



Access to justice impact report

June 2025

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We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of Naarm (Melbourne), the land on which our office sits. We pay our respects to their Elders; past and present. We support Treaty for Victoria.

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Sam Hay KC
Victorian Legal Services Board
Chairperson



Fiona McLeay
Victorian Legal Services Board
CEO and Commissioner



Foreword

Equitable access to justice is fundamental to the rule of law, the cornerstone of our democracy. Without it, there are people within our society who can't exercise their rights with confidence.

All Victorians have a right to effective and high-quality legal services. But complexities within legal and societal systems mean that there are open doors for some, while others are shut out. For many people with legal problems, just resolution may be difficult to achieve, or out of reach entirely. We want to see that change.

As the regulator of the legal profession in Victoria, and a significant funder within the legal system, we are committed to doing our part to increase Victorians' access to justice.

With that goal in mind, we are pleased to present the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's first *Access to justice impact report*. This is a celebration of the hard work our legal sector partners undertake on a daily basis to help people with their legal problems, highlight areas for improvement, and trial new approaches. We are proud to support the justice and law-related entities and programs highlighted in this report – and many others – through funding provided from the Public Purpose Fund, which we administer on behalf of the people of Victoria.

This report also shines a light on how our work as the independent regulator of the legal profession in Victoria seeks to increase access to justice. We recognise that our roles as an independent regulator, funder and investor means we are uniquely positioned to foster and influence change for the better.

We are focused on our mission, and ready for the next phase of work.

Acknowledgements

Our impact as a funder is reliant upon the efforts of our partners and grantees.

Our impact as a regulator is enhanced by working closely with the profession, our Consumer Panel and our sector colleagues.

We thank all our staff, grantees, partners, collaborators and the profession itself for the impact we have created together.

Introduction

Enabling positive impact for access to justice is a core commitment for the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C).

Our definition of access to justice is broader than a person's ability to access the courts, tribunals and dispute resolution services of the justice system.

Access to justice is affected by pervasive inequities, and actual or perceived barriers that impact a person's experience of the legal system.

A person might not:

- + realise an issue is a legal one, and therefore not look for a legal remedy
- + know how to find a lawyer
- + be able to afford legal help
- + get the *right* legal help.

All these factors and more can impinge on a person's ability to seek legal help or get a just resolution to their legal problem – and indeed on their ability to protect and enforce their rights.

Our role

We are in a unique position to positively impact access to justice in Victoria. We contribute through the work that we do, and the work we support others to do.

We have 3 clear roles in access to justice:

we are a regulator

we are a funder

we are an investor.

Across these roles we act as a system shaper to help increase access to justice. Much of the work we do is direct, particularly in our role as regulator of the legal profession.

Other aspects of our work see us acting as an enabler, primarily as a funding partner for our collaborators in the justice and community sectors who share our commitment to ensuring Victorians have equitable access to justice.

In our Corporate Plan 2022–24, for the first time, we identified improving access to justice as one of our strategic objectives and committed to specific actions we would take. We have made steady progress with these commitments, including publishing our Access to Justice Policy Statement and delivering our first impact report.

How the Public Purpose Fund supports access to justice

The work we do and support to increase access to justice is funded through the Public Purpose Fund (PPF). The PPF is a Victorian statutory fund established by the *Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014* (Vic). This legislation defines our responsibility for administering the PPF and gives us the unique capability to direct funds towards increasing access to justice.

A history of the PPF

The PPF, which used to be called the Solicitors Guarantee Fund, was established through the *Legal Profession Practice Act 1946* (Vic) and administered by the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV). Its purpose was to compensate solicitors' clients who had become victims of their solicitor's theft or other dishonest conduct. It eventually came to be funded by the interest on solicitors' trust accounts in the 1960s and, in 1996, it began to be administered by the Legal Services Board.

Since the move to interest-bearing trust accounts, the PPF's purposes have been expanded to support a range of justice-related objectives, including regulating the profession and assisting legal aid, the Victoria Law Foundation and other organisations working to improve access to justice.

How the PPF works

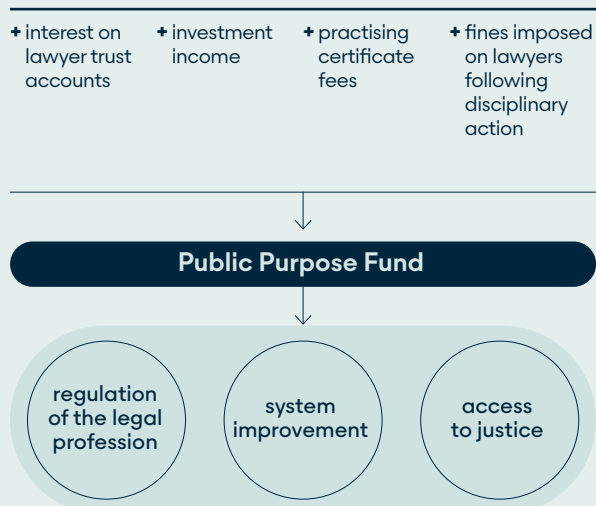
Money comes into the PPF from:

- + interest on lawyer trust accounts
- + investment income
- + practising certificate fees
- + fines imposed on lawyers following disciplinary action.

Money is allocated out of the PPF according to three themes:

1. regulation of the legal profession
2. system improvement
3. access to justice.

Our access to justice funding aims to boost services for those who can't afford legal advice and representation, to develop more effective ways to increase access to legal help, and to improve the quality of legal services. This includes helping those who are especially disadvantaged or marginalised. It also extends to conducting research and funding initiatives that may minimise a person's engagement with the justice system, for example through supporting health or housing.



How to read this report

This report tells the story of our impact on access to justice from 2022 to 2024. There's complexity involved in reporting the impact we make, and enable others to make, because of the diversity of the work and the way it manifests over time to improve access to justice.

We've addressed this complexity by dividing our story into 3 sections: the impact we have in our roles as a regulator, funder and investor.

Within each of these sections, we've identified the audiences we're targeting as part of that role: the community, the legal sector and the justice system.

And finally, for each of these target audiences, we've documented our work, and the work we've enabled, in terms of our Shared Outcomes Framework.

The Shared Outcomes Framework was developed and launched in early 2024 to give our funded organisations a way to talk about the impact of the funding they receive from the PPF. The framework:

acknowledges that we work collaboratively to make a collective impact

specifies a set of activities and shared outcomes that we are seeking to fund

enables us to monitor and evaluate the impact of PPF funding in the legal sector.

In this report, we've used this framework to structure our impact story, beyond its usual application to our funded organisations.

We provide a representation of the **Shared Outcomes Framework and our role on the following page.**

Under each outcome, we've selected representative initiatives (the work), with evidence of emerging or established impact. We could have aligned some examples with multiple outcomes – but no matter where we've placed them, their impact speaks for itself.

This report is not an exhaustive catalogue of all the work we've undertaken ourselves, or funded, to improve access to justice. Rather, it's a showcase of some of the work that we believe has made a tangible, demonstrable difference.

Shared Outcomes Framework

our shared outcomes and impact

our vision

VLSB+C exists to maintain and enhance public trust and confidence in the legal profession in Victoria

our role and what we have done

legal sector

Legal professionals effectively and efficiently comply with their professional obligations.
The legal sector has improved understanding of community needs and expectations.
The legal sector designs and delivers effective, inclusive services to better meet community needs.
Legal professionals access resources and professional development to support high standards of practice and ethics.

community

The legal profession is robust, sustainable and provides a satisfying career path.
Laws, policies and systems reflect and respond to community priorities and needs.
Organisations have authoritative voice and influence government policy and practice.
Organisations are able to advocate for improvements in policies, legislation and systems.

justice system

Community members can access timely, appropriate and effective legal services.
Barriers to affordable and accessible legal services are reduced.
First Nations people have increased access to justice.
The community has greater trust and confidence in the legal profession and the justice system.



we are a **regulator**

we support a functional justice system in Victoria through effective regulation of the legal profession
page 10

1

the work

Ensuring access to quality legal representation
Intervening early
Guiding the profession on ethical issues
Addressing sexual harassment
Understanding the experience of consumers
Improving legal information for consumers
Building First Nations cultural awareness
Focusing on lawyer wellbeing
Making our services more accessible



we are a **funder**

we are committed to supporting organisations and projects that increase access to justice in Victoria
page 30

2

Djirra
Federation of Community Legal Centres
Justice Connect
Law Institute of Victoria
Law Library of Victoria
Sentencing Advisory Council
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Victorian Bar Association
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
Victoria Law Foundation
Victorian Law Reform Commission
Victorian Legal Admission Board
Victoria Legal Aid
Grant recipients

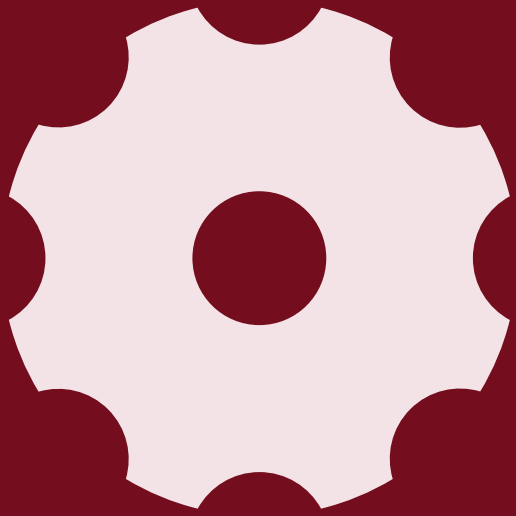


we are an **investor**

we are committed to supporting access to justice in the way we invest public monies held in the Public Purpose Fund (PPF)
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3

Building organisational capability
Establishing an impact investment fund
Incorporating environmental, social and governance principles in our investments



we are a regulator

we support a functional justice
system in Victoria through effective
regulation of the legal profession

All Victorians are entitled to access effective, high-quality and ethical legal services and remedies. But when the public loses confidence and trust in the legal profession, access to justice is diminished.

As a regulator, we're empowered by the *Legal Profession Uniform Application Act 2014* (Vic) to provide assurance to the Victorian community about the quality of the lawyers we license, and to hold them to account for their conduct and competence. We work to be a neutral umpire who helps with disputes between lawyers and consumers, and makes sure consumers are informed about their own rights and their lawyer's responsibilities.

