



**FEDERATION**  
OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES VIC



VICTORIAN COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR

**10-YEAR PLAN**



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WE ACKNOWLEDGE 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.

## FOREWORD

It is nothing but an incredible privilege to be part of the community legal sector.

When we talk about those passionate people who challenged the status quo half a century ago by providing free legal services for Victorians who previously had no support when facing everyday legal challenges, we are reminded of the Margaret Mead quote: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” Since those early days of Community Legal Centres, thousands of Victorian lawyers and social services professionals have been part of a movement for social change that has reshaped how we think about law, legal assistance and fairness – for the better.

Fifty years on, the workforce across Victoria’s 47 Community Legal Centres now numbers 4,000 staff and volunteers and the community legal sector is a crucial and foundational part of Victoria’s legal landscape. Community Legal Centre frontline legal services ensure access to justice for everyone, not just those who can afford it; and their advocacy work informs, influences and changes the laws on which our society is built.

Recognising that we are currently celebrating 50 years of Community Legal Centres in Victoria, it is appropriate that we give thought to what we want to achieve into the future. That is what this document has been designed to do – setting out the ambitions for the next decade to take Community Legal Centres to the next level of impact.

This is a sector plan – and now, each of us in the community legal sector will be involved in leading, innovating and implementing the actions to achieve its aims.

**THIS 10-YEAR PLAN IS THE PRODUCT OF 18 MONTHS OF CONSULTING, THINKING AND ENVISAGING BY PARTICIPANTS ACROSS THE SECTOR, AND BEYOND. THANK YOU TO ALL THE COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WHO GAVE THEIR TIME AND TALENTS TO DEVELOP THE PLAN COLLABORATIVELY.**

We also extend our thanks to our legal sector, social services and government partners, who willingly provided their ideas to support our planning. A huge debt of appreciation goes to those Community Legal Centre clients who also gave their time to share their knowledge and advice, to ensure this plan is built on the lived experience of those communities that we serve.

Special thanks also to the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety for funding the development of the 10-Year Plan. This investment has given Victoria’s Community Legal Centres the space and opportunity to produce a comprehensive plan developed through a collaborative and consultative process, so that this remarkable group of thoughtful, committed citizens can continue to change the world over the next decade.

What a privilege to be part of that.

**STAFF OF THE FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES VICTORIA**



## STRATEGIC PLAN-ON-A-PAGE

### SECTOR'S VISION AND PURPOSE

We stand for a Victorian community which is fair and equitable. We help people and communities experiencing disadvantage to prevent and resolve legal issues. At the same time, we advocate for fairer laws, policies and systems for everyone.

#### PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- ▼ More equitable access to legal assistance
- ▼ Fairer laws, policies and systems
- ▼ Increased understanding of the law and legal rights
- ▼ Improved lives for people and communities

#### WHAT WE ARE KNOWN FOR

- ▼ Strong connections to place-based and target communities
- ▼ Expert, culturally competent staff and volunteers
- ▼ Integrated, client-centred approach with a focus on early intervention
- ▼ Commitment to innovation

#### WHAT WE DO

- ▼ Legal advice, information, representation and casework
- ▼ Community legal education and engagement
- ▼ Social services support, referrals and capacity building
- ▼ Systemic advocacy

#### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1:

##### INCREASE ACCESS TO JUSTICE



#### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2:

##### STRENGTHEN OUR COLLECTIVE VOICE FOR CHANGE



#### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3:

##### FOCUS ON IMPACT



#### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:

##### BUILD OUR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH



#### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1a. Build community awareness and understanding of rights and responsibilities  
1b. Strengthen access to support for those who need it most  
1c. Develop, share and scale effective models

- 2a. Create a shared vision and framework for collaboration  
2b. Embed a targeted, co-ordinated advocacy approach

- 3a. Build and share the evidence base of what works  
3b. Invest in data capability  
3c. Tell the story of our impact

- 4a. Strengthen our financial sustainability  
4b. Build our workforce  
4c. Develop shared platforms, processes and resources

**CROSS-CUTTING THEME** - Enhance the skills and expertise of our people

## SECTION 1:

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

Community Legal Centres are independent community organisations which offer free, quality legal services to people and communities experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. Victoria's community legal sector is diverse and responsive, comprising 47 Community Legal Centres (a combination of place-based, specialist and Aboriginal Legal Services) supported by a workforce of 4,000 committed staff and volunteers.

This document outlines the 10-Year Plan for Victoria's community legal sector. It articulates the community legal sector's aspirations for the future and how it will collectively address the opportunities and challenges facing the community legal sector in a unified, sustainable way, to better serve the Victorian community.

The 10-Year Plan includes:

- ▼ The shared vision and purpose for Victoria's Community Legal Centres over the next 10 years;
- ▼ The key strategic directions and supporting priorities which will guide the community legal sector's focus over the next decade; and
- ▼ The initiatives which will be undertaken in the first three years of the 10-Year Plan to commence delivering on the strategic directions.

The audiences for the 10-Year Plan are the Community Legal Centres which comprise the community legal sector, the Commonwealth Government and Victorian State Government, the broader legal and justice sectors, the social services sector, local councils, philanthropic bodies and other current and future partners and funders of the community legal sector's work.

## 1.2 PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE 10-YEAR PLAN

The development of the 10-Year Plan was stewarded by the Federation of Community Legal Centres (the Federation).

It was a highly consultative process which began in 2021. Further detail on the approach and process is in Appendix A.



## SECTION 2:

CURRENT  
CONTEXT

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES CAN BE PLACE-BASED, PROVIDING SERVICES ACROSS A RANGE OF LEGAL ISSUES TO A GEOGRAPHIC COMMUNITY; OR SPECIALIST, FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC AREAS OF LAW OR COHORTS OF PEOPLE.

2.1 HISTORY AND ROLE  
OF THE COMMUNITY  
LEGAL SECTOR

Victoria's Community Legal Centres are a 50-year movement for social justice.

Community Legal Centres started in Victoria in the early 1970s. The movement for free legal advice was a logical progression during a time of radical protest and social change.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a growing awareness across Victoria of the impact of laws on communities and the lack of access to justice for many citizens. It was against this backdrop that young lawyers began considering how legal representation and advice could be accessible to more people and how legislation could be drafted to ensure it was 'fair and equitable' for even the most marginalised Victorians.

Just weeks after Gough Whitlam was sworn in as Prime Minister, a group of lawyers began providing free legal advice from the basement of Fitzroy Town Hall. That service became Fitzroy Legal Service, which still operates as a Community Legal Centre.

Across town, a group of Monash University students and academics provided free legal assistance over the phone to those who needed it. What started as a phone advice line became the South-East Monash Legal Service, providing legal services and social justice advocacy across the south-east of Melbourne.

In St Kilda, a similar service evolved. 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 community legal services operating in Australia.

Meanwhile, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS) was established as a community-controlled Co-operative Society in 1973. It built on the movement for access to justice for Australia's First Nations women, men and children that started with Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service opening its doors in 1970.

Over the years, Community Legal Centres have advocated 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 prisoners' rights.

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

Community Legal Centres can be place-based, providing services across a range of legal issues to a geographic community; or specialist, focusing on specific areas of law (such as tenancy, consumer action or employment) or cohorts of people (such as women, young people, people with disability or asylum seekers).

In all cases, the cornerstone of social justice continues to define the sector.

There are now more than 170 Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Legal Services in Australia, including 47 in Victoria.

About 4,000 staff and volunteers work in Community Legal Centres across Victoria.<sup>1</sup> In the 2021-2022 financial year, Victoria's Community Legal Centres supported Victorians with more than 100,000 legal issues, and another half a million Victorians accessed online tools to help navigate and solve their legal issues.<sup>2</sup>

Victoria's Community Legal Centres currently conduct four activities:

- ▼ Legal advice, information, representation and casework
- ▼ Social services support, referrals and capacity building
- ▼ Community legal education, development and engagement
- ▼ Systemic advocacy.



## LEGAL ADVICE, INFORMATION, REPRESENTATION AND CASEWORK

Community Legal Centres provide legal support to clients across the areas of civil, criminal and family law. Where matters go to the courts, this includes delivering legal services on a range of areas including family violence and crime, as well as strategic litigation in areas such as human rights and environment matters.

