respond to climate events and disasters.

We actively participated in Disaster Legal Help Victoria that supported Community Legal Centres to work in a coordinated fashion with other legal assistance providers when responding to disasters.

We developed a business case and project logic for the Climate Justice Legal Project that is supporting its implementation.

📍 L-R TALI RECHTMAN (VALS), GENEVIEVE WILKS (VICTORIA LEGAL AID, GIPPSLAND REGIONAL OFFICE) AND NAZ BESAVEND (VALS)

CLIMATE JUSTICE LEGAL PROJECT

A partnership between the Federation of Community Legal Centres, Environmental Justice Australia and the Climate Council. It centres around a commitment to realising climate justice across the legal sector. The project:

- ▼ trains and supports community lawyers to identify and address the impacts of climate injustice
- ▼ collects evidence, data, and stories to advocate for and amplify the voices of communities
- ▼ co-designs programs with Community Legal Centres to support communities in preparing for worsening climate change, and to recover from the impacts
- ▼ pursues strategic litigation and law reform to address climate injustice and drive faster, fairer, and more ambitious climate action.



17 MEMBERS
UPSKILLED in resilience and capacity to respond to climate events.

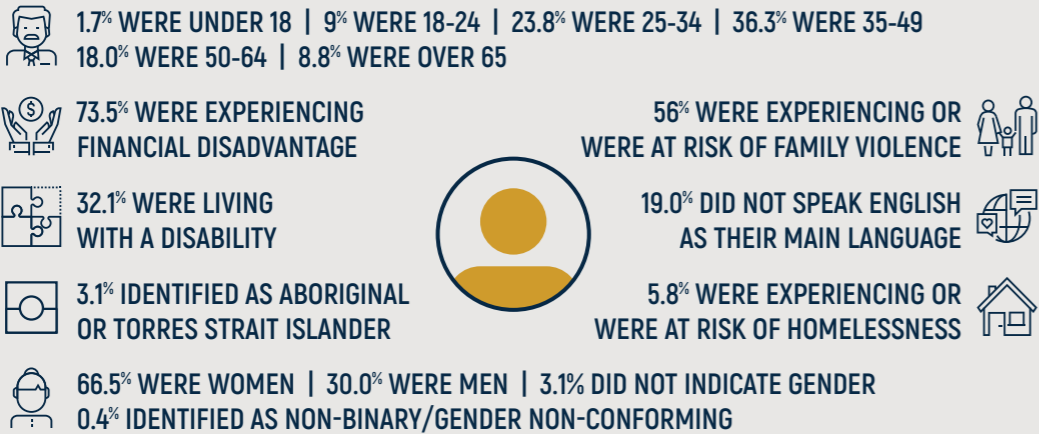


SECTOR DATA SNAPSHOT

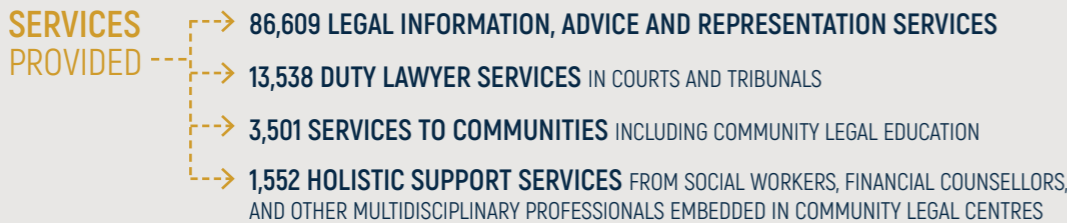
JULY 2021
TO JUNE 2022

Community Legal Centres offer a hugely diverse range of services and record statistics in different ways. You can read more about how the Federation is supporting more consistent data on the following pages. Currently, 31 centres already collect and report on data using the same format. The data from these 31 Community Legal Centres is presented here. With services provided by an additional 15 Community Legal Centres, the real numbers would show us more detail and represent many more Victorians than are counted here.

WHO WERE THE CLIENTS SERVED BY COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES



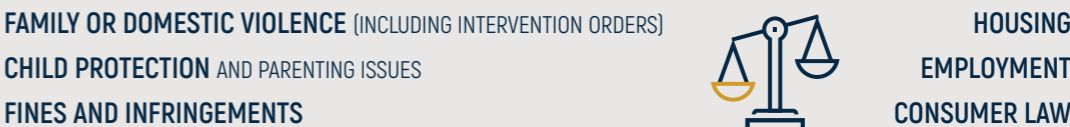
101,700 LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDED TO VICTORIANS BY COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES



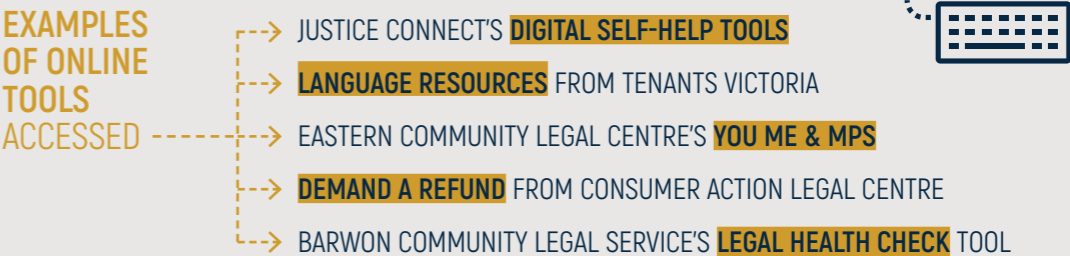
INCREASED DEMAND SINCE LAST FINANCIAL YEAR



MOST COMMON LEGAL PROBLEMS FOR CLIENTS WERE



500,000+ PEOPLE ACCESSED SELF-HELP TOOLS FROM OUR COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

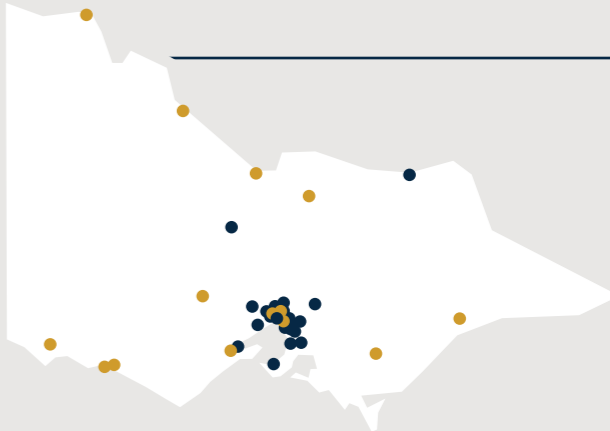


THE FEDERATION



MEMBERS OF THE FEDERATION

- 21 PLACE-BASED SERVICES
- 25 SPECIALIST SERVICES INCLUDING 2 ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES
- 72% METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE-BASED
- 28% PERI-URBAN-BASED OR IN REGIONAL VICTORIA
- 45% OFFERING STATEWIDE SERVICES