Over the past 3 years in our role as regulator, we've:

improved our licensing process and strengthened our early intervention work, to ensure lawyers meet their professional obligations and provide ethical and high-quality legal services

provided guidance to lawyers on risk management and professional boundaries, and self-assessment tools for lawyers to assess and improve their professional development, which helps support high standards of practice

established a lawyer wellbeing program of work to address systemic issues affecting poor wellbeing in the profession; undertaken research into the supervision of new lawyers; and continued to lead a targeted approach to sexual harassment, to support a robust, ethical and sustainable legal profession

executed a public awareness campaign around consumer rights when engaging a lawyer, to increase the confidence and capability of the community to address problems they may experience with their lawyer

improved the accessibility of our services, worked closely with our independent Consumer Panel, established a dedicated and independent research function to guide our work, and developed our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to strengthen our own response to the needs of the community.

Our regulatory approach

We take a proportionate, risk-based approach to the use of our regulatory tools, with the aim of deterring lawyers from engaging in risky conduct in the first place.

We license lawyers and assess their ongoing fitness to engage in legal practice each year. Where there are concerns about the service or conduct of a lawyer, our regulatory teams respond, investigate and act.

We also manage the Fidelity Fund, which compensates people who have lost trust money or trust property due to the dishonest or fraudulent behaviour of a lawyer, an employee of a law practice, or a barrister's clerk.



Regulatory impact snapshot: 2022–24

Practising certificates

81,034

practising certificates issued

6,158

new legal practitioners admitted

29,187

legal practitioners registered in Victoria
as of December 2024

Consumer complaints

14,903

consumer enquiries answered

3,028

enquiries progressed to complaints

602

complaints resolved through mediation

43

Fidelity Fund claims totalling \$6,886,078
paid to consumers from the Fidelity Fund

We regulate to make an impact in the legal sector

THE OUTCOME

legal professionals effectively and efficiently comply with their professional obligations

THE WORK

Early Intervention Strategy

Since the launch of our Early Intervention Strategy in 2022, we're increasingly using alternative regulatory tools designed to help us identify lawyers engaging in risky behaviours and poor practice management before more intrusive regulatory measures are needed. Working like this means we can anticipate areas where lawyers may need support and help them get back on track when they're heading down a wrong path. This ultimately helps to avoid or reduce harm to consumers and helps maintain confidence in the profession.

Identifying systemic issues through compliance auditing

A rigorous and strategic approach to compliance fosters accountability, improves operational integrity, and delivers measurable benefits across the profession.

We know that our response to emerging, systemic issues goes beyond the individual law practice. The underlying causes of what requires an audit or investigation are usually shared by the profession as a whole. Compliance audits focus on practice management generally – rather than investigating the details of a complaint – to identify systemic issues that could prevent a law practice from meeting expectations.

By identifying those issues early, making compliance as easy and as clear as possible, creating avenues for law practices to receive support, or intervening promptly and decisively when necessary, we are contributing to a healthy, safe and accessible profession.

Our external Compliance Audit Panel, established in 2023, is made up of 29 experts with diverse skills and qualifications.

Success looks different for each audit, ranging from law practices proactively adopting our recommendations, through to our regulatory teams taking further action after identifying serious conduct issues.

Since 2022, we've concluded 61 compliance audits. Of these, 26% identified no compliance issues. However, in 41% of audits we identified a moderate compliance issue and in 20% we identified serious compliance issues that required us to take regulatory action, such as cancelling a practising certificate or appointing a manager to intervene in the practice and prevent further harm to consumers. The remaining 13% of audits identified minor issues and we provided practice management assistance and directions to rectify them.





Compliance audits completed in FY 2022–2024, by outcome (n=61)

20%

SERIOUS compliance issues identified – regulatory action taken

41%

MODERATE compliance issues identified – regulatory action taken

13%

MINOR compliance issues identified – assistance and direction provided

26%

NO compliance issues

Case study

Early intervention leads to vital support

After a protracted investigation into alleged property settlement failures by a sole legal practitioner, our regulatory teams became concerned that the practitioner was failing to meet their obligations to clients in general.

The lawyer didn't answer our requests for further information, so we undertook a compliance audit to find out whether the failed property settlements were an isolated issue, or whether the lawyer was failing to meet their obligations more broadly.

The audit found that the lawyer was complying with most of their professional obligations but was struggling to communicate with their clients due to poor systems, structures and supports.

We recommended a range of improvements to help them better manage their practice, many of which they adopted. The law practice has since resolved its issues, and its clients are experiencing a better level of service as a result.

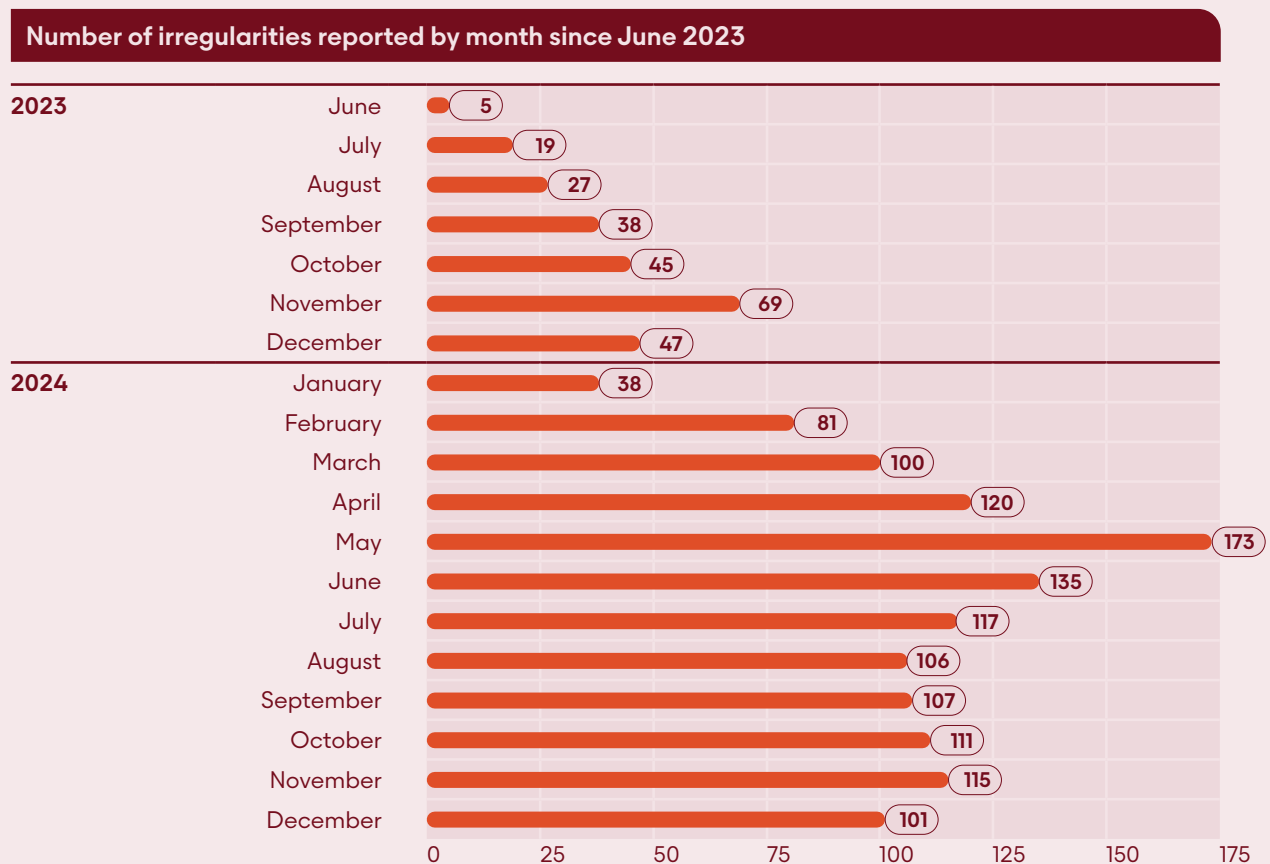
Improving trust account irregularity detection

Our online reporting form for trust account irregularities was launched in June 2023. It was designed to help lawyers and law practices notify us quickly and easily when they identify a deficiency in a trust account or trust ledger.

The form takes just minutes to complete, and we are notified immediately. This enables us to act promptly to protect consumers' trust money.

The new form has resulted in a steady increase in trust account irregularity reporting. Since June 2023, we have received over 1,500 irregularity reports representing \$63.8 million in trust money. Most of these reports concern issues that were easily rectified, such as mistakes in trust account statements, accidental intermixing of money, and other minor reporting irregularities.

Gathering this information allows us to communicate early with law practices, banks and the public about the common issues that we see and how to avoid them.





Access to quality legal representation

Access to justice is not limited to access to legal representation. It includes access to quality representation by appropriately qualified and skilled legal practitioners. Our licensing function is fundamental to ensuring lawyers are competent, ethical and licensed according to their level of experience and the legal services they provide.

Each year, Victorian lawyers must apply to renew their practising certificate and disclose certain matters that go to whether they are fit and proper to practise. Being fit and proper is not just about having the necessary qualifications. It is about being competent, ethical and able to carry out the inherent requirements of the role.

We carefully consider disclosures to ensure lawyers meet the standards required to hold a practising certificate. If we have concerns about a lawyer's fitness to practise, we may vary, suspend or cancel their practising certificate, refuse to grant the certificate in the first instance, or apply conditions that help to mitigate any risk to consumers or the broader public.

By upholding these standards, we protect consumers from unethical behaviour and enhance confidence in legal services.

We also play a key role in improving access to justice by maintaining a public register of lawyers in Victoria with a current practising certificate and any disciplinary action taken against them within the last 5 years. This helps consumers ensure their lawyer is appropriately qualified and entitled to practise law in Victoria so they can make an informed decision about who they want to act for them.

