

Developing a not-for-profit sector blueprint

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of a not-for-profit (**NFP**) sector blueprint (the **blueprint**). The community legal sector is a critical part of the NFP landscape. Community Legal Centres (**CLCs**) provide free legal assistance and support to people experiencing disadvantage, family violence and homelessness. CLCs work in partnership with other community agencies, including health, education, family violence and youth services, to provide holistic and trauma-informed support. We have drawn on the sector's frontline experience in our feedback to shape the blueprint.

We have focused our feedback on the following key areas:

- recognising the value of the NFP sector in Australia through sustainable, long-term and fit-for-purpose funding
- streamlining data reporting and impact measurement
- elevating advocacy and systemic reform in the NFP sector
- promoting and investing in modern technology systems for NFPs
- supporting effective governance arrangements for NFPs and volunteer board members.

We have set out a summary of our recommendations below.

About the Federation

The Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) is the peak body for Victoria's 47 CLCs. 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 problem.

For over 50 years, CLCs have been part of a powerful movement for social change, reshaping how people access justice, creating stronger more equitable laws, and more accountable government and democracy. 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 ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL OWNERS 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.

Summary of recommendations

We have set out a summary of recommendations for the blueprint below.

We recommend that:

The not-for-profit sector in Australia

- The blueprint prioritises sustainable, long-term and fit-for-purpose funding as part of its 10 year vision for Australia's NFP sector so that the value and impact of this sector is meaningfully recognised.

Measurement, outcome and quality of services

- The blueprint recognises:
 - the importance of harnessing the expertise of the NFP sector and people with lived experience as part of co-design and program development and that their contribution is remunerated.
 - the value of NFPs collaborating to provide more holistic and trauma informed support, with associated funding for integrated service models.
 - the importance of resourcing the NFP sector to implement modern and fit-for-purpose data systems and support for implementation to ensure value is maximised and quality of data is improved.
 - the importance of government and other funders working together to simplify and streamline reporting requirements for NFP organisations with multiple funding streams.
- If the blueprint promotes outcome focused evaluations for the NFP sector, then there is support for ancillary resourcing, particularly for smaller NFPs.

Policy, advocacy, communications and engagement

- The blueprint promotes policy and advocacy work in the NFP sector and highlights the need for further investment in this area.

Governance, organisation and legal environment

- The blueprint promotes NFPs and volunteer board members having access to subsidised training, resources and advice on effective governance arrangements.

Leadership and staff development

- The blueprint supports greater wage parity with comparable sectors, improved work conditions at NFPs (e.g., modern technology and office space), long-term funding enabling ongoing employment contracts and adequate indexation, sufficient notice about lapsing funding contracts and access to subsidised leadership programs.

- The blueprint supports multi-year graduate placements as a way of creating a workforce pipeline for NFPs with workforce shortages and no existing structured graduate pathways.
- The blueprint supports funding for NFPs with limited resources to recruit, train and supervise volunteers.
- The blueprint prioritises innovative approaches to build capacity across the sector, alongside appropriate resourcing.

Government funding, contracting and tendering

- The blueprint priorities long-term (7 years), sustainable and fit-for-purpose funding which reflects the real costs of delivering services in the NFP sector.
- The blueprint promotes co-design procurement processes where this will lead to the best outcome, rather than solely focusing on competitive tenders in the NFP sector.

The not-for-profit sector in Australia

What is your vision or aspiration for the NFP sector over the next 10 years? What core themes for action should be prioritised in realising this vision?

The NFP sector has enormous value in Australia in supporting people who are struggling, providing core services to the community and advocating for social justice, equality and action on climate change. Despite the invaluable role of the NFP sector for individuals, families and communities across Australia, NFPs are often chronically underfunded.

