

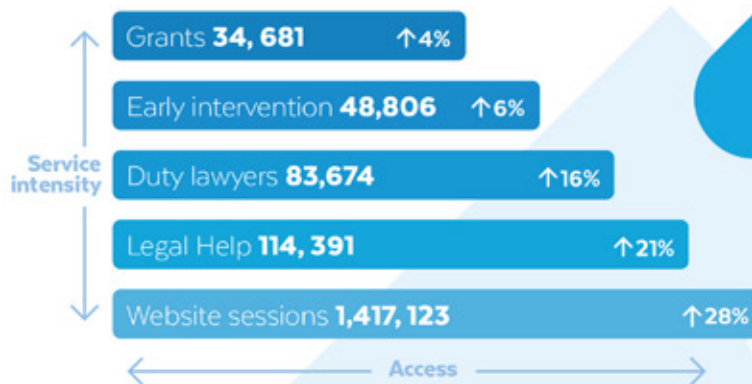


HELPING VICTORIANS WITH THEIR LEGAL PROBLEMS



ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

Increased service delivery



Legal Help
20,000 more calls
133,958 matters up 23%
Met target to answer 70% of calls



Duty lawyers
11,730 more
duty lawyer services



Grants of legal aid
1,416 more grants

Helped
85,000
unique clients
up 4%

15% increase
in legal service delivery
mostly duty lawyer
services responding to
more summary crime
and family violence
matters

Strategy 2015-2018

- Invest in timely intervention, especially for children and young people
- Match services to the needs and abilities of our clients
- Maximise benefits by working with others
- Working together better

imha
independent
mental health
advocacy

Non-legal advocacy
services for people
on compulsory
treatment orders
funded by Department
of Health and Human
Services

Responding to family violence

35 recommendations to improve legal response to family violence in submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

14% increase in family violence legal services

Improvements to legal assistance sector

Major review of family law services
- 35 actions to enhance client and community outcomes

Continued working with the legal profession to implement improvements to the quality of legally aided criminal trials

GOOD MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING CERTAINTY PROVIDES SOLID FOUNDATIONS TO BUILD ON FUTURE INVESTMENT

We have come a long way in recent years and prioritising services to people most in need and prudent financial management is paying off.

We are now helping more people, as intended.

We have expanded our services

Manage the challenges of population growth, rising client demand and increasing costs of services

Accurate forecasting and financial management sees expenditure within

1% of budget

Good decision-making allowed us to maintain surplus while increasing expenditure by

\$8.9M

Still need to manage increasing demand

From 2013 to 2015 family violence, child protection and criminal matters up

19%

Increased reporting of family violence

Increased child protection officers

Increase in police notifications

Predict deficit in 2018 without additional investment

Financial position

A stronger balance sheet boosted by a one-off **\$11m** surplus

One-off, unexpected, late and backdated indexation from the Public Purpose Fund

One-off, State Government funds for family violence, IMHA, reimbursement of Expensive Commonwealth Criminal Cases

Signing of the five year NPA

in June provided Commonwealth Government funding certainty which will now allow us to expand access to justice

Chairperson's declaration

In accordance with section 12N of the *Legal Aid Act 1978 (Vic)* and provisions of the *Financial Management Act 1994 (Vic)*, I am pleased to present the Victoria Legal Aid Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 2015.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Guy', with a stylized, cursive script.

Andrew Guy
Chairperson

28 August 2015

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Understanding this report

The services we provide and our initiatives are guided by the themes and goals we have committed to in our *Strategic Plan 2011–14* and the Council of Australian Governments' *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services* (NPA).

Our work is underpinned by the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic).

National Partnership Agreement

The NPA is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories that forms the basis of Commonwealth funding to all legal aid commissions.

The NPA focuses on providing assistance to disadvantaged people to resolve legal problems before they escalate and, where appropriate, avoid the need for litigation. It also promotes increased collaboration and co-operation with other service providers, and between legal assistance providers themselves, to ensure better targeting of legal assistance services for clients. A new NPA has been signed and is effective 1 July 2015. We will report against the new NPA in next year's report.

NPA We have used this icon where we have reported against legal aid services provided under the NPA.

Victorian Government service delivery outputs

The 2014–15 Victorian Budget sets a number of output performance measures and targets for departments and their agencies and statutory bodies in *Budget Paper 3: Service Delivery* (BP3). Victoria Legal Aid falls within the portfolio of the Department of Justice and Regulation.

BP3 We have used this icon where we have reported against BP3 output performance measures.

Strategic plan



Access and inclusion

Strategic goal: To deliver timely and respectful access to the justice system; to help people resolve legal problems and protect rights.



Relationships and collaboration

Strategic goal: To build strong, effective relationships with other organisations for the benefit of our clients.



Organisational responsiveness

Strategic goal: To enhance organisational capability to respond to a changing environment.

We have used these icons where we have reported against legal aid services provided under the themes and goals of our strategic plan. This annual report continues to align with our *Strategic Plan 2011–14*, as our *Strategy 2015–18* was launched in March 2015.

Our performance outcomes

Summary

Clients	2014–15	2013–14	% change
Unique clients*	85,007	81,400	4%
Preventative services			
Calls to our Legal Help telephone service	114,391	94,151	21%
Matters dealt with by our Legal Help telephone service NPA p. 17	133,958	109,327	23%
Matters referred externally NPA p. 19	93,676	84,603	11%
Publications distributed NPA p. 19	252,205	399,814	-37%
Community legal education participants NPA p. 16	11,215	16,542	-32%
Community legal education sessions BP3 p. 16	326	444	-27%
Sessions on our website	1,417,123	1,104,264	28%
Early intervention services			
Legal advice, minor assistance and advocacy NPA BP3 p. 17	48,806	46,178	6%
Family Dispute Resolution Service			
Number of conferences	1,087	1,190	-9%
Duty lawyer services			
In-house duty lawyer services NPA BP3 p. 21	76,948	65,727	17%
Private practitioner duty lawyer services NPA p. 21	6,726	6,217	8%
Casework under grants of legal assistance			
Grants of legal assistance NPA BP3 p. 22	34,681	33,463	4%
Applications for legal assistance processed by Victoria Legal Aid within 15 days BP3 p. 22	93%	89%	4%
Clients receiving government benefits	61%	62%	-1%
Clients with no income	36%	34%	2%
In-house grants of legal assistance	11,176	9,760	15%
Private practitioner grants of legal assistance	23,097	23,270	-1%
Community legal centre grants of legal assistance	408	433	-6%

NPA Legal aid services provided under the *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services*.

BP3 Legal aid services identified as output performance measures in the Victorian Budget 2014–15 *Budget Paper 3*.

* Unique clients are individual clients who accessed one or more of Victoria Legal Aid's legal services. This does not include people for whom a client-lawyer relationship was not formed, who received telephone, website or in-person information at court or at public counters, or participated in community legal education – we do not create an individual client record for these people.

Financial summary	2014–15 \$000	2013–14 \$000	% change
Income from government	132,262	132,408	-0.1%
Income from the Public Purpose Fund	29,273	25,663	14%
Total income from transactions	166,749	162,222	3%
Total expenses from transactions	(155,774)	(146,903)	6%
Net result from transactions	10,975	15,319	-28%
Net result for the period	11,006	16,109	-32%
Net cash flow from operating activities	13,411	20,493	-35%
Cash at 30 June	44,235	32,185	38%
Total assets	78,961	67,064	18%
Total liabilities	37,405	36,514	2%
Total equity	41,556	30,550	36%

Chairperson and Managing Director's message



'We value a society that aspires to fairness and opportunity and we work towards remedying injustice where it exists.' Strategy 2015–18

We have had another successful year in helping Victorians in need, representing the interests of the voiceless and disadvantaged. As always, there are more things we can do as an organisation and as a community to ensure fairness and justice for all.

We have come a long way in recent years. We have adopted a longer term planning cycle that has allowed us to expand services and more effectively meet population growth, rising client demand and increasing costs within a challenging funding environment.

Prioritising our services to people most in need and prudent financial management is paying off and we are now helping more people. Last year more than 85,000 people had a Victoria Legal Aid funded lawyer help them with their legal issue and we increased our services by 15 per cent, largely driven by our duty lawyer services responding to more summary crime and family violence matters. We helped nearly 20,000 more Victorians through our Legal Help call centre, added language lines and substantially improved accessibility. Grants of legal aid for our clients with more serious matters also increased by four per cent. Significantly, our sound decision-making has also allowed us to maintain an operating surplus while increasing expenditure by \$8.9 million.

Shaping the future direction of legal assistance

In addition to delivering more information, advice and legal services to individuals, in 2014–15 we continued to drive improvements that impact on the legal assistance sector more broadly.

We concluded a comprehensive review of family law services following extensive consultation and committed to 35 actions to enhance client and community outcomes. We continued working with the legal profession to implement our response to improving the quality of legally aided criminal trials. We broke new ground with the establishment of the Independent Mental Health Advocacy service, which will deliver non-legal advocacy for people on compulsory treatment orders.

Our partners and stakeholders in the legal and community sector have played a vital role in shaping the directions of all of these undertakings.

We also established two new significant partnerships that will inform future directions. These include:

- a partnership with the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Centre for Innovative Justice and Fastrack Program at RMIT University to improve access to justice through better use of technology
- a two year alliance with the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales to undertake evaluation of legal assistance services.

Responding to family violence

We play a leading role in delivering information, advice and legal representation to women, men and children who are affected by family violence.

Our submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence was a significant undertaking that reflects contributions from across Victoria Legal Aid, our values and the strategic directions. The submission contains 35 recommendations to improve the legal response to family violence.

We also made a two-year multi-million dollar commitment to provide more legal services to people affected by family violence. Additional State Government one-off funding of \$2.1 million for family violence legal assistance services is welcome and will go some way to help us meet increasing demand and better meet client needs in the short term.

Strategy 2015–18

In April, we launched our *Strategy 2015–18*, which builds on strong foundations to broaden our focus beyond resolving one legal problem at a time to making lasting positive changes for our clients and the community.

Over the next three years we will act with courage and stand up for what is fair. We will care for clients and invest in timely intervention and help especially for children and young people. We will match services to the needs and abilities of our clients and maximise benefits by working with others.

In developing our *Strategy 2015–18*, we consulted with clients, community partners, Commonwealth and State Governments, the judiciary, members of the Bar, lawyers in private practice, other justice sector partners, and community and welfare sector stakeholders. We were greatly informed by research we commissioned to better understand Victorians' awareness of legal aid, perceptions about priority access to services, and their expectations of government-funded legal aid.

Increasing demand and financial sustainability

This is our second successive year of recording an operating surplus, following two years of deficit, which has substantially restored our short-term financial wellbeing. More stable government funding bolstered by the signing of a new five year National Partnership Agreement on 30 June 2015, also provides greater funding certainty for the future.

Our short-term financial sustainability has improved and we have temporarily increased our capacity to meet the rising cost of our services. We are now in a position, and are pleased, to have made a number of financial commitments during the year, that will improve access to justice and that will be incurred in 2015–16.

However, our surplus continues to mask the growing demand for our services, particularly in the areas of family violence, child protection and criminal matters, where demand has increased 19 per cent over the past two years. Demand is forecast to further grow in response to an additional 88 child protection officers, increases in police and child protection notifications and reporting of family violence. Without further investment or changes to services we will again be in deficit by 2018.

Future outlook

The coming 12 months represent our first steps in aligning our efforts to the directions and commitments set out in our *Strategy 2015–18*. Importantly, they are steps that will enable us to deliver the most appropriate legal services at the right time, based on client needs.

Greater financial certainty, combined with short-term increased revenue, will allow us to invest in initiatives that will expand access to justice. In 2015–16 we forecast an additional nine per cent or \$14 million expenditure.

This additional investment of ongoing (\$11.5m) and one-off spending (\$2.5m) has been made possible by greater funding certainty and the results of our efforts to plan and prioritise services effectively.

The extra expenditure will benefit civil justice (\$1.9m), criminal law (\$2.3m) and family, youth and children’s law (\$7m) programs. Of that, \$4 million will go to the private profession to meet the demand for additional criminal law and family law services, particularly in relation to summary crime and child protection matters, extra duty lawyer services provided by the Bar and private practitioner fee increases.

Victoria Legal Aid will spend \$5.3 million on enhancing family violence legal services, establishing the Independent Mental Health Advocacy service, expanding Legal Help and meeting wage and rent increases. We have also allocated an additional \$1.1 million in one-off project funds to begin a review of our means test, improve client complaint handling processes, undertake regional planning and demand analysis and help implement the changes recommended in our family law services review.

Finally, an extra \$2.8 million will be invested in our community legal sector partners to cover additional family violence legal services, one off Innovation and Transformation Fund grants and ongoing wage supplementation.

Thank you

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the Victoria Legal Aid Board of Directors, our staff and our community and justice sector partners for their tireless commitment to our clients during a period of considerable change.


We also thank the Attorney-General of Victoria, the Hon. Martin Pakula MP, former Attorney-General of Victoria, the Hon. Robert Clark MP, the Attorney-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Hon. Senator George Brandis QC, for their ongoing commitment to legal aid.

During the year we bid farewell to board member Virginia Rogers, whose term expired. We thank Virginia for her valuable contributions to Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian justice system.

In May we also welcomed our new Board member Jennifer Kanis.



Andrew Guy
Chairperson



Bevan Warner
Managing Director

Financial year overview

We finished the year with a surplus on transactions, our day-to-day business, of \$11.0 million, less than last year's \$15.3 million surplus, which reflects increased expenditure of \$8.9 million and increased income of \$4.5 million.

More services were provided as a result of the increased expenditure.

Although revenue increased, it did not increase as much as expenditure and some revenue was received late in the year. The operating result reflects additional Public Purpose Fund and one-off government income, offset by higher payments to staff and suppliers, including private practitioners.

The year-end cash balance was \$44.2 million, which is above the minimum cash balance we hold, to ensure we can meet fluctuations in payments for cases approved in prior periods and to hedge against future demand and cost pressures.

The 2014–15 financial statements record:

- Victorian Government income of \$85.0 million
- Commonwealth Government income of \$47.2 million
- Public Purpose Fund income of \$29.3 million
- \$63.6 million spent on case-related private practitioner payments
- \$25.0 million funding provided to community legal centres (this includes \$9.2 million in Commonwealth funds passed directly to community legal centres and not recognised as income or expenditure in our financial statements)
- an operating surplus of \$11.0 million.

See 'Our finances' (p. 100) for the financial year in review and financial statements, including the Auditor-General's Report.

About Victoria Legal Aid

Our vision

A fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld.

Our purpose

To make a difference in the lives of our clients and for the community by:

- resolving and preventing legal problems
- encouraging a fair and transparent justice system.

Our values

Fairness

We stand up for what is fair.

We aim to be fair when making choices about which people we help and how we help them.

Care

We care about our clients and the community in which we live.

We look out for and take care of each other.

Courage

We act with courage backed by evidence about what is best for clients and the community.

We act with courage to be the best we can be.

Our functions

Victoria Legal Aid is an independent statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic). We are funded by Commonwealth and Victorian governments but operate independently of government.

Our statutory objectives¹ are to:

- provide legal aid in the most effective, economic and efficient manner
- manage resources to make legal aid available at a reasonable cost to the community and on an equitable basis throughout the state
- provide to the community improved access to justice and legal remedies
- pursue innovative means of providing legal aid directed at minimising the need for individual legal services in the community.

In so doing, we may²:

- co-operate with social service or social welfare organisations
- undertake research
- make recommendations to reform the law

¹ Section 4 *Legal Aid Act 1978*

² Section 6 *ibid.*

-
- carry out educational programs
 - provide financial assistance to voluntary legal aid bodies.

In performing our functions, we must³:

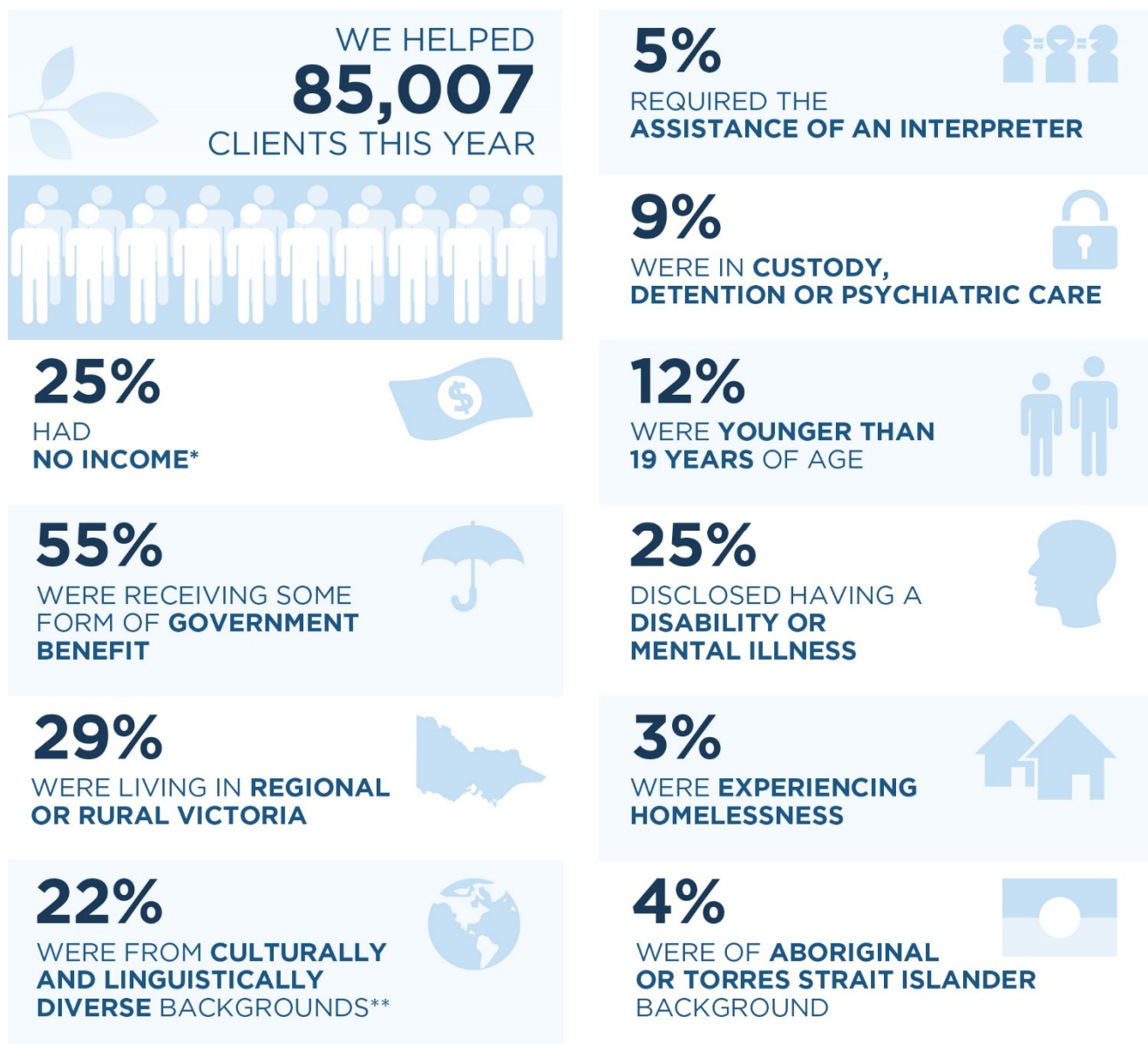
- ensure that legal aid is provided in a manner which dispels fear and distrust
- establish any local offices considered appropriate and generally use best endeavours to make legal aid available throughout the state
- determine priorities around who gets legal aid and guidelines for the allocation of work between staff and private practitioners
- co-operate with other legal aid commissions and professional associations to facilitate the use of services provided by private legal practitioners
- make maximum use of services which private legal practitioners offer to provide on a voluntary basis
- endeavour to secure the services of interpreters, counsellors, welfare officers and other appropriate persons to assist people where necessary
- inform the public of the services we provide and the conditions on which those services are provided
- encourage and permit law students to participate on a voluntary basis and under professional supervision in the provision of legal aid
- manage the Legal Aid Fund.

Public benefit

We work to address the barriers that prevent people from accessing the justice system by participating in reforms and ensuring the actions of government agencies are held to account. We serve the broader community by providing information, legal advice and education with a focus on the prevention and early resolution of legal problems, and legal representation to those who need it the most.

³ Sections 7 and 8 *ibid.*

Our clients



Figures are based on the total number of unique clients: 85,007. Unique clients are individual clients who accessed one or more of Victoria Legal Aid's legal services. This does not include people for whom a client-lawyer relationship was not formed, who received telephone, website or in-person information at court or at public counters, or participated in community legal education – we do not create an individual client record for these people.

* Examples include children and young people, people experiencing homelessness, people in custody and immigration detention, and psychiatric patients.

** This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It includes people who speak a language other than English at home and people who were born in a non-English speaking country.

Our clients across Victoria

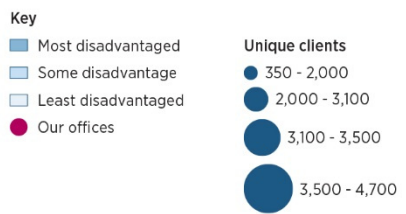
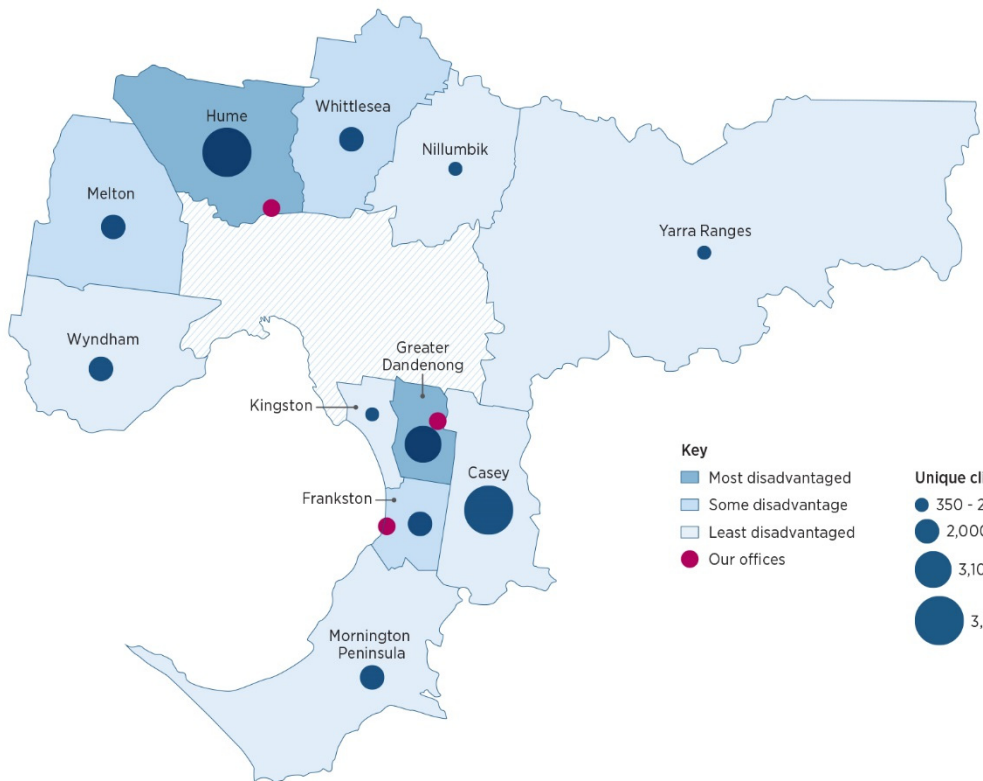
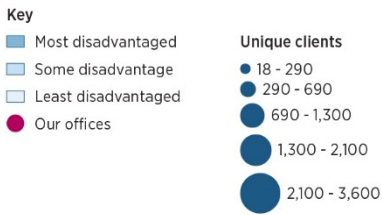
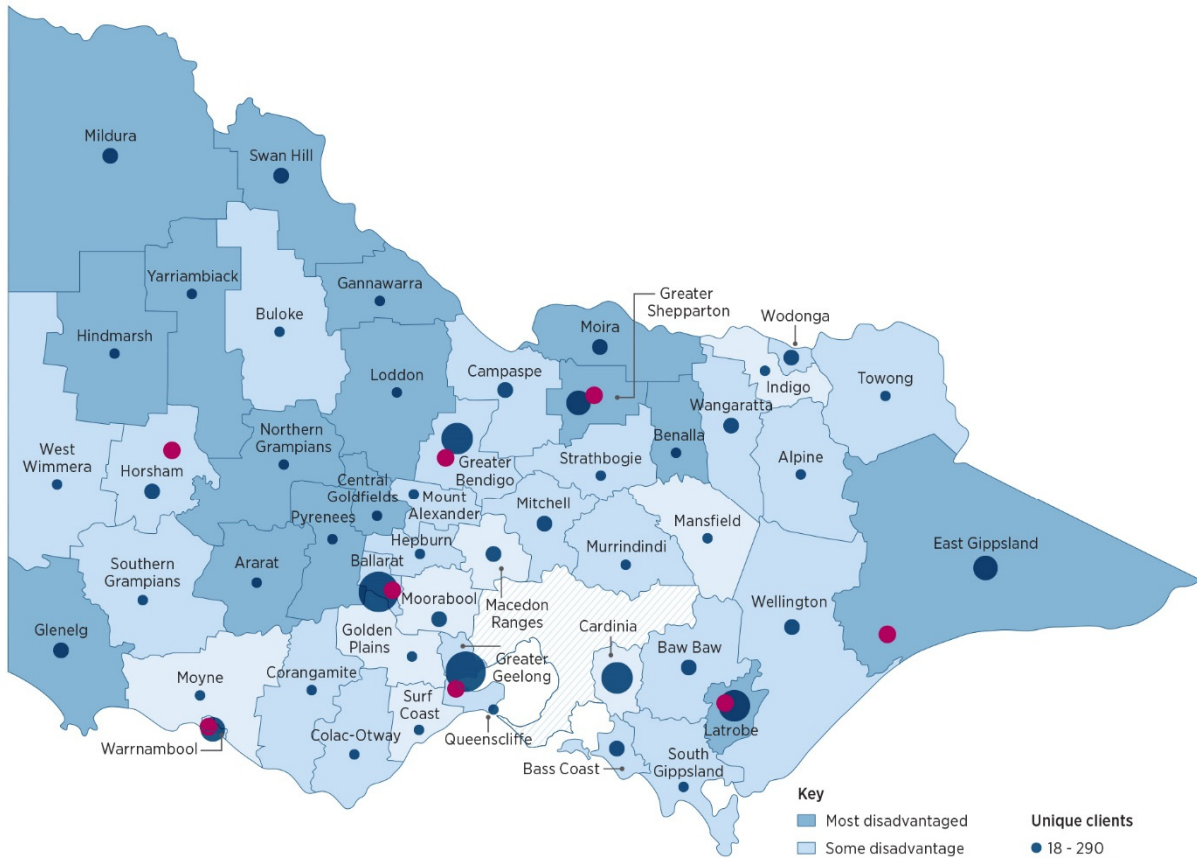
Our clients are among the most disadvantaged people in Victoria. The following maps indicate the number of unique clients we helped in each local government area in 2014–15. They are represented as a proportion of the total 85,007 clients we helped across Victoria.

Client locations are based on the primary address they nominate. This may include prisons, hospitals, remand centres and temporary accommodation facilities.

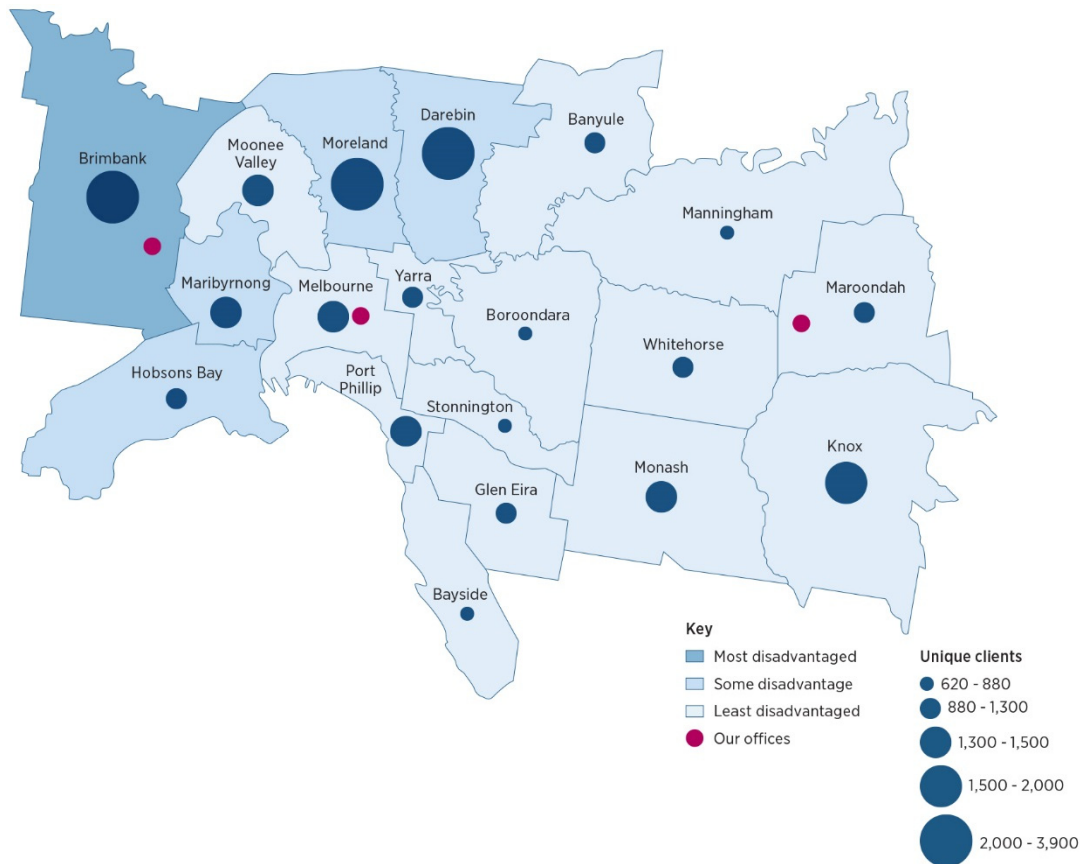
The maps also show the relative socio-economic disadvantage of each area, using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2011 Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage. The Australian Bureau of Statistics broadly defines relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in terms of 'people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society'.

See p. 163 for a list of our office locations. To read about cases that show how our help made a positive impact on individual clients, see p. 29, p.37 and p. 46.

Regional and rural Victoria



Metropolitan Melbourne



What our clients had to say about us

We conducted a client survey to help us better understand our clients' experience and their expectations of our service. The survey provided an opportunity for clients to tell us what they think of our services and give valuable feedback to help us improve our services.

Clients were asked to provide feedback about our Legal Help telephone information service, legal advice, duty lawyer and legal representation (casework) across our civil, criminal and family law program areas.

The survey found 76 per cent of clients were satisfied or extremely satisfied with our services overall.

While most clients were satisfied across all program areas, satisfaction varied depending on the program, and on the type of service.

Overall client satisfaction with specific programs areas:

- 81% for criminal law
- 73% for civil law
- 72% for family law.

Overall satisfaction with the type of service received:

- 85% for clients who had received a grant of legal assistance (casework)
- 78% for callers to our Legal Help telephone information service
- 75% for clients who had received a duty lawyer service
- 72% for clients who had received a legal advice service.

Depending on the type of service a client received, 75 to 94 per cent would recommend our service to others.

For some clients, receiving legal assistance gave them the confidence to sort out their own problems in the future. If a similar problem arose again:

- 52% of callers who used our Legal Help telephone information service felt confident they could sort it out without seeking assistance from us
- 31–39% of clients who received legal advice or a duty lawyer service felt confident they could sort it out with seeking assistance from us.

About the survey

An independent research agency conducted the survey. More than 1,000 clients, who had received a service from us in 2014–15, participated in the survey by telephone or email.

Of the clients who participated in the survey:

- 26% reported having a disability
- 66% were in receipt of a government benefit or pension
- 20% had received more than one service from us during 2014–15 (excluding Legal Help callers).