A better licensing process

In recent years, we've streamlined the renewal process, improved our communications to the profession, and enhanced collaboration with our stakeholders at the Law Institute of Victoria, the Victorian Bar Association (Victorian Bar) and the Legal Practitioners' Liability Committee. This has led to a more efficient renewal experience, and resulted in:

- + a record number of applications submitted by the deadline
- + a 4% reduction in licensing enquiries during the renewal period despite an 8% increase in applications
- + 85% of practitioners reporting the ability to access the information they needed for renewal within the online portal ¹
- + lawyers reporting a high level of satisfaction with the process, which took less than 10 minutes for most applicants ²
- + a rating of 8.8 out of 10 from our stakeholders for fostering trust and confidence in the legal profession. ³

We are designing a new online practising certificate renewal portal as part of our Digital Transformation Strategy. The portal will offer a more integrated and seamless experience for lawyers complying with their regulatory obligations.

¹ According to our 2024 practising certificate renewal survey, which was completed by nearly 400 lawyers.

² Ibid.

³ According to a 2024 survey we conducted with the Law Institute of Victoria, the Victorian Bar and the Legal Practitioners' Liability Committee.

THE OUTCOME

legal professionals access resources and professional development to support high standards of practice and ethics

THE WORK

Guiding the profession on ethical issues

Guidance on professional boundaries

The Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants was an independent inquiry into Victoria Police's recruitment and management of police informants, subject to the legal obligations of confidentiality or privilege.

The Royal Commission handed down its final report in late 2020, with recommendations on the need for specific guidance for the legal profession on maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, and further guidance on the duty of confidentiality and its exceptions.

In June 2023, we published guidance on professional boundaries, which:

- + explained why they matter and how they link with professional conduct rules
- + provided examples of boundary-compromising situations
- + recommended where to go for further information and support.

This guidance and its accompanying resources had been viewed over 1,700 times on our website by December 2024.

Guidance on the duty of confidentiality and its exceptions was published in August 2024. It outlined factors to assist lawyers to assess whether a disclosure of confidential information is justified, where lawyers can go for ethical advice, and how to document a decision to disclose. By December 2024, this guidance had been viewed nearly 3,000 times.

Ethics self-assessment tools to enhance continuing professional development and guidance for training providers

Ethics are at the heart of the legal profession, and ethical lawyers are fundamental to public trust and confidence in the legal system.

As lawyers progress through their career, they'll encounter new challenges and ethical dilemmas in an evolving legal profession and landscape.

In July 2023, in line with the recommendations of our independent review into continuing professional development (CPD) in Victoria, we published a suite of tools to help lawyers understand the essential components of ethical practice. The tools are designed to support lawyers to reflect on their ethical development needs at specific stages in their career. There have been close to 1,000 downloads since publication in July 2023, with engagement peaks at launch and during the practising certificate renewal period.



Understanding the impacts of lawyer supervision

Past research and anecdotal reports have indicated that early career lawyers are at greater risk of negative workplace experiences that impact on their wellbeing.

In 2021, we began a multi-stage research project to improve our understanding of early career lawyers' experiences. The first stage of our research, a literature review on the experiences of early career lawyers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK, revealed that poor supervision of early career lawyers was a key issue, with negative implications for their wellbeing and later professional development.

The review also revealed that supervised legal practice (SLP), a period of compulsory supervision when early career lawyers are first admitted to the profession, is a unique legislative requirement in Australia – and wasn't featured in other common law jurisdictions.

Following the literature review, in 2023, we surveyed 325 supervised lawyers about their experiences during SLP and, in 2024, we surveyed 409 supervising lawyers about their experiences supervising early career lawyers under an SLP condition. The survey of supervised early-career lawyers revealed that the majority of supervised and supervising lawyers agreed that SLP is beneficial, but also uncovered concerning trends about their experiences and wellbeing.

In response to these findings, we:

- + highlighted inadequate supervision (both generally, and specifically regarding early career lawyers) in our 2023 and 2024 Risk Outlooks. Our regular Risk Outlooks spotlight emerging and enduring risks facing the profession, which are also the areas where we intend to focus our regulatory activities
- + shared our findings with the profession, to highlight the benefits of SLP for supervised and supervising lawyers, as well as the challenges they experience during this important time in early career lawyers' development
- + are developing a regulatory strategy, targeted at improving the experiences of early career lawyers and their supervisors – this strategy will include development of products to reduce some of the challenges and resource burdens that supervised and supervising lawyers experience during SLP, such as a competency framework for early career lawyers
- + conducted targeted discussions with legal professionals and organisations about the prevalence and characteristics of risks faced by the legal profession, as part of our Early Intervention Strategy (p 14) – we shared the insights back with the legal profession to improve risk management, drew on them to inform our work, and expanded the focus on lawyer supervision in these targeted discussions.

THE OUTCOME

the legal profession is robust, sustainable and provides a satisfying career path

THE WORK

Focusing on better lawyer wellbeing

Research shows that poor wellbeing is widespread in the legal profession. So, we have increased our focus on lawyer wellbeing, with the goal of lawyers staying safe and well while delivering high-quality legal services.

To effect genuine and lasting change, we believe that the focus needs to move beyond individual resilience to the system-wide drivers of poor wellbeing.

Our Lawyer Wellbeing Program focuses on collaboration and communications, pilot and practice, regulatory processes, and research and measurement.

In 2024, the Lawyer Wellbeing Program:

- + undertook extensive consultation with the sector to develop a system-level Theory of Change for wellbeing in the profession. This work was preceded by a Systems Effects report by First Person Consulting, which identified 45 factors driving poor lawyer wellbeing and highlighted the most impactful intervention opportunities
- + led a collaboration across NSW and WA legal regulators supporting researchers at the Australian National University and the University of Melbourne to explore lawyer wellbeing, workplace experiences and ethics
- + began developing lawyer wellbeing guidelines, which will be shared in mid-2025 and will provide evidence-based, actionable steps legal organisations can take to improve wellbeing in legal workplaces
- + led a collaboration across NSW and WA legal regulators and the Law Institute of Victoria to commission a discussion paper on managing vicarious trauma in the legal profession.

The legal profession is eager to engage with content about lawyer wellbeing. From 2023 to 2024, visitation to our lawyer wellbeing webpages more than doubled, from 4,981 in 2023 to 12,165 in 2024. Visitation peaked between June and September 2024, in response to improvements we made to navigation and content on our lawyer wellbeing projects.

In 2025, we'll deliver the system-level Theory of Change framework with resources to support implementation, including a series of funded pilots across the profession. We'll also use the Theory of Change to explore the impact on lawyer wellbeing of our regulatory role.

Also in 2025, we'll publish our Lawyer Wellbeing guidelines, the research into lawyer wellbeing, workplace experiences and ethics, and a discussion paper and resources on managing vicarious trauma in the profession.

Addressing sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a systemic issue that threatens the health and sustainability of the legal profession. Our 2019 *Sexual Harassment in the Victorian Legal Sector* survey of more than 2,300 Victorian lawyers found that 36% of legal professionals have experienced sexual harassment. This is of great concern to us.

Our Sexual Harassment Regulatory Strategy, established in 2019, focuses on working with the profession to build the knowledge and skill to address and prevent sexual harassment in legal workplaces.



Making it easier to report sexual harassment

In September 2021, we launched Australia's first online sexual harassment reporting tool for the legal profession. It's designed to reduce the barriers to reporting identified in the *Sexual Harassment in the Victorian Legal Sector* survey, including:

- + a belief that the complaint process would be embarrassing, difficult or complicated
- + a concern for current job or future career prospects
- + a distrust or lack of confidence in the system in place to address the incident
- + a wish to avoid confronting the harasser.

Our online reporting tool responds to these barriers by ensuring:

- + users can decide to report anonymously, or identify themselves at any point throughout the process
- + the reporting tool is available via our website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- + users can submit a report in a single session, or save their progress and complete the report across multiple sessions
- + the reporting tool is available to all participants in legal workplaces, including legal support staff and clients, to report sexual harassment by any other participant in a legal workplace.

The online reporting tool has contributed to an increase in reports, suggesting that the option to report harassment anonymously lowered the barrier to reporting. In the online reporting tool's first year, reporting shifted from being done primarily via email to 70% via the online reporting tool. Since the tool was launched, we've received more than 60 reports.

Taking action

Even when reports are submitted anonymously, they offer valuable information that we can use to begin an investigation into a lawyers' conduct, trigger a compliance audit into a practice, or start monitoring the suitability of a lawyer to retain their practising certificate.

Nearly 40% of sexual harassment reports have resulted in us taking regulatory action, such as investigating a complaint, prosecuting offences, and suspending or cancelling practising certificates.

One lawyer who sexually harassed their client had their practising certificate suspended. Another lawyer who sexually harassed their client was found guilty of professional misconduct when we brought their case to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The lawyer was reprimanded, suspended from legal practice for two months – after having spent a considerable amount of time out of practice as a result of our other regulatory action – and ordered to pay \$20,000 in legal costs.

Sometimes regulatory action is not possible because the person making the report is reluctant to participate in the complaint process. However, there is still value in these reports because they provide the person agency and may increase the likelihood of future engagement.

THE OUTCOME

the legal sector has improved understanding of community needs and expectations

THE WORK

Supporting lawyers to improve costs practices

According to the *Public Understanding of Law Survey 2023*, more than 95% of Victorians trust lawyers to act ethically and within the law, and to be knowledgeable and skilled in their work. But 38%, more than a third of Victorians, expect lawyers to overcharge them.

Costs issues are the single largest source of consumer complaints we receive. So, we're focused on working with consumers, lawyers and policymakers to improve practices around costs and costs disclosure, with the goal of giving more clarity for consumers to make informed decisions.

In 2024, we began trialling a novel approach of engaging directly with lawyers or firms frequently at the centre of costs complaints. Our Costs Support Initiative sees our regulatory teams collaborating with the lawyer or firm to review their costs communication documents and consider best practice improvements. The lawyers who have participated to date have been very engaged with the initiative and open to adopting our suggested changes.

Understanding consumer experience

Consumer Panel

Our Consumer Panel was established in 2020 to foster legal services that are responsive to consumer needs. It's the only panel of its kind in Australia, and consists of a group of diverse experts with a wealth of experience across consumer law, policy and advocacy.

The Consumer Panel focuses on providing policy and research expertise to increase our awareness of how consumers interact with and experience legal services. This has pushed us to regulate in a more consumer-centric way.

When we make decisions that meet the consumer where they are, we help to make justice more accessible for all Victorians.

The Consumer Panel has advised on VLSB+C projects, including:

- + a framework to understand and better meet the needs of consumers experiencing vulnerability
- + a deep dive into the root causes of costs complaints
- + a review of our complaints-handling processes.