### SCHOOL LAWYERS AT WORK

## SOUTH-EAST MONASH LEGAL SERVICE: SPORTING CHANGE PROGRAM

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.

## SOCIAL SERVICES SUPPORT, REFERRALS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Community Legal Centres provide social services support to clients (such as financial counselling and social work) as well as referrals to, and capacity building for, social services organisations.

### KEEPING MOTHERS AND THEIR BABIES SAFE, AND TOGETHER

## WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE VICTORIA AND MONASH HEALTH: TOGETHER FROM THE START PROGRAM

Women experiencing violence in their relationship can risk having newborn babies removed from their care. To address this, Women's Legal Service Victoria and Monash Health launched Together from the Start, a partnership that supports mothers so they can keep their babies from birth.

The program brings together lawyers, health workers, social workers and financial counsellors to support at-risk women who attend Monash Hospital for antenatal care. It provides women with legal support and representation, as well as healthcare, social work and other supports. This allows mothers to make more informed decisions about their lives and provide a safe home for their babies.

The partnership has already made a big difference to clients' lives. Most women who were referred to the program in the first year were discharged from hospital with their baby safely in their care and appropriate support services in place. Women's Legal Service Victoria has also helped a number of clients from the program with other legal issues stemming from violence, as part of their unique approach to helping women recover and gain financial independence.

By providing women with family law and family violence legal assistance – as well as representation in Children's Court proceedings – victim-survivors can receive all the legal help they need to move on with their lives.



# COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Community Legal Centres deliver activities which help communities to better understand and exercise their legal and other rights.

## DISASTER LAW AND RESPONSE WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

### VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

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.”

VALS is 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,” says Tali.

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;
- ▼ distribute resources participating in working groups such as the Federation’s Climate Change and Disaster Working Group and Disaster Legal Help Victoria;
- ▼ 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.

# SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Community Legal Centres undertake policy and advocacy work for fairer laws, policies and systems, drawing on clients’ lived experiences.

## PUBLIC HOUSING LOCKDOWN

### INNER MELBOURNE COMMUNITY LEGAL, FLEMINGTON AND KENSINGTON LEGAL SERVICE, MOONEE VALLEY LEGAL SERVICE

When 3,000 residents in nine public housing towers in North Melbourne and Kensington were forced into lockdown without notice during the COVID-19 pandemic, local Community Legal Centres (Inner Melbourne Community Legal, Flemington and Kensington Legal Service and Moonee Valley Legal Service) were some of the first on the scene, working alongside residents to fight for a fair, proportionate, and human-rights based response.

Community Legal Centres took action to support tenants who were confused and scared, and who needed information, support and care. This included establishing a dedicated phone number for legal information and advice.

The failure of public health authorities and enforcement officials to treat public housing residents humanely and with dignity was later confirmed in a December 2020 Victorian Ombudsman report concluding that: “the rushed lockdown was not compatible with the residents’ human rights, including their right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty.”





The role and approach of Community Legal Centres have adapted and evolved over time. For example, Community Legal Centres increasingly offer multidisciplinary integrated services. Multidisciplinary integrated services in a community legal setting involve community lawyers and other social service professionals working together to respond to the needs of community members.<sup>3</sup> They aim to support clients’ needs in a holistic way, including their legal needs, financial needs such as financial counselling, and their other social, emotional and wellbeing needs. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the community legal sector’s digital transformation which has allowed Community Legal Centres to increasingly offer services using digital platforms.<sup>4</sup>

Providing services early are part of this approach. Victoria’s Community Legal Centres address problems before they escalate, which provides good wellbeing outcomes for communities whilst also helping to reduce pressure and costs to other parts of the justice system and broader social support system.

Importantly, Victoria’s Community Legal Centres do not operate in isolation. While individual Community Legal Centres have their own geographic and target communities, where possible, the community legal sector operates collaboratively to maximise its impact. For example, place-based and specialist Community Legal Centres have formed partnerships which research has shown has generated positive outcomes. These includes stronger referral pathways and increased understanding of the law through knowledge sharing.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Community Legal Centres operate in partnership with a range of organisations in the broader social service ecosystem to meet mutual goals, such as the delivery of integrated services and policy and advocacy work.

## 2.2 COMPOSITION OF THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR

As at 1 January 2023, the community legal sector comprises 47 Community Legal Centres operating across Victoria. There are two main types of Community Legal Centres: about half of Victoria’s Community Legal Centres are place-based centres and half are specialist centres.

Place-based Community Legal Centres practice in a range of areas of law and generally support clients within a geographic catchment. Specialist Community Legal Centres focus on either a particular area of law, such as JobWatch (employment law) and Tenants Victoria (tenancy law) or supporting a particular cohort. For example, there are two Community Legal Centres in Victoria, Djirra and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, which are Aboriginal Legal Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that specialise in supporting First Nations clients. In addition, there are several Community Legal Centres who solely focus on advocating on behalf of issues or rights, such as Human Rights Law Centre, Environmental Justice Australia and Animal Law Institute.

### THE PEAK BODY FOR THE VICTORIAN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES IS THE FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES.

## 2.3 IMPACT OF THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR

Victoria is a fairer and more equitable place as a result of the work of Community Legal Centres. They play a central role in vibrant, flourishing communities, demonstrated by them supporting millions of people to access legal support for over half a century.

Research conducted in 2012 found that Australia’s Community Legal Centres deliver on average a cost-benefit ratio of 1:18. For every \$1 invested in services provided by a Community Legal Centre this generates \$18 worth of benefits to the community (with benefits including costs avoided in the legal and other social service systems).<sup>6</sup> Given their success in supporting the community, Australian Community Legal Centres are considered a global example of ‘what works’ in access to justice.<sup>7</sup>

The stakeholder consultations conducted in support of the development of the 10-Year Plan affirmed the value provided by Community Legal Centres. This includes the ability to service a diverse range of client needs, support to help clients understand the justice system, the availability of multi-disciplinary, integrated services and hybrid service delivery.

Figure 1 on the next page provides a snapshot of the community legal sector’s impact.

## 2.4 SECTOR LANDSCAPE AND FUNDING

The community legal sector is part of the broader Victorian legal assistance sector which also includes Victoria Legal Aid, Victoria Law Foundation, Law Institute of Victoria, Victorian Bar, the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Attorney-General of Victoria. Further details of the policy context are outlined in Appendix B.

In 2022, the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety published the *Victorian Legal Assistance Strategy 2022-2025*.<sup>8</sup> This 10-Year Plan operates separately, but alongside the Victorian Legal Assistance Strategy. While both strategies have a shared purpose of enhancing the delivery of legal assistance services to people experiencing disadvantage, the Victorian Legal Assistance Strategy applies to the entire Victorian legal assistance sector, whereas this plan is specifically for the community legal sector. As key providers of legal assistance, Community Legal Centres will continue to actively participate in the development and implementation of the Victorian Legal Assistance Strategy.

Most Community Legal Centres are primarily funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety. This funding is administered through the Department of Justice, Victoria Legal Aid (via the Community Legal Services Program) and the Federation.

However, each Community Legal Centre’s funding mix is unique to its context. Some Community Legal Centres are funded entirely from government grants, while others do not accept any government funding to promote independence in their advocacy work. Other prominent funding sources for Community Legal Centres include partnerships with philanthropic organisations, public donations, local council funding, direct grants from Victoria Legal Aid, Legal Services Board and Commissioner and Victoria Law Foundation, and funding through other government departments (that is, departments besides the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety).


