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**Connect with Victoria Legal Aid**

VLA acknowledges and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past and present. We are committed to understanding, respecting, and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, cultures, and values, to contribute to Australia’s reconciliation journey.

# Foreword

Inclusion matters to us. That’s why we’re taking the next important step in our journey with the release of Our Inclusion Framework.

The Framework outlines our journey so far: where we are now and where we hope to be in the future.

It sets out our overarching vision for an increasingly inclusive and diverse organisation that respects every individual – their differences, backgrounds, and rights – and details the goals and principles that will guide our continued progress.

We’re tracking well. But we want to do more.

We want to provide a safe, accessible, and inclusive workplace where our people feel a sense of belonging. Where each of us strive to do and be better at understanding one another. We want to provide legal services for our clients that are accessible, inclusive, and culturally safe. Walking together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the path to reconciliation is critical to our organisation.

Developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including our employee diversity networks, the Framework brings together the many elements of our diversity and inclusion work and sets out how they intersect with each other.

Strong goals, principles and targets as outlined in the Framework will help map our progress.

We recognise that a diverse, inclusive, and respectful workforce means we are better equipped to support one another and respond to the growing needs of our Victorian clients and communities.

I look forward to us all working together to fulfill the vision and goals of this Framework.

**Louise Glanville**

**CEO**

## Inclusion at our organisation

Ensuring Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is a safe and inclusive workplace and service is critical to achieving our vision of a fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld. This framework aligns with VLA’s values of fairness, courage, and care. It outlines our goals, provides guiding principles, and ensures we develop action plans to support our staff, clients, and community to experience equality in access, inclusion, and cultural safety. The framework is intended to be adaptable to ensure we respond to evolving needs of our staff, clients, and communities.

## Our diversity footprint – what we know

### Our clients[[1]](#footnote-1)

* 6% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
* 37% identify as female
* 25% disclosed having a mental health issue and/or disability
* 23% identify from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

### Our employees[[2]](#footnote-2)

* 2.7% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander[[3]](#footnote-3)
* 77% identify as female
* 17% identify as LGBTIQ+
* 27% disclosed having a mental health issue and/or disability
* 38% identify as having a culturally diverse background with 19% identifying as People of Colour (PoC)[[4]](#footnote-4)

## Our inclusion goals

We aim to provide a safe, accessible and inclusive workplace where everyone feels a sense of belonging. We aim to provide legal services for our clients that are inclusive, safe, and accessible.

Our inclusion goals are:

1. Actively seeking to contribute to Australia’s reconciliation journey by working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve social justice.
2. Creating a safe, accessible and inclusive working environment that recognises and embraces every aspect of people’s identities and experiences.
3. Building a competent and capable workforce through education in equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.
4. Attracting, recruiting, and retaining staff from a range of backgrounds, experiences, and skills, including those with lived experience of marginalisation, to reflect the diversity of the community that we serve.
5. Responding, where possible, in our service delivery and strategic advocacy to, systemic, policy and practice failures for people who experience the most marginalisation within society.

## Our guiding principles

### Supporting Aboriginal self-determination

We acknowledge First Nations peoples’ right to make decisions on matters that affect their lives and communities. We aim to seek the expertise of First Nations staff, clients, and communities to ensure we design and deliver work practices and services that are culturally safe.

### Valuing lived experience

We aim to involve staff and clients with lived experience of marginalisation in developing, planning, delivering, and evaluating our services, policies, procedures, and work practices.

### Addressing systemic barriers

We aim to identify and address systemic barriers that staff and clients from various backgrounds and identities face. This includes recognising where bias may be apparent and adapting our services and workplace practices to enhance inclusion.

### Taking an intersectional approach

We recognise many different factors make us who we are. We acknowledge our staff and clients may be affected by multiple forms of discrimination and inequity and aim to consider this in the design and delivery of our services and workplace practices.

### Taking a client-first approach

We aim to seek and use client expertise in the design of policies, services, and projects. We will use our leadership role within the justice system to advocate for improvements to the broader system to make it more accessible, equitable and safer for clients.

### Evidence-based approach

We aim to take an evidence-based approach to collecting, understanding, and responding to our workforce and client data. We will work to identify gaps in our current methodology and fill these in innovative ways to implement systemic change. We support the principle of data sovereignty, particularly in relation to First Nations people, who have the right to exercise authority and govern their own affairs.

## Our action plans

We recognise factors, such as colonisation, racism, violence, abuse, discrimination, and lack of access to power and resources, may further isolate and marginalise specific groups. Marginalisation is experienced in different ways and can be further compounded by other identity factors.