A full report including analysis of results and recommendations will be available from our website later in 2015. For more information see www.legalaid.vic.gov.au



Our services

Preventative and early intervention services for Victorians

What we do

We provide preventative and early services to Victorians to help them understand their legal options at the earliest opportunity and where to go if they need further assistance. An informed person is able to act on their legal rights and can help prevent a legal situation from escalating, avoiding costly litigation at court.

Our services

Our preventative and early intervention services are free and include:

- our Legal Help telephone service, the main entry point to legal aid services, which provides legal information, advice and referrals
- our face-to-face information and referral service, available at all Victoria Legal Aid offices
- online and printed information through our website and publications
- targeted community legal education to increase people's knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities and mitigate the escalation of legal disputes
- legal advice sessions over the phone or face-to-face at our offices or via outreach services
- minor assistance and advice (which includes advocacy services) when there is a need for some ongoing assistance and there is a tangible benefit for the client. This includes looking over documents, providing written advice, making telephone calls, negotiating on a person's behalf or making a simple appearance before a court or tribunal.

Key achievements

Improved accessibility and assisted more Victorians through Legal Help

Our free Legal Help telephone service helped more people with a new legal problem. We helped more than 114,000 people (an increase of 21 per cent compared with 2013–14), answering 70 per cent of calls with an average wait time of three minutes.

We opened five new language lines staffed by bilingual lawyers in Legal Help, enabling us to provide direct assistance in 19 languages other than English without the need for a third party interpreter. We have more than doubled the number of languages in which help is provided since 2012–13.



A new step forward to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people

We launched our first *Reconciliation Action Plan* as part of National Reconciliation Week in May 2015. The plan outlines actions to help address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the justice system, and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal and community organisations to advocate for systemic change. It commits us to:

- improve access to our legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- build cultural awareness among our staff
- advocate for systemic change
- improve employment opportunities at Victoria Legal Aid for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Reaching vulnerable communities and young people through education

We launched *Learning the law: Fines and driving*, a new educators' kit created in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training. The kit was created specifically for specialist school teachers of high school students with a mild intellectual disability, and includes short films and e-learning activities. We created tailored professional development sessions for teachers to build their knowledge and confidence to deliver legal education using the kit. More sessions are scheduled in the coming year.

Our *Sex, young people and the law* program continues to be a key education program. This year we ran 49 education and training sessions with 1,327 participants, prioritising disadvantaged young people. In addition, we trained staff at partner agencies such as Berry Street to provide sessions to users of their service.



Increased access to online legal information

This year we noted a continued and increasing reliance on our online information by the Victorian community to assist with their legal problems. While session traffic for our whole website increased by around 28 per cent, sessions for our *Find legal answers* legal information section increased at an even greater rate of 36 per cent, with the majority of this traffic coming directly from search engines.



Challenges

Reducing call wait times at busy periods

Meeting demand during Legal Help's peak periods remains a challenge. To make it easier for our callers we will introduce new contact centre software to pilot a 'work from home' approach and trial new channels like webchat, with features such as 'virtual hold'.

Connecting with our stakeholders in a digital world

Our stakeholders are using more online educational content every year. We are investigating new ways of recording this work, understanding how workers access and use our content and ensuring workers can access our content easily on our website. We provided funding for the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT University. The centre will run a three year project which invites students

from across RMIT, supported by mentors from community legal centres and Victoria Legal Aid, to develop technology based solutions to common legal problems.

Future challenges

In 2015–16 we expect to see:

- increased demand for free legal information, matched by our promotion and improved delivery of assistance through our Legal Help telephone service
- continued demand, driving us to look for innovative ways to provide online self-help resources for people with legal problems, complementing our more intensive services.

Outlook

We are developing a better referral and booking system for our services to improve our clients' experience in seeking our help. In the coming year we will also continue to strengthen links between our free Legal Help telephone service and community legal centres so that clients can be referred into services across the legal assistance sector in a more timely and appropriate way.

We will also increase our programs and content for workers to use in educating their clients, including for youth workers, and teachers and professionals working within the community, health, education and justice sectors.

Upcoming strategic initiatives such as revising our approach to family violence service delivery (p. 51) will provide opportunities for us to look at different ways of delivering training to staff and providing information to the community.

Facts and figures

Performance against target – community legal education and information services BP3

Our performance against our target for providing legal information services over the telephone or face-to-face (by number of matters) and via community education activities (by number of sessions) is:

2014–15 target	2014–15 outcome	% variance
90,000	137,668	53

The outcome for 2014–15 includes 137,342 information services (up by 23%), with increases in information calls dealt with by Legal Help combined with our implementing the triage process across all suburban and regional offices. This is consistent with directions under the *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services*. NPA

This result includes delivery of 326 community legal education sessions to community groups, workers and educators (down by 27%), reaching 11,215 participants (not including potential audience reach for the four sessions we delivered on radio). The reduction in session numbers is expected and consistent with fewer *Settled and safe* sessions being held this year, as well as greater use of statewide resources and programs resulting in fewer one-off sessions undertaken by our suburban and regional offices. The result does not include online sessions.

Performance against target – legal advice and minor assistance services BP3

Our performance against our target for providing legal advice (by number of distinct advice sessions) and minor assistance (by number of work files) is:

2014–15 target	2014–15 outcome	% variance
47,000	48,806	3.8

The variance can be attributed to an increase in legal advice provided by Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help telephone service with the final result only marginally greater than the 2014–15 target. Increases in the provision of legal advice can be seen for sexual offences, child protection, social security and mental health and disability matters.

Legal advice and minor assistance over two years

Year	Legal Advice	Minor assistance	Total
2014-15	43,853	4,953	48,806
2013-14	40,090	6,088	46,178

Legal Help telephone service

We dealt with 114,391 calls (up by 21%) and 133,958 matters (up by 23%). NPA

Call wait time and duration over two years

Year	Average call wait time	Average call duration
2014–15	2 minutes 59 seconds	6 minutes 49 seconds
2013–14	3 minutes 28 seconds	7 minutes 38 seconds

We increased staffing for our Legal Help telephone service, reducing the call wait time in the process. Legal Help provides different levels of service depending on the nature of the enquiry, the complexity of the enquiry and the needs and personal circumstances of the caller. The average call duration figure includes very short calls and longer calls of up to 30 minutes. For example short calls (two to five minutes) may refer people to a more appropriate service or a specialist Victoria Legal Aid service, while longer calls (15 to 30 minutes) include Legal Help staff providing detailed information, advice, intake and warm referrals to staff lawyers.

Legal information over two years*

Year	Civil Law	Criminal Law	Family, Youth, and Children's Law
2014–15	55,469	31,790	50,083
2013–14**	47,325	23,750	40,501

* This data excludes legal information provided via our website, publications and targeted community legal education sessions. Data for these delivery methods is provided below.

** Data for 2013–14 covers information provided by telephone and face-to-face, and includes information provided in our suburban and regional offices.

Triage of clients

There are different pathways a client can take, based on our assessment or 'triage' of their needs when they first contact us. We triage clients through our Legal Help service, and suburban and regional offices. Our suburban and regional offices dealt with 16,791 calls (up by 20%) and 19,754 matters (up by 26%).

Client triage pathway	Legal Help number of matters	Suburban and regional offices number of matters	Number of matters (total)
Legal information*	67,375	7,680	75,055
Legal advice**	16,373	0***	16,373
Referral only	50,213	12,074	62,287
Total	133,961	19,754	153,715

* This is a subset of information services counted in 'Community legal education and information services'.

** This is a subset of advice services counted in 'Legal advice and minor assistance services'.

*** Our suburban and regional offices refer requests for advice to our Legal Help service (counted in 'Referral to another Victoria Legal Aid service') or make a follow-up advice appointment (counted in 'Legal advice and minor services').

Referrals*	Legal Help	Suburban and regional offices	Total
Referral to another Victoria Legal Aid service	41,165	11,969	53,134
Referral to an external service	69,226	5,629	74,855

* Some calls may result in more than one matter or referral, depending upon the client's circumstances and needs.

Top five legal information services matters

Matter	Number
Spending time with children	9,037
Family violence intervention orders	8,958
Infringements	7,767
Property settlement	6,885
The law in general	4,542

Top five non-English languages

The top five non-English languages spoken by people contacting our legal information services by phone or in person were:

- Mandarin (1,774)
- Vietnamese (1,467)
- Arabic (815)
- Cantonese (499)
- Spanish (280).

Client access and referrals

We make appropriate referrals to other services (non-legal as well as legal) that may be relevant to a client's needs. We also refer clients to external agencies when we are unable to help, for example, if we have a conflict of interest or we cannot provide assistance because of the nature of the matter.

We referred 93,676 matters to appropriate external agencies (up by 11%).^{NPA}

The top five referrals were to:

- private practitioners
- generalist community legal centres
- Law Institute of Victoria referral service
- specialist community legal centres
- courts.

We also referred clients to non-legal services, including family relationship centres, Consumer Affairs Victoria, drug and alcohol counselling, dispute resolution, financial counselling and social welfare services. For referrals from our website, see below.

Website and publications

We had 1,417,123 sessions on our website (up by 28%). A session is a group of interactions that take place on a website within a given time frame. A session can include multiple page views.

The top five online legal information matters were:

- traffic offences
- going to court for criminal charge
- criminal offences
- family violence intervention orders
- separation, divorce and marriage annulment.

Our website also facilitated 173,406 online referrals. The top five online referrals to other agencies were to:

- Fitzroy Legal Service Law Handbook – [Wills](#)
- Federation of Community Legal Centres – [Find a CLC](#)
- Office of the Public Advocate – [Take control](#) and [Forms](#)
- Law Institute of Victoria – [Find Your Lawyer Referral Service](#)
- [Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria](#).

We distributed 252,205 publications (down by 37%). This reduction reflects new methods we adopted for delivering legal education material.

Family Dispute Resolution Service

What we do

We help parents and other adult family members involved in family separation resolve their family disputes about:

- parenting arrangements
- division of property (where parents are in dispute about children's issues and have superannuation or a home mortgage)
- partner maintenance
- adult child maintenance
- international parental child abduction.

About our service

Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution Service, previously known as Roundtable Dispute Management, has a new name that better reflects the service offered. It involves a case manager assessing whether family dispute resolution is appropriate in each case (considering, for instance, safety issues and a parent's capacity to negotiate). A family dispute resolution practitioner (a chairperson) conducts a conference to help family members discuss their dispute and make decisions that are in the best interests of the children.

Each person usually has a lawyer to help them make decisions and to provide legal advice. Clients may have to pay for their own lawyer's fees if they do not have a grant of legal assistance. In some cases a client can be referred to a free lawyer from the Family Law Legal Service.

Most conferences occur at an early stage in family law matters, avoiding the need to go to court. However, in appropriate matters, conferences occur during court proceedings (called litigation intervention conferences) to help settle the dispute before a final hearing.

Our Family Dispute Resolution Service is part of our Family, Youth and Children's Law program (p. 46).

Facts and figures

We provided 1,087 family dispute resolution conferences (down by 9%) with a settlement rate of 86 per cent. The settlement rate is based on settlement of some or all issues in a dispute on an interim or ongoing basis. The decrease in the number of conferences can be attributed to guideline changes made in April 2013 taking effect.

Family dispute resolution services over two years

Year	Number of services	Settlement rate
2014–15	1,087	86%
2013–14	1,190	88%

Duty lawyer services

What we do

We have lawyers on 'duty' at many courts and tribunals across Victoria. These duty lawyers help people who are at court for a hearing, but do not have their own lawyer.

Our service

Our duty lawyers provide free legal information, advice and representation to clients. Duty lawyers do not represent everyone. We prioritise serious cases, including people who are in custody or at risk of going into custody and people who need intensive support.

Duty lawyer services are delivered through our legal programs:

- Criminal Law program (p.43) – Magistrates' Court summary crime duty lawyer services
- Family, Youth and Children's Law program (p. 52) – Children's Court (Family Division), Magistrates' Court (for family violence intervention order matters) and Commonwealth Family Law Courts
- Civil Justice program (p. 34) – Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Human Rights and Residential Tenancies Divisions), Mental Health Tribunal, Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Magistrates' Court (Special Circumstances List) and Federal Circuit Court (migration directions).

Facts and figures

We provided 83,674 duty lawyer services (up by 16%). A duty lawyer may be one of our staff lawyers or a private practitioner funded by us.

Our staff lawyers provided 76,948 services (up by 17%) to 49,721 unique clients (up 12%). Unique clients are clients who accessed one or more duty lawyer services during the year.

Performance against target BP3

Performance against our target for providing duty lawyer services (by number of sessions provided by our staff lawyers and private practitioners) is:

2014–15 target	2014–15 outcome	% variance
74,000	83,674	13.1

The increase in services is driven by a number of external factors beyond our control, including legislative changes in the mental health jurisdiction, increased police initiations, and an increase in family violence and child protection matters coming before the courts. Victoria Legal Aid staff have responded well to meeting the increased demand.

Duty lawyer services over two years

Year	Staff lawyers	Private lawyers	Total
2014–15	76,948	6,726	83,674
2013–14	65,727	6,217	71,944

Grants of legal assistance

What we do

We provide grants of legal assistance to people who cannot afford a lawyer, who meet our eligibility criteria and who are experiencing a legal problem that we can help with. A grant of legal assistance can enable a lawyer to:

- give legal advice
- help resolve matters in dispute
- prepare legal documents
- represent a client in court.

Grants are provided for certain criminal, family or civil law matters.

Our service

We determine whether an applicant is eligible for a grant of legal assistance based on:

- their financial situation
- the type of legal problem they have
- how successful they are likely to be in their case.

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.

Facts and figures

We provided 34,681 grants of legal assistance (up by 4%) to 26,805 unique clients (up by 4%). Unique clients are clients who accessed one or more grants of legal assistance during the year.

Performance against targets BP3

Performance against targets for providing grants of legal assistance is:

2014–15 target	2014–15 outcome	% variance
33,000	34,681	5.1

The variance to target is partly due to the staff practice meeting increased demand in cases relating to infringements, sexual offences, summary crime, youth crime, child protection and independent children's lawyers.

Performance against target for processing applications for legal assistance within 15 days is:

2014–15 target	2014–15 outcome	% variance
95%	93%	-1.9

Our variance reflects day-to-day workflow pressures. Our simplified grants process allows staff lawyers and private practitioners on our section 29A specialist panels to use their professional judgement to self-certify grants of legal assistance via our online application management system ATLAS and get a response within minutes. This means applications can be approved and processed quickly which ensures vulnerable clients can get a speedy resolution to their legal problem.

Approval and processing of applications for summary crime matters

In 2014–15, of all new summary crime applications approved, 81 per cent were automatically approved via ATLAS with the remaining 19 per cent approved by our staff. In 2014–15, of all new applications received for summary crime matters, 77 per cent were processed within two days, 86 per cent within seven days, and 93 per cent within 15 days. These figures include applications that were approved, refused, or required additional information.

Grants of legal assistance allocation over two years

Year	Staff lawyers	Private and community legal centre lawyers	Total
2014–15	11,176	23,505	34,681
2013–14	9,760	23,703	33,463

Key achievements

Streamlining assessment of complex funding issues with the County Court

We commenced a pilot with the County Court, which involves one of our Assignments Unit lawyers appearing one day each week at mentions for matters where complex funding issues are raised. We anticipate this will streamline the process for assessing applications for legal assistance, and create an opportunity for us to clarify outstanding issues about applications for grants of legal assistance.



Introducing a more effective compliance framework

We piloted a new risk-based compliance framework this year. Compliance checks were targeted to firms, offices and practitioners who had previously demonstrated non-compliance, while we conducted fewer checks of firms that had demonstrated strong compliance.

Our selection of practitioners and files for compliance checking is based on identified risk indicators, which are set quarterly in response to grant volumes and costs, complexity of matters, historical compliance results, feedback from stakeholders, and guideline changes.

We also continued to closely monitor the quality of legal services provided in response to client feedback.



Challenges

Ensuring compliance with grants guidelines and funding requirements

Our ongoing challenge is ensuring that practitioners on our panels correctly apply our eligibility guidelines, meet the conditions of panel membership, and obtain and retain sufficient documentary proof in support of their decisions to recommend a grant of legal assistance. Practitioners also need to be able to demonstrate the work they have performed.

This year we provided support and assistance to practitioners by conducting targeted and tailored training sessions on compliance with individual firms and offices.

Outlook

We remain committed to ensuring that quality legal aid services are delivered to our clients. We will continue to ensure that practitioners comply with our new practice standards, and deliver quality

services through our specialist panels. As always, we will ensure that our clients receive fair decisions and understand the outcome of their applications for legal assistance.

In the coming year we will also provide greater oversight of major criminal cases and monitor the Criminal Trial Preferred Barrister List. We will also review the means test, consulting widely about the circumstances in which we provide grants of legal assistance to eligible clients.

More information

For more information about the number and allocation of grants of legal assistance see:

- Criminal Law program (p. 44)
- Family, Youth and Children's Law program (p. 53)
- Civil Justice program (p. 35).

Victoria Legal Aid Chambers

What we do

We provide high quality advocacy for legally aided clients in civil, criminal and family, youth and children's law matters. We also conduct strategic litigation to remedy a legal problem or change a policy or process to benefit an individual client and the broader community.

Our services

Victoria Legal Aid Chambers:

- provides high level in-court advocacy for clients with a grant of legal assistance in civil, criminal and family, youth and children's law
- advises on and conducts strategic and test case litigation to challenge the law
- provides merits advice on complex applications for grants of legal assistance
- co-ordinates briefing and advocacy across our legal practice
- implements initiatives to ensure quality advocacy for legally aided clients, including the Trial Counsel Development Program and Block Briefing Pilot project.

Chambers' advocates are also involved in justice and law reform activities.

Facts and figures

- Our advocates appeared in 2,037 cases (84% criminal, 14% family, 2% civil) including 82 County Court criminal trials (20 in Circuit Courts located in regional centres) and six Supreme Court criminal trials (three in regional Victoria).
- 20% of all hearings were conducted in regional locations.
- Of the criminal matters, 21% were conducted in regional locations.
- Of the family matters: 17% were conducted in regional locations. In 26% of family matters, our advocates appeared as an independent children's lawyer.
- Of the civil matters, 3% were conducted in regional locations.
- 51% of significant cases were briefed to female barristers (up by 2%).
- Our Trial Counsel Development Program funded 18 criminal trials. In all of those trials, junior counsel was a female member of the Victorian Bar.

Key achievements

Increased capacity to support early intervention

We increased capacity with the addition of civil and family law advocates. Our civil law advocates now assist the staff practice in judicial review matters, tenancy, migration, mental health and other civil jurisdictions. Our family law advocates bring additional skills as independent children's lawyers to our already strong focus in child protection law. Both recognise our organisational emphasis on early intervention, and children and the law.



Helping people in regional Victoria with quality representation and timely justice

We continued to work closely with the County Court to develop flexible and responsive approaches to listing in regional circuit courts. Over the last year, delays in regional courts have dropped, so that regional matters are often reached far faster than comparable cases in Melbourne. We continued to prioritise providing advocates for our regional staff practice. Twenty-one per cent of our appearances were in regional courts, helping ensure that regional practitioners and clients have access to the same quality representation as their metropolitan counterparts.



Challenges

Co-ordinated briefing in family law and civil justice matters

We continue to develop a co-ordinated briefing policy in our family law and civil justice program after successfully implementing this in the Criminal Law program. It will require careful analysis to determine the areas of legal need in which our advocates would be best placed to assist clients. This will be followed by policy development and implementation across our staff practice to change workflows so that we work efficiently and consistently when briefing counsel.

Outlook

In 2015–16 we will:

- continue to work collaboratively with the courts to develop and deliver innovative solutions to reduce delay in regional criminal circuits and ensure timely justice for clients
- further develop the skills of our staff practice through direct mentoring and role-modelling of best practice in advocacy
- continue to prioritise providing advocates to assist regional practitioners
- focus on internal efficiency and staff wellbeing, including critical examination of work practices to support high quality representation for clients alongside manageable workload and stress levels.

Strategic advocacy

What we do

We are committed to working on the justice system as well as within it. Under the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic) we are required to seek innovative means of providing legal assistance to reduce the need for individual legal services.

We are also required to provide the community with improved access to justice and legal remedies. One way of achieving this is by pursuing improvements in law and policy that result in better outcomes for our clients and the community more broadly.

Our service

We work to address systemic problems and improve the operation of the justice system through strategic litigation and casework, law reform submissions and engagement with stakeholders and the media.

This work is informed by our broad practice in civil, criminal and family, youth and children's law. Our extensive practice experience means we are uniquely placed to identify patterns that expose opportunities for reform.

Based on the issues faced by our clients, our strategic advocacy priority areas in 2014–15 were:

- access to justice for people with a mental illness or disability
- appropriate interventions for children and young people
- more effective responses to family violence
- better administrative decision-making
- vulnerable people and fines.

Facts and figures

We continued to assist governments and reviewing bodies in making improvements to the law by providing high quality, evidence-based submissions on issues affecting our clients. This year we made 18 law reform submissions, two of which were made jointly with National Legal Aid (Appendix 2, p. 158).

Key achievements

The major organisation-wide strategic advocacy and law reform activities we undertook in 2014–15 included:

Royal Commission into Family Violence

We made an extensive submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria, drawing on our substantial expertise in assisting applicants and respondents in family violence intervention order matters, as well as people accused of crimes in the context of family violence. We also relied on our first-hand knowledge of the way family violence intersects with other legal problems.

Our submission highlighted the need for investment in both legal and non-legal services to promote better outcomes for people affected by family violence and reduce system congestion.

We highlighted the way in which legal services can have a preventative role in the response to family violence and can reduce the likelihood of inappropriate or unsafe agreements being reached through court processes.

Our submission also supported adopting a therapeutic and diversionary response to children and young people who use violence in the home.



National Ice Taskforce

In our submission to the National Ice Taskforce, our lawyers gave unique first-hand accounts of working clients affected by methamphetamines to detail the devastating toll the drug has on the community.

The submission, which received significant media coverage, warned that the social costs and impact on the justice system of ice use will escalate if specialist rehabilitation and family support services are not introduced across the state.

Advocating for the state-wide rollout of the Drug Court and better access to specialist long-term rehabilitation and detox facilities for ice addiction will continue to be a focus in the year ahead.



Productivity Commission report on Access to Justice Arrangements

In December 2014, we welcomed the final report from the Productivity Commission on *Access to Justice Arrangements*, which called for an additional \$200 million injection into legal assistance Australia-wide that would see hundreds of thousands of extra people eligible for legal aid.

We contributed extensively to the review through written submissions and oral hearings, highlighting the important role that legal assistance plays in promoting access to justice. The commission acknowledged that a failure to invest in legal assistance constitutes a false economy as other services inevitably absorb the costs of unresolved legal problems.

We have used the commission's report to inform a number of initiatives in our new *Strategy 2015–18* and continue to advocate for the adoption of a number of its recommendations.



More information

Major strategic advocacy and law reform activities were also undertaken through our programs. See:

- Civil Justice program – landmark discrimination outcomes (p. 31)
- Criminal Law program – Supreme Court of Appeal guideline judgment (p. 40)
- Family, Youth and Children's Law program – Family Law Council Inquiry and Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into the Child Support Program (p. 48).

Civil Justice program

What we do

Our work in civil and administrative law aims to contribute to a fairer, more inclusive community that respects human rights.

We deal with matters such as social security, mental health, guardianship and administration, infringements, immigration, tenancy, debt, discrimination, sexual harassment and victims of crime.

Our services

The Civil Justice program's objectives are to:

- deliver services that help people deal with their legal issues at the earliest opportunity
- negotiate and mediate to achieve fair outcomes for clients without going to court
- advocate for clients' rights through representation in courts, tribunals and review boards.

Clients

- 13,661 unique clients* (up by 13%)
- 20% presented with two civil law problems and 13% with three to five
- 4,303 or 31% from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**
- 277 or 2% from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

* These are clients who accessed one or more services during the year, including early intervention services, duty lawyer services, dispute resolution services and grants of legal assistance.

** This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It includes people who speak a language other than English at home and people who were born in a non-English-speaking country.

Client case study: Speaking up for people detained for involuntary psychiatric treatment

'It is a very isolating, unpleasant, and intimidating experience to be an involuntary patient.' – Patient X

Patient X – a woman who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder – was detained for involuntary treatment at a hospital psychiatric unit.

With our assistance she appealed against her detention to the then Mental Health Review Board. The Board, which has legal and medical expertise, independently reviews decisions to detain people for involuntary treatment.

The Board decided she should be discharged. Hours later, before she could leave the hospital, a psychiatrist re-admitted her to hospital against her will.

In the first legal action of its kind in Australia, we asked the Supreme Court to consider Patient X's situation and clarify the decision-making authority of the Board and its successor, the Mental Health Tribunal.

The Supreme Court upheld the vital role played by the tribunal in safeguarding involuntary patients' rights and ruled that doctors cannot order people to be detained for involuntary treatment again simply because they disagree with its decisions.

This judgment means doctors must consider the tribunal's decisions and the reasons for it, and there must be a change in circumstances before a new order can be made.

After clarifying the impact of tribunal decisions, the Supreme Court ruled that the mental health service had not acted unlawfully in recommencing involuntary treatment and detention for Patient X as it found that in her particular situation, there had been a change of circumstances.

For the thousands of people receiving compulsory treatment in the mental health system this ruling clarified and strengthened their rights. It provided reassurance that there is effective oversight of detention and involuntary treatment for mental illness, and confirmed the crucial role of the Mental Health Tribunal in protecting their rights.

Program operating expenditure*

Income sources	Expenditure	% expenditure
Commonwealth	\$6.3 million	14.0% of Commonwealth expenditure
State	\$7.9 million	8.4% of State expenditure
Total	\$14.2 million	10.2% of total expenditure

* This excludes expenditure for community legal centres.

Sub-program operating expenditure

Sub-program	Operating expenditure	% of total expenditure
Commonwealth Entitlements	\$3 million	2.1%
Equality	\$1.8 million	1.3%
Mental Health and Disability Advocacy	\$3.2 million	2.3%
Migration	\$1.9 million	1.3%
Social Inclusion	\$4.3 million	3.1%
Total	\$14.2 million	10.2%

Civil justice sub-programs

Commonwealth Entitlements

We assist eligible people to access income support and entitlements and challenge unfair administrative decisions by Centrelink and the Department of Veterans' Affairs by providing quality legal advice and representation, and by encouraging agencies to administer systems that treat clients fairly and respectfully.

We also assist people to navigate the social security prosecution system, and aim to influence the system to be efficient, fair and respectful to accused people.

Equality

We promote substantive equality by addressing individual and systemic discrimination through case work, legal education and law and policy reform.

Mental Health and Disability Advocacy

We provide advice and representation in relation to laws that impact the liberty, dignity and autonomy of people with a mental health diagnosis or cognitive disability. We work to minimise restrictions on these rights as well as help to ensure the justice and health systems operate fairly.

Migration

We assist new migrant citizens and asylum seekers and other vulnerable non-citizens by providing community legal education to understand the law, and appropriate legal assistance and other forms of advocacy to obtain just outcomes.

Social Inclusion

We contribute to the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion by providing advocacy to help resolve problems that would otherwise lead to entrenched disadvantage, including problems relating to debt, tenancy, infringements and experience as a victim of crime.

Key achievements

Increasing help for clients with a mental illness

We significantly increased our assistance to people with a mental illness, representing 1,137 people before the Mental Health Tribunal (661 representations in 2013–14). In addition, we doubled our outreach advice services (29 compared with 14 in 2013–14) and outreach duty lawyer services (28 compared with 12 in 2013–14).

The new *Mental Health Act 2014* commenced on 1 July 2014 and brought about major changes to the compulsory assessment and treatment of people diagnosed with mental illness. We agreed to deliver a new non-legal service for people on compulsory treatment orders, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services. Our new Independent Mental Health Advocacy service will commence in September 2015, with non-legal advocates assisting people to have a say in their treatment, care and recovery. Our non-legal advocates will be located in Melbourne, Geelong, Bendigo and Dandenong.

Our response to the new Act also included a major revision of our duty lawyer service, broad communication of developments under the Act, training and further developing our extensive practice expertise.



Increasing equality for the whole community

We achieved landmark outcomes for clients who experienced discrimination. In one case it was found that morning sickness is a disability, providing increased protection against discrimination for pregnant employees under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*.

As the result of another case, changes were made to the policy of a major health service where a patient requests same-gender care, particularly benefitting women who, because of their beliefs or experience of sexual violence, would be distressed by being physically examined by a male doctor.

We also succeeded in a ground-breaking discrimination claim in which a man with multiple disabilities had been banned for more than five years from all buildings at his local council because it alleged he was disruptive. The outcome included an order that the councillors, chief executive and directors complete training on the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

Recognising how vital addressing the needs of vulnerable Victorians through this program is, the State government this year committed to fund the Equal Opportunity Legal Service on an ongoing basis.



Using education and information to increase awareness and understanding of laws

Amendments to the *Migration Act 1958* in late 2014 mean the mandatory cancellation of visas for prisoners who fail the 'character test.' Once notified, a prisoner has a very short timeframe to challenge the decision. In response we developed a range of education and self-help materials to assist prisoners and lawyers unfamiliar with migration law; we attended prisons with members of our community legal education team to educate staff and prisoners; and we began a student intern program to help prisoners prepare submissions.

We also helped to develop a range of self-help materials which provide clear information and guidance about how to deal with fines. Their development recognises that the infringements scheme still remains confusing and, when caught up in it, all some people need is clear information. This material has also increased our lawyers' capacity to provide more intense services to people who require them.



Helping more clients adversely affected by Centrelink decisions

We continued to increase the number of locations where we provide specialist legal services to clients adversely affected by Centrelink decisions, this year expanding to the Eastern Community Legal Centre in Healesville. We helped more clients in outer suburban and regional Victoria (1,224 compared with 980 in 2013–14), and provided more advice, minor work and litigation file assistance to eligible clients.



Helping to mobilise a legal response to disaster

Disaster Legal Help Victoria was quick to respond when 400 people were evacuated following a fire in an apartment block in November 2014. Our lawyers worked with colleagues from Inner Melbourne Community Legal Centre and Consumer Action Legal Centre to provide the evacuees with timely legal advice at the emergency services relief centre and through the dedicated telephone advice line. Nearly 90 per cent of clients were born overseas, and the incident revealed overcrowding issues and associated residential tenancies problems. The value of this assistance led to all state emergency services making Disaster Legal Help Victoria a part of future disaster responses.



Challenges

Meeting increased demand for clients with mental illness

We cannot assist every in-patient and community patient. The 46 electro-convulsive therapy treatment hearings we undertook before the Mental Health Tribunal this year is a fraction of the total heard. Likewise, we completed 181 compulsory treatment order hearings, or under 10 per cent of the total heard. We are also concerned that we may not be able to sustain the high number of Mental Health Tribunal representations we achieved this year without increased resourcing to meet demand.

Responding to Centrelink rule changes

The May 2014 Federal Budget proposed a number of significant changes to social security law, many impacting on our priority clients. More people adversely impacted by Centrelink decisions have sought our assistance because of the tightening of Disability Support Pension (DSP) qualifications, and also the requirements around how long a recipient can receive this pension while overseas. The impact of

these changes on our clients has been exacerbated by the ever-increasing gap between Disability Support Pension and Newstart Allowance rates.

Future challenges

In 2015–16 we expect to see:

- continued demand for assistance before the Mental Health Tribunal
- increased demand for our discrimination law services
- the need for us to inform others of major changes to the *Fines Reform Act 2014*, and to advocate for the development of proper administrative systems underpinning the reforms
- uncertainty around legal issues arising in social security ‘omission prosecutions’ and an increase in social security prosecutions
- clients impacted by the amalgamation of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, as they will no longer have an automatic right of legal representation at the first external and independent review of a Centrelink decision
- an increase in National Disability Insurance Scheme appeals at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal
- clients impacted by further changes to social security law, including the possible loss of disability support pensions for forensic patients at Thomas Embling Hospital.

Outlook

We will progress the expansion of our outreach program to help clients disputing Centrelink administrative decisions or other actions, and look for opportunities and service delivery options. From mid-July, services will be delivered from Western Community Legal Centre in Werribee.

Committed to helping reverse the cycle of family violence offending, we will also begin to focus on cases involving women who have had adverse Centrelink decisions or been charged with social security offences in the context of actual or threatened violence or financial abuse by their partner. We will also advocate for law reform that will protect victims of family violence from discrimination, and promote gender equality more broadly.