A dedicated Research team

In 2021, the Consumer Panel commissioned a literature review of research into consumers' experiences of legal services and the operation of the markets for legal services. The report highlighted the need for more research into the experiences of consumers of legal services.

Therefore, in 2024, we established a dedicated Research team. Working with the Consumer Panel, the Research team has been working on the Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (LULU) surveys – a groundbreaking research program to illuminate consumer experiences of using lawyers and locate unresolved legal needs. This research will help to drive evidence-based and consumer-focused regulation.

Building First Nations cultural awareness

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to, and unequal treatment within, the justice system.

Building cultural awareness and capability within our organisation helps us understand First Nations consumers' needs and expectations.

In 2023, we developed our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We partnered with Aboriginal-owned Not Just a Consultancy (NJAC) to devise our RAP and deliver First Nations Truth-telling training to our staff as a necessary first step. The training is an immersive session about First Nations people's experiences of colonisation.

Our first RAP (called a Reflect RAP, as part of a four-stage process) was endorsed by Reconciliation Australia in 2024. Since the plan's endorsement, we've established a RAP working group and implemented 45 of the 47 actions we committed to, including:

- + developing a report detailing best practice guidelines on First Nations partnerships and a business case for procurement from First Nations-owned businesses
- + conducting a review of anti-discrimination provisions and future needs within People and Culture policies and procedures
- + delivering NJAC's First Nations Truth-telling training to more than 170 staff, including all new starters, to improve our shared understanding of Australia's history and its ongoing impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

THE OUTCOME

the legal sector designs and delivers effective, inclusive services to better meet community needs

THE WORK

Accessible services and information

In 2022, we underwent a voluntary review of our complaints-handling process by the Victorian Ombudsman, which recommended improvements to accessibility for people with communication difficulties. Since the review, we have worked across the organisation to increase accessibility and uplift the way we provide services to the whole community.

Web accessibility

We've worked to meet web accessibility standards, by using plain language, captioning video formats, and adding alternative text to images.

Scope Communication Access accreditation

In 2023, we began the Scope Communication Access accreditation program. As part of achieving accreditation, we:

- + established the Communication Challenges and Vulnerability Reference Group, and created a communication tool that was tested by people with lived experience. The communication tool supports our customer-facing staff to communicate more effectively with people with communication difficulties (nearly 60% of our customer-facing staff received training in using the tool and more staff will be trained over the next year)
- + added 2 Scope e-learning modules to mandatory staff training, on disability and awareness, and how to better interact with people with communication difficulties.

In early 2025, we passed the assessment phase of our accreditation journey and can now display the internationally recognised Communication Access Symbol and will be promoted as an inclusive organisation through the Scope directory of Communication Accessible Places.

Improving our communications

Recognising that plain language communications improve everyone's understanding, we've begun a major program of work to improve the day-to-day communications of our customer-facing teams.

We've developed an Operational Communications Framework to guide people in communicating clearly, consistently and in line with the organisation's approved style and tone.

We will be revising a large portion of our communications in line with the framework over the next year. This work will ensure all communication touchpoints throughout our processes are tailored to each customer's needs and communication preferences, and reflect the stage of the process they are in.

The framework is supported by staff training. In 2024, we ran 2 plain language training sessions for staff, with more planned for 2025.



Accessible operational processes

In 2023–24, we improved our systems with feedback from people with disabilities by:

- + embedding social procurement into our relevant policies and processes
- + reviewing our complaint and feedback systems to include a disability-related category
- + developing guidance for our staff to recognise and respond to the needs of people who may need extra support when interacting with us, and making reasonable adjustments to accommodate our customers' unique needs and circumstances
- + improving our engagement and communication by developing a new Client Services Charter
- + reviewing our Grants Program procedures to include access and inclusion requirements
- + adding tools and resources to our website to create awareness of our role in access to justice and help people find assistance.

Improving the experience of our customers

We know that understanding the experience of lawyers and consumers who engage with us is key to improving how we work and deliver our services.

In 2024, we trialled a customer experience survey approach with a segment of the consumers and lawyers who interact with us, to systematically track satisfaction with our staff, processes and communications.

This work will be used to develop an ongoing insights program that uses post-case feedback, evaluation and research data to support continuous improvement within the organisation.



We regulate to make an impact in the community

THE OUTCOME

community members have increased capability to address or prevent legal problems

THE WORK

Improving legal information for consumers

Explaining 'no win, no fee'

Confusion about the meaning of 'no win, no fee' legal costs agreements often leads to complaints about the lawyers offering them. So, we developed 2 video resources to help improve the public's understanding of what 'no win, no fee' means. One was an animated explainer; the other was an interview format, discussing potential pitfalls for consumers. We launched the videos during Victorian Law Week in May 2023.

- *Watch the video at:*
lsbc.vic.gov.au/consumers/legal-costs-and-billing/no-win-no-fee-cost-agreements

Six Questions to Ask About Legal Costs campaign

Maintaining our focus on costs, we developed a campaign to educate consumers on 6 questions they can ask a prospective lawyer about legal costs. This campaign, which included a video and Easy English fact sheet, was designed to help consumers of legal services have productive conversations about legal costs and find the lawyer that will be most suitable for their needs.

- *Watch the video at:*
lsbc.vic.gov.au/consumers/legal-costs-and-billing/six-questions-ask-about-legal-costs

Your Right to Ask campaign

In 2020, the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants were handed down. Recommendation 76 called for VLSB+C to collaborate with the legal sector to 'prepare and distribute communications aimed at restoring and promoting public and client confidence in the legal profession'.

In April 2023, we launched a public education campaign to help consumers of legal services understand their lawyer's obligations to them as a client. The campaign provided questions on how to prepare for their first appointment, what to do if conflicts of interest arise, how a lawyer might bill, and how a case might be managed.

The campaign ran for 10 weeks, with information available in Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hindi, Vietnamese, Punjabi, English and Easy English to reach the diverse Victorian audience. This was the first time we'd delivered a communications campaign of this scale and type, which was developed in collaboration with several Victorian legal and justice organisations.

- *Find out more at:*
lsbc.vic.gov.au/consumers/ask-your-lawyer



Ten weeks of Your Right to Ask: the impact

31.5 million

impressions

17,326

Google search impressions

42,519

unique website visitors

517,819

video views on YouTube

↑ 28%

website traffic

↑ 7%

general enquiries

95%

of consumer webpage traffic flowed
from targeted advertising

↑ 215%

consumer webpage traffic during
campaign vs. previous 10 weeks

Community Legal Education Working Group

In 2022–23, we participated in a multi-agency Community Legal Education Working Group involving representatives from several community legal services, as well as:

- + Victoria Law Foundation
- + Victoria Legal Aid
- + Victorian Ombudsman
- + Law Institute of Victoria
- + Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- + Federation of Community Legal Centres.

Member organisations explored the types of legal issues consumers experience and their legal information needs, and shared resources to help improve consumer legal education. We harnessed this group to broaden the reach of the Six Questions to Ask About Legal Costs, No win – No fee, and Your Right to Ask campaigns.

Making it easier to find the information consumers need

Our website has a dedicated section for consumers of legal services, with information on legal costs, how to choose and work with your lawyer, your rights as a consumer of legal services, and more.

To make it easier to find the right information quickly, we analysed website traffic, search results and user feedback to improve our website's content and information architecture.

Consumer web content improvements led to a 30% increase in traffic between 2022 and December 2024. User satisfaction also increased, with 59% of website users indicating that the pages they viewed were 'helpful', compared to 40% in 2022.



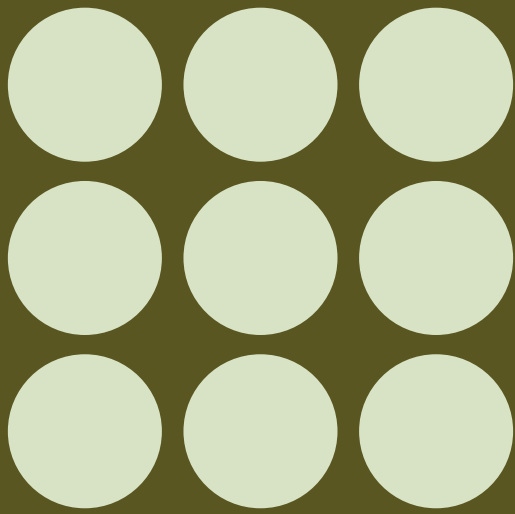
Website traffic and user satisfaction

Average monthly visits to the consumer content of the VLSB+C website, by year



Percentage of website users who said pages were helpful, by year





we are a funder

we are committed to supporting
organisations and projects
that increase access to justice
in Victoria

Each year, we distribute funding to increase access to justice in Victoria. We're focused on funding programs that benefit consumers of legal services and the wider public.

Our funding approach

We provide funding in three distinct ways:

- + ongoing and recurring funding to justice sector organisations
- + annual grants programs
- + sponsorships.

The Shared Outcomes Framework, launched in 2024, helps us better understand the impact of our funding. We can now categorise the funding we provide by activity and outcome.

Funded organisations

We provide significant ongoing funding to organisations with regulatory or delegated responsibilities under the Uniform Law framework, and other legal and justice sector organisations, to provide legal assistance and support services across the state.

These include:

- + Victoria Legal Aid
- + Victorian Legal Admissions Board
- + Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
- + Law Institute of Victoria
- + Victorian Bar.

Between 2022 and 2024, we provided \$141.9 million to 13 organisations, supporting them to assist in the regulation of the profession, deliver accessible legal services and contribute to lasting systemic change.

Grants Program

Our Grants Program provides targeted funding focused on 3 goals:

- + accessible legal services
- + holistic and diversionary responses
- + fairer laws and processes.

Our vision is of a justice system that:

- + enables people to exercise their rights
- + addresses systemic injustices through policy reform
- + implements evidence-based, holistic responses
- + works to divert people away from the justice system.

Since 2007, we've provided more than \$97 million through 339 grants that make our justice system fairer and more accessible for everyone.

Our grants model has two distinct streams: Change Grants and Strong Foundations Grants.

