



Corporate Plan 2026–27

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 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 in creating better futures for First Peoples.

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Foreword

On behalf of our Board, we are pleased to share our Corporate Plan for 2026–27.

This is our first Corporate Plan under Strategy 30. In the year ahead, we will focus on the foundations that will help us deliver our strategy and better meet the needs of our clients. This includes supporting staff wellbeing, strengthening workforce capability, improving our long-term financial sustainability, enhancing our support for panel practitioners, and building our ability to deliver critical upgrades to systems and technology.

Ensuring access to justice will continue to be at the heart of our work. We will continue to support clients as they navigate significant changes to the law and justice system. Through our advocacy, we will promote fairness and justice, helping people to access legal help when they need it, achieve fair outcomes and reduce the long-term impacts of disadvantage.

Focusing on the following foundational areas will make us a stronger and more sustainable organisation, helping us continue to deliver high-quality services for the Victorian community.

Wellbeing

Our staff do difficult work, often supporting people at the most challenging time in their lives. Their wellbeing is essential to a strong and effective organisation. In the year ahead, we will continue to improve the systems and supports that promote wellbeing, safety and inclusion, with a focus on cultural safety, sustainable workloads and inclusive workplaces. A safe and supported workforce is fundamental to delivering high-quality services.

Capability

We will continue to strengthen the skills and capability of our workforce and service partners to support high-quality, culturally safe and client-centred services. This includes enhancing education and training for early career lawyers and expanding the support we provide to our partners. We will also continue to build cultural capability across our workforce to better support First Peoples.

Financial sustainability

Like many organisations in our sector, we operate in a challenging financial environment. Our funding is not sufficient to meet the growing demand for our services. We will continue to advocate for sustainable funding for our organisation and the private practitioners who play a vital role in service delivery. Increased investment is essential to help address our funding shortfall and avoid service reductions that would further limit clients' access to legal assistance and have negative impacts on the justice system.

Maintaining our long-term financial sustainability will remain a key priority in 2026–27. This will enable us to continue delivering high-quality legal services, respond to increasing demand, and ensure clients can access support now and into the future. We will improve how we make decisions and allocate resources so they are directed where they can have the greatest impact.

Digital delivery

Outdated technology, systems and processes slow down service delivery, increase administrative burden and divert time and energy away from client service delivery. Building our capability to

deliver major technology and systems improvements to better support staff, private practitioners and clients will be a key focus in the year ahead. These changes will make it easier to do the work, freeing up more time to focus on helping clients.

Working with our partners to respond to legal change and create fairer laws and systems

Significant legal and policy changes continue to affect our clients and the communities we serve. We will work closely with our partners across the justice system to respond to recent changes to bail, youth justice and committals laws, support clients to navigate complex legal processes, and advocate for changes where laws have unfair or disproportionate impacts, particularly on First Peoples and children.

We will also continue to bring our expertise and frontline experience to law reform and policy discussions, including advocating for changes that strengthen early intervention and prevention and reduce the risk of people becoming entrenched in the system. This includes advocating for stronger protections for children and victim survivors of family violence, better safeguards for women and children in legal processes, evidence-based sentencing reform, and stronger oversight and protections for people in custody.

Llewellyn Prain

Chair

Toby Hemming

Chief Executive Officer

Our budget and financial outlook

In the 2026–27 Victorian Budget, we received funding extensions for three critical programs including Help Before Court, Independent Family Advocacy and Support and the Victims Legal Service. We also received \$4.5 million for the next two years to help us respond to the increase in demand for our services following the government's stricter bail and youth justice laws.

While this specific initiative funding is welcome, our projected demand across all existing services will continue to exceed our funding, consistent with previous financial years. This will result in a projected deficit of \$29.4 million. This deficit is higher than in 2025–26 due to the impacts of some one-off funding received that year. The timing of fixed-term initiative funding (reported as a surplus in previous financial years) also contributes to the deficit.

We are carefully using limited and nearly depleted unallocated operating funds to defer the need to reduce vital services. However, this is not sustainable beyond this year. The current balance of our operating fund reflects the fact that we receive funds in advance to meet future commitments tied to specific initiatives, which often span multiple years in line with court activity.

