# Victoria Legal Aid 2024–25 quarter four report1 April – 30 June 2025

## Message from the CEO

In quarter four, we continue to experience high demand across our services. This includes growing demand for our family violence legal services across the state, which is in line with increasing levels of family violence offences reported by the Crime Statistics Agency. We welcomed the recent extension of funding for our family violence pre-court engagement services for another three years. This will allow us to continue providing earlier intervention assistance to victim-survivors and respondents (in partnership with community legal centres and panel practitioners), which is important to improving safety and the court users’ experience in family violence matters.

Thanks to further government investment in several of our initiatives, we have increased legal assistance provided to Victorians throughout the year, including through:

* expansion of our Help Before Court and Independent Family Advocacy and Support services across Victoria
* improvement and growth of our services at the Assessment and Referral Court (as part of its statewide expansion)
* increased services for people appealing permanent protection visa decisions.

As a service for all Victorians, we have also continued to invest in our facilities around Victoria to improve our capacity to meet demand. We are pleased to have established new services in Wodonga to serve communities in the Ovens-Murray region. We are also preparing to deliver vital legal and support services to the rapidly growing community in Melbourne’s west for when the new Wyndham Law Courts commence operations later this year.

We will continue to engage with government on the implementation of changes to Victoria’s bail laws, and the proposed further amendments to the Bail Act. The changes will mean more people spend time in custody waiting for the case to go to court, even when they are unlikely to get a prison sentence. We have also observed that the impact of the first tranche of changes go further than addressing high-harm, repeat and serious offending, and are disproportionately affecting people experiencing homelessness, people with a disability and First Nations people. We will continue to work constructively with the government and our sector colleagues to monitor the impact on our clients and to identify the resourcing required to implement these changes.

In 2024–25, our consolidated operating result was a funding deficit of $3.3 million. We project that service demand will continue to be higher than our core funding resulting in a projected deficit in 2025–26. We have implemented short-term strategies to defer the need to implement service reductions. This includes carefully using our cash reserves to maintain our service delivery over the next 12 months while we work with the government on sustainable long-term funding options.

**Toby Hemming**
Chief Executive Officer

## Our services

We serve the Victorian community by providing services to those facing disadvantage and need legal assistance the most. We provide community legal information and education and more intensive services such as legal representation, advice and non-legal advocacy. Our services are tailored to the diverse needs and capabilities of people seeking assistance, as we recognise the varying barriers to accessing justice and the intersections between legal and social issues that people may face. We are also invested in delivering more early intervention and early engagement and resolution services, as these services help prevent legal problems from escalating and connect our clients with allied services.

### Client services

We continue to experience high demand across our services. Legal Help experienced high volumes of requests relating to family violence matters, which resulted in higher legal advice services delivered, as these clients are priority for more intensive services.

In 2024–25, we provided 40,854 new grants of legal assistance (one per cent more than in 2023–24). In addition, we provided 23,679 further grants (‘extensions’) for matters that progressed and administered 4,226 court ordered funding requests. The number of grant extensions is consistent with feedback from practitioners that matters are becoming increasingly complex~~.~~

We will be reporting against new service measures in 2025–26 to align with our Department Performance Statement measures recently endorsed by government. The unique clients measure is replaced by a new suite of performance measures that overall allow for more transparency and better representation of our service delivery.

Table 1.1 Unique client count and client services

| **Unique clients and client services** | **Full year 2024–25****actual** | **Q4****2024–25****actual** | **Q1****2025–26****projection** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unique clients[[1]](#footnote-2) | 81,874 | 15,730 | N/A |
| Legal advice and minor assistance | 37,889 | 11,507 | 9,100 |
| Duty lawyer services | 92,247 | 26,831 | 23,400 |
| Grants of legal assistance  | 40,854 | 10,245 | 11,000 |

### Community services

We aim to improve the understanding of legal issues in the community to stop legal problems from happening or getting worse. We do this by providing community legal education and information on legal rights and responsibilities, which is a central part of our commitment to early intervention and prevention services.

In 2024–25, we built on our successful community engagement work and started new legal information projects to help people get the right information when, where and how they needed it.

#### Community legal education

In 2024–25, we delivered 267 community legal education sessions (including 110 sessions in quarter four). During the year, we continued to offer statewide and local legal education through our community engagement sessions and saw a strong increase in participants. There was a focus on preventative education for young people (including co-offending, rights and responsibilities with police, sexting/sexual consent, and drugs and alcohol) and education for First Nations communities. In quarter four, we also expanded our work in prisons, delivering sessions across six prisons around Victoria aimed at helping people in prison to better navigate the legal system.

#### Community legal information

Providing legal information to the community is our largest service and is available to everyone through our website, publications, offices, Legal Help phone line and webchat and Help Before Court service.

Legal Help is still the main entry point for help seekers, with 152,749 sessions answered across phone line and webchat in 2024–25. We continued to see high demand for these services, including a high volume of requests for family law matters. During the year, we launched our new Legal Help service delivery model aimed at improving accessibility for help seekers. Minor disruptions from the transition resulted in slightly longer average wait times across phone line and webchat channels. We also recently launched 1300 MOB VLA, a new legal helpline offering free, confidential and culturally safe legal assistance for First Nations people and direct referral to other culturally appropriate service providers. The service will strengthen access to justice for First Nations people in a culturally safe and responsive way commencing 2025–26.

Additional government funding received during the year has allowed the expansion of our Help Before Court services across the state. In 2024–25, our Help Before Court intake team delivered 4,192 information sessions (including 1,114 information sessions in quarter four) to clients before attending court. In addition, referrals from the intake team resulted in 3,052 pre-court advice services being delivered by our lawyers.

