



Our Strategy 2018–22

fairness, care, courage

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Victoria Legal Aid acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land where we work and pays respect to their Elders both past and present. We recognise their continuing connection to country and the resilience and strength of Victoria's Aboriginal communities.



CONTENTS

Contents	
Acknowledgement of country	ii
Message from the Chairperson	2
Who we are	3
The legal assistance sector	3
Our vision	4
Our values	4
Our purpose	4
Introduction to Strategy 22	5
Our key directions	6
Clients:	6
Impact:	8
Together:	10
Measuring our progress	12
Performance measures	12
Informing our strategy	15
Financial outlook 2018-22	16

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON— BILL JABOOR



Victoria Legal Aid acts as a safety net to ensure people who cannot afford a lawyer are supported to enforce their rights in legal proceedings. We play a key role in preventing legal problems from occurring or escalating through legal information and community legal education, and advocate for law reform and systemic change that makes our legal system fairer.

The challenge for all legal aid organisations is to meet the significant demand for legal assistance. This is particularly the case for Victoria Legal Aid over the next four years, where our financial circumstances are tightening in response to demand created by significant increases in police officers, child protection workers, legislative reforms and population growth. Effectively navigating these challenges requires clear and considered strategic priorities.

The three priority areas in Strategy 22 are intended to support us to make difficult decisions, respond to evolving client and community expectations, improve our service delivery and strengthen our relationships within the justice sector.

Central to Strategy 22 is our desire to become a more client centred organisation, by working more directly with our clients in the design and delivery of our services. This requires us to move away from the assumption that 'we know best', to an organisational mindset that acknowledges that clients themselves are best-placed to describe whether our services helped them resolve their legal problems. We will be proactive in seeking feedback and advice from clients and will listen, innovate and broaden our thinking in response to what clients tell us.

Strategy 22 reflects the need for us to improve our data, technology and evaluation capabilities to ensure we can keep pace with expectations of public agencies to be accountable for our performance. Technology and more sophisticated data analytics will support us to find creative and efficient ways of serving the community to maximise the benefit of legal assistance.

We know that we cannot succeed without strong, trusting and productive relationships. Victoria Legal Aid relies on our dedicated, skilled and committed practice partners—private practitioners and community legal services staff—to support us in assisting Victorians who need legal help. We also have an interdependent relationship with professionals working in courts and tribunals across Victoria, which benefits from goodwill and mutual respect.

Our consultations revealed support for Victoria Legal Aid taking a greater role in coordinating the provision of legal aid across the legal assistance sector, as recommended by the Victorian Government's Access to Justice Review—provided this is done in a collaborative, principled and transparent manner. We intend to assume new responsibilities in a careful and considered way that recognises the skills, knowledge and experiences of those working within the legal assistance sector.

Victoria Legal Aid is proud of its contributions across the Victorian community and is excited to start a new chapter under Strategy 22, which we hope will see the organisation be more innovative, dynamic and responsive to client and community needs.



WHO WE ARE

Victoria Legal Aid is an independent statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic) (the Act). We play a leadership role in the legal assistance sector in Victoria and deliver legal services for Victorians facing disadvantage.

Victoria Legal Aid was established under the Act with the objectives to:

- provide legal aid in the most effective, economic, and efficient manner
- manage its 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.

When changes to the Act¹ come into effect in later in 2019, we will have the added objectives of:

- ensuring the coordination of the provision of legal aid so that it responds to the legal and related needs of the community
- ensuring the coordination of the provision of legal assistance information so that information responds to the legal and related needs of the community, including by being:
 - » accessible
 - » current
 - » high quality
 - » of sufficient breadth.

Under the Act, Victoria Legal Aid has the authority to control and administer the Legal Aid Fund.

THE LEGAL ASSISTANCE SECTOR

Section 8 of the Act establishes that Victoria Legal Aid provides legal services through a mixed model of service delivery.

The mixed model comprises:

- solicitors working as sole practitioners or in law firms and incorporated legal practices
- barristers
- Victoria Legal Aid's staff practice
- community legal centres
- Aboriginal Legal Services, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Djirra².