We will continue to scrutinise decisions made by the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions to prosecute social security recipients, as we are finding that people are being charged again for failing to notify Centrelink of a change in circumstances. Our work will help ensure that people are not prosecuted unfairly in these proceedings.

Following the introduction of a ‘fast track’ review process for people who arrived during 2013–14, we expect to see a large increase in requests for assistance with asylum seeker applications. We will continue to work with others to develop a service response in readiness for the new process being tested, as the prohibition of some 30,000 people across Australia from making an application for a protection visa is lifted.

Facts and figures

Our client information services

Our information services dealt with 53,146 civil law enquiries (up by 16.7%), covering 55,469 civil law matters (up 16.9%). [NPA](#)

Referrals

We referred 38,673 matters* to appropriate external agencies (up by 11%). [NPA](#)

The top five referrals were to:

- generalist community legal centres
- specialist community legal centres
- the Law Institute of Victoria
- private practitioners
- courts.

We also referred clients to non-legal services, including financial counsellors, housing, health and employment services.

* We make appropriate referrals to other services (non-legal as well as legal) that may be relevant to a client's needs. We also refer clients to external agencies when we are unable to help, for example, if we have a conflict of interest or we cannot provide assistance because of the nature of the matter.

Free legal advice

We provided 17,316 legal advice, minor assistance and advocacy services (up by 19%). [NPA](#)

We also provided legal advice at court for people who need it most through our duty lawyer service.

Number of duty lawyer services for civil matters [NPA](#)

Victoria Legal Aid lawyers provided 6,065 duty lawyer services for civil law matters, an increase of 37%*. In 2014–15, private practitioners did not provide any duty lawyer services for civil law matters**.

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

** Private practitioners have historically provided a low number of duty lawyer services for civil matters. In 2013–14 they provided services on two occasions.

Civil in-house duty lawyer services

- 66% of duty lawyer services were provided for infringement cases of which 66% were handled by our suburban and regional offices.
- 18% of duty lawyer services were provided for matters before the Mental Health Tribunal of which 76% dealt with inpatient treatment orders and 15% community treatment orders.
- 8% of duty lawyer services were provided at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal of which 73% dealt with landlord and tenant disputes.

Number of grants of legal assistance for civil matters ^{NPA}

Legal provider	Number of grants	% change*
Victoria Legal Aid lawyers	1,047	32% up
Private practitioners	198	16% down
Community legal centres	84	1% down
Total	1,329	

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

Number of grants by sub-program

Sub-program	Number of grants	% change*
Commonwealth Entitlements	153	21% up
Equality	48	36% down
Mental Health and Disability Advocacy	136	1% up
Migration	39	49% down
Social Inclusion	953	36% up
Total	1,329	20% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

Services provided by private practitioners

- Private practitioners received 15% of the grants of legal assistance for civil matters.
- 80% of these cases were assigned to 20 private practitioner firms.
- Total payments to private practitioners for civil law matters, including to barristers, was \$0.8 million (up by \$0.1million).*
- 86% of the total private practitioner expenditure was paid to 20 private practitioner firms.

* In previous years barristers were briefed and paid directly by solicitor firms, with funds provided for this purpose under a grant of legal assistance. This meant payment records were not collected or held by Victoria Legal Aid. In September 2013 Victoria Legal Aid commenced direct payment to barristers, once private practitioners authorised and submitted online claims that work had been performed. In November 2013 this practice became mandatory and, following the support of the Law Institute of Victoria, has been adopted by practitioners.

Legal information services*

Number of services	% change**
55,469	17% up

* This data covers information services provided by phone and face-to-face, and includes services provided in our suburban and regional offices. It excludes our website, publications and targeted community legal education sessions.

** Percentage change is based on comparison with 2013–14.

Top five matters*

Matter type	Number of matters
Infringements	15,292
Tenancy	4,981
The law in general **	4,601
Inpatient treatment orders	3,401
Other migration matters	2,614

* This includes matters for grants, advice, duty lawyer services and our phone service.

** The law in general includes issues around commercial law, wills and trusts – we do not fund representation for these matters but receive requests for information and advice about them.

Criminal Law program

What we do

We provide high quality legal advice and representation for people charged with criminal offences who cannot otherwise afford it and meet our eligibility criteria, with a focus on people who are disadvantaged or at risk of social exclusion. We also:

- influence the criminal justice system to provide timely justice, the fair hearing of charges and appropriate outcomes
- ensure that people charged with offences are treated with dignity, are well-informed and guided appropriately through the criminal justice system
- improve community understanding of criminal justice and behavioural issues.

Our services

The Criminal Law program's core services are to provide:

- duty lawyers at courts, advice in the community, advice in prisons, education and legal representation for summary and indictable crime matters
- legal representation for appeals in the County Court, Court of Appeal and High Court
- advice in youth justice facilities, duty lawyers at Children's Court, advice and education in the community for young people and legal representation in youth crime matters.

Clients

- 48,364 unique clients* (up by 5%)
- 24% presented with two criminal law problems and 19% with three to five
- 10,145 or 21% from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**
- 1,952 or 4% from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

* These are clients who accessed one or more services during the year, including early intervention services, duty lawyer services, dispute resolution services and grants of legal assistance.

** This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It includes people who speak a language other than English at home and people who were born in a non-English speaking country.

Client case study: Help and support the key to a workable community correction order

'Tarek, a young refugee, struggled to comply with a community correction order. Without the right mental health support, many people are at risk of a cycle of re-offending' – Tarek's lawyer

Tarek* was on a tumultuous path from the time his father was shot dead and he first entered a refugee camp. His mother hoped that bringing her son to Australia would end the violence and unpredictability in their lives.

Tarek finished high school and began work in the family business. However the combination of living with an abusive stepfather and an undiagnosed mental illness meant he was unsettled.

As a teenager, he drank heavily, smoked cannabis and was increasingly agitated, culminating in a number of charges against him, including assault of a police officer.

After this first brush with the law, a magistrate imposed a community correction order. It required Tarek to attend drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and do unpaid work in the community.

But because his underlying mental health problems had not been addressed Tarek failed to follow the terms of the order. His first breach incurred a one-month suspended prison sentence.

Tarek was by now on a downward spiral. He faced further charges of recklessly causing injury following a brawl. His substance abuse increased and he lashed out at his family, resulting in an intervention order that prevented him seeing his mother and effectively made him homeless.

He was arrested again when he breached that order by trying to contact his mother. At this point a prison psychiatrist assessed him and he was finally diagnosed with schizophrenia.

For the first time Tarek began receiving the support, case management and housing assistance he needed

He was still facing prison for the serious injury charge however. Representing him, our lawyer outlined how much his circumstances had changed. Now that he was stable and receiving support, the court agreed that he was in a much better position to stick to the conditions of a new community correction order.

Now that he has ongoing support, Tarek has not needed any further legal help over the past six months.

* We have changed our client's name to protect his privacy.

Program operating expenditure*

Income sources	Expenditure	% expenditure
Commonwealth	\$4.0 million	8.9% of Commonwealth expenditure
State	\$67.5 million	72.2% of State expenditure
Total	\$71.5 million	51.6% of total expenditure

* This excludes expenditure for community legal centres.

Sub-program operating expenditure

Sub-program	Operating expenditure	% of total expenditure
Appellate Crime	\$2.9 million	2.1%
Indictable Crime	\$18.7 million	13.5%
Sexual Offences	\$7.8 million	5.6%
Summary Crime	\$32.3 million	23.3%
Youth Crime	\$9.8 million	7.1%
Total	\$71.5 million	51.6%

Criminal Law sub-programs

Appellate Crime

We strive to maintain client and public confidence in the criminal justice system by ensuring that cases demonstrating legal errors and miscarriages of justice can be tested by higher courts through expert representation and by contributing to the development of the law through senior appellate courts.

Indictable Crime

We aim to achieve timely and appropriate outcomes for people facing serious criminal charges by providing high quality expert legal advice and representation and by influencing the criminal justice system to be efficient, fair and respectful to accused people.

Sexual Offences

We provide specialist legal advice and representation to people facing sexual offence charges in all courts, specialist duty lawyer services at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court and expert assistance to people who are responding to applications pursuant to the *Serious Sex Offender (Detention and Supervision) Act 2009* (Vic). We also apply our specialist knowledge and experience to law reform and policy development, to promote fair and just outcomes in sexual offence cases.

Summary Crime

We help people charged with summary crimes to achieve timely and appropriate outcomes by targeting finite resources to a range of interventions based on need, and by influencing the criminal justice system to be efficient, fair and respectful to accused people.

Youth Crime

We ensure that children charged with crimes are treated fairly and that outcomes have a therapeutic focus by providing expert legal advice and representation in a way that reflects the unique status and vulnerability of children.

Key achievements

Delivering high quality criminal trials

Engaging with a broad range of stakeholders last year enabled us to collaboratively identify a number of areas for improving the quality of legally aided trials. This consultation has led to the implementation of a number of outcomes including the brief analysis and case strategy tool to improve the quality of early case preparation and resolution, supported by a specific brief analysis fee. We also retained at-court trial instructing fees in a more flexible and accountable way.

A key outcome of this consultation was the introduction of the Criminal Trial Preferred Barrister List to ensure quality of counsel in publicly funded trials. The expression of interest process attracted over 250 applications from barristers. In addition, our major trials framework to be introduced in January 2016 will enable greater oversight of legally aided trials that run for more than 15 days to ensure we are managing this major expenditure in an efficient, effective and economic way.

We also re-structured our in-house indictable practice by merging our indictable and sexual offences specialist teams. The creation of a unified Indictable Crime sub-program led by the one manager will address concerns around vicarious trauma associated with the exclusive practice of sexual offence work and also enable continuous improvement around client service delivery, staff development, stakeholder and policy work.



Contributing to Victoria's first guideline judgment

We played a key role in the formulation of Victoria's first guideline judgment *Boulton v The Queen* [2014] VSCA 342, which has already made a significant impact to the sentencing landscape by encouraging the greater use of community correction orders and reducing the impact of overcrowding in our prisons. Victoria Legal Aid submitted that a guideline judgment would promote consistency and transparency in sentencing thereby increasing community confidence in the justice system. The court's guideline provides important guidance to the lower courts on how community correction orders combine flexible conditions to both punish and rehabilitate offenders. Our close collaboration with stakeholders ultimately saw the Court of Appeal adopt many aspects of our legal submissions within their judgment.

Following the guideline judgment we delivered training to our staff lawyers and the profession so they could apply the judgment and understand their new obligations in supporting clients and the courts when making submissions around community correction orders.



Timely and appropriate resolution of summary matters

We continued our focus this year on the timely and appropriate resolution of summary matters, which enabled us to deliver services to more clients (41,608 compared with 39,471 in 2013–14). We also continued to support the operation of the weekend court and assisted with the rollout of video-conferencing facilities in the Magistrates' Court, which will help reduce delays and improve conditions for our clients.



Improving the quality of legally aided appeals

In finalising our Criminal Appeals Review we identified a number of areas for improving the quality of legally aided appeals. We analysed over 100 Court of Appeal sentencing decisions and engaged with a broad range of stakeholders including victims of crime. Since adopting actions for improvement in September 2014, we have amended our appeals guideline, introduced a more rigorous grants approval process, introduced a guideline for elections to renew an appeal refused by a single judge, and provided training on preparing high quality advice and appeals. Developed with the assistance of stakeholders, the training covered the use of a compulsory checklist designed to help identify meritorious appeal grounds.

We also commenced discussions with the Court of Appeal and the Office of Public Prosecutions to provide the feedback given to us by victims such that the court and the Office of Public Prosecutions could improve how they support and notify victims.



Improving informal diversion options for children and young people

As a result of our continued advocacy in and out of court, it is now widely accepted that the law relating to diversion in the adult courts applies in an appropriately modified form in the Children's Court. While this is a major step forward and a significant improvement, we remain committed to advocating for a legislated diversion scheme for children and young people across Victoria.

Working towards this goal, we sat on the steering committee for the newly introduced Youth Diversion Pilot Program in the Children's Court, which commenced in select regional locations in June 2015.

We also worked closely with Victoria Police to establish diversion opportunities for young people in locations where this pilot is not available.

With the support of Victoria Police, Youth Justice and the Children's Court in Shepparton, our Shepparton office established an informal youth crime diversion initiative, where none had previously operated. The 12-month pilot is targeted at children and young people in state residential or out-of-home care, and will contribute to an evidence base to further advocate for a formal legislative youth diversion scheme.



Challenges

Responding to increased demand

Overall we have seen a marked increase in demand for duty lawyer services, in part due to changes made to eligibility guidelines in 2013–14 but also as a result of a sharp increase in police initiations.

Family violence is pervasive in the summary criminal justice system, and the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, and the societal issues it is concerned with, present profound challenges. The most significant issue for the legal response to family violence is the level of demand in the system. Over a three year period, Victoria Legal Aid has seen a 100 per cent increase in duty lawyer services for breaches of family violence intervention orders and a 19 per cent increase in the number of grants for the same (we assisted with 5,176 breach of intervention order matters compared with 3,985 in 2013–14).

Our staff have responded well to meeting this increased demand. However responding effectively to the increasing number of matters involving our representation of defendants is a key challenge. This is exacerbated by the lack of appropriate services and programs to address the underlying causes of family violence.

We also experienced an increase in *Sex Offender Registration Act 2004* matters (101 compared with 57 in 2013–14) and *Serious Sex Offender (Detention and Supervision) Act 2009* matters (117 compared with 105 in 2013–14), with more applications, reviews and breaches.

Representing clients affected by the drug ice

The increasing prevalence and insidious nature of the drug 'ice' has made working with clients under its effect incredibly challenging for our lawyers. Clients using ice often present with complex legal needs and require a higher intensity of service, placing an additional burden on our service delivery and on our staff. We expect these clients will also suffer lasting and complex mental health issues as a consequence of their drug addiction, which will also present future challenges in terms of re-offending and how to best address the underlying addiction contributing to or causing criminal offending.

Keeping pace with legislative reform

A large number of legislative reforms were introduced in 2014–15 which significantly changed the criminal law and the laws of sentencing. We prepared an unprecedented number of policy submissions and advice in response to government reforms relying on our in-house expertise and client experiences to ensure new laws operated in a practical and balanced way. These reforms included the introduction of baseline sentencing legislation, the introduction of new offences and penalties around breaching orders, unfitness and mental impairment proceedings to the Children's Court jurisdiction, and significant changes to jury directions, sexual offences, statutory defences and

the laws of complicity. Making sure our lawyers and the private profession felt supported through information and training has been imperative in ensuring that lawyers are confident and keep their skills and knowledge up to date so they can provide high quality legal advice and representation to clients as they navigate an increasingly complex criminal justice system.

Future challenges

In 2015–16 we expect to see:

- more demand for all of our criminal law services particularly in relation to family violence, summary crime and sexual offences
- increased pressure and costs flowing from the baseline sentencing scheme which is expected to lead to longer hearings, fewer pleas and less certainty for accused and victims in the criminal trial and sentencing process
- increased appeals in the Court of Appeal around the new baseline sentencing regime and other legislative reforms that will require clarification and guidance
- continued demand for our clients to be able to access appropriate diversionary programs and non-legal support and rehabilitation programs no matter where they live in Victoria.
- an increased need for services that address vicarious trauma and staff well-being given the risks associated with managing more family violence cases and those cases involving ice addicted clients.

Outlook

We look forward to fully embedding the outcomes of the Delivering High Quality Criminal Trials project and our review of criminal appeals. We will also continue to focus on improving informal diversion options for young people, whilst advocating for equal access to diversionary programs and rehabilitative supports across Victoria, recognising that long term investment in rehabilitation will contribute to a reduction in re-offending which protects the community.

A much changed legislative landscape, in particular brought about by the reform to jury directions, sexual offences and the introduction of baseline sentencing, will require ongoing monitoring and training to ensure our clients receive legal advice which is timely, precise and which appropriately guides their decision making.

In the coming year we will undertake a review of our youth crime legal services to intensify our work around creating opportunities for timely intervention for at risk children and young people.

Facts and figures

Our client information services

Our information services dealt with 26,462 criminal law enquiries (up by 25.7%), covering 31,790 criminal law matters (up by 29.6%) [NPA](#)

Referrals

We referred 21,957* matters to appropriate external agencies (up by 13%). [NPA](#)

The top five referrals were to:

- private practitioners
- courts
- generalist community legal centres
- police and other law enforcement agencies
- the Law Institute of Victoria.

We also referred clients to non-legal services, including drug and alcohol counselling, social welfare services and anger management counselling.

* We make appropriate referrals to other services (non-legal as well as legal) that may be relevant to a client's needs. We also refer clients to external agencies when we are unable to help, for example, if we have a conflict of interest or we cannot provide assistance because of the nature of the matter.

Free legal advice

We provided 17,442 legal advice, minor assistance and advocacy services (down by 4%). [NPA](#)

We also provided legal advice at court for people who need it most through our duty lawyer services.

Number of duty lawyer services for criminal matters [NPA](#)

Legal provider	Number of services	% change*
Victoria Legal Aid lawyers	54,748	17% up
Private practitioners	5,121	2% up
Total	59,869	16% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

In-house duty lawyer services for criminal matters

- 89% of duty lawyer services were provided in the Magistrates' Court of which 7% dealt with breaches of family violence intervention orders.
- 6% of duty lawyer services were provided in the Children's Court of which 32% dealt with theft offences.

Number of grants of legal assistance for criminal matters NPA

Legal provider	Number of grants	% change*
Victoria Legal Aid lawyers	7,558	16% up
Private practitioners	12,413	2% down
Community legal centres	155	22% down
Total	20,126	4% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

Number of grants by sub-program*

Sub-program	Number of grants	% change*
Appellate Crime	889	6% down
Indictable Crime **	1,858	13% down
Sexual Offences	1,031	15% up
Summary Crime **	12,604	6% up
Youth Crime	3,744	8% up
Total	20,126	4% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

** This does not include sexual offences or youth crime matters dealt with by our Sexual Offences and Youth Crime sub-programs respectively.

Services provided by private practitioners

- Private practitioners received 62% of the grants of legal assistance for criminal matters.
- 55% of these cases were assigned to 20 private practitioner firms.
- Total payments to private practitioners for criminal law matters, including to barristers, was \$31.1 million (down by \$1.3 million).*
- 56% of the total private practitioner expenditure was by 20 private practitioner firms.

* In previous years barristers were briefed and paid directly by solicitor firms, with funds provided for this purpose under a grant of legal assistance. This meant payment records were not collected or held by Victoria Legal Aid. In September 2013 Victoria Legal Aid commenced direct payment to barristers, once private practitioners authorised and submitted online claims that work had been performed. In November 2013 this practice became mandatory and, following the support of the Law Institute of Victoria, has been adopted by practitioners.

Legal information services*

Number of services	% change**
31,790	34% up

* This data covers information services provided by phone and face-to-face, and includes services provided in our suburban and regional offices. It excludes our website, publications and targeted community legal education sessions.

** Percentage change is based on comparison with 2013–14.

Top five matters*

Matter type	Number of matters
Common assault **	7,635
Drive while licence suspended	6,978
Breach of family violence intervention order	6,952
Theft	6,395
Miscellaneous criminal offences ***	5,394

* This includes matters for grants, advice, duty lawyer services and our phone service.

** Common assault does not include assault with weapons, assault with intent to rape, intentionally or recklessly causing serious injury, recklessly causing injury or assault with intent to rob.

*** 'Miscellaneous criminal offences' includes defamation and libel, offences against privacy, public health and safety offences, and illicit drug offences.

Family, Youth and Children's Law program

What we do

We assist people to resolve their family disputes to achieve safe, workable and child-focused parenting and care arrangements. We also assist parents to build their capacity to resolve future disputes without legal assistance.

Our services

Services we provide through our Family, Youth and Children's Law program include:

- duty lawyer, legal advice, representation and information services in Commonwealth family law matters and at the Family Law Courts, including in parenting disputes, family violence matters and financial and child support matters
- lawyer-assisted and child-inclusive family dispute resolution to help settle disputes without going to court
- independent children's lawyers who promote the interests of children at risk and help judicial officers make good decisions
- duty lawyer, legal advice, representation and information services to children and parents in the Children's and Magistrates' courts of Victoria, including in child protection and family violence matters
- legal advice and education in the community.

Clients

- 31,600 unique clients* (up by 3%)*
- 17% presented with two family law problems and 10% with three to five
- 5,660 or 18% from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**
- 1,240 or 4% from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

* These are clients who accessed one or more services during the year, including early intervention services, duty lawyer services, dispute resolution services and grants of legal assistance.

** This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It includes people who speak a language other than English at home and people who were born in a non-English speaking country.

Client case study: Setting new ground in young people's rights

'Isaac is a resilient and resourceful young person who was facing many challenges: in a minority regarding his gender identification, with English as his second language, several legal issues confronting him and, on top of all of this, was the subject of family violence.' – Isaac's lawyer

Isaac*, born overseas and living, since his teens, with extended family in Australia, had always had a powerful sense that though he was assigned a female gender at birth, this did not match his own sense of his identity – feelings which crystallised once he reached puberty.

He first contacted us was when he was 16 and trying to find out his rights in relation to his school's insistence that he wear a dress.

Isaac was also at risk of family violence. His family, both here and overseas, strongly opposed his wish to live as a male and were threatening to forcibly remove him from the country.

We ensured that he was placed on an Airport Watch List so that this could not occur, and then helped Isaac apply to the Family Court for consent to begin medical treatment.

After considering reports from experts, the court ruled that he was competent to provide informed consent for his own treatment, and made an order giving Isaac sole parental responsibility for making medical decisions for himself.

This decision set new ground in clarifying children’s legal rights around serious medical procedures. It was the first time the Family Court had decided that a child could make their own decision about medical treatment for gender alignment, even if that decision was not supported by their parents.

* We have changed our client’s name to protect his privacy.

Program operating expenditure*

Income sources	Expenditure	% expenditure
Commonwealth	\$34.7 million	77.1% of Commonwealth expenditure
State	\$18.2 million	19.4% of State expenditure
Total	\$52.9 million	38.2% of total expenditure

* This excludes expenditure for community legal centres.

Sub-program operating expenditure

Sub-program	Operating expenditure	% of total expenditure
Child Protection	\$18.7 million	13.5%
Family Dispute Resolution	\$12.3 million	8.9%
Family Law Financial Support	\$1.7 million	1.2%
Family Violence*	\$3.0 million	2.2%
Independent Children's Lawyers	\$8.6 million	6.2%
Parenting Disputes	\$8.5 million	6.2%
Total	\$52.9 million	38.2%

* This figure includes matters under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* and a small number of matters under the *Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010*. It does not include the many breach matters (which are generally handled by the Summary Crime sub-program), or other matters which may have a family violence component, but do not specifically fall under the Family Violence Protection Act.

Family, Youth and Children's Law sub-programs

Child Protection

We assist children, young people and parents responding to child protection applications by the state by helping to ensure that any legal intervention is limited to that which is necessary to promote the child's or young person's health, safety and wellbeing.

We provide legal information, advice and representation, as well as community legal education designed to help protect and promote the rights of children, young people and parents before, during and after child protection proceedings.

Family Dispute Resolution

We provide timely, legally assisted family dispute resolution services to vulnerable people. We assist separated families to meet the best interests of their children by providing case management, assessment, preparation and referral (including to our child-inclusive Kids Talk program where appropriate), and by holding conferences facilitated by experienced chairpersons.

Family Law Financial Support

We work to ensure that children of separated parents are financially supported in accordance with the law. In cases where a separated person is unable to adequately support themselves, and their former partner has capacity to pay, we work towards a solution of financial support and the fair distribution of assets and liabilities.

We also ensure that liable parents have access to independent legal advice and representation where appropriate.

Family Violence

We contribute to the safety of adults and children impacted by family violence and assist in reducing the incidence of family violence by providing legal information, advice and representation to affected adults and children. This includes acting for clients at the Family Law Courts, the Children's Court and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.

We also contribute to public debate about policies and practices of Australian courts and governments in relation to family violence.

Independent Children's Lawyers

We provide assistance in Family Law Court proceedings to children at risk of harm due to the conduct of one or both parents. We aim to ensure that judicial officers make good decisions based on the best available evidence and that arrangements ordered by the court are in the children's best interests.

Parenting Disputes

We provide information, advice and representation to separating or separated couples who are in dispute about their children's living and care arrangements. For high-conflict families who have been unable to resolve children's issues through family dispute resolution services, we may assist with access to the Family Law Courts.

Our aim is to achieve safe, workable and child-focused parenting and care arrangements.

Key achievements

Comprehensive review of family law legal aid services

We completed a comprehensive review of Commonwealth family law legal aid services to ensure they are fair, as widely available as possible and sustainable. We mapped family law services across Victoria, analysed external information and research, met with over 50 stakeholders and received 29 written submissions in response to a public *Consultation and Options Paper* we released in January 2015.

We announced the outcomes of the review in late June and have committed to implementing 35 actions to enhance client and community outcomes through improved client access and intake, improved service quality, timely intervention in legal problems across all family law programs, targeting intensive services to priority clients, and providing additional supports to independent children's lawyers. Actions will be implemented over the next three years.



A voice for children and young people in family law proceedings

Children are often the subject or focus of serious legal proceedings, including in family violence, child protection and family law matters. We have significant expertise and experience providing quality legal help to this vulnerable client group.

Our response to the final report of the *Independent Children's Lawyers Study* by the Australian Institute of Family Studies included training for our newly established Independent Children's Lawyer Panel practitioners on meeting with children. We are also delivering an ongoing suite of training and development to support high quality legal help on behalf of children in the family law courts. In addition we established an independent children's lawyers working group involving the Family and Federal Circuit Courts.



Community legal centre family and children's law pilot

We began a two-year pilot in collaboration with two community legal centres to test a new way of delivering services to vulnerable clients and achieve better outcomes for families with child protection and family law problems. The pilot will seek to address clients' family and children's law-related issues by providing an intensive service to clients at a point that is likely to help prevent the escalation of those problems.

Under the pilot, Women's Legal Service Victoria and Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre will deliver alternative duty lawyer services to children and parents presenting to the Family Division of the Children's Court sitting in Moorabbin, Bendigo and surrounding courts, and at the pilot Family Drug Treatment Court. The centres will also respond to the ongoing casework needs of those clients in child protection, family law, family violence and other legal matters.



Practice experience informing system improvements

This year we engaged in a number of important public inquiries. Most notably, we contributed to a substantial submission to the current Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. We also made a significant submission to the Family Law Council inquiry on issues experienced by families

with complex needs, making a number of recommendations to better support vulnerable children who are the focus of legal proceedings in the family law, family violence and child protection jurisdictions.

We made a submission to and appeared at the public hearings of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into the Child Support Program, making recommendations to simplify and improve the child support system, particularly the change of assessments process and in relation to cases involving family violence.



Ten years of helping families in dispute

We marked 10 years of resolving children's and property issues for separated families by renaming our Roundtable Dispute Management service. Now known as the Family Dispute Resolution Service, the new name more clearly tells clients what we do and reflects the terminology used by the family courts.

We began developing new software and business processes to enable us to reach greater numbers of disadvantaged Victorian families, while maintaining high quality case managed assistance for clients.



Providing conferences and developing mediation practice

We again provided over 1,000 conferences, and also further developed our mediation practice to support children caught up in high conflict international parental child abduction cases. Mediation in these cases takes place alongside Hague child abduction proceedings in the Family Court of Australia. While relatively small in number, timely mediation can make a real difference to these children's lives and may substantially reduce the length, stress and costs of court proceedings.



Challenges

Meeting high demand while providing consistent high quality services

In our submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence we note the critical role played by family violence legal help but also our current inability to meet the demand for that help.

In particular, growing public awareness of the unacceptability of family violence and more effective system-wide responses have continued to impact significantly on demand. We have seen a 5 per cent increase in unique clients with a 6 per cent increase in services. Family violence matters are also increasingly more complex, involving clients with various interrelated legal and social issues. This has informed our approach to dedicated training, a revised family violence service delivery model, and the opening of a specialist family violence panel.

The challenge to meet demand while maintaining high quality services also persisted across our family law and child protection services. While we are to begin a comprehensive review of child protection legal services in the coming year, ultimately we will need additional investment to meet growing demand for help in this important legal area.

Future challenges

In 2015–16 we expect to see:

- high demand for family violence legal help and the need for us to respond in ways that aim to meet individual client needs and community expectations, as well as any Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations
- increased demand for child protection legal services due to initiatives like recent amendments to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, the opening of the new Broadmeadows Children's Court and additional state funding to significantly increase the number of child protection workers
- access to family law legal aid services will remain inaccessible for many people, necessitating a greater commitment to working with others to improve options for self-represented litigants.

Outlook

Implementing actions arising from the Family Law Legal Aid Services Review will involve clarifying, simplifying and refining Commonwealth family law guidelines to ensure we are appropriately targeting our most intensive services and enhancing assistance for vulnerable clients. This will include broadening access to our Family Dispute Resolution Service. Other changes will re-calibrate the delivery of our most intensive services.

In the coming year we will also revise our family violence service delivery approach to support our lawyers to provide consistent, effective and holistic assessments and responses to all clients affected by family violence, and which contribute to safer immediate and long-term outcomes for clients and families. We will increase our family violence services at high demand locations and address regional service gaps. While the additional \$2.1 million we received for one year in the 2015–16 state budget to increase family violence legal assistance services is welcomed, we will still not be able to sustain increased service provision without securing recurrent additional funding.

We will begin a comprehensive review of our child protection legal services, driven by our commitment in *Strategy 2015–18* to invest in timely intervention especially for children and young people.

We will also build on existing outreach activities by identifying access points, enhancing engagement with the community sector and improving referral pathways.

Facts and figures

Our client information services

Our information services dealt with 43,203 family, youth and children's law enquiries (up by 21.9%), covering 50,083 family, youth and children's law matters (up by 22.4%). [NPA](#)

Referrals

We made 33,046* referrals to appropriate external agencies (up by 9%). [NPA](#)

The top five referrals were to:

- private practitioners
- generalist community legal centres
- the Law Institute of Victoria
- courts
- dispute resolution services

We also referred clients to non-legal services, including family relationship centres, financial counselling, family support and family violence services.

* We make appropriate referrals to other services (non-legal as well as legal) that may be relevant to a client's needs. We also refer clients to external agencies when we are unable to help, for example, if we have a conflict of interest or we cannot provide assistance because of the nature of the matter.

Free legal advice

We provided 14,048 legal advice, minor assistance and advocacy services (up by 4%). [NPA](#)

We also provided legal advice at court for people who need it most through our duty lawyer service.

Number of duty lawyer services for family, youth and children's law matters [NPA](#)

Legal provider	Number of services	% change*
Victoria Legal Aid lawyers	16,135	10% up
Private practitioners	1,602	35% up
Total	17,737	12% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

In-house duty lawyer services for family, youth and children's law matters

- 73% of duty lawyer services were provided for family violence intervention orders matters of which 89% were handled by our suburban and regional offices and 3% were in the Children's Court.
- 16% of duty lawyer services were provided for child protection matters of which 56% were dealt with by our suburban and regional offices.
- 77% of duty lawyer services were provided in the Magistrates' Court, 13% in the Children's Court, 8% in the Family Law Courts, and 1% in the Neighbourhood Justice Centre.

Number of grants of legal assistance for family, youth and children's law matters NPA

Legal provider	Number of grants	% change*
Victoria Legal Aid lawyers	2,571	4% up
Private practitioners	10,486	1% up
Community legal centres	169	13% up
Total	13,226	2% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

Number of grants by sub-program*

Sub-program	Number of grants	% change*
Child Protection	6,704	8% up
Family Dispute Resolution	1,788	8% down
Family Law Financial Support	578	3% down
Family Violence	1,910	3% up
Independent Children's Lawyers	1,005	13% up
Parenting Disputes	1,241	18% down
Total	13,226	2% up

* Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

Services provided by private practitioners

- Private practitioners received 79% of the grants of legal assistance for family law matters.
- 48% of these cases were assigned to 20 private practitioner firms.
- Total payments to private practitioners for family law matters, including to barristers, was \$27.8 million (up by \$1 million).*
- 45% of the total private practitioner expenditure was paid to 20 private practitioner firms.