Without additional funding beyond next year, we will need to reduce services, which will have a significant and negative impact on our clients, the justice system and the community.

Table 1: Budget

Categories	2026–27 budget (\$ million)
State government and Public Purpose Funding (excluding CLC)	244.7
Commonwealth government (excluding CLC)	81.7
Community legal centre (CLC) revenue	81.0
Case revenue (including client contributions) and other income	8.4
Total revenue	415.8
Case expenditure	144.9
Employee-related expenditure	187.5
CLC payments	81.0
Other operating expenditure	19.9
Depreciation and amortisation	11.9
Total expenditure	445.2
Net result	-29.4

Client services

We serve the Victorian community by providing legal advice, representation, information and advocacy services, recognising the intersections between legal and social issues. Our early support, including through community legal education, stops small issues from escalating, helping make the justice system fairer and more efficient for everyone.

We are projecting service levels to be higher than our targets. This reflects increased demand for our early intervention programs aligned with State Budget outcomes, together with current system drivers, including stricter bail laws. We will continue to monitor the impact on our services during the year.

Table 2: Departmental Performance Statement targets

Measure	2026–27 target
Grants of legal assistance	42,000
Duty lawyer services	91,000
Legal advice and minor assistance	35,000
Proportion of our services where family violence is involved	27%
Advocacy and client support services	113,000
Community legal education and information services	130,000
Average minutes of wait time to Legal Help	15 mins
Client satisfaction with services	80%

Our priorities and key activities

1. Supported clients and informed communities

Strategic priority – Deliver targeted and effective services that are grounded in professional, inclusive and client-centred practice, while supporting sustainable workloads for staff.

Support clients affected by significant criminal justice changes

We will deliver high-quality and effective services to people impacted by changes to bail, youth justice and committal laws, supporting participation, protecting rights and achieving fair outcomes.

Deliver targeted services that promote early intervention and rights

We will embed and extend services funded by state and federal governments that help prevent legal issues from escalating and promote rights and inclusion. These include Independent Family Advocacy and Support, and specialist legal services for victims of crime, people facing compulsory mental health treatment and refugees and people seeking asylum.

Strategic priority – Refine our services using client and lived experience expertise, supported by evidence and organisational experience, to ensure our services respond to need and achieve meaningful outcomes for clients.

Deliver high quality client centred services

We will provide consistent, respectful, accessible and equitable service delivery by implementing:

- our Client Service Charter to provide greater clarity and consistency in service delivery and strengthen client experience
- a framework for lived experience partnerships and workforce to guide the engagement and contribution of lived experience experts in informing our service design and delivery.
- sustainable workload management practices that recognise the value of a well-supported and reflective workforce.

2. Strong partnerships to extend impact

Strategic priority – Strengthen partnerships with private practitioners and make it easier to work with us by reducing the administrative burden on them and improving communication, engagement, transparency and support.

Improve engagement and support for private practitioners

We will strengthen engagement and collaboration with private practitioners by increasing support, simplifying guidance and creating more opportunities to contribute to service improvement, including through the establishment of a new private practitioner advisory group. We will also continue to advocate for sustainable funding for private practitioners and service partners.

Support experts in criminal law matters

We will support psychologists, psychiatrists and neuropsychologists – and practitioners engaging these experts – to provide high-quality mental health assessments and reports in criminal law proceedings to maintain strong partnerships and achieve better outcomes for clients.

Modernise grants management

We will begin foundational work to modernise ageing systems that no longer adequately support the delivery of legal assistance services. This will include beginning the reform of grants management to simplify processes and reduce the administrative burden on private practitioners.

Strategic priority – Collaborate with community legal centres and the broader justice sector to share evidence, secure resources, deliver services that respond to legal need, coordinate planning and strengthen collective advocacy.

Strengthen access to family law services

We will improve access to family law services in regional areas by supporting community legal centres to respond to immediate service delivery gaps.

Strategic priority – Deepen relationships with First Peoples communities, and First Peoples-led organisations, to further enable self-determination in the justice system, and take shared accountability for implementing Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations.

Advance First Peoples self-determination

We will strengthen cultural safety, self-determination and service excellence for First Peoples by embedding the First Peoples Framework and Cultural Capability Framework across our workforce, systems and services.

