



# STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2024 - 2028



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the unceded Traditional Owners of the land on which our service stands. We recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past, and present. We honour their resilience in the face of ongoing injustice.

MVLS looks forward to working as allies towards self-determination.



## FROM THE BOARD

We are excited to present the new Strategic Plan for Moonee Valley Legal Service to guide our decisions, services, and engagement with our community over the next four years and beyond. The Board and staff have worked hard to develop a plan which reflects the needs of our community, the opportunities and challenges we are facing, and the resourcing capability of our organisation.

We strive to provide a quality service which responds to the needs of our community, and we do this by:

- Partnering with our community, government, health, and community organisations to improve service pathways and ensure our services are welcoming, accessible, and integrated.
- Working proactively to educate and empower our community about early intervention and the prevention of legal problems.
- Walking alongside community members to provide legal support when it is needed.

We see this Strategic Plan as an important part of how we will continue to support and empower our community and strengthen the capability of our organisation. We look forward to working collaboratively to develop strong, innovative, and responsive partnerships that support great outcomes for our community and our organisation.

# MOONEE VALLEY LEGAL SERVICE

Moonee Valley Legal Service (MVLS) has a 35-year history of working with members of our community, responding to legal need, facilitating access to justice, working towards positive legal outcomes, and improving understandings of the law. We provide free legal advice, information, education, and referrals to anyone who lives, works, or studies within the City of Moonee Valley, but we prioritise service to community members who are more likely to encounter justice issues and difficulties in identifying and managing legal problems. This includes people experiencing or at risk of family violence, mental illness, disability, financial hardship, barriers due to cultural and linguistic diversity, elder abuse, housing insecurity and homelessness, and those of increased risk of justice system intervention.

Our main office is located at the Wingate Avenue Community Centre in Ascot Vale, and we offer outreach services in multiple locations including:

- Avondale Heights Library
- Niddrie Library
- Travancore Prevention and Recovery Centre
- Flemington Library

In addition to providing direct legal support, MVLS is committed to supporting the holistic needs of our clients and communities. Through embedding a social work program in our service, alongside our integration with co-locating services and Health Justice Partnership agencies, MVLS uses a tailored approach that improves both legal and social outcomes for our clients. Furthermore, our community legal education programs aim to equip people with knowledge of their rights, promote self-advocacy, and prevent legal issues from occurring in the first instance.



# OUR COMMUNITY

Moonee Valley Legal Service supports the residents of the Moonee Valley Local Government Area. Moonee Valley hosts the third highest proportion of [public housing dwellings in Victoria](#)<sup>1</sup>, indicating the LGA's proportionately high population financial disadvantage. The State Government Big Housing Build: Dunlop Ave Estate in Ascot Vale and Flemington are featured projects impacting our local community. The Big Build includes a mandate to seek tenders and provide grants to not-for-profits with expertise in supporting public housing residents. The initiative has led to concern amongst residents about the loss of their home, and confusion about when, where and how they will move, which has increased the need for legal support.