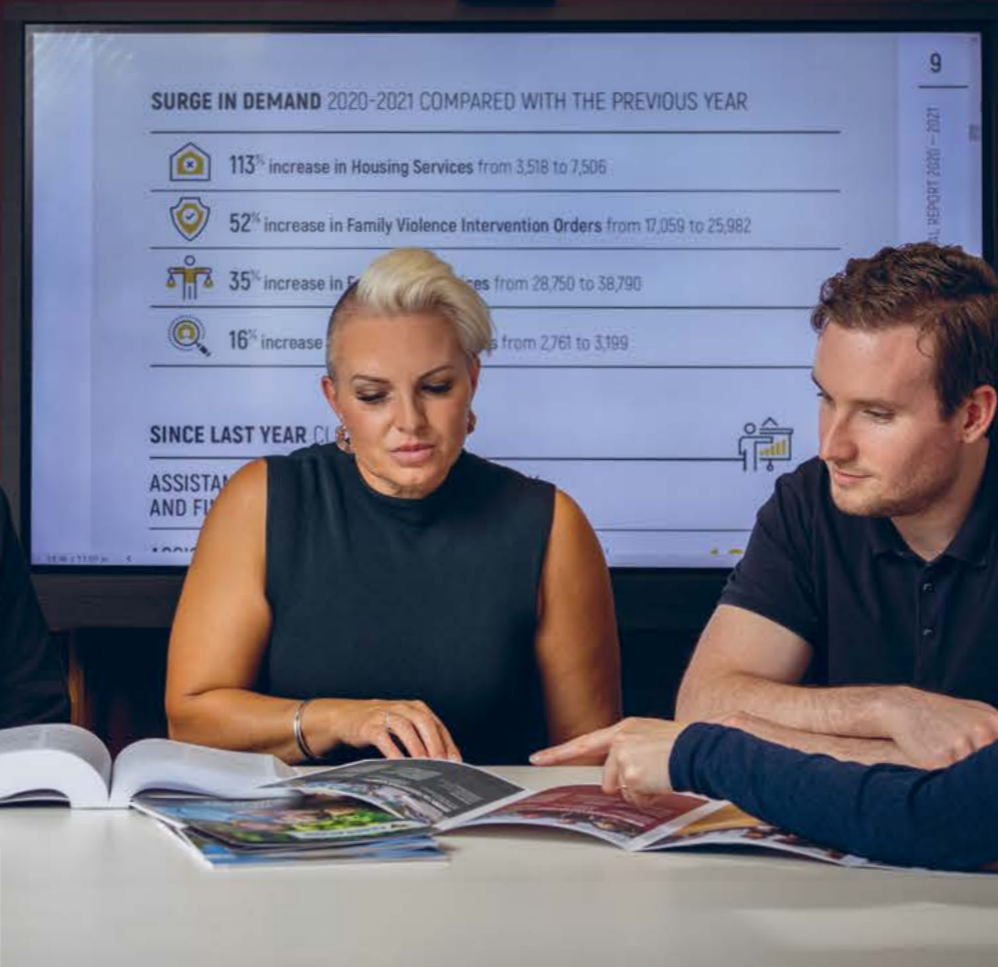
46 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES AND ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES WORKING TOGETHER FOR A FAIR AND JUST VICTORIA

DATA INNOVATION

MEETING PRESENT CHALLENGES AND ENSURING FUTURE SUCCESS FOR COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

STAFF FROM THE FEDERATION AND MEMBER COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES DISCUSS THE SURGE IN DEMAND FOR SERVICES

26 MEMBERS
SUPPORTED to implement modern case management systems



While Victorian Community Legal Centres have been helping communities for more than 50 years, showing our collective impact through statistics and data is an ongoing challenge. Knowing the critical and increasing importance of data in the work that our members do, we are meeting this issue head on.

An old cliché tells us that knowledge is power – but how do you best accumulate knowledge to meet the myriad challenges faced by the community legal sector? And how do you best use that information to help Victorian communities?

Seniors Rights Victoria is a specialist legal service that helps older Victorians address elder abuse. Its team has been consistently improving the gathering and analysing of client data collected through its helpline and legal and advocacy casework beyond the scope of funding and compliance reporting requirements.

With more than 3,500 calls received this financial year through its helpline, Seniors Rights Victoria has been able to record key information to better understand the people who use its services and the types of supports they require. While that data could be recorded simply for compliance purposes, Seniors Rights Victoria has used the data collected to help tell a story of the needs of its community.

The evidence base has directly enabled Seniors Rights Victoria to acquire more funding for next financial year for a new staff member to assist more people through the helpline.

The team has also used service data to create an infographic factsheet to help with their advocacy efforts with the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers.

That's the power of data. It helps organisations like Seniors Rights Victoria, who do so much for the community with limited funding and resourcing, to achieve better outcomes for their communities.

BY HELPING TO IMPLEMENT NEW DATA SYSTEMS AND DESIGNING A CENTRALISED DATA REPOSITORY, WE ARE DRIVING INNOVATION TO STRENGTHEN THE SECTOR WELL INTO THE FUTURE.

One of our greatest strengths is the diversity of the services offered by Victoria's 46 Community Legal Centres – but this also poses a challenge. Even basic demographic information or service details can be reported in a multitude of ways, and many existing case management systems no longer meet the needs of Community Legal Centres.

