

# MOVING INTO THE FUTURE



 2021–22 ANNUAL REPORT  
[www.imcl.org.au](http://www.imcl.org.au)

 INNER  
MELBOURNE  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL

## OUR VISION

Inner Melbourne Community Legal Centre (IMCL) believes in a society where the law is fair and everyone has access to legal help when they need it. A place where there is a shared sense of fairness and wellbeing. We believe that fair and thriving local communities are the foundation of a just society, and that this starts at the local level. To contribute to creating a just society, we build fairness and wellbeing in our local community through the law.

## WHO WE ARE

We are an independent community legal centre working for a social purpose, based in the inner Melbourne area. We are part of a large network of community legal centres working in local communities across Australia. Our lawyers are experts in community law, and part of a small, dedicated team of lawyers, administrative and project staff supported by volunteer law students and pro bono corporate partners.

## WHY WE EXIST

We work with people experiencing the greatest disadvantage in our area to achieve —

**Fairer laws:** We help to ensure the legal system is as fair as possible.

**Fairer outcomes:** We help our community be heard, and have their legal rights upheld.

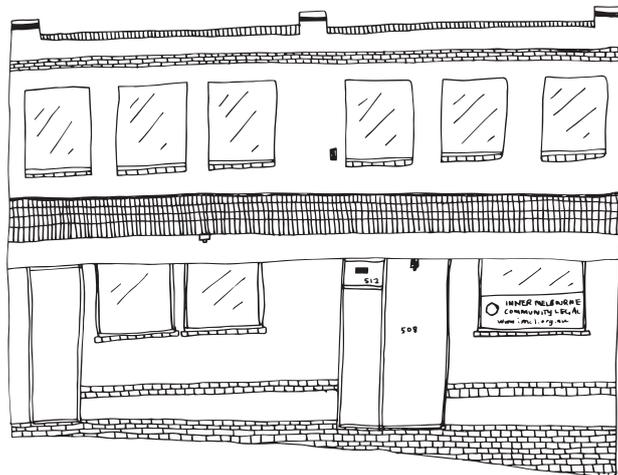
**Improved wellbeing:** We improve our community's capability to focus on their health and quality of life.

## WHAT WE DO

**Legal help:** We provide free accessible legal help in the form of information, advice, casework and representation.

**Legal education:** We provide community legal education to targeted community members and professionals that aims to prevent legal problems from occurring or escalating.

**Law reform and advocacy:** We challenge and work to change unfair laws that disproportionately affect disadvantaged people in our community.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Inner Melbourne Community Legal acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land where IMCL is based and works. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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# Chairperson and CEO report

## TWO HISTORIES, ONE FUTURE

In November 2021, the membership of [Inner Melbourne Community Legal](#) (IMCL) and Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre (FKCLC) [voted to merge](#), which saw the birth of a new entity with a bright future.

The community legal centres have their own unique and longstanding histories. FKCLC was established as a volunteer service in 1980 by founder Neil Cole. For more than 40 years, the centre provided hundreds of people with free legal advice every year and worked with a wide range of local community groups and organisations to address local community need. FKCLC has and continues to play a trailblazing role in police accountability through the Police Accountability Project (PAP). The Hon. Justice Peter Almond, William Houghton QC and Peter Collinson QC founded IMCL in 1978. Since then, IMCL has continued to support communities experiencing systemic disadvantage for almost 45 years, with a long-term emphasis on place-based integrated practice models.

Combining the strengths of each organisation, this year we were able to maintain and grow our service delivery in the expanded catchment, helping more people than ever. The amalgamation has meant IMCL can also offer a broader range of holistic legal services, including the preparation of Refugee or Special Humanitarian visa applications and assisting our community with police complaints.

Throughout the year as COVID-19 restrictions lifted, we were able to connect more deeply with our communities: lawyers started to return to face-to-face appointments, enhancing client access; and we were also able to conduct more assertive community engagement to reach new organisations and people, enabling us to even better understand and shape our work based on their experiences and needs.

