

Open up

Open up for a list of ombudsmen, service commissioners and government schemes

What is an ombudsman?

An ombudsman handles complaints in a particular industry, such as telecommunications or financial services.

What is a service commissioner?

A service commissioner handles complaints, undertakes investigations and acts as a regulator in a particular industry, such as legal services or health services.



Do you need this brochure in a different format?

Please ring us on (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications. We can talk with you about what you need.

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Disclaimer: The material in this publication is a general guide only. It is not legal advice. If you need to, please get legal advice about your own particular situation.

Ombudsmen, service commissioners, government schemes

Complaint or dispute resolution services

General

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Provides information and advice to help consumers and businesses resolve problems with the purchase of goods and services in Victoria. Can also help with renting, buying and selling a home, scams, product safety and other issues.

1300 558 181
www.consumer.vic.gov.au

Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria

Provides information, advice and mediation services to help resolve common neighbourhood issues like fencing, trees and antisocial behaviours.

1300 372 888
www.disputes.vic.gov.au

Business

Victorian Small Business Commission

Advocates on issues that affect small business, helps small business owners learn about their rights and responsibilities, and helps small businesses avoid or resolve disputes.

13 87 22
www.vsbcb.vic.gov.au

Discrimination

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Educates, advocates and resolves complaints about discrimination, sexual harassment, and racial and religious vilification.

1300 292 153
www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Disability

Disability Services Commissioner

An independent body resolving complaints and upholding the rights of people with a disability.

1800 677 342
www.odsc.vic.gov.au

Office of the Public Advocate

Safeguards the rights and interests of people with disability in Victoria. Assists people with disability, their families, carers, and supporters, by providing information and advice on powers of attorney, guardianship and administration, and medical consent.

1300 309 337
1300 305 612 (TTY)
www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

Employment

Fair Work Ombudsman

Gives people information and advice about workplace rights and obligations and helps them to resolve workplace issues.

13 13 94
www.fairwork.gov.au

Energy and water

Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)

Resolves disputes between Victorians and their energy and water companies.

1800 500 509
www.ewov.com.au

Financial products and services

Australian Financial Complaints Authority

A fair, free and independent dispute resolution scheme for consumers and small businesses. Considers complaints about credit, finance and loans, insurance, banking deposits and payments, investments and financial advice, and superannuation.

1800 931 678
www.afca.org.au

Government

Victorian Ombudsman

Investigates actions and decisions of Victorian government departments and agencies, statutory authorities and local government.

(03) 9613 6222
1800 806 314 (regional areas)
www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Health

Health Complaints Commissioner

Resolves complaints about health services and the handling of health records.

1300 582 113
www.hcc.vic.gov.au

Mental Health Complaints Commissioner

Deals with complaints about Victorian public mental health services, provides advice and education, and makes recommendations to address issues of rights, quality and safety in services.

1800 246 054
www.mhcc.vic.gov.au

Legal services

Victorian Legal Services Commissioner

Investigates and attempts to resolve complaints against lawyers and disputes between lawyers and clients.

1300 796 344
www.lsbcb.vic.gov.au

Privacy and freedom of information

Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner

Investigates complaints about breaches of privacy and conducts reviews of freedom of information decisions made by Victorian government agencies.

1300 006 842
www.ovic.vic.gov.au

Public transport

Public Transport Ombudsman

Independent dispute resolution service for consumers with complaints about Victorian public transport.

1800 466 865
www.ptovic.com.au

Telephone and internet services

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

Independent dispute resolution services for phone and internet complaints.

1800 062 058
www.tio.com.au

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Law help guide

Need legal help? Where to start



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I think I may have a legal problem

Start here

If you have a legal problem, this brochure is the best place to start. It will help you understand the options available to you and help you work out what to do next.

While a private lawyer can help you, you may be able to use other services that are free or low cost to help solve your legal problem.

Ombudsmen, service commissioners, government schemes

A number of different organisations offer these services but only operate in limited dispute areas. These services are generally free, but you will usually have to show that you have tried to solve the problem yourself first.

Free or low-cost legal assistance

These services are generally able to provide initial advice or information to anyone for free. More complex services may be restricted to priority clients.

A private lawyer

Anyone can use a private lawyer, but you will have to pay for their services. Remember, no matter which service you choose, it can take time for legal problems to be resolved.

What is the best service for me?

The best service for you will depend upon:

- the type of problem that you have
- your personal situation
- the complexity of your case.

Remember, you may have to try a few different services before you find the right one.

Ombudsmen, service commissioners, government schemes

There are many organisations set up to help you resolve a dispute as quickly and efficiently as possible without having to go to court. Each organisation usually specialises in a specific area. For example, the Fair Work Ombudsman assists with disputes about employment. Some government organisations deal with a range of different areas, such as Consumer Affairs Victoria, which oversees various issues affecting consumers and businesses. These services are independent, confidential and generally free. But you usually have to show that you tried to resolve the problem yourself first.



Turn over for a list of these services and the type of disputes they deal with.

Free or low-cost legal services

Victoria Legal Aid can give free legal advice or information. If we can't help you, we will often refer you to someone who can.

Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid provides free legal information, education and advice for all Victorians, focusing on people with low incomes and those experiencing disadvantage. Victoria Legal Aid's website is a good place to start to find out how to deal with your legal problem. You can also call the Legal Help service, where you can speak to someone in English or in your own language.

Victoria Legal Aid also has offices in most major metropolitan and regional areas and has lawyers who provide help in many courts, some hospitals, prisons and detention centres.

For free help and information call our Legal Help line:
1300 792 387

Do you need help calling us?



Translating and Interpreting Service

Tel: 131 450



National Relay Service

TTY: 133 677

Speak and listen: 1300 555 727

See www.relayservice.gov.au for more information

Visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au to access information on wide range of legal topics.



Community legal centres

Community legal centres also provide free legal advice, information and representation to the public, with a focus on people experiencing disadvantage. Some centres provide help on a wide range of issues to people who live, work or study in a particular area, while others specialise in a particular field of law or assisting people with specific needs.

The Federation of Community Legal Centres is the peak body for all centres. They can help you find the best community legal centre for your problem.

(03) 9652 1500

www.communitylaw.org.au

A private lawyer

Using a private lawyer is one way of getting the legal help you need.

If you want to use a private lawyer, you'll need to find one who is experienced in dealing with your kind of problem.

Shop around. Speak to a couple of different lawyers and compare their services and fees. Only use a lawyer you feel comfortable with and can afford.

If you are unclear about the advice given to you, you can ask to have it explained in a way that you understand.

Law Institute of Victoria

The Law Institute of Victoria provides referrals to law firms across Victoria. Law firms included in the Find Your Lawyer Referral Service provide a free 30-minute inquiry interview.

(03) 9607 9550

www.findyourlawyer.com.au

More information

These resources can help you find out more about the law and how it operates in Victoria.

Victoria Legal Aid website

Up-to-date information about a wide range of legal topics, and free publications and education kits in English and many community languages.

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Victoria Legal Aid Public Law Library

A specialist law library in Victoria open to the public that offers a wide range of print and electronic resources covering a variety of legal topics.

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-law-library

Court Services Victoria

Information about all courts and tribunals operating in Victoria, including a brief description of their roles.

www.courts.vic.gov.au

Department of Justice and Regulation (Victoria)

Information about the justice system including policing, fines, courts and tribunals, youth justice, community corrections and prisons. Find a Justice of the Peace, download a statutory declaration or access services for victims of crime.

www.justice.vic.gov.au

What if I still don't know what to do?

If you are still not sure which service to use, or even whether you have a legal problem, call Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help service:

1300 792 387

