



26 Strategy



Acknowledgement of Country

This document was written on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Victoria Legal Aid acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Victoria and pays respect to Elders past and present. We recognise the continuing connection to country, culture and identity and the importance of self-determination for creating better futures for First Nations people.

Chairperson message



I am pleased to present Victoria Legal Aid's Strategic Plan 2022–26, 'Strategy 26'.

Strategy 26 was written during an uncertain period after a tumultuous two years. It builds on the successes and lessons from our last four-year strategy while reflecting an environment of change.

Our vision and values have been refined and strengthened in Strategy 26. We continue to work towards a fair, just and inclusive society where people can get help with their legal problems and have a stronger voice in how laws and legal processes affect them. Strategy 26 incorporates a new value, recognising the importance of valuing inclusion and diversity in all our work.

We accept that achieving our vision is not possible without listening more deeply to client voices and needs or without the support of our partners in the legal assistance sector. We will collaborate with specialist and generalist community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services and private legal practitioners to respond to legal needs. We aim to make it easier to interact with our organisation and improve access to justice, laws and other systems.

We support the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services. We will continue to take steps to ensure that our practices are culturally safe and work with others to advocate for laws and policies to address systemic racism and other injustice. We will make sure our services are accessible, inclusive and equitable.

Our work is deeply connected to the work of justice and community sectors. We will continue to take opportunities to improve experience and outcomes for clients and communities and to support fairer laws and systems.

We have introduced new strategic directions acknowledging that our organisation must be effective to achieve our vision. We will invest in our people and achieve financial sustainability, including demand-based funding arrangements. We will also expand our digital and data systems and enhance our commitment to the environment and carbon-neutral targets.

To ensure that we are accountable to our priorities, Strategy 26 outlines clear measures of success. We will monitor our progress through a new Outcomes Framework, which will help us achieve our longer-term goals.

Thank you to all those who have helped develop this important document.

Robbie Campo, Acting Board Chair

About Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid is a statutory authority that serves the broader community by providing information, legal advice, and education with a focus on the prevention and early resolution of legal problems. We prioritise more intensive services, such as legal advice, legal representation, non-legal advocacy, and family dispute resolution, for those who need it most. We recognise the intersections between legal and social issues in how we do our work and advocacy. We also work to dismantle the barriers that prevent people from accessing the justice system by participating in systemic reforms and strategic advocacy.

The next four years

Over the next four years, our efforts will focus on responding to our broader operating environment, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and expectations from the community and government for more connected services.

We will continue to provide legal assistance, dispute resolution, and related services to people across Victoria who most need help with their legal problems. We will have a stronger focus on helping people understand, minimise or prevent legal issues from escalating, including expanding our *non-legal* advocacy services¹.

We will also play a significant role in responding to royal commissions, government inquiries, and new directions in justice and related systems. This includes restorative justice initiatives, with better responses and experiences for children and young people, victims of crime, First Nations people, those experiencing mental health issues and people with disability. We will maintain our commitment to efforts to prevent violence against women and play our part in gender equality reforms, including advocating for safe and equitable workplaces.

Financial Outlook

Like other organisations across the justice and legal sectors, VLA has experienced the impacts of COVID-19 on our operations and our financial position. With many court proceedings deferred due to the reduced functions of the courts, this has only temporarily reduced our services and expenditure. These funds have been committed to supporting vulnerable Victorians with their legal matters over the coming years, as the courts resume normal operations and reduce their case backlog.

We expect demand to return to pre-pandemic levels over the next four years. Despite the strong investment in the justice sector, this presents financial challenges for VLA because the way we are funded is no longer adequate for the expectations of our service delivery. The funding we receive from the Public Purpose Fund has been reduced. Over the next four years, we expect that demand for our services will far exceed the funding we receive. Without alternative funding, our financial outlook is a series of structural deficits that can only be reduced by limiting the services we deliver the Victorian community.

¹ Non-legal advocacy is a service provided by allied professionals to support people to understand and enact their rights, navigate systems access the services they need to address legal and psycho social needs and present their views and preferences to decision makers, for example, to mental health clinicians or child protection practitioners.

Vision

Our **Vision** is for a fair, just and inclusive society where people can get help with their legal problems and have a stronger voice in how laws and legal processes affect them.