3. Fair and equitable systems

Strategic priority – Focus advocacy efforts where evidence shows we can most improve fairness, minimise legal need and improve system outcomes.

We support fair and equitable laws and systems through advocacy that advances First Peoples' inherent right to self-determination, elevates lived experience and promotes accountability and transparency within systems that impact people's lives. We prioritise children, uphold their rights and recognise their unique needs and developmental circumstances.

We recognise that legal issues are often driven by structural inequity and compounded by intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination, which disproportionately impact First Peoples and people from marginalised backgrounds. We promote prevention, early intervention, procedural fairness and restorative approaches that uphold dignity, wellbeing and community connection.

Guided by the above strategic advocacy principles and acknowledging the over-representation of First Peoples in the justice system, we will use our client and practice experience to advocate for:

- improved legal and systemic responses to children who are victim survivors of family violence, to embed children's right to participate in decisions that affect them
- criminal justice responses that are tailored to the developmental and rehabilitative needs of children and that support children's ability to participate
- influence implementation of the women's safety reforms, and development of sexual offence reforms, in ways that improve the experience, protections and pathways for women and children, and promote fair and supportive processes for all participants.
- stronger rights protections for people with disability, including by influencing system-wide impacts of proposed changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.
- contribute to evidence-based, fair and appropriate sentencing reform that prioritises therapeutic and restorative outcomes
- stronger rights protections and oversight in custodial settings and influential contributions to the statutory review into bail laws.

4. Well supported people and effective, sustainable systems

Strategic priority – Support our workforce through inclusive and culturally safe work practices, psychologically safe working environments and ongoing education and professional development.

Strengthen cultural and psychological safety and wellbeing for staff

We will strengthen cultural and psychological safety and wellbeing across the organisation through:

- expanding practical supports that promote staff wellbeing and sustainable ways of working
- equipping staff to manage challenging interactions through training and support
- embedding an intersectional approach that supports cultural, psychological and physical safety for staff and clients.

Strategic priority – Support sustainable workloads, including by strengthening workforce planning, improving how we prioritise and allocate work, and securing funding to meet growing demand, including for our service partners.

Achieve financial sustainability

We will actively pursue and advocate for increased and sustainable funding to strengthen service delivery, improve access to justice for clients, address ongoing funding shortfalls and secure long-term financial sustainability.

Strengthen workforce capability

We will improve access to consistent, high-quality legal assistance services by strengthening workforce capability, sustainability and retention through:

- enhanced training and support for early career lawyers, including planned offerings for panel practitioners
- foundational activities to target efforts to attract, recruit and retain staff in hard to fill and hard to retain roles, particularly in regional areas
- supporting leaders to identify and build capabilities to lead diverse teams and deliver complex services effectively.

Strategic Priority – Improve processes and work practices and implement technologies that support staff and practice partners to deliver high-quality services.

Improve document management practices

We will make it easier for staff and practice partners to access, use and share the client information they need through simpler and more secure document management practices.

Build digital capability and delivery excellence

We will build organisational digital capability and strengthen our ability to deliver complex projects through effective governance, prioritisation and workforce capability development. This will ensure investment is focused on the highest-value initiatives and that staff are supported to adopt new technologies and ways of working.

Our outcomes

Our 2026–27 priorities and activities align with our Outcomes Framework, which outlines the difference we want our services to make for our clients and the community. Throughout the year, we will monitor progress against our priorities and their contribution to these longer-term outcomes.

O1



Clients have increased access to justice

- 1.1 Clients address or prevent legal problems
- 1.2 Clients equitably access timely legal and related services, including early intervention and preventative services, that meet their needs and capabilities
- 1.3 First Nations clients experience culturally safe legal services and improved access to justice
- 1.4 Clients experience culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and respectful services
- 1.5 Clients have a strong voice in services and systems affecting them

O2



Improved legal understanding in the community

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

O3



Collaborative legal assistance sector

- 3.1 The legal assistance sector works together to deliver responsive services and conduct joint advocacy
- 3.2 VLA effectively supports self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services
- 3.3 The legal assistance sector shares and uses evidence to design and deliver services

O4



Fairer laws and systems

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

O5



Effective and sustainable Victoria Legal Aid

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