



Corporate Plan 2025–26

Acknowledgement of Country

This plan was written on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past and present. We also acknowledge the strength and resilience of all First Nations people who today are still arrested and imprisoned at rates far higher than other Australians.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Foreword | 2 |
| Our budget | 4 |
| Our outcomes | 7 |
| Our priorities | 8 |
| Outcome 1 – Clients have increased access to justice | 8 |
| Outcome 2 – Improved legal understanding in the community | 10 |
| Outcome 3 – Collaborative legal assistance sector | 10 |
| Outcome 4 – Fairer laws and systems | 11 |
| Outcome 5 – Effective and sustainable Victoria Legal Aid | 11 |
| Our strategic advocacy | 12 |

Foreword

On behalf of our Board, we are pleased to share our Corporate Plan 2025–26.

This is our last plan under Strategy 26. In the year ahead, we will reflect on our achievements and progress under our current strategy as we develop our next strategy, Strategy 30.

We will prioritise addressing unmet client needs in the regions, providing culturally safe services and listening to client voices in the design of services and programs. We will also work closely with our sector partners to improve the coordination of service delivery and ways of working.

We are operating in a challenging environment, with a tightening budget and planned expenditure reductions across the Victorian public service and justice sector. We will continue to advocate strongly for sustainable, long-term funding for the legal assistance sector, and for law reform and system changes to reduce demand. We will continue to carefully use our cash reserves to maintain our service delivery over the next 12 months as we consider how to respond to whole-of-government savings. We are also making some strategic investments to deliver better client outcomes, support staff safety and wellbeing and transform our business practices to improve our long-term efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Through the mixed model, we provide essential frontline services to the Victorian community. We are monitoring the impacts of recent changes to youth justice and bail, noting the disproportionate and detrimental impact previous changes had on First Nations people and young people. We continue to share our practice experience with the government to help inform the changes. This includes advocating for appropriate protections for those most at risk and promoting alternative options such as prevention, diversion and support programs that we know can make a meaningful difference to clients and the community.

We will also continue to work with government to secure ongoing funding for early resolution services, such as the Help Before Court, Independent Family Advocacy and Support and Pre-Court Engagement services. These services assist clients sooner and generate flow on efficiencies for the justice system with reduced court backlogs and system wide savings.

We support self-determination and the path to Treaty. Working in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Law Institute of Victoria, we have supported the development of the First Nations Cultural Capability Framework. We will align our practice and service delivery with the framework to ensure First Nations clients are culturally safe, respected and empowered in all aspects of the Victorian legal profession.

We will also independently review our First Nations strategies and critically reflect on the findings and recommendations to develop our next First Nations strategy. This will build our organisational understanding of self-determination and guide our readiness for statewide Treaty outcomes.

Making sure clients can access timely legal and related services will be a focus for the year. Select early resolution services will be expanded to regional areas to help address unmet need in those areas. Work on new technology and practices that make intake processes easier will occur will support a more consistent client experience across the state. We are also investing in new and updated offices to support our staff to continue to deliver quality services to our clients.

Practice partners are vital in the delivery of the mixed model. Working with our colleagues at National Legal Aid, we will advocate for adequate remuneration for practitioners doing legal aid work. We will review our fee structure for expert reports and undertake a fee pilot to address regional supply issues and increase our training and support for private practitioners and in-house

staff to enhance service quality. Several planned technology upgrades, including the new grants management system, will better support our staff and practice partners through more efficient ways of working and improved collaboration across the sector.

The wellbeing and cultural safety of our staff remains of utmost importance. We will develop our first intersectional diversity, equity and inclusion strategy that builds on our work to date through various existing action plans. We will also continue to increase our focus and supports for our staff on the psychosocial impacts of our challenging work.

Bill Jaboor

Chairperson

Toby Hemming

Chief Executive Officer

Our budget

As in previous financial years, the projected demand for our services will continue to exceed the level of funding we receive, resulting in a projected financial deficit of \$19.3 million. In addition, the timing of fixed-term initiative funding (reported as a surplus in previous financial years) contributes to the reported deficit and higher than normal cash balances. We will continue to carefully use our cash reserves to maintain our service delivery over the next 12 months while ensuring we can continue to meet our ongoing grant commitments.

