# Victoria Legal Aid 2024–25 Quarter three report 1 January – 31 March 2025

## Message from the CEO

In quarter three, we overall had a 3 per cent increase in services delivered to Victorians seeking legal assistance. We reported a modest consolidated operating surplus, largely driven by case related expenditure which is highly dependent on the timing of court activities. However, our financial projections beyond this year reflect that our ongoing funding is insufficient to meet demand for our services. We will carefully utilise our cash reserves to maintain services as a short-term mitigation whilst we continue to work with the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) on sustainable long-term funding options.

We recently [expanded our Independent Family Advocacy and Support (IFAS) service](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/more-advocacy-and-support-families-navigating-child-protection-system) thanks to additional funding received. IFAS has been providing critical non legal advocacy support for families early on in their involvement with child protection. This includes helping families navigate the child protection system, understand their rights and divert them away from court proceedings where possible. Expansion to several new regions is already underway and a second stage rollout is being planned by mid-2025.

Our [Remand Support Service](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/join-us-new-advisory-panel-to-improve-remand-services-for-our-clients) is currently being developed to assist clients held on first remand. An independent review of our remand services identified that clients on remand would benefit from extra assistance to deal with both their legal and non-legal needs. Our integrated approach will see lawyers and remand support practitioners working together to support people in custody at the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court. A panel of lived experience advisors is also being set up to provide important advice and guidance as we pilot the service.

We continue to advocate for a justice system which is fair for everybody. We are monitoring the impact of new bail laws which commenced in March, and continue to share our practice experience with DJCS to help inform the development of stage two of the planned changes. We have seen firsthand the impact that previous changes to bail laws have had on our clients, particularly First Nations women, children and others including people of colour, people dealing the impacts of family violence, mental health issues, homelessness and poverty. We continue to advocate for appropriate protections for those most at risk, and for the expertise of First Nations-led organisations to be included.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the critical work that private practitioners continue to do in helping us support those in need across the state. Important insights from a recent [survey on private practitioners by National Legal Aid](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/victorian-insights-national-census-legal-aid-private-practitioners) (NLA) showed that more than half of private practitioners surveyed felt undervalued and a third planned on doing less legal aid work over the next five years, largely due to inadequate funding received for their work. We support NLA’s urge for the Standing Council of Attorney’s-General to review Legal Aid Commission fees and grants structures. We are also working on implementing initiatives to provide improved support, training and technology for private practitioners.

**Toby Hemming**
Chief Executive Officer

## Our services

Our client and community services are targeted towards people facing disadvantage and have the greatest legal need. We tailor our services to people’s diverse needs and capabilities and recognise that many people experience barriers to accessing justice. We provide a mix of early intervention and preventative services, high intensity legal services, communication legal education and information services and independent advocacy and specialist resolution services.

### Client services

In quarter three, we delivered 3 per cent more client services across all service types to a total of 16,722 unique clients (Table 1.1). Our unique client count does not capture people provided with a community legal education session, legal information session or independent advocacy service under our service delivery model. The Victorian State Government has approved new performance measures for next financial year to improve the relevance of our service output performance measures.

Table 1.1 Unique client count and client services

| **Unique clients and client services** | **Q2 2024–25** | **Q3 2024–25** | **Q4 2024–25** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **actual** | **projection** |
| Unique clients[[1]](#footnote-2) | 19,488 | 16,722 | 12,512 |
| Legal advice and minor assistance | 9,164 | 9,245 | 8,815 |
| Duty lawyer services | 21,533 | 22,826 | 23,412 |
| Grants of legal assistance  | 10,378 | 10,179 | 10,903 |

### Community information and education services

Our Legal Help phone line and webchat service remains the key entry point for Victorians seeking legal assistance. Legal Help delivered 39,490 sessions across phone and webchat channels within a combined average wait time of 14:53 minutes that is lower than our performance target (Table 1.2). The 30,844 information sessions delivered were largely through Legal Help (Table 1.2). In addition, Victorian State Government funding has allowed the expansion of our Help Before Court intake team which delivered 1,114 information sessions that assisted clients before attending court.