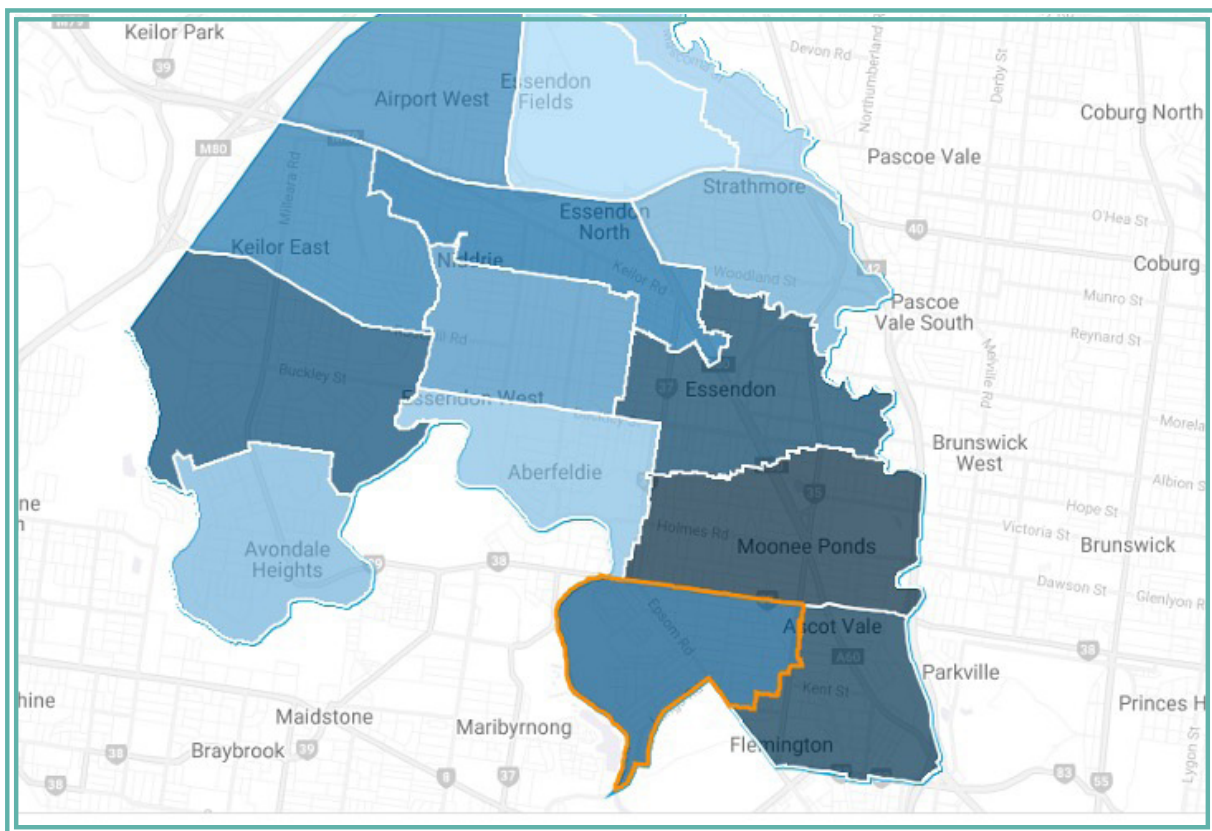


Figure 1: Moonee Valley local government

<sup>1</sup>Public housing' is defined as long term rental accommodation for Victorians on low incomes that is managed by the Victorian government.



Between 2021 and 2023, Moonee Valley Legal Service supported a diverse group of clients. Key characteristics of our clients during this time were:

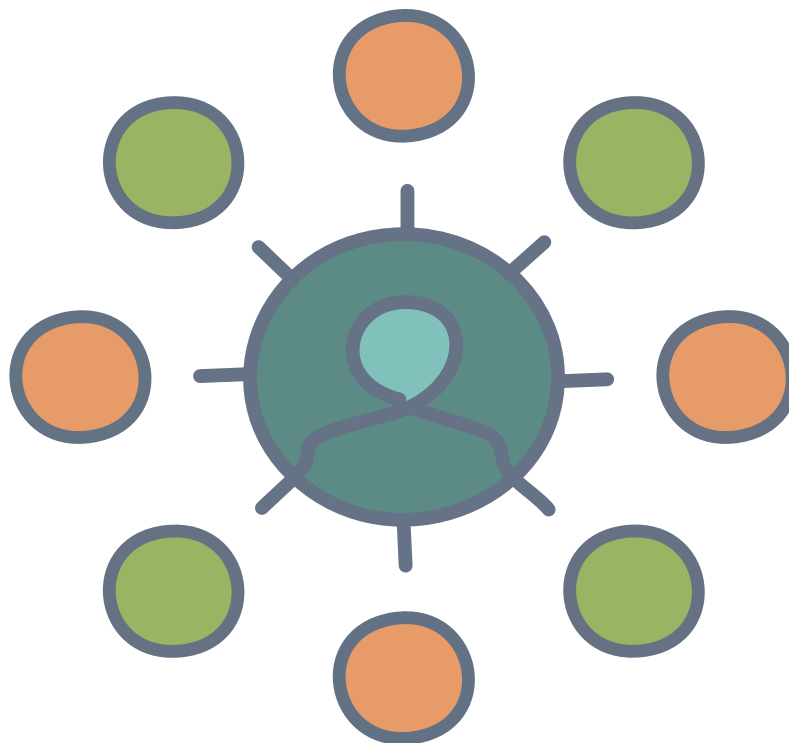
- 90% of clients face financial disadvantage.
- 63% of clients are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), including in total speaking more than 68 languages other than English at home.
- 62% of clients were born overseas.
- 39% of clients living in public housing.
- 28% of clients indicated they have some form of disability.
- 25% of clients indicated they were at risk of or experiencing family violence.
- 17% of clients indicated that they were at risk of or were experiencing homelessness.
- 10% of clients were under 25 or over 65 years of age.

# THE PLAN

This Strategic Plan is underpinned by thorough background research and consultation, and it builds on the directions and priorities set out in the previous Strategic Plan 2020 - 2023. The planning process has included assessing the profile of our community, the funding and policy environment in which we operate, the programs and services we offer, the approach of other community legal services, and a program of consultation and engagement with the community, partners, board members and staff. A summary of the research outcomes is provided as part of this document.

The Strategic Plan seeks to position Moonee Valley Legal Services for a sustainable future, strengthening our relationships with the community, government and partners, and delivering services which meet the needs of our community.

Priority actions are provided as an attachment to the Strategic Plan and will form part of the Business Plan. These actions will be reported upon and updated each year, to ensure the Moonee Valley Legal Service responds to emerging issues and opportunities.





## OUR PURPOSE

Provide free, accessible, holistic wrap-around legal and support services in our community to enhance wellbeing, fairness, equity and justice.

Empower our clients to improve their legal outcomes.

Connect people to and promote understanding of the law.

Drive positive change to address injustice and inequality in systems and laws.

## OUR VISION

**Equity and justice for all.**

## OUR VALUES

### Community

Our community are at the core of what we do. We listen to the voice of our vibrant and diverse community. We promote empowerment and respect for all.

### Best Practice

Our practice strives to promote wellbeing, continual improvement, and seek the best possible outcomes for all.

### Collaboration

We work in partnership with others to empower our community, so no one is left behind by walking alongside and building the voice of our community.

### Innovation

We are innovative and creative in all that we do, always striving to create more effective ways of delivering services and meeting the needs of our community.



# OUR FUTURE

Moonee Valley Legal Service is dedicated to effectively support local community members seeking legal services and assistance by:

**Empowering our community:** We will continue to empower our community by providing legal advice, casework, education, and holistic support.

**Providing quality legal casework support:** We will provide ongoing support to clients at risk of disadvantage to navigate the legal system.

**Accessibility and Timeliness:** We will ensure that our services are easily accessible to communities in need in a timely manner.

**Improving Support for First Nations People:** We are committed to walking alongside our First Nations people, improving their access to our services and support.

**Strengthening Community Partnerships:** We will invest in and nurture existing partnerships with community organisations while actively seeking new relationships to broaden our impact.

**Advocating for Sustainable Funding:** We will actively advocate for consistent and sustained funding to ensure the Service's viability and sufficient resources to address the community's needs.