This has been the experience of the community legal sector. CLCs across Australia provide critical services to the community, including to:

- keep women and children safe from family violence
- help separating families to resolve disputes over children and property
- assist people experiencing financial hardship to deal with debts and fines
- support people seeking asylum and victim survivors of family violence on temporary visas to remain in Australia safely
- assist people experiencing financial hardship with resolving social security issues
- support preparedness, response and recovery for disaster and climate change impacted communities
- prevent homelessness and housing insecurity for people experiencing disadvantage
- assist people subject to harassment at work, unfair dismissal or poor work conditions

However, despite the critical services delivered by CLCs to the community, the community legal sector is predominantly dependent on limited, project-based and short-term funding grants. The uncertainty and short-term nature of this kind of funding constrains the sector's capacity to engage in important, long-term planning. It leads to service disruption, loss of key staff and reduces the critical reach of CLCs to their communities, resulting in people being unable to rely on crucial services from year to year. This is only set to deepen. Unmet community need is likely to continue to grow due to factors including accelerating population growth, increased risk resulting from disasters (which are predicted to become more severe and frequent due to climate change), rising cost pressures and the housing affordability crisis.

Any long-term vision for the NFP sector must be underpinned by recognition of the value of the NFP sector in Australia and sustainable, long-term and fit-for-purpose funding mechanisms to meaningfully realise this vision.

We recommend that the blueprint prioritises sustainable, long-term and fit-for-purpose funding as part of its 10-year vision for Australia's NFP sector so that the value and impact of this sector is meaningfully recognised.

Measurement, outcomes and quality of services

Service design

What core principles of service design and delivery might a sector Blueprint commit to?

Role of NFPs and lived experience in co-design

NFPs can provide invaluable input in co-design and program development processes by drawing on their frontline experience working in the community. We support strengthening co-design opportunities between government and other funders and the NFP sector to harness NFP's frontline expertise. NFPs contribution to co-design and programmatic development should be funded, particularly for smaller NFPs with limited resources.

For example, the community legal sector is an important collaborator in the development of new legal programs and services. CLCs are well placed to contribute to co-design as they are embedded in their communities and place based. They build strong relationships with their local organisations and networks, understand the needs of their community, and respond to dynamic changes in the communities they work in. However, the community legal sector often has limited resources to input into co-design and program development. Where government relies on the community legal sector for their expertise, this work is often unfunded, diverting finite resources from core work. This underscores the importance of ensuring co-design and input in program development is appropriately resourced.

We also support the involvement of people with lived experience and advisory groups to inform design, implementation and evaluation of programs. Some NFPs have experience engaging with lived experience consultants and advisory groups in a trauma informed way and have established funding pools and systems to provide remuneration for this work. For those NFPs who are new to this, there will need to be support to maximise collaboration between the NFP and lived experience consultants, ensure any engagement is trauma informed and that there is resourcing/funding to provide adequate remuneration. Remuneration may include training for lived experience consultants, such as media training where they are taking on a role as a spokesperson.

We recommend that in the blueprint, the expertise of the NFP sector and people with lived experience is harnessed as part of co-design and program development and that their contribution is remunerated.

Holistic service provision

People experiencing hardship often face complex and interrelated problems, such as health, social, legal and financial issues. Yet the support system can be disconnected, making it challenging for people in tough circumstances to get help. To meaningfully assist people experiencing hardship it is crucial that they are provided with holistic and trauma informed support and continuity of service. A core principle of service design and delivery should be integrated and holistic responses, with funding which enables multidisciplinary services and professionals to work together to support people in need.

CLCs often work in integrated legal practice models which involve partnering with other community organisations or employing community service professionals within legal centres

(such as social workers, financial counsellors, case managers and advocates). Integrated practice aims to provide more holistic support to people with complex and intersecting legal, social, financial and health needs. This integrated way of working ensures that people can access legal help wherever they seek support, including at schools, hospitals, maternal health clinics, youth centres, alcohol and drug programs, settlement services, family violence services and community hubs. This also assists in identifying legal issues as early as possible to avoid them escalating, thereby reducing downstream costs on other parts of the service system.

Intervening as early as possible and providing a more wrap-around response maximises positive outcomes. People are more likely to be re-traumatised and disengage from supports when they are bounced around different services, given multiple referrals, left to self-represent in court or required to retell deeply personal and distressing information to multiple professionals. Resourcing NFPs to provide more holistic responses as early as possible is critical to promoting end-to-end service provision.

