

Access to justice impact report

Summary: June 2025

Report overview

As the regulator of the legal profession in Victoria, and a significant funder within the legal system, the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C) is committed to improving Victorians' access to justice.

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. While all Victorians have a right to effective and high-quality legal services, 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 situation change.

Our *Access to justice impact report* shines a light on how our work continues to increase access to justice. It includes Shared Outcomes Framework results that we use to assess the long-term impact of our work, as well as our collaborative work with, and financial support of, other organisations. The report also features case studies and statistics that highlight our progress over the past 3 years.

In this summary of that report, we show 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 mean we are uniquely positioned to foster and influence change for the better.

Access to justice

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.

For example, a person might not:

- + realise an issue is a legal one, and so not look for a legal remedy
- + know how to find a lawyer
- + be able to afford legal help, or
- + 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 – as well as on their ability to protect and enforce their rights.



Our impact as 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 provide that assurance to Victorians about the quality of the lawyers we license and hold to account for their conduct and competence.

As a regulator we:

- + take a regulatory approach that is proportionate, risk-based and focused on early intervention to prevent harm before it occurs
- + ensure that legal professionals practising in Victoria are licensed to do so
- + answer enquiries from the public
- + address breaches of conduct in the profession
- + mediate between consumers and practitioners
- + provide compensation for consumers who have been wronged, and
- + make sure consumers are informed about their rights and their lawyer's responsibilities.

Regulatory impact snapshot: 2022–24

81,034 practising certificates issued

14,903 enquiries answered

3,028 complaints received

602 complaints resolved through mediation

\$6,886,078 awarded over 43 Fidelity Fund claims

Shared Outcomes Framework highlights

REGULATORY ACTIONS

Ensuring high standards in the legal profession through early intervention, compliance and licensing

Promoting ethical conduct and accountability within the legal profession

Fostering the wellbeing of lawyers through close collaboration with the sector and making it easier to report sexual harassment

Staying across the legal needs of the community in ever-changing times, including through the work of our Consumer Panel and a dedicated research team

Ensuring that information, services and justice are within the community's reach, regardless of an individual's ability

Supporting consumers of legal services, particularly vulnerable communities

OUTCOMES

Legal professionals effectively and efficiently comply with their professional obligations

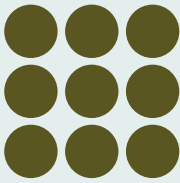
Legal professionals access resources and professional development to support high standards of practice and ethics

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

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

Community members have increased capability to address or prevent legal problems



Our impact as 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.

Our funding approach involves:

- + ongoing and recurring funding to justice sector organisations
- + Change Grants and Strong Foundations Grants, which have a focus on accessible legal services, holistic and diversionary responses, and fairer laws and processes, and
- + sponsorships for events and initiatives aligned with justice sector priorities.

Funding impact snapshot: 2022–24

\$141.9m provided to 13 organisations

\$25m distributed in grants to 68 projects

\$7m of Strong Foundations Funding to 8 inaugural recipients – building the capability of organisations that make our justice system fairer and more accessible to everyone.

Our impact as an investor

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

The aim of the PPF is to generate sufficient income that can then be distributed to regulate the legal profession, improve the capability of the justice system, and increase access to justice.

We have also established an Impact Investing Fund that has uplifted our capability to invest ethically and for impact. It includes a sub-fund allocated to access to justice-aligned impact investments. This fund aims to invest in opportunities that:

- + address drivers of legal need to reduce legal need and engagement with the legal system
- + address unmet legal need, and
- + develop legal products and services that increase access to justice, with a focus on those 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.

Shared Outcomes Framework highlights

FUNDING ACTIONS

Enabling people to navigate legal systems through digital self-help tools like Justice Connect's *Home of Your Own*

Enabling over 1,500 people to address disputes over Centrelink overpayments through the Social Security Debt Help project

Supporting dedicated First Nations services and culturally safe programs, such as Bunjilwarra's residential rehabilitation and healing program

Supporting authoritative research by Victoria Law Foundation that created insights into the public understanding of law

Strengthening the advocacy and systemic reform capacity of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Mental Health Legal Centre

Improving public engagement with the justice system through initiatives such as *You be the Judge* run by the Sentencing Advisory Council

OUTCOMES

Community has increased capability to address or prevent legal problems

Community members can access timely, appropriate and effective legal services

First Nations people have increased access to justice

Legal sector has improved understanding of community needs and expectations

Organisations have authoritative voice, and influence government policy and practice

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

Looking ahead

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 our *Access to justice impact 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.

While we are pleased to report the significant progress we have made with our partners, we remain focused on our mission and are ready for the next phase of work.

Our future priorities and commitments include:

- + targeting our regulatory initiatives and funding to increase the accessibility of legal services
- + investing responsibly
- + expanding the body of research on barriers to access, unmet legal needs and equitable justice, including through the work of our new independent research centre, led by world-renowned expert Professor Nigel Balmer, and
- + continuing 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 read the full *Access to justice impact report* visit:

▶ lsbc.vic.gov.au/resources/access-justice-impact-report

or follow us on LinkedIn:

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

Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner

Level 27, 500 Bourke Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 492 Melbourne Victoria 3001
lsbc.vic.gov.au

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.