During the year, there were a number of standout achievements. The Police Accountability Project published a landmark report concerning predictive policing, and to build on this, we commenced a research study exploring the circumstances and experiences of racialised communities being

stopped by police in Victoria in relation to potential COVID breaches. We were able to expand our service model at the Royal Women's Hospital to provide legal help to women with infants experiencing homelessness, and to continue developing our expertise in delivering legal services to people experiencing mental ill-health using insights from our lived experience committee. Informed by our client experiences, throughout the year we advocated for improved laws and government policies, especially around the one of the most significant social issues of our time: housing.

As we work through the implementation of our merged organisation, the organisation is able to operate and provide services from both the Kensington office and the North Melbourne headquarters, in addition to delivering assertive outreach in an even greater range of community locations. IMCL's areas of focus for 2022-23 will ensure the critical work of both organisations will continue into the future. This includes: a campaign to improve independent police oversight with the introduction of a Police Ombudsman; stronger engagement with public housing residents; solidifying our approach to leading with client voice; renewed and expanded engagement with schools as well as maternal and child health care centres; producing reports for key demonstration projects connected with our housing and mental health work to show the impact of our approach; and the development of a new strategic plan to guide the merged organisation.

We warmly thank all staff, volunteers, secondees, partner organisations and supporters for your contributions, which have enabled a successful year and set the foundations for a strong year ahead together.

— CAROLINE EVANS, CHAIR  
— NADIA MORALES, ACTING CEO



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**Clockwise, from top left:**

1. Public meeting at the Kensington Town Hall on 27 June 1989 after a string of police shootings in the area.
2. FKCLC staff working with the local community on the People's Project.
3. IMCL founders Peter Collinson QC, Hon. Justice Peter Almond and William Houghton QC.
4. IMCL staff at the main office in North Melbourne.
5. FKCLC staff and volunteers at the Flemington office in 2010.
6. Daniel Haile-Michael, one of the men involved in the racial discrimination case. He went on to be awarded the national Youth Human Rights Medal for his advocacy work.
7. Edwin Tanner, one the first North Melbourne Legal Service lawyers (now known as IMCL).



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# Who we help

## SNAPSHOT OF OUR CLIENTS

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to cause more legal problems, social isolation and exacerbated existing socio-economic obstacles that prevent people accessing the help they need, such as language barriers, financial constraints or disabilities. Of the people we assisted:

 <p><b>88%</b> WERE EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL DISADVANTAGE</p>	<p><b>48%</b> WERE BORN OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA (FROM 89 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES)</p> 
 <p><b>54%</b> WERE EXPERIENCING OR AT RISK OF FAMILY VIOLENCE (OF WHICH 65% WERE SURVIVORS)</p>	<p><b>32%</b> WERE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS</p> 
 <p><b>53%</b> WERE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY (OF WHICH TWO-THIRDS HAD A PSYCHOLOGICAL DISABILITY)</p>	<p><b>30%</b> MAINLY SPOKE A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH</p> 
 <p><b>51%</b> IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE</p> <p><b>46%</b> IDENTIFIED AS MALE</p> <p><b>3%</b> IDENTIFIED AS NEITHER OR DID NOT STATE A GENDER</p>	<p>WHERE WE PROVIDE ONGOING CASEWORK:</p> <p><b>70%</b> FACED MORE THAN ONE BARRIER TO ACCESSING LEGAL HELP</p> <p><b>41%</b> FACED MORE THAN TWO BARRIERS TO ACCESSING LEGAL HELP</p> 

# What we do

IMCL continued to employ all limbs of our three core streams of work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It was essential to help people in need of legal assistance in times of rapid change and political decisions that impact our everyday lives.





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## Spotlight: Criminal Practice

IMCL has been able to increase the number of cases in our criminal practice to assist clients and the courts to navigate remote hearings and backlogs in the court system.

The remote hearings allowed IMCL to maintain carriage of criminal matters where clients have multiple court listings. This resulted in the continuity of service and a reduced need for clients to seek assistance from multiple services. Many of IMCL's criminal cases came through our hospital or homelessness agency partnerships and they often had court matters listed across metro Melbourne and sometimes regional Victoria.

### JESSICA'S STORY

Jessica\* left her de facto partner because he was physically and mentally abusive. The ex-partner has repeatedly pursued her through the courts as part of a wider pattern of abuse, including multiple intervention order applications. His abuse caused her and their children significant mental distress and instability. Jessica has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of this ordeal.