Change Grants

Our annual Change Grants provide funding for individual projects that address issues or gaps limiting people's access to justice. These are allocated either through general rounds, or themed rounds focusing on priority areas, like our recent Housing Justice round. From 2022 to 2024, we have awarded \$24.9 million in Change Grants funding to support 68 projects being delivered by legal and community organisations across Victoria.

Strong Foundations Grants

The Strong Foundations Grants stream emerged from our 2023 Grants Strategy to help organisations build capacity and achieve their strategic objectives. This flexible funding is provided over 3 to 5 years and has already seen 8 organisations receive \$7 million in funding.

Sponsorship

We sponsor events, conferences, awards and scholarship programs that align with our strategic objectives. In 2024, we provided \$134,523 for activities and events that raised awareness about systemic justice issues, including lawyer wellbeing, health-justice partnerships and First Nations-focused events.

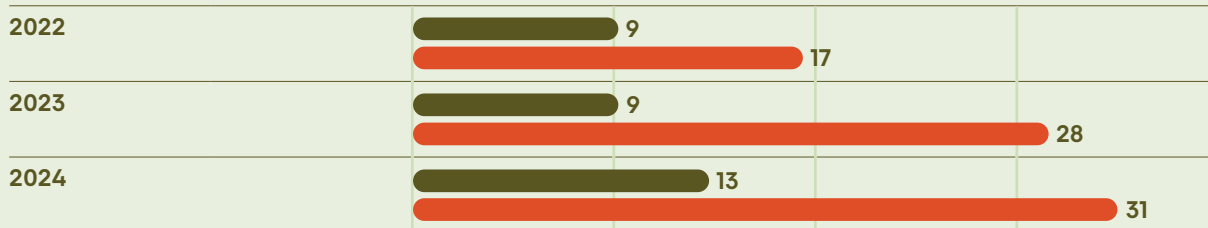
In 2024, we reviewed our Sponsorship Policy to clarify the ways we can measure the positive impact of sponsorships. From 2025, we will measure and evaluate the impact that our sponsorships have across the sector.



Funding impact snapshot: 2022–24

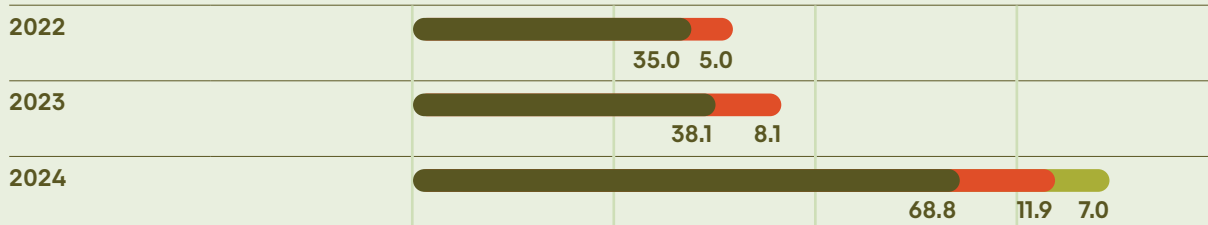
Funding provided, by number

- organisations we have funded
- grants we have provided



Funding, by value (\$ million)

- funding to organisations
- funding through Change Grants
- funding through Strong Foundations Grants



Grants

68

we awarded 68 grants over
3 Change Grants rounds

57

organisations
received grants

\$25m

\$25 million worth
of grants went to access
to justice initiatives

Funding

\$141.9m

\$141.9 million in funding was
distributed from the PPF

13

organisations
were funded

Sponsorship

\$134,523

was provided as sponsorship

6

organisations
were sponsored

Zooming out on impact (\$ million)

\$1.7m

housing security

\$1.7 million to support people in understanding their legal rights regarding housing security

\$3.5m

family violence

\$3.5 million to improve access to justice for women and children with experiences of family violence

\$3.6m

First Nations

\$3.6 million to improve access to justice for First Nations people

\$4.3m

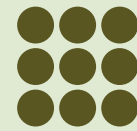
health justice

\$4.3 million to health justice and improved access to justice for people with disability

\$4.5m

young people

\$4.5 million to improve access to justice for youth and young people



Distribution of base funding to organisations and funding for Change Grants, by outcome

● Funded organisations FY2024

● Change Grants FY2022–24



Note: organisations / grantees could select multiple outcomes and not all outcomes are applicable to our grants program.

We fund to make an impact in the community

THE OUTCOME

barriers to affordable and accessible legal services are reduced

THE WORK

More access to Victoria Legal Aid (VLA)

Our support helps VLA fund regular operations, digital transformation work, cyber security and First Nations services.

In the financial year 2023–24, VLA provided a range of high and low intensity services to 82,606 clients across Victoria. Over that period, our funding constituted 17% of Victoria Legal Aid's total core services funding. This means that our funding supported the delivery of core services to over 14,000 individuals through:

18,900+

duty lawyer services

6,800+

grants of legal assistance

6,100+

legal advice and minor assistance

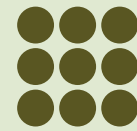
10,200+

family violence services.

Our funding also helped VLA to modernise its Legal Help Chat line, including a successful trial of providing advice via webchat for family violence cases.

This is an innovative approach to reaching marginalised groups, such as women and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. It has additional benefits of being enabled with trauma-informed language, and the provision of a record of the advice through transcripts.

The trial's evaluation showed a high level of satisfaction, with clients commenting that they found the service safer, easy and convenient to access and use.



Victorian Bar Pro Bono Scheme

We provided \$1.3 million to support improvements to the Victorian Bar Pro Bono Scheme (VBPBS), administered by Justice Connect. The VBPBS assists the courts to connect people in need with barristers for pro bono, or free-of-charge, legal assistance.

In 2023–24, barristers accepted 210 pro bono briefs through the VBPBS, with cases spanning civil and criminal matters in practice areas such as:

- + banking and finance
- + care and protection
- + compensation law
- + discrimination law.

Victorian barristers also receive direct referrals for pro bono assistance under arrangements in place with various courts and tribunals. The Victorian Bar's Pro Bono Committee advises the Bar Council on all matters relating to the provision of pro bono services by members of the Bar. The Bar promotes and encourages barristers of all levels of seniority to participate in the provision of pro bono services and encourages their involvement in the VBPBS. The Pro Bono Committee contributes to the Bar's CPD program by arranging lectures and seminars for members of the Bar regarding pro bono issues.

Funding highlight

Victorian Bar

In 2023–24 we funded the Victorian Bar's IT Transformation Project, which included significant website updates and content development, including sections on ethics and practice support, the Victorian Bar's history and the Victorian Bar Pro Bono Scheme.

Legal support for Geelong youth at risk of homelessness

With a 2022 Change Grant of \$500,000 over 3 years, Barwon Community Legal Service designed and piloted an early intervention youth law program to address the civil law needs of young people at risk of school disengagement and homelessness in Geelong.

In partnership with The Geelong Project and Meli, the program addresses the civil law needs of young people at risk of school disengagement and homelessness by embedding tailored legal support at key screening points. It also builds the capacity of local youth workers and school wellbeing staff to identify and address civil law issues early.

Mortgage Stress Victoria

Mortgage Stress Victoria (MSV) is a free specialist community legal centre that helps Victorians in mortgage stress stay in their homes sustainably.

Originating as a VLSB-funded pilot project in 2014, MSV launched as a standalone community legal centre in December 2024. It adopts an integrated service model, with a team that includes lawyers, financial counsellors and social workers.

The evolution of MSV, which started with seed funding we provided, demonstrates the long-term impact our grants have on improving access to justice in Victoria.

THE OUTCOME

community members can access timely, appropriate and effective legal services

THE WORK

Leveraging DSP Help to address Centrelink overpayments

Social Security Rights Victoria received a 2022 Change Grant of \$380,000 over 2 years for its project, Social Security Debt Help. This project provides access to fair and adequate income support for social security applicants and recipients who are engaged in disputes over Centrelink overpayments. It builds on the experience, technology and tools gained from the DSP Help website and chatbot, which guides people through the process of applying for disability support payments.

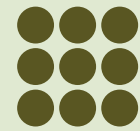
Funded through our 2019 Designing Justice Differently grant round. The 2022 Change Grant has also gone towards strengthening and promoting DSP Help.

In its first year, Social Security Debt Help reached more than 1,500 people, providing information about debts, how to challenge them, and how to manage paying them back.

► *Find out more at:*
dsphelp.org.au

StreetLaw Over Coffee

With a 2023 Change Grant of \$400,000 over 2 years, Peninsula Community Legal Centre established StreetLaw Over Coffee as a vehicle to engage and provide legal services to isolated and disengaged communities across south-east Melbourne. This innovative project involves a free coffee van staffed by a lawyer, a community engagement officer and a barista. The van visits disadvantaged neighbourhoods and urban growth areas where residents are often in need of, but rarely access, free legal services due to a range of barriers.



StreetLaw Over Coffee's first year at a glance

1,910

community members received legal health checks
– 44% of coffee van attendees

35%

of legal health checks identified
legal issues

55

cases undertaken on behalf of vulnerable community
members, including court representation

255

clients provided with legal assistance



Family Reunion Legal Clinic Program

With a 2023 Change Grant of \$400,000 over 2 years, Refugee Legal has established a Family Reunion Legal Clinic Program. The program provides free and expert legal assistance to people who previously held Temporary Protection Visas and have now been granted permanent Resolution of Status (RoS) Visas, which now allow them the right to family reunion following national legal reform.

People granted RoS Visas – many of whom have been separated from family for at least 10 years – are now eligible to sponsor family to come to Australia under the Family Visa Stream of the Migration Program.

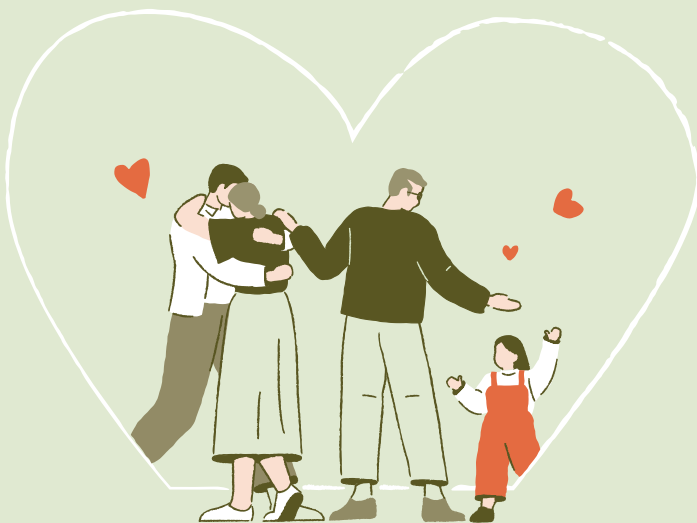
The program has so far provided legal advice, assistance and information to more than 1,200 people, including:

- + identification of visa options
- + advice about visa options and any risks when applying for a family reunion visa
- + full assistance with the preparation and lodgement of family reunion visa applications.

