

Grants of legal assistance

Many services provided by VLA are free. However, if you need to apply for a grant for representation in legal proceedings, your eligibility will be assessed against VLA's guidelines. This type of legal assistance is not always free. We may ask you to contribute to your legal costs.

Our vision

To be a leading and responsible force for community access to the legal system and for social justice.

Our values

We are committed to:

- serving our clients and community professionally and ethically
- acting with integrity, fairness and transparency at all times
- respecting and valuing diversity
- pursuing continuous improvement across the organisation.

Feedback and complaints

Our aim is to resolve complaints quickly, fairly and without prejudice. If you have a complaint about our service, a staff member, or a private lawyer funded by VLA, you should contact our Client Relations Office by phone or in writing. The officer will record your complaint and advise you on how it can be resolved.

Complaints and feedback process

VLA's Client Relations Officer will do one of the following:

- investigate and help resolve your issue immediately, if possible
- refer the complaint to the relevant grants officer if it is connected to a grant of legal assistance for action in a manner consistent with the *Legal Aid Act 1978*
- refer the complaint to the relevant VLA manager or other staff to resolve
- refer you to another organisation, for example, the Legal Services Commissioner or the Law Institute of Victoria
- record your feedback.

If your complaint concerns the professional conduct of a VLA lawyer or a VLA funded private lawyer or barrister, we may refer you to the professional standards body at the Law Institute of Victoria or the Legal Services Commissioner.

We take all complaints seriously and where possible we will let you know in writing the results of your complaint, subject to the confidentiality provisions of the *Legal Aid Act 1978*.

If you are not satisfied with how we resolve your complaint, write to our Client Relations Officer within 21 days from receipt of our letter advising the outcome, to request a review. Your request will be referred to a senior VLA manager for review and you will be notified in writing of the outcome.

Contact Client Relations Officer

Victoria Legal Aid
GPO Box 4380
Melbourne VIC 3001
Tel: (03) 9269 0234 or 1800 677 402 (Victorian country callers). Ask for the Client Relations Officer.
Fax: 9269 0250
E-mail: clientcomplaint@vla.vic.gov.au

Client service charter

Victoria Legal Aid

About Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) can help you with your legal problems.

VLA is committed to providing legal services in a fair and accessible manner.

This pamphlet explains what you can expect from us and what we expect of you when you use our services. It also gives information on providing feedback and lodging a complaint.

We will:

- 1 Provide a safe environment for you and our staff.
- 2 Provide you with information on the services we offer.
- 3 Respect your privacy and give you access to your personal information. Ask your lawyer or our Privacy Officer about how you can access your personal information.
- 4 Provide a respectful, courteous service and listen to your concerns.
- 5 Provide you with accurate information, within a reasonable time.
- 6 Be available between 8.45am and 5.15pm Monday to Friday (except public holidays).
- 7 Respond to your requests for information and return your phone calls within two working days.
- 8 Arrange a qualified interpreter to assist non-English speaking people if requested.
- 9 Provide access to our services via the National Relay Service, if you have a hearing or speech problem.

Client service charter

Victoria Legal Aid

You can expect:

- 10 Our staff to observe the highest standards of ethical and professional behaviour. (VLA lawyers, VLA funded private lawyers and barristers are required to comply with their professional and legal obligations as legal practitioners.)
- 11 Us to be impartial and open with you in assessing your inquiry or case, and to provide a realistic assessment of it.
- 12 Us to treat any information you give us as confidential, unless the law says otherwise.
- 13 If we owe a duty of confidentiality to anyone else who might be involved in your matter, we may only be able to provide you with general information and referral. A duty of confidentiality may apply if we have ever provided the other person with assistance about a current or past matter.
- 14 To be kept advised on the progress of your case or inquiry.
- 15 To be informed in writing about costs, even when you do not have to pay.
- 16 When your legal matter is completed, we will inform you in writing about anything you need to do and what is likely to happen.
- 17 That if you are unhappy about a decision made by VLA about your application for a grant of legal assistance, to have the decision considered again by VLA and by an Independent Reviewer.

To help us assist you:

- 18 While you are receiving our services, let us know if your details change – such as your address or job.
- 19 Be courteous to our staff. We acknowledge that you may be frustrated and experiencing difficulties, however our staff are here to help you.
- 20 Meet the terms and conditions of your grant of legal assistance. These terms and conditions are explained in the letter you will receive from VLA.
- 21 Provide our staff with all the facts and circumstances of your case. Tell us if you do not understand something and feel free to ask questions. It will help if you put things in writing.
- 22 Give our staff relevant documents as soon as possible. We will provide you with any copies you need while your case is running and return the original documents to you at the end of the process.
- 23 Let us know if you are not satisfied with any part of our service or if you have any suggestions for improvement. (See the back panel on Feedback and complaints.)

VLA provides legal advice and help in relation to criminal matters, family breakdown, family violence, immigration, social security, mental health, debt and traffic offences.