The mixed model provides several benefits, such as including the flexibility to respond to changes in demand for legal aid services, and support for a client's entitlement to select a legal practitioner of their choice.

¹ *Justice Legislation Amendment (Access to Justice) Act 2018* (Vic), s 12 comes into effect on 1 July 2019.

² Aboriginal community controlled legal services form part of the mixed model of service delivery; however, in recognition of the importance of Aboriginal self-determination, Victoria Legal Aid does not undertake strategic planning or direct the funding of Aboriginal legal services.



OUR VISION

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

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 to 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 PURPOSE

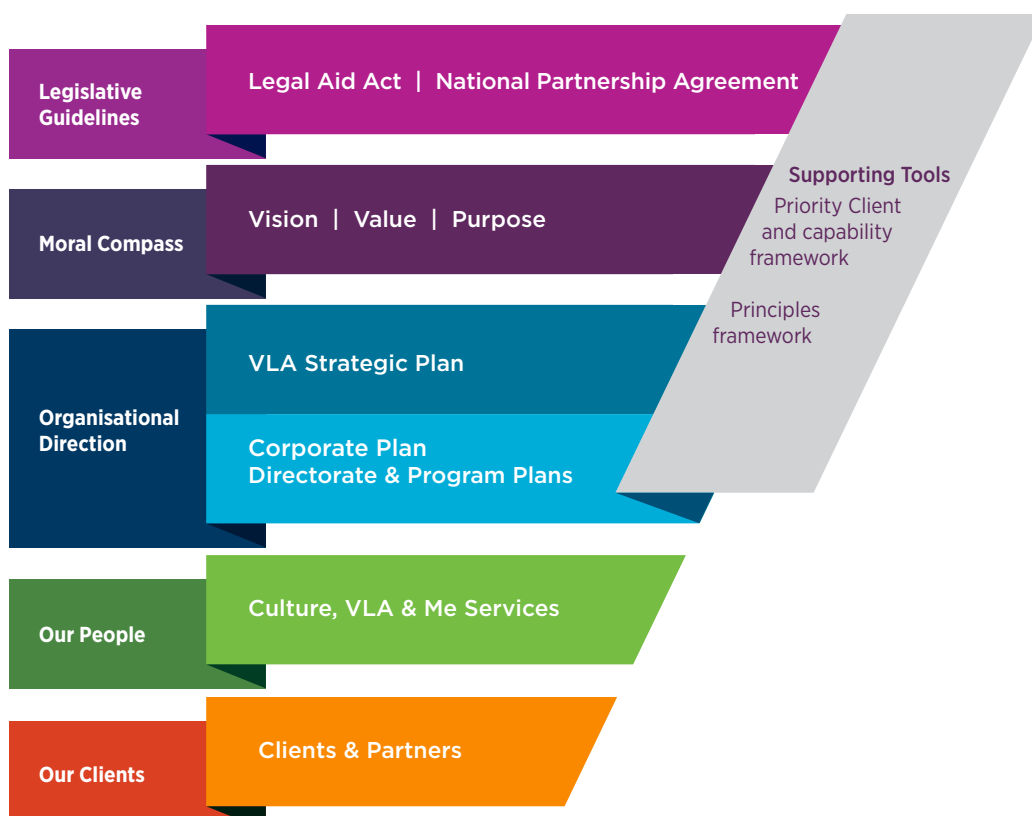
To make a difference for clients and the community through the provision of effective legal services and collaborative leadership of a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector.



INTRODUCTION TO STRATEGY 22

Strategy 22 outlines how we will work towards our intended purpose, which is to make a difference for clients and the community through effective legal services and collaborative leadership of a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector.

Strategy 22 is informed by legislation, policy and government agreements that govern Victoria Legal Aid and outlines our strategic priorities in the next four years. Our plans, and investment decisions are informed by these priorities.



OUR KEY DIRECTIONS—CLIENTS · IMPACT · TOGETHER

Strategy 22 is built around three key directions that will drive Victoria Legal Aid over the next four years. These key directions are intended to act as the foundation for more accessible, client-centred services and a collaborative style of leadership and partnership across the legal assistance sector.