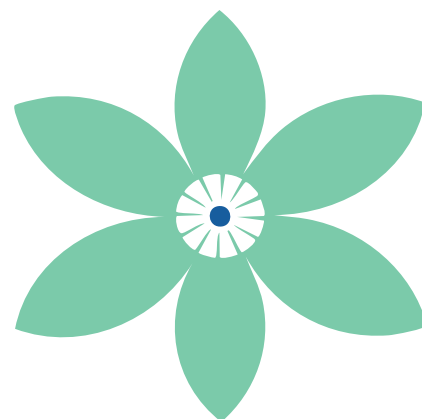
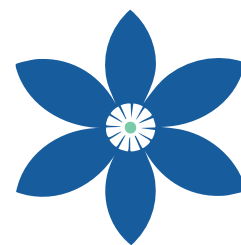
**Supporting Staff Well-being:** Recognising the challenges in our sector, we are committed to effectively supporting our staff in navigating the stresses involved in their work.

**Investing in Staff, Board and Volunteers:** We will prioritise investing in and acknowledging the value of our staff, board and volunteers.

**Community Representation:** We aim to increase representation from our local community on both our Board and Staff team, fostering a more inclusive and community-driven approach.

## GOALS AND AREAS OF FOCUS

- Strengthening community access to justice
- Working with others
- Responsive services
- Employer of choice
- A sustainable future



Goal	Description	Areas of focus
<b>Strengthening Community Access to Justice</b>	Resourcing the community to be stronger and more connected through access to holistic legal support.	Providing high quality holistic legal support that meets the ongoing legal needs and achieves the best possible outcomes for our service users.
		Supporting and empowering members of our community who are experiencing or at risk of disadvantage to navigate the legal system through addressing systemic barriers.
		Engaging with and resourcing local community members and organisations and facilitating community development initiatives.
		Raising and amplifying our community's voice about issues and challenges they are experiencing.
		Embedding the voice and involvement of our community in our organisation.
<b>Working with others</b>	Our local community is strengthened when we work effectively with others.	Facilitating a multidisciplinary approach that provides the best possible outcomes for our clients.
		Actively facilitating partnerships and collaboration that nurtures connections with organisations who support our community.
		Nurturing our highly valued relationships with other co-located organisations at Wingate Avenue Community Centre.
<b>Responsive services</b>	We deliver services and supports which are evidence based and respond to the needs of our community.	Reviewing data and evidence regularly, to inform decisions about the services and supports we deliver.
		Inviting feedback from clients, community and stakeholders about how we can improve.
		Develop our communications strategy to ensure our communication are culturally appropriate, timely and accurate.
<b>Employer of choice</b>	We will strive to be an employer of choice.	Attracting and retaining experienced and capable staff, volunteers and Board members.
		Providing a positive workplace culture that recognises contributions to our purpose and vision.
		Providing opportunities for professional development so staff and volunteers can continue to grow their skills and capabilities.
<b>A sustainable future</b>	Our organisation is stable and viable with clear priorities, a strong funding base and certainty about future accommodation.	Improving the security and continuity of funding for core services.
		Taking a strategic and evidence-based approach to seeking funding to respond to emerging needs and opportunities.
		Ensuring the long-term accommodation needs of the organisation are secured.

# RESEARCH UNDERPINNING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

## The Value of Community Legal Services

Community legal services are an important source of advice and support to many in the community. This is especially so for individuals experiencing financial and social disadvantage who are both more likely to experience legal issues requiring assistance, and face increased barriers to accessing that assistance than the general population.

Such groups are considered a priority for legal assistance and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, young people, older people, people at risk of or experiencing family violence, people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, people in custody, people residing in rural/remote locations, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, people with a disability or mental illness, people with low education levels, and single parents.

Although funding for Community Legal Centres is decreasing, a study conducted in 2012, showed that for every \$1 invested into Australia's Legal Centres, they deliver \$18 worth of community benefit. According to the Federation of Community Legal Centres (FCLC), the peak body for CLCs in Victoria, Victoria's 47 Community Legal Centres [provided Victorians assistance](#) with more than 100,000 legal matters and their online, self-help tools supported more than 500,000 individuals last financial year.