We recommend that the blueprint recognises the value of NFPs collaborating to provide more holistic and trauma informed support, with associated funding for integrated service models.

Data and impact measurement

What role(s) should government play in helping NFPs become data capable and informed by evidence? What would be needed to move towards an outcome focused approach and what unanticipated consequences should government and the sector consider?

Robust data mechanisms to measure the impact of NFPs and comply with government and donor reporting requirements is essential. For NFPs with limited resources, the government can play a key role in supporting these organisations to build effective data capability and streamline reporting requirements under various government funding contracts.

In the community legal sector's experience, it is important to address reporting burden, data quality and relevance to better inform the needs and issues faced by CLCs and the communities they serve. In parallel this better supports the work of government and other funders to manage funding, inform decisions and ensure responsiveness to ongoing and emerging needs.

Implementing modern data systems

It is important for government to support the NFP sector to implement modern fit-for-purpose data systems, particularly for NFPs that have limited resources. For example, the core data system provided to CLCs to assist with case management and reporting is inadequate and does not support CLCs to manage the services they provide. This data system has limitations as a sector planning tool, the quality of the data is highly variable and the data fields are complex. This places a significant administrative burden on staff without any dedicated funding for reporting and leads to inadequate data for analysis on an organisational and sector level.

We recommend that the blueprint recognises the importance of resourcing the NFP sector to implement modern and fit-for-purpose data systems and support for implementation to ensure value is maximised and quality of data is improved.

For example, the Federation received Victorian Government funding to support CLCs in Victoria to transition to a more modern and fit-for-purpose data system. It was only through dedicated funding

from the Victorian Government that has allowed for improvements in data collection and reporting in Victoria.

Streamlining reporting requirements

Some NFPs have multiple funding streams through government and other funders. Each donor or government grant can have different reporting requirements, leading to significant administrative burden for NFPs. This operational work is often unfunded and diverts finite resources away from core work.

This has been the experience of the community legal sector. For example, typically, Victorian CLCs manage an average of nine funding streams (noting that we are aware of one Victorian CLC having 48 funding streams). To accommodate nine of the most common funding programs, a CLC needs to capture 53 data fields that are about clients and services. As the data system for CLCs may not have all the data indicators required by each different funding stream/contract, this can lead to CLCs relying on manual data collection (e.g., excel spreadsheets) which creates a significant administrative burden.

We recommend that the blueprint recognises the importance of government and other funders working together to simplify and streamline reporting requirements for NFP organisations with multiple funding streams.

Focusing on effective data

While we support outcomes-based reporting for NFPs, many NFPs may not have the data, monitoring and evaluation expertise to undertake outcome measurement of their services or programs or the resources to contract this out to evaluation experts. If funders require outcome measurement, then there needs to be a commitment for this type of evaluation to be resourced, particularly for smaller NFPs.

For the community legal sector's government funding agreements, we have suggested a mixed approach which includes a focus on outcomes, as well as service delivery and areas for improvements. For CLCs, we consider that it is important to balance some key indicator data that is collected routinely (and provides a basic view of the quantum of services delivered and types of needs being served) with more in-depth information to better understand:

- the nature of community need
- the types of service mixes required
- the value of integrated approaches (e.g., multidisciplinary practice between legal teams and other community professionals)
- how different approaches lead to better individual and systemic outcomes.

We consider that it is important to promote data collection which both provides funders with the information they need about the services being delivered, and also provides NFP organisations with the information they need to evaluate and improve their programs.

This could include:

- Performance indicators which are collected by NFPs and reported regularly to funders. This is the only data formally used for accountability/compliance purposes.
- Additional in-depth data based on research projects to probe specific issues or problems and to provide more in-depth information. This is the approach that will most usefully inform practice improvement, taking into consideration the many factors which influence outcomes.

More in-depth information is better served by specifically focused activity, which is conducted as a research project, conducted periodically. This would enable the formulation of an appropriate methodology and allow for some limited adaptation by jurisdiction or other factors (e.g. regionality or remoteness). This could involve joint work with relevant research bodies and government grants.