CLIENTS

We listen to our clients and make meeting their diverse needs our priority

Over the next four years, we will make Victoria Legal Aid a more client-centred organisation that routinely seeks and uses client feedback in the design of policies, services and projects. We will also use our leadership role within the justice system to advocate for improvements to the broader system to make it more accessible for clients. We know that some people are more likely to experience a legal problem and can have greater difficulty in resolving their legal issue without assistance. For this reason, we will continue to focus our resources on priority clients that face disadvantage within the legal system, including children and young people, people experiencing mental illness or living with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, and clients who encounter violence, trauma and abuse.

GOALS

Clients 1.1: Clients are assisted to make their own decisions about how to resolve their legal issues

We will embed a culture at Victoria Legal Aid that puts the needs of clients at the centre of all our services and empowers them in the resolution of their legal problems. We will consult with our clients to improve our communications, improve our client feedback mechanisms and advocate for client-centred approaches within the broader justice system.

Clients 1.2: Clients' broader needs are better met through triage, referrals and service delivery, especially those with mental health concerns and cognitive disabilities

Working with a client to resolve a legal problem often requires us to look beyond the narrow legal issue and consider the broader circumstances that may be contributing to, or exacerbating, their legal issues. Mental ill health or disability can increase the likelihood of legal problems across all our practice areas and often requires a specialised legal response. We will make it easier for clients to access our services through improved triage and intake, and strengthen referral pathways with our partners in legal, health and community services sectors to meet clients' needs.

Clients 1.3: Clients have more access to user-friendly services through innovative technologies, partnering and outreach

We will invest in projects and technologies that are accessible and responsive to clients' needs. This will include exploring digital tools that help our clients navigate the legal system and improve our reach. We will continue to work with our partners to pilot innovative approaches to service delivery that enables clients access to services at the time and place they need them.

Clients 1.4: Clients feel safe, understood and respected when dealing with us, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and people who have experienced violence, trauma or abuse

We will invest in increasing the capability of staff and practice partners to support clients with empathy, understanding, cultural sensitivity and respect. We will use feedback from specific groups to better understand their perspectives and improve the quality and design of our services. Family violence will continue to be a focus as we contribute to the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Victoria Legal Aid recognises the importance of self-determination and independence of Aboriginal Community Controlled legal service providers in advancing access to justice for Aboriginal Victorians.



2

IMPACT

*We design effective services
using evidence and feedback
when deciding how and where
they are delivered*

Population growth, clients' legal needs and the community's expectations all have an impact on the demand for, and nature of, legal assistance services. It is critical that Victoria Legal Aid is able to monitor and anticipate evolving needs through more effective use of service data and demographic information. Our use of public funds makes it important for us to monitor and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of our services across Victoria.

GOALS

Impact 2.1: Priority clients are legally represented at courts and tribunals

We will continue to focus our more intensive services on our priority client groups to ensure that they receive the help they need, including alternate dispute resolution services. We will refresh our priority client framework to ensure that those experiencing the greatest disadvantage are supported to enforce their legal rights.

Impact 2.2: We strengthen prevention, timely intervention and diversion approaches to reduce pressure on the courts and avoid legal problems getting worse, especially for children and young people

We will work to structure our services in a way that seeks to prevent legal issues occurring or escalating, rather than waiting until the legal problem is critical. This includes providing legal education and training to enhance the community's understanding of the law and structuring services to resolve legal problems at the earliest opportunity. We will consistently advocate for diversion and therapeutic approaches—particularly for children and young people—to encourage rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

Impact 2.3: Data and systems capabilities for the sector are strengthened

To deliver effective services, we need evidence to guide decision making and to measure impact. We will invest in data analysis and service design capabilities that allow us to maximise the impact of our limited resources and enable the community to hold us accountable for our performance.

We will work across the broader legal assistance sector to ensure the benefits of improved data and technology platforms are designed and shared with our partners.

Impact 2.4: We design and target our services by using data, evidence and collaborative planning

Victoria Legal Aid needs to provide the right services, in the right place and in the right way. We will develop a more rigorous and transparent approach to anticipating legal need, and work with our legal and social service partners to better align service provision. This collaborative place-based planning will be supported by a robust evidence base, using data and best practice approaches to address postcode injustice and build coalitions of support for improved outcomes.