Figure 1: Snapshot of Victoria's Community Legal Sector, 2021–2022

# SECTOR DATA SNAPSHOT


JULY 2021  
TO JUNE 2022

Community Legal Centres offer a hugely diverse range of services and record statistics in different ways. **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




1.7% WERE UNDER 18 | 9% WERE 18-24 | 23.8% WERE 25-34 | 36.3% WERE 35-49  
18.0% WERE 50-64 | 8.8% WERE OVER 65




73.5% WERE EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL DISADVANTAGE




32.1% WERE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY




56% WERE EXPERIENCING OR AT RISK OF FAMILY VIOLENCE



19.0% DID NOT SPEAK ENGLISH AS THEIR MAIN LANGUAGE



5.8% WERE EXPERIENCING OR WERE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS



66.5% WERE WOMEN | 30.0% WERE MEN | 3.1% DID NOT INDICATE GENDER  
0.4% IDENTIFIED AS NON-BINARY/GENDER NON-CONFORMING

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

SERVICES PROVIDED

86,609 LEGAL INFORMATION, ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION SERVICES

13,538 DUTY LAWYER SERVICES IN COURTS AND TRIBUNALS

3,501 SERVICES TO COMMUNITIES INCLUDING COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

1,552 HOLISTIC SUPPORT SERVICES FROM SOCIAL WORKERS, FINANCIAL COUNSELLORS, AND OTHER MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROFESSIONALS EMBEDDED IN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

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

EXAMPLES OF ONLINE TOOLS ACCESSED


JUSTICE CONNECT'S **DIGITAL SELF-HELP TOOLS**

**LANGUAGE RESOURCES** FROM TENANTS VICTORIA

EASTERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE'S **YOU ME & MPS**

**DEMAND A REFUND** FROM CONSUMER ACTION LAW CENTRE

BARWON COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE'S **LEGAL HEALTH CHECK** TOOL



## MEMBERS OF THE FEDERATION

47 COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES AND ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES WORKING TOGETHER FOR A FAIR AND EQUITABLE VICTORIA

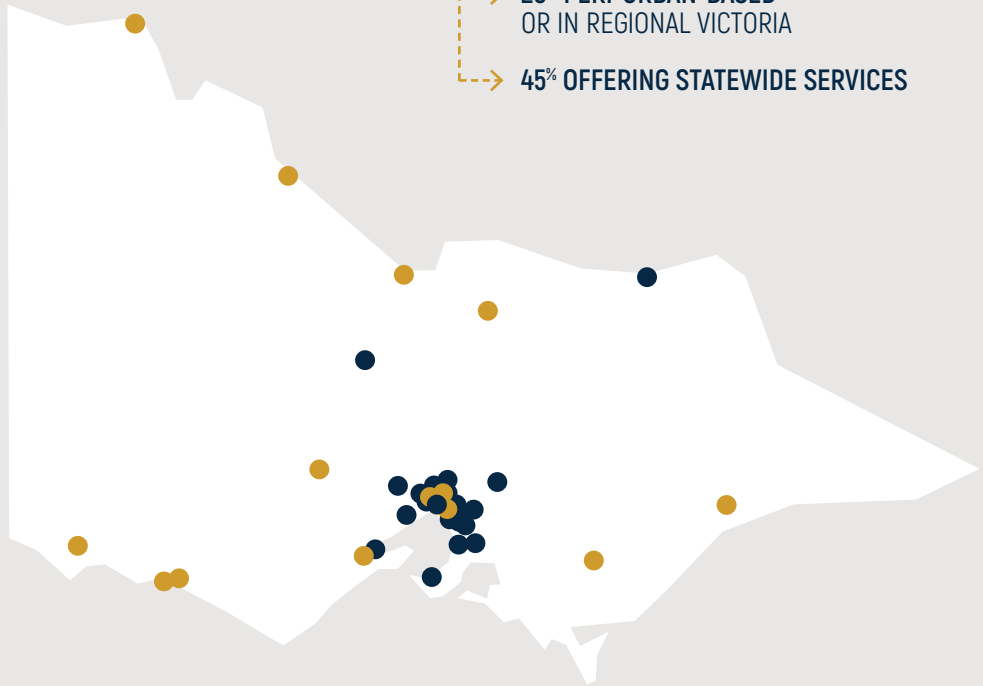
21 PLACE-BASED SERVICES

26 SPECIALIST SERVICES INCLUDING 2 ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES

72% METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE-BASED

28% PERI-URBAN-BASED OR IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

45% OFFERING STATEWIDE SERVICES







## 2.5 LEGAL NEED

Legal need in Victoria is widespread. The most recent research, conducted in 2012, reported that every year 50 per cent of people will experience one or more legal problems and over 20 per cent of people will experience at least three legal problems.<sup>9</sup> The nature of legal need is such that people often have multiple legal problems and issues can span different aspects of their lives, such as housing, fines, employment, family violence and discrimination. These problems are often intersectional and compounding, meaning that they interact with and influence each other. The ability to identify and seek assistance for these legal issues is also impacted by the lived experience of Victorians – including their experiences of unstable housing, mental ill-health, family violence, employment barriers, poverty, low English language skills, disability and discrimination.

Current service delivery levels of Community Legal Centres only paint a picture of those who access the services of Community Legal Centres. This data does not capture those who have a legal need but who have not sought assistance (research has found that approximately 15 per cent of the Australian population annually experience a serious legal problem without seeking legal assistance<sup>10</sup>), those who sought assistance but were not eligible or those who were turned away because of a lack of capacity to provide services. The data also does not capture those Victorians who access services from Victoria Legal Aid, or who pay for legal services from the private sector.

The Commonwealth Government has identified a number of priority cohorts for the legal assistance sector across Australia. These cohorts have been identified as those which have a greater likelihood of experiencing legal problems and are less likely to access services and/or seek assistance.<sup>11</sup>

The national priority cohort groups have been identified as:

- ▼ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- ▼ Children and young people (up to 24 years)
- ▼ Older people (aged over 65 years or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50 years)
- ▼ People experiencing, or at risk of, family violence
- ▼ People experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- ▼ People in custody and/or prisoners
- ▼ People residing in rural or remote areas
- ▼ People who are culturally and linguistically diverse
- ▼ People with a disability or mental illness
- ▼ People with low education levels
- ▼ Single parents

The national priority cohort groups above reflect many of the groups that the Victorian community legal sector seeks to support. However, as independent organisations, each Community Legal Centre identifies its own priority cohorts based on its particular community's needs.

## 2.6 KEY ISSUES CURRENTLY FACING THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR

### UNMET DEMAND

Demand for legal assistance continues to outpace the community legal sector's ability to provide services. The most recent data from 2014 shows that 72 per cent of Community Legal Centres nationally reported being unable to meet demand for services, with unmet demand for services being higher than for any other community service.<sup>12</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue as it led to a large increase in the number of people seeking help from Community Legal Centres.<sup>13</sup>

### LOW LEGAL LITERACY

Many community members lack basic knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities. This means that many people do not recognise when they have a legal problem and are unaware of potential solutions, including knowing where to go to get further information or assistance.<sup>14</sup> This is supported by research which has consistently found significant gaps in the legal knowledge of certain demographic groups and the general public.<sup>15</sup> For example, an Australia-wide survey conducted by the Law and Justice Foundation found that those who are experiencing the most disadvantage have lower legal capability and are therefore less likely to take action in response to their legal problems.<sup>16</sup> When these community members do take action, they are more likely to use not-for-profit legal services as opposed to other supports such as self-help.<sup>17</sup>

### VARIABLE OUTCOMES MANAGEMENT AND DATA CAPABILITY

There is also inconsistent data and outcomes management capabilities across the community legal sector, made more challenging by legacy data systems and funder reporting and data requirements. This can make it difficult for Community Legal Centres to communicate the impact of the community legal sector's work to stakeholders and can inhibit the identification of the most effective service models for scaling.

### WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

The community legal sector faces challenges with workforce attraction and retention. In particular, the community legal sector struggles to attract and retain staff, for various reasons including funding models preventing Community Legal Centres from offering salaries which are competitive with other employers, as well as the prevalence of casual and short fixed-term contracts.<sup>18</sup> There is also the potential for burnout given the workload and complexity of the work.

This situation has also been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated by 68 per cent of respondents to the Community Legal Centre Workforce Survey conducted by Victoria Law Foundation reporting that COVID-19 increased their level of work-related stress.<sup>19</sup>

### ONGOING FUNDING CHALLENGES

The community legal sector is not sufficiently or appropriately funded to meet current demand and service the complex needs of the community. Accessing funding is a complex, resource-intensive and lengthy process, and often comes with reporting requirements which differ for each funding source. Furthermore, funding is often short-term (frequently only one-year cycles) and focussed on project funding for specified services and roles rather than core funding for the general operations required to run a Community Legal Centre. In addition, funding announcements are often not sufficiently timely meaning that Community Legal Centres risk losing staff when funding has not been renewed in time.

