# Collaborative Planning Committee

## 19 August 2020

### Attendance

**Present:** Anna Faithfull (Department of Justice and Community Safety), Ashwinny Krishna (Federation of Community Legal Centres), Stuart Webb (Law Institute of Victoria), Lynne Haultain (Victoria Law Foundation), Louise Glanville (Victoria Legal Aid), Nerita Waight (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service), Megan Ross (Djirra) Andrew Saunders (VLA Board).

**Apology:** Simon Moglia (Vic Bar)

**Observers:** Peter Noble (VLA)

**Secretariat:** Sonia Law (VLA)

## Meeting summary

The Committee met online due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Committee opened with an Acknowledgement of Country and acknowledged the various lands on which Committee members were joining the meeting from. Louise Glanville, Chair of the Collaborative Planning Committee welcomed Andrew Saunders from the Victoria Legal Aid Board as a guest to the meeting.

The Committee reflected on the impacts of COVID-19 that are being seen through their work. These included:

1. The importance of ensuring staff, client and stakeholder well-being, both in response to the immediate threat posed by COVID-19 and the related consequences of altered service methods and demands.
2. The impact on Aboriginal and other clients in custody of being subject to quarantine andpotentially being subject to longer periods in custody due to court delays. The increased risk of people on bail, parole and community corrections orders going into custody as result of reduced access to appropriate community services.
3. The impact on clients in the child protection system where the reduction in face to face contact with children potentially impact reunification efforts, increasing the likelihood of permanent child removal.
4. The importance of a community driven approach and assisting people with the range issues they are facing, rather than a narrow focus on legal service provision. The importance of relationships with non-legal partner organisations in maintaining client access to legal services.
5. The potential for positive changes to future work and systems arising from the learnings of the COVID era. There may be opportunities to improve systems for greater efficiency and improved client outcomes, noting that the current arrangements are likely to remain for some time. The benefits of remote service delivery approaches alongside place-based responses should be considered in light of desired outcomes and quality considerations.
6. The workforce challenges arising from permitted worker categories for lawyers initially being confined to court-based work.
7. Increased reporting of family violence and the greater reliance by those experiencing family violence on social media, online support and other ways of accessing legal assistance, such as through non-legal support services, to hide the fact that legal assistance is being sought.
8. The opportunity to embrace digital transformation as a means to improve service responsiveness and efficiency.

The Committee determined to keep discussion of COVID-19 and its impacts on its agenda for future meetings.

The Committee provided feedback on a draft Legal Need and Regional Service Statement and noted its value for future planning, including for the next National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement. The Statement identified the areas of greatest unmet demand and proposed working principles to guide legal assistance service design and planning responses in regional Victoria. Feedback given included the importance of recognising the unique experience of Aboriginal clients with the legal system and the distinctive contribution of Aboriginal controlled legal assistance services, the value of place based and integrated approaches to legal assistance service design and the need to recognise the systemic factors that drive unmet legal demand.

This feedback will be incorporated into the Statement and it will be further refined by a working group of the Committee before being considered by the VLA Board at its October meeting.

The Committee received an update on the implementation of the new National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement which commenced on 1 Jul 2020. The Committee noted the valuable contributions of members during the agreement negotiation phase and recognised the value of maintaining this engagement to support the data reform process and future service planning for the next agreement. Insights from the COVID-19 era will also prove valuable for future collaborative planning.

The Committee noted the importance of continuing its focus on outcomes measurement in the legal assistance sector in its work program for the year. This will be progressed later in the year once the work on the Legal Need and Regional Services Statement is finalised and provided to the VLA Board.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on18 November 2020.