Funding highlight

Our funding has helped the Federation of Community Legal Centres implement its 10-year plan for Community Legal Centres in Victoria. The plan sets out how it will build on existing programs of work, improve and expand service delivery, and amplify advocacy.

► Read the plan at:
fclc.org.au/10_year_plan





Spotlight

Legal help for renters facing family violence

Project: **Home of Your Own**

Organisation: **Justice Connect**

Funded: **2022**

Grant: **\$185,000 over 1.5 years**

Launched: **April 2024**



Family violence continues to be a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, who represent 74% of people accessing Victorian homelessness services. Developed with vital funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, Home of Your Own is Justice Connect's newest award-winning, self-help tool, working to break the links between family violence and homelessness through free, anonymous, legal information and personalised document generators for renters experiencing family violence."

Chris Povey
CEO, Justice Connect

The project

Home of Your Own is a free, online self-help tool that empowers Victorian renters facing family violence to safely and proactively avoid homelessness. The funding we provided in 2022 enabled Justice Connect to develop the first iteration of the tool, which went on to win a Good Design Award in 2024 for social impact.

Since its launch, Home of Your Own has reached more than 408,000 Victorians, and helped more than 12,000 renters to safely avoid homelessness across Victoria.

Home of Your Own features:

- + personalised information in over 40 targeted legal scenarios
- + practical guidance and steps to help women discern the complex housing and financial impacts of family violence, understand their options and take proactive steps on their rights
- + customised document generators to help renters communicate with their rental providers about safety and privacy needs in their rental homes
- + targeted pathways to additional support, including legal, housing, financial and family violence support services.

Co-designed with women with lived experience

To develop Home of Your Own, Justice Connect embedded human-centred design principles throughout its extensive research, design and development process. It collaborated with women who have lived experience of family violence and homelessness, as well as frontline community workers at each stage of the iterative design.

A tool for advocacy

Justice Connect is redoubling the impact of Home of Your Own, using the data and insights to support advocacy with key government agencies to raise awareness of the needs of women facing family violence and housing insecurity.

► Find out more at:
justiceconnect.org.au/fairmatters/home-of-your-own/

THE OUTCOME

the community has increased capability to address or prevent legal problems

THE WORK

Victoria Law Foundation's Public Education Program

Victoria Law Foundation's Public Education Program reached more than 27,000 individuals in 2023–24, through live events, on-demand resources and published legal materials.

Features of the program included:

- + Victorian Law Week 2024, which featured 163 events, engaged 13,658 participants and reached 8,356 viewers of on-demand content
- + Law Week programming delivered through a partnership with Neighbourhood Houses and libraries across the state, which tailors sessions to the legal needs of the community and helps people understand the law in a familiar setting
- + community law talks and sessions that delved into specific legal topics like artificial intelligence in the law
- + the Schools Education Program, which fostered an early understanding of legal principles by engaging more than 1,100 students across Victoria through
 - regional and metropolitan Law Talks and classroom events, including 2-day Law Talks programs in Bendigo and Shepparton
 - legal literacy resources, including videos and fact sheets.

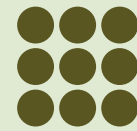
Keeping rental properties safe and healthy

Tenants Victoria received a 2022 Change Grant of \$328,000 over 2 years to establish an online help tool and single point of contact for enquiries about repairs and minimum standards in rental properties, as well as a clinic for eligible renters seeking assistance with repairs and compensation.

The Repairs Toolkit informs renters of their repair rights, Victoria's minimum rental standards, and how to act on those rights to ensure properties are safe and healthy to live in.

- *Explore the resource at:*
tenantsvic.org.au/advice/common-problems/repairs/repairs-toolkit/





Spotlight

Supporting sex workers to exercise their legal rights

Project: **Sex Worker Legal Program**Organisation: **Southside Justice**Change Grant: **\$350,000**
over 3 yearsFunded: **2022**

SWLP 2023–24 at a glance

66%

▲
increase in discrimination advice

157%

▲
increase in intervention order advices, leading to increased personal safety and sexual offenses advocacy and accountability in Victoria

91

▲
clients received legal advice, casework or representation over the life of the project, including:*

- 65 with financial disadvantage
- 37 experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- 53 with a disability
- 17 LGBTIQ+
- 10 with a first language other than English.

*Noting that clients are likely to experience multiple factors.

The program

New laws aren't helpful if people don't know about them. So, when Victoria introduced the *Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022* (Vic), Southside Justice established its Sex Worker Legal Program (SWLP) to:

- + maximise the impact of the legislative reforms by making sure sex workers are aware of, and supported to exercise, their new legal rights
- + test the new rights in legal cases
- + learn from, and capture, sex workers' experiences to feed information into future mandatory legislative reviews of the new laws – a function the SWLP is uniquely placed to perform.

Southside Justice focuses its efforts on sex worker cohorts and legal areas where they see the greatest need, and the biggest potential for impact, including discrimination, equal opportunity and workplace rights.

Southside Justice also works closely with street-based sex workers, whose work remains criminalised in certain contexts. It captures these sex workers' experiences to support its continued advocacy for full decriminalisation of all forms of sex work.

The SWLP has received positive feedback from stakeholders and service users, particularly about timeliness, accessibility and responsiveness to personal, cultural and communication needs.

SWLP client feedback at a glance

100% of clients strongly agreed or agreed the service made them feel safe, and the service responded to their personal, cultural and communication needs

95% of clients felt the waiting time for help was acceptable

100% of clients said they would refer to the SWLP again

“

The lawyer was fantastic, she was very helpful, and she fought for me a lot. I really appreciated what she did for me. I feel more confident and supported now. I have told other sex workers if they have any problems they can contact Southside Justice and they will help.” —SWLP client

“

I feel confident Southside Justice can manage a range of complex client enquiries with respect and genuinely want to protect the rights of my client group. A lot of my client cohort experience unmanaged alcohol and other drug use, mental health and homelessness and I have witnessed Southside Justice working effectively and well with people who experience these issues.” —Community worker

THE OUTCOME

the community has greater trust and confidence in the legal profession and the justice system

THE WORK

Increasing trust by building knowledge

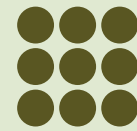
The Sentencing Advisory Council (SAC) fosters trust and confidence in the legal system by providing public access to information and education, and undertaking legal research and policy projects. We fund the SAC to:

- + maintain a suite of statistical products related to sentencing
- + publish policy and research reports
- + deliver the online community education program You Be the Judge, to encourage civic engagement by bridging the gap between the courts, the government and the community. In 2023–24, eight You Be the Judge sessions were delivered to university law students, social service organisations and departmental staff.

These sessions routinely receive very positive feedback from participants, including that they are informative and engaging.

In 2024, the Council also published 9 new Sentencing Snapshots and reports on topics including the effectiveness of the Criminal Justice Diversion Program and sentencing trends in the Supreme, Magistrates' and Children's Courts.





THE OUTCOME

First Nations people have increased access to justice

THE WORK

Better outcomes for First Nations people at Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) has received funding from us to strengthen its capacity to achieve better outcomes for First Nations people in the legal system, including establishing a stand-alone First Nations Services directorate to lead and support initiatives such as the Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer Program.

In October 2024, VLA released its third Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This will guide its work in building stronger relationships with First Nations communities and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. First Nations leadership has also expanded within the organisation to further the commitment to achieving justice for First Nations people.

Bunjilwarra Justice Coordination Project

In 2022, Bunjilwarra received a Change Grant of \$400,000 over 3 years to provide coordinated legal assistance to Aboriginal young people aged 16 to 25 who were referred from the justice system to Bunjilwarra's residential rehabilitation and healing program. In the first year of the program, 26 young Aboriginal people were provided with support.

In February 2023, Bunjilwarra recruited a Justice Coordinator to work with Aboriginal youth, families and community to ensure that legal matters and supports are in place for all youth who are referred to Bunjilwarra, including:

- + linkages and referrals to legal supports
- + attendance and provision of advocacy at Victorian courts, including Magistrates' Court, County Court, Koori Court, Children's Court and Marram-Ngala Ganbu
- + provision of court support letters and evidence to courts
- + information, guidance and post-discharge follow-up for former Bunjilwarra clients.

Throughout 2023, the Justice Coordinator undertook a program of work to establish cross-sector relationships and to promote Bunjilwarra and the Justice Coordination Project.



Event: **17th National Indigenous Legal Conference**

Organisation: **Tarwirri Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association Victoria Inc**



VLSB+C's contribution made this historic event possible. Your sponsorship was pivotal to the conference's success and the broader impact of the NILC. Without your support, we would not have achieved such a remarkable outcome."

Tekan Cochrane
Executive Officer, Tarwirri

The project

Tarwirri plays an important role in the Victorian legal sector by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal professionals, law graduates and law students to connect, collaborate and build capacity to achieve their career aspirations.

In December 2024, Tarwirri hosted the 17th National Indigenous Legal Conference (NILC), bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous legal professionals, scholars, activists, law students, graduates and community leaders from across the country.

The conference provided a culturally safe forum for examining and discussing important legal and policy matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationwide, addressing critical legal, justice and social issues, sharing best practices and fostering collaboration.

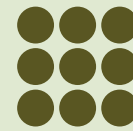
As the regulator of the legal profession in Victoria, we were incredibly proud to support this event.

We were one of several event supporters, providing sponsorship because we recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and lore offer valuable lessons for the legal profession. The broad knowledge and skills of First Nations people strengthens the sector, making it more adaptable, vibrant and better positioned to serve and support the community.

The result

The 2024 NILC was the largest in its 17-year history, with more than 385 attendees across the 3 days.