We have also seen legal information from our website appearing in the new artificial intelligence overviews at the top of Google search results. This means people can access our information without visiting our website; however, it has meant our engaged sessions have declined during the year.

Table 1.2 Community information and education services

| **Community information and education services** | **Full year 2024–25****actual** | **Q4** **2024–25** | **Q1** **2025–26** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **projection** |
| Number of Legal Help sessions delivered[[2]](#footnote-3)  | 152,749 | 41,763 | 37,900 |
| Combined average wait time (minutes)  | 15:09 | 15:09 | 15:00 |
| Information sessions  | 129,010 | 38,858 | 33,900 |
| Community legal education sessions  | 267 | 110 | 45 |
| Engaged sessions[[3]](#footnote-4) of legal information website pages  | 966,382 | 205,413 | N/A |

### Independent advocacy services

We provide independent non-legal services to help people advocate for themselves and inform people and communities of their rights when it comes to both the mental health and the child protection systems.

* [Independent Mental Health Advocacy](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/independent-mental-health-advocacy)
* [Independent Family Advocacy and Support](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/independent-family-advocacy-and-support)

We provide information and referrals and more intensive services such as advocacy and self-advocacy.

In 2024–25, we delivered 126,355 independent advocacy services (including 30,322 services in quarter four). We continued to see high demand for these services.

Table 1.3 Independent Mental Health Advocacy services

| **Independent Mental Health Advocacy services** | **Full year 2024–25 actual** | **Q4** **2024–25****actual** | **Q1** **2025–26****projection** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Advocacy, self-advocacy and debriefing services  | 51,720 | 12,142 | 12,500 |
| Information, referral and intake services | 65,634 | 14,297 | 14,300 |

We recently published a [report on the first 12 months](https://www.imha.vic.gov.au/more-consumers-ever-have-access-mental-health-support-and-advocacy) of the legislated op-out model of access to Independent Mental Health Advocacy services for all people subjected to compulsory treatment. The report showed that the new model has greatly increased access to the service since it came into effect on 1 September 2023. In 2024–25, we had also expanded our Melbourne office to 8 other locations across Victoria, including a dedicated team of First Nations advocates.

Table 1.4 Independent Family Advocacy and Support services

| **Independent Family Advocacy and support services** | **Full year 2024–25 actual** | **Q4** **2024–25****actual** | **Q1** **2025–26****projection** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Advocacy, self-advocacy and debriefing services | 4,999 | 2,269 | 1,400 |
| Information, referral and intake services | 4,002 | 1,614 | 1,200 |

In 2024–25, we progressed our phased expansion of Independent Family Advocacy and Support services across the state. New advocates are in place in metropolitan Melbourne, Wimmera south-west and northern Victoria. We delivered 4,999 advocacy, self-advocacy support and debriefing services (74 per cent more than in 2023–24) and 4,002 information, referral and intake sessions (35 per cent more than in 2023–24). Independent Family Advocacy and Support services will be available statewide with the final phase of expansion to south-east Victoria to be completed in late 2025.

## Our financials

At the end of 2024-25, our operating result was overall a deifict position.

Our cash balance remains high at $103.5 million. However, this mainly relates to the timing of initative funding from previous financial years, which is tied up to meet our future obligations of around $45 million.The remaining cash reserves are mostly discretionary and will be carefully managed in the short term to ensure we can:

* continue to meet our grant commitments of up to $72 million, which have already been approved and committed to, but work has not been completed.
* replace assets to ensure we can continue to meet service demands, protect the safety and well-being of staff and use technology to improve our operations and service delivery.

However, this is 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 ongoing 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.Table 2.1 Total revenue breakdown ($’000)

| **Revenue**  | **Full year 2024–25 actual** | **Q4****2024–25** | **Q1** **2025–26** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **projection** |
| Commonwealth Government – grants  | 106,931 | 28,800 | 28,615 |
| ECCCF Income | 459 | 459 | 160 |
| State Government – grants  | 200,441 | 52,415 | 53,682 |
| Public Purpose Fund - grants | 62,841 | 16,747 | 15,734 |
| Case revenue  | 5,020 | 997 | 1,156 |
| Other income  | 6,545 | 1,508 | 1,260 |
| **Total revenue**  | **382,238** | **100,926** | **100,607** |

Table 2.2 Total expenditure breakdown ($’000)

| **Expenditure**  | **Full year 2024–25 actual** | **Q4** **2024–25** | **Q1** **2025–26** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **actual** | **projection** |
| Case expenditure  | (123,492) | (31,406) | (32,034) |
| Community legal centre payments  | (68,375) | (18,505) | (18,456) |
| Staff costs  | (162,329) | (49,979) | (44,417) |
| Administration  | (27,905) | (7,879) | (7,117) |
| Depreciation and revaluation  | (3,389) | (1,089) | (898) |
| **Total expenditure**  | **(385,491)** | **(108,858)** | **(102,922)** |

1. A unique client is an individual who has accessed one or more of our legal assistance services during the financial year and with whom a client-lawyer relationship was formed. We count our clients the first time we see them in the financial year even though some clients may receive multiple services throughout the financial year. This definition does not include individuals who have received information over the phone or via our online web chat (Legal Help), from our website, in person at a court counter, through our Help Before Court service or those who have attended one of our community legal education sessions. It also excludes individuals who have received one of our independent advocacy and specialist resolution services. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Sessions answered will also not always result in a delivered service due to call dropouts or outbound returned calls which do not connect (i.e. go to voicemail). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Engaged sessions are when a website session lasts longer than ten seconds, when a session includes at least one conversion, or when a session includes two or more page views. There is still not enough historical data available to make quarterly projections for this relatively new performance measure. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)