* In previous years barristers were briefed and paid directly by solicitor firms, with funds provided for this purpose under a grant of legal assistance. This meant payment records were not collected or held by Victoria Legal Aid. In September 2013 Victoria Legal Aid commenced direct payment to barristers, once private practitioners authorised and submitted online claims that work had been performed. In November 2013 this practice became mandatory and, following the support of the Law Institute of Victoria, has been adopted by practitioners.

Legal information services*

Number of services	% change**
50,083	24% up

* This data covers information services provided by phone and face-to-face, and includes services provided in our regional offices. It excludes legal information provided via our website, publications and targeted community legal education sessions.

** Percentage changes are based on comparison with 2013–14.

Top five matters*

Matter type	Number of matters
Family violence intervention orders	24,361
Spending time with children	13,655
Property settlement	7,145
Who children live with	6,767
Parenting plans	4,906

* This includes matters for our telephone service, early intervention services, duty lawyer services and grants of legal assistance.

Our organisation

Governance

Governing legislation

Victoria Legal Aid is an independent statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic). We receive funding from the Commonwealth and Victorian governments and through the Public Purpose Fund, but are independent of government.

Our responsibilities are set out in the Act, which gives us authority to provide legal aid in accordance with the legislation and to control and administer the Legal Aid Fund.

We are also required to perform functions according to any specific written direction given by the Victorian Attorney-General. No ministerial directions were given during 2014–15.

We have legislated and organisational processes in place to ensure transparency and accountability to the Victorian public. These include external and internal auditing, regular reporting to stakeholders, and the tabling of audited financial statements as part of this report.

National Partnership Agreement

Our strategic directions are guided by the Council of Australian Governments' *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services*.

The National Partnership Agreement is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, which commenced on 1 July 2010 and expires on 30 June 2015. It forms the basis of Commonwealth funding to all legal aid commissions and aims to drive nationally significant reform across the legal assistance sector.

The National Partnership Agreement focuses on providing assistance to disadvantaged people to resolve legal problems before they escalate and, where appropriate, avoid the need for litigation. It also promotes increased collaboration and co-operation with other service providers, and between legal assistance providers themselves, to ensure better targeting of legal assistance services for clients.

NPA We have used this icon where we have reported against legal aid services provided under the National Partnership Agreement.

Strategic planning

We consulted extensively with staff, stakeholders, clients and the community during 2014–15 to develop a unifying new strategy (p. 57), to lead on from our expiring *Strategic Plan 2011–14*. As our *Strategy 2015–18* was launched in April 2015, this annual report continues to align with our *Strategic Plan 2011–14*.

Our *Strategic Plan 2011–14* prioritises assistance for people who are poor and cannot afford the protection of the law and:

- face detention by the state or having decisions made for them
- are exposed to risk of violence or harm
- are marginalised or vulnerable to exploitation and unfair treatment.

In line with our commitments under the Council of Australian Governments' *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services*, our Strategic Plan also focuses on services that:

- uphold rights and due process
- focus on early intervention and prevention
- build the capacity of clients to resolve their future problems without legal assistance
- deliver a wide benefit to the community.

The services we provide and our initiatives are guided by the themes and goals we have committed to in our Strategic Plan:



Access and inclusion

Strategic goal: To deliver timely and respectful access to the justice system; to help people resolve legal problems and protect rights.



Relationships and collaboration

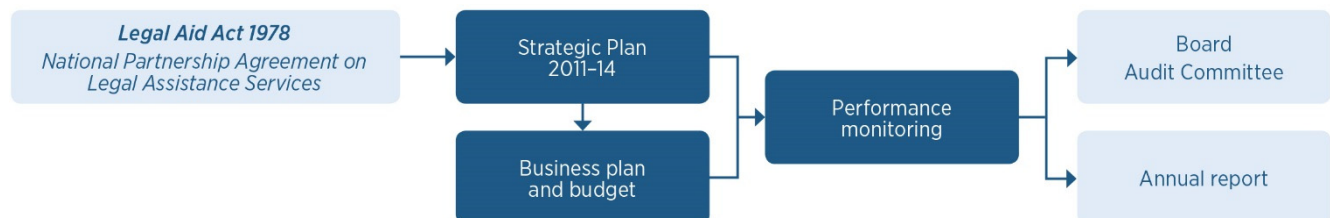
Strategic goal: To build strong effective relationships with other organisations for the benefit of our clients.



Organisational responsiveness

Strategic goal: To enhance organisational capability to respond to a changing environment.

Our strategic planning environment



Strategy 2015–18

We will treat people with dignity and respect, uphold people's rights to fair process and the protection of the law, and ensure people have a real say in the resolution of their legal problem.

About our Strategy

In developing our *Strategy 2015–18*, we articulated values of care, fairness and courage to guide our choices about who we help and how we help them. At its heart, our purpose is to make a difference by ensuring that disadvantaged and vulnerable people can benefit from the same legal rights as everyone else.

Strategic directions

Three strategic directions will guide us in working with our partners in the justice and community sector to improve the way Victorians access justice. They will enable us to deliver the most appropriate legal services at the right time, based on client needs.

Invest in timely intervention, especially for children and young people

Helping people as soon as they need it rather than when their lives have reached a crisis point benefits clients and the community.

Match services to the needs and abilities of our clients

Legal help can be difficult to access, particularly for people who have complex legal and personal issues.

Maximise benefits by working with others

To maximise our reach, we must do more than just respond to individual clients—we must work to resolve legal problems that affect many people.

We value a society that aspires to fairness and opportunity and we work towards remedying injustice where it exists.

Informing our strategic directions

We have listened, taken note and applied ourselves to develop a strategy that builds on our strengths and makes a renewed commitment to the community we serve, while keeping our sights on the future.

The Board

Our Board of Directors is responsible for ensuring Victoria Legal Aid meets its statutory objectives and carries out its functions and duties in accordance with the Act. The Board met eight times in 2014–15.

Board members

The Board has five directors nominated by the Victorian Attorney-General and appointed by the Governor-in-Council. At least one member must have experience in financial management and one must have experience in business or government operations. One of the directors is our Managing Director.

Andrew Guy, Non-executive Director and Chairperson



Andrew Guy has more than 40 years of legal and management experience. A former managing partner at Arthur Robinson & Hedderwicks, Andrew has extensive experience as a director, sitting on the boards of several listed public companies as well as Anglicare Victoria. Andrew was appointed as Chairperson of the Victoria Legal Aid Board in October 2011.

Bevan Warner, Managing Director



Bevan was appointed Managing Director of Victoria Legal Aid in August 2008. He has 20 years' senior executive experience including in Corrections and in Aboriginal Affairs where he developed an appreciation of the diversity and underlying causes of the over representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice and child protection systems. Bevan was formerly the General Manager of Legal Aid Western Australia.

Catherine McGovern, Non-executive Director



Catherine McGovern has extensive experience in merchant banking, government relations and public affairs. She was previously the General Manager, Government and Public Affairs at Medibank Private and the industry adviser for the then Minister of Industry, Science and Resources, Senator the Hon. Nick Minchin. Catherine is also a board member of Melbourne City Mission. Catherine was appointed in September 2011.

Virginia Rogers, Non-executive Director



Virginia Rogers has extensive legal and board experience with a diverse range of organisations. A former Chairperson of the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria, she is currently a member of the Victorian Board of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia and Chairperson of Marriott Support Services. Virginia was appointed in May 2012. Her term on the Board expired on 1 May 2015.

David Thompson, Non-executive Director



David Thompson has more than 30 years' experience in the finance sector in senior roles in Australia and America, including as Chief Financial Officer for the NAB Business Bank. He holds a Masters in Applied Finance and graduate diplomas in computing, chartered secretarial practice and corporate administration. He is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants Victorian Regional Council. David was appointed in February 2013.

Jennifer Kanis, Non-executive Director



Jennifer Kanis has extensive legal, government and community experience. She has practised in employment, industrial relations and equal opportunity law. Prior to pursuing a legal career, Jennifer spent six years as a secondary school teacher. She was elected to the Melbourne City Council in 2008 and the Parliament of Victoria in 2012 as the Member for Melbourne. Jennifer was appointed to the Board in May 2015 to fill a vacancy created by the departure of Virginia Rogers.

Audit committee

The Audit Committee assists the Board to fulfil its governance responsibilities. It provides oversight of financial performance including:

- the annual financial statements
- assurance on the operation and implementation of the risk management framework
- overview of the scope, quality and outcome of internal and external audits
- monitoring our compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and compliance policies.

The Charter for the Audit Committee, approved by the Board, specifies the committee's purpose and objectives, authority, membership, attendance at meetings, and roles and responsibilities.

Members

The Audit Committee membership comprised:

David Thompson

Chair of Audit Committee

Andrew Guy

Non-executive Audit Committee member

Catherine McGovern

Non-executive Audit Committee member

Virginia Rogers

Non-executive Audit Committee member

A standing invitation to attend Audit Committee meetings is issued to the:

- Managing Director, Executive Manager and Chief Financial Officer
- external auditor – the Victorian Auditor-General's Office
- internal auditor – KPMG.

These representatives receive a copy of the meeting papers and minutes.

The Audit Committee met four times in 2014–15.

Internal audit

KPMG provides our internal audit services. Our internal auditing procedures assist the Audit Committee through examining our control and risk management practices and determining whether they are effective, efficient and economical in assisting us to achieve our objectives. Where necessary, improvements in procedures and systems are recommended.

Reports

The Audit Committee was regularly presented with reports on audit activities undertaken, advisory services provided and audit support carried out. Reports and advice during the year included:

- community legal centres
- program performance and evaluation
- workforce planning and performance management
- information and communications technology strategy.

Agency executive

The senior executive team meets regularly to plan, discuss and review operational performance.

Bevan Warner

Managing Director



Bevan was appointed Managing Director of Victoria Legal Aid on 4 August 2008. He has 20 years' senior executive experience including in Corrections and in Aboriginal Affairs where he developed an appreciation of the diversity and underlying causes of the over representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice and child protection systems. Bevan was formerly the General Manager of Legal Aid Western Australia.

Kristen Hilton

Director Civil Justice, Access and Equity (maternity leave until January 2015)

Director for Barwon and South Coast regions



Kristen was previously the Executive Director of the Public Interest Law Clearing House and has extensive knowledge of current civil law and human rights issues and the needs of marginalised and disadvantaged individuals. Kristen has practised in the private profession and in a number of community legal centres, and is currently completing a Master of Laws at the University of Melbourne. Kristen commenced as Director, Civil Justice, Access and Equity in November 2009.

Helen Fatouros

Director Criminal Law

Director for Goulburn region and North Western suburbs



Helen was appointed Director of Criminal Law in January 2013. She was previously employed by the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) for 13 years. She held the role of Legal Prosecution Specialist, appearing on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions in complex indictable matters. Helen has an extensive criminal law background having also been the Directorate Manager of the Specialist Sex Offences Unit at the OPP. She also led the profession-wide implementation of the Sexual Offences Interactive Legal Education Program in 2012, earning her the Law Institute of Victoria's 2013 President's Award, for Government Lawyer of the Year. Helen is a Commissioner to the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

Nicole Rich

Director Family, Youth and Children's Law
Director for Westernport, Peninsula and Gippsland regions



Nicole commenced as Director Family, Youth and Children's Law in August 2013 and was formerly our Director Research and Communications. She is experienced in developing legal research and policy, including as the former Director, Policy and Campaigns at the Consumer Action Law Centre, and has practised in the private profession and community legal centres. Nicole is currently the Chair of CHOICE (the Australian Consumers' Association).

Tim Marsh

Chief Counsel
Director for Loddon–Campaspe and North West regions



Tim joined Victoria Legal Aid as a Senior Public Defender in 2011, after eight years at the Criminal Bar. Tim was also formerly a solicitor at the Office of Public Prosecutions. Tim appears regularly in Supreme Court and County Court trials and appeals and has developed an extensive practice in mental impairment and unfitness matters. Tim is a member of the Victorian Law Reform Steering Committee for the VLRC reference into mental impairment, and is a past legal member of the Mental Health Review Board. Tim commenced as Chief Counsel, Victoria Legal Aid Chambers in August 2013.

Meagan Keogh

Director Legal Practice
Director for Outer Eastern and Western suburbs



Meagan oversees implementation of quality practice standards throughout the Victoria Legal Aid network. Meagan has experience in private practice and community legal centres, and with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions. She is an Accredited Criminal Law Specialist and was previously the Managing Lawyer of our Preston office. Meagan is currently Chair of the Law Institute of Victoria Accredited Specialisation Board. Meagan commenced as Director Legal Practice in October 2010.

Cameron Hume

Director Corporate Affairs

Director for Central Highlands and Wimmera regions



Cameron was appointed Director Corporate Affairs in November 2014, following his appointment as Director Research and Communications in October 2013. He previously worked at the Department of Justice in project, policy and operations management roles relating to law reform and administration of the justice system. He also spent several years as a management consultant working across a variety of public sector management areas, including research and evaluation, strategic planning, corporate governance, business case development, organisational and operational reviews. This work spanned a range of social policy and operational portfolios including justice, human services and the community sector. Cameron holds a Masters of Public Policy and Management and is an independent member of the joint Finance and Audit Committee for the Sentencing Advisory Council and Judicial College of Victoria.

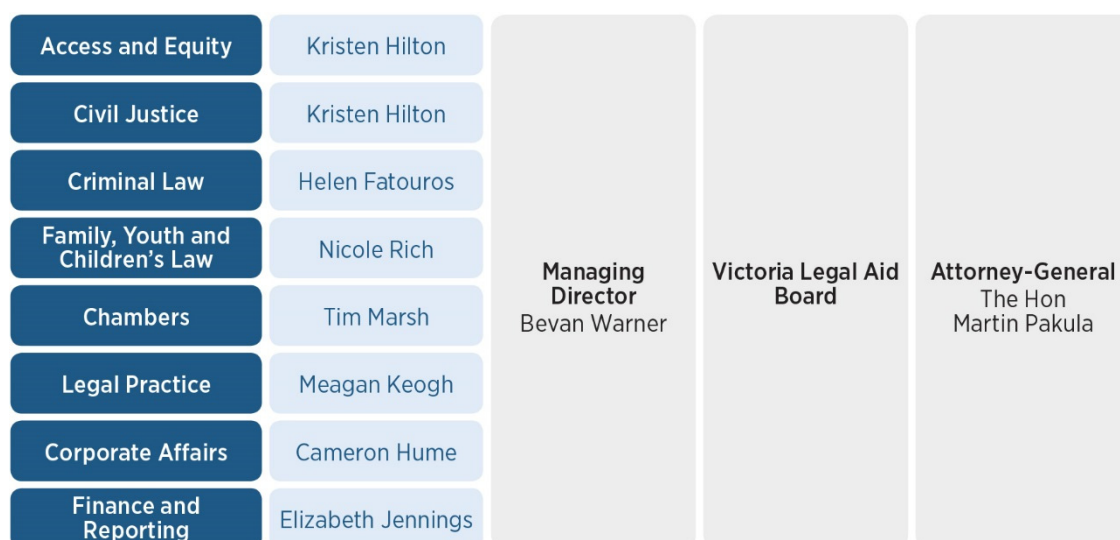
Elizabeth Jennings

Chief Financial Officer



Elizabeth joined Victoria Legal Aid as Chief Financial Officer in November 2011. She was previously Head of Strategic Finance at World Vision Australia. She has held senior financial roles in government and not-for-profit sectors. Her commitment to social justice is also reflected in a prior board role at the Leprosy Mission Australia and a current board role at donkey wheel. Elizabeth's qualifications include a Master of Business and a Master of Assessment and Evaluation.

Organisational chart



Independent review

Independent reviewers can reconsider or review a decision made by one of our officers or another independent reviewer, where it relates to a grant of legal assistance.

They can also hear and determine matters relating to the removal or exclusion of a lawyer from one of our practitioner panels.

When reviewing a matter, the independent reviewer must have regard to the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic) and any guidelines determined by the Board. They can confirm or change our decision.

Independent review of decisions

Review of decisions relating to a grant of legal assistance

Nature of review	2014–15	2013–14
Independent reviewer agreed with our decision	154	161
Independent reviewer changed our decision	27	38
Total	181	199

Review relating to proposed removal or exclusion of a lawyer from one of our practitioner panels

Nature of review	2014–15	2013–14
Independent reviewer agreed with our decision	0	0
Independent reviewer changed our decision	0	0
Total	0	0

Independent reviewers

We acknowledge the valuable contribution of the independent reviewers appointed under the Act:

- John Nixon (Chairperson)
- Brook Hely
- Carmel Morfuni.

Community Consultative Committee

The Community Consultative Committee in its current form lapsed in late 2014. The committee was made up of representatives from a wide range of organisations we work with, or that are impacted by our work. Committee members were appointed by the Board and included a Victoria Legal Aid staff member and a person nominated by the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

We are grateful to the former members of the Community Consultative Committee who provided advice and recommendations about various matters referred to it by our Board. In 2014–15 the committee met twice and discussed:

- our review of high court appeal processes
- the development of our new organisational strategy, with a particular focus on our engagement with the community to ensure the strategy reflects community needs and expectations.

Members

The Community Consultative Committee was chaired by the Chairperson of the Victoria Legal Aid Board, Andrew Guy. We thank the following people who were members in 2014–15:

Professor Marie Connolly

Chairperson and Head of Social Work, Melbourne School of Health Sciences, University of Melbourne

Nicky Friedman

Head of Pro Bono and Community Programs, Allens

Dr Stefan Gruenert

Chief Executive Officer, Odyssey House Victoria

Peter Norden AO

Vice Chancellor's Fellow, University of Melbourne; Adjunct Professor, RMIT University; Director, Norden Directions

Alan Wu

Non-Executive Director, Oxfam Australia; former Chairperson, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

Denis Nelthorpe AC

Manager, Footscray Community Legal Centre (Federation of Community Legal Centres nominee)

Dr Beth Wilson AM

Former Victorian Health Services Commissioner

Tracey Cocks

President of the Foster Carers Association

Inghard Ehrenberg

Superintendent, Victoria Police

Aimee Cooper

Senior Lawyer, Equality Law Program, Victoria Legal Aid (staff representative).

The Board of Victoria Legal Aid has endorsed the establishment of a sector planning and innovation committee to provide advice on key planning and reform issues. This new committee, to be established in 2015–16, will constitute the Victoria Legal Aid Community Consultative Committee.

Our people

Victoria Legal Aid is committed to increasing staff engagement, improving the way we work together and developing our approaches to managing staff health risks and wellbeing.

Employment practices

We work in an inclusive environment, supported by policy and procedures that reflect the values of our organisation and help us to develop and deliver services that meet community justice needs.

Employment and conduct principles

Our staff are bound by the values and employment principles in the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees and the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic).

To further strengthen understanding and commitment to these values and principles, this year we focused attention on ensuring induction processes and staff obligations are clearly defined and behavioural expectations are communicated to all new staff.

Employee benefits

Our employees have access to a broad range of flexible working options that support work/life balance. Twenty-nine per cent of our staff work part-time and the vast majority access flexible working hours.

Our parental leave provisions continue to support staff retention. Thirteen per cent of staff accessed paid maternity leave entitlements this year and six staff accessed paid parent/partner leave.

Maternity leave absence often extends beyond 12 months and our staff can request part-time work arrangements until each child reaches school age. We expect maternity leave absences to remain at a relatively high level due to our current staff profile, which is 77 per cent female, of which 55 per cent are between 23 and 40 years of age.

Provisions in the Victoria Legal Aid Enterprise Agreement 2013–2016 provide access to family violence leave and further clarify access to compassionate leave.

Employee engagement and development

This year we successfully implemented our new performance development and review process. This was supported by dedicated training to all staff, in all locations across the organisation. Early feedback indicates that 85 per cent of participants experienced it as useful.

We continued our focus on increasing manager engagement and capability through the provision of regular manager forums. These forums have been useful to elicit responses to the draft of our *Strategy 2015–18* and enabling managers to connect with and support strategy implementation.

We introduced a new comprehensive induction program for managers and improved our approach, support materials and an 'on-boarding' process for all staff.

Workforce data

This year we continued our commitment to aligning people resources to priority client service delivery, improving efficiencies and achieving financially sustainable employment levels for the longer-term.

Our vacancy rate has reduced and staffing levels have increased, reflecting new work demands and our commitment to prioritising roles that work directly with clients and the community or support direct service provision. The number of active staff in direct or indirect service delivery roles has increased by 11.6 FTE or 2.1 per cent. Corporate service roles have decreased slightly.

We continue to allocate 90 per cent of our people resources to direct or indirect service delivery, ensuring prudent use of limited legal aid resources. The 'Workforce distribution' table below shows distribution of staff across direct and indirect client service roles and corporate service roles.

Productive workforce

Comparative staffing levels across two years are expressed below as full-time equivalent (FTE) staff on our payroll and labour hire or agency staff engaged short term to perform the work of vacant budgeted positions.

We have excluded 15.2 FTE maternity leave absences from the table below as these positions are usually backfilled by contract staff who are included in the count. We have continued to maintain relatively low levels of agency or labour hire staff.

Productive workforce	2014–15	2013–14	Variance (FTE)
FTE staff on payroll	603.4	595.4	8
Agency staff by headcount (labour hire)	11	8	3
Total	614.4	603.4	11

Workforce distribution

Comparative workforce distribution of active FTE across two years is expressed below. 'Active' FTE is defined as people who attend work or are paid during the last full pay period of the financial year. This includes ongoing, maximum-term and casual employees and maternity leave absences, and excludes labour hire or agency staff.

Workforce distribution	2014–15	2013–14	Variance (FTE)
Direct service delivery*	439.3	428.9	10.4
Indirect service delivery**	118.2	117	1.2
Corporate***	61.1	60.5	0.6
Total	618.6	606.4	12.2

* Direct client service delivery roles involve direct client interaction.

** Indirect client service delivery roles do not involve direct interaction with clients, but support direct client services.

*** Corporate service roles deliver traditional corporate functions, such as finance, communications, human resources, business reporting and information and communication technology.

The increase in direct service delivery has mainly been in the Criminal Law program and Chambers.

Total headcount and full-time equivalent employees

'Active' FTE is defined as people who attend work or are paid during the last full pay period of the financial year. This includes ongoing, maximum term and casual employees and maternity leave absences, and excludes labour hire or agency staff.

Full-time equivalent* staffing trends

2014–15	2013–14	2012–13	2011–12	2010–11
618.6	606.4	570.2	596.5	583

* Based on active FTE, meaning people who attend work or are paid during the last full pay period of the financial year, including ongoing, maximum-term and casual employees and maternity leave absences, and excluding labour hire or agency staff.

Gender breakdown of ongoing employees*

Gender	2014–15 headcount	2013–14 headcount	2014–15 FTE	2013–14 FTE
Male	131	128	127.5	124.5
Female	444	442	392.6	392.1
Total	575	570	520.1 **	516.6 **

* Staff engaged on an open-ended contract of employment or executives engaged on a standard executive contract.

** Includes 15.8 maternity leave FTE.

*** Includes 11 maternity leave FTE.

Gender breakdown of maximum term/casual employees*

Gender	2014–15 headcount	2013–14 headcount	2014–15 FTE	2013–14 FTE
Male	23	20	21	19.1
Female	87	81	77.5	70.7
Total	110	101	98.5 **	89.8 ***

* Staff engaged casually or on a contract for a maximum period.

** Includes 0.0 maternity leave FTE.

*** Includes 0.0 maternity leave FTE.

Age breakdown of ongoing employees*

Age	2014–15 headcount	2013–14 headcount	2014–15 FTE	2013–14 FTE
Under 25	4	1	3.8	1
25–34	190	183	177.4	170.9
35–44	173	171	150.2	150.6
45–54	116	118	104.7	104.4
55–64	78	82	70.7	75.7
Over 64	14	15	13.2	14
Total	575	570	520.1	516.6

* Staff engaged on an open-ended contract of employment or executives engaged on a standard executive contract.

Age breakdown of maximum term/casual employees*

Age	2014–15 headcount	2013–14 headcount	2014–15 FTE	2013–14 FTE
Under 25	10	6	8.2	5.2
25–34	57	59	53.6	52.9
35–44	23	26	20.1	23.1
45–54	16	7	13.4	6.2
55–64	3	2	2.6	1.8
Over 64	1	1	0.6	0.6
Total	110	101	98.5	89.8

* Staff engaged casually or on a contract for a maximum period.

Classification breakdown ongoing employees*

Classification	2014–15 headcount	2013–14 headcount	2014–15 FTE	2013–14 FTE
VLA 1	0	0	0	0
VLA 2	120	126	103.3	109.2
VLA 3	211	207	190.9	188.1
VLA 4	156	149	141.3	134.6
VLA 5	65	67	62.5	63.8
VLA 6	15	13	14.5	13
Executive	8	8	7.6	7.9
Total	575	570	520.1	516.6

* Staff engaged on an open-ended contract of employment or executives engaged on a standard executive contract.

Classification breakdown of maximum term/casual employees*

Classification	2014–15 headcount	2013–14 headcount	2014–15 FTE	2013–14 FTE
VLA 1	0	1	0	1
VLA 2	30	23	24.3	20.1
VLA 3	53	55	49.2	49
VLA 4	19	17	17.1	14.7
VLA 5	5	2	4.9	2
VLA 6	3	3	3	3
Executive	0	0	0	0
Total	110	101	98.5	89.8

* Staff engaged casually or on a contract for a maximum period.

Workforce inclusion

We are working toward creating a balanced working environment where equal opportunity and diversity are valued.

Executive officers at 30 June 2015

An 'executive officer' is defined as a person employed as an executive officer at an annual remuneration rate not less than an executive officer employed by a Victorian Government department.

We have one executive board member, the Managing Director, and seven executive staff leading our services and functions.

Executive officers are classified into two categories. 'Ongoing' executives are responsible for functions or outputs that are expected to be ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

'Special projects' executives are employed for a specific project, generally for a fixed period of time. We do not currently engage executive officers for special projects.

Number of ongoing executive officers

Class	Headcount 2014–15	Variation 2013–14
EO-1	0	0
EO-2	1	0
EO-3	7	0
Total*	8	0

* The number of executive positions was consistent across both years. We have no 'special projects' executive officers.

Breakdown of executive officers into gender

Class	Male	Variation 2013–14	Female	Variation 2013–14
EO-1	0	0	0	0
EO-2	1	0	0	0
EO-3	2	1	5	1
Total*	3	1	5	1

* The number of executive positions was consistent across both years. We have no 'special projects' executive officers.

Reconciliation of executive numbers

The workforce data tables above include executive officers active in the last full pay period of the financial year, whereas the Financial Statement Note 15 includes any individual employed as an executive officer or with executive officer responsibility (as defined in FRD 21B) at any time during the financial period.

	Reconciliation of executive numbers	2014–15	2013–14
	Executives with total remuneration over \$100,000	8*	9***
	Executives employed with total remuneration below \$100,000	0	0
	Sub-total (as reported in Financial Statement Note 15)	8	9
Add	Vacancies	0	0
	Accountable Officer (Managing Director)	1	1
Less	Separations	0	1
	Non-executive role	0**	1
	Executive role removed	0	0
	Total executive numbers at 30 June*	9	8

* The number of executive positions was consistent across both years. One executive was on maternity leave through part of 2014–15 and this position was backfilled.

** Converted to an executive role.

***Includes one non-executive

Staff wellbeing

We undertook a pilot project to support staff in our Family, Youth and Children's Law program identify and deal with vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma is the potential for the trauma experienced by clients to transfer to staff and negatively impact their wellbeing. The pilot tested various strategies for mitigating the risk of vicarious trauma, including education and regular group debriefing.

Formal evaluation of the project has resulted in refining debriefing activity, and will inform tailored solutions for other work areas within the staff legal practice.

Our staff continue to be supported with access to a 24-hour employee assistance program, which provides counselling for personal and work-related issues. Critical incident debriefing occurs where necessary.

These services are important in maintaining the psychological health of staff who are exposed to disturbing case-related material and the inherent pressures associated with legal aid work.

Occupational health and safety

The review of our Occupational Health and Safety Management System is complete and improvements to processes are well underway. Most managers have completed safety leadership workshops designed to improve their capability in meeting health and safety obligations and leading a proactive approach to managing safety risks to staff. Our refurbishment of the Frankston office has, among other things, improved security arrangements for staff when interacting with clients. This will be completed in August 2015.

Reported incidents have decreased this year and a clear shift towards security incidents has been identified. We are developing protocols for assessing under what circumstances staff should limit client service delivery. We are also reviewing appropriate control measures to further support safety in client interactions. Managers are better equipped to respond to these incidents through improved hazard identification protocols and risk assessment techniques as a result of safety leadership workshops.

We tested revised processes for effective Workcover claims management and return to work, and evaluation is underway. We support our managers to co-ordinate these processes with coaching and consultancy from People and Culture and expert external providers.

Performance against occupational health and safety measures

Incidents

Performance indicator	2014–15	2013–14	2012–13
No. of incidents	31	46	30
Rate per 100 FTE	5.1	7.59	5.26

Claims

Performance indicator	2014–15	2013–14	2012–13
Total WorkCover claims	1	5	3
No. of standard claims*	0	4	1
Rate per 100 FTE	0	0.66	0.02
No of lost time claims*	1	4	1
Rate per 100 FTE	0.016	0.66	0.02
No of claims exceeding 13 weeks*	0	1	0
Rate per 100 FTE	0	0.16	0

* Data was sourced from WorkSafe Victoria's authorised agent. A claim is standard when the employer liability period (ten days lost and/or medical expenses of \$564 indexed annually) has been exceeded.

Other measures

Performance indicator	2014–15	2013–14	2012–13
Fatality claims	0	0	0
Average cost per standard claim*	N/A	\$22,135.92**	N/A
Percentage of claims with return to work plan less than 30 days	N/A	100%	N/A

* Data was sourced from WorkSafe Victoria's authorised agent.

**Costs relate to three ongoing claims from previous years.

Staff achievements

The awards and recognition many of our staff receive are added testament to the quality of our work and commitment to helping our clients. In 2014–15, these included:

- Louise Akenson, Assignments Family Law Managing Lawyer – elected to Chair of the Government Lawyer’s Section at the Law Institute of Victoria in February 2015
- Helen Fatouros, Director Criminal Law – appointed as Commissioner to the Victorian Law Reform Commission in September 2014
- Cameron Hume, Director Corporate Affairs – appointed as independent member of the joint Finance and Audit Committee for the Sentencing Advisory Council and Judicial College of Victoria in February 2015
- Meagan Keogh, Director Legal Practice – appointed Chair of the Law Institute of Victoria's Accredited Specialisation Board in January 2015
- Skye Rose, Equality Law Program Senior Lawyer – awarded Government Lawyer of the Year, 2015 Law Institute of Victoria Awards on 15 May 2015
- James Wardlaw, Migration Lawyer – finalist for Rising Star of the Year, 2015 Law Institute of Victoria Awards, nominated during his previous employment with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

Specialist accreditation

We recognise the value of the Law Institute of Victoria’s Accredited Specialisation program as a means of ensuring quality representation for legally aided clients. We continued to support the program, which assesses and accredits the expertise of lawyers in diverse areas of law.

Our support of participants included guidance from our professional support lawyers, professional legal education lectures and intensive sessions, facilitation of study groups and provision of study notes, resources and practice exams, and payment of application fees for Victoria Legal Aid lawyers.

This year we supported lawyers to participate in the children’s law and criminal law accreditation assessment program. Our own lawyers received a 100 per cent pass rate in the specialisation programs. Please note that our accreditation program runs on a calendar-year basis and 2014 figures are reported below.

Number of lawyers supported through the specialist accreditation program in 2014

Area of law	Staff lawyers	Private practitioners	Staff lawyers who passed	Private practitioners* who passed
Children’s law	2	10	2	4
Criminal law	7**	28***	5	14

* Includes community legal centre and private lawyers.

** Two Victoria Legal Aid lawyers withdrew.

*** Three external lawyers withdrew.

At 30 June 2015 we have:

- 30 accredited criminal law specialists
- nine accredited family law specialists
- 20 accredited children’s law specialists
- one accredited immigration law specialist
- one accredited administrative law specialist.

Number of lawyers supported through the specialist accreditation program in 2015*

Area of law	Victoria Legal Aid lawyers	External lawyers**
Family law	3	1
Administrative law	1	0

* Exams will be conducted in July–August 2015.