The overall lack of funding leads to tightened eligibility criteria for service delivery and limits Community Legal Centres' investment in areas including impact measurement, community engagement/research, training, technology and other infrastructure. It also means that Community Legal Centres often do not have the capacity to invest in scaling innovative service models.





### 3.1 THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR'S VISION, PURPOSE AND PRIORITY OUTCOMES

The community legal sector's vision is for a Victorian community which is fair and equitable. The sector's role in working towards this vision – the sector's purpose – is to:

- ▼ Help people and communities experiencing disadvantage to prevent and resolve legal issues.
- ▼ Advocate for fairer laws, policies and systems for everyone.

Consistent with its vision and purpose, the community legal sector aspires to achieve four priority outcomes:

- ▼ More equitable access to legal assistance.
- ▼ Increased understanding of the law and legal rights.
- ▼ Fairer laws, policies and systems.
- ▼ Improved lived for people and communities.

### 3.2 WHAT THE COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR DOES AND IS KNOWN FOR

The activities of Community Legal Centres are outlined in section 2.1.

Across the diverse mix of Community Legal Centres, there are some common themes in how Community Legal Centres go about their work and what they are known for. These are:

- ▼ **Strong connections to place-based and target communities** – Community Legal Centres are closely linked to the communities served (whether defined by geography, cohort or areas of law) and have a strong understanding of the issues facing communities.
- ▼ **Integrated, client-centred approach with a focus on early intervention** – Community Legal Centres aim to deliver early intervention services to address problems before they escalate, view problems holistically and keep the client at the centre.
- ▼ **Expert, culturally competent staff and volunteers** – Community Legal Centres have highly committed and diverse staff and volunteers who are passionate about working to achieve positive outcomes for clients and have deep expertise in their relevant fields.
- ▼ **Commitment to innovation** – Community Legal Centres continue to improve the way services are delivered through piloting and scaling new models with strong evidence of achieving improved outcomes.

## SECTION 3:

# ASPIRATIONS FOR THE SECTOR



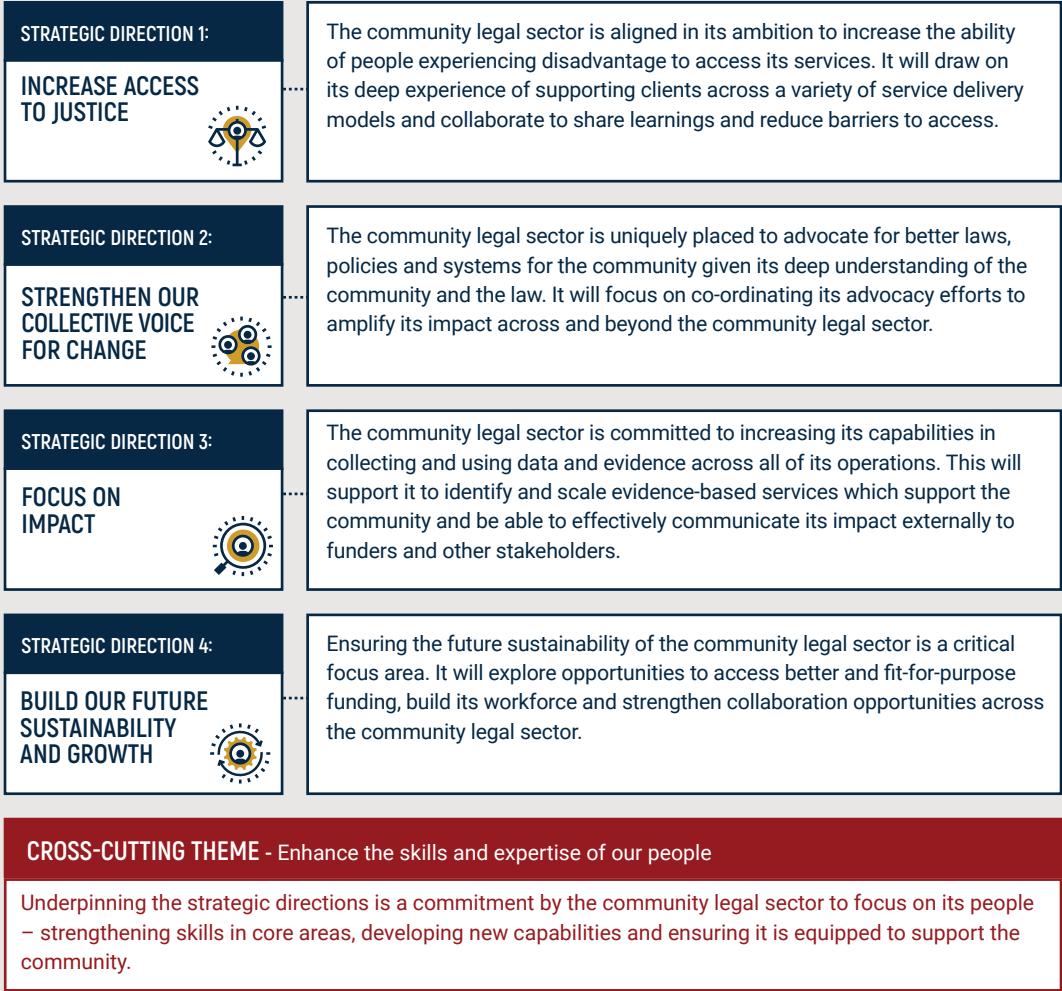


### 3.3 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND CROSS-CUTTING THEME

The 10-Year Plan identifies the four strategic directions and one cross-cutting theme which will guide the community legal sector’s focus and effort over the next decade. Whilst it is anticipated that the priorities and initiatives which sit under each strategic direction (designed to provide additional focus and detail for implementation) may need to flex and change over the time frame of the 10-Year Plan, it is expected that the overarching strategic directions will endure. The four strategic directions and cross-cutting theme are set out in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Strategic directions, cross-cutting theme and aspirations



### 3.4 PRIORITIES

The community legal sector has identified a number of key priorities to provide focus within each strategic direction. Eleven priorities have been identified as outlined in Figure 3.

This section outlines for each priority (and the cross-cutting theme) the community legal sector’s aspiration for each priority, a brief description of the priority and the initiatives (the streams of work the community legal sector will undertake) to achieve the aspiration. More detail on each of the initiatives is set out in Section 4.