We delivered 45 community legal education sessions (Table 1.2) despite schools only re-opening in late January. This included our regular co-offending, rights and responsibilities with police, sexting/sexual consent, and drugs and alcohol education sessions with at-risk youths. This quarter we also held various regional based sessions connecting Victorians with our services including at Local Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, the Having A Say conference and Sisters Day Out events. We also continued our work with migrant communities through the Citizenship project and continued prisoner education sessions.

Engaged sessions of legal information website pages were higher this quarter (Table 1.2). Although tracking data has been impacted by the launch of Google AI Overview, we have had more engagement with our *I need legal information about* webpages. There is still not enough historical data available to make quarterly projections for this relatively new performance measure.

Table 1.2 Community information and education services

| **Community information and education services** | **Q2 2024–25** | **Q3 2024–25** | **Q4 2024–25** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **actual** | **projection** |
| Number of Legal Help sessions delivered  | 34,789 | 39,490 | 39,702 |
| Combined average wait time (minutes)  | 14:57 | 14:53 | 14:00 |
| Information sessions  | 28,281 | 30,844 | 35,187 |
| Community legal education sessions  | 47 | 45 | 50 |
| Engaged sessions[[2]](#footnote-3) of legal information website pages  | 230,048 | 239,772 | N/A |

### Independent advocacy services

At Victoria Legal Aid, we provide specialist non-legal services that help people advocate for themselves and inform people and communities of their rights when it comes to both the mental health and the child protection systems.

In quarter three, we delivered more Independent Family Advocacy and Support services, largely driven by the expansion of these services. Our Independent Mental Health Advocacy services were stable (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 Independent advocacy services

| **Independent advocacy services** | **Q2 2024–25****actual** | **Q3 2024–25****actual** | **Q4 2024–25****projection** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Independent Mental Health Advocacy information and referral sessions | 17,109 | 17,078 | 17,000 |
| Independent Mental Health Advocacy advocacy and self-advocacy | 13,445 | 12,597 | 12,600 |
| Independent Family Advocacy and Support information and referral sessions  | 576 | 1,255 | 1,138 |
| Independent Family Advocacy and Support advocacy and self-advocacy | 812 | 1,348 | 1,392 |

## Our financials

In quarter three, our consolidated operating position was a surplus of $3.7 million. This was largely driven by lower than expected case related expenditure, which is highly dependent on the timing of court activities. However, we are projecting case related expenditure to return to normal levels in quarter four.

**Table 2.1 Total revenue breakdown ($’000**)

| **Revenue**  | **Q2 2024–25** | **Q3 2024–25** | **Q4 2024–25** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **actual** | **projection** |
| Commonwealth Government – grants  | 26,070 | 26,010 | 25,256 |
| State Government – grants  | 49,096 | 50,084 | 50,815 |
| Public Purpose Fund - grants | 17,068 | 16,176 | 16,747 |
| Case revenue  | 1,495 | 1,744 | 902 |
| Other income  | 1,779 | 1,483 | 1,659 |
| **Total revenue**  | **95,508** | **95,497** | **95,379** |

Table 2.2 Total expenditure breakdown ($’000)

| **Expenditure**  | **Q2 2024–25** | **Q3 2024–25** | **Q4 2024–25** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **actual** | **Projection** |
| Case expenditure  | (31,013) | (29,981) | (31,848) |
| Community legal centre payments  | (15,733) | (17,506) | (15,820) |
| Staff costs  | (39,264) | (37,222) | (40,711) |
| Administration  | (7,106) | (6,504) | (7,529) |
| Depreciation and revaluation  | (906) | (583) | (936) |
| **Total expenditure**  | **(94,022)** | **(91,797)** | **(96,845)** |

1. A unique client is an individual who has accessed one or more of our legal assistance services during the financial year and with whom a client-lawyer relationship was formed. We count our clients the first time we see them in the financial year even though some clients may receive multiple services throughout the financial year. This definition does not include individuals who have received information over the phone or via our online web chat (Legal Help), from our website, in person at a court counter, through our Help Before Court service or those who have attended one of our community legal education sessions. It also excludes individuals who have received one of our independent advocacy and specialist resolution services. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Engaged sessions are when a website session lasts longer than ten seconds, when a session includes at least one conversion, or when a session includes two or more page views. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)