TOGETHER

We lead and act in ways that build trust and deepen relationships with colleagues, partners, and the community

We understand the importance of building and maintaining trust within an effective legal assistance sector and justice system. It is critical that our clients and the community trust us, and value the services we deliver and fund. It is equally important that our legal and community sector partners understand what we do and why we do it. To foster trust, we will increase transparency internally and externally and play our leadership role in a collaborative and inclusive manner with our practice partners.

GOALS

Together 3.1: We work with partners and allies to reform and fix systemic problems that undermine fairness and erode legal rights

Victoria Legal Aid's position as a large statutory authority gives us the opportunity to influence how the justice system operates and work closely with partners to address systemic problems. We will continue to work with Courts and prosecutors to drive systemic improvements, especially in the Magistrates' Court. We will continue to participate in law reform and strategic litigation to push for changes that have broader benefits for our clients and the community.

Together 3.2: Staff and practice partners are equally supported with practice resources and learning

We will take a sector-wide approach to training and professional support by extending training and development opportunities available for our staff practice to all practitioners undertaking legally aided work. This will promote continuous improvement in capability across the legal assistance sector. We will also focus on offering career progression pathways and develop strategies to retain and develop talented staff and providers.

Together 3.3: All people feel safe and supported at work because safety is prioritised, diversity is embraced, and workloads are managed

Safeguarding the health and wellbeing of those working within the legal assistance sector is crucial for safe and sustainable service delivery. We will continue to monitor and contain unsustainable growth in demand for services and ensure staff and providers are supported. We want to become known as an employer of choice because we cultivate a positive and psychologically safe workplace for all staff.

Together 3.4: Decisions about the best use of funds are clear and understood

We will use our role in leading and coordinating the legal assistance sector to ensure that legal assistance is delivered in an efficient, principled and transparent way that meets the needs of our clients. We will be clear and collaborative to ensure that our staff, practice partners, clients and the community understand our decisions about the allocation of funds.

MEASURING OUR PROGRESS

Strategy 22 is our commitment to putting clients first, delivering services with impact and acting as a collaborative leader within a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this commitment when client feedback is being used to design services our services are achieving their desired impact and the legal assistance sector is strong and united.

Over the next four years we will use a range of measures to understand and manage our progress towards achieving our strategic objectives. Specifically, these measures will enable us to:

- publicly monitor performance to track our progress towards our goals
- know if our clients and partners are satisfied with our performance
- take action to affect performance or to make adjustments if needed.

These measures sit within a broader framework of measuring and monitoring our performance as part of our internal corporate planning and reporting processes. Our annual Corporate Plan will include measures that will link back to Strategy 22 and help us to assess what we have achieved over the shorter term and the difference we have made to our clients and the sector.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Strategic goal
being measured

Performance measure 1: Increased client satisfaction with the services we provide

We have committed to embedding a culture that continues to put the needs of clients at the centre of everything we do. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when we see by seeing an overall increase in client satisfaction with the services we provide. Data to inform this measure will be drawn from the biennial client satisfaction survey as well as through a range of other feedback mechanisms.

Clients 1.1
Clients 1.2
Clients 1.4
Impact 2.1
Impact 2.4
Together 3.4

Performance measure 2: Increased use of client feedback in the design of our services

We have committed to asking our clients for their input, so we can design services that they need. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when new projects and initiatives include client input and/or feedback and we have increased our use of consumer panels and advisory groups.

Clients 1.1
Clients 1.2
Clients 1.3
Clients 1.4
Impact 2.1
Impact 2.2
Impact 2.4
Together 3.4



Performance measure 3: Increased client and community understanding of how and when to obtain legal help

We have committed to ensuring we provide effective entry, triage and referral services for our clients. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when we have engaged clients in designing the services we deliver and their feedback indicates improved understanding of how to access legal help. We will see an increase in community access to multiple channels of legal information and referral resources.

We will also focus on using data effectively to ensure that our services are accessible and available where needed most.