This year, the Federation has taken significant steps to help Community Legal Centre members improve their systems for collecting and using client and case information. We know how important access to detailed data can be, and we are developing strategies for using data more effectively within the Victorian community legal sector.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Federation is funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety to help our members implement modern case management systems. This is embedding consistent data standards and supporting improved evidence and reporting of the impact of Community Legal Centres.

DATA IN THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR

Community Legal Centres rely on data for many things, including supporting evidence-based advocacy and service design, reporting compliance, and securing funding to meet service demand. But with the breadth, depth, and complexity of the services that centres provide, data can be difficult to collect. Client and case data is confidential, and must be de-identified before it can be shared outside a centre. Additionally, different funding providers ask for different reporting fields and metrics.

Many case management systems currently in place at Community Legal Centres no longer keep pace with the evolving nature of data use and digital technologies. Different systems also collect information in different ways, and it has not been feasible to customise data and drill down easily into areas of interest for the whole sector.

At the Federation, our approach to addressing these issues includes two objectives:

- ▼ improving data capacity within Community Legal Centres by helping staff to collect and use data, and introducing better systems and supporting their implementation
- ▼ designing a model to collect sector-wide data.

These projects will empower both individual and collective advocacy, improve information and knowledge-sharing, and provide pathways for future innovation across Community Legal Centres.

MODERNISING COMMUNITY LEGAL PRACTICE SYSTEMS

Community Legal Centres have always been at the forefront of innovation when it comes to meeting the needs of the people seeking help. To do this work effectively, systems and processes can be used that better enable and automate work.

With funding from the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Federation has developed a project to support 26 Community Legal Centres to implement modern case management systems. Modern case management software generally provides a single, secure location for all information relating to a client's case to:

- ▼ empower staff through automation and workflow tools
- ▼ enhance compliance by using standardised processes
- ▼ integrate with other technological tools.

The project supports centres either to implement a modern case management system for the first time, or to make changes to their existing systems so data can be added to the national dataset.

Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre was the first centre to go 'live' with its new modern case management system in March 2022. As a smaller centre without in-house data specialists, the team found working with Federation staff alongside a commercial implementation partner a productive and supportive experience.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK CAMERON BLOYE, MANAGER/PRINCIPAL LAWYER, BRIMBANK MELTON COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

"While transitioning to [the modern case management system] has been a challenge with a few teething issues, over all it has been a very positive and exciting step for our team. With the support of the Federation... we are now able to make custom improvements, which help in the efficiency and quality of our data collection.

"The greatest challenge has been to understand how the system and CLASS* work alongside each other, and design processes to work well with both systems so all the necessary data is collected and reported to our funders. The support has been invaluable in guiding us through this

transition. [Federation staff] Tim and Skye have both been available to provide timely support in terms of process elaboration; data extraction; cost subsidisation; process design; developing and sharing templates and resources; and convening the community of practice on Teams.

"This is an evolving process, and we're still at the early stages of having a finalised set up that we're happy with. However, we've been able to get in place a workable system as we progress towards a fully implemented system that does everything we want it to."

* CLASS is the platform for reporting Community Legal Centre data nationally, managed by Community Legal Centres Australia

A CENTRALISED DATA REPOSITORY

Community Legal Centres are incredibly effective collaborators. To enable greater visibility of our sector's ongoing work and collective successes, we are designing a data model using modern business intelligence tools that will better help us share information.

Evidence is critical for our sector to best address present issues, and to plan for the future. A strong and consistently updated set of data will help Community Legal Centres to spot trends and emerging issues in their communities, just like Seniors Rights Victoria was able to do with the information produced through its helpline reports. The data collected from across the sector will, eventually, provide us with a big picture, state-wide view.

In April 2022, we confirmed that a centralised data repository would be viable. Through this kind of repository, we will be able to identify both the most effective service interventions and the most entrenched legal problems in our community.

Just imagine how powerful this information will be in helping us to advocate for a fairer Victoria and to provide better, more targeted services to the community.

OUR IMPACT:

We designed a project and secured funding to enable member Community Legal Centres to implement modern case management systems. As a result, over half our member centres are improving the way they capture and use data.

We engaged a dedicated Implementation Analyst to provide support to member Community Legal Centres. This has ensured technical support is specific to the needs of the community legal sector data reporting requirements.

We investigated how a centralised data repository can work for Community Legal Centre data, and will now test a data repository with a sample group of representative Community Legal Centres. This will improve the utility of data collected for sector-wide planning, advocacy and program design.



BUILDING CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE SUCCESS

Capacity building delivered to
795 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE
STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND
BOARD MEMBERS



VICTORIA'S 4,000 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WORK EVERY DAY TO BUILD A MORE JUST AND FAIRER VICTORIA. TO FURTHER THEIR INCREDIBLE WORK, THE FEDERATION FACILITATES A TRAINING CALENDAR THAT OFFERS WIDE-RANGING OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD THEIR SKILLS AND CAPACITY.

FEDERATION STAFF



In 2021-2022 we offered a variety of training options relevant to work in the unique community legal sector. Overall, we saw 570 registrations for 24 training offerings. In addition, 225 people registered for our virtual Continuing Professional Development event, which included nine sessions over three weeks.

The Federation strives to engage facilitators that will offer different perspectives to members' work and has developed a strong network of providers to access the best training possible. Some sessions are delivered by experts from the Federation or member Community Legal Centres such as Djirra. Other training providers, such as Non Profit Training, David Cherry, and Koorie Heritage Trust have now delivered many sessions. Developing these relationships has resulted in training programs that are targeted to the community legal sector, with deep insights into the work undertaken and our sector's potential for growth.

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THIS CALENDAR OF SESSIONS – IT FEELS A LOT MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN THE IN-PERSON SESSION WAS IN THE PAST AND HAVING THE VARIETY TO CHOOSE FROM IS MUCH MORE MEANINGFUL."

- CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENT, PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

-  45 OF OUR 46 MEMBER CENTRES WERE REPRESENTED IN AT LEAST ONE TRAINING SESSION FROM A SUITE OF 24 DIFFERENT SESSIONS
-  570 REGISTRATIONS FOR TRAINING SESSIONS THROUGHOUT 2021-2022 INCLUDING 99 FROM REGIONAL CENTRES (ENABLED BY VIRTUAL DELIVERY)
-  225 REGISTRATIONS FOR VIRTUAL CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENT THAT INCLUDED 9 SESSIONS ACROSS 3 WEEKS (SOME PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED ALL SESSIONS).



795 REGISTRATIONS IN TOTAL

"Having all our staff complete this training allows us to build our cultural competency as a service. I think it is really valuable to do these trainings yearly."

- TRAINING PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

"As a new leader [I found it] very informative to mould myself into a good leader and learn good practices early."

- TRAINING PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



CULTURAL SAFETY
Sessions by both Djirra and Koorie Heritage Trust

CULTURAL COMPETENCE
Koorie Heritage Trust

CLIMATE JUSTICE
Dr Bronwyn Lay, Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victoria

GOVERNANCE
Integrity Governance

GRANT WRITING
Non Profit Training

INTERVIEWING CLIENTS
David Cherry


LEADERSHIP
Non Profit Training

MEDIA
The Media Angle

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID
College of Law

TRANSLATOR SERVICES
Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)


UNDERSTANDING THE STATE BUDGET
Lara Freidin, Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victoria and Stephanie Millione, Senior Adviser to the Treasurer of Victoria



SESSION TOPICS

"The breakout rooms were great – especially at a time where networking/socialising with colleagues is rare. The practical tasks were timely and helpful."

- TRAINING PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK





**"I LEARNED WHAT I HAD
HOPED, AND MORE."**
TRAINING PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

© FEDERATION STAFF AT THE KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST

FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

The aim of the program was to contribute to participants' career progression, and to the sustainability and success of Community Legal Centres into the future.

Targeted to those new to people management or aspiring to be a manager. These sessions helped 20 staff from 10 member Community Legal Centres evolve and strengthen their management skills.

The Foundations of Leadership sessions were tailored both to share insights from across the Community Legal Centre sector and to introduce new ways of working from across the business sector. These skills help participants and their workplaces by:

- ▼ helping build confidence in the skills they have informally developed throughout their career
- ▼ strengthening participants' staff management skills and gaining an understanding of how they prefer to be managed, resulting in greater job satisfaction for the attendee and their colleagues
- ▼ project planning skills for successful delivery of organisational needs.

A key aspect of this training was understanding oneself as a leader. Participants learned how to maximise their own positive impact and, in turn, that of their colleagues. This involved activities that modelled behaviours attendees hoped to encourage in their own staff.

The attendees undertook a profile activity to identify their best ways of working. Once they received and reflected on the profile, participants were then encouraged to consider the profiles of their team members. This helped to identify potential ways of working that support everyone's strengths, building a cohesive team under considered leadership.

OUR IMPACT:

We built the capacity of nearly 800 staff, volunteers and board members in all but one of Victoria's Community Legal Centres by delivering virtually a suite of training and a Continuing Professional Development program.

We engaged with participants to collect feedback and continue to optimise and improve our training offerings.

ENSURING MEMBER SUCCESS

KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Capella Henderson, a project coordinator at Eastern Community Legal Centre who attended the Foundations of Leadership training, shared:

"It was very interesting to hear about the challenges and experiences that staff at other Community Legal Centres go through. This helped me to better understand the structure and workings of other Community Legal Centres with learning gained from how they responded to some of their challenges."

Participants from Eastern Community Legal Centre who participated in the Foundations of Leadership found the training helped them reflect on their own leadership style and modes of behaviour "in a very practical and applicable way".

With these insights in mind, Eastern Community Legal Centre decided to bring aspects of the Foundations of Leadership training to reflect inwards and learn more about their own leadership team.

Around 30 staff at Eastern participated in the internal profile activity and follow-up workshop, and found that it helped them "better understand how they may be perceived" by their team and to "reflect on potential new ways of communicating and understanding [our] team members".

UNDERSTANDING OUR WORKFORCE

Who works at a Community Legal Centre? How did COVID-19 affect the way community lawyers engage with their clients, and with one another? And how can we better support Community Legal Centre staff and volunteers into the future? Through our workforce survey, we were able to discover the answers to these questions and more.

In partnership with the Victoria Law Foundation, we launched the first three reports in an ongoing series produced from the 2020 Community Legal Centre Workforce Survey.

Through surveys distributed to all of our member Community Legal Centres, we collected information on the following:

- ▼ the profile of Victoria's community legal workforce
- ▼ the pathways that Community Legal Centre staff and volunteers took to their chosen field
- ▼ the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on work conditions at Community Legal Centres.



NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE
STAFF, ANNUAL PLANNING DAY 2022

Through the published findings, we have learned that Community Legal Centre workers are as diverse as the communities they represent. We also know that keeping your job at a Community Legal Centre can be complicated by insecure and short-term funding, and that this impacts the ability of talented and dedicated staff to pursue a long-term career in the community legal sector.

Based on what we learned in the reports, we are now investigating how diversified funding streams can ensure our members have greater funding security. We are also building stronger foundations for the future of the community legal workforce, by strengthening relationships with Victorian universities to inspire new lawyers and to increase the visibility of community lawyering as a rewarding and meaningful career path.

Through the experiences of COVID-19 lockdowns, we have greater insights on the opportunities of tech-literacy and investing in digital systems to enable sector workers and their clients.

The reports are also informing the 10-Year Plan for the community legal sector, and the Federation's own four-year strategy.

OUR IMPACT:

We publicly launched the first three reports in our series on the community legal sector workforce, researched by Victoria Law Foundation. This is promoting a better understanding of the diversity and value of Community Legal Centre staff, volunteers and career paths.

We are using the findings from the empirical research to inform the strategic, evidence-based work of the Federation to support future growth and sustainability of the community legal workforce.

COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR WORKFORCE SNAPSHOT

OUR WORKFORCE INCLUDES OVER 4,000 STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

 3 OUT OF 4 PEOPLE IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE (76.9%)

 1 OUT OF 5 PEOPLE IDENTIFIED AS MALE (21.5%)

 1.6% IDENTIFIED AS NON-BINARY, GENDER DIVERSE

 17% IDENTIFIED AS LGBTIQ+

 1 IN 10 LIVED WITH A DISABILITY

 NEARLY 4% IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

 85% OF RESPONDENTS WENT TO UNIVERSITY

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE WORKFORCE SURVEY AND REPORTS

52% VOLUNTEERED IN THEIR ROLE AT A COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

49% HELD A LEGAL PRACTISING CERTIFICATE

67% WORKED IN PRIMARILY CIVIL OR ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

52% WORKED PRIMARILY IN FAMILY LAW

29% WORKED PRIMARILY IN CRIMINAL LAW

ON AVERAGE STAFF HAVE WORKED AT THEIR CURRENT CENTRE FOR 4 YEARS



PRIOR TO THEIR ROLES, THEY WERE WORKING:

16.6% AT PRIVATE LAW FIRMS

15.7% AT A NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION

14.9% AT ANOTHER COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

12.1% AT A GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION



WORKING TO EXCEPTIONAL STANDARDS:

NATIONALLY-RECOGNISED ACCREDITATION

Victorian Community Legal Centres are collectively known for excellence in service delivery and accountability. This is supported by the Federation implementing the National Accreditation Scheme, which builds the credibility and capability of centres at a nationally-recognised level.

The National Accreditation Scheme is Community Legal Centres Australia's industry-based certification process for Community Legal Centres. It supports and recognises good practice in the delivery of community legal services. Participation in the Scheme enables Community Legal Centres to maintain high service standards, and to reflect and develop increasingly effective governance and management practices. Through engaging with the National Accreditation Scheme, our members can improve service delivery and achieve greater outcomes for clients and the broader community.

In the past year, 12 Community Legal Centres achieved accreditation to Phase 3, the newest phase of the Scheme. This phase:

- ▼ builds on compliance, helping Community Legal Centres take greater ownership of continuous quality improvement
- ▼ supports early intervention strategies when Community Legal Centres experience organisational change
- ▼ acknowledges achievement and high performance.

Due to ongoing concerns around COVID-19, the Federation conducted assessments remotely, with members approaching this process with great engagement and openness to discussion and feedback.

OUR IMPACT:

We supported 12 Community Legal Centres through their accreditation to Phase 3 of the National Accreditation Scheme, ensuring clients receive service that has been quality assured to an exacting national standard.

We provided all our member Community Legal Centres with year-long support so that they were able to maintain quality standards in their governance and service delivery.



MALLEE FAMILY CARE COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE DURING LAW WEEK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Professional Standards and Support Committee provides guidance and support for the Federation and the community legal sector in risk management. The committee oversees the cross-check process, in which Community Legal Centres review each other's work to standardise best practice and mitigate risk across the sector. The co-convenors also represent Victorian Community Legal Centres at the National Professional Indemnity Insurance network meetings.

This year we thank the following Professional Standards and Support Committee members:

Joanne Carlton – Moonee Valley Legal Service
Marquita Nolan – Northern Community Legal Centre
Martin Ha – Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre
Sohka Um – Peninsula Community Legal Centre
Stephen Nowicki – Consumer Action Law Centre
Rebecca Edwards – Seniors Rights Victoria

We said farewell to:

Kate Ross – Peninsula Community Legal Centre
Galit Aflalo – Consumer Action Law Centre

FEDERATION CEO LOUISA GIBBS ATTENDING A VIRTUAL MEETING WITH COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE MEMBERS



FUNDRAISING FOR A FAIR VICTORIA

WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO LIVE IN AN EQUITABLE COMMUNITY? ONE IN WHICH EVERYONE HAS EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE, AND EVERY PERSON IS CONSIDERED EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW?

But if everyone has a right to access legal support, who pays if the individual can't afford to?

Community Legal Centres gratefully receive funding from both State and Federal Governments. A 2014 review by the Victorian Council of Social Service found that Community Legal Centres received 85 per cent of funding income from government sources, making them one of the most dependent social services on government grants. However, we know increasingly government funding is being stretched thin, particularly in the wake of COVID-19 and climate-induced disasters and the priority for governments to support those people directly affected.

Many Community Legal Centres, as well as the Federation, also receive donations from individuals and philanthropic organisations who believe in the importance and value of a fairer Victoria and in the community legal sector's determination to make that a reality.

On top of this, most Community Legal Centres rely heavily on volunteers to deliver their services. We learned through our workforce survey undertaken by the Victoria Law Foundation that 52 per cent of the 4,000 staff working in Community Legal Centres across Victoria are volunteers who contribute a staggering 11,654 hours every year.

It's fair to say Community Legal Centres do a lot with very little funding – but we are conscious that there is a service gap that is only growing. More people need access to legal support and advice than ever before, and Community Legal Centres play a crucial role in advocating on behalf of Victorians to ensure laws do not adversely impact particular sections of the community.

However, knowing that an organisation needs to increase and diversify its funding pool and actually committing to broader fundraising are two very different things. As one Community Legal Centre CEO commented, "diverting resources from frontline resources is a risk". Often, fundraising is not an essential Community Legal Centre function.

To collectively support Victoria's Community Legal Centres to maximise their ability to raise funds for the important work they do, the Federation engaged Amplify Fundraising to better understand the challenges and opportunities of fundraising for Community Legal Centres.

This has involved looking at the diversity of understanding, engagement and opportunity in fundraising across the variety of Community Legal Centres. The review of the sector found half were concerned about funding but only three had a strategic fundraising plan.

Looking ahead, the Federation is now working with Amplify Fundraising to develop strategies that can help support Community Legal Centres in their unique fundraising aspirations. This work includes developing key tools and resources that can be used in their fundraising outreach – and to reach more ambitious goals.

OUR IMPACT:

We engaged Amplify Fundraising to help us investigate and strategise around fundraising opportunities for our Community Legal Centres.