Moonee Valley Legal Service is the only generalist community legal service serving the residents of the Moonee Valley Local Government Area. Moonee Valley hosts the third highest proportion of public housing dwellings in Victoria<sup>2</sup>, an indicator of the areas proportionately high population financial disadvantage.



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<sup>2</sup>'Public housing' is defined as long term rental accommodation for Victorians on low incomes that is managed by the Victorian government.

## Our Services

Moonee Valley Legal Service has been operating since 1985 (until 2009 as Essendon Community Legal Centre) providing services and supports to members of the local community. It is the only generalist community legal service, serving the residents of Moonee Valley LGA.

Our services cover the following areas:

- **Legal assistance** including one-off advice, case work, and court/tribunal representation.
- **Community outreach** including clinics and drop-in services.
- **Coordination with other co-located services** at the Wingate Avenue Community Centre.
- Integrated social work **case management**.
- **Community legal education**, including through the 'Legal Concierge' program.
- **Cross-sector coordination and capacity development**, including through the Moonee Valley Family Violence Network.
- **Advocacy and law reform**.
- **Research**, including monitoring and evaluation of service delivery and sharing findings with the sector.

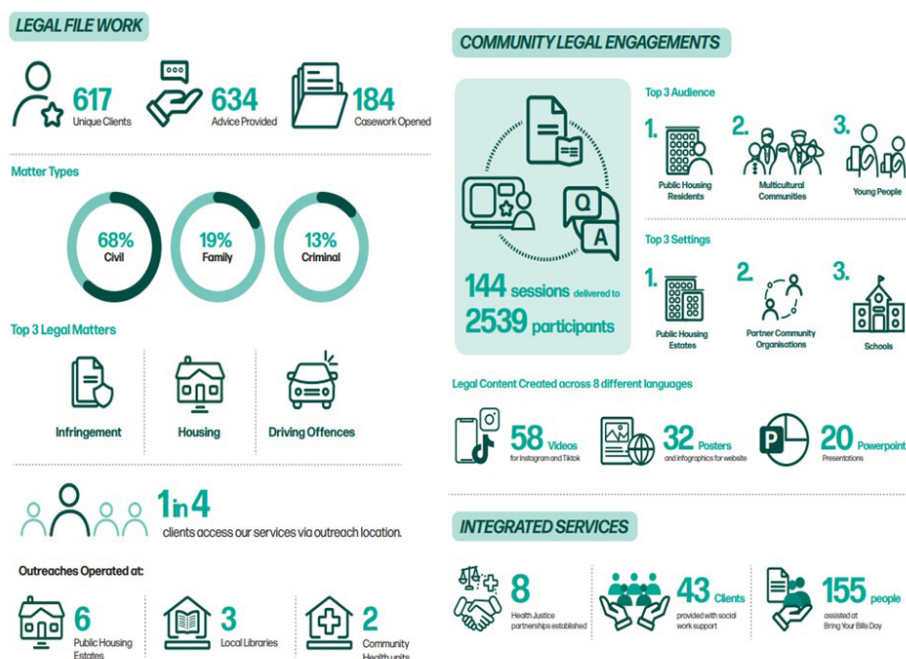


Figure 2: MVLS service delivery data July – December 2022

# The Context in Which We Work

## Community Legal Services Program

The Community Legal Services Program is a Victorian State Government program administered by Victorian Legal Aid through which community legal services are provided in 43 Community Legal Centres across the state. Community Legal Centres are independent community organisations that provide free advice, casework and legal education to their communities. Funding is provided to the sector by the Program on behalf of the Federal and State Governments as well as Victoria Legal Aid.