Clients 1.2

Clients 1.3

Impact 2.1

Impact 2.2

Impact 2.4

Performance measure 4: Increased use of data and system capabilities to inform service design and delivery

We have committed to strengthening data, technology and evaluation capacity for the sector to inform and support decision making. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when we have made the necessary investments in technology solutions and platforms to ensure we have accurate and consistent data that is accessible and used in the design, delivery and evaluation of our services. We will see evaluation data used as a tool to improve service offerings. We will also see a shift in collaborative service planning with partners across more regional locations and the transparent publishing and sharing of service data.

Clients 1.2

Clients 1.3

Impact 2.2

Impact 2.3

Impact 2.4

Together 3.1

Together 3.4

Performance measure 5: Increased staff engagement

We have committed to providing a thriving workplace for our staff where safety is prioritised, diversity is embraced, and workloads are managed. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when we see an increase staff satisfaction in regular staff engagement survey results.

Together 3.2

Together 3.3

Together 3.4

Performance measure 6: Increased practice partner satisfaction

We have committed to building trust with our practice partners as part of building a stronger, more united legal assistance sector. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal by regularly engaging with our practice partners through surveys and reference bodies to be developed and implemented during the strategy period.

We will know we have been successful when survey and engagement results, over the period of Strategy 22, show an increase in the level of practice partner satisfaction.

Together 3.1

Together 3.2

Together 3.3

Together 3.4

PERFORMANCE MEASURES CONTINUED

Performance measure 7: Increased number of practice partners accessing professional development sessions/resources

Together 3.2

Together 3.3

We have committed to ensuring that both our staff and practice partners are equally supported with practice resources and learning. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when we see an increase in the number of practice partners accessing our professional development packages and resources, as recorded through our training and resource records.

Performance measure 8: Collaborative Planning Committee recommendations and advice are being applied

Together 3.1

Together 3.4

We have committed to building and maintaining trust with our partners and stakeholders as part of an effective legal assistance sector and justice system. As part of this, a new statutory Collaborative Planning Committee is being established to provide evidence-based advice and recommendations to the Victoria Legal Aid Board on the provision of legal aid and the legal needs of the Victorian community. We will know we have been successful in delivering on this goal when the advice and recommendations of the Collaborative Planning Committee are consistently considered and our relationship with the committee is one of mutual trust and respect.

As an independent statutory authority, Victoria Legal Aid is accountable to the Victorian Government for the return we provide on investment, and our effectiveness at accomplishing our vision of creating a fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld. As part of the Victorian Government's Performance Management Framework, Victoria Legal Aid publicly reports against performance as part of the annual budget process. These measures are published in Budget Paper No.3, with performance also reported on as part of our annual report and Corporate Plan.

Budget Paper No. 3 Performance measures	Unit of measure
Community legal education and information services (Victoria Legal Aid) – excluding family violence related services	number
Community legal education and information services (Victoria Legal Aid) – family violence related services	number
Duty lawyer services – excluding family violence related services (Victoria Legal Aid)	number
Grants of legal assistance provided by Victoria Legal Aid – excluding family violence-related services	number
Legal advice and minor assistance for clients (Victoria Legal Aid) – excluding family violence-related services (Victoria Legal Aid)	number
Family violence legal services (Victoria Legal Aid)	number
Number of unique clients who accessed one or more of Victoria Legal Aid's legal services	number
Client satisfaction with services provided by Victoria Legal Aid	per cent
Average call wait time to the Legal Help phone line (Victoria Legal Aid)	minutes



INFORMING OUR STRATEGY

Victoria Legal Aid’s Strategy 22 is informed by a comprehensive development process that encompassed engagement and research activities. We talked to clients, staff and stakeholders, and asked for their thoughts about what is working, what needs to be improved and where they believe our value lies.

Our clients:

We spoke to a cross section of clients about their interactions with us. We interviewed 30 former clients across family, criminal and civil law who received legal assistance from us via Legal Help, legal advice, a duty lawyer or casework. The data from our biennial client satisfaction survey completed in September 2017 also informed Strategy 22. We also held interactive workshops with our mental health consumer advocate group, Speaking from Experience.

Our Board and staff:

Over 400 staff attended one of the 10 consultation sessions held over seven locations. The workshops collected staff views on a range of issues, including service delivery, professional development and our use of data and technology.