Jessica's latest court case was referred to IMCL when she was charged with using a carriage service to harass her ex-partner's partner at the time. We negotiated with Victoria Police and requested that they withdraw all charges on the basis that it was not in the public interest to prosecute a victim-survivor of family violence, and that Jessica's behaviour was not harassing. IMCL achieved a successful outcome in this case and all the charges were withdrawn.

Jessica said, "I have never felt the support of the justice system. I felt persecuted by the system and now get anxious every time I see them." She said IMCL restored some faith in the system. "I've never had lawyers so devoted to winning the case. They asked what I wanted and were extremely supportive of my decision."

\*name has been changed

### SNAPSHOT OF CRIMINAL PRACTICE WORK:

WE SAW 223 PEOPLE

WE OFFERED 166 ADVICE SERVICES

WE OPENED 149 CASES

WE CLOSED 124 MATTERS

### THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

ACTS INTENDED TO CAUSE INJURY

ROAD TRAFFIC AND MOTOR VEHICLE

REGULATORY OFFENCES

### OTHER AND MISC. OFFENCES INCLUDE WEAPONS/EXPLOSIVES, SUCH AS:

ASSAULT (WITH/WITHOUT WEAPON)

POSSESSION OF POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ITEMS

POSSESSION OF FALSE DOCUMENTS

BREAKING INTO A PROPERTY

MAKING A FALSE REPORT TO POLICE

### THE TOP THREE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED WERE:

AN ADJOURNED UNDERTAKING

CHARGES WITHDRAWN

DIVERSION

## JACK'S STORY

Jack\* was referred to IMCL by a case-worker at Inner West Area Mental Health. Discharged from inpatient stay at John Cade Unit, he had a significant mental illness diagnosis. Jack was charged with public indecency and engaging in sexual activity directed at another person arising from an incident within Melbourne CBD while acutely unwell.

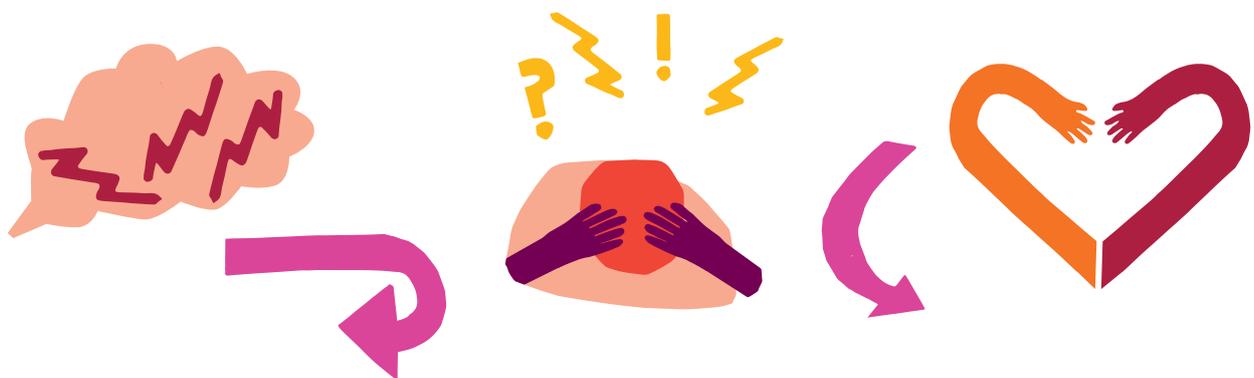
Jack, already experiencing significant distress and anxiety, was in recovery after his stay in the unit, and eager for legal assistance. We agreed to assess the evidence and determine whether the matter could be defended on the basis of mental impairment, and whether Jack's matter would be referred to Victoria Legal Aid (VLA).

Our lawyer worked closely not only with Jack, but his supportive family, and Jack's treating team at Royal Melbourne Hospital. They identified that Jack's alleged conduct on the day of the incident should have been recognised by attending police in the context of his mental health presentation.

Our lawyer attended court on numerous occasions over many months, to conduct negotiations with police prosecutions regarding the charges. He highlighted the lack of evidence to prove the offending, and the low public interest in continuing the prosecution. Victoria Police held their ground, and the matter was listed for a contested hearing.

