# Victoria Legal Aid 2018–19 midyear report

This report provides a snapshot of our first six months of operations in the 2018–19 financial year from 1 July 2018 to 31 December 2018.

## Snapshot of service delivery

As forecast, demand for legal services remained strong in the first half of 2018-19 with Victoria Legal Aid assisting more clients compared to the same period last financial year. In particular, we saw the number of calls dealt with by the Legal Help telephone service increase by 15 per cent as a result of an extension to the hours of operation of this service as well as a continued focus on service improvements and reforms.

| **Clients as at** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** | **Variance** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unique clients | 53,752 | 59,797 | 11% |
| Calls dealt with by our Legal Help telephone service | 62,151 | 71,493 | 15% |

| **Preventative and early intervention services** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** | **Variance** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Calls to our Legal Help telephone service | 93,484 | 94,293 | 1% |
| Information and community legal education services | 64,240 | 65,841 | 2% |
| Sessions on our website | 1,089,044 | 1,188,309 | 9% |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Duty lawyer services** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** | **Variance** |
| In-house and private practitioners | 46,966 | 47,207 | 0.5% |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grants of legal assistance** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** | **Variance** |
| In-house, private practitioners and community legal centres | 20,910 | 22,212 | 6% |

## Outlook for remainder of 2018–19 and beyond

We expect the trend of increasing demand for our services to continue for the remainder of this financial year and beyond. Whilst we are operating in a tightening economic environment, we are committed to maintaining our focus on ensuring our services are client centred, designed using evidence and data, and delivered with a strengthened spirit of trust and collaboration. While our efforts to attract revenue will not lessen, we are preparing for difficult decisions about how to contain expenditure growth. We will commence discussions with stakeholders in coming months about the ongoing viability of our current service offerings and priorities. Developing innovative and client-focused technology solutions and data capabilities will remain critical to ensuring we use our limited funding in the most efficient and effective way.

## Our clients

In the six months prior to 31 December 2018, Victoria Legal Aid assisted 59,797 unique clients.[[1]](#footnote-2)

| **Unique clients as at** | **31 Dec 2015** | **31 Dec 2016** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unique clients | 50,390 | 51,798 | 53,752 | 59,797 |
| **Growth** | - | 3% | 4% | 11% |

Over the past 6 months we have seen:

* Clients who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander up by 15%
* Clients who identify as being from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background up by 16%
* Clients who required an interpreter up by 7%

Overall:

* 5% or 3,305 clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
* 4% or 2,678 clients required an interpreter
* 22% or 13,153 clients identified as being from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background.

## Services we provide

### Grants of legal assistance

We provide grants of legal assistance to people who cannot afford a lawyer, are experiencing a significant legal problem that we can assist with and who meet our eligibility criteria. A grant of legal assistance is an amount of money paid by VLA for a lawyer to represent a client. Clients with a grant of legal assistance can be helped by a Victoria Legal Aid lawyer or a lawyer on one of our panels, including private practitioners and lawyers from community legal centres.

Compared to the same time last year, we have seen an increase of over 6% in grants of legal assistance, with the main growth being in the criminal law and family law areas. Over the previous six months there have been 8,017 family law related grants, an increase of 5%, which can be attributed to increases in grants for child protection matters. There have been 13,819 grants provided in the criminal law area over the previous six months, an increase of 14%, mainly due to an increase within the Summary Crime area.

| **Grants of legal assistance as at** | **31 Dec 2015** | **31 Dec 2016** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Crime | 9,938 | 10,809 | 12,149 | 13,819 |
| Family and Children | 6,519 | 7,019 | 7,638 | 8,017 |
| Civil | 697 | 635 | 569 | 376 |
| **Totals** | 17,154 | 18,463 | 20,356 | 22,212 |
| **Growth** | - | 8% | 9% | 10% |

### Who delivers our grants?

We have seen the number of grants of legal assistance assigned to practitioners on our panels remain steady. 77% of grants between 1 July 2018 and 31 December 2018 were assigned to practitioners on our panels. For the same period last year, it was 76%.

| **Grants of legal assistance as at** | **31 Dec 2015** | **31 Dec 2016** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| In-house | 5,646 | 5,498 | 5,019 | 5,039 |
| Panel practitioner | 12,817 | 14,968 | 16,001 | 17,173 |
| **Totals** | 18,463 | 20,466 | 21,020 | 22,212 |
| **Growth** | - | 11% | 3% | 6% |

### Duty lawyer services

Victoria Legal Aid lawyers and some private practitioners are on ‘duty’ at many courts and tribunals across Victoria to help people who are at the court or tribunal for a hearing, but do not have their own lawyer.

Our duty lawyers provide free legal information, advice and representation to clients. Duty lawyers do not represent everyone. For example, in adult summary criminal matters, we prioritise serious cases, including people who are in custody or at risk of going into custody, and people needing intensive support. We also provide duty lawyer services relating to Family Violence Intervention Orders, child protection, and family law.

| **Duty lawyer services as at** | **31 Dec 2015** | **31 Dec 2016** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Duty lawyer services | 42,788 | 45,633 | 47,123 | 48,270 |
| **Growth** | - | 7% | 3% | 2% |

Duty Lawyer services have increased slightly in the period of 1 July–31 December 2018 compared to the same time last year. The main area of growth is family law. In particular, family violence related matters are up 14% to 8,448 services, and child protection matters are up 14% to 2,703.

### Legal advice and minor assistance

Victoria Legal Aid lawyers provide legal advice and minor assistance to help people resolve their legal problems as early as possible and, in some circumstances, avoid the need to go to court.