## Funding Sources

Moonee Valley Legal Service is primarily funded through support from the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments. The main funding programs are:

- National Legal assistance Partnership: provides baseline funding as well as targeted funding for family law, family violence, integrating the social and community sector with legal assistance, and domestic violence units/health justice partnerships.
- State Government funding determined on an annual basis: key priorities are family violence, elder abuse, regional Aboriginal Victorian's legal assistance, and early intervention/early dispute resolution.

## Working with Community and Partners

**Moonee Valley Legal Service is located** in the Wingate Avenue Community Centre in Ascot Vale which is set in the Ascot Vale public housing estate. **The Community Centre offers childcare, adult education courses, employment support. A number of other community organisations and support services are co-located there.**

# The Wider Community Legal Service Sector

As part of the strategic planning process a review was undertaken of the activities of other community legal services in metropolitan Melbourne. The purpose was to provide perspective to the activities of Moonee Valley Legal Service by looking at the funding sources, number of clients supported, suite of services and supports provided, service models in place and approach to partnering and advocacy.

Figure 3 below shows the overall level of activity of the services reviewed.

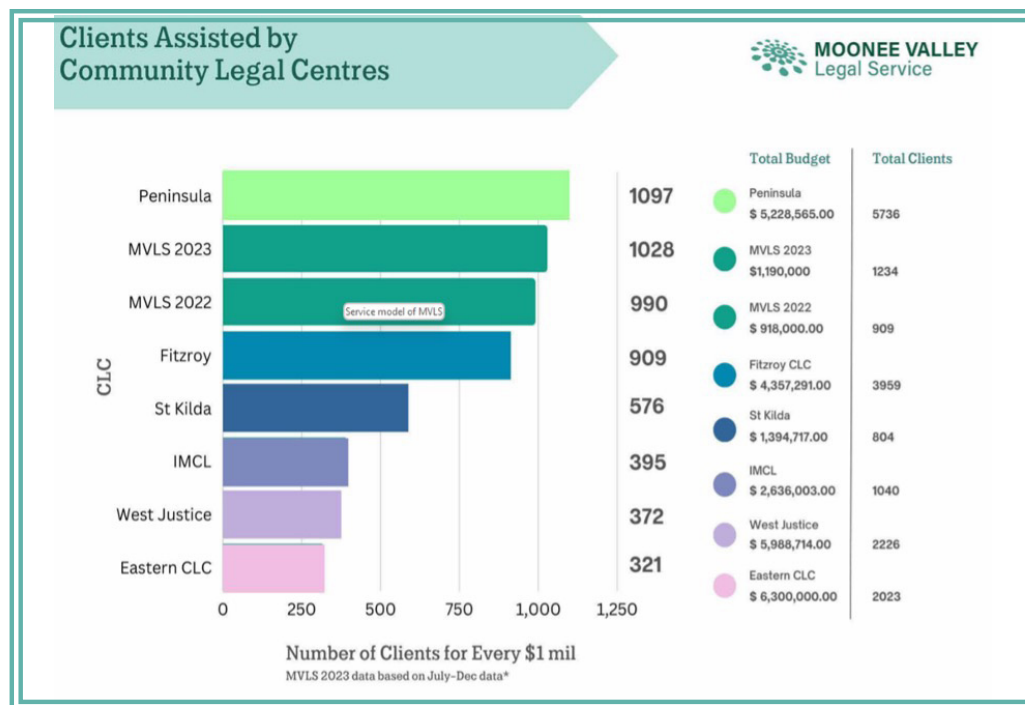


Figure 3: Comparison data from community legal services in Melbourne, 2022

The review showed that:

- As one of the smaller community legal services in Melbourne, Moonee Valley Legal Service provide support to a high number of clients relative to the funding received.
- Moonee Valley Legal Service provides a broad suite of services and support in comparison to other services;
- Moonee Valley Legal Service has a high presence in the community development and legal education space and there is potential to further develop its policy and advocacy activity.
- Several other services operate a help line and this may be worth exploring.