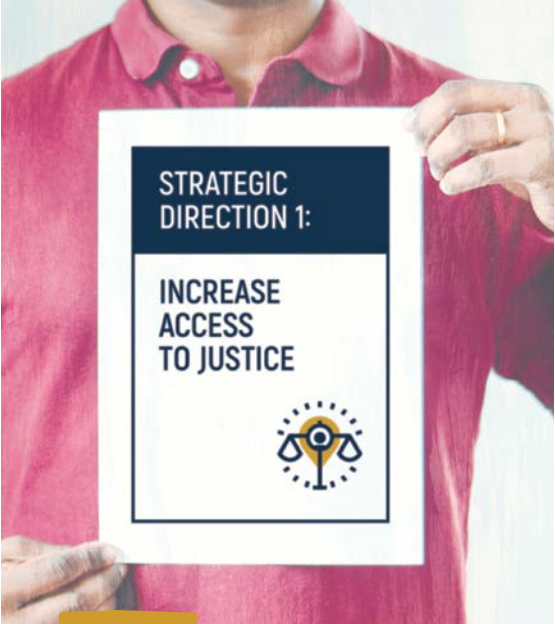
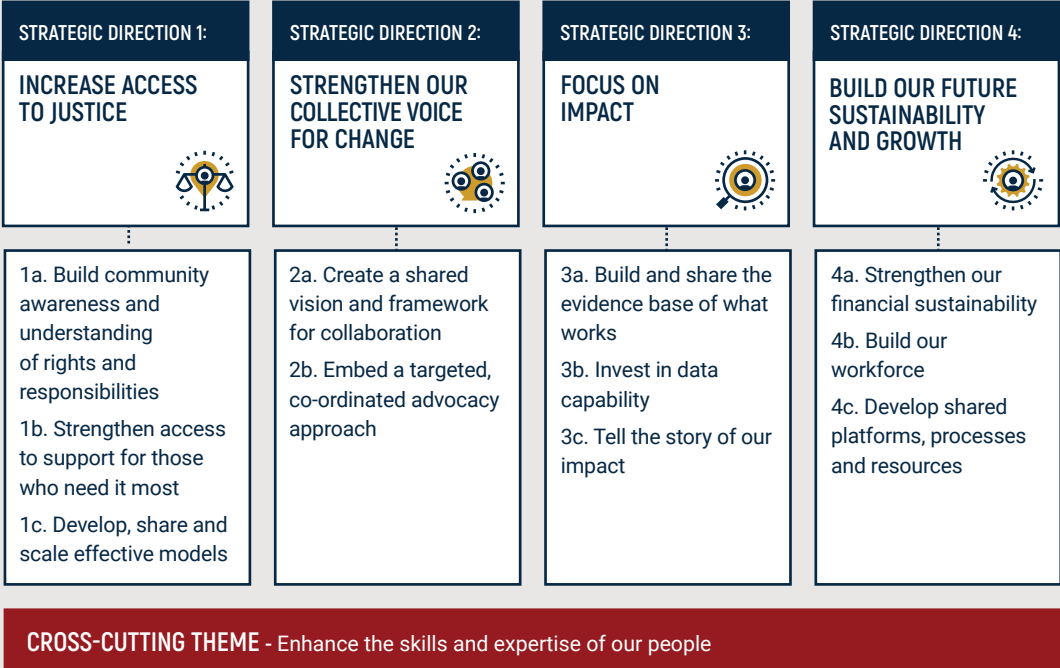


Figure 3: Priorities for each of the strategic directions





### 3.4.1 STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: INCREASE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

#### PRIORITY 1A

##### BUILD COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The aspiration for this priority is that all community members, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, understand their rights and responsibilities and are empowered to exercise their rights.

This priority directly responds to perspectives that surfaced through the consultations which highlighted there is relatively low legal literacy across the community. It also addresses the opportunity for greater co-ordination between Community Legal Centres to capitalise on opportunities to jointly plan and deliver services, including community development activities. This includes where there is commonality of interest within parts of the community legal sector on their target areas (cohorts, geography, areas of law). This will support a targeted approach to reaching those most in need, including to improve their level of legal literacy.

Significant activity already takes place in this area – community legal education and engagement is a core activity of Community Legal Centres and there is existing and upcoming research on legal need which will further inform the community legal sector’s approach (the Victoria Law Foundation’s Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) which is underway).<sup>20</sup> This priority will enhance and amplify the community legal sector’s work in addressing this issue through a more consistently joined-up approach.

Links to other Priorities: Priority 1b

**PRIORITY 1A INITIATIVES**

Strengthen the foundations for joint service delivery and community development

Create a central database of community development materials and resources

Develop a stronger brand for the community legal sector

#### PRIORITY 1B

##### STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST

The aspiration for this priority is that community members experiencing disadvantage can access timely, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and people-centred services offered by Community Legal Centres in a way which is convenient to them.

This priority responds to the challenge that there are cohorts in our community which are more likely to experience legal issues and face barriers to accessing legal assistance (see section 2.4 which discusses priority cohorts). Supporting communities experiencing disadvantage is at the core of what Community Legal Centres do but there is an opportunity for Community Legal Centres to work together more deliberately to do this most effectively in the resource-constrained environment in which the community legal sector operates.

This priority also responds to changes in the external environment, most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic which led to increasing use of hybrid service delivery models in the community legal sector.

**HYBRID SERVICE DELIVERY** is where services are delivered through a mix of in-person and digital or online channels, including self-help options

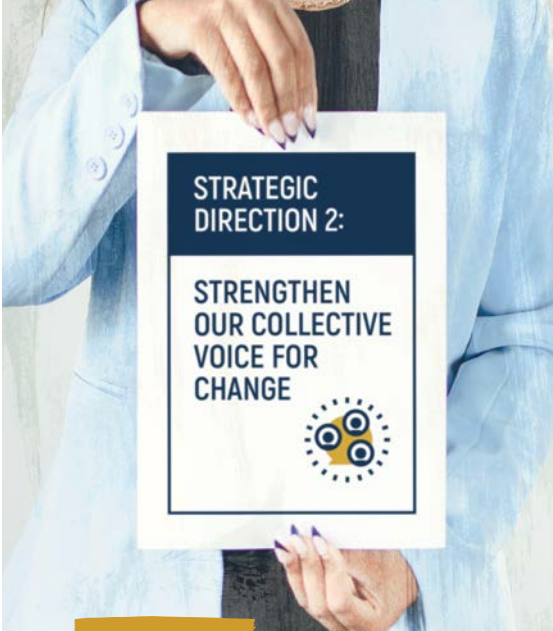
The community legal sector will collaboratively investigate ways of increasing access to target communities, including through exploring service delivery models (including through hybrid models), which will best meet the identified needs. This will support the community legal sector in its aspiration to strive for more equitable access to its services across Victoria.

Links to other Priorities: Priority 1a, priority 1c

**PRIORITY 1B INITIATIVES**

Reduce barriers which inhibit hybrid service delivery models

Address inequitable service delivery across the sector



#### PRIORITY 1C

##### DEVELOP, SHARE AND SCALE EFFECTIVE MODELS

The aspiration for this priority is that the community legal sector consistently strives for improvement through piloting, securing funding and scaling effective ways of delivering services.

The community legal sector prides itself on its commitment to piloting and scaling new ways of supporting clients. However, consultations highlighted that Community Legal Centres have struggled to access funding to support the scaling of effective models even where there is evidence of impact.

Further, the recent challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic along with events such as floods and bushfires have all demonstrated the potential for external events to disrupt the community legal sector’s ability to deliver services.

This priority identifies the opportunity to capitalise on the community legal sector’s innovative approaches to work more collaboratively to develop, trial and scale effective service delivery models and maximise the opportunities to fund those models to achieve better outcomes across the Victorian community.

Links to other Priorities: Priority 1b, priority 3a

**PRIORITY 1C INITIATIVES**

Promote flexible service delivery models which drive business continuity

Establish a sector-wide working group to pursue opportunities for innovation

### 3.4.2 STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: STRENGTHEN OUR COLLECTIVE VOICE FOR CHANGE

#### PRIORITY 2A

##### CREATE A SHARED VISION AND FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION

The aspiration for this priority is the community legal sector has an agreed vision and coordinated approach to advocacy to influence policy, funding and other issues facing the community legal sector and which impact people and communities experiencing disadvantage.

This priority recognises the opportunity for the community legal sector to take a more joined-up approach to accelerate and amplify its impact for communities through strategic engagement and advocacy, which is a critical part of the work of Community Legal Centres. The community legal sector is known for its strong connections to place-based and target communities. It is this deep understanding of the issues facing communities which uniquely places the community legal sector to advocate effectively for change.

Community Legal Centres are committed to working more closely together to jointly agree the community legal sector’s vision for advocacy, to share its learnings and plan an approach that promotes and enables joined-up advocacy on issues across the community legal sector and the communities it supports.

Taking a co-ordinated approach for targeted issues (existing and emerging) will lay the foundations for the community legal sector to drive greater change for fairer laws, policies and systems.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 2b

**PRIORITY 2A INITIATIVES**

Codify and strengthen the sector’s coordinated advocacy practices

Develop new digital platform and capabilities to support advocacy efforts





PRIORITY 2B

EMBED A TARGETED, CO-ORDINATED ADVOCACY APPROACH

The aspiration for this priority is for the community legal sector to more effectively conduct joint advocacy work to achieve fairer laws, policies and systems which deliver meaningful change for people and communities experiencing disadvantage.

This priority directly builds on the foundations that will be established through Priority 2a above and is the opportunity for the community legal sector to activate the framework it has developed to more effectively advocate for change.