For 2025–26, we have budgeted \$363 million in revenue, a decrease of \$6.6 million (2 per cent) on the 2024–25 budget. The reduction in state government funding mainly reflects the impacts of previously announced whole-of-government savings and lapsing program funding slightly offset by normal indexation increases. The budget includes the State Budget outcomes related to continued funding for our pre-court engagement for family violence matters and the Victims Legal Service. Other income reductions mainly reflect lower investment income due to the draw down of our cash reserves and general market conditions.

Table 1: 2025–26 revenue by source

| Source of revenue | 2024–25 budget (\$ million) | 2025–26 budget (\$ million) | Growth |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| State government | 195.0 | 183.7 | -6% |
| Commonwealth government | 102.4 | 106.3 | 4% |
| Public Purpose Fund | 62.8 | 64.3 | 2% |
| Case revenue (including client contributions) and other income | 9.6 | 8.9 | -7% |
| Total revenue | 369.8 | 363.2 | -2% |

In 2025–26, the budgeted expenditure of \$382.5 million is a decrease of \$10.2 million (3 per cent) on the 2024–25 budget. The decrease in case expenditure mainly reflects the phasing of externally funded initiatives across financial years to align with court activity following detailed project planning completed last year.

Employee related expenditure is largely aligned with the phasing of externally funded initiatives and increases aligned with our Enterprise Agreement 2024–28. It also reflects further strategic investment to deliver better client outcomes, support staff safety and wellbeing and transform our business practices with the aim of improving our efficiency and cost effectiveness over the long term.

We administer community legal centre funding on behalf of the state government and distribute funding aligned with government decisions. We are awaiting final decisions from the Department of Justice and Community Safety on the final distributions for 2025–26.

Table 2: 2025–26 expenditure by category

| Expenditure category | 2024–25 budget (\$ million) | 2025–26 budget (\$ million) | Growth |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Case expenditure | 143.2 | 125.9 | -12% |
| Employee-related expenditure | 151.3 | 160.4 | 4% |
| Community legal centre payments | 64.4 | 63.0 | -2% |
| Other operating expenditure | 30.4 | 29.6 | -2% |
| Depreciation and amortisation | 3.4 | 3.6 | 6% |
| Total expenditure | 392.7 | 382.5 | -3% |

Financial outlook

We have implemented short-term mitigation strategies to defer the need to implement service reductions. However, these are not sustainable in the long term. Beyond 2025–26, longer-term projections continue to highlight that core funding is insufficient to meet the projected demand and address government-imposed savings and reprioritisation decisions.

In addition, we will assess any further impacts of the government's response to the Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service. Without additional funding, we will need to consider service reductions, while carefully managing our cash reserves. Any service reductions would be for court-based services, following consultation with sector partners.

Client services

New service performance measures have been developed for 2025–26 to improve transparency and best represent the total number of services we deliver.

This includes a new advocacy and client support services measure, which relates to our advocacy service functions. The increase in advocacy and client support services compared to 2024–25 reflects the expansion of these service across our offices.

The new measure aligns with our statutory obligations to support people in understanding and enacting their rights, navigating systems and accessing the services they need to address legal and non-legal needs, and presenting their views and preferences to decision-makers.

We expect the remaining service output projections to be largely similar to 2024–25 levels, aligned with court activity. However, we are already experiencing increased demand in our remand services due to recent youth justice and bail changes. We will continue to monitor the impact on our services.

Table 3: Departmental performance statement measures

| Measure | 2024–25 actual | 2025–26 target | Growth |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------|
| Grants of legal assistance | 40,854 | 42,000 | 2% |
| Duty lawyer services | 92,247 | 91,000 | 3% |
| Legal advice and minor assistance | 37,889 | 35,000 | 3% |
| Proportion of our services where family violence is involved | 30% | 27% | 0% |
| Advocacy and client support services | 126,355 | 113,000 | 12% |
| Community legal education and information services | 129,277 | 130,000 | 4% |
| Average minutes of wait time to Legal Help | 15:09 mins | 15 mins | 0% |
| Client satisfaction with services | 68% | 80% | 0% |

Our outcomes

Our 2025–26 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.