Purpose

To make a difference for clients and the community by helping to effectively address legal problems, supporting the coordination of a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector and working with partners to create fairer laws and systems.

Values

Fairness

We are committed to fairness in society and to facilitating fair and equitable access to legal support.

Care

We care about our clients and the community and we approach our work with an awareness of the effects that trauma and discrimination can have. We treat each other with kindness and respect.

Courage

We approach our work with strength and confidence. We are guided by our values and what matters most to our clients and society.

Inclusion

We provide an inclusive environment for clients, staff, and referral partners.

Strategic direction 1 – Clients



Outcome

Clients have increased access to justice

Priorities

- 1.1 Strengthen early intervention services and early engagement and resolution services² to prevent the escalation of legal problems and better connect with allied services.
- 1.2 Strengthen our regional service delivery and non-legal advocacy services.
- 1.3 Develop culturally safe services for First Nations clients while supporting the principle of self-determination and the important role of Aboriginal community-controlled legal services.
- 1.4 Work to ensure our services are culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and equitable.
- 1.5 Embed client-first approaches by involving clients and consumers in designing, delivering and reviewing our services.

Measuring our success

- Clients are assisted to address or prevent legal problems.
- Clients equitably access timely legal and related services that meet their needs and capabilities.
- First Nations clients access culturally safe legal services and have increased access to justice.
- Clients experience culturally safe, inclusive, accessible, and respectful services.
- Clients have a strong voice in services and systems affecting them.

Strategic direction 2 – Community



Outcome

Improved legal understanding in the community

Priorities

- 2.1 Expand and improve access to online, phone and face-to-face legal information that addresses peoples' diverse needs and capabilities.

Measuring our success

- Community members have improved understanding and capability to address or prevent legal problems.
- Community members access reliable, timely legal information that meets their needs and capabilities.

Strategic direction 3 – Legal assistance sector



Outcome

Collaborative legal assistance sector

Priorities

- 3.1 Create opportunities and support improved service coordination, collaboration, and transparency across the legal assistance sector.
- 3.2 Improve our engagement with and make it easier for private practitioners and community legal centres to work with VLA.
- 3.3 Collaborate with legal aid providers in other states and territories on service provision and systems reform.
- 3.4 Improve the way we collect, use, and share data across the legal assistance sector to strengthen client planning, service development and connected services.

² Early intervention services are services that aim to prevent social issues turning into legal issues, and to prevent legal issues from getting worse. Early engagement and resolution services are services for clients who have proceedings in court. They aim to engage clients earlier, with a view to resolving proceedings, or narrowing issues in dispute and providing more time to prepare for court.

Measuring our success

- The legal assistance sector works together to deliver coordinated and responsive services and advocacy.
- VLA effectively supports self-determination of First Nations legal services.
- The legal assistance sector shares and uses evidence to design and deliver services.

Strategic direction 4 – Laws and systems



Outcome

Fairer laws and systems

Priorities

- 4.1 Work with others across the justice, legal assistance and community sectors to:
 - a. create fairer laws and other systems
 - b. prevent the escalation of legal and related issues
 - c. address the impacts of systemic racism and discrimination
 - d. promote rights, accountability and client voices.

Measuring our success

- Laws and policies address systemic injustices and improve equality for clients and communities.
- Changes in practices by government, courts, tribunals, police, corrections and service providers to be people-centred, and embed self-determination.

Strategic direction 5 – Victoria Legal Aid



Outcome

An effective and sustainable Victoria Legal Aid

Priorities

- 5.1 Invest in our people and work in a safe, inclusive, equitable way that involves people with lived experience.
- 5.2 Achieve financial sustainability, including demand-based funding arrangements so that VLA can continue to support an effective and efficient justice system.
- 5.3 Develop our digital and data systems to improve access to justice, provide clients with better quality services and choices appropriate to their capabilities, and create more efficient work practices.
- 5.4 Enhance our commitment to environmental sustainability and carbon-neutral targets.

Measuring our success

- VLA is a safe, inclusive, and equitable workplace with diverse and skilled staff.
- VLA services and advocacy are shaped by people with lived experience.
- VLA practices are culturally safe and embed First Nations peoples' self-determination.
- VLA is equipped with sustainable resources and technology that reduce our environmental impact and enable us to deliver services.
- VLA's data capabilities are strengthened to support outcomes and evidence-based services.