52% of our workforce are VOLUNTEERS

Contributing 11,000+ HRS every year

FEDERATION STAFF ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

A STRONG FEDERATION AT THE HEART OF A STRONG FUTURE

In March 2022, we were delighted to receive the Voice Project’s Best Workplace Award for 2021. This recognised the Federation as an organisation that achieved exceptional levels of employee engagement and satisfaction. Through the Voice Project staff survey, our team acknowledged the flexibility of our workplace, our focus on wellbeing and support, and demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the Federation’s purpose and principles.

Over the last few years and alongside our mission to be strong to support our Community Legal Centre members, the Federation has strategically grown. As our team increased in size, so has our ability to lead and support the sustainability and impact of Victorian Community Legal Centres to achieve improved access to justice for their communities.

With both newly created and recently refreshed roles in legal policy, training, data systems and across enabling functions, we have strengthened our expertise and capacity to continue to support our member Community Legal Centres.

Despite the challenges of a continuing pandemic, of growth and change, and of disrupted periods of returning to the office and working from home, the Federation team has remained resilient, engaged and determined to deliver on our strategic priorities. We may also have had some fun along the way!

Our team connection and commitment to a collaborative approach – both internally and with our members – was strengthened during our first whole team, in-person Collaboration Week in June. During this week, we focused on strengthening our relationships, and reflected on our strategic plan and future opportunities. We also visited the Law and Advocacy Centre for Women, Tenants Victoria and Youthlaw, so our team could better understand the diverse work of our member Community Legal Centres.

We are committed to our goal of being a strong, capable and trusted peak body. It is through the capacity, capability and diversity of our people that we can best support and enable our 46 Community Legal Centres and their communities to thrive.

OUR IMPACT:

We recruited more staff to the Federation and expanded internal teams that have provided better support, engagement and results with our Community Legal Centre members.

OUR TEAM (AS AT 30 JUNE 2022)

Angela McCrorie	Executive Assistant to Chief Operating Officer
Bronwyn Lay	Climate Justice and Disaster Response Lead
Deborah Wilson	Finance Officer
Diane Squires	Communications Director
Gabby Talmadge	Training Coordinator
Izzy Lyndon-James	Digital Communications Officer
Kimberly Yeung	Quality and Program Support Officer
Linda Loveder	Executive Assistant to CEO and Board
Louisa Gibbs	Chief Executive Officer
Michelle Taylor	Operations Manager
Natalie Peters	Quality and Capacity Development Manager
Rachael Pliner	Manager, Policy and Advocacy
Rosanna Di Grazia	Office Coordinator
Sarah Lefevre	Legal Policy Adviser
Simon Barry	Senior Legal Policy Adviser
Skye Forster	Implementation Analyst – Legal Practice Management System
Tanya Sawtell	People and Culture Adviser
Thanh Coutts	Project Coordinator
Tim McMahon	Data System Project Manager

THANK YOU ALSO TO ALL FORMER TEAM MEMBERS WHO MADE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORK OF THE FEDERATION AND OUR TEAM CULTURE OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS.



OUR BOARD (AS AT 30 JUNE 2022)

Chairperson	Kristen Wallwork, South-East Monash Legal Service
Treasurer	Thomas Green, Deloitte Australia
Secretary	Jackie Galloway, Peninsula Community Legal Centre
General members	Bryanna Connell, Barwon Community Legal Service
	Chris Povey, Justice Connect
	Jennifer Beveridge, Tenants Victoria

Thank you also to outgoing Board members Claudia Fatone (Man Cave Global), Zana Bytheway (JobWatch) and Daniel Nguyen (Moonee Valley Legal Service).

THANK YOU
OUR FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

SPONSORSHIP, IN KIND, PRO BONO

City of Melbourne
Clayton Utz
Gadens
Holding Redlich
Maddocks
Russell Kennedy Lawyers
Tenants Victoria
Wisewould Mahony

FUNDERS

Bushfire Recovery Victoria
Department of Justice and Community Safety
Legal Services Board and Commissioner
Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation
Victoria Legal Aid

OUR MEMBERS

AED Legal Centre
Animal Law Institute
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service
Barwon Community Legal Service
Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre
Consumer Action Law Centre
Disability Discrimination Legal Service
Djirra
Eastern Community Legal Centre
Emma House Domestic Violence Services
Environmental Justice Australia
First Step Legal Service
Fitzroy Legal Service
Gippsland Community Legal Service
Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre (ARC Justice)
Human Rights Law Centre
Hume Riverina Community Legal Service
Inner Melbourne Community Legal
inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
JobWatch
Justice Connect
Law and Advocacy Centre For Women

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre (ARC Justice)
Melbourne University Student Union Legal Service
Mental Health Legal Centre
Monash Law Clinic
Moonee Valley Legal Service
Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre
Northern Community Legal Centre
Peninsula Community Legal Centre
Refugee Legal
Seniors Rights Victoria
Social Security Rights Victoria
Southport Community Legal Service
Southside Justice
South-East Monash Legal Service
Tenants Victoria
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service
West Heidelberg Community Legal Service
WEstjustice
Whittlesea Community Connections
Women’s Legal Service Victoria
Youthlaw
Young Workers Centre

📷 FEDERATION STAFF AT COLLABORATION WEEK

FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY
LEGAL CENTRES (VICTORIA) INC.
ABN 30 036 539 902

FINANCIAL
REPORTS

YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE
INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

THE ACCOMPANYING NOTES FORM PART OF THIS FINANCIAL REPORT.