01



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

02



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

03



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

04



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

05



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

Our priorities

Outcome 1 – Clients have increased access to justice

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|---|---|---|
| Strengthen regional service delivery | Expand our in-house practice in family law across regions to facilitate access to justice for clients and support the market for legally aided services | 1.1 Clients are assisted to address or prevent legal problems |
| Strengthen regional service delivery | Increase access to our services to the Ovens Murray region | 1.2 Clients equitably access timely legal and related services, including early intervention and preventative services that meet their needs and capabilities |
| Strengthen regional service delivery | Upgrade our regional offices to improve the staff and client experience | 1.2 Clients equitably access timely legal and related services, including early intervention and preventative services that meet their needs and capabilities |
| Strengthen regional service delivery | Expand our Help Before Court and Independent Family Advocacy early resolution services across the state, with a continued focus on reducing court delays and increasing diversion | 1.4 Clients experience culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and respectful services |
| Work to ensure our services are culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and equitable | Respond to significant reform to bail, committal and youth justice laws and systems, including by promoting prevention, diversion and earlier resolution of legal matters | 1.4 Clients experience culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and respectful services |

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|---|---|---|
| Work to ensure our services are culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and equitable | Embed and expand the Mental Health Legal Rights Service | 1.2 Clients equitably access timely legal and related services, including early intervention and preventative services that meet their needs and capabilities |
| Work to ensure our services are culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and equitable | Enhance the quality of services our staff and practice partners provide through streamlined practice standards and improved training and support | 1.1 Clients are assisted to address or prevent legal problems |
| Work to ensure our services are culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and equitable | Establish new intake processes for our services to better respond to client needs and capabilities | 1.2 Clients equitably access timely legal and related services, including early intervention and preventative services that meet their needs and capabilities |
| Embed client first approaches by involving clients, consumers in designing, delivering and reviewing our services | Refresh our client-focused strategies and policies to ensure that our services remain client-centred, inclusive and effective in meeting client needs | 1.5 Clients have a strong voice in services and systems affecting them |
| Embed client first approaches by involving clients, consumers in designing, delivering and reviewing our services | Embed working with lived experience experts in the design, delivery and evaluation of our remand and Assessment and Referral Court services | 1.5 Clients have a strong voice in services and systems affecting them |

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|--|--|---|
| Develop culturally safe services for First Nations clients while supporting the principle of self-determination and the important role of Aboriginal community-controlled legal services | Develop a First Nations Strategy to support our organisational understanding of First Nations self-determination, increase accountability to Victorian First Nations community and guide organisational readiness for statewide Treaty outcomes and earnest engagement in VALS' Justice Treaty development project | 1.3 First Nations clients experience culturally safe legal services and increased access to justice |
| Develop culturally safe services for First Nations clients while supporting the principle of self-determination and the important role of Aboriginal community-controlled legal services | Strengthen practice and uphold justice by aligning our practice and service delivery with the First Nations Cultural Capability Framework to ensure First Nations clients are culturally safe, respected and empowered in all aspects of the Victorian legal profession | 1.3 First Nations clients experience culturally safe legal services and increased access to justice |

Outcome 2 – Improved legal understanding in the community

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|--|--|--|
| Expand and improve access to online, phone and face-to-face legal information that addresses peoples' diverse needs and capabilities | Embed enhanced service delivery in Legal Help, including establishing a dedicated First Nations Legal Helpline | 2.2 Community members access reliable, timely and targeted legal information that meets their needs and capabilities |

Outcome 3 – Collaborative legal assistance sector

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|---|--|--|
| Create opportunities and support improved service coordination, collaboration, equity and transparency across the legal assistance sector | Expand services to support the new Wyndham Court in collaboration with our sector partners | 3.1 The legal assistance sector works together to deliver coordinated and responsive services and advocacy |

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|---|---|--|
| Create opportunities and support improved service coordination, collaboration, equity and transparency across the legal assistance sector | Collaborate with National Legal Aid on advocacy for improved practice partner fees | 3.1 The legal assistance sector works together to deliver coordinated and responsive services and advocacy |
| Improve our engagement with and make it easier for private practitioners and community legal centres to work with VLA | Review our fee structures and other supports for expert reports | 3.1 The legal assistance sector works together to deliver coordinated and responsive services and advocacy |
| Improve our engagement with and make it easier for private practitioners and community legal centres to work with VLA | Complete requirements and start to implement a grants management system to improve the staff and partner experience | 3.1 The legal assistance sector works together to deliver coordinated and responsive services and advocacy |

Outcome 4 – Fairer laws and systems

Our priorities for this outcome are outlined in [our strategic advocacy priorities](#).