The community legal sector is committed to identifying the issues it is uniquely placed to address and target, developing sector-wide positions on key policy areas to maximise impact. It will also consolidate its standing and position as subject matter experts, through deep and targeted stakeholder engagement and collaboration outside of the community legal sector.

Working collaboratively on this priority will elevate the community legal sector’s advocacy work.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 2a, priority 3c

PRIORITY 2B INITIATIVES

Develop and launch sector-wide policy platform  
Strengthen the sector’s position as a credible authority on policy and advocacy issues

3.4.3 STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: FOCUS ON IMPACT

PRIORITY 3A

BUILD AND SHARE THE EVIDENCE BASE OF WHAT WORKS

The aspiration for this priority is that the sector can better use evidence to support all its operations including service delivery, advocacy and fundraising.

The community legal sector, government and other funders have an increasing appetite to understand the outcomes that the community legal sector helps achieve for the community, and to ensure that services are based on evidence of what works.

There is significant work already underway to build the sector’s evidence base, such as the sharing of evidence between Community Legal Centres through member meetings and working groups as well as the development of a measurement and evaluation framework for the community legal sector.

This priority aims to amplify the work to date and support Community Legal Centres to access the sector’s evidence-base, continue to collect and develop their own evidence, and to effectively use evidence. This will support the community legal sector to better communicate the impact of its work and to identify the most effective services for replication and scaling across the sector.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 1c, Priority 3b, Priority 3c

PRIORITY 3A INITIATIVES

Develop a Centre of Excellence to build the sector’s capability in building, sharing and using evidence, and to help position the sector externally as a leader in its fields of expertise

PRIORITY 3B

INVEST IN DATA CAPABILITY

The aspiration for this priority is that the community legal sector has a comprehensive and consistent approach to the collection and use of data.

There is a desire within the community legal sector to become more data-driven – to support achieving and demonstrating outcomes, to improve efficiency in reporting, case management and decision-making, and to ensure timely data is available to support advocacy, service design and continuous improvement.

The community legal sector is currently implementing a data project to increase the use of modern case management systems across the community legal sector, simplify the collation of data for reporting, establish a central repository of data and increase the sector’s usage of data visualisation to support the development of insights.

This priority seeks to build on, and continue with, the momentum of the current project.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 3a, Priority 3c

PRIORITY 3B INITIATIVES

Drive increased usage of modern case management systems  
Develop a data strategy for the sector  
Strengthen the central data repository to enable greater access to relevant data

PRIORITY 3C

TELL THE STORY OF OUR IMPACT

The aspiration for this priority is that the sector has a clear and compelling story of impact which is well understood by key stakeholders.

This priority responds to perspectives from the consultations that more needs to be done to increase awareness of the community legal sector, its work and its value. One way of achieving this is through the sector clearly articulating and communicating the impact of its work to stakeholders such as government, other funders and the broader legal and justice sectors. By doing so, the community legal sector aims to derive several benefits, including enhanced ability to attract funding as well as heightened reputation as a leading authority on issues facing people and communities, leading to a greater ability to influence stakeholders in its advocacy work.

The community legal sector already uses methods such as impact reports, annual reports and social media to communicate impact. This priority will build on these methods to enhance the sector’s ability to tell the story of its impact in a unified, cohesive and consistent way.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 2b, Priority 3a, Priority 3b, Priority 4a

PRIORITY 3C INITIATIVES

Strengthen communication of the sector’s impact externally

MAKING THE MOST OF DATA SENIORS RIGHTS VICTORIA

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.



3.4.4 STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:  
BUILD OUR FUTURE  
SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

PRIORITY 4A

STRENGTHEN OUR FINANCIAL  
SUSTAINABILITY

The aspiration for this priority is that the community legal sector is appropriately funded to meet service delivery demand as well as to effectively contribute to systems change initiatives and ensure its ongoing sustainability.

The community legal sector remains under-resourced which inhibits its ability to meet the demand for its services and make critical investments which are vital to its success. Despite its best efforts, advocating for adequate funding remains a significant challenge and demand for the community legal sector’s services is expected to continue to grow.

Whilst the sector is already undertaking a program of work to build its fundraising capabilities to access diverse funding streams, there is a need for the community legal sector to work together to secure more diverse and appropriate funding sources.

This priority focuses on the sector developing new ways of engaging with potential funders to advocate for fit-for-purpose funding as well as leveraging pro-bono support where appropriate.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 3c

PRIORITY 4A INITIATIVES

Build the sector’s capabilities to access diverse revenue sources

Advocate to a cross-section of government for fit-for-purpose funding

Continue to explore the expansion of pro-bono support provided to community legal centres



PRIORITY 4B

BUILD OUR WORKFORCE

The aspiration for this priority is that the community legal sector continues to attract high quality staff, volunteers and board members with the right mix of skills and experience to ensure all Community Legal Centres can meet the needs of their clients and communities.

The community legal sector’s staff and volunteers are critical to the community legal sector’s ongoing sustainability but there are challenges in attracting and retaining staff and board members, as well as supporting the health and wellbeing of staff (particularly during and post-COVID).

This priority focuses on developing a clear and attractive value proposition for legal and social services careers in the community legal sector, including competitive employment conditions, increasing the availability of targeted professional development and more attractive career pathways. The priority also focuses on attracting more people into the sector, building on work already underway, such as with universities to develop community lawyering subjects in law degree programs.

Link to other Priorities: Cross-cutting theme  
- Enhance the skills and expertise of people who work in the sector

PRIORITY 4B INITIATIVES

Build the value proposition for legal and social services careers in the community legal sector

Strengthen education and other career pathways into the sector

PRIORITY 4C

DEVELOP SHARED PLATFORMS,  
PROCESSES AND RESOURCES

The aspiration for this priority is that the community legal sector can allocate resources to the areas of highest impact, enabling it to operate more sustainably.

The community legal sector operates in a resource-constrained environment. In order to maximise its impact, there is an opportunity for the community legal sector to explore how it can more effectively co-ordinate its efforts on operational activities, to free up resources, reduce duplication of these activities across the sector and increase the potential for scale advantages.

This priority will build upon the operational co-ordination activities already underway in the community legal sector (for example, the provision of some central functions through the Federation such as employee assistance programs and subscription services) to look at new ways to collaborate where there is aligned interest, appetite and benefits in doing so.

PRIORITY 4C INITIATIVES

Develop portal for sector-relevant template documents

Collaborate to drive improvements in operations

CROSS-CUTTING THEME

ENHANCE THE SKILLS AND EXPERTISE  
OF PEOPLE WHO WORK IN THE SECTOR

The aspiration for this theme is that people who work in the sector are supported to develop the required knowledge and skills to excel at their roles.

Community Legal Centre staff already have access to significant training and professional development opportunities. However, the consultations highlighted that there is an opportunity to build the community legal sector’s capability in targeted areas such as data literacy, outcomes management and media and communications.

This priority aims to ensure that the community legal sector’s staff have the right mix of skills needed to excel in all elements of their work including service delivery, advocacy and operations. This priority is closely connected to priority 4b, as offering professional development forms part of the value propositions for careers in the community legal sector.

Link to other Priorities: Priority 4b

CROSS-CUTTING THEME INITIATIVES

Strengthen culturally appropriate, trauma informed and people centred practice

Build capabilities of boards to ensure effective governance

Continue to strengthen legal expertise in areas of greatest need

Strengthen capability of individual community legal centres to tell stories of impact

Invest in capability building of advocacy skills

Strengthen sector capability in financial management



SECTION 4:

# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 10-YEAR PLAN



## 4.1 HORIZONS APPROACH

To bring the priorities of the 10-Year Plan to life, the community legal sector has identified the initiatives which it will undertake to achieve the aspirations set out for each of the priorities.