We recommend that if the blueprint promotes outcome focused evaluations for the NFP sector, then there is support for ancillary resourcing, particularly for smaller NFPs.

Policy, advocacy, communications and engagement

How can the role of advocacy by NFP organisations be better embedded and preserved in policy and legislation? What mechanisms are needed so that the expertise of the NFP sector is better used in designing policy and services?

Many NFPs are uniquely placed to identify systemic issues arising from their frontline work in communities and to advocate for reform. NFPs can be particularly effective where they are involved in both frontline community work and broader systemic reform. This involves an interplay between micro and macro level work which enables a focus on individuals, community and systemic issues within their field of expertise. Effective advocacy and policy/law reform work can lead to avoided downstream costs as it not only benefits people directly impacted by the specific issue, but also the broader community through improvements to policy and legal systems. However, many NFPs are not funded to undertake broader systemic policy and advocacy work, with the focus mainly being on service delivery. This is a lost opportunity.

For example, CLCs are well placed to provide input into law reform processes to increase the effectiveness of the legal system, improve efficiencies (and potentially reduce downstream costs) and to ensure that proposed law reform changes will not disproportionately impact groups already experiencing disadvantage.¹ However, like other NFPs, until recently, there were clauses in some government contracts with CLCs that effectively restricted any advocacy work. While these restrictions have been removed, a lack of proactive investment in this area continues to constrain CLCs from engaging in advocacy and law reform.

Despite the lack of resourcing, the important role that CLCs play in advocacy and law reform is recognised by governments who routinely seek expert advice from the community legal sector on proposed legal and policy reforms across a broad range of areas, such as criminal justice, family law, family violence, tenancy and homelessness and human rights. The final report of the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme highlighted that the role of CLCs during the scheme “in enabling access to justice for people who may not have the means to otherwise advocate for themselves is integral in a society that champions the concept of equality before the law” and recognised the importance of government funding this public interest role.² However, this work is often unfunded.

We support further investment in advocacy and policy/law reform in the NFP sector to enable organisations to collectively amplify marginalised voices. NFPs often work with people experiencing systemic disadvantage, discrimination and trauma and can shed light on important issues that may

¹ Recommendation 21.7, Productivity Commission, Access to Justice Arrangements: Inquiry Report, 2014, p.709-711. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/access-justice/report>

² *ibid.* p.372.

otherwise remain invisible. The government would benefit from the expertise of NFPs by formalising regular and meaningful consultation with the NFP sector on law reform and policy issues. Investment in advocacy also enables NFPs to work with other organisations to conduct research (such as, universities and research institutes), engage in awareness raising, and organise and support community campaigns that can bring about meaningful and enduring change.

We recommend that the blueprint promotes policy and advocacy work in the NFP sector and highlights the need for further investment in this area.

Governance, organisation and legal environment

What does the sector need in its boards to be effective?

The majority of boards at NFPs are volunteer based. Many NFPs, particularly smaller NFPs, do not have the resources to upskill board members in governance and strategic decision-making or provide access to training, resources and mentor programs. Many NFPs also do not have the resources or expertise to develop robust governance arrangements to ensure their board is effective, strategic and has the right mix of skills and experience.

This is an area that the corporate sector could assist NFPs in and provide pro-bono support to NFPs. For example, this could include access to advice on effective governance arrangements, subsidised training for volunteer board members and resources, templates and policies on governance. NFPs are often where board members build their governance experience and then go on to hold other board positions underscoring the importance of investing early in governance practices at NFPs.

We recommend that the blueprint promote NFPs and volunteer board members having access to subsidised training, resources and advice on effective governance arrangements.

Leadership and staff development

How can we make employment opportunities attractive and build career pathways to develop the paid NFP workforce of the future?

Workforce challenges

Australia's employment market is facing complex challenges, and these impacts are being acutely felt in the NFP sector. In the experience of the community legal sector, recruitment and retention of suitably qualified, trained, and experienced staff is challenging and amplified for CLCs in regional, rural and remote areas (due to their geography, population size and higher operating costs).