** This includes community legal centre and private lawyer.

Supporting quality services

We are committed to delivering high quality, client-centred services throughout Victoria.

New practice standards

This year we introduced our new practice standards and measures. All lawyers on our section 29A panels must comply with and meet our practice standards, and the measures set out the ways by which practitioners can demonstrate they have met the standards. The practice standards were developed in consultation with private practitioners. The standards and measures will form the basis of our upcoming quality audits.

Panels Project

This year saw the completion of the Panels Project which commenced in February 2012. The Panels Project aimed at improving the quality of services delivered to clients who receive a grant of legal assistance.

The project delivered a number of new processes and procedures including the development and introduction of a new panels model to manage our section 29A practitioner panels, a suite of practice standards and the development of a quality audit model.

This year we:

- opened up our last two section 29A panels (the Family Law Panel and Family Violence Panel) to applications
- rolled out the final Panel Deed to firms approved to be on our section 29A panels
- rolled out the conditions of membership for practitioners who have been approved as panel certifiers on our section 29A panels
- rolled out our new practice standards and measures
- developed a quality audit model which will allow us to monitor compliance with the practice standards.

Training, development and support

Professional development

We provide training, development and support for our lawyers (and other staff who work directly with clients where appropriate) through:

- professional support lawyers
- ongoing professional legal education
- specialist accreditation support, including study groups and materials.

Professional legal education includes training on priority topics for each practice area delivered face-to-face and online, as well as topics that span the compulsory fields of continuing professional development. We also provide targeted internal and external training opportunities to our lawyers, with selected activities extended to community legal centres and panel practitioners.

This year we continued to work with the Children's Court and the Department of Health and Human Services to deliver multi-disciplinary training and development events. This training assists court staff, child protection practitioners and lawyers to perform more effectively in areas including child protection and permanent care reforms, court practices and other changes to the law.

New Lawyers Program

Our New Lawyers Program attracts and retains high quality first and second year lawyers and provides the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively represent our unique and diverse clients.

Participants are selected through a rigorous and highly competitive process and after two years in the program are placed as legal vacancies emerge. Through this, the program supports agile and streamlined recruitment into lawyer roles, complementing our regular recruiting practices.

Since the first intake in September 2010, 54 lawyers have participated in the New Lawyers Program, with an average retention rate of 80 per cent. Most participants are now in ongoing roles in our offices across Victoria.

Of the 10 participants who commenced the 2013 program, four have been placed in ongoing roles at Victoria Legal Aid. The remaining six are filling vacancies on contracts while we identify appropriate ongoing roles.

New lawyers recruited in 2014 participated in placements across our programs and offices, including our Warrnambool, Ballarat, Geelong, Morwell and Bendigo offices.

The program continues to attract high calibre junior lawyers and provides Victoria Legal Aid with a skilled pool of talent ready to deliver legal services across our offices.

Law student opportunities and training placements

We continued to meet our statutory obligation to provide opportunities for law students to obtain experience in legal aid work. In 2014–15 we hosted:

- 25 students from the University of Melbourne and 15 students from Victoria University completed the Family Law Internship Program
- 14 students from the Australian Catholic University and 12 students from Melbourne Law School who completed training in our Civil Justice Program. One student completed their Practical Legal Training and four completed work experience
- seven students from the Leo Cussen Centre for Law who completed their three-week professional placements at offices in Melbourne, Ringwood, Sunshine, Dandenong and Geelong
- 18 students from Deakin University who assisted with court clerking at Dandenong Magistrates' Court and the Infringements Clinic
- two students from Chisholm TAFE who shadowed lawyers from Moorabbin Justice Centre
- two students from Deakin University who assisted duty lawyers with court clerking at the Geelong Magistrates' Court for 12 weeks
- 24 students from Victoria University who assisted duty lawyers with court clerking at the Sunshine Magistrates' Court and Werribee Magistrates' Court
- 15 students from Deakin University who assisted duty lawyers with clerking at Ringwood Magistrates' Court
- 10 students from Deakin University and Monash University who assisted with court clerking at the Frankston Magistrates' Court and Moorabbin Justice Centre in criminal law and family violence matters. Four students also received training in infringements

-
- five students from the Leo Cussen Centre for Law who completed clinical trainee placements at our Broadmeadows office, and attended Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court in relation to criminal and family violence matters
 - three students from the Australian National University, Deakin University and the University of South Australia who assisted duty lawyers with court clerking at local courts in the Wimmera region
 - four secondary students who shadowed lawyers from our Horsham office at court
 - five law and secondary school students who completed work experience at our Morwell office
 - two students from Monash University who assisted at our Family Dispute Resolution Service.

Information systems and online services

We develop, maintain and protect information technology assets to ensure our systems are reliable, effective and responsive to organisational and client service needs. This year we:

- migrated all physical and virtual computers from Windows XP to a mix of Windows 7 and Windows 8, and all staff to Outlook/Exchange for email and calendar
- migrated and refreshed our precedent collection to the ActiveDocs automated document generation tool
- commenced a rollout of Office 2013
- undertook a proof of concept to replace desk phones, desk computers and iPads with a single Windows tablet for staff in one suburban office, with a view to rolling out replacements across the organisation in 2015–16
- piloted cloud storage and collaboration for case files
- began developing a cloud-based case management solution for the Family Dispute Resolution Service
- upgraded the ATLAS grants management system
- upgraded our Storage Area Network to enhance performance and capacity to store data
- upgraded the Data Warehouse environment to enhance data reporting
- piloted and procured a new modern contact centre solution, to be deployed in 2015–16.

Information and records management

We have obligations under the relevant legislation to make and keep full and accurate records of our business practices. These records must be managed in accordance with revised Public Record Office Victoria standards and specifications under section 12 of the *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic). The standards apply to all records (in all formats) and detail requirements for the creation, maintenance and authorised timely disposal of these records.

We continue to focus on achieving compliance with the revised standards and specifications. This year we:

- upgraded our electronic document and records management system (TRIM) and continued implementation and training for users to capture and manage administrative records
- completed a major records destruction project in accordance with relevant disposal authorities and policies, which significantly reduced our archival storage costs.

Our partnerships

We are committed to building strong, effective partnerships with other organisations for the benefit of our clients. We work with state and national partners, lawyers in private practice, community legal centres, local communities and educational institutions.

National Legal Aid

As a member of National Legal Aid, we work with the other state and territory legal aid commissions to ensure that legal aid is delivered in the most effective and efficient way possible across Australia.

More information: www.nationallegalaid.org

Legal assistance forums

Australian Legal Assistance Forum

The Australian Legal Assistance Forum brings together National Legal Aid, the Law Council of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, National Association of Community Legal Centres and National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum.

The forum allows these organisations to address legal assistance issues in Australia in a co-operative and coordinated way.

More information: www.nationallegalaid.org

Victorian Legal Assistance Forum

The Victorian Legal Assistance Forum brings together the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Vic), Federation of Community Legal Centres, Justice Connect, Law Institute of Victoria, the Victorian Bar, Victoria Law Foundation, Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

The forum allows these organisations to plan and advocate for increased access to legal services for socially and economically disadvantaged Victorians, and to develop responsive service delivery models.

The forum also meets with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation to discuss funding arrangements for the legal assistance sector, including the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services.

This year the Victorian Legal Assistance Forum:

- established a working group, chaired by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, to look at developing more co-ordinated and collaborative responses to address gaps in civil and family law needs of Indigenous clients, and improving entry points to mainstream legal assistance services to compliment Aboriginal-run legal services
- held a conference on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), as part of the forum's Disability Working Group (known as the Barwon Disability Advocacy Network). Over 100 legal and non-legal sector representatives explored the rollout of the NDIS to date, with a focus on improvements going forward
- activated Disaster Legal Help Victoria in response to the Docklands apartment block fire in November 2014.

More information: www.vlaf.org.au

Private practitioners

The significant contribution of private legal practitioners enables us to help more people access legal services. Our partnership with private practitioners is essential for the provision of quality legal aid services.

Private practitioners providing duty lawyer services

Private practitioners help us to deliver duty lawyer services at a number of courts and tribunals across Victoria. Eight per cent of duty lawyer services were provided by private practitioners through the support of local law associations.

Private practitioners receiving grants of legal assistance

In 2014–15, 68 per cent of grants of legal assistance were assigned to private practitioners on our panels. This included:

- 62% of criminal law grants
- 81% of family law grants
- 21% of civil law grants.

Private practice law firms vary greatly in size and areas of practice and this impacts on the volume and type of legal aid work they can undertake.

Some private firms are assigned over 900 cases per year, while others are assigned as few as one. The duration and complexity of individual cases also influences the number of cases that each firm can undertake.

As a result of the change to our work allocation guideline in November 2014, lawyers must now be on one of our specialist private practitioner panels in order to conduct most legally assisted matters. This increases our ability to monitor the quality of work and improves knowledge of, and confidence in, the professional competence of practitioners who act for legally aided clients.

Private practitioner firms receiving the highest aggregate payments for legal aid cases in 2014–15

Rank	Private practitioner firm	Amount paid \$ (GST exclusive)	Number of new cases assigned
1	Stary Norton Halphen Pty Ltd	1,842,487	882
2	Dowling McGregor Pty Ltd	1,432,526	770
3	Gorman & Hannan	1,145,877	656
4	James Dowsley & Associates	1,056,345	1,001
5	Revill & Papa Lawyers	961,613	833
6	Cathleen Corridon & Associates Family Lawyers	802,599	362
7	Leanne Warren & Associates	744,167	360
8	Tyler Tipping & Woods	767,652	439
9	Doogue & O'Brien George	739,020	432
10	Claudia Grimberg	732,865	273
11	Emma Turnbull Lawyers Pty Ltd	654,260	352
12	Nicole Amad	643,420	245
13	C Marshall & Associates	642,792	280
14	Marich Legal Pty Ltd (Dr Martine Marich)	612,528	64
15	Nancy V Battiato	586,009	290
16	Greg Thomas	571,932	275
17	Heinz & Partners	569,405	210
18	Lampe Family Lawyers	534,193	239
19	Ann Valos Criminal Law	533,570	284
20	Dotchin Tan	518,373	352

Expenditure includes any fees and disbursements to third parties where the payment is made via private practitioners. Disbursements may include court fees, interpreters' fees, service fees, barristers fees and those that have prior written approval of Victoria Legal Aid (for example, fees for investigations and professional/expert reports, transcripts of evidence, plans and photographs). Expenditure may include cases from previous years.

Barristers

Barristers make an important and specialist contribution to the provision of legal aid. This year we implemented changes to assist with equitable briefing practices and other quality initiatives in our work with barristers.

In previous years barristers were briefed and paid directly by solicitor firms, with funds provided for this purpose under a grant of legal assistance. This meant payment records were not collected or held by Victoria Legal Aid.

In September 2013 Victoria Legal Aid commenced direct payment to barristers, once private practitioners authorised and submitted online claims that work had been performed. In November 2013 this practice became mandatory and, following the support of the Law Institute of Victoria, has been adopted by practitioners.

Our partnerships – barristers

Includes all costs paid including circuit fees, travelling cost and other expenses

	Private practitioner assigned	Victoria Legal Aid assigned	Total
Total all barrister payments	\$10.6 million	\$3.5 million	\$14.1 million

Direct payments to barristers by area of law

In 2014–15, Victoria Legal Aid paid \$14.1 million to barristers across the state. This included more than \$9 million for criminal law matters, \$4.4 million for family law matters and \$336,076 for civil law matters.

Area of law	Payments to barristers	% of total
Criminal	\$9.4 million	66.7%
Family	\$4.4 million	30.9%
Civil	\$ 0.3 million	2.4%

Direct payments to barristers criminal matters

Type of work	Payments to barristers	% of total
Appellate Crime	\$0.5 million	5.2%
Indictable Crime	\$5.1 million	53.9%
Sex Offences	\$1.7 million	17.6%
Summary crime	\$1.6 million	16.8%
Youth crime	\$0.6 million	6.5%

Of the \$9.4 million paid to barristers for criminal matters, almost \$5 million was for 'significant work', including County and Supreme Court trials, County and Supreme Court pleas, contested committals and serious sex offender supervision contests. This figure represents payments for preparation and time in court and does not include peripheral costs associated with the case that the barrister may have incurred, including any preliminary hearings.

Direct payments to barristers for family related-matters

Type of work	Payments to barristers	% of total
Family Dispute Resolution Service	\$0.4 million	9.4%
Child Protection	\$1.5 million	35.0%
Family Violence	\$0.4 million	8.9%
Family Law Financial Support	\$0.02 million	0.4%
Independent Children's Lawyers	\$1.4 million	31.7%
Parenting Disputes	\$0.6 million	14.6%

Direct payments to barristers for civil related-matters

Type of work	Payments to barristers	% of total
Commonwealth Entitlements	\$0.05 million	16.2%
Equality	\$0.03 million	8.8%
Mental Health and Disability	\$0.03 million	9.5%
Migration	\$0.1 million	28.4%
Social Inclusion	\$0.1 million	37.1%

Community legal centres

Community legal centres are independent community organisations that provide free advice, casework and legal education to their communities. There are currently 51 centres in Victoria. Some specialise in particular areas of law.

More information: www.communitylaw.org.au

We administer funding to most (39) of Victoria's community legal centres and the Federation of Community Legal Centres and monitor their performance against service agreement obligations and service targets to ensure accountability for the use of those funds. We are increasingly focusing on working with the sector to understand and respond to legal need collaboratively through joint legal needs assessment projects.

This year we:

- provided and administered record funding of more than \$25.4 million to centres (up 13.9% from last year). We committed \$16,403,565 of state government funds to centres, including \$2,103,981 in new strategic grants
- held the first round of grants for the Innovation and Transformation Fund, receiving a total of 21 applications from 25 centres. We committed to grants of \$636,000 from the fund's total two-year allocation of \$2 million for projects that will commence in 2015–16. The remaining \$1.36 million will be allocated during 2015–16
- supported three centres to amalgamate and form the Western Community Legal Centre, a new entity that will provide high quality legal assistance across the western suburbs of Melbourne.
- ensured that centres were given appropriate additional funds to increase staff salaries under the Social and Community Services Award Equal Remuneration Order. This additional investment totalled \$1,772,354 in 2014–15.

Community legal centre performance outputs

Activity	2014–15	2013–14	% variance
Information	57,937	54,057	7.2
Advice	56,014	52,113	7.5
Cases* opened	24,941	23,697	5.2
Community legal education projects delivered	1,185	1,121	5.7
Law reform and legal policy submissions	107	145	-35.5

* Community legal centre case definition is different from a case conducted under a grant of legal assistance. It involves more than one-off advice. For example, a lawyer looking over documents, undertaking research, providing written advice, making telephone calls, advocating for a person or negotiating on their behalf, or making a simple appearance before a court or tribunal. Occasionally it involves representation in court, including complex matters.

Top 10 matters*

Matter type	Number of matters
Family or domestic violence order	13,280
Child contacts or contact orders	7,176
Government/admin issues relating to fines	4,598
Road traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences	4,112
Property in marriage	3,718
Divorce	3,370
Family or domestic violence	2,628
Motor vehicle accident	2,625
Child residency	2,355
Family Law other	2,059

Explanatory notes for performance outputs

Figures are from a database used by 36 of the 40 community legal centres funded through the Community Legal Services Program in 2014–15. The figures do not include client service and community and law reform activities undertaken by the following funded centres: Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Vic), Homeless Law (Justice Connect), Job Watch and Refugee and Immigration Legal Clinic. These community legal centres do not use the common database. Figures do not include client advice provided by the Tenants' Union of Victoria, which records this activity on a separate database.

Funding through the Community Legal Sector Program

We granted and administered funding to 39 community legal centres across Victoria and the Federation of Community Legal Centres as the sector's peak body. Funding was provided by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and by Victoria Legal Aid out of its state funding allocation.

Community legal centre	Commonwealth funding* (\$)	State core funding (\$)	Total payments (\$)
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Vic)**	0	304,028	304,028
Barwon Community Legal Service	476,934	509,090	986,024
Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre, Community West	238,121	595,894	834,015
Broadmeadows Community Legal Service	254,017	336,795	590,812
Casey Cardinia Legal Service	296,273	273,996	570,269
Central Highlands Community Legal Centre	264,670	351,862	616,532
Consumer Action Law Centre**	284,633	983,357	1,267,990
Darebin Community Legal Centre	186,106	463,703	649,809
Disability Discrimination Legal Service**	205,931	51,160	257,091

Community legal centre	Commonwealth funding* (\$)	State core funding (\$)	Total payments (\$)
Eastern Community Legal Centre	422,110	718,075	1,140,185
Emma House Domestic Violence Service	59,029	79,349	138,378
Environment Justice Australia (Victoria)**	0	179,417	179,417
Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)**	0	775,290	775,290
Fitzroy Legal Service	191,760	460,367	652,127
Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre	101,276	248,868	350,144
Footscray Community Legal Centre	92,046	398,118	490,164
Gippsland Community Legal Service, Anglicare Victoria	341,713	260,583	602,296
Homeless Law, Justice Connect**	162,723	315,571	478,294
Hume Riverina Community Legal Service, Upper Murray Family Care	461,735	252,320	714,055
Job Watch**	0	449,757	449,757
Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, Advocacy and Rights Centre (including Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre)	217,887	809,046	1,026,933
Monash Oakleigh Legal Service	207,529	27,869	235,398
Moonee Valley Legal Service	91,289	258,024	349,313
Moreland Community Legal Centre	105,281	227,404	332,685
Murray Mallee Community Legal Service, Mallee Family Care	476,989	167,874	644,863
North Melbourne Legal Service	220,255	224,542	444,797
Peninsula Community Legal Centre	720,772	964,897	1,685,669
Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre**	0	162,519	162,519
Senior Rights Victoria, Council on the Ageing**	78,673	565,989	644,662
Social Security Rights Victoria	213,977	44,171	258,148
Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau**	80,749	4,017	84,766
Springvale Monash Legal Service	444,014	246,784	690,798
St Kilda Legal Service	107,922	300,959	399,881
Tenants Union of Victoria**	119,853	614,479	734,332
West Heidelberg Community Legal Service	101,236	192,966	294,202
Western Suburbs Legal Service	99,445	199,123	298,568
Whittlesea Community Legal Service, Whittlesea Community Connections	244,518	450,423	694,941

Community legal centre	Commonwealth funding* (\$)	State core funding (\$)	Total payments (\$)
Women's Legal Service Victoria**	1,044,044	317,433	1,361,477
Wyndham Legal Service	245,864	349,329	595,193
Youthlaw, Young People's Legal Rights Centre**	143,208	164,136	307,344
Total	9,002,582 (38.6%)	14,299,584 (61.4%)	23,302,166

* This funding includes Commonwealth funding to the Community Legal Sector Program. It does not include other Commonwealth funding allocated directly to centres.

** Specialist community legal centre.

Explanatory notes for core funding table

These funding amounts include core grants and contributions from the Commonwealth and Victorian governments to assist funded community legal centres to meet increased staff salaries under the Social and Community Services Award Equal Remuneration Order.

Victoria Legal Aid's 'Comprehensive operating statement' (p. 106) excludes Commonwealth grants (core and one-off) to community legal centres because we do not control these funds and we do not make the decisions that enable these investments in the centres. As such, these Commonwealth grants cannot be considered Victoria Legal Aid revenue.

Special projects strategic grants

We also committed an additional \$2,103,981 in strategic grants for special projects in 2014–15. These included grants to centres for innovation and transformation fund projects to be implemented from 1 July 2015, including:

- Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service to develop a Koori Women's service hub at their new premises
- Eastern Community Legal Centre to develop a triage and intake process enabling eastern suburbs clients to be referred better into a range of community legal centre and Victoria Legal Aid services
- the Federation of Community Legal Centres to help community legal centres better measure the impact and effectiveness of their services
- Eastern Community Legal Centre to provide more legal help in Healesville and throughout the Yarra Ranges.
- inTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence to provide better legal help to culturally and linguistically diverse victims of family violence.
- Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and Women's Legal Service for two-year pilot projects to deliver child protection and family law legal services.
- Wyndham Legal Service to fit out significant new premises in Werribee which have become the main office of the newly formed Western Community Legal Centre.

Educational institutions

We have established relationships with many educational institutions, including most of the major universities in Victoria.

We provide opportunities for students to undertake placements within our organisation to gain practical experience, including hosting law, research, business and criminal justice administration students. This year we hosted students from Monash University, Faculty of Law.

See 'Supporting quality services' (p. 75) for more about student training placements this year.

Engaging with the community and stakeholders

The Victorian community and our stakeholders in legal and non-legal sectors help us meet our objectives and deliver services effectively. Engaging with the community and stakeholders enables us to:

- harness knowledge and experience to help us improve our services
- test policies, ideas and directions
- identify and, where possible, address issues of concern.

This year we consulted and collaborated with the community and our stakeholders on a number of activities and projects. The input we received influenced our decision-making and is contributing to the continuous improvement of our services.

Key achievements

Seeking community and stakeholder views to help shape our future directions

During the past year, we consulted with nearly 4,000 stakeholders including our staff, members of the community and external stakeholders to ensure we had the best input possible on which to make decisions about the future of legal aid in Victoria and our strategic directions.

Listening to the community and our stakeholders also helped us to make informed choices about how we assist the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in a challenging environment where community need for services outweighs our capacity to always respond in the way we would like.

One result of our extensive consultation is our unifying *Strategy 2015–18* (p. 57).

Community research

We commissioned research to better understand community awareness of legal aid, perceptions about priority access to services, and expectations of government funded legal aid. We consulted more than 1,500 people, with 92 per cent of respondents agreeing that it was important or very important for a government funded agency to help people who cannot afford legal services. Aligning with our priority clients, respondents nominated people on a low income, people experiencing or at risk of experiencing family violence and people with a disability as most in need of legal aid.

External stakeholder consultation

We also undertook a comprehensive stakeholder consultation to gather views from our Commonwealth and state governments, the judiciary, members of the Bar, lawyers in private practice, other justice sector partners, and community and welfare sector stakeholders. Consultation took the form of individual meetings, roundtable discussions and an online survey. The consultation highlighted:

- a strong call for increased collaboration through closer, more respectful and mutually beneficial relationships
- the need to forge better links with the non-legal, not-for-profit sector
- increased transparency and accountability.

Establishing new and stronger collaborations

We also commenced a number of new collaborations that we will start to deliver on our new *Strategy 2015–18* commitment to ‘working better together’. In 2014–15 we:

- announced a new fund for community legal centres – the Innovation and Transformation Fund – to foster innovation and further strengthening of the sector
- commenced a collaboration with the Federation of Community Legal Centres and RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice and its Innovation Fastrack Program to improve access to justice through better use of technology
- established a two-year partnership with the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales to undertake evaluation services. The foundation has extensive experience in undertaking independent high quality evaluations in the legal assistance sector.

More information

You can also read about other consultations and community engagement efforts we have undertaken this year:

- Family Law Legal Aid Services Review – p. 49
- delivering high quality trials – p. 39
- the completion of our review of criminal appeals – p. 40
- the establishment of the Independent Mental Health Advocacy service – p. 31
- engaging with the community through legal education – p. 15.

Statutory reporting responsibilities

This report has been prepared in accordance with all relevant legislation. See Appendix 1 for the disclosure index that identifies our compliance with statutory disclosure requirements.

Complaints

We take a proactive approach to complaints. We believe they provide invaluable feedback about the quality of our services, and that this in turn can help us to improve.

Our website explains what people can expect from us when they use our services. It also explains how to make a complaint if we do not meet expectations. Anyone can make a complaint about services provided by our staff, private practitioners representing clients under a grant of legal assistance, or about our services more generally.

We aim to resolve complaints quickly, fairly and without prejudice. We have a complaints process that encourages staff and private practitioners to take responsibility for complaints and to resolve them when they first arise.

This year we received 741 complaints and enquiries compared to 681 in 2013–14 (up by 8%).

In 74 per cent of cases we met our target of acknowledging a complaint within 48 hours and reaching a resolution within 28 days.

What people complained about

Nature of complaint	2014–15	2013–14
Our services	125	119
Services provided by private practitioners	97	182
Services provided by our staff	131	111
Enquiries	388	269
Total	741	681

Complaints about our services

Complaints about our services covers complaints about all aspects of our services except complaints about individual staff members and services provided by private practitioners on behalf of Victoria Legal Aid.

We received 125 complaints about our services (up by 5%). The most common complaints were about:

- failure to pay a barrister (19%)
- funding eligibility or service limitations (16%)
- financial contributions from clients (8%).

These complaints were most commonly resolved by:

- providing information or an explanation to the complainant (28%)
- payment of an outstanding account (12%)
- finding that the complaint was not substantiated (8%).

Complaints about services provided by private practitioners

We received 97 complaints about services provided by private practitioners (down by 46%), including services relating to a grant of legal assistance. The most common types of complaints were about:

- improper request for payment from a person in receipt of a grant of legal assistance (12%)
- lack of communication to a client (12%)
- failing to progress a case (8%)

These complaints were most commonly resolved by:

- providing information or an explanation to the complainant (27%)
- finding that the complaint was not substantiated (18%)
- closing the complaint due to insufficient information being provided by the complainant (6%).

This decrease may reflect improvements in service delivery, resulting from the tightening of our private practitioner panel membership conditions and improvements to our framework for checking compliance with our guidelines.

We referred two complainants to the Legal Services Commissioner as the appropriate authority for investigating misconduct complaints about lawyers.

Complaints about services provided by our staff

We received 131 complaints about our legal and non-legal staff (up by 18%).

The most common complaints were about:

- the conduct of a staff member (19%)
- dissatisfaction with representation (15%)
- lack of communication to a client (9%).

These complaints were most commonly resolved by:

- providing information or an explanation to the complainant (22%)
- finding that the complaint was not substantiated (12%)
- passing on the complainant's feedback to the staff member (9%).

This increase is due largely to the improvements we made to our complaints process and record keeping. Under our updated process, our program managers and regional managers are recording more complaints in the first instance, and aiming to resolve client concerns without unnecessary delay.

Summary of complaints about private practitioners and our staff

The table below shows the total number of complaints we received this year about private practitioners and our staff against our complaint categories. Most complaints against our staff related to service quality and professional conduct, while private practitioners' complaints were mostly about fee-related matters and professional conduct.

Complaint category*	Our staff	Private practitioners
Service quality	58	29
Professional conduct	50	32
Victoria Legal Aid requirements	6	14
Fee-related matters	2	5
Other	15	17
Total	131	97

* Complaint categories are defined as:

- Service quality – includes complaints about the regularity of communications with a client, the accuracy of advice provided, the effectiveness of legal representation or how well a client's case was prepared.
- Professional conduct – includes complaints about a possible conflict of interest, a practitioner failing to appear in court, or a practitioner improperly ceasing to act for a client.
- Victoria Legal Aid requirements – includes complaints about breaches of our panel membership obligations, failure to inform Victoria Legal Aid of relevant information for a grant of aid or providing false information.
- Fee-related complaints – includes complaints about a request for payment from a client or from Victoria Legal Aid, or failure to pay a third-party service provider.
- Other – includes where the complainant does not provide enough information to categorise the complaint and decides not to take the matter further upon request for further information.

Enquiries

We received 388 enquiries this year about a range of issues including queries about another person's eligibility for a grant of legal assistance and complaints not related to our services.

These enquiries were mostly resolved by:

- referral for investigation into third party aid eligibility (33%)
- information provided (25%)
- referral to Legal Help line (8%).

Government advertising expenditure

The disclosure threshold for government advertising expenditure is more than \$150,000 (exclusive of GST). Our total advertising expenditure during 2014–15 was not more than \$150,000 (exclusive of GST).

Consultancy expenditure

Details of consultancies (valued at \$10,000 or greater)

In 2014–15, we engaged 18 consultancies where the total fees payable to the consultants were greater than \$10,000. The total expenditure incurred during 2014–15 in relation to these consultancies is \$983,773 (excluding GST). Details of individual consultancies are outlined below:

Consultant	Purpose of consultant	Total approved project fee (\$) (excl. GST)	Expenditure (\$) (excl. GST)	Future expenditure (\$) (excl. GST)
ACIL Allen Consulting	Management consulting evaluation framework for Panels Project	30,000	30,000	0
Catriona Lowe Consultant Services	North Western Community Legal Centre's reform project	21,000	21,000	0
Clear Horizon Consulting	Focus research and a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Mental Health and Disability Advocacy program	27,115	17,225	9,890
Colmar Brunton	Conduct client satisfaction survey	74,074	47,130	15,710
Enhance Solutions	Occupational health and safety policy development and training design, and facilitation	112,600	119,734	0
Finity Consulting	Valuation of legal creditors and debtors	60,000	51,718	8,282
Forrester Research Australia	Information technology strategy support	39,985	39,985	0
Heidrich & Struggles	Review of Board effectiveness and executive leadership development and assessment	215,000	206,500	0
Law Institute of Victoria	Review of funding models in Criminal and Family Law	35,000	35,000	0
Linda Stoneman Consulting	Annual business plan and corporate services consulting	20,000	14,998	5,002
Procurement Australia	Professional tendering services	14,800	15,387.50	0

Consultant	Purpose of consultant	Total approved project fee (\$) (excl. GST)	Expenditure (\$) (excl. GST)	Future expenditure (\$) (excl. GST)
Property Dynamics	Property advice and services	72,706	72,706	0
Real Politic Consulting	Legal needs analysis and stakeholder consultation	42,084	42,084	0
RMIT	Development of the Access to Justice Technology Program	150,000	50,000	100,000 (50,000 each year for next 2 years)
Social Ventures Consulting	Mental Health and Disability Advocacy program evaluation	41,000	14,500	26,500
Temuka Breeze	Strategy project management	120,000	72,700	0
The Social Research Centre	Community research for the Strategy	90,000	88,104	0
Tim Corcoran & Associates	Victoria Legal Aid Service Review – Practice Support	45,000	45,000	0

Details of consultancies under \$10,000

In 2014–15, we engaged four consultancies where the total fees payable to the individual consultancies was less than \$10 000. The total expenditure incurred during 2014–15 in relation to these consultancies was \$30,998 (excluding GST).

Contracts

There were zero contracts entered into during the financial year that require specific disclosure as they were all less than \$10 million in value.

Information privacy

We are committed to protecting the personal privacy of our clients and the people we help. We only collect, use or disclose personal information where it is necessary to perform legal aid functions or where required by law.

We comply with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic) and our policies and processes for dealing with personal information comply with the Information Privacy Principles.

We received one notification of a complaint lodged with the Commissioner for Privacy and Data Protection this year, which alleged we failed to comply with our privacy obligations. This complaint was resolved by the commissioner dismissing the complaint.

Information about how we handle personal information is available at www.legalaid.vic.gov.au.

Freedom of information

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)* gives members of the public the right to apply for access to information held by us. It applies to the documents we create, as well as those created by other organisations in our possession.

We received 15 applications this year. Of these:

- three resulted in documents being released in full
- seven resulted in documents being released in part
- four resulted in Victoria Legal Aid confirming that we did not hold documents covered by the request
- one application was refused in full.

Freedom of Information Commissioner

Members of the public can complain to the Freedom of Information Commissioner about the way we handle freedom of information requests or our decisions about freedom of information applications.

This year we received notification of two complaints and four review requests from the Freedom of Information Commissioner. Of these:

- one review upheld our decision in full
- one review upheld our decision in part
- two reviews remain ongoing
- one complaint was resolved
- one complaint remains ongoing.

Making a request

Access to documents may be obtained through written request, as detailed in section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act. In summary, the requirements for making a request are that it should:

- be in writing
- identify as clearly as possible which document is being requested
- be accompanied by the appropriate application fee (or a request to have the fee waived).

Access charges may also apply once documents have been processed (for example, photocopying and search and retrieval charges).

Freedom of information requests can be made by:

- email to foi@vla.vic.gov.au
- post to:
Freedom of Information
Victoria Legal Aid
GPO Box 4380
MELBOURNE VIC 3001.

Victoria Legal Aid's Complaints and Statutory Compliance team can also be contacted by phone on (03) 9280 3789 for any questions about Freedom of Information requests.

Victorian Ombudsman

Members of the public can complain to the Victorian Ombudsman about administrative actions taken by Victoria Legal Aid, if we cannot resolve their complaint directly.