Outcome 5 – Effective and sustainable Victoria Legal Aid

| Strategic priority | Actions | Sub-outcome |
|---|--|---|
| Invest in our people and work in a safe, inclusive, equitable way that involves people with lived experience | Implement our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy | 5.3 VLA is a safe, inclusive, and equitable organisation, with diverse and skilled staff |
| Invest in our people and work in a safe, inclusive, equitable way that involves people with lived experience | Implement the psychosocial wellbeing framework to ensure staff are supported and we manage psychosocial risks, including workload and work demands | 5.3 VLA is a safe, inclusive, and equitable organisation, with diverse and skilled staff |
| Develop our digital and data systems to improve access to justice, provide clients with better quality services and choices appropriate to their capabilities, and create more efficient work practices | Complete planning for, and start to implement, a new human resource information system to support modern ways of working | 5.4 VLA is equipped with sustainable resources and technology, that reduce our environmental impact and enable us to deliver services |

Our strategic advocacy

The *Legal Aid Act 1978* requires us to take steps to deliver legal services efficiently and innovatively to reduce the need for repeat, individualised legal services. One way we achieve this is by pursuing improvements in law and policy that result in better outcomes for our clients and the community, as detailed in our [Outcomes Framework](#).

Principles

These principles guide our strategic advocacy:

- **Self-determination** – As part of our ongoing commitment to upholding First Nations peoples' right to self-determination, we will be led by the expertise of, and work collaboratively with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, stakeholders and First Nations communities to inform our advocacy and reform work, and support truth-telling and Treaty processes in Victoria.
- **Lived experience** – Our advocacy is shaped by the experiences and expertise of people directly affected by laws, policies and systems.
- **Intersectionality** – We recognise that different aspects of identity – including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, mental health issues, neurodiversity, age, migration and socioeconomic status – intersect to affect a person's experiences of discrimination and inequity.
- **Anti-discrimination** – We acknowledge and challenge discrimination, and systemic and structural racism, with a focus on anti-racism and working with marginalised and minority communities to improve access to justice and build fairer laws and systems.
- **Sharing experience** – We proactively amplify client voices and experiences, our practice experience, evidence and data to support evidence-based policy and law reform and to promote greater community understanding of the experiences of our clients in the justice system.

Priorities

We will prioritise advocacy aimed at achieving these improvements in law and policy and better outcomes for clients and the community.

1. **Safety for women, gender-diverse people and children** – Systemic reform to improve safety for women, gender-diverse people and children, including reducing misidentification of the primary aggressor of family violence.
2. **First Nations justice** – Implementation of recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission to ensure lasting and systemic change.
3. **Children's contact with the legal system** – Promote holistic and diversionary supports and responses to children to prevent contact with the legal system, including through:
 - a. providing earlier therapeutic supports to families where children are using violence or behaviours of concern
 - b. raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 and the age of imprisonment to 16 without delay

-
- c. ending the over-criminalisation and the disproportionate representation of First Nations children and children of colour in the youth justice system.
 4. **Child protection** – Reforms to the child protection system embedding children’s rights, improving fairness and supporting families to stay together where it safe and appropriate to do so.
 5. **Criminal justice system** – Reduce involvement in the criminal justice system and minimise the harm it causes to all participants, including through sentencing reform, improving access to therapeutic and culturally appropriate approaches, and embedding restorative justice.
 6. **Bail reforms** – Reforms to the bail system, including:
 - a. addressing the discriminatory and disproportionate impact of the *Bail Act 1977* on marginalised groups
 - b. increasing access to bail supports, early intervention and prevention programs.
 7. **Police and custodial oversight** – Promote mechanisms that create greater accountability, transparency, fairness and access to independent police and custodial oversight.
 8. **Mental health reforms** – Mental health reforms that promote consumer rights, embed consumer leadership, self-determined responses and cultural safety, and increase accountability to:
 - a. work toward the elimination of compulsory treatment, and seclusion and restrictive practices
 - b. address overrepresentation of First Nations consumers.
 9. **Federal systems** – Strengthen rights and accountability across federal systems, with a particular focus on social security, migration, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and human rights and equality reforms.

We may also do strategic advocacy work in response to emerging or urgent systemic issues or to reform processes (such as reviews, commissions, inquiries or legislative change) that are not identified in these priorities.