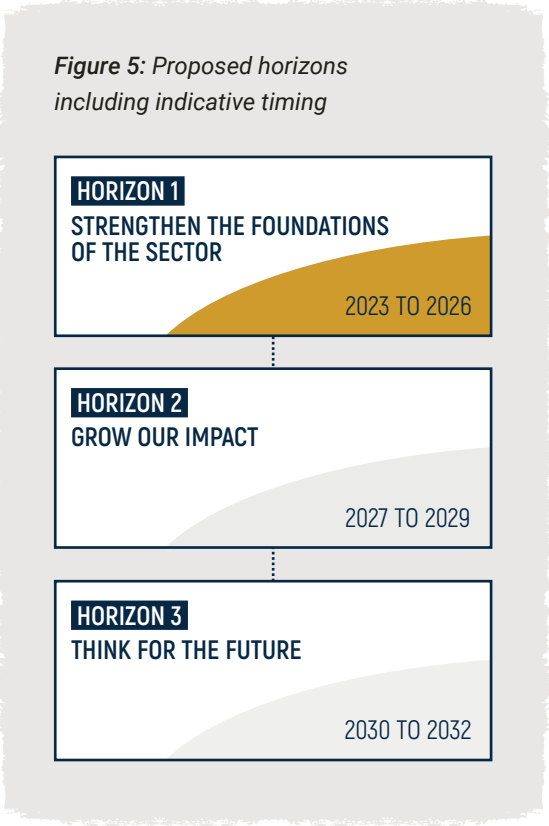
Through consultations, Community Legal Centre staff agreed on 29 initiatives to deliver on the identified priorities. The initiatives are set out below, grouped by corresponding strategic direction or cross-cutting theme (access, voice, impact, sustainability and people), and aligned to the relevant priority.

Figure 4: Initiatives

	PRIORITIES	INITIATIVES		
ACCESS	1a. Build community awareness and understanding of rights and responsibilities	Strengthen the foundations for joint service delivery and community development	Create a central database of community development materials and resources	Develop a stronger brand for the community legal sector
	1b. Strengthen access to support for those who need it most	Reduce barriers which inhibit hybrid service delivery models	Address inequitable service delivery across the sector	
	1c. Develop, share and scale effective models	Promote flexible service delivery models which drive business continuity	Establish a sector-wide working group to pursue opportunities for innovation	
VOICE	2a. Create a shared vision and framework for collaboration	Codify and strengthen the sector's coordinated advocacy practices	Develop new digital platform and capabilities to support advocacy efforts	
	2b. Embed a targeted, co-ordinated advocacy approach	Develop and launch sector-wide policy platform	Strengthen the sector's position as a credible authority on policy and advocacy issues	
IMPACT	3a. Build and share the evidence base of what works	Develop a Centre of Excellence to build the sector's capability in building, sharing and using evidence, and to help position the sector externally as a leader in its fields of expertise		
	3b. Invest in data capability	Drive increased usage of modern case management systems	Develop a data strategy for the sector	Strengthen the central data repository to enable greater access to relevant data
	3c. Tell the story of our impact	Strengthen communication of the sector's impact externally		
SUSTAINABILITY	4a. Strengthen our financial sustainability	Build the sector's capabilities to access diverse revenue sources	Advocate to a cross-section of government for fit-for-purpose funding	Continue to explore the expansion of pro-bono support provided to Community Legal Centres
	4b. Build our workforce	Build the value proposition for legal and social services careers in the community legal sector	Strengthen education and other career pathways into the sector	
	4c. Develop shared platforms, processes and resources	Develop portal for sector-relevant template documents	Collaborate to drive improvements in operations	
PEOPLE		Strengthen culturally appropriate, trauma informed and people centred practice	Build capabilities of boards to ensure effective governance	Continue to strengthen legal expertise in areas of greatest need
		Strengthen capability of individual Community Legal Centres to tell stories of impact	Invest in capability building of advocacy skills	Strengthen sector capability in financial management



As the Plan is for a 10-Year period, the community legal sector is using a horizons approach to sequence and prioritise implementation of the initiatives. This approach acknowledges that not everything can be done in parallel (noting that many of the initiatives are programs of work that the community legal sector will undertake in addition to its business-as-usual activities), and the sector needs to have some capacity to be responsive to change. The broad approach for the three horizons of the 10-Year Plan is set out in Figure 5 below:



During each horizon there will be planned reflection points – both to assess progress to date and any changes in the external environment. This may ultimately result in different initiatives being pursued in later time horizons.

To determine the sequencing of initiatives across horizons, the factors set out below were taken into consideration:

- ▼ Appetite for the initiative from Community Legal Centre CEOs and senior leadership teams.
- ▼ The ability to leverage current work underway to support the initiative.
- ▼ The practical likelihood of implementing initiatives in Horizon 1 (including the ability to attract funding in a timely manner for the work).

## 4.2 HORIZON 1 INITIATIVES

The community legal sector has agreed 13 initiatives to pursue in Horizon 1.

Each Horizon 1 initiative has been grouped into one of three categories to clarify responsibility for leading implementation of that initiative. The categories are:

- ▼ **Community Legal Centre driven and led:** These are initiatives which will be driven and led by individual or groups of Community Legal Centres with a particular shared expertise and passion. For example, a group of aligned Community Legal Centres could pilot a joint planning approach for a target area of interest. The Federation may also be a participant in these initiatives (where appropriate).
- ▼ **Community Legal Centre driven and led with Federation support:** Individual or groups of Community Legal Centres will drive these initiatives with Federation support. These will be initiatives where the Community Legal Centres have expertise to lead but where the Federation has a clear supporting role to play, often due to its capacity to convene. The support provided by the Federation may differ across initiatives and, over time, some of the initiatives in this group may transition to the “Community Legal Centre driven and led” category.
- ▼ **Federation driven and led:** The Federation will lead initiatives where there are programs of work which are already underway being led by the Federation and/or initiatives where the Federation may have some existing funding for work, such as the three initiatives related to data capability. The Federation will also lead initiatives where it is uniquely positioned with its sector-wide view, for example strengthening education pathways into the sector.

Figure 6: Horizon 1 initiatives

INITIATIVES FOR THE FIRST HORIZON OF THE PLAN - STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE SECTOR

	PRIORITIES	INITIATIVES*	DRIVERS
ACCESS	1a. Awareness and understanding	Strengthen the foundations for joint service delivery and community development	CLC driven and led
VOICE	2a. Framework for collaboration	Codify and strengthen the sector's coordinated advocacy practices	CLC driven and led with Federation support
	2b. Co-ordinated advocacy approach	Develop and launch sector-wide policy platform	CLC driven and led with Federation support
IMPACT	2a. Data capability	Drive increased usage of modern case management systems	Federation driven and led
		Develop a data strategy for the sector	
		Strengthen the central data repository to enable greater access to relevant data	
SUSTAINABILITY	4a. Financial sustainability	Build the sector's capabilities to access diverse revenue sources	CLC driven and led with Federation support
	4b. Workforce	Build the value proposition for legal and social services careers in the community legal sector	CLC driven and led with Federation support
		Strengthen education and other career pathways into the sector	Federation driven and led
	4c. Shared resources	Develop portal for sector-relevant template documents	Federation driven and led
PEOPLE		Strengthen culturally appropriate, trauma informed and people centred practice	CLC driven and led
		Build capabilities of boards to ensure effective governance	CLC driven and led with Federation support
		Strengthen capability of individual Community Legal Centres to tell stories of impact	CLC driven and led with Federation support

\*Implementation plans have been developed for each of the Horizon 1 initiatives.





# 4.3 IMPLEMENTATION GOVERNANCE

The design of the governance structure for implementation of the 10-Year Plan takes into account that this is a sector-wide strategy and it spans a ten year time frame.

The structure outlines the roles of different stakeholder groups who will be responsible for oversight and implementation of the plan.

The implementation governance structure is set out in Figure 7.

Over the four-year period of Horizon 1 it is expected there will be opportunities for these stakeholder groups to meet to review the progress of initiatives, overall progress against the Plan's priorities, reflect on process and governance, agree any changes to the planned initiatives for the next year, and in the fourth year, plan for the second horizon initiatives. See Appendix C for more detail on the suggested meeting cadence for the Steering Committee.