The Victorian Ombudsman notified us of five complaints lodged with her office this year. All were resolved informally by providing the Ombudsman with further information.

Compliance with the *Building Act 1993 (Vic)*

We are exempt from notifying our compliance with the building and maintenance provisions of the Building Act because we do not own any buildings.

We undertook minor upgrades at our Bendigo office and security upgrades to our offices in Broadmeadows, Ballarat and Dandenong.

We completed an expression of interest using the Victorian Government Tenders website to establish a panel of builders to undertake future works and ensure cost effectiveness. We then completed a tender for the Frankston office refurbishment, with works due to be completed in August 2015.

The Frankston office upgrade will guide our future office design. It optimises work practices and staff interaction, allows for a greater number of staff to service the region, and provides a secure client interaction and meeting area. It also includes an external ramp entry and accessible public toilet, compliant with the *Disability Discrimination Act 2006* (see below).

Compliance with the *Disability Act 2006*

Our *Disability Action Plan 2012–2014* complies with the *Disability Act 2006 (Vic)* and includes clear timeframes, accountabilities and performance measures. The plan was rolled over for the 2014–15 period. Key activities under the plan this year included:

- advocacy for systemic change – ran Patient X, a Supreme Court case which clarified the impact of decisions of the Mental Health Tribunal and developed a comprehensive strategic response to the new Mental Health Act 2014
- improving the provision of services – established the Independent Mental Health Advocacy service and ran legal professional training sessions for our lawyers on working with clients with a mental illness and with cognitive and neurological disabilities
- improving access to legal information and education – launched two modules of *Learning the law: Fines and driving*
- making our buildings and facilities more accessible (see above).

Industry Participation Policy

We are required to apply the Victorian Industry Participation Policy in all tenders over \$3 million in metropolitan Melbourne and \$1 million in regional Victoria. No tenders were awarded over these amounts.

National Competition Policy

We comply with the requirements of the National Competition Policy, where relevant, to ensure competitive neutrality where any services compete, or potentially compete, with the private sector.

Compliance with the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic)*

The Protected Disclosure Act encourages and assists people in making disclosures of improper conduct by public officers and public bodies. The Act provides protection to people who make

disclosures in accordance with the Act and establishes a system for the matters disclosed to be investigated and rectifying action to be taken.

We do not tolerate improper conduct by employees, nor the taking of reprisals against those who come forward to disclose such conduct. We are committed to ensuring transparency and accountability in administrative and management practices. We support the making of disclosures that reveal:

- corrupt conduct
- conduct involving a substantial mismanagement of public resources
- conduct involving a substantial risk to public health and safety or the environment.

We will take all reasonable steps to protect people who make such disclosures from any detrimental action in reprisal for making the disclosure. We will also afford natural justice to the person who is the subject of the disclosure to the extent it is legally possible.

Disclosures about Victoria Legal Aid or any of its employees can be made to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. See www.ibac.vic.gov.au.

For more information about reporting improper conduct go to www.legalaid.vic.gov.au.

Compliance with the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*

We are exempt from reporting on our compliance under the Act because Victoria Legal Aid is not a public service care agency or a funded care agency. As such, the Act does not apply.

Risk management

Our risk management framework is consistent with the Victorian Government Risk Management Framework, the Australian/New Zealand risk management standard AS/NZS ISO31000:2009 and the directions issued under the *Financial Management Act 1994* (Vic).

Our strategic risk profile is reviewed annually in line with our risk management policy and is undertaken in accordance with the risk management procedures.

Our risk profile is developed by aggregating risks across the organisation and then identifying the top risks we face. Factors influencing the prioritisation of risks are our strategic priorities, external factors impacting on service delivery and financial commitments.

We developed mitigating strategies and actions to embed planning around identified risks into current activities. Key risk indicators were developed to track and monitor the movement of risks, against likelihood and consequence. The risk profile is approved by the Victoria Legal Aid Board. Quarterly reports against the risk profile are provided to our Audit Committee.

Identified risks

Risks identified during the year included:

- failure to attain compliance with processes and standards that enable the delivery of quality services to legal aid clients
- failure to secure adequate levels of funding
- community fails to value legal aid services
- failure to align staff capability with organisational goals
- failure to deliver on and meet targets
- failure to successfully plan and implement key strategic projects impacting our ability to adapt to change and innovate
- failure to identify, forecast and respond to service pressures
- failure of government decisions and activity to take into account Victoria Legal Aid and other entities
- failure to provide staff with a safe and supportive work-place and work-environment impacting physical or mental wellbeing.

Attestation of compliance with the Australian/New Zealand risk management standard

I, Andrew Guy certify that Victoria Legal Aid has complied with the Ministerial Standing Direction 4.5.5 – Risk Management Framework and Processes. The Victoria Legal Aid Audit Committee verifies this.



Andrew Guy

Chairperson

on behalf of the Board of Victoria Legal Aid

Additional information available on request

In compliance with the requirements of the Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance, information relating to the 2014–15 reporting period to be made available to ministers, members of parliament and the public on request and subject to the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)* include:

- a statement that declarations of pecuniary interests have been duly completed by all relevant officers of Victoria Legal Aid
- details of shares held by senior officers as nominee or held beneficially in a statutory authority or subsidiary
- details of publications produced by Victoria Legal Aid about our activities and where they can be obtained
- details of changes in prices, fees, charges, rates and levies charged by Victoria Legal Aid for its services, including services that are administered
- details of any major external reviews carried out in respect of the operation of Victoria Legal Aid
- details of any other research and development activities undertaken by Victoria Legal Aid that are not otherwise covered either in the report of operations or in a document which contains the financial statement and report of operations
- details of overseas visits undertaken including a summary of the objectives and outcomes of each visit
- details of major promotional, public relations and marketing activities undertaken by Victoria Legal Aid to develop community awareness of the services provided by it
- details of assessments and measures undertaken to improve the occupational health and safety of employees, not otherwise detailed in the report of operations
- a general statement on industrial relations within Victoria Legal Aid and details of time lost through industrial accidents and disputes, which are not otherwise detailed in the report of operations
- a list of major committees sponsored by Victoria Legal Aid, the purposes of each committee and the extent to which the purposes have been achieved
- details of all consultancies and contractors.



Our finances

Year in review

We finished the year with a surplus on transactions, our day-to-day business, of \$11.0 million. We planned for a surplus but the result was greater than expected due to additional revenue.

The comprehensive surplus was \$11.0 million, compared to a \$16.1 million surplus last year.

The year-end cash balance was \$44.2 million, which is above the targeted \$20.0 million minimum cash balance we hold to ensure we meet fluctuations in annual payments.

The 2014–15 financial statements record:

- Victorian Government income of \$85.0 million
- Commonwealth Government income of \$47.2 million
- Public Purpose Fund income of \$29.3 million (\$3.0 million of these funds were one-off funds)
- \$63.6 million spent on case-related private practitioner payments
- \$25.0 million funding provided to community legal centres (this includes \$9.2 million in Commonwealth funds passed directly to community legal centres and not recognised as income or expenditure in our financial statements)
- a comprehensive surplus of \$11.0 million.

Five-year financial summary

Financial summary	2014–15 \$'000	2013–14 \$'000	2012–13 \$'000	2011–12 \$'000	2010–11 \$'000
Income from government and the Public Purpose Fund	161,535	158,071	147,842	144,872	142,093
Total income from transactions	166,749	162,222	155,990	153,831	149,204
Total expenses from transactions	(155,774)	(146,903)	(162,473)	(159,991)	(140,748)
Net result from transactions	10,975	15,319	(6,483)	(6,160)	8,456
Net result for the period	11,006	16,109	(9,332)	(3,095)	2,124
Net cash flow from operating activities	13,411	20,493	(1,035)	(3,660)	9,788
Cash at 30 June	44,235	32,185	12,893	14,560	19,913
Total assets	78,961	67,064	50,048	52,411	55,987
Total liabilities	37,405	36,514	35,609	28,638	29,119
Total equity	41,556	30,550	14,439	23,773	26,868

Our income

Our operating income is predominantly provided by the Victorian and Commonwealth governments and the Public Purpose Fund.

The Commonwealth Government, through the Council of Australian Governments' *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services* provided \$45.8 million (\$44.9 million in 2013–14). The Commonwealth provided supplementary funding of \$1.2 million for expensive criminal cases. Direct grants for community legal centres are passed on directly by Victoria Legal Aid and thus are not recognised as income in our financial statements.

The state government provided \$85.0 million (\$83.0 million in 2013–14), including specific funds for the establishment of a state wide non-legal advocacy service, the weekend remand court, equal opportunity and family violence. Without these specific funds these services cannot be provided.

Funding from the Public Purpose Fund was \$29.3 million of which \$3.0 million was one-off funding. These one-off funds were received as restoration of indexation not received in 2012–13 and 2013–14. The remaining operating income was \$5.2 million (\$4.2 million 2013–14).

Income growth this year was 2.7% compared to 4.0% in 2013–14. The decreased growth is due to lower Commonwealth grants. In 2013–14 one-off funds of \$3.5 million were received from the Commonwealth.

Income five-years

Source	2014–15 \$000	2013–14 \$000	2012–13 \$000	2011–12 \$000	2010–11 \$000
Commonwealth grants	47,228	49,366	46,875	46,345	47,228
State grants	85,034	83,042	75,304	72,864	69,096
Public Purpose Fund	29,273	25,663	25,663	25,663	25,769
Client contributions	2,025	1,331	5,157	5,913	4,042
Other income	3,189	2,820	2,991	3,046	3,069
Total income from transactions	166,749	162,222	155,990	153,831	149,204
% income annual growth	2.7%	4.0%	1.4%	3.1%	8.5%

Our expenditure

Our total operating expenditure this year was \$155.8 million, an increase of 6.0%.

Case-related payments totalled \$63.6 million, an increase of 2.6%. These funds are paid to private practitioners, barristers, medical experts and interpreters, as well as to third parties for services rendered on in-house cases. The other major expense was staffing-related costs totalling \$57.5 million, an increase of 5.8%. Staffing-related costs accounted for 37% of total operating expenditure.

Expenditure five-years

Source	2014–15 \$000	2013–14 \$000	2012–13 \$000	2011–12 \$000	2010–11 \$000
Case-related payments	63,567	61,942	77,461	79,639	67,103
Community legal centre payments	15,481	13,335	12,855	12,367	11,527
Employee benefits	57,465	54,294	53,577	50,305	45,546
Depreciation and amortisation	2,936	2,812	3,304	2,737	2,403
Other administration	15,965	14,520	15,276	14,943	14,169
Total expenses from transactions	155,774	146,903	162,473	159,991	140,748
% expenditure annual growth	6.0%	(9.6%)	1.6%	13.7%	6.9%

Our operations and financial position

Operations result

The net result from transactions, our day-to-day business, was a surplus of \$11.0 million. The surplus from transactions indicates that the strategies we implemented have enabled us to operate within the resources we have available to us. We planned to operate with a surplus and this was achieved although the surplus was greater than anticipated due predominately to additional revenue.

Financial position

Our comprehensive result was a surplus of \$11.0 million. The comprehensive surplus takes into account year-end adjustments of less than \$0.1 million.

The year-end cash balance was \$44.2 million, which is above the targeted \$20.0 million minimum cash balance to ensure we meet fluctuations in annual payments.

Future planning

We continue to implement strategies to ensure that we operate within the resources we have available. However, we anticipate that increased demand and greater costs that, if not matched by increased income, will make our financial sustainability difficult and challenge our ability to remain effective and efficient in meeting our clients' needs.

Understanding the financial statements

The 'Financial statements' detail our financial performance and overall financial position for the year ended 30 June 2015. They are presented in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and the requirements set by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

There are four financial statements in this section and notes to the financial statements.

Comprehensive operating statement

This statement is often known as the 'Profit and loss statement' and details the sources of our income or revenue under the headings 'Government' and 'Operating' as well as the expenditure or expenses incurred in running Victoria Legal Aid during the financial year. The expenditure is operational in nature and does not include costs associated with the purchase or the building of assets (capital expenditure).

An item that is included in the operational expenditure is 'depreciation', which is the sum of the assets 'used up' during the financial year. The 'Comprehensive operating statement' includes both cash and non-cash items, and all income and expenses for the year are reflected in the statement even though some income may not be received and some expenses may not yet be paid (such as supplier invoices not yet paid for goods or services received).

A key figure in the 'Comprehensive operating statement' is the surplus (or deficit) for the year, which is equivalent to the profit (or loss) of Victoria Legal Aid for the financial year. A surplus indicates that the income was greater than the expenditure. The comprehensive result is also equal to the movement in our net assets or total equity from the prior year.

Balance sheet

This 'Balance sheet' is a snapshot of our financial position as at 30 June 2015 and details what we own (assets) and owe (liabilities). The assets and liabilities are separated into current and non-current. 'Current' indicates that the assets or liabilities are likely to be consumed or fall due within the next 12 months. The 'net assets' value is the residual of assets once the liabilities have been deducted. This represents the net financial worth of Victoria Legal Aid at 30 June 2015.

Statement of changes in equity

The 'Statement of changes in equity' summarises the change in our net financial worth during the financial year. During the course of the year the value of total equity as set out in the balance sheet changes. This statement shows the values of such changes and how these changes arose. The main

reason for a change in our equity is from the 'Comprehensive result', or from the operations described in the 'Comprehensive operating statement'.

Cash flow statement

The 'Cash flow statement' summarises our cash receipts and cash payments for the financial year ended 30 June 2015. The values may differ from those shown in the 'Comprehensive income statement' because the income statement is prepared on an accrual accounting basis. This means that income is reported when earned and expenses when incurred not when the physical cash is transacted. Cash in the 'Cash flow statement' refers to bank deposits and other forms of liquid amounts that can readily be converted to cash. Our cash arises from, and is used in, two main areas:

1) Cash flows from operating activities

Receipts include all cash received into our bank account from those who owed money to Victoria Legal Aid. Receipts also include the interest received from our cash investments but do not include the costs associated with the sale of assets. Payments include all cash paid by Victoria Legal Aid from its bank account to staff and payments to legal and trade creditors but do not include the costs associated with purchasing assets.

2) Cash flows from investing activities

This section shows the cash invested in the creation or purchase of assets such as property, plant and equipment and the cash received from the sale of these assets, mainly Victoria Legal Aid pool cars.

Notes to the financial statements

The notes should be read in conjunction with the four financial statements so that a clear picture can be obtained of the financial accounts. They provide greater detail to support the presented figures, enabling an understanding of the basis on which the amounts reported in the financial statements are derived.

Victoria Legal Aid

Financial statements – 30 June 2015

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This financial report covers Victoria Legal Aid as an individual entity

Victoria Legal Aid is a statutory authority of the state of Victoria. The authority was established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978*. Its principal address is:

Victoria Legal Aid
350 Queen Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Comprehensive operating statement

For the financial year ended 30 June 2015

	Notes	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
CONTINUING OPERATIONS			
Income from transactions			
Government			
Commonwealth grants	1(e), 2(c)	47,228	45,866
Commonwealth grants – one-off	1(e), 2(c)	-	3,500
State grant	1(e), 2(c)	85,034	83,042
Public Purpose Fund	1(e)	26,240	25,663
Public Purpose Fund – one-off	1(e)	3,033	
		161,535	158,071
Operating			
Client contributions (secured and unsecured)	1(e)	2,025	1,331
Costs recovered and appeals cost fund	1(e)	1,812	1,691
Interest on investments	1(e)	1,312	924
Other income		65	205
		5,214	4,151
Total income from transactions		166,749	162,222
Expenses from transactions			
Case-related professional payments	1(f)	(63,567)	(61,942)
Grants and other payments	1(f), 2(b)	(15,841)	(13,335)
Employee benefits	1(o), 3	(57,465)	(54,294)
Depreciation and amortisation	1(f), 3	(2,936)	(2,812)
Other expenditure	3	(15,965)	(14,520)
Total expenses from transactions		(155,774)	(146,903)

Net result from transactions (net operating balance)		10,975	15,319
Other economic flows included in net result			
Items that may be reclassified subsequently to net result			
Net gains/(losses) arising from other economic flows	1(h), 4	31	790
Total other economic flows included in net result		31	790
Net result from continuing operations		11,006	16,109
Comprehensive result		11,006	16,109

The above comprehensive operating statement should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes.

Balance sheet

As at 30 June 2015

	Notes	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Financial assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	1(i), 6	44,235	32,185
Accrued income	7	1,155	109
Receivables	1(j), 8	21,832	21,959
Prepayments		865	844
Total financial assets		68,087	55,097
Non-financial assets			
Property, plant and equipment	1(l), 9	6,217	6,508
Intangible assets	1(l), 10	4,657	5,459
Total non-financial assets		10,874	11,967
Total assets		78,961	67,064
Liabilities			
Payables	1(n), 11	21,459	21,574
Provisions	1(o), 12	15,946	14,940
Total liabilities		37,405	36,514
Net assets		41,556	30,550
Equity			
Contributed capital	1(k), 13(a)	42,194	42,194
Accumulated deficit	13(b)	(638)	(11,644)
Total equity		41,556	30,550
Contingent liabilities	1(v), 21		
Commitments for expenditure	1(u), 19		

The balance sheet should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes.

Statement of changes in equity

For the financial year ended 30 June 2015

	Notes	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Equity at start of financial year			
Contributed capital	13(a)	42,194	42,194
Accumulated deficit	13(b)	(11,644)	(27,753)
Total equity at start of financial year		30,550	14,441
Comprehensive result for the year		11,006	16,109
Total recognised income and expenses for the year		11,006	16,109
Total equity at end of financial year		41,556	30,550

The above statement of changes in equity should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes.

Cash flow statement

For the financial year ended 30 June 2015

	Notes	2015 \$'000 inflow/ (outflow)	2014 \$'000 inflow/ (outflow)
Cash flows from operating activities			
<i>Receipts from government</i>			
Commonwealth grants		47,226	45,189
Commonwealth grants – one-off		-	3,500
		47,226	48,689
State		84,281	82,832
Public Purpose Fund		26,240	25,663
Public Purpose Fund – one-off		1,033	2,000
		111,554	110,495
<i>Receipts from operating activities</i>			
Client contributions		2,556	2,168
Costs recovered and appeals cost fund		2,003	1,860
Interest on investments		1,204	868
Goods and services tax recovered from the ATO		9,191	8,439
Other income		210	196
		15,164	13,531
		173,944	172,715
<i>Payments to suppliers and employees</i>			
Case-related professional payments		(69,378)	(70,235)
Employee benefits		(56,795)	(52,978)
Community legal centres		(17,446)	(14,670)
Administration costs		(16,914)	(14,339)
		(160,533)	(152,222)
Net cash from/(used in) operating activities	17	13,411	20,493
Cash flows from investing activities			
Payments for non-financial assets		(1,276)	(1,262)
Proceeds from sale of non-financial assets		73	114
Net cash from/(used in) investing activities		(1,203)	(1,148)
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held		12,208	19,345
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year		29,993	10,648
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year	1(i), 6	42,201	29,993

The above cash flow statement should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies

The following summary explains the significant policies that have been adopted in the preparation of these financial statements.

(a) Statement of compliance and basis of accounting

The financial report is a general purpose financial report that has been prepared on an accrual basis in accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1994*, the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012*, the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Regulations 2013 and the applicable Australian Accounting Standards (AASs), which includes Interpretations issued by the Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB) and other mandatory professional requirements.

Where appropriate, those AASs paragraphs applicable to not-for-profit entities have been applied.

The financial statements were authorised for issue by the Board on 19 August 2015.

(b) Basis of preparation

The financial report has been prepared on the basis of historical cost, except for the revaluation of certain non-current assets and financial instruments. Cost is based on the fair values of the consideration given in exchange for assets.

In the application of AASs management is required to make judgements, estimates and assumptions about carrying values of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and various other factors that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances, the results of which form the basis of making the judgements. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised if the revision affects only that period or in the period of the revision and future periods if the revision affects both current and future periods.

Consistent with AASB 13 Fair Value Measurement, Victoria Legal Aid determines the policies and procedures for both recurring fair value measurements such as property, plant and equipment and financial instruments in accordance with the requirements of AASB 13 and the relevant Financial Reporting Directions.

All assets and liabilities for which fair value is measured or disclosed in the financial statements are categorised within the fair value hierarchy, described as follows, based on the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement as a whole:

- Level 1 – quoted (unadjusted) market prices in active markets for identical assets or liabilities
- Level 2 – valuation techniques for which the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement is directly or indirectly observable
- Level 3 – valuation techniques for which the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement is unobservable.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

For the purpose of fair value disclosures, Victoria Legal Aid has determined classes of assets and liabilities on the basis of the nature, characteristics and risks of the asset or liability and the level of the fair value hierarchy as explained above.

Accounting policies are selected and applied in a manner which ensures that the resulting financial information satisfies the concepts of relevance and reliability, thereby ensuring that the substance of the underlying transactions or other events is reported.

The functional currency of Victoria Legal Aid is the Australian dollar, which has also been identified as the presentation currency of Victoria Legal Aid. Amounts in the financial report have been rounded to the nearest thousand dollars, unless otherwise stated.

The accounting policies set out below have been applied in preparing the financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2015 and the comparative information presented for the year ended 30 June 2014.

When necessary, comparative figures have been adjusted to conform to changes in presentation for the current financial year.

(c) Objectives

The objectives of Victoria Legal Aid as detailed in the *Legal Aid Act 1978* are:

- (i) to provide legal aid in the most effective, economic and efficient manner
- (ii) to manage its resources to make legal aid available at a reasonable cost to the community and on an equitable basis throughout the state
- (iii) to provide to the community improved access to justice and legal remedies
- (iv) to pursue innovative means of providing legal aid directed at minimising the need for individual legal services in the community.

(d) Scope and presentation of financial statements

Comprehensive operating statement

Income and expenses in the comprehensive operating statement are separated into either 'transactions' or 'other economic flows'.

Balance sheet

Items of assets and liabilities in the balance sheet are:

- aggregated into financial and non-financial assets
- classified according to Government Finance Statistics (GFS) terminology, but retain measurement and disclosure rules under existing accounting standards applicable to Victoria Legal Aid
- current versus non-current assets and liabilities are disclosed in the notes where relevant.

Cash flow statement

Cash flows are classified according to whether or not they arise from operating, investing or financing activities. This classification is consistent with requirements under AASB 107 Statement of Cash Flows.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

For cash flow statement presentation purposes, cash and cash equivalents include bank overdrafts, which are included as current borrowings on the balance sheet.

Statement of changes in equity

The statement of changes in equity presents reconciliations of non-owner and owner changes in equity from opening balances at the beginning of the reporting period to the closing balances at the end of the reporting period. It also shows separately changes due to amounts recognised in the 'Comprehensive result' and amounts related to 'Transactions with owner in its capacity as owner'.

(e) Revenue recognition

Amounts disclosed as revenue are, where applicable, net of returns, allowances, duties and taxes. Revenue is recognised for each of Victoria Legal Aid's major activities as follows:

(i) Government grants

Grants payable by government are recognised as revenue when Victoria Legal Aid gains control of the underlying assets. For reciprocal grants (i.e. equal value is given back by Victoria Legal Aid to the provider) Victoria Legal Aid is deemed to have assumed control when Victoria Legal Aid has satisfied its performance obligations under the terms of the grant. For non-reciprocal grants, Victoria Legal Aid is deemed to have assumed control when the grant is receivable or received. Conditional grants may be reciprocal or non-reciprocal depending on the terms of the grant.

(ii) Public Purpose Fund

Monies from the Public Purpose Fund are distributed to the Legal Aid Fund pursuant to section 6.7.9 of the *Legal Profession Act 2004* and it is recognised as revenue when received. The Public Purpose Fund comprises interest and investment earnings on clients' funds held in solicitors' trust accounts. The amount of any distribution from the Public Purpose Fund to the Legal Aid Fund can vary from year to year depending on its investment performance and any other calls that may be made on the fund, as set out in the *Legal Profession Act 2004*.

The Public Purpose Fund – one-off funds represents the restoration of indexation not received in 2012–13 and 2013–14.

(iii) Client contribution revenue

Revenue from the provision of legal services to clients is recognised at fair value. Contributions for services are only recognised when the fair value can be reliably determined.

(iv) Sale of goods and disposal of assets

Revenue from the sale of goods and disposal of other assets is recognised when Victoria Legal Aid has passed to the buyer the significant risks and rewards of ownership of the goods or other assets.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(v) Interest

Interest revenue is recognised on a time-proportionate basis that takes into consideration the effective yield on the financial asset.

(vi) Costs recovered and appeal costs fund

Revenue arising from costs recovered and appeal costs fund is recognised when Victoria Legal Aid gains control of the revenue or the right to receive revenue.

(vii) Other income

Other income includes room rental and other minor income and is recognised when the right to receive payment is established.

(f) Expenses from transactions

(i) Case

Payments made to the organisation's panel members for legal work undertaken on behalf of the organisation. This includes duty lawyer, mediation, interpreter fees, medical reports and conduct monies. Case-related professional payments are recognised as an expense in the reporting period in which they are incurred and fluctuate depending on demand and types of cases funded.

(ii) Grants payments

Supplies and services, including case-related professional payments, are recognised as an expense in the reporting period in which they are incurred. Case-related professional payments fluctuate depending on demand and types of cases funded.

(iii) Supplies and services

Supplies and services, including case-related professional payments, are recognised as an expense in the reporting period in which they are incurred.

(iv) Depreciation and amortisation

Depreciation is calculated on a straight-line basis to write off the net cost of each item of plant and equipment (excluding cultural assets) over its expected useful life to its estimated residual value. Leasehold improvements are depreciated over the period of the lease or estimated useful life, whichever is the shorter, using the straight-line method. Estimates of useful lives, residual values and depreciation method are reviewed on a regular basis.

The following depreciation rates are used for each major class of depreciable assets for the current and prior years:

Furniture, fixture and fittings	10%
IT equipment	33%
Leasehold improvements	10%
Motor vehicles	20%
Office machines and equipment	15%
Cultural assets	0%

Intangible assets with finite useful lives are amortised on a systematic (typically straight-line) basis over the asset's useful life. Amortisation begins when the asset is available for use. The

amortisation period and method for an intangible asset with a finite useful life are reviewed annually at the end of each reporting period, in conjunction with a review for impairment.

(g) Maintenance and repairs

Assets of Victoria Legal Aid are required to be refurbished on a regular basis. This is managed as part of an ongoing major cyclical maintenance program. The costs of this maintenance are charged as expenses as incurred, except where they relate to the replacement of a component of an asset, in which case the costs are capitalised and depreciated in accordance with Note 1(f). Other routine operating maintenance, repair costs and minor renewals are also charged as expenses when incurred.

(h) Other economic flows included in net result

Other economic flows measure the change in volume of assets or liabilities that do not directly result from transactions.

(i) Net gains/(losses) on non-financial assets

Net gains/(losses) on non-financial assets and liabilities includes realised and unrealised gains and losses from revaluations, impairments, disposals of all non-financial assets and intangible assets.

Any gain or loss on the sale of non-financial assets is recognised at the date that control of the asset is passed to the buyer and is determined after deducting from the proceeds the carrying value of the asset at that time.

Intangible assets with indefinite lives (and intangible assets not yet available for use) are tested annually for impairment and whenever there is an indication that the asset may be impaired. All other assets are assessed annually for indications of impairment, excluding financial assets (Note 1m).

(ii) Net gains/(losses) on financial instruments and statutory receivables/payables

Net gains/(losses) on financial instruments and statutory receivables/payables includes realised and unrealised gains and losses from revaluations by actuarial assessment of legal payables and receivables.

Bad and doubtful debts are assessed on a regular basis. Those bad debts considered as written off by mutual consent are classified as a transaction expense. The allowance for doubtful receivables and bad debts not written off by mutual consent are adjusted as 'other economic flows'.

(iii) Net gains/(losses) arising from other economic flows

Other gains/(losses) from other economic flows include the gains or losses from reclassifications of amounts from reserves and/or accumulated surplus to net result, and from the revaluation of the present value of the long service leave liability due to changes in the bond interest rates.

(i) Cash and cash deposits

Cash and deposits, including cash equivalents, comprise cash on hand, cash in banks and deposits at call, and highly liquid investments with an original maturity of three months or less, that are readily convertible to cash and are subject to an insignificant risk of changes in value.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(i) *Monies held in trust*

Monies held in trust are for the purpose of administering specific matters and are held on behalf of the Department of Justice and Regulation.

(j) **Receivables**

Granting of legal assistance

Pursuant to the *Legal Aid Act 1978*, as amended, the organisation is empowered to make a grant of legal assistance subject to certain conditions. Under section 27 of the Act, Victoria Legal Aid may require a client to:

- (a) make a contribution towards the cost of providing assistance
- (b) make a contribution in respect of any out-of-pocket expenses incurred in providing assistance
- (c) pay contributions in such a manner and within such a time as the organisation directs
- (d) provide the organisation with security against costs incurred on their behalf.

In accordance with Victoria Legal Aid's means test and asset guidelines, a client may or may not be required to make a contribution towards the cost of their legal assistance.

Under section 46 of the Act, all costs payable under the terms of any judgment or order, or of any settlement of an action or claim by a client, are payable to the organisation.

Client contribution receivables arise as a result of contributions assessed as above and are recorded at their recoverable amount.

Impairment of legal debtors is reviewed on an annual basis. A provision for impairment is raised for estimated irrecoverable amounts, determined by the actuarial assessment. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised and also in future periods that are affected by the revision. Bad debts are written off when identified.

(k) **Contribution by owners**

Consistent with Interpretation 1038 *Contribution by Owners Made to Wholly-Owned Public Sector Entities*, appropriations for additions to net assets have been designated as contributions by owners. Other transfers that are in the nature of contributions or distributions have also been designated as contributions by owners.

(l) **Non-current assets**

Non-current physical assets

Plant and equipment are measured initially at cost and subsequently revalued at fair value less accumulated depreciation and impairment.

In accordance with FRD 07A Early adoption of authoritative accounting pronouncements Victoria Legal Aid has early adopted the AASB 2015-7 Amendments to Australian Accounting Standards - Fair Value disclosures of Not-for-Profit Public Sector Entities to benefit from some limited scope exemption in relation to fair value disclosures for the 2014-15 reporting period.

Leasehold improvements

The cost of improvements to or on leasehold properties is amortised over the unexpired period of the lease or the estimated useful life of the improvement to Victoria Legal Aid. Leasehold improvements are measured at cost less accumulated depreciation and impairment (Note 1m).

Where applicable, leasehold improvements include a component for leasehold make-good at the end of the lease. A corresponding provision for decommissioning expense is created based on present value of the expected make-good expense.

Cultural assets

Cultural assets such as artworks that Victoria Legal Aid intends to preserve because of their unique cultural and historical attributes are valued at fair value.

Intangibles assets

Intangible assets represent identifiable non-monetary assets without physical substance.

An internally generated intangible asset arising from development is recognised if, and only if, all of the following are demonstrated:

- (a) the technical feasibility of completing the intangible asset so that it will be available for use or sale
- (b) an intention to complete the intangible asset and use or sell it
- (c) the ability to use or sell the intangible asset
- (d) the intangible asset will generate probable future economic benefits
- (e) the availability of adequate technical, financial and other resources to complete the development and to use or sell the intangible asset
- (f) the ability to measure reliably the expenditure attributable to the intangible asset during its development.

Where no internally generated asset can be recognised, development expenditure is recognised as an expense in the period incurred.

Intangible assets are measured at cost less accumulated amortisation and impairment, and are amortised on a straight-line basis over their useful lives as follows:

Capitalised software and development costs – 3–10 years.

Receivables client contributions

Finity Consulting Pty Limited actuaries perform an annual independent assessment of the net present value of receivables. The analysis undertaken reviews the receivable portfolio, recovery history and the current and forecast financial environment to determine a recoupment pattern. This payment pattern was discounted by 3.6% (2014: 4%) for secured receivables which is the forecast earnings rate of the organisation's investment portfolio to determine the net present value. The average repayment time for unsecured receivables is significantly less than that for secured, and therefore a higher discount rate of 2.7% was used for 2015 (2014: 4.25%).

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(m) Impairment of assets

All assets are assessed annually for indications of impairment.

If there is an indication of impairment, the assets concerned are tested as to whether their carrying value exceeds their recoverable amount. Where an asset's carrying value exceeds its recoverable amount, the difference is written off by a charge to the operating statement except to the extent that the write-down can be debited to an asset revaluation reserve amount applicable to that class of asset.