	Note	2022 (\$)	2021 (\$)
INCOME			
Victoria Legal Aid - Recurrent	8(a)	1,374,631	394,672
VLA - ERO State	8(a)	59,784	351,948
VLA - ERO Extra	8(a)	64,186	51,156
Grant Income - Other Projects - net of distributions	2	1,349,051	1,609,060
Other Income		122,732	160,577
Interest		3,125	7,154
		2,973,509	2,574,567
EXPENDITURE			
Employee benefit expenses		1,870,665	1,648,003
Occupancy expenses		21,580	21,795
Operating expenses		128,663	112,406
Project related expenses		667,033	451,168
		2,687,941	2,233,372
Surplus before income tax expense		285,568	341,195
Income tax expense		-	-
Surplus after income tax expense		285,568	341,195
Other comprehensive income net of income tax		-	-
Total comprehensive income attributable to the entity		285,568	341,195

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

	Retained Earnings (\$)	Total (\$)
Balance at 1 July 2020	770,138	770,138
Surplus attributable to the entity	341,195	341,195
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Balance at 30 June 2021	1,111,333	1,111,333
Surplus attributable to the entity	285,568	285,568
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Balance at 30 June 2022	1,396,901	1,396,901

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 30 JUNE 2022

	Note	2022 (\$)	2021 (\$)
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	3	1,852,817	1,896,264
Trade and other receivables	4	3,921,164	13,209
Financial assets	5	1,430,311	1,428,701
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		7,204,292	3,338,174
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	6	-	-
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		-	-
TOTAL ASSETS		7,204,292	3,338,174
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	7	486,030	200,598
Amounts received in advance	8	5,204,662	1,942,665
Provisions	9	103,993	73,508
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		5,794,685	2,216,771
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Provisions	9	12,706	10,070
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		12,706	10,070
TOTAL LIABILITIES		5,807,391	2,226,841
NET ASSETS		1,396,901	1,111,333
MEMBERS' FUNDS			
Retained surplus'		1,396,901	1,111,333
TOTAL MEMBERS' FUNDS		1,396,901	1,111,333

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES			
Receipts from Gov't Grants - recurrent		1,019,343	747,565
Receipts from Gov't Grants - non-recurrent		-	251,791
Receipts from Other Sources		1,326,035	1,840,216
Interest received		3,031	7,777
Payments to Suppliers and Employees		(2,390,246)	(2,259,383)
Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities	10	(41,837)	587,966
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES			
Investment in term deposits		(1,610)	(6,373)
Payments for purchase of property and equipment		-	-
Net cash used in investing activities		(1,610)	(6,373)
Net cash increase/(decrease) cash held		(43,447)	581,593
Cash at the beginning of the year		1,896,264	1,314,671
Cash at the end of the year	3	1,852,817	1,896,264

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

NOTE 1: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Financial Reporting Framework - The Board has determined that the Association is not a reporting entity because it is unlikely there are users of these financial statements who are not in a position to require the preparation of reports tailored to their information needs. Accordingly, these financial statements have been prepared to satisfy the Board's reporting requirements under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. The Association is a not-for-profit entity for financial reporting purposes under Australian Accounting Standards.

Statement of Compliance - The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the mandatory Australian Accounting Standards applicable to entities reporting under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. These special purpose financial statements do not comply with all the recognition and measurement requirements in Australian Accounting Standards. The recognition and measurement requirements that have not been complied with are those specified in AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers* and AASB 1058 *Income of Not-for-Profit Entities* as, in accounting for income, recognition of all grant income has been deferred until the related expenses are incurred without assessing whether there are enforceable performance obligations to transfer a good or service to a third party which are sufficiently specific to know when the performance obligation has been satisfied. Refer to Note 1(d) Revenue below.

Basis of Preparation - The financial statements, except for the cash flow information, have been prepared on an accrual basis and are based on historical costs unless otherwise stated in the notes. The material accounting policies adopted in the preparation of these financial statements are presented below and have been consistently applied unless stated otherwise. Where applicable they indicate how the recognition and measurement requirements in Australian Accounting Standards have not been complied with. The amounts presented in the financial statements have been rounded to the nearest dollar.

Impact of COVID-19 - The Association relies on on-going support from both state government and other non-government funders in the form of grant funding to further its principal activities. The pandemic may have an impact on the Association's financial position and may affect financial performance of the Association in the future.

a. Cash and Cash Equivalents - includes cash on hand, deposits held at call with banks, and other short-term highly liquid investments with original maturities of three months or less.

b. Income Tax - The Association is exempt from paying income tax by virtue of Section 50-45 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*. Accordingly, tax effect accounting has not been adopted.

c. Property, Plant and Equipment - Furniture and equipment are carried at cost less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation. The depreciable amount of all furniture and equipment is depreciated over the useful lives of the assets to the Association commencing from the time the asset is held ready for use.

d. Revenue - Grant Income - All grant income has been deferred upon receipt and not recognised as revenue until the related expenses are incurred, without assessing whether enforceable performance obligations exist. This does not comply with AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers* or AASB 1058 *Income of Not-for-Profit Entities*. In future financial years, the Association intends to comply with AASB 1058 and AASB 15. **Membership Revenue** - Membership revenue is recognised as revenue in the year that the membership is for. **Interest Revenue** - Interest revenue is recognised using the effective interest rate method, which for floating rate financial assets is the rate inherent in the instrument. **Donations** - Donation income is recognised when the Association obtains control over the funds which is generally at the time of receipt. All revenue is stated net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST).

e. Goods and Services Tax (GST) - Revenues, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of GST, except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Receivables and payable are stated inclusive of the amount of GST receivable or payable. The net amount of GST recoverable from, or payable to, the ATO is included with other receivables or payables in the assets and liabilities statement.

f. Leases - Exceptions to lease accounting The Association has elected to apply the exceptions to lease accounting for both short-term leases (i.e. leases with a term of less than or equal to 12 months) and leases of low-value assets. The Association recognises the payments associated with these leases as an expense on a straight-line basis over the lease term.

g. Employee Entitlements - Short-term employee benefits Provision is made for the Company's obligation for short-term employee benefits. Short-term employee benefits are benefits (other than termination benefits) that are expected to be settled wholly before 12 months after the end of the annual reporting period in which the employees render the related service, including wages, salaries and sick leave. Short-term employee benefits are measured at the (undiscounted) amounts expected to be paid when the obligation is settled. The Company's obligations for short-term employee benefits such as wages, salaries and sick leave are recognised as part of current trade and other payables in the statement of financial position. **Other long-term employee benefits** Provision is made for employees' long service leave and annual leave entitlements not expected to be settled wholly within 12 months after the end of the annual reporting period in which the employees render the related service. Other long-term employee benefits are measured at the present value of the expected future payments to be made to employees. Expected future payments incorporate anticipated future wage and salary levels, durations of service and employee departures and are discounted at rates determined by reference to market yields at the end of the reporting period on government bonds that have maturity dates that approximate the terms of the obligations. Upon the remeasurement of obligations for other long-term employee benefits, the net change in the obligation is recognised in profit or loss as part of employee benefits expense. The Company's obligations for long-term employee benefits are presented as non-current provisions in its statement of financial position, except where the Company does not have an unconditional right to defer settlement for at least 12 months after the end of the reporting period, in which case the obligations are presented as current provisions.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

