# Collaborative Planning Committee

## 10 February 2021

### Attendance

**Present:** Anna Faithfull (DJCS), Serina McDuff (FCLC), Stuart Webb (LIV), Lynne Haultain (VLF), Simon Moglia (Vic Bar), Nerita Waight (VALS), Kate Lightfoot (Djirra), Peter Noble (VLA) (Chair)

**Apologies**: Louise Glanville (VLA), Anne Lenton (Djirra)

**Secretariat**: Samantha Watson (VLA)

## Meeting Summary

The Committee met online due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Committee opened with an Acknowledgement of Country and acknowledged the various lands from which Committee members were joining.

**Legal Need and Regional Services – Response from VLA Board**

The Regional Services Statement and Legal Need Assessment, previously endorsed by the Committee, were provided to the VLA Board for consideration at the 27 October 2020 meeting. The Committee discussed the Board’s response.

The Committee discussed the benefits and unintended pitfalls of implementing virtual service delivery innovations created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Service delivery models must balance the needs of clients, supply of lawyers and client access, workforce implications and the importance of place-based models, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

The Committee reflected on the significant steps made in ‘systems thinking’. There have been some great examples of client focused collaborative planning and budget bid processes, and efforts to improve sector data sharing and strengthen demand modelling. This work should continue.

**VLA mixed model position**

The Committee discussed the Mixed Service Model Policy, a statement setting out the strengths of the mixed model and identifying key success factors and challenges for the future. The mixed model of service delivery encompasses Community legal services, Victoria Legal Aid’s staff practice, and private practitioners and barristers who deliver legal assistance under a grant of legal aid. The Policy outlines VLAs commitment to the model. It also recognises the unique roles and contributions that the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Djirra play in providing culturally safe services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Clients.

Although recognising that the Policy is not a comprehensive description of the operation of the mixed model, the Committee commended the work and discussed the benefits of consulting with a broader audience. There is opportunity to focus on service delivery trends in the system and take a considered and evidence-based approach to how resources are deployed across the states, mindful of the need to align interests that deliver public value, including improved client outcomes, cost effectiveness and system improvement. It is a positive statement and the Committee will continue to feed into this work.

**Budget priorities**

Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020-21 budget process was challenging, particularly given the timing of the budget. These challenges will carry over into the 2021-2022 budget process and it will be important to start the budget planning sooner than what has historically been done and to take a systems approach.

Key focus for the 2021-2022 budget will include:

* mental health, on the back of the imminent release of the Royal Commission into Victorian’s Mental Health System report
* the regional strategy for Aboriginal Legal Services, including place-based services
* court backlog demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the short-term funding provided in the 2020-2021 budget for the Justice Recovery Plan.

**NLAP Status Update**

Legal Assistance Strategy

Under the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement 2020-25 (NLAP), each State and Territory must develop a Legal Assistance Strategy (LAS) in consultation with respective legal assistance sectors by 30 June 2022, and make publicly available a LAS endorsed by its Attorney General; and develop an associated Legal Assistance Action Plan which must also be made publicly available by September 2022.

This work is well underway, with the Department of Justice and Community Safety working with key stakeholders and the Committee to identify objectives for 2021-25.

National Data Strategy

The intergovernmental committee has been progressing the National Data Strategy (NDS). The Committee noted Victoria is well-placed in terms of its data and evidence-based development and collaborative work to influence the NDS. It was recognised that ensuring the quality, consistency and usefulness of data requires an investment of resources.

**COVID-19 impacts**

Insights and innovation in workforce, service delivery and system approach and opportunities for collaboration to support recovery and backlog management

The Committee reflected on the impacts of COVID-19 that are being seen through their work. These included:

* organisations taking a hybrid approach to returning to the office and in-person services delivery, noting the diversity of interests and approaches of returning to in person services across the State;
* as we move into COVID-normal, organisations are gathering data (including back-log data from the Courts) to inform planning and decision-making;
* the long-term mental health impact on clients and uncovering hidden demand for legal services on the back of COVID-19;
* COVID-19 has changed some of the ways that we provide legal assistance; often earlier and via technology to minimise court contact and resolve matters in a timely way. There are many benefits to clients, however this model is often labour intensive for practitioners and requires adequately resourced funding models.

**CPC Terms of Reference and 2021 planner**

The Terms of Reference discussed by the Committee, clarifying that Committee membership is conditional on being the nominee of one of the prescribed organisations rather than being held on a personal basis. This aligns the terms of appointment with the legislative provisions for organisation membership.

**Collaborative Planning Committee meetings**

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 12 May 2021.