The recoverable amount for most assets is measured at the higher of depreciated replacement cost and fair value less costs to sell. It is deemed that, in the event of the loss of an asset, the future economic benefits arising from the use of the asset will be replaced unless a specific decision to the contrary has been made.

(n) Payables

Payables are recognised when Victoria Legal Aid becomes obliged to make future payments resulting from the purchase of goods and services.

Trade creditors

The amounts are unsecured and are usually paid within 30 days of recognition. No interest is charged within the first 30 days. Payables are measured at face value.

Case-related professional payments

Legal creditors represent amounts owing to the organisation's panel members for legal work undertaken on behalf of the organisation. The amount owing to legal creditors for work performed comprises two components:

- (i) amounts certified but not paid
- (ii) amounts incurred not yet invoiced at balance date.

An actuarial assessment was undertaken by Finity Consulting Pty Limited to identify amounts owing to legal creditors for work performed prior to 30 June 2015 but not yet invoiced. The actuarial assessment includes a prudential margin of 10% of the outstanding estimates for criminal law matters. The application of the prudential margin is re-assessed each year.

No interest charge is applicable.

(o) Employee benefits

(i) Wages and salaries and annual leave

Liabilities for wages and salaries, including non-monetary benefits and annual leave expected to be wholly settled within 12 months of the reporting date, are recognised in the provision for employee benefits in respect of employee services up to the reporting date, classified as current liabilities and measured at their nominal values.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

Those liabilities that are not expected to be settled within 12 months are recognised in the provision for employee benefits as current liabilities, measured at present value of the amounts expected to be paid when the liabilities are settled using the remuneration rate expected to apply at the time of settlement.

(ii) Long service leave

Liability for long service leave (LSL) is recognised in the provision for employee benefits.

- Current liability – unconditional LSL (representing seven or more years of continuous service) is disclosed as a current liability even where Victoria Legal Aid does not expect to settle the liability within 12 months because it will not have the unconditional right to defer the settlement of the entitlement should an employee take leave or depart within 12 months.

The components of this current LSL liability are measured at:

- o present value – component that Victoria Legal Aid does not expect to settle within 12 months
 - o nominal value – component that Victoria Legal Aid expects to settle within 12 months.
- Non-current liability – conditional LSL (representing less than seven years of continuous service) is disclosed as a non-current liability. There is an unconditional right to defer the settlement of the entitlement until the employee has completed the requisite years of service.

This non-current liability is measured at present value. Gain or loss following revaluation of the present value of non-current LSL liability due to changes in bond interest rates is recognised as another economic flow (refer Note 1h).

(iii) Employee benefits on-costs

Employee benefits on-costs (workers compensation, superannuation, annual leave and LSL accrued while on LSL taken in service) are recognised separately from provision for employee benefits.

(iv) Termination benefits

Termination benefits are payable when employment is terminated before the normal retirement date. Victoria Legal Aid recognises termination benefits when it is demonstrably committed to terminating the employment of current employees according to a detailed formal plan without possibility of withdrawal. Benefits falling due more than 12 months after balance sheet date are discounted to present value.

(v) Defined contribution superannuation funds

Contributions to defined contribution superannuation plans are expensed when incurred (see Note 14).

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(vi) *Defined benefit superannuation funds*

The amount charged to the comprehensive operating statement in respect of defined benefit superannuation represents the contribution made by Victoria Legal Aid to the superannuation fund in respect to the current services of current staff of Victoria Legal Aid. Superannuation contributions are made to the plans based on the relevant rules of each plan.

The Department of Treasury and Finance centrally recognises the defined benefit liability or surplus of most Victorian Government employees in such funds.

(p) **Provisions**

Provisions are recognised when Victoria Legal Aid has a present obligation, the future sacrifice of economic benefits is probable, and the amount of the provision can be measured reliably.

The amount recognised as a provision is the best estimate of the consideration required to settle the present obligation at reporting date, taking into account the risks and uncertainties surrounding the obligation. Where a provision is measured using the cash flows estimated to settle the present obligation, its carrying amount is the present value of those cash flows.

When some or all of the economic benefits required to settle a provision are expected to be recognised from a third party, the receivable is recognised as an asset if it is virtually certain that recovery will be received and the amount of the receivable can be measured reliably.

(q) **Operating leases**

Operating leases are those in which the lessor effectively retains all substantial risks and benefits. Payments made in relation to operating leases are charged to the comprehensive operating statement in the periods in which they are incurred, as this represents the pattern of benefits derived from the leased assets.

(r) **Goods and services tax**

Income, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of associated GST, unless the GST incurred is not recoverable from the taxation authority. In this case it is recognised as part of the cost of acquisition of the asset or as part of the expense.

Receivables and payables are stated inclusive of the amount of GST receivable or payable. The net amount of GST recoverable from, or payable to, the taxation authority is included with other receivables or payables in the balance sheet.

Cash flows are presented on a gross basis. The GST components of cash flows arising from investing or financing activities which are recoverable from, or payable to, the taxation authority are presented as operating cash flow.

Commitments and contingent assets and liabilities are presented on a gross basis.

(s) **Supplies and services**

Supplies and services generally represent cost of goods sold and the day-to-day running costs, including maintenance costs, incurred in the normal operations of Victoria Legal Aid. These items are recognised as an expense in the reporting period in which they are incurred.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(t) Events after reporting date

Assets, liabilities, income or expenses arise from past transactions or other past events. Where the transactions result from an agreement between Victoria Legal Aid and other parties, the transactions are only recognised when the agreement is irrevocable at or before balance date. Adjustments are made to amounts recognised in the financial statements for events which occur after reporting date and before the date the statements are authorised for issue, where those events provide information about conditions which existed at the reporting date. Note disclosure is made about events between the balance date and the date statements are authorised for issue where the events relate to conditions which arose after the reporting date and which may have a material impact on the results of subsequent years.

(u) Commitments

Commitments include those operating, capital and other outsourcing commitments arising from non-cancellable contractual or statutory sources and are disclosed at their nominal value and inclusive of GST payable (see Note 19).

(v) Contingent assets and contingent liabilities

Contingent assets and contingent liabilities are not recognised in the balance sheet, but are disclosed by way of a note and, if quantifiable, are measured at nominal value (see Note 21).

(w) Critical accounting estimates and judgements

The preparation of financial statements requires management to make judgements about the application of accounting policies that have a significant effect on the amounts recognised in the financial statements. Victoria Legal Aid evaluates these judgements regularly.

- Critical accounting estimates and assumptions

Measurement of payables – case-related professional creditors

Measurement of outstanding payments for case-related professional creditors is based on an actuarial assessment. The actuarial assessment makes reference to historical data.

Measurement of receivables – client contributions

Measurement of receivables for secured client contributions is based on an actuarial assessment which makes reference to annual modelling and historical data on debt recovery.

(x) Going concern

The financial report has been prepared on a going-concern basis. Victoria Legal Aid is funded predominantly by regular appropriations from the Victorian Government and the Commonwealth Government. The appropriation for Commonwealth funding under the National Partnership Agreement for the provision of legal services expired on 30 June 2015 and a new agreement has been signed which will expire on 30 June 2020. The Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation provides continued support as indicated in the annual Budget Papers.

These financial statements have been prepared in the reasonable expectation that such funding will continue.

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(y) New accounting standards and interpretations

Certain new accounting standards and interpretations have been published that are not mandatory for the 30 June 2015 reporting period. The Department of Treasury and Finance assesses the impact of these new standards and advises departments and other entities of their applicability and early adoption where applicable.

As at 30 June 2015, the following standards and interpretations had been issued but were not mandatory for the financial year ending 30 June 2015. Victoria Legal Aid has not adopted these standards early, and does not intend to.

Standard / Interpretation	Summary	Applicable for annual reporting periods beginning or ending on	Impact on public sector entity financial statements
AASB 9 Financial Instruments	The key changes include the simplified requirements for the classification and measurement of financial assets, a new hedging accounting model and a revised impairment loss model to recognise impairment losses earlier, as opposed to the current approach that recognises impairment only when incurred.	1 January 2018	<p>The assessment has identified that the financial impact of available for sale (AFS) assets will now be reported through other comprehensive income (OCI) and no longer recycled to the profit and loss.</p> <p>While the preliminary assessment has not identified any material impact arising from AASB 9, it will continue to be monitored and assessed.</p>

Standard / Interpretation	Summary	Applicable for annual reporting periods beginning or ending on	Impact on public sector entity financial statements
AASB 15 Revenue from Contracts with Customers	The core principle of AASB 15 requires an entity to recognise revenue when the entity satisfies a performance obligation by transferring a promised good or service to a customer.	1 January 2017 (Exposure Draft 263 – potential deferral to 1 January 2018)	<p>The changes in revenue recognition requirements in AASB 15 may result in changes to the timing and amount of revenue recorded in the financial statements. The Standard will also require additional disclosures on service revenue and contract modifications.</p> <p>A potential impact will be the upfront recognition of revenue from licenses that cover multiple reporting periods. Revenue that was deferred and amortised over a period may now need to be recognised immediately as a transitional adjustment against the opening returned earnings if there are no former performance obligations outstanding.</p>
AASB 2014 1 Amendments to Australian Accounting Standards [Part E Financial Instruments]	Amends various AASs to reflect the AASB's decision to defer the mandatory application date of AASB 9 to annual reporting periods beginning on or after 1 January 2018 as a consequence of Chapter 6 Hedge Accounting, and to amend reduced disclosure requirements.	1 January 2018	This amending standard will defer the application period of AASB 9 to the 2018-19 reporting period in accordance with the transition requirements.

Standard / Interpretation	Summary	Applicable for annual reporting periods beginning or ending on	Impact on public sector entity financial statements
<p>AASB 2014 4 Amendments to Australian Accounting Standards – Clarification of Acceptable Methods of Depreciation and Amortisation [AASB 116 & AASB 138</p>	<p>Amends AASB 116 Property, Plant and Equipment and AASB 138 Intangible Assets to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish the principle for the basis of depreciation and amortisation as being the expected pattern of consumption of the future economic benefits of an asset; • prohibit the use of revenue based methods to calculate the depreciation or amortisation of an asset, tangible or intangible, because revenue generally reflects the pattern of economic benefits that are generated from operating the business, rather than the consumption through the use of the asset. 	<p>1 January 2016</p>	<p>The assessment has indicated that there is no expected impact as the revenue-based method is not used for depreciation and amortisation.</p>

Note 1. Summary of significant accounting policies (continued)

(z) Changes to accounting policies

Subsequent to the 2013–14 reporting period, the following new and revised standards have been adopted in the current period with their financial impact detailed as below.

AASB 10 Consolidated Financial Statements

AASB 10 provides a new approach to determine whether an entity has control over an entity, and therefore must present consolidated financial statements. The new approach requires the satisfaction of all three criteria for control to exist over an entity for financial reporting purposes:

- (a) The investor has power over the investee;
- (b) The investor has exposure, or rights to variable returns from its involvement with the investee; and
- (c) The investor has the ability to use its power over the investee to affect the amount of investor's returns.

Based on the new criteria prescribed in AASB 10, Victoria Legal Aid has reviewed the existing arrangements to determine if there are any additional entities that need to be consolidated into the group. Victoria Legal Aid has concluded that no additional entity has met the control criteria.

AASB 11 Joint Arrangements

In accordance with AASB 11, there are two types of joint arrangements, i.e. joint operations and joint ventures. Joint operations arise where the investors have rights to the assets and obligations for the liabilities of an arrangement. A joint operator accounts for its share of the assets, liabilities, revenue and expenses. Joint ventures arise where the investors have rights to the net assets of the arrangement; joint ventures are accounted for under the equity method. Proportionate consolidation of joint ventures is no longer permitted.

Victoria Legal Aid has reviewed its existing contractual arrangements with other entities to ensure no arrangements fall under the new AASB 11.

Note 2. Funding

(a) The organisation

On the 1st July 2010 the Commonwealth and the Victorian Government entered into a National Partnership Agreement for legal assistance services which expired on 30 June 2015. A new agreement has been signed and will expire on 30 June 2020. The agreement specified arrangements for the delivery of Commonwealth-funded services by the state. Funding flows through the Victorian Government to Victoria Legal Aid and is reported as an indirect Commonwealth funding, 2015 \$45.8 million (2014: \$44.9 million).

Victoria Legal Aid continues to be reimbursed for expensive Commonwealth cases directly, 2015 \$1.2 million (2014: \$0.8 million).

Funding is received from the State Budget for supporting legal processes, 2015 \$84.2 million (2014: \$83.0 million).

Funds are provided from the Public Purpose Fund, the amount distributed each year can vary depending on the performance of the fund and when calls on the fund are made.

(b) Community legal centres

Each year Victoria Legal Aid allocates a portion of its funding and provides certain administration assistance to community legal centres in Victoria. For the year ended 30 June 2015, Victoria Legal Aid allocated \$14.3 million of direct funds (2014: \$13.3 million) and \$1.6 million of project funds (2014: \$0.4 million)

The organisation has disclosed this transaction in its financial statements as the Board of Victoria Legal Aid has discretionary funding choices over the allocation of state grants.

The organisation does not control the allocation of grants received from the Commonwealth Government and consequently does not include these funds in its financial statements as income or expenditure. The total amount received from the Commonwealth for community legal centres to 30 June 2015 was \$9.2 million (2014: \$9.0 million).

(c) Commonwealth grants

	2015	2014
	\$'000	\$'000
Commonwealth grants		
Commonwealth expensive criminal cases	1,249	748
National partnership agreement	45,800	44,942
Community legal centre project	179	176
	<u>47,228</u>	<u>45,866</u>
Commonwealth one off	<u>-</u>	<u>3,500</u>
State grants		
State base grant	67,895	67,208
State project income	2,484	2,070
Community legal centre	14,054	13,168
Community legal centre project	601	596
	<u>85,034</u>	<u>83,042</u>

Note 3. Expenses from ordinary activities

Employee benefits

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Salaries and overtime	44,780	42,043
Annual leave and long service leave expense	5,964	6,253
Superannuation	4,616	4,209
Staff development	423	426
Workcover	172	184
Temporary employment cover	891	589
Other	619	590
Total employee benefits	57,465	54,294

Depreciation of property, plant and equipment

Furniture, fixture and fittings	65	68
Information technology equipment	168	207
Leasehold improvements	1,740	1,509
Motor vehicles	101	105
Office machines and equipment	38	110
Total depreciation	2,112	1,999

Amortisation of intangible assets

Software	824	813
Total amortisation	824	813

Total depreciation and amortisation

2,936	2,812
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Other expenditure from ordinary activities

Other supplies and services	5,691	4,766
Premises – minimum lease payments	5,133	5,084
Premises – other	2,332	2,602
Information management systems	1,825	1,515
Bad debts	984	553
Total other expenditure from ordinary activities	15,965	14,520

Note 4. Other economic flows included in net result

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
(a) Net gains/(losses) on non-financial assets:		
Net gains/(losses) on disposal property, plant and equipment	12	(69)
Net gains/(losses) on revaluation of cultural assets	-	5
(b) Net actuarial gains/(losses) on receivable amounts:		
Net actuarial gains/(losses) of secured client contributions receivables – net present value	(781)	(7)
Net actuarial gains/(losses) on impairment of unsecured client contributions receivables	588	867
Net actuarial gains/(losses) on recognition of outstanding legal receivables	(70)	(90)
Total net actuarial gains/(losses) on recoverable amounts	(263)	770
(c) Net actuarial gains/(losses) on amounts payable:		
Net actuarial gains/(losses) on movement in case-related professional payments	(27)	(38)
(d) Net gains/(losses) arising from other economic flows:		
Net gains/(losses) arising from revaluation of long service leave liability due to changes in discount bond rates	255	122
Total other economic flows included in net result	31	790

Note 5. Remuneration of auditors

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Remuneration of auditors comprises:		
Audit of financial reports: Victorian Auditor-General's Office	55	57

Note 6. Cash and cash equivalents

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Cash at bank and on hand	3,268	1,651
Term deposits	38,933	28,342
Monies held in trust	2,034	2,192
	44,235	32,185

The above figures are reconciled to cash at the end of the financial year as shown in the cash flow statement as follows:

Cash at bank and on hand	3,268	1,651
Term deposits	38,933	28,342
Balance as per statement of cash flows	42,201	29,993

Note 7. Accrued income

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Commonwealth expensive criminal cases	180	45
Interest accrual	175	64
State Treasurer's advance – ending violence against women and children	800	-
	1,155	109

Accrued income represents amounts that Victoria Legal Aid has earned through the provision of goods and services or obtained the right to receive. The amounts are recognised as an asset and income as the income recognition criteria are met but the cash will be received in the new reporting period.

Note 8. Receivables

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
(a) Secured		
Secured client contributions receivable	18,791	18,506
Provision for secured client contributions (b)	(7,043)	(6,262)
Secured client contributions receivable at net present value	<u>11,748</u>	<u>12,244</u>
Unsecured		
Unsecured client contributions receivable	5,028	5,818
Provision for unsecured client contributions (c)	(2,171)	(2,759)
Unsecured client contributions receivable at net present value	<u>2,857</u>	<u>3,059</u>
Secured client contributions receivable on unfinalised matters	2,004	2,096
Total client contributions	<u>16,609</u>	<u>17,399</u>
Sundry receivables		
GST receivable	5,187	4,518
Other	36	42
	<u>5,223</u>	<u>4,560</u>
Total receivables	<u>21,832</u>	<u>21,959</u>
This is represented by:		
Current	7,130	6,944
Non-current	14,702	15,015
	<u>21,832</u>	<u>21,959</u>
(b) Provision for secured client contributions		
Balance at 1 July 2014	6,262	6,255
Movements in actuarial assessment of secured client contributions receivable	781	7
Balance at 30 June 2015	<u>7,043</u>	<u>6,262</u>
(c) Provision for unsecured client contributions		
Balance at 1 July 2014	2,759	3,626
Re-assessments and bad debts written off	-	-
Increase/(decrease) in provision for re-assessments and bad debt write-downs	984	553
Movements in actuarial assessment of unsecured client contributions receivable	(1,527)	(1,420)
Balance at 30 June 2015	<u>2,171</u>	<u>2,759</u>
Total provision for client contributions	<u>9,214</u>	<u>9,021</u>

Note 8. Receivables (continued)

No interest is charged on receivables.

A provision is made against secured client contributions, determined by actuarial assessment of the recoverable amount. Secured debtors are long term, therefore the balance is measured at the net present value. The recoverable amount estimates the extent of future debts receivable after adjustments and the discount to net present value.

A provision for impairment has been made for unsecured client contributions receivable. The assessment estimates future cash flows receivable after adjustments and bad debts determined by reference to past default experience, and discounts the estimate to the net present value.

Actuarial assessment of the recoverable amount is used.

Note 9. Property, plant and equipment

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Information technology at fair value	3,421	3,197
Less: accumulated depreciation	(3,094)	(2,926)
	327	271
Furniture, fixtures and fittings fair value	812	818
Less: accumulated depreciation	(623)	(564)
	189	254
Leasehold improvements at fair value	22,828	21,361
Less: accumulated depreciation	(17,710)	(15,970)
	5,118	5,391
Motor vehicles at fair value	552	525
Less: accumulated depreciation	(147)	(147)
	405	378
Office machines and equipment at fair value	1,619	1,637
Less: accumulated depreciation	(1,548)	(1,530)
	71	107
Cultural assets at valuation	107	107
	107	107
Total property, plant and equipment	29,339	27,645
Less: total accumulated depreciation	(23,122)	(21,137)
Total written-down value	6,217	6,508

Note 9. Property, plant and equipment (continued)

(a) Reconciliation

Reconciliations of the carrying amounts of each class of property, plant and equipment, including cultural assets, at the beginning and end of the current and previous financial year are set out below.

	At fair value (Level 3) information technology \$'000	At fair value (Level 3) furniture, fixtures and fittings \$'000	At fair value (Level 3) leasehold improvements \$'000	At fair value (Level 3) motor vehicles \$'000	At fair value (Level 3) office machines and equipment \$'000	At fair value (Level 2) cultural assets \$'000	Total \$'000
2015							
Carrying amount at start of year	271	254	5,391	378	107	107	6,508
Additions	224	-	1,467	193	2	-	1,886
Revaluations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Disposals	-	-	-	(65)	-	-	(65)
Depreciation/ amortisation expense	(168)	(65)	(1,740)	(101)	(38)	-	(2,112)
Carrying amount at end of year	327	189	5,118	405	71	107	6,217
2014							
Carrying amount at start of year	399	315	6,209	361	178	101	7,563
Additions	86	17	755	223	39	-	1,120
Revaluations	-	-	-	-	-	6	6
Disposals	(7)	(10)	(64)	(101)	-	-	(182)
Depreciation/ amortisation expense	(207)	(68)	(1,509)	(105)	(110)	-	(1,999)
Carrying amount at end of year	271	254	5,391	378	107	107	6,508

Property, plant and equipment is classified as 'Public Safety and Environment' by 'purpose' for which the assets are used, according to one of five 'purpose groups' based upon Government Purpose Classifications (GPC).

Note 9. Property, plant and equipment (continued)

(b) Description of significant unobservable inputs to level 3 valuations

Asset	Valuation Technique	Significant unobservable inputs
Information technology	Depreciated replacement cost	Cost Per Unit
		Useful Life
Furniture, fixtures and fittings	Depreciated replacement cost	Cost Per Unit
		Useful Life
Leasehold improvements	Depreciated replacement cost	Cost Per Unit
		Useful Life
Motor Vehicles	Depreciated replacement cost	Cost Per Unit
		Useful Life
Office machines equipment	Depreciated replacement cost	Cost Per Unit
		Useful Life

Unobservable inputs to level 3 valuations for the current and prior years.

Note 10. Intangible assets

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Software at cost	8,330	8,308
Less: accumulated amortisation	(3,673)	(2,849)
	4,657	5,459

Reconciliation

Reconciliations of the carrying amounts of each class of intangible assets at the beginning and end of the current and previous financial year are set out below.

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Software		
Carrying amount at beginning of year	5,459	6,039
Additions	22	233
Amortisation	(824)	(813)
Carrying amount at end of year	4,657	5,459

Note 11. Payables

	2015	2014
	\$'000	\$'000
Current		
<i>Unsecured</i>		
Case-related professional creditors	13,249	12,793
Trade creditors	2,813	3,615
GST payable	3,363	2,974
Monies held in trust	2,034	2,192
	21,459	21,574

The average credit period for creditors is 30 days. No interest is charged.

Note 12. Provisions

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
(a) Provisions		
Current		
Employee benefits:		
- Unconditional and expected to be settled within 12 months:		
- Annual leave	3,818	3,619
- Long service leave	657	409
- Executive officer bonus	93	74
- Unconditional and expected to be settled after 12 months:		
- Long service leave	5,311	4,901
Employee benefits on-costs:		
- Unconditional and expected to be settled within 12 months:		
- Annual leave	375	355
- Long service leave	58	51
- Unconditional and expected to be settled after 12 months:		
- Long service leave	527	469
	10,839	9,878
Non-current		
Employee benefits:		
- Long service leave (conditional)	1,876	2,375
Employee benefits on costs:		
- Long service leave (conditional)	184	233
Decommissioning	3,047	2,454
	5,107	5,062
Aggregate carrying amount of provisions		
Current	10,839	9,878
Non-current	5,107	5,062
	15,946	14,940

Note 12. Provisions (continued)

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
(b) Employee benefits and related on-costs		
Current employee benefits		
Current employee benefits for annual leave, sick leave, executive officer bonus entitlements	3,911	3,693
Current employee benefits for unconditional long service leave entitlements	5,968	5,310
	9,879	9,003
Non-current employee benefits		
Conditional long service leave entitlements	1,876	2,375
Total employee benefits	11,755	11,378
Current on-costs	960	875
Non-current on-costs	184	233
Total on-costs	1,144	2,375
Total employee benefits and on-costs	12,899	11,378
(c) Movement in provisions		
Employee benefits on-costs		
Balance at 1 July 2014	1,108	951
Additional provisions recognised	36	157
Balance at 30 June 2015	1,144	1,108
Decommissioning		
Balance at 1 July 2014	2,454	2,401
Reductions arising from payments		(5)
Additions/(reductions)	738	282
Unwind of discount and effect of changes in the discount rate	(145)	(224)
Balance at 30 June 2015	3,047	2,454

The provision for decommissioning represents the present value of future leasehold make-good expense at the end of the lease. The unexpired terms of the leases vary from one month to nine years.

Note 13. Equity and movements in equity

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
(a) Contributed capital		
Balance at the beginning of the year	42,194	42,194
Movement during the year	-	-
Balance at the end of the year	42,194	42,194
(b) Accumulated deficit		
Balance at the beginning of the year	(11,644)	(27,753)
Net result for the year	11,006	16,109
Balance at the end of the year	(638)	(11,644)

Note 14. Superannuation funds

The organisation contributes to a number of different superannuation schemes on behalf of staff including:

(a) Victorian Government Superannuation

No liability is recognised in the balance sheet for Victoria Legal Aid's share of the state's unfunded superannuation liability. The state's unfunded superannuation liability is reflected in the financial statements of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

This covers former employees of the State Public Solicitor's Office and any employee who joined the organisation after its commencement date and who elected to contribute to superannuation. The Victorian Government operates three schemes for employees.

Paid employer contributions for the year:

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
State Superannuation Fund – new scheme	150	155
VicSuper Pty Ltd	3,199	2,996
Various other	1,266	1,050
	4,615	4,201

The employer contribution rate is 9.50% for new employees.

Employees under State Superannuation Fund schemes are entitled to defined lump-sum benefits on retirement, disability or death. These benefits are based on years of service and final average salary.

Note 14. Superannuation funds (continued)

Funds participating during the period ending 30 June 2015:

Superannuation fund schemes	Employee numbers
State Superannuation Fund – new scheme	24
VicSuper Pty Ltd	549
Various other	253

(b) Outstanding liabilities

The organisation had no amounts outstanding as at the end of the reporting period to any superannuation scheme. No liability is recognised for Victoria Legal Aid's share of the state's unfunded superannuation liability. There were no loans made between any of the superannuation funds and Victoria Legal Aid during the financial year.

Note 15. Ministers and accountable officers

In accordance with the Ministerial Directions issued by the Minister for Finance under the *Financial Management Act 1994*, the following disclosures are made regarding responsible persons for the reporting period.

Names

The persons who held the above positions in Victoria Legal Aid are as follows:

Responsible ministers

Victorian Attorney-General	The Hon. Robert W Clark MLA	1 July 2014 to 4 December 2014
Victorian Attorney-General	The Hon. Martin Pakula MP	4 December 2014 to 30 June 2015
Commonwealth Attorney-General	The Hon. George Brandis QC	1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015

Responsible directors

Chairperson	Mr Andrew Guy	1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015
Managing Director and Accountable Officer	Mr Bevan Andrew Warner	1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015
Managing Director and Accountable Officer	Ms Kristen Hilton (Acting)	22 December 2014 to 6 January 2015
Managing Director and Accountable Officer	Ms Nicole Rich (Acting)	27 April 2015 to 9 May 2015
Managing Director and Accountable Officer	Mr Tim Marsh (Acting)	29 June 2015 to 30 June 2015
Director	Ms Catherine McGovern	1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015
Director	Ms Virginia Rogers	1 July 2014 to 30 April 2015
Director	Mr David Thompson	1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015
Director	Ms Jennifer Kanis	26 May 2015 to 30 June 2015

Note 15. Ministers and accountable officers (continued)

Remuneration of directors

Remuneration received or receivable by the directors in connection with the management of Victoria Legal Aid during the reporting period was in the range:

Income Band	Total remuneration		Base remuneration	
	2015 No.	2014 No.	2015 No.	2014 No.
\$0–\$9,999	1	-	1	-
\$10,000–\$19,999	3	3	3	3
\$40,000–\$49,999	-	1	-	1
\$50,000–\$59,999	1	-	1	-
\$280,000–\$289,999	-	-	-	1
\$290,000–\$299,999	-	-	1	-
\$300,000–\$309,999	-	1	-	-
\$320,000–\$329,999	1	-	-	-
Total number	6	5	6	5
Total amount \$000's	426	409	403	390

Other transactions

Other related transactions and loans requiring disclosure in accordance with the Ministerial Directions issued by the Minister for Finance have been considered and there are no matters to report other than the Trust Account as per Note 22.

Note 16. Remuneration of executives and payments to other personnel

(a) Remuneration of executives

The number of executive officers, other than directors (board members), who held office at any one time during the reporting period are reported in the table below.

Executive officers are defined as persons occupying a management position within the reporting entity and employed at an annual compensation rate not less than the minimum remuneration of the Victorian Public Service (VPS) EO-3 band over the reporting period.

Total remuneration for the 2015 reporting period is shown in relevant income bands in the first two columns of the table. Total remuneration includes any cessation entitlements and any bonus payments. Base remuneration for the 2015 reporting period is shown in the third and fourth columns of the table. Base remuneration includes employer superannuation contributions.

The total annualised employee equivalent provides a measure of full-time equivalent executive officers over the reporting period. All executive officer positions were occupied during the 2015 reporting period. There was one position where the incumbent took maternity leave for part of the year and the position was backfilled. During the 2014 reporting period, one executive officer ceased employment, one was on maternity leave and one was employed. This resulted in a higher head count than the annualised employee equivalent.

There were no cessations during the 2015 reporting period.

Note 16. Remuneration of executives and payments to other personnel (continued)

Income Band	Total remuneration		Base remuneration	
	2015 No.	2014 No.	2015 No.	2014 No.
\$40,000–49,999	-	-	-	1
\$50,000–59,999	-	1	-	-
\$60,000–69,999	-	-	1	-
\$70,000–79,999	1	-	-	-
\$80,000–89,999	-	1	-	1
\$90,000–99,999	-	-	1	-
\$110,000–119,999	1	-	-	-
\$120,000–129,999	-	1	-	1
\$130,000–139,999	-	1	-	1
\$150,000–159,999	-	-	-	1
\$160,000–169,999	-	1	-	-
\$170,000–179,999	-	1	1	1
\$180,000–189,999	2	-	2	2
\$190,000–199,999	2	2	2	1
\$200,000–209,999	1	1	1	-
\$210,000–219,999	1	-	-	-
Total number of executives at any one time during the year	8	9	8	9
Total annualised employee equivalents*	7.0	6.7	7.0	6.7
Total amount \$000's	1,339	1,341	1,291	1,282

* Note: Annualised employee equivalents is calculated by dividing the total number of ordinary hours that an employee worked over the reporting period by the total number of full-time working hours per annum (38 hours per week over 52 weeks).

(b) Payments to contractors charged with significant management responsibility

There were no payments made to contractors charged with significant management responsibility in 2015 (2014: Nil).

Note 17. Reconciliation of net results from continuing operations to net cash inflow from operating activities

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Net result from continuing operations	11,006	16,109
Depreciation and amortisation	2,936	2,812
Net loss on disposal of non-current assets	(12)	64
Movement in adjustment for recoverable amount	1,247	(632)
Change in operating assets and liabilities		
(Increase) decrease in accrued income	(1,045)	307
Decrease (increase) in receivables	(1,118)	938
Decrease (increase) in prepayments	(21)	72
Increase (decrease) in trade creditors	(450)	1,739
Increase (decrease) in case-related professional creditors	456	(2,164)
Increase (decrease) in provisions	412	1,248
Net cash inflow/(outflow) from operating activities	<u>13,411</u>	<u>20,493</u>

Note 18. Financial instruments

(a) Financial risk management, objectives and policies

Victoria Legal Aid's activities do not expose it to any significant financial risks other than interest rates held on deposit. Victoria Legal Aid does not enter into derivative financial instruments to manage its exposure to interest rate risk.

Victoria Legal Aid does not enter into financial derivatives, no formal policy have been formally adopted.