Our action plans serve to strategically implement our inclusion goals, measure our impact, and deliver on our vision to build an inclusive, accessible and anti-racist workplace culture and reflect the diversity of the community we serve.

Our [strategic action plans](https://viclegalaid.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/aboutus/Pages/our-diversity-and-inclusion.aspx) that underpin this framework include:

* Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2019–21
* Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (CDIS) 2020–23
* Anti-Racism Action Plan 2021–22
* Gender Equality Action Plan 2021–24 (GEAP) **(TBD December 2021)**
* Disability Action Plan 2021–23 (DAP) **(TBD December 2021)**

## Inclusion benefits everyone – we all have a role to play

### Senior Leaders

Our Executive Management Group (EMG) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is responsible for leading from the front, strategic oversight, and accountable for inclusion outcomes.

### Inclusion Committee

Our Inclusion Committee is responsible for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Inclusion Framework. The Inclusion Committee includes senior leaders, staff diversity network chairs and staff from a cross section of roles and regions.

### Staff Diversity Networks

### Our staff diversity networks provide employees with an opportunity to connect with similar colleagues from across the organisation, build a support network with each other, work with our organisation to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion and to help inform future policies, services, and activities.

### Inclusion Champions

Inclusion Champions are self-nominated staff members who promote activities and initiatives across VLA to drive our inclusion agenda forward.

### All Staff

We all have a role to play in our organisations inclusion journey. All staff to participate, execute, amplify, and model inclusive behaviours and champion equity and inclusion across VLA.

## Implementation

Supporting tools will be developed to assist staff to translate the commitments of this framework into everyday practice. The tools will be available on the intranet and is intended to be an evolving library of tools, guides, and resources to support inclusion planning and implementation.

## Reporting and measuring progress

Reporting and measuring progress on our inclusion framework will be via a yearly progress report. Our RAP will continue to be reported separately to reflect our organisation’s commitment to support the national reconciliation movement. The Inclusion Framework’s yearly report will include background information, supporting data, and concrete examples of how we are progressing in our diversity and inclusion action plans and towards our overall inclusion goals.

## Contact

For information about the Inclusion Framework and/or if you have suggestions for additional supporting tools or resources, please contact the [Learning and Organisational Development Team](mailto:LandOD@vla.vic.gov.au).

## Our inclusion targets and progress

Our inclusion targets are based on our commitment to reflect our client-base and the Victorian community that we serve. Increasing workforce representation is only one part of our journey. We need to ensure we retain our staff by ensuring our workplace is one where everyone feels a sense of belonging and inclusion.

### Workforce representation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographics** | **Baseline 2018** | **Current 2021** | **Target By 2025** |
| Female | 75% | 77% | **TBD in GEAP** |
| First Nations | 1.7% | 2.7% | 5%[[5]](#footnote-5) |
| Cultural Diversity, including PoC | 42% | 38% with  19% PoC | 41%[[6]](#footnote-6) |
| Disability and/or mental health issue | 12% | 27% | **TBD in DAP** |
| LGBTIQ+ | 10% | 17% | Maintain the current %, leading to a gradual increase |

### Inclusion and belonging

* Over half of our staff (>50%) agreeing that VLA provides a working environment that is culturally safe and inclusive by 2025 (currently tracking at 48%)
* Three quarters of our staff (75%) agreeing that they would recommend VLA as an employer of choice to their friends, family, and community by 2025 (currently tracking at 65%)

### Mandatory inclusion training

* Improved uptake in our mandatory diversity and inclusion e-learning programs (currently tracking around 65%)
* Improved uptake of the cultural safety reflection tool in our performance management process, VLA & Me (currently tracking at 87% for the 20-21 cycle)

We will continue to track our inclusion progress and targets through our learning and development records, Pulse Surveys, VPS People Matter Surveys, dedicated Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Surveys and our exit surveys.

1. Victoria Legal Aid 2020 Annual Report [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Victoria Legal Aid 2021 Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion Survey (n= 519 out of 899). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As of May 2021, our payroll systems show 2.7 per cent of our staff identify as First Nations (n=25 out of 910). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For the purposes of VLA, a Person of Colour (PoC) is a person who self-identifies as a PoC and unlike the term suggests is not reflective of the colour of skin. It is a terminology used to highlight solidarity amongst people who experience marginalisation and inequity with race and ethnicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy commits VLA to increase our First Nations staffing to 5% by 2025 to reflect our client-base [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Our Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (CDIS) commits VLA to reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian Community. The 2016 ABS census shows that 41.9% of Victorians were born overseas or born in Australia with at least one parent born overseas [↑](#footnote-ref-6)