Legal advice is provided over the phone, via Legal Help live chat, face-to-face at our offices, or via outreach services. Minor assistance is provided where there is a need for some ongoing assistance such as providing written advice, making phone calls, and negotiating on a person’s behalf.

| **Legal advice and minor assistance as at** | **31 Dec 2015** | **31 Dec 2016** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Legal advice and minor assistance | 20,710 | 21,266 | 18,397 | 25,138 |
| **Growth** | - | 3% | -13% | 37% |

We have seen an overall increase of 37% when compared to the same time last year. There have been increases across all areas of legal advice, with 7,324 criminal law related legal advice services provided (an increase of 78%) and 9,876 family law related legal advice services provided (an increase of 75%). This is largely due to increases in advice relating to family violence, parenting disputes, and adult summary crime.

### Legal Help telephone service

Our free Legal Help telephone service is a major access and triage point for legal aid services.

There has been an increase in Legal Help staffing numbers over the previous six months that has enabled a 15% increase in calls answered for the period. Average call duration has also increased over this period due to an increase in legal advice being provided, and a greater number of more intensive matters that require additional time. Compared with the same time last year Legal Help provided 5,728 additional legal advice sessions.

| **Legal Help telephone service as at** | **31 Dec 2015** | **31 Dec 2016** | **31 Dec 2017** | **31 Dec 2018** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Calls to the service | 89,797 | 89,592 | 93,484 | 94,293 |
| **Growth** | - | -0.2% | 4% | 0.8% |
| Calls answered | 56,911 | 59,655 | 62,151 | 71,493 |
| **Growth** | - | 5% | 4% | 15% |
| Answer rate | 62% | 67% | 66% | 76% |
| Average call duration | 6m 49s | 9m 15s | 10m 6s | 18m 31s |

## Other Victoria Legal Aid headlines for 2018

* **September** –Victoria Legal Aid released the findings of an evaluation into our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The evaluation shows that the RAP has had a positive impact on Victoria Legal Aid, with our corporate priorities now including a commitment to improving access to our legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
* **October** – Victoria Legal Aid’s new Chief Executive Officer Louise Glanville started after Bevan Warner completed a ten-year term in August 2018.
* **October** – Changes to Victoria Legal Aid’s means test were introduced following the means test review. 13 recommendations were introduced to ensure our services are properly targeted to those in need.
* **November** – Victoria Legal Aid’s Legal Help Live Chat pilot marked its half way point with 675 chat sessions having been completed since the opening of the service in early October.
* **December** – Victoria Legal Aid’s Legal Help service extended its hours to increase the accessibility and availability of legal assistance to Victorians. The service now operates for an additional 90 minutes per day.

## Financial summary

Demand for our services has continued to increase which is reflected in a 12.6% expenditure increase compared to the same period last year. Our operating result for the period of 1 July to 31 December 2018 was a $0.8 million in deficit. The trend of increased service demand means our deficit is forecast to grow over the remaining six months. This is due to a growth in expenditure in the areas of indictable crime, summary crime and child protection. We will be enacting several internal savings measures this financial year to contain our deficit to around $3 million.

### Revenue

| **Revenue year to date** | **As at 31 Dec 2017 ($’000)** | **As at 31 Dec 2018 ($’000)** | **Variance** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Commonwealth – grants | 32,275 | 35,588 | 10.3% |
| State – grants | 56,309 | 64,824 | 15.1% |
| Public Purpose Fund | 15,018 | 16,069 | 7% |
| Case revenue | 1,965 | 2,650 | 34.9% |
| Other income | 510 | 540 | 6% |
| **Total revenue** | 106,078 | 119,672 | 12.8% |

### Expenditure

| **Expenditure year to date** | **As at 31 Dec 2017 ($’000)** | **As at 31 Dec 2018 ($’000)** | **Variance** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Case expenditure | 46,385 | 53,825 | 16% |
| Community legal centre payments | 14,297 | 15,574 | 8.9% |
| Staff costs | 35,277 | 40,126 | 13.7% |
| Administration | 9,944 | 9,980 | 0.4% |
| Projects | 989 | 853 | (13.8%) |
| **Total expenditure** | 106,892 | 120,358 | 12.6% |
| Other economic flows | (39) | (108) | 180.1% |
| Operating surplus/(deficit) | (852) | (795) | 6.8% |

## Performance against Victorian Government service targets

### Our results against targets up to 31 December 2018 for Victoria Legal Aid’s output measures under Budget Paper No. 3

| **Output measure** | **Annual Target** | **YTD Target** | **YTD Actual** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Community legal education and information services (excluding family violence related services) | 123,500 – 128,500 | 64,444 – 66,944 | 53,884 |
| Community legal education and information services (family violence related services) | 11,700 | 5,933 | 11,957 |
| Duty lawyer services (excluding family violence related services) | 78,000 | 29,582 – 30,632 | 34,744 |
| Grants of legal assistance (excluding family violence related services) | 32,900 | 15,971 | 16,109 |
| Legal advice and minor assistance (excluding family violence related services) | 34,800 | 17,550 | 20,875 |
| Family violence legal services | 36,300 | 17,747 | 22,476 |
| Number of unique clients | 96,300 | 54,787 | 59,797 |
| Average call wait time to the Legal Help phone line | <10 | <10 | 7.5 |

1. A unique client is an individual who accessed one or more of our legal services. This does not include people

   for whom a client-lawyer relationship was not formed, who received information via the telephone, website or

   in-person at court or at a public counter, who participated in community legal education sessions, or clients

   from community legal centres. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)