(b) Recognised financial instruments

Victoria Legal Aid's accounting policies, including the terms and conditions of each class of financial asset, financial liability and equity instrument, both recognised and unrecognised at balance date, are as follows:

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

Recognised financial instruments	Balance sheet notes	Accounting policies	Terms and conditions
(i) Financial assets			
Cash at bank and on hand	6	Cash at bank and on hand are stated at their principal amount. Interest is recognised in the comprehensive operating statement when earned.	Cash at bank is held at normal commercial interest rates.
Monies held in trust	6	Monies held in trust is not recognised in the comprehensive operating statement, but is offset by related expenditure when incurred.	Monies held in trust is held at normal commercial interest rates.
Accrued income	7	Accrued income is recognised in the comprehensive operating statement when earned, but yet to be received.	Accrued income is dependant on the agreements in place with the third parties for work carried out.
Client contributions receivable	8	Client contributions are actuarially adjusted to their net present value.	The organisation can request a client to contribute towards the cost of providing assistance. Clients pay contributions in such a manner and within such a time as the organisation directs. The organisation will often take security against costs incurred on their behalf.
Term deposits	6	Term deposits are stated at their principal amount. Interest is recognised in the comprehensive operating statement when earned.	Term deposits are invested as funds permit at normal commercial rates available at the time of investment.

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

Recognised financial instruments	Balance sheet notes	Accounting policies	Terms and conditions
(ii) Financial liabilities			
Case-related professional creditors	11	Liabilities are recognised for amounts to be paid in the future for goods and services received, whether or not billed to the organisation.	Liability is normally settled on 30-day terms.
Monies held in trust	11	Monies held in trust is not recognised in the comprehensive operating statement, but is offset by related expenditure when incurred.	Monies held in trust does not incur penalty interest rates.
Trade creditors	11	Liabilities are recognised for amounts to be paid in the future for goods and services received, whether or not billed to the organisation.	Liability is normally settled on 30-day terms.

(c) Interest rate risk exposures

Exposures to interest rate risk are limited to assets and liabilities bearing variable interest rates. The majority of financial assets are term deposits with fixed interest rates and terms. These are held to maturity.

The carrying amounts of financial assets and liabilities held by Victoria Legal Aid that are exposed to interest rates are detailed below.

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

2015	Notes	Weighted average interest rate %	Floating interest rate \$'000	Fixed interest maturing in 1 year or less \$'000	Non-interest bearing \$'000	Total \$'000
Financial assets						
Cash at bank and at hand	6	1.95%	3,268	-	-	3,268
Monies held in trust	6	2.03%	2,034	-	-	2,034
Accrued income		0%	-	-	1,155	1,155
Term deposits	6	2.28%	-	38,933	-	38,933
Receivables ⁽ⁱ⁾	8	0%	-	-	16,645	16,645
			5,302	38,933	17,800	62,035
Financial liabilities						
Case-related professional creditors	11	0%	-	-	13,249	13,249
Monies held in trust	11	0%	-	-	2,034	2,034
Sundry payables ⁽ⁱ⁾	11	0%	-	-	2,813	2,813
			-	-	18,096	18,096
Net financial assets (liabilities)			5,302	38,933	(296)	43,939

Note (i): The carrying amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts (e.g. amounts owing from Victorian Government and GST recoverable/payable).

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

2014	Notes	Weighted average interest rate %	Floating interest rate \$'000	Fixed interest maturing in 1 year or less \$'000	Non-interest bearing \$'000	Total \$'000
Financial assets						
Cash at bank and at hand	6	2.45%	1,651	-	-	1,651
Monies held in trust	6	2.66%	2,192	-	-	2,192
Accrued income		0%	417	-	109	109
Term deposits	6	2.68%	-	28,342	-	28,342
Receivables ⁽ⁱ⁾	8	0%	-	-	17,441	17,441
			3,843	28,342	17,550	49,735
Financial liabilities						
Case-related professional creditors	11	0%	-	-	12,793	12,793
Monies held in trust	11	0%	-	-	2,192	2,192
Sundry payables ⁽ⁱ⁾	11	0%	-	-	3,615	3,615
			-	-	18,600	18,600
Net financial assets (liabilities)			3,843	28,342	(1,050)	31,135

Note (i): The carrying amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts (e.g. amounts owing from Victorian Government and GST recoverable/payable).

(d) Credit risk

Credit risk refers to the risk that a counterparty will default on its contractual obligations resulting in financial loss to Victoria Legal Aid. Victoria Legal Aid has adopted a policy of obtaining sufficient collateral where appropriate, as a means of mitigating the risk of financial loss from defaults. Victoria Legal Aid measures credit risk on a fair value basis.

Victoria Legal Aid has a significant credit risk exposure to its client contributions receivable balance. These receivables are established on the basis of representation provided to clients and their ability to pay for such services following an assessment of their disposable income and net assets held. Services are provided where individuals do not have sufficient funds to afford privately funded legal representation. In this respect, the likelihood and timing of recovery may vary significantly between individual debtors. The services of a qualified actuary are utilised to establish the recoverable amount of these receivables.

The credit risk on liquid funds is limited because the counterparties are banks with high credit ratings assigned by international credit-rating agencies.

The carrying amount of the financial assets recorded in the financial statements, net of any allowances for losses, represents Victoria Legal Aid's maximum exposure to credit risk without taking account of the value of any collateral obtained.

The maturity profile of financial assets held by Victoria Legal Aid is detailed below.

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

	Carrying amount \$'000	Not past due and not impaired \$'000	Past due but not impaired				Impairment \$'000
			Less than 1 month \$'000	1–3 months \$'000	3 months – 1 year \$'000	1–5 years \$'000	
2015							
Financial assets							
Cash at bank and at hand	3,268	3,268	-	-	-	-	
Monies held in trust	2,034	2,034	-	-	-	-	
Accrued income	1,155	1,155	-	-	-	-	
Term deposits	38,933	38,933	-	-	-	-	
Receivables ⁽ⁱ⁾	16,645	-	-	-	2,183	14,262	9,214
	62,035	45,390	-	-	2,183	14,262	9,214
2014							
Financial assets							
Cash at bank and at hand	1,651	1,651	-	-	-	-	
Monies held in trust	2,192	2,192	-	-	-	-	
Accrued income	109	109	-	-	-	-	
Term deposits	28,342	28,342	-	-	-	-	
Receivables ⁽ⁱ⁾	17,441	-	-	-	2,426	15,015	9,021
	49,735	32,294	-	-	2,426	15,015	9,021

Note (i): The carrying amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts (e.g. amounts owing from Victorian Government and GST recoverable/payable).

(e) Liquidity risk

Liquidity risk is the risk that Victoria Legal Aid will be unable to meet its payment obligations when they fall due.

Ultimate responsibility for liquidity risk management rests with the Board, who have built an appropriate liquidity risk management framework for the management of Victoria Legal Aid's short, medium and long-term funding and liquidity. This framework takes into consideration that Victoria Legal Aid is prohibited by the *Legal Aid Act 1978* from incurring borrowing costs and, consequently, borrowing funds. Victoria Legal Aid manages its liquidity risk by maintaining adequate cash reserves, and by continuously monitoring forecasts and actual cash flows while matching the maturity profiles of financial assets and liabilities.

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

The maturity profile of financial liabilities held by Victoria Legal Aid is detailed below.

	Carrying amount \$'000	Nominal amount \$'000	Maturity dates			
			Less than 1 month \$'000	1–3 months \$'000	3 months – 1 year \$'000	1–5 years \$'000
2015						
Financial liabilities						
Case-related professional creditors	13,249	13,249	4,610	8,639	-	-
Monies held in trust	2,034	2,034	-	-	-	2,034
Sundry payables ⁽ⁱ⁾	2,813	2,813	487	2,326	-	-
	18,096	18,096	5,097	10,965	-	2,034
2014						
Financial liabilities						
Case-related professional creditors	12,793	12,793	5,082	7,711	-	-
Monies held in trust	2,192	2,192	-	-	-	2,192
Sundry payables ⁽ⁱ⁾	3,615	3,615	408	3,207	-	-
	18,600	18,600	5,490	10,918	-	2,192

Note (i): The carrying amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts (e.g. amounts owing from Victorian Government and GST recoverable/payable).

(f) Sensitivity analysis

The table below details Victoria Legal Aid's sensitivity to shifts in interest rate. The 2014–15 financial exposures are based on management's best estimates.

Annual risk by risk type	Minimum		Average		Maximum	
	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Interest rate	97	71	243	177	389	283

Interest rate analysis is based upon financial assets not exceeding one year, which are all fixed interest rates. Minimum and maximum exposures are calculated at shifts of 25 basis points and 100 basis points respectively. A net decrease in interest translates into a fall in revenue as investment income is reduced.

(g) Net fair value of financial assets and liabilities

(i) On-balance sheet

The directors consider the net fair value of cash and cash equivalents and non-interest-bearing monetary financial assets and financial liabilities of Victoria Legal Aid approximates their carrying amounts.

The fair values and net fair values of financial instrument assets and liabilities are determined as follows:

Note 18. Financial instruments (continued)

- Level 1 – the fair value of financial instrument with standard terms and conditions and traded in active liquid markets are determined with reference to quoted market prices
- Level 2 – the fair value is determined using inputs other than quoted prices that are observable for the financial asset or liability, either directly or indirectly.
- Level 3 – the fair value is determined in accordance with generally accepted pricing models based on discounted cash flow analysis using unobservable market inputs.

The net fair value of other monetary financial assets and financial liabilities is based upon market prices where a market exists or by discounting the expected future cash flows by the current interest rates for assets and liabilities with similar risk profiles.

The carrying amounts and net fair values of financial assets and liabilities at reporting date are:

	2015			2014		
	Carrying amount	Fair value at end of period using:		Carrying amount	Fair value at end of period using:	
		Level 1	Level 2		Level 1	Level 2
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
On-balance sheet financial instruments						
Financial assets						
Cash and deposits	3,268	3,268	-	1,651	1,651	-
Monies held in trust	2,034	2,034	-	2,192	2,192	-
Accrued income	1,155	-	1,155	109	-	109
Term deposits	38,933	38,933	-	28,342	28,342	-
Receivables ⁽ⁱ⁾	16,645	-	16,645	17,441	-	15,303
	62,035	44,235	17,800	49,735	32,185	17,550
Financial liabilities						
Case-related professional creditors	13,249	-	13,249	12,793	-	12,973
Monies held in trust	2,034	2,034	-	2,192	2,192	-
Sundry payables ⁽ⁱ⁾	2,813	-	2,813	3,615	-	3,615
	18,096	2,034	16,062	18,600	2,192	16,588

Note (i): The carrying amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts (e.g. amounts owing from Victorian Government and GST recoverable/payable).

Note (ii): There is no significant transfers between level 1 and level 2 during the year.

(ii) Off-balance sheet

Victoria Legal Aid has potential financial liabilities which may arise from certain commitments and contingencies disclosed in notes 18 and 20. As explained in those notes, no material losses are anticipated in respect of any of those contingencies and the net fair value disclosed below is the estimate of amounts which would be payable by Victoria Legal Aid as consideration for the assumption of those considerations by another party.

Note 19. Commitments for expenditure

	2015 \$'000	2014 \$'000
Capital commitments		
Commitments for the acquisition of plant and equipment contracted for at the reporting date but not recognised as liabilities, payable:		
Within one year	482	98
	482	98
Lease commitments		
Commitments in relation to non-cancellable operating leases for office equipment and rental for premises contracted for at the reporting date but not recognised as liabilities, payable:		
Within one year	5,768	5,704
Later than one year but not later than five years	9,922	14,361
Later than five years	124	221
	15,814	20,286
Other expenditure commitments		
Commitments for the acquisition of other operations and maintenance contracted for at the reporting date but not recognised as liabilities, payable:		
Within one year	391	340
	391	340
Outsourcing commitments		
Commitments under outsourcing contracts for legal services and maintenance at the reporting date but not recognised as liabilities, payable:		
Within one year	12,300	12,151
Later than one year but not later than five years	2,469	2,539
	14,769	14,690
Grants commitments		
Commitments in relation to the second round of applications for grants from the Innovation and Transformation Fund for Community Legal Centre that have not been recognised as liabilities, payable:		
Within one year	1,500	-
	1,500	-
Total commitments for expenditure (inclusive of GST)	32,956	35,414
Less GST recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office	2,996	3,219
Total commitments for expenditure (exclusive of GST)	29,960	32,195

Note 20. Ex-gratia payments

Victoria Legal Aid made total ex-gratia payments of \$97,449 during the period to three former employees upon termination of employment (2014: \$115,706 to six former employees).

Note 21. Contingent liabilities

The organisation does not have any contingent liabilities or claims of a material nature which have not already been disclosed in these financial statements (2013: Nil).

Note 22. Trust account

Victoria Legal Aid as a corporate entity under the *Legal Practice Act 1996* maintains a trust account in accordance with that Act.

Victoria Legal Aid
Trust account statement of receipts and payments
For the year ended 30 June 2015

	2015	2014
	\$'000	\$'000
Receipts		
Balance at beginning of year	382	455
Amounts received from Legal Practice Board	5	31
Amounts received on behalf of clients	357	220
	744	706
Less Payments		
Amounts paid on behalf of clients	519	324
Balance at end of year	225	382
This amount is represented by:		
Cash at bank	98	89
Deposits with the Legal Practice Board	127	293
	225	382

The Trust Fund does not form part of the organisation's financial statements. It is included for information purposes only and is audited by a private accounting firm.

Certification of financial report

We certify that the attached financial statements for Victoria Legal Aid have been prepared in accordance with Standing Direction 4.2 of the *Financial Management Act 1994*, the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012*, the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Regulations 2013*, applicable Financial Reporting Directions, Australian Accounting Standards including interpretations and other mandatory professional reporting requirements.

We further state that, in our opinion, the information set out in the comprehensive operating statement, balance sheet, statement of changes in equity, cash flow statement and notes to and forming part of the financial statements, presents fairly the financial transactions during the year ended 30 June 2015 and financial position of Victoria Legal Aid as at 30 June 2015.

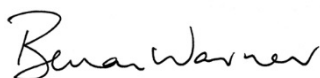
At the time of signing we are not aware of any circumstance which would render any particulars included in the financial statements to be misleading or inaccurate.



Andrew Guy

Chairperson

19 August 2015



Bevan Warner

Managing Director

Victoria Legal Aid

Accountable Officer

19 August 2015



Elizabeth Jennings

Chief Finance and Accounting Officer

19 August 2015

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Board Members, Victoria Legal Aid

The Financial Report

The accompanying financial report for the year ended 30 June 2015 of Victoria Legal Aid which comprises the comprehensive operating statement, balance sheet, statement of changes in equity, cash flow statement, notes comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information, and the certification of financial report has been audited.

The Board Members' Responsibility for the Financial Report

The Board Members of Victoria Legal Aid are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards, the financial reporting requirements of the *Financial Management Act 1994* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012* and for such internal control as the Board Members determine is necessary to enable the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor's Responsibility

As required by the *Audit Act 1994*, my responsibility is to express an opinion on the financial report based on the audit, which has been conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Those standards require compliance with relevant ethical requirements relating to audit engagements and that the audit be planned and performed to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report is free from material misstatement.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial report. The audit procedures selected depend on judgement, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, consideration is given to the internal control relevant to the entity's preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal control. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of the accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by the Board Members, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial report.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my audit opinion.

Independence


The Auditor-General's independence is established by the *Constitution Act 1975*. The Auditor-General is not subject to direction by any person about the way in which his powers and responsibilities are to be exercised. In conducting the audit, the Auditor-General, his staff and delegates complied with all applicable independence requirements of the Australian accounting profession and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. I confirm that I have given to the Board Members of Victoria Legal Aid a written independence declaration, a copy of which is included in the Annual Report.

Opinion

In my opinion, the financial report of Victoria Legal Aid is in accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1994*, and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*, including:

- (a) giving a true and fair view of the entity's financial position as at 30 June 2015 and of its financial performance or the year ended on that date
- (b) complying with Australian Accounting Standards and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Regulation 2013*.

MELBOURNE
27 August 2015


for John Doyle
Auditor-General

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

To the Board Members, Victoria Legal Aid

The Auditor-General's independence is established by the *Constitution Act 1975*. The Auditor-General, an independent officer of parliament, is not subject to direction by any person about the way in which his powers and responsibilities are to be exercised.


Under the *Audit Act 1994*, the Auditor-General is the auditor of each public body and for the purposes of conducting an audit has access to all documents and property, and may report to parliament matters which the Auditor-General considers appropriate.

Independence Declaration

As auditor for Victoria Legal Aid for the year ended 30 June 2015, I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit
- no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

MELBOURNE
27 August 2015


for John Doyle
Auditor-General



Appendices

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Appendix 2: Justice and law reform submissions 158

Appendix 1: Disclosure index

The annual report of Victoria Legal Aid is prepared in accordance with all relevant Victorian legislation. This index has been prepared to enable identification of our compliance with statutory disclosure requirements.

Ministerial Directions

Report of operations – FRD Guidance

Charter and purpose

Legislation	Requirement	Page
FRD 22F	Manner of establishment and the relevant Ministers	138
FRD 22F	Purpose, functions, powers and duties	7
FRD 8	Departmental objectives, indicators and outputs	3–99
FRD 22F	Initiatives and key achievements	14–54
FRD 22F	Nature and range of services provided	14–54

Management and structure

Legislation	Requirement	Page
FRD 22F	Organisational structure	63

Financial and other information

Legislation	Requirement	Page
FRD 8C, SD 4.2(k)	Performance against output performance measures	1
FRD 8C	Budget portfolio outcomes	3–54
FRD 10	Disclosure index	155
FRD 12A	Disclosure of major contracts	94
FRD 15B	Executive officer disclosures	70
FRD 22F	Employment and conduct principles	66
FRD 22F	Occupational health and safety policy	71
FRD 22F	Summary of the financial results for the year	2
FRD 22F	Significant changes in financial position during the year	100
FRD 22F	Major changes or factors affecting performance	102
FRD 22F	Subsequent events	121

Financial report

Legislation	Requirement	Page
FRD 22F	Application and operation of <i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	95
FRD 22F	Compliance with building and maintenance provisions of <i>Building Act 1993</i>	96
FRD 22F	Statement on National Competition Policy	96
FRD 22F	Application and operation of the <i>Protected Disclosure Act 2012</i>	96
FRD 22F	Application and operation of the <i>Carers Recognition Act 2012</i>	97
FRD 22F	Details of consultancies over \$10,000	93
FRD 22F	Details of consultancies under \$10,000	94
FRD 22F	Statement of availability of other information	99
FRD 24C	Reporting of office-based environmental data by government entities	N/A
FRD 25B	Victorian Industry Participation Policy disclosures	96
FRD 29A	Workforce data disclosures	66
SD 4.5.5	Risk management compliance attestation	98
SD 4.5.5.1	Ministerial Standing Direction 4.5.5.1 compliance attestation	N/A
SD 4.2(g)	Specific information requirements	N/A
SD 4.2(j)	Sign-off requirements	i

Financial statements required under Part 7 of the FMA

Legislation	Requirement	Page
SD4.2(a)	Statement of changes in equity	109
SD4.2(b)	Operating statement	106
SD4.2(b)	Balance sheet	108
SD4.2(b)	Cash flow statement	110

Other requirements under Standing Directions 4.2

Legislation	Requirement	Page
SD4.2(c)	Compliance with Australian accounting standards and other authoritative pronouncements	111, 151
SD4.2(c)	Compliance with Ministerial Directions	i
SD4.2(d)	Rounding of amounts	125
SD4.2(c)	Accountable officer's declaration	i
SD4.2(f)	Compliance with Model Financial Report	N/A

Other disclosures as required by FRDs in notes to the financial statements

Legislation	Requirement	Page
FRD 9A	Departmental disclosure of administered assets and liabilities by activity	N/A
FRD 11A	Disclosure of ex-gratia expenses	N/A
FRD 13	Disclosure of parliamentary appropriations	N/A
FRD 21B	Disclosures of responsible persons, executive officers and other personnel contractors) with significant management responsibilities) in the financial report	58
FRD 102	Inventories	N/A
FRD 103E	Non-financial physical assets	116
FRD 104	Foreign currency	111
FRD 106	Impairment of assets	145
FRD 109	Intangible assets	133
FRD 107A	Investment properties	N/A
FRD 110	Cash flow statements	110
FRD 112D	Defined benefit superannuation obligations	137
FRD 113	Investments in subsidiaries, jointly controlled entities and associates	N/A
FRD 114A	Financial instruments – general government entities and public non-financial corporations	141
FRD 119A	Transfers through contributed capital	116

Legislation

Act	Page
<i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	95
<i>Building Act 1983</i>	96
<i>Protected Disclosure Act 2012</i>	96
<i>Carers Recognition Act 2012</i>	97
<i>Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003</i>	96
<i>Financial Management Act 1994</i>	111, 151

Appendix 2: Justice and law reform submissions

Submission name	Authority	Date
Exposure Draft of the Children, Youth and Families (Disclosure of Youth Offending) Bill	Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation	19 December 2014
Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria	Victorian Ombudsman	23 December 2014
Consultation on Proposed Legal Profession Conduct Rules (Solicitors)	Law Council of Australia	19 January 2015
Consultation on Proposed Uniform General Rules	Chief Executive Officer and Commissioner for Uniform Legal Services	19 January 2015
Inquiry into the Tribunals Amalgamation Bill 2014	Commonwealth Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee	27 February 2015
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Consultation Paper on Redress and Civil Litigation (National Legal Aid)	Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse	6 March 2015
Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Framework	Productivity Commission	23 March 2015
Review of Families with Complex Needs	Family Law Council	30 April 2015
Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2015	Commonwealth Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee	15 May 2015
Inquiry into Access to Legal Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People	Commonwealth Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee	15 May 2015
Inquiry into Access to Legal Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (National Legal Aid)	Commonwealth Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee	15 May 2015
Review of the Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution	Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council	15 May 2015
Magistrates' Court Review of the Criminal Justice Diversion Program	Magistrates' Court	28 May 2015

Submission on the Victorian Law Reform Commission Final Report on the <i>Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997</i>	Department of Justice and Regulation	5 June 2015
National Ice Taskforce	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	29 May 2015
Royal Commission into Family Violence	Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence	15 June 2015
2015 Review of the Charter of Human Rights	Mr Michael Brett Young c/o Charter Review Secretariat Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation	17 June 2015
Inquiry into the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Restrictions on the Making of Protection Orders) Bill 2015	Victorian Legal and Social Issues Committee	23 June 2015

Glossary

accused – person charged with a criminal offence.

advocacy – making legal arguments or negotiating on behalf of a person or group of people, often involving representing them in court.

barrister – an independent lawyer who specialises in courtroom advocacy, drafting legal documents and giving expert legal opinions. Barristers may also act as a mediator and/or arbitrator.

brief – a document sent to the barrister by a lawyer which gives details on the issues arising in a case, and encloses any relevant paperwork which the barrister will need in order to provide advice and/or represent a client at court (if appropriate).

community legal centre – an independent community organisation that provides free advice, casework and legal education to its community.

duty lawyer services – information, advice and representation services provided at a court or tribunal where a court or tribunal appearance is imminent and services have not been arranged under a grant of legal assistance.

early intervention services – these incorporate our extensive legal advice, minor assistance and advocacy services. Includes any Commonwealth or state-funded matters.

family dispute resolution services – roundtable dispute conferences that seek to resolve family legal problems outside of the court system. Family dispute resolution services are Commonwealth-funded matters. To use our Family Dispute Resolution Service (FDRS), at least one person involved in the family dispute must apply for and obtain a grant of legal assistance. If appropriate, FDRS may also be available where court proceedings have been commenced but before a person is provided with a grant of legal assistance to be represented at a final hearing. (see also appropriate dispute resolution).

family violence – behaviour that is used to control, threaten, force or dominate a family member through fear of their or another's personal wellbeing or safety. It includes sexual psychological, physical, emotional and financial abuse.

Federation of Community Legal Centres – the peak body for 50 community legal centres across Victoria, which leads and supports the centres to pursue social equity and challenge injustice.

grant of legal assistance – money from the Legal Aid Fund that enables a lawyer to help a person with their legal problem. The grant enables a lawyer to give legal advice, help reach agreement, prepare legal documents and/or represent a person in court. In determining whether to provide a grant of assistance we apply guidelines that look at what a person wants legal assistance for, if they are likely to win their case, the financial circumstances of the person, the likely cost of the case, and whether it is in the interests of justice to do so. Some people are required to pay a contribution towards the cost of their legal representation.

independent children's lawyer – a lawyer appointed by Victoria Legal Aid following the making of an order by a court for the child to be separately represented in their best interest.

indictable offence – a serious criminal offence often heard before a judge and jury of the County or Supreme Court. Certain indictable offences may be heard and determined by a magistrate.

intervention order – court order to protect you from family violence or stalking.

legal advice – initial advice about a legal problem including help in preparing an application for a grant of legal assistance and the information required for that purpose. Legal advice is a short, one-off session available face-to-face, or by phone or video-conference in some circumstances. We do not provide legal advice by email or via our website.

legal aid – defined in the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic) as education, advice or information in or about the law; legal services (including legal advice, duty lawyer services and legal assistance services); appropriate dispute resolution programs and any other matter within the scope of Victoria Legal Aid's functions, powers and duties under the Act.

Legal Aid Fund – controlled and administered by Victoria Legal Aid. It is made up of money received from the state and Commonwealth governments for legal aid purposes, and from money received from the Legal Services Board from the Public Purpose Fund. The Legal Aid Fund also contains monies received from other sources such as contributions received from legally assisted people. Victoria Legal Aid pays for all expenses associated with the provision of legal aid, including administrative costs and expenses, from the Legal Aid Fund.

legally assisted clients – clients in receipt of a grant of legal assistance.

legal assistance services – defined in the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic) as legal services provided other than by way of duty lawyer services or legal advice (i.e. grants of legal assistance). However, in a more general sense, defined by the National Partnership Agreement as the services provided by all of the sector-wide legal service providers, including legal aid commissions, community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services and family violence prevention legal services.

legal matter – an issue under consideration in a case of law.

litigation services – includes Commonwealth and related state legal representation before a court or tribunal under a grant of legal assistance. Cases may be handled by our in-house practice or private practitioners.

means test – a test applied to an application for a grant of legal assistance that looks at what income the applicant for assistance gets from work, welfare benefits or other sources and what their weekly living expenses are. It also looks at if the applicant supports anyone else, or whether anyone else supports the applicant (their income and assets are included), and whether the applicant has assets such as owning a car, home or anything else of value.

minor assistance – legal work, including perusal of documents, written advice, telephone calls on the client's behalf, oral or written negotiations and, in some cases, simple appearances before courts or tribunals that are conducted within reasonable limits. This work is not carried out under a grant of legal assistance and is only undertaken where it can be demonstrated there is a tangible benefit for the client. This may include matters such as general civil law assistance that is not funded under a grant of legal assistance.

National Partnership Agreement (NPA) – an agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the states and territories which provides policy directions and funds for legal assistance programs to assist disadvantaged Australians. Victoria signed the Council of Australian Governments' *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services* in early July 2010. More information: www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au

practitioner panel – a list of suitably qualified legal firms and/or lawyers who can act for legally assisted clients for specific types of legal matters.

preventative services – includes all referrals to external agencies, any legal information provided by telephone or face-to-face at Victoria Legal Aid offices, including through the Legal Help telephone service, community legal education, publications produced and distributed and website page views (of relevant pages). This includes any Commonwealth or state-funded matters.

private practitioner – a lawyer who assists a legally aided client through a private practice. Private practitioners referred to throughout this report are on our practitioner panels.

Public Purpose Fund – a fund established under the *Legal Profession Act 2004* used to fund the regulation of the legal profession, finance legal aid and fund a number of other public purposes such as legal education and law reform. It is managed by the Legal Services Board, an independent statutory body within the portfolio of the Department of Justice.

settlement – resolution or agreement of a claim or dispute.

settlement agency – an organisation that provides support and assistance to new and recently arrived refugees and migrants.

strategic advocacy – involves working on the justice system to achieve practical outcomes and procedural fairness for groups of disadvantaged people. It is about influencing those who make, interpret and apply law and policy to effect change, consistent with our objectives and priorities.

summary offence – a less serious criminal offence usually heard in the Magistrates' Court or Children's Court.

triage – the process of finding out enough about a person's circumstances and their legal issues when they first contact Victoria Legal Aid to make a decision about the best service available to them.

unique client – an individual client who accessed one or more of Victoria Legal Aid's early intervention and duty lawyer services or received a grant of legal assistance either for dispute resolution or litigation. Unique clients not include people who received information or participated in community legal education, for whom an individual client record is not created.

Our offices

Melbourne

350 Queen Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
GPO Box 4380
Melbourne VIC 3001
Tel: 1300 792 387

Suburban offices

Broadmeadows

North-western suburbs
Level 1, Building 1
Broadmeadows Station
Centre
1100 Pascoe Vale Road
Broadmeadows VIC 3047
Tel: (03) 9302 8777

Dandenong

Westernport region
Level 1, 9–15 Pultney Street
Dandenong VIC 3175
Tel: (03) 9767 7111

Frankston

Peninsula region
Cnr O'Grady Avenue and
Dandenong Road
Frankston VIC 3199
Tel: (03) 9784 5222

Ringwood

Outer-eastern suburbs
23 Ringwood Street
Ringwood VIC 3134
Tel: (03) 9259 5444

Sunshine

Western suburbs
1/474 Ballarat Road
Sunshine VIC 3020
Tel: (03) 9300 5333

Regional offices

Ballarat

Central Highlands region
Area A, Level 1
75 Victoria Street
Ballarat VIC 3350
Tel: (03) 5329 6222
Toll free: 1800 081 719

Bairnsdale

Gippsland region branch
office
101A Main Street
Bairnsdale VIC 3875
Tel: (03) 5153 1975

Bendigo

Loddon–Campaspe region
424 Hargreaves Street
Bendigo VIC 3550
Tel: (03) 5448 2333
Toll free: 1800 254 500

Geelong

Barwon region
Level 2, 199 Moorabool
Street
Geelong VIC 3220
Tel: (03) 5226 5666
Toll free: 1800 196 200

Horsham

Wimmera region
29 Darlot Street
Horsham VIC 3400
Tel: (03) 5381 6000
Toll free: 1800 177 638

Morwell

Gippsland region
2 Chapel Street
Morwell VIC 3840
Tel: (03) 5134 8055

Shepparton

Goulburn region
36 – 42 High Street
Shepparton VIC 3630
Tel: (03) 5823 6200

Warrnambool

South Coast region
185 Fairy Street
Warrnambool VIC 3280
Tel: (03) 5559 7222
Toll free: 1800 651 022

Main reception

350 Queen Street, Melbourne

Postal – GPO Box 4380, Melbourne Vic 3001

Telephone – (03) 9269 0234

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Monday to Friday 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

Legal Help

Telephone – 1300 792 387

Monday to Friday 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

Disaster Legal Help

We have a dedicated telephone line for legal help after disasters such as a bushfires or floods.

Telephone – 1800 113 432

For hearing impaired (TTY)

Call the National Relay Service and ask to be put through to Victoria Legal Aid.

TTY/voice – 133 677 or 1800 555 677 (country callers)

SSR/speak and listen – 1300 555 727 or 1800 555 727 (country callers)



In different languages

عربي / Arabic	(03) 9269 0127
Bosanski / Bosnian	(03) 9269 0164
廣東話 / Cantonese	(03) 9269 0161
普通話 / Mandarin	(03) 9269 0212
Hrvatski / Croatian	(03) 9269 0164
فارسی / Persian (Farsi, Dari)	(03) 9269 0123
Ελληνικά / Greek	(03) 9269 0167
हिंदी / Hindi	(03) 9269 0487
Italiano / Italian	(03) 9269 0202
Македонски / Macedonian	(03) 9269 0477
Polski / Polish	(03) 9269 0228
Русский / Russian	(03) 9269 0315
Српски / Serbian	(03) 9269 0332
Español / Spanish	(03) 9269 0384
Türkçe / Turkish	(03) 9269 0386
Українська Мова / Ukrainian	(03) 9269 0390
أردو / Urdu	(03) 9269 0389
Việt-ngữ / Vietnamese	(03) 9269 0391

For all other languages, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask to be put through to Victoria Legal Aid.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the delivery of our work throughout the year and to the development of this report.

Feedback

Feedback on this report is welcome. Please write to Victoria Legal Aid, Research and Communications, GPO Box 4380, Melbourne Vic 3001.

Annual report website

This annual report is also available as a website. To read the report online or download a copy go to www.legalaid.vic.gov.au.



Established in 1950

2011–12 Silver, 2010–11 Silver, 2009–10 Silver, 2008–09 Bronze