We gathered staff input through workshops with the Senior Executive Team, via various management forums (including regional managing lawyer, manager and administrative managers forums). A delegation of 33 senior staff were also interviewed in the directorate groups.

Our Board members were interviewed individually and in small groups, with collective discussion occurring at regular Board meetings as Strategy 22 was developed and refined.

Our partners:

We drew on valuable insights provided by our private practitioners in a 2017 engagement survey, and feedback provided by practitioners through their participation in consultations for the Child Protection Review, Summary Crime Evaluation, and Family Law Legal Aid Services review. We also conducted a workshop with the members of the Sector Innovation and Planning Committee.

Our stakeholders:

We conducted interviews with stakeholders from:

Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
Office of Public Prosecutions
Department of Justice and Community Safety
Department of Health and Human Services
Law Institute of Victoria
Victorian Bar
Health Justice Australia
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Federation of Community Legal Centres
Djirra
Victoria Police
Legal Services Board and Commissioner
Court Services Victoria

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK 2018-22

The ever-present challenge for legal aid organisations, both nationally and internationally, is to meet the significant demand for legal assistance services. Over the past three years, we have experienced a 20 per cent increase in demand for our Legal Help telephone service, where we are now helping 24,000 more Victorians per year to manage their legal problems and get the legal help they need. We are also providing legal advice and representation to almost 10,000 more people per year, representing a 9 per cent increase, but we are also seeing vulnerable members of our community present with more complex legal and non-legal issues, such as homelessness, family breakdown, mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

Over the next four years, this challenge is expected to be felt even more acutely by Victoria Legal Aid. Recent legislative and policy reforms, which reflect the Victorian Government's focus on justice and community safety, has given rise to unprecedented demand on our services.

Some of the factors that will likely affect demand for services in coming years includes:

- population growth (Victoria has the fastest growing population nationally)
- increases in police and child protection workers
- legislative reforms in the criminal justice system that increase demand for legal assistance and the number of serious and complex criminal law matters
- a continued focus on the consistent policing of family violence to support victim-survivors' safety
- ongoing reforms to child protection services to better support vulnerable children and young people and their families
- structural factors in funding agreements (for example, partial CPI indexation from the Commonwealth Government).

With a growth in demand for our services we expect to see a tightening of our financial circumstances, which may require us to make difficult decisions to remain sustainable.

These decisions will be made in close consultation with our stakeholders, within the framework of Strategy 22. The three priority areas are intended to help us respond to evolving client and community expectations, improve our service delivery and strengthen our relationships within the justice sector.

A fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld

To make a difference for clients and the community through provision of effective legal services and collaborative leadership of a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector



1 CLIENTS

We listen to our clients and make meeting their diverse needs our priority

GOALS

- 1.1 Clients are assisted to make their own decisions about how to resolve their legal issues
- 1.2 Clients' broader needs are better met through triage, referrals and service delivery, especially those with mental health concerns and cognitive disabilities
- 1.3 Clients have more access to user-friendly services, through innovative technologies, partnering and outreach
- 1.4 Clients feel safe, understood and respected when dealing with us, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and people who have experienced violence, trauma or abuse

SUCCESS

We have asked clients what they want and use this feedback to design services



2 IMPACT

We design effective services using evidence and feedback when deciding how and where they are delivered

GOALS

- 2.1 Priority clients are legally represented at courts and tribunals
- 2.2 We strengthen prevention, timely intervention and diversion approaches to reduce pressure on the courts and avoid legal problems getting worse, especially for children and young people
- 2.3 Data and systems capabilities for the sector are strengthened
- 2.4 We design and target our services using data, evidence and collaborative planning

SUCCESS

Our services are achieving their desired impact



3 TOGETHER

We lead and act in ways that build trust and deepen relationships with colleagues, partners, and the community

GOALS

- 3.1 We work with partners and allies to reform and fix systemic problems that undermine fairness and erode legal rights
- 3.2 Staff and practice partners are equally supported with practice resources and learning
- 3.3 All people feel safe and supported at work because safety is prioritised, diversity is embraced, and workloads are managed
- 3.4 Decisions about the best use of limited funds are clear and understood

SUCCESS

The legal assistance sector is strong and united