Two days before the hearing police prosecutions agreed to withdraw all charges. Jack and his family were elated at this outcome. They wrote, "(We) can't express enough how grateful we are for your help." The outcome enabled Jack to focus on his recovery and "get him back on his feet again."

\*name has been changed



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## Spotlight: Safe from Harm

FKCLC jointly ran the Safe from Harm (SFH) program with the Moonee Valley Legal Service for the project's ninth and final year. The program provided free specialist family violence legal assistance to 37 people (predominantly women) who experienced relationship breakdown or family violence.

SFH lawyers engaged with local communities and services to raise awareness of family violence. They provided free community legal education and outreach services to a range of groups and locations. The program had a particular focus upon assisting those from amongst culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities living in public/community housing with over 80 per cent of clients born in Asia or Africa and speaking a language other than English.

Recognising the ongoing need for this work, we will continue this work through new projects and initiatives.

### FIONA'S STORY

Fiona\* left the home shared with her partner because she experienced family violence. "I felt very really helpless and I didn't know the laws in Australia," she said. Fiona contacted IMCL to assist in the termination of a fixed-term tenancy shared with her partner. A lawyer appeared in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) on her behalf to terminate the tenancy and ensure that the client was not liable for any future costs arising from the rental agreement. IMCL was successful with the VCAT ordering a reduction in the tenancy term without making an order for compensation to the residential rental provider. "IMCL felt me feel secure in Australia. The service provided was beyond kind. I'm so grateful to IMCL."

\*name has been changed

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## Spotlight: Tenancy Practice

IMCL focuses assisting public and social housing renters, but has periodically helped private renters that experienced family violence or people that struggled to assert their rights due to other barriers, for example; CALD background.

The Homelessness to a Housing Program (H2H), which housed homeless people during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in most of the eviction matters that we handled, channelled through our [Housing Justice Project](#). The matters - primarily referred through Salvation Army's Greenlight program - were initially due to behavioural issues associated with renters with complex needs who were housed amongst privately owned or rented dwellings.

These cases are now evictions based only on end-of-lease notices to vacate, whereby the community housing provider is evicted as the head tenant. Such clients face the prospect of becoming homeless again through no fault of their own. Whilst the program showed that homelessness can be solved with will power, it was flawed to rely on the private rental market. The clients' predicament points to the socially and economically costly failure to invest in long-term stable housing options for people on low incomes and with complex needs.

IMCL also continues to see many clients that experience housing insecurity due to a violent partner. The cases are often clients that either need their name off the rental agreement for a property they have left because of family violence or they need to become a sole renter.

Through our casework, IMCL has seen that public housing renters often experience mould and overcrowding, while community housing renters find themselves in less secure and less affordable housing than public housing renters. These systemic issues have informed our housing advocacy and our calls for recurrent funding for low-cost housing expansion to adequately address the rapidly expanding social housing waitlist and create solutions to homelessness that are permanent, safe and affordable.

## Partnerships

Given the enduring COVID-19 restrictions, IMCL delivered primarily phone-based delivery services to our partner organisations, with some re-commencement of face-to-face consultations at some outreach locations as restrictions eased, and the office was open by appointment.



## HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS

Hospitals have faced unprecedented challenges over the last three years as part of the frontline that dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this obstacle, IMCL assisted more clients than ever before across our three Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) at [Royal Women's Hospital \(RWH\)](#), [Royal Melbourne Hospital \(RMH\)](#) and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (**Peter Mac**).

IMCL adapted our service model for HJPs, with lawyers visiting some clients at home when they could not speak on the phone to ensure they had legal support. Our 'on-call' lawyer model also allowed the team to be responsive and assist patients over the phone with urgent legal issues outside of our usual weekly clinic model. Given the context, the increase in our services to patients during this time is a testament to the strength of our partnerships, relationships with social work teams at each hospital and our staff.

Clients can be in or out patients receiving medical care from RWH, RMH or Peter Mac. By helping clients resolve their legal problems, they have an enhanced ability to focus on their health and treatment.

### Areas of advice

- **Peter Mac** saw a broad range of areas including family law, employment law, medical treatment decision making, and powers of attorney.
- **RMH** primarily saw family violence protection orders, injury compensation and other civil law matters such as fines.
- **RWH** most commonly saw parenting arrangements, family violence protection orders and family law matters.