The Victoria Law Foundation's workforce survey found that almost half of the CLCs in Victoria had vacancies – a total of 63 vacant employee positions of which 65 per cent (41) were for full-time positions.³ Access to lawyers for legal assistance services in regional areas is even harder. 29 per cent of Australia's population live outside a major capital city, however only 10.5 per cent of lawyers

³ Working in Community Legal Centres in Victoria – Results from the Community Legal Centres Workforce Project, Victoria Law Foundation, 2022.

reside in, and service, these populations.⁴ Skill shortages and labour market challenges have significant impact in terms of service delivery. This is in the context of significant community need, which is being unmet. The Victoria Law Foundation's Public Understanding of Law Survey found that where a legal need existed, 78 per cent was unmet.⁵

Key workforce challenges include the following:

- **Lack of wage parity with competitive sectors:** for the community legal sector, wages are typically and significantly higher at legal aid commissions and in the public sector which make CLC roles less attractive and harder to fill.
- **Short-term funding and lack of indexation:** Short-term funding results in short employment contracts which makes employment at NFPs less secure or attractive and recruitment and retention of staff more challenging. This issue has become more acute as cost-of-living pressures have sharply risen without commiserate increases in salaries due to inadequate indexation.
- **Delays in funding announcements:** Delays in announcements of lapsing funding to NFPs results in employment uncertainty due to contracts not being renewed until just before or after expiry. This leads to high levels of staff attrition, disrupts service continuity and results in lengthy and resource intensive recruitment drives.
- **Lack of technology:** working conditions are behind other more well-resourced sectors (e.g., the availability of new technology to reduce the administrative burden).

To strengthen leadership in NFPs, there should also be access to subsidised managerial and leadership programs, training and mentoring opportunities.

We recommend that the blueprint supports greater wage parity with comparable sectors, improved work conditions at NFPs (e.g., modern technology and office space), long-term funding enabling ongoing employment contracts and adequate indexation, sufficient notice about lapsing funding contracts and access to subsidized leadership programs.

Graduate programs

Many sectors have structured pathways for graduates which creates a workforce pipeline. For many NFPs, including CLCs, these types of graduate pipelines or programs do not exist. For the community legal sector, there is no structured pathway for graduate lawyers to move into CLCs. There is some urgency to address this to create a workforce for the future to address community demand for legal assistance.

The blueprint should support multi-year graduate placements for parts of the NFP sector where there is no graduate pipeline and ongoing workforce shortages. For the community legal sector, this could include, for example, incentivising new law graduates to join these programs by providing evidence of study, volunteering or clinical placements at CLCs to demonstrate interest in and fitness for work in community legal settings; and reducing their HECS debt after completing a placement and continuing to work at a CLC for a period of time. Such a program could be used to incentivise placement of law graduates in regional, rural and remote locations (with sufficient support for both the graduate and the host CLC).

⁴ PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting, *The benefits of providing access to justice*, National Legal Aid, January 2023, page 19.

⁵ Balmer, N.J., Pleasence, P., McDonald, H.M. & Sandefur, R.L. (2023). *The Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) Volume 1: Everyday Problems and Legal Need*. Melbourne: Victoria Law Foundation, p152.

We recommend that the blueprint supports multi-year graduate placements as a way of creating a workforce pipeline for NFPs with workforce shortages and no structured graduate pathways.

Supporting volunteer programs

Like many NFPs, the community legal sector relies heavily on volunteers to provide leadership, legal, client service and operations. The Victorian Law Foundation's Workforce Survey estimated that volunteers, students and board members contribute an average of 15,633 volunteer hours per week at Victorian CLCs.⁶

Without these extraordinary volunteer contributions, CLCs would be unable to reach the number of individuals and communities that they do. However, many CLCs do not receive any funding to operate their volunteer programs. While the volunteer workforce saves government significant money, it costs NFPs to operate.

We recommend that the blueprint supports funding for NFPs with limited resources to recruit, train and supervise volunteers.