Figure 7: Plan implementation governance structure



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A. APPROACH

The development of the 10-Year Plan took place over 2021-2022. It commenced in April 2021 with a discussion paper. The discussion paper was the basis for consultation with Community Legal Centres – through written submissions, surveys and participation in workshops during the course of April–May 2021. In addition, between November 2021–April 2022, the Federation commissioned consultations with the broader legal and social sectors, as well as with community members who had either accessed services from the community legal sector or were unable to access services despite being eligible. External consultants who supported the Federation with consultations were Mark Madden, Denise Goldfinch from Golden Thread Consulting and LDC Group.

The final stage of work focussed on articulating the aspirations for the community legal sector, agreeing the strategic directions, priorities and initiatives and documenting the 10-Year Plan. This included further consultation with the community legal sector through a further series of workshops. For this final stage, the Federation was supported by Social Ventures Australia.

## APPENDIX B. POLICY CONTEXT

There are some elements of the current policy context which are relevant to how the Victorian community legal sector operates:

- ▼ The *National Strategic Framework for Legal Assistance* provides the policy framework for all Commonwealth, state and territory government-funded legal assistance, which includes funding for services delivered by the community legal sector.<sup>21</sup> It encourages a collaborative and consistent approach by governments and the legal assistance sector across policy development, service delivery and sector planning.

- ▼ The *National Strategic Framework for Legal Assistance* is supported by the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020–2025 (NLAP), which is the agreement between the Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments for Commonwealth-funded legal assistance.<sup>22</sup> The NLAP prescribes a series of requirements which must be met for states and territories to receive Commonwealth funding for legal assistance services. As at 1 January 2023, 36 Victorian Community Legal Centres receive NLAP funding.
- ▼ The NLAP requires each state and territory government to develop a *Legal Assistance Strategy and Action Plan*. In 2022, the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety published the *Victorian Legal Assistance Strategy 2022–2025*,<sup>23</sup> and the *Victorian Legal Assistance Action Plan 2022–2025*.<sup>24</sup>

## APPENDIX C. STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING CADENCE

The suggested meeting cadence for the Steering Committee for Horizon 1 is as follows:

### YEAR 1

- ▼ 2 x updates on progress of initiatives

### YEAR 2

- ▼ 1 x update on progress of initiatives
- ▼ 1 x review meeting – update on progress plus reflections on first two years (progress overall, learnings about process and governance)

### YEAR 3

- ▼ 1 x update on progress of initiatives
- ▼ 1 x review meeting – update on progress plus discussion on key considerations for strategy horizon 2 planning

### YEAR 4

- ▼ 2 x planning meetings – updates on progress of initiatives plus planning for horizon 2 initiatives

This is provided as a guide and the Steering Committee may adjust the meeting cadence as needed.



# ENDNOTES

1

Victoria Law Foundation, Working in Community Legal Centres in Victoria: Workforce profile, <https://victorialawfoundation.org.au/research/research-reports/working-in-community-legal-centres-in-victoria-workforce-profile>

2

Consolidated data on number of legal services is available for 31 of Victoria's 47 Community Legal Centres. The real number of services when all 47 Community Legal Centres are taken into account, is much greater. Further detail can be found in the Federation of Community Legal Centre's 2021–2022 Annual Report [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/fclc/pages/705/attachments/original/1667429538/2021-2022\\_Federation\\_annual\\_report.pdf?1667429538](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/fclc/pages/705/attachments/original/1667429538/2021-2022_Federation_annual_report.pdf?1667429538)

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Eastern Community Legal Centre, Integrated Practice – Better Practice Principles, <https://eclc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ECLC-Better-Practice-Principles-Integrated-Practice-Report.pdf>

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Law and Justice Foundation New South Wales, Legal Australia-Wide Survey: Legal Need in Australia, [http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/templates/LAW\\_AUS/\\$file/LAW\\_Survey\\_Australia.pdf](http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/templates/LAW_AUS/$file/LAW_Survey_Australia.pdf). Note that Victoria Law Foundation is undertaking its Public Understanding of Law Survey during 2021–2023. This will provide up-to-date, Victorian-specific evidence of legal need. <https://victorialawfoundation.org.au/research/puls>

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Productivity Commission (2014), Access to Justice Arrangements Volume 1, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/access-justice/report/access-justice-volume1.pdf>

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Commonwealth of Australia, (2020), National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement Schedule A, [https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2020-08/nlap\\_schedule\\_a.pdf](https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2020-08/nlap_schedule_a.pdf)

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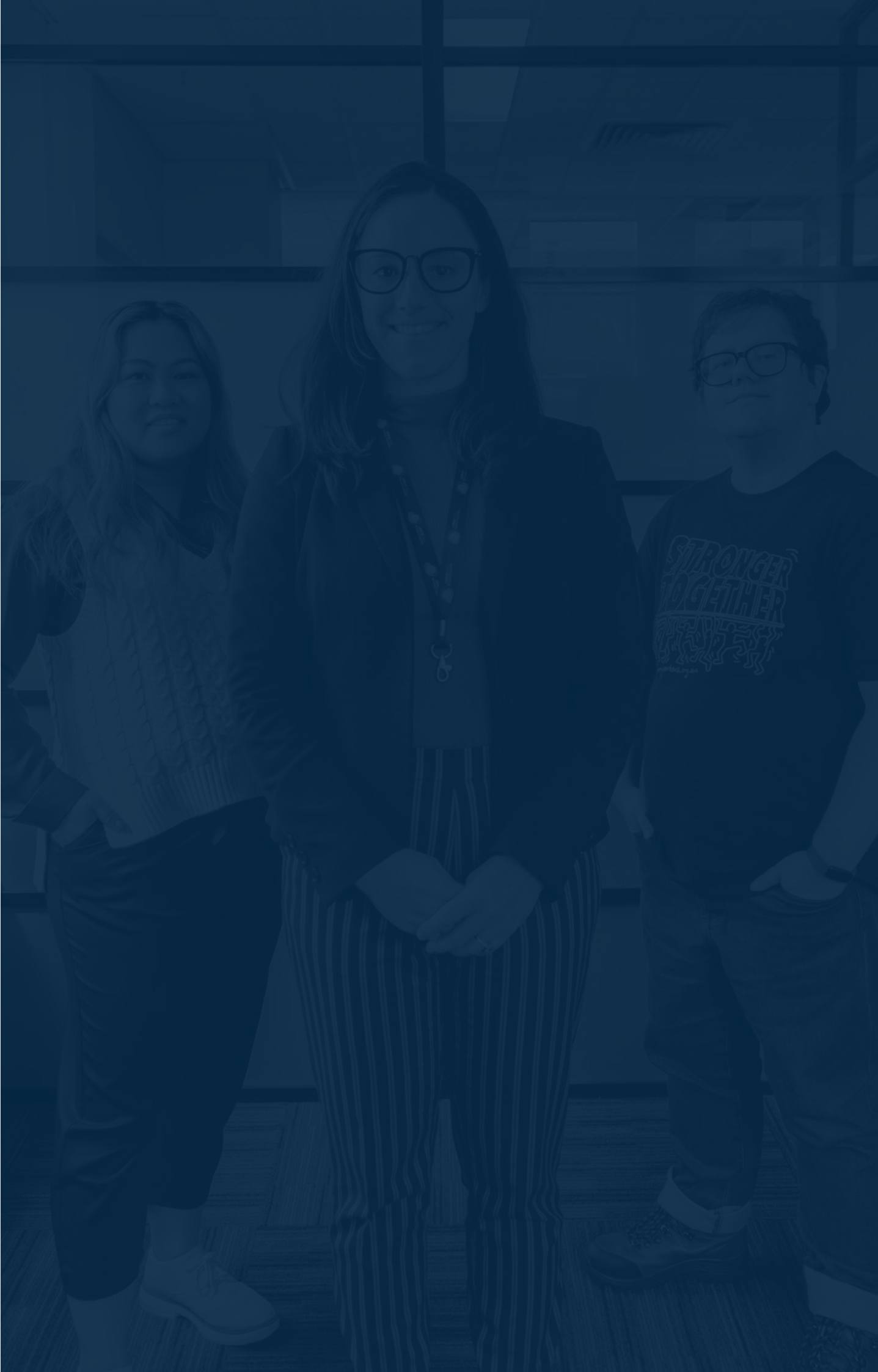
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*A fair and equitable Community*