At RWH, we were able to expand our service model to provide legal help through the [Cornelia Program](#), which provides pregnant women that are experiencing homelessness or insecure housing with safe accommodation and psychosocial support.

At RWH, IMCL participated regularly in family safety advocates training, which helps train health care professionals to identify and respond to family violence in clinical settings.

IMCL received a request from the social work team at RMH to respond to a cohort of patients experiencing long COVID that find themselves in financial hardship. This includes both advocacy work, in relation to the need for adequate income support, as well as assessing the separate legal needs this patient cohort might have and how we can support them.

There has been a consistent increase in family violence cases each year among our clients from RMH, with 54 per cent of clients impacted by family violence this financial year. Our aim is to prevent people from falling through the cracks because they knocked on the wrong door. The "no wrong door" model for HJPs would not be possible without the generous support of our pro bono partners, who enable IMCL to assist clients with a broad range of complex legal needs and towards increasing the well-being of people in our community.

WE SAW **211** PEOPLE ACROSS ALL HJPS:

- **100** CLIENTS AT ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL
- **85** CLIENTS AT ROYAL MELBOURNE HOSPITAL
- **26** CLIENTS AT PETER MAC

WE OPENED **98** CASES

WE CLOSED **104** MATTERS

**64%** OF OUR 211 HJP CLIENTS EXPERIENCED OR WERE AT RISK OF EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

**17%** OF PEOPLE WERE HOMELESS, WITH **14%** AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

**"Procedure from taking call and arranging appointment etc was very professional and lawyer very welcoming in helping to resolve the issue."**

— IMCL CLIENT

## Projects

### COMMUNITY LEGAL MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

In 2021–22, we completed two-and-a-half years of our three-year Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner funded project, which builds on our Health Justice Partnerships. During this time we tested and refined a model of partnership between mental health clinician first responders and Melbourne Health inpatient and outpatient mental health units. To guide the service design to ensure it is accessible and meets the needs of mental health consumers.

We established our inaugural Community Legal Advisory Group in July 2021 to guide the service design, ensure it is accessible and meet the needs of mental health consumers. This group is comprised of individuals with lived experience of the intersection between the mental health system and policing.

Whilst the consumer/lived experience movement is well established in the mental health sector, it as a relatively new concept in legal services, and we are proud to be leading this work.

To date, topics explore have included: co-locating lawyers in appropriate service settings so consumers can access them directly without being dependent on a health clinician providing a referral; reviewing service intake and delivery processes to ensure they are safe and not stigmatising for people experiencing mental ill health; and exploring policy responses that address the correlation between mental ill health and social outcomes, such as housing evictions.

Going forward, we plan to also assertively engage with hospital peer work forces as sources of referrals and to support safe consultations for clients in acute settings.

Upon the announcement of the Local Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs – a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Mental Health – we shared insights gleaned through this project. This will strengthen our capacity to advocate for the inclusion of legal services as a central and funded component of the service mix.

With the project wrapping-up at the end of 2022, we will publish a report with our findings in 2023. You can read more about this project [on our website](#).

### HOUSING JUSTICE PROJECT

The Housing Justice Project is a two-year demonstration project which commenced in 2021, funded by The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation. IMCL has worked closely with two major homelessness organisations, [VincentCare's Ozanam House](#), [Salvation Army's Flagstaff Accommodation and The Open Door](#) to deliver an integrated service that addresses the impact of unresolved legal problems that influence a person's housing security. The project's aim is to increase housing readiness through the delivery of legal assistance in all areas of law, including tenancy law to prevent evictions and maintain ongoing housing.

#### IN THE FIRST YEAR:

THE PROJECT PROVIDED OVER 250 LEGAL SERVICES FOR 132 CLIENTS

THE MOST COMMON LEGAL PROBLEMS WERE FINES, HOUSING AND MINOR DRUG OFFENCES.

LAWYERS PROVIDED A FURTHER 17 SECONDARY CONSULTATIONS FOR STAFF AT THE HOMELESSNESS ORGANISATIONS. WE ASSISTED THEM TO IDENTIFY LEGAL PROBLEMS AMONG THEIR SERVICE USERS AND REFER THEM TO IMCL FOR TIMELY ASSISTANCE.