	2022 (\$)	2021 (\$)
NOTE 2: GRANT INCOME - OTHER PROJECTS		
Total Grant income	3,950,775	3,573,189
Distribution of Integrated Services Fund	(2,601,724)	(1,964,129)
	1,349,051	1,609,060

The Association administered funding from Department of Justice and Community Safety and provided grants to 16 Community Legal Centres (2021: 9 Community Legal Centres) to support their work delivering services to disadvantaged people through integrated services partnerships.

NOTE 3: CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS		
Cash on hand	226	94
Cash at bank	1,852,591	1,896,170
	1,852,817	1,896,264

NOTE 4: TRADE AND OTHER RECEIVABLES		
Accounts Receivable	3,899,524	12,521
Prepayments and Sundry Receivables	21,452	594
Accrued Bank Interest	188	94
	3,921,164	13,209

As per Note 2, the Association administered money from the Department of Justice and Community Safety to 16 member centres through the Integrated Services Fund. The notable difference in Trade and other Receivables in 2021-2022 compared with 2020-2021 is as a result of the timing of the Integrated Services Fund funding being received into the Association's accounts but not yet being distributed via the grants.

NOTE 5: FINANCIAL ASSETS		
Term deposits maturity greater than 3 mths	1,430,311	1,428,701

NOTE 6: PROPERTY, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT		
Furniture and fittings - at cost	129,908	129,908
Less accumulated depreciation	(129,908)	(129,908)
	-	-

NOTE 7: TRADE AND OTHER PAYABLES		
Creditors and accruals	458,600	151,356
Salary and wage accruals	27,430	49,242
	486,030	200,598

NOTE 8: AMOUNTS RECEIVED IN ADVANCE		
Victoria Legal Aid (ERO)		
- Extra - Future Years	-	64,186
Victoria Legal Aid (ERO)		
- State (unused)	-	59,784
Victoria Legal Aid (recurrent)	606	355,894
Total Generalist Funds carried forward	8 (a)	606
		479,864
Non-VLA Project Funds carried forward		
	5,204,056	1,462,801
	5,204,662	1,942,665

NOTE 8(A) RECONCILIATION OF VLA GENERALIST FUNDS				
	VLA (\$)	VLA SACS ERO State (\$)	VLA SACS ERO Extra (\$)	Total (\$)
Funds brought forward - 1 July 2021	355,894	59,784	64,186	479,864
Funds received	1,019,343	-	-	1,019,343
Funds utilised (net of interest)	(1,374,631)	(59,784)	(64,186)	(1,498,601)
Funds carried forward - 30 June 2022	606	-	-	606

	2022 (\$)	2021 (\$)
NOTE 9: PROVISIONS		
Current		
Provision for annual leave	103,993	73,508
	103,993	73,508
Non-Current		
Provision for Long Service Leave	12,706	10,070
	12,706	10,070


NOTE 10: RECONCILIATION OF CASH FLOW FROM OPERATIONS WITH SURPLUS FROM ORDINARY ACTIVITIES AFTER INCOME TAX		
Surplus after income tax	285,568	341,195
Non-cash flows in profit:		
- Depreciation	-	-
Changes in assets and liabilities;		
- (Increase)/decrease in trade and other debtors	(3,907,955)	389,882
- Increase/(decrease) in trade and other payables	285,432	(1,178)
- Increase/(decrease) in amounts received in advance	3,261,997	(90,594)
- Increase/(decrease) in provisions	33,121	(51,339)
Net cash provided by Operating Activities	(41,837)	587,966


STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE BOARD
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

The Board has determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and that this special purpose report should be prepared in accordance with the accounting policies outlined in Note 1 to the financial statements.

- In the opinion of the Board of Federation Of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc.:
- a) the financial statements and notes of Federation Of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc. are in accordance with the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act (Vic) 2012* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*, including:
- i. giving a true and fair view of its financial position as at 30 June 2022 and of its performance for the financial year ended on that date; and
 - ii. complying with the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013*; and
- b) there are reasonable grounds to believe that Federation Of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc. will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Board and is signed for and on behalf of the Board by:


Kristen Wallwork,
Chairperson
Dated: 10 October 2022


Thomas Green,
Treasurer
Dated: 10 October 2022

AUDITOR'S INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION UNDER
SECTION 60-40 OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND
NOT-FOR-PROFITS COMMISSION ACT 2012

OPINION

In accordance with the requirements of section 60-40 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*, as auditor for the audit of Federation Of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc. for the year ended 30 June 2022, I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:


- i. no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit; and
- ii. no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

Sean Denham Dated: 10 October 2022
Suite 1, 707 Mt Alexander Road.
Moonee Ponds VIC 3039

REFERENCES

- 1 Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council – Legal and Social Issues Committee, Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System, p.xiii.
- 2 E Russell et al, A Constellation of Circumstances: The drivers of womens' increasing rates of remand in Victoria, July 2020, p 5.
- 3 Corrections Victoria, Annual Prisoner Statistical Profile, June 2019.
- 4 Corrections Victoria, Annual Prisoner Statistical Profile, June 2019.
- 5 Victorian Law Reform Commission, Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences: Report, September 2021.
- 6 Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Legal Australia-wide survey: Legal Need in Australia, 2012, p.25.

📷 BACK COVER IMAGE: FEDERATION STAFF ON
SCAR TREE WALK WITH KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST



WE APPRECIATE AND CELEBRATE DIVERSITY
IN ALL ITS FORMS. WE BELIEVE DIVERSITY OF
ALL KINDS MAKES OUR TEAMS, SERVICES AND
ORGANISATIONS STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE.



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*Community Legal Centres are
the heart of a movement for justice.*