Capacity building opportunities

In a context where there are acute skill shortages and significant areas of unmet community need, a priority for the development of the NFP sector's paid workforce should be innovation in building sector capacity and capability, with appropriate funding to support this. It is critical that the government leverages the specialist expertise within the NFP sector to achieve this. We have included case studies from Women's Legal Service Victoria in an appendix to demonstrate how this approach can be effective.

Government should consider where innovative approaches to NFP workforce development and labour market challenges, such as outlined in the two case studies in the appendix, could be expanded, replicated or developed, along with appropriate resourcing, in order to leverage the specialist expertise within the sector to build capacity. Approaches such as this have significant potential to build capability and capacity in the sector's paid workforce, provide career pathways to develop the paid NFP workforce of the future, and address urgent areas of unmet community need.

We recommend that the blueprint consider innovative approaches to build capacity across the sector, alongside appropriate resourcing.

⁶ Jozica Kutin, Hugh McDonald, Tenielle Hagland, Clare Kennedy & Nigel Balmer, Working in community legal centres in Victoria. Results from the Community Legal Centres Workforce Project: Workforce profile, Victoria Law Foundation, 2021, p.28 <https://victorialawfoundation.org.au/research/research-reports/working-in-community-legal-centres-in-victoria-workforce-profile> Using the Volunteer Replacement Cost Calculator (<https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/volunteer-replacement-cost-calculator/>) the 15,644 hours of work by volunteers in Victoria's CLCs each week equates to a workforce expense (and minimum avoided costs to government) of \$35,818,683 each year in Victoria.

Government funding, contracting and tendering

Government funding

How should government improve the way it funds and contracts charities?

In the community legal sector's experience, NFPs are often subject to short-term, insecure and insufficient funding which limits their critical reach in the community. A key priority for the blueprint should be establishing long-term, sustainable and fit-for-purpose funding for the NFP sector.

For the community legal sector, we consider that government funding contracts should be at least five years but preferably seven years in length with appropriate indexation. There should be gradual increase in funding over the life of the agreement to respond to expected population growth and associated demand for community services. Funding agreements should put in place additional and flexible funding to respond to extreme weather and disaster related measures. There should also be mechanisms to allow for additional funding to respond to unforeseen changes in demand or input prices, as well as a result of changes to law and policies. For lapsing funding, the government should be required to give substantial notice to NFPs as to whether this funding will be renewed. For CLCs, we consider that this should be at least 6 months before the funding agreement expires.

There needs to be a focus on providing government funding grants which reflect the real costs of running an organisation. For example, for the community legal sector, funding should cover the following areas:

- The real costs of running an organisation, such as:
 - adequate wages (on par with comparable sectors, e.g, legal aid commissions).
 - learning and development pathways for staff, cultural safety, staff safety and wellbeing, trauma informed practice.
 - corporate services, IT and administration.
 - robust governance structures.
 - data collection and reporting (including, fit for purpose systems for data collection and analysis).
 - managing volunteer programs.
- Higher service delivery to meet unmet community need
- Core work – legal service delivery, integrated/multidisciplinary practice, advocacy and communications, community legal education and community development.

We support the higher costs of service delivery in regional, rural and remote areas being reflected in an uplift in government funding for NFPs operating in these areas.

We recommend that the blueprint priorities long-term (7 year cycle), sustainable and fit-for-purpose funding which reflects the real costs of delivering services.

Tendering

How could government funding, tendering and contracting drive a good balance of collaboration and competition to support innovation in the NFP sector?

We consider that there should be more opportunities for co-design procurement processes, rather than solely a focus on competitive tenders. Co-design procurement processes can be particularly

useful where there is a limited pool of eligible organisations, these organisations are already known to government/funders and they have a proven track record.

This is particularly relevant to CLCs, many of which have been operating for more than 50 years, have confined areas they work in and can maximise outcomes and scale where they work collaboratively. In this context, competitive grants processes can be inefficient, time intensive and divert scarce resources from core work, and can undermine collaboration and partnership building among CLCs.