A number of guiding documents were also created in year one of the project, including a Theory of Change, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and an Advocacy and Engagement Strategy to enable us to measure and show the impact of the work.

The project will be guided by an expert advisory committee and the findings will be provided to the Victorian Government to demonstrate the effectiveness and value of the integrated service model as part of the solution to homelessness.

## POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

FKCLC's merger with IMCL has allowed the [Police Accountability Project \(PAP\)](#) to develop a new strategic plan and theory of change. This will inform our casework, advocacy and outreach objectives. Our new strategic vision is that 'We are working towards a future where police power is reduced and regulated so that people have the freedom to be and become what they want'.

Our core areas of focus include: responding to systemic excessive use of force by police; addressing racialised policing; and advocating for the introduction of effective and independent police accountability and monitoring mechanisms; and responding to policing family violence harms, duty failures, and police perpetrated family violence.

As part of our racialised policing work, we delivered a significant increase in targeted community outreach programs, aimed at supporting young people to safely navigate the harms of racialised policing and criminalisation. We worked with young people and youth workers at community centres, alcohol and drug services, schools, and legal centres. This outreach increased community contact and trust, provided know-your-rights training, offered casework services and allowed us to better understand community issues of concern.

We also published a landmark report, [Predictive Policing and Young People: Discriminatory impacts of pre-emptive and racialised policing in Victoria](#). The report analysed predictive risk assessment tools adopted by Victoria Police, identified the corrosive harms of those practices and made strong recommendations for them to end. We continued to provide criminal law representation to people of colour experiencing racialised policing. We were pleased to be able to host training workshops run by Tamar Hopkins to guide criminal defence lawyers in identifying and responding to racial profiling and/or other forms of police misconduct in their casework.

PAP runs strategic civil litigation to address police misconduct. This last year we had six cases in the courts and we built or explored several other cases. We also settled our longest running case against the state on substantially favourable terms, providing our client financial dignity after many years of personal hardship.



Our Beyond Survival program is an integrated socio-legal project focused on the intersection of family violence and harms related to family violence policing. This project is a partnership with [Flat Out Inc](#) and the [Law & Advocacy Centre for Women](#) and is strategically guided by a network of survivors.

This financial year has seen a continued wraparound legal and social work service for victim-survivors; we instigated strategic litigation files targeted at core police accountability issues; strengthened our collaborations on survivor-led advocacy work to major public reviews; and developed training resources for the community legal and family violence sectors. The project had a training and advocacy focus on police perpetrated family violence and mis-identification of primary aggressors. Beyond Survival also conducted a survey of 270 family violence workers and community lawyers, among others, about their practice insights into key issues related to family violence policing.

### ABOUT NOUR'S STORY

The police stopped and searched About Nour\*, a young African Australian man, and found items they thought to be stolen. He received more than a dozen charges. About felt that he had been subject to racial profiling, and the evidence also suggested that police had conducted a 'pretext' stop, which means they were fishing for evidence despite not having lawful grounds for a stop and search.

A PAP lawyer acted for About to challenge the over-policing and criminalisation of people of colour. We successfully had all the charges withdrawn, arguing that the search was unlawful. About was glad that we were able to defend his right to be in public without unjustified police contact.

\*name has been changed

# Duty lawyer service, Early Intervention and Early Resolution Services

IMCL provides a variety of services for court users with family violence intervention orders (FVIVO) hearings at the Melbourne Magistrates Court (MMC). Court users do not always have the time or resources to obtain the services of a lawyer before attending a hearing for family violence intervention orders (FVIVO).

We provide assistance to court users before court through the Early Resolution Service (ERS). ERS is pre-court engagement initiative established during the pandemic with the Magistrates Court, Victoria Legal Aid and other Community Legal Centres to provide court users with legal advice and support before their court hearing at 10 court locations across Victoria, including Melbourne. Key findings from an evaluation of ERS show that: there is a high need and escalating demand for the early resolution model; it better supports services and court users; improves court user experience; and supports more efficient use of court time.

IMCL also has a duty lawyer rostered on two days per week at MMC to provide legal advice and representation in FVIVO matters, including those court users that have received assistance through ERS. Duty lawyers are essential and ensure that court users are fairly represented in FVIVO hearings.

