RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR CLIENTS, STAFF AND PARTNERS

We will receive $7.9m from the State and Commonwealth Governments, across 2019–20 and 2020–21, to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have targeted the additional funding to these key areas:

• addressing service impacts that are new or intensified by the pandemic such as Family Dispute Resolution Services and Family Violence Intervention Orders
• increasing our capacity to provide frontline services, with additional roles to meet demand in regional Victoria, our Legal Help phone and web chat service, child protection, civil law and family violence
• supporting courts to progress cases through enhanced case management
• supporting staff working from home with enhanced IT capability
• ensuring safety including reducing the need for face-to-face contact, providing client-facing staff with masks and increased cleaning in our offices.
CONTINUING TO DELIVER ESSENTIAL LEGAL SERVICES TO OUR CLIENTS

Website COVID-19 info hub
84,032 sessions on the dedicated COVID-19 section of our website

The top four legal answers looked at on our website during the pandemic were:
1. COVID-19 and losing work
2. COVID-19 and parenting issues
3. COVID-19 and being unable to work
4. COVID-19 and fines

Continued to deliver our Family Dispute Resolution Service
The number of requests for Family Dispute Resolution Services rose sharply from April to June 2020 – an increase of 32 per cent compared to the same time last year.

Prioritised family violence matters
We set up a dedicated family violence priority phone line and webchat channel to improve the safety of help-seekers and manage the increase in family violence related enquiries to Legal Help.

Continued to deliver essential duty lawyer services
Our duty lawyers provided 9753 services between mid-March and 30 June in urgent areas like family violence, child protection, and bail and remand, communicating with our clients over the phone where possible.

We also commenced development of Help Before Court, a digital intake tool designed to help address the backlog of matters in the Magistrates’ Court and connect clients with duty lawyers prior to their court hearings.

SUPPORTING OUR PARTNERS

Reduced our invoice processing time
1,300 invoices worth almost $13 million were paid within five days during the last week of March.

For the remainder of this financial year we continued our commitment to support our private practitioner partners and other businesses by paying all invoices within 10 days in line with the State Government directive. This is a significant reduction from our pre-COVID-19 payment terms of up to 30 days.

Distributed additional funding to community legal centres
As part of the State and Commonwealth Government response, we will distribute $14.8 million to community legal centres (CLCs) to support them in providing essential legal services through the pandemic.

COVID-19 resources for our practice partners
We had 2418 unique page views of the COVID-19 information hub on our website for practice partners including CLCs, VALS, Djirra, private practitioners and stakeholders. This section provided up-to-date information about changes to our programs and processes as well as justice sector updates.

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF

Working from home
By the end of April the vast majority of our staff had transitioned to working from home with the exception of urgent or priority court matters.

Created a digital mail process
We digitised 3,761 documents with over 40,000 pages through our digital mail process to reduce the need for staff to attend the office.

Impact of COVID-19 staff health and wellbeing initiatives
In response to the pulse survey held in late May, 77 per cent of our workforce reported that they felt supported by the organisation during the pandemic.