We recommend that the blueprint promotes co-design procurement processes where this will lead to the best outcome, rather than solely focusing on competitive tenders in the NFP sector.

Appendix

Case Study 1: Family Law Access Project

The Family Law Access Project (**FLA Project**) is an impactful example of how specialist NFP expertise can be leveraged to build the capacity and capability of the paid workforce in community legal services and improve access to justice.

The FLA Project was a pilot collaboration – funded by the Commonwealth Government and supported by start-up State Government funding – between Women’s Legal as project lead, Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), Barwon Community Legal Service, Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre and WEstJustice. Informed by a legal needs assessment undertaken by Victoria Legal Aid and Women’s Legal, the pilot was run in an area of high unmet family law legal need. Lack of access to family law help continues to be one of the most significant barriers to safety and restorative justice for victim-survivors of family violence. The FLA Project sought to establish high quality and comprehensive family law services at these legal centres to increase access to family law legal assistance for clients experiencing disadvantage in the inner West and Greater Geelong area.

The FLA Project responded to the lack of family law services in those communities by building the capability of the three place-based CLCs to deliver comprehensive family law litigation assistance (where previously these services were not being provided). The FLA Project included comprehensive capacity building: development of a competency framework and the development and implementation of a learning and development program (which included training, shadowing, reverse shadowing, supervision, secondary consults, and a community of practice).

While at this stage there has not been a government commitment to ongoing funding of the pilot, the FLA Project demonstrates the role a specialist CLC can play - working in collaboration with place based CLCs - to expand access to services. An independent evaluation of the FLA Project demonstrated that it efficiently and effectively increased access to family law services for clients, particularly women who have experienced family violence. There were also important flow-on effects for the broader NFP sector. For example, based on the data collected during the FLA Project it is likely that there were significant costs avoided from homelessness and family violence by virtue of the program’s capacity to support women into safer housing and access to other supports to avoid ongoing family violence. The integrated model of service provision by a CLC with a combined family law, family violence and other legal and social supports has the capacity to save costs to government.

While the FLA Project addressed these issues in the inner West and Greater Geelong region, there are still large geographic areas of Victoria where family law legal need remains persistently high and unmet. The FLA Project provides a proven model for building the capacity of the paid workforce within family law services that can address current postcode injustices and inequitable access to family law legal help.

Case Study 2: CLC New Lawyers Program

Women’s Legal has recently committed to implementing a CLC New Lawyers Program (the **NLP**) to leverage its specialist expertise to build a pipeline of skilled CLC family lawyers and increase workforce capacity in areas in Victoria where family law legal need remains persistently high and unmet. The NLP is intended to address challenges for regional CLCs in attracting experienced lawyers

in a considerably difficult employment market, to enable them to better support regional women with family law legal needs and address postcode injustices.

The NLP (which is scheduled to commence in June 2024) will build the pipeline of CLC family lawyers by Women's Legal recruiting, employing and seconding new lawyers to identified CLC partners. A centralised training and development program will be provided by Women's Legal to support these new lawyers.

Under the NLP, Women's Legal will work with CLCs selected to achieve reach and impact with a focus on high-need areas and communities. Women's Legal will recruit six to ten new lawyers (being a lawyer with less than 12 months' practising experience) and second them to work in another CLC for a period of 18 months. To address some of the challenges faced by the rural and regional workforce, it is intended that host CLCs will provide assistance with identifying suitable housing if required and other relocation support.

The first month of employment will be focused on induction, training and professional development activities at Women's Legal. In order to support workforce development, a capability framework will be developed which would identify key competencies expected of new lawyers at different stages of the program (6 months, 12 months, 18 months). A centralised training and education program will be provided which would also enable peer support for the new lawyers involved. The NLP also provides an opportunity for a practical assessment of what competencies new lawyers bring to the program and address gaps/opportunities that could inform advocacy to university law schools and Practical Legal Training providers.

The NLP Program provides another model for leveraging the expertise of specialist services to build workforce capacity and capability in a challenging employment market in order to improve and increase service delivery where there are areas of very high community need.