Our sponsorship meant Tarwirri could decrease the registration costs and provide subsidised registrations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendees and others, while also helping Tarwirri to provide support to people who could not afford to attend on their own.



We fund to make an impact in the legal sector

THE OUTCOME

the legal sector designs and delivers effective, inclusive services to better meet community needs

THE WORK

Victoria Law Foundation's grants program

We provide funding for the Victoria Law Foundation's (VLF) grants program to enhance the capacity of the legal sector to design and deliver services to improve community access to justice.

In 2024, VLF awarded 15 grants, including:

- + 4 Knowledge Grants
- + 5 Community Legal Grants
- + 6 Everyday Legal Grants.

Community legal centres, which serve as critical access points for marginalised communities, received 84% of the funding available through VLF's grants program. This underscores our shared commitment with VLF to support organisations on the ground that are well-positioned to address systemic barriers to justice.

VLF's grants program has focused on research and capacity-building initiatives, with 62% of funds allocated to research projects. This emphasis has produced valuable insights into systemic issues and helped shape legal services that are more inclusive and effective, with projects including:

- + Inner Melbourne Community Legal's project on policing during COVID-19 in Victoria, which highlighted critical issues around law enforcement practices during the pandemic and contributed to the broader discourse on human rights and equitable legal responses.
- + Eastern Community Legal Centre's resources on family law and young people demonstrate how tailored information can build the capacity of legal services to meet specific community needs, particularly in complex areas like family separation and property rights.

THE OUTCOME

the legal profession is robust, sustainable and provides a satisfying career path

THE WORK

Supporting the Victorian Legal Admissions Board (VLAB)

We fund the VLAB to maintain the effective functioning of its regulatory and administrative activities.

VLAB is a statutory body that performs functions associated with the admission of lawyers, under the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014 (Vic).

In the 2023–24 funding period, VLAB successfully facilitated the admission of more than 2,000 law graduates as Victorian lawyers.

Alongside our licensing function, which provides lawyers with practising certificates in Victoria, this contributes to the legal profession growing at 4.1% each year. This is higher than the annual growth of Victoria's population, which means that the profession remains sustainable at a macro level.

THE OUTCOME

legal professionals effectively and efficiently
comply with their professional obligations

THE WORK

Supporting and enhancing the performance of the legal profession

The VLSB+C provides ongoing funding to the Law Institute of Victoria to promote and develop standards of best practice that ensure an inclusive and safe legal profession that is reflective of the diversity in our community.

The Law Institute of Victoria helps to guide the future capability and professionalism of its service to clients and the community. It provides ethics and practice support to practitioners, including responding to 3,649 calls to its ethics and practice support line.

The Law Institute of Victoria also audits lawyers' mandatory continuing professional development and delivers wellbeing support to practitioners, to help with the sustainability of legal practices. This contributes to access to justice by helping to ensure that legal service providers are supported to deliver ethical, high-quality services and act in compliance with their professional obligations.

Ethics and practice support at the Victorian Bar

We fund the Victorian Bar to develop ethics and practice support resources for barristers who practise in the areas of civil, criminal and family law. The Victorian Bar maintains an Ethics digest, Practice digest, and various digests according to practice area for the benefit of Victorian barristers.

The Victorian Bar's regulatory activities during the reporting period focused on barrister licensing activities, including assessing barrister practising certificate (PC) applications and renewals, and monitoring compliance with professional and ethical obligations for barristers to maintain professional standards, ethics and behaviours for the integrity of the legal profession.

The Victorian Bar's Ethics Committee, Counsel Committee and Education Committees advise the Victorian Bar Council and assist in the decision-making process and efficient exercise of the Victorian Bar's delegated functions.

In 2023-24, the Bar Council approved 100% of valid and completed PC applications.

If PC holders were issued with conditions, the Bar's Counsel Committee monitored them for compliance.



THE OUTCOME

the legal sector has improved understanding of community needs and expectations

THE WORK

Victoria Law Foundation's research program

Our funding has supported Victoria Law Foundation (VLF) to continue its authoritative research program, which is contributing to the legal sector's understanding of community needs and expectations.

The Public Understanding of Law Survey

In 2023–24, the VLF launched reports for 3 volumes of the *Public Understanding of Law Survey*, which will play an important role in shaping the VLF's evidence-based approach to addressing legal challenges and barriers faced by Victorians.

The *Public Understanding of Law Survey* is only the second population sample legal needs survey conducted in Victoria and the first anywhere in the world to explore legal capability at that scale. The reports have already been viewed and downloaded over 6,000 times since publication.

The 3 volumes are:

Volume 1: *Everyday Problems and Legal Need*, published in August 2023, which updates the broad picture of access to justice and legal need, exploring

- + who experiences legal problems
- + what people do about them
- + problem duration
- + happiness with problem progress
- + outcomes
- + whether legal need was met

Volume 2: *Understanding and Capability*, published in February 2024, which provides new insights to better understand legal problem-solving behaviour and outcomes

Volume 3: *A New Perspective on Legal Need and Legal Capability*, published in August 2024, which investigates the impact and implications of legal capability on legal problem experience and resolution.

► Read the reports at:
puls.victorialawfoundation.org.au

We fund to make an impact in the justice system

THE OUTCOME

organisations can advocate for improvements in policies, legislation and systems

THE WORK

Building the capacity and expertise of the Victorian legal assistance sector

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) received a 2023 Strong Foundations Grant of \$1 million over 4 years to continue its important work offering free legal assistance, outreach programs and strong community partnerships to more than a million residents in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

This follows on from ECLC's 2022 Change Grant of \$300,000, which it used to identify, develop and deliver learning and development initiatives and resources that build the capacity and expertise of the Victorian legal assistance sector workforce regarding multidisciplinary practice.

In March 2024, ECLC presented a workshop on developing integrated legal practice in a community legal centre setting to an audience of 120 stakeholders. ECLC delivered a full day multidisciplinary legal practice forum at the end of that year to support capacity building within the sector.

“

There is a sophistication within the VLSB+C Grants team that provides space for innovation and groundbreaking work... they create the space for funded organisations to test and try solutions to complex societal problems based on our knowledge and expertise developed over many years.”

Melissa Hardham, CEO, WEstjustice

Transforming outcomes for youth in the west

In 2023, we awarded WEstjustice a Change Grant of \$480,000 over 3 years to address the overrepresentation of young people from the western suburbs on remand, and to advocate for system change for this community. This grant continues our multi-year investment in WEstjustice's ground-breaking youth justice programs.

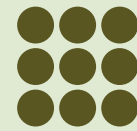
Besides providing hands-on legal help, WEstjustice has engaged with key stakeholders to advocate for cross-sector cooperation to achieve justice for young people in the west.

Its most recent report noted that reoffending for first time offenders in its catchment dropped from 54.7% to 30.5%.

A key achievement is the establishment of TARGET ZERO, an ambitious coalition of youth and community services aiming for:

- + zero criminalisation of young people aged 10 to 25 in Brimbank, Wyndham and Melton over the next 10 years
- + zero overrepresentation of First Nations young people, multicultural young people and young people in residential care in the criminal justice system.

With our foundational support, WEstjustice has gone on to secure \$7.5 million in philanthropic funding for TARGET ZERO.



THE OUTCOME

organisations have authoritative voice and influence government policy and practice

THE WORK

Law reform and legal education at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

In 2024, we funded the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) to strengthen its law reform and legal education capacity. This funding supported VALS to expand its team, publish submissions to government enquiries, and run community legal education forums. There are now 4 Aboriginal staff members in the Policy, Communications and Strategy Team, ensuring there is a cultural lens to advocacy and more engagement with community.

Advocacy and voice

VALS' advocacy and voice has remained strong and consistent as it ensures the rights and needs of community are upheld and heard at both the state and federal level.

Since July 2023, VALS has published 16 publicly available submissions to government inquiries, including 6 submissions to the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Leading the way towards an Aboriginal-led child protection system

Our funding has supported VALS to take a significant role in advocating for a transformative approach to child protection through an Aboriginal-led system. VALS has formed a joint working group dedicated to taking up the Yoorrook Justice Commission's challenge: an Aboriginal-led child protection system and standalone legislation negotiated by The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. The joint working group includes Djirra (previously the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service), Aboriginal community representatives, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that work with Aboriginal children, and members of the legal assistance sector.

This process is part of the historic Treaty process legislated by the Victorian Government. The working group is currently developing positions on what a self-determined child protection model could, and should, look like.

System change in supported residential services

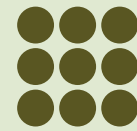
We awarded the Mental Health Legal Centre (MHLC) a 2024 Change Grant of \$1 million over 3 years to increase access to justice for people living with psychosocial disability in supported residential services and other 'supported' accommodation. This project builds on the findings of MHLC's Supported Residential Services legal assistance pilot project by leveraging extensive sector-wide relationships to provide advocacy, deliver education and contribute to systemic reform.

MHLC's advocacy has influenced the government to alter its perceptions of at-risk people in both state and federal government settings, alongside:

- + increased fines for rule breaking being imposed by the Magistrates' Court on Supported Residential Services providers
- + the banning of some former Supported Residential Service owners from being acceptable NDIS suppliers
- + the appointment of new industry regulators at the state and federal level.

MHLC has illustrated the complexity of enforcement and the lack of communication between the vast network of regulators, working to ensure that at-risk people are seen, heard and valued, not exploited, marginalised and dismissed.

MHLC is also working with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to prevent exploitation and abuse through guardianship and administration. This involves working alongside the Office of the Public Advocate and State Trustees to embed good practice to support at-risk people.



THE OUTCOME

laws, policies and systems reflect and respond to community priorities and needs

THE WORK

High-quality, authoritative and timely law reform efforts

We have provided \$2.4 million to the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) to continue its work towards laws that better reflect and respond to community priorities and needs.

Centring the community

In May 2023, the VLRC report *Inclusive Juries – Access for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind or Have Low Vision* was tabled in Parliament. This project was initiated by a suggestion from the community.

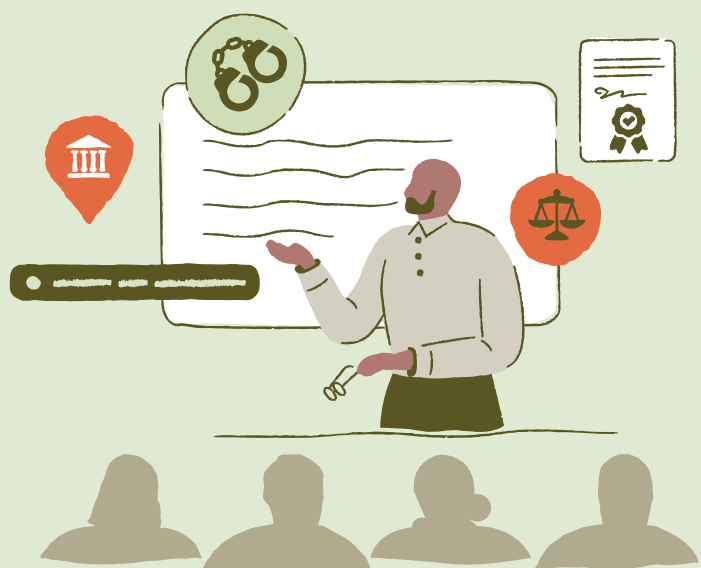
In July 2023, VLRC published *The Law Reform Longlist: 77 Suggestions from the Community*, which was the result of extensive community consultations around proposals for community law reform projects. The publication was provided to the Victorian Attorney-General and the Department of Justice and Community Safety to inform their future decision-making.

In May 2024, the VLRC commenced a new, timely project at the request of the Attorney-General on artificial intelligence in Victoria's courts and tribunals. During 2024, a consultation paper was published, and research and consultations with the community and stakeholders were undertaken.

Also in May 2024, the Commission started publishing its new series, *Spotlights*. These small research papers are about topics suggested by members of the community, and are designed to encourage community debate and discussion. *'I Want to Tell My Story': The Guardianship and Administration Confidentiality Law* will be released in early 2025.

Materials for students

VLRC's school curriculum materials, available on its website, received 4,862 views in 2024, surpassing the target of 3,000 views based on the previous year's figures. The VLRC also presents in person to VCE students at around 20 schools each year, including in regional areas.



Continuing work on sentencing reforms

We contributed funding to the Sentencing Advisory Council's (SAC) Sentencing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Offences Law Reform Project. In January 2024, SAC received the terms of reference from the Victorian Government for the OHS project, including a request to examine whether current sentencing practices align with community expectations. SAC has:

- + published a statistical report on sentencing OHS offences
- + published a consultation paper on key issues relating to sentencing OHS offences
- + conducted 8 community consultations (5 in regional Victoria)
- + conducted a survey on the Engage Victoria platform
- + called for written submissions, with 21 key stakeholders making submissions.

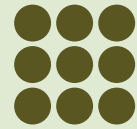
In late 2024, SAC delivered its final report with 12 recommendations for reform to the Attorney-General, the Minister for WorkSafe and the Transport Accident Commission. As a testament to the consultation processes the SAC undertook, almost all the recommendations had near-unanimous support for legal and health and safety experts. The final report was published on the SAC website in early 2025.

- **Read the report at:**
sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/publications/sentencing-occupational-health-and-safety-offences-in-victoria-report-and-recommendations

Police Complaints and Oversight Project

We awarded a 2022 Change Grant to Inner Melbourne Community Legal (IMCL) of \$520,000 over 2 years for its Police Complaints and Oversight Project. This project builds on the advocacy work by the Police Accountability Project to achieve best practice police accountability in Victoria.

When IMCL and Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre (FKCLC) merged in 2021, FKCLC brought decades of experience in advocating for best practice police accountability in Victoria. With our grant, IMCL has continued this advocacy for a police ombudsman and met with decision-makers to increase awareness of the need for reform. This grant has enabled IMCL to open a small-scale police complaints clinic to test IBAC's focused complaints pilot and engage in consultations with regional and metropolitan communities regarding what a state-wide police accountability service should look like. The grant has been used to obtain contemporary police complaints data in Victoria, with the aim of making some findings on complaint hotspots across Victoria to enable targeted service delivery to those areas.



Improved consumer protection against 'lemon' cars

We awarded the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) a 2022 Change Grant of \$273,000 over 2 years to advocate for the improvement of the dispute resolution processes for 'lemon' cars – or cars that show significant signs of failure or defects soon after purchase.

To do this, CALC commissioned the Consumer Policy Research Centre report *Detours and Roadblocks: The Consumer Experience of Fixing Faulty Cars in Victoria*.

It's the most thorough forensic examination of the user experience of faulty cars ever undertaken in Victoria.

The report puts forward a three-step plan, beginning with the urgent need to replace Victoria's currently long and complex process with a new fit-for-purpose dispute resolution scheme to deal with faulty cars, which recognises that a functioning car is essential to many people's lives.

CALC also engaged a national coalition of practitioners and regulators – the National Lemon Cars Working Group – that built a groundswell of momentum for reform, grounded in consumer experience. Consumer Affairs Victoria now has defective vehicles as a regulatory priority, and there are several defective vehicle-related projects being led by state and federal regulators across the country, including ASIC.

- **Read the report at:**
cprc.org.au/detours-and-roadblocks





we are an investor

we are committed to supporting access to justice in the way we invest public monies held in the Public Purpose Fund (PPF)

How is PPF money invested?

We have a long-term financial management strategy that sets out how the Board manages and invests PPF money. The aim of the PPF is to generate sufficient income that can then be distributed to regulate the legal profession, support entities and activities improving the capability of the justice system, and increase access to justice. In the past, our main goal was to maintain the financial stability of the PPF. Looking ahead, we're adding a new, twin goal: to increase access to justice through the way we invest.

Access to justice through impact investment

We have an opportunity to increase access to justice by putting PPF money into investments that have positive, measurable social and environmental impact, alongside financial returns. This is called impact investing. Impact investing is different from responsible investing. While responsible investing seeks to minimise harms, impact investing seeks to achieve measurable impact, as well as financial returns.

Impact investing can progress access to justice by investing in opportunities that address systemic barriers to legal services.

It can support innovation and bring new services to scale that can prevent or resolve justice problems. Opportunities include:

affordable legal services for the 'missing middle', people who don't qualify for legal aid but can't afford private legal services

social enterprise legal services

technology that supports access to justice, such as self-service legal assistance products, generative and diagnostic artificial intelligence, or alternative dispute resolution services

services for prison populations, offending and recidivism reduction, and post-release support

investment in areas like housing and health, which we know interact with people's experience with legal services and the justice system.

We invest to make an impact in the justice system

THE OUTCOME

barriers to affordable and accessible legal services are reduced

THE WORK

Building organisational capability

In 2023 and 2024, our focus was on building awareness, knowledge and skills within the organisation around impact investing:

- + Members of the Board and Executive team, including our CEO, attended forums on impact investing, including the Impact Investment Summit, to increase their knowledge and understanding of how to put it into practice
- + We selected a new investment advisor for our investment portfolio, and impact investing was a key criterion in the request for proposal.

Gathering information

In February 2024, we commissioned a leading consultant to gather and analyse information about the current state of impact investing, including access to justice opportunities.

This scan provided insights into the current state of impact investing in Australia and recommendations into further research and initiatives that have potential as impact investments.

The report's recommendations were based on 3 criteria for impact investing for the Victorian Legal Services Board (VLSB). They are:

- 1 delivers a measurable access to justice impact
- 2 generates a financial return (either directly, or via cost savings to government that are structured into a financial return via a bond)
- 3 offers a scalable solution that would benefit from an injection of capital.

Environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) principles

In June 2024, we approved a new Investment Policy Statement that sets out our investment objectives and the management, monitoring and reporting requirements for the 2 funds managed by VLSB – the PPF and the Fidelity Fund.

This new Investment Policy Statement includes environmental, social and corporate governance principles that will guide our investing decisions towards having a positive impact on access to justice.



What's next?

In late 2024, our Board determined to allocate a portion of its portfolio to impact investments through the establishment of an Impact Investing Fund. This Fund includes a sub-fund specifically allocated to access to justice-aligned impact investments. This fund will seek to invest in a range of opportunities that:

- + address the drivers of legal need, thereby reducing legal need and engagement with the legal system
- + address unmet legal need
- + develop legal products and services which increase access to justice, with a focus on communities and groups who are underserved by traditional models of legal service delivery.

By investing in this way, we will receive a return on our investment that can be directed to further funding or grants to organisations in the Victorian access to justice ecosystem, and reuse our capital over time for the benefit of consumers, the legal profession and society.

The path forward

As far as we have come, our collective work to increase access to justice is ongoing. We know that the justice system does not deliver just resolutions nearly as often as it should. We work alongside the legal sector in an interdependent network, and together we continue to strive towards our shared goal.

In doing so, it's essential that we continue measuring what we do, promoting what works and calling out opportunities to do things better. This is what we've set out to do with this report.

Our position as both independent regulator of lawyers, and funder into the legal system gives us an important and unique perspective to see gaps and opportunities in the ecosystem.

We will continue to use our funds to strengthen the rule of law and the administration of justice, and to open up greater levels of access to justice for the people of Victoria.

At the time of writing this report, we're developing a new Strategic Plan, in which we'll refine and develop our goal of increasing access to justice through our distinct roles and responsibilities as a regulator, funder and investor. This will include targeting our regulatory initiatives and funding to increase the accessibility of legal services, focusing on investing responsibly and expanding the body of research on barriers to access and unmet legal needs.

Our newly established independent research centre, led by world-renowned expert Professor Nigel Balmer, will be instrumental in helping our organisation navigate this path forward. It will build on and analyse the international and local evidence base for making justice more equitable.

The research centre's *Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use Survey* will tell us about why and how people use legal services, obstacles to service use and alternative strategies to deal with legal issues. Together with the Victoria Law Foundation's *Public Understanding of the Law Survey* reports, this will help us better understand the role of legal capability in access to justice, and ensure our regulatory approach encourages legal services to be provided in a way that improves access and reduces unmet legal need.

And as we analyse and utilise data on access to justice, we'll continue to refine the methods we use to measure and report on our own work, and the work we fund, so we can keep telling our impact story.

To stay connected to our work supporting access to justice, visit:

▶ lsbc.vic.gov.au

or follow us on LinkedIn:

▶ linkedin.com/company/victorian-legal-services-commissioner



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BOARD + COMMISSIONER

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