Family violence cases are often complex and clients can have multiple legal issues that are yet to be addressed. IMCL lawyers can identify these related legal problems when they speak to a client for an ERS appointment or at court and provide advice and assistance on these related legal problems through our Early Intervention Legal Service (EILS).

## THIS YEAR, WE PROVIDED:

267 DUTY LAWYER SERVICES  
FOR 228 CLIENTS

210 COURT APPEARANCES

53 NEGOTIATIONS WITH OPPOSING PARTY OR  
DRAFTING DOCUMENTS

17 ADVICES ONLY

115 EARLY INTERVENTION LEGAL SERVICE  
FOR 65 CLIENTS

10 INFORMATION PROVISION AND REFERRAL

40 LEGAL ADVICES

40 LEGAL TASKS

25 PROGRESSED TO OPEN CASES

270 EARLY RESOLUTION SERVICE  
FOR 125 CLIENTS

7 INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

143 LEGAL ADVICES

105 LEGAL TASKS

10 CASES (COURT/TRIBUNAL + OTHER REP)



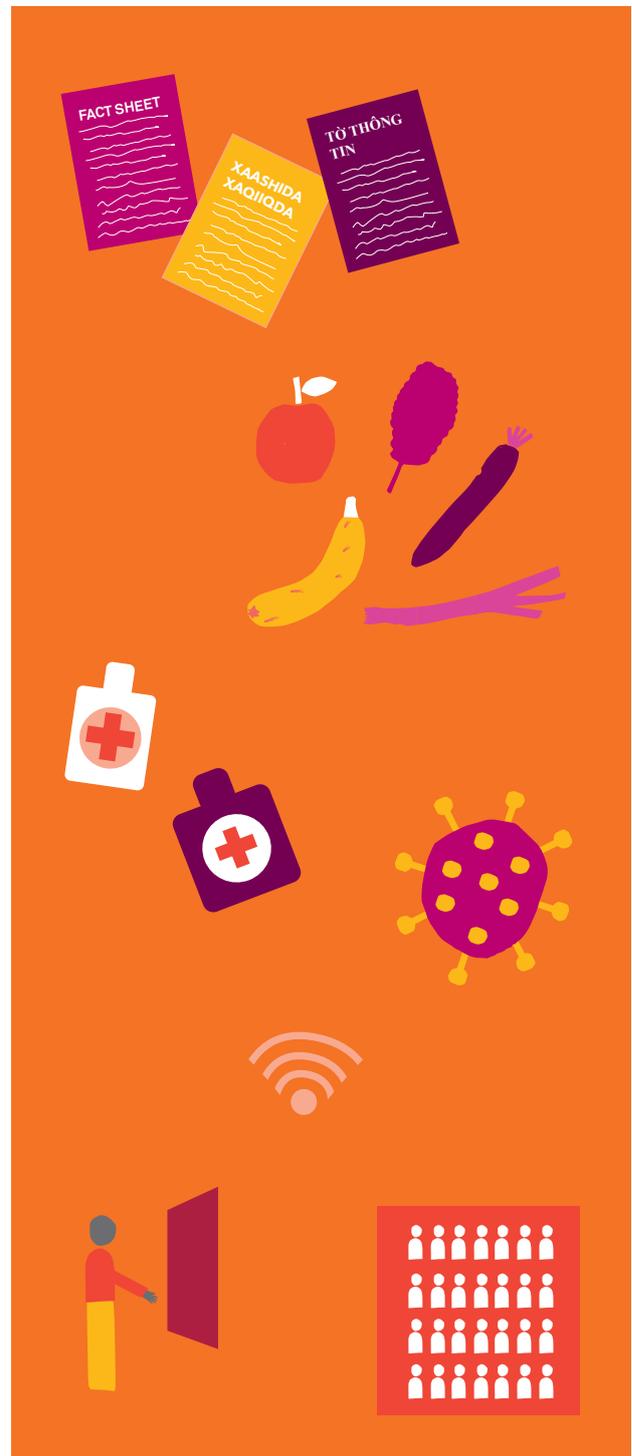
## Legal education

### COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEGAL EDUCATION

Legal problems are not always easy to recognise for individuals and professionals among our non-legal partners. IMCL provides legal education for our partners that is tailored for the work they deliver in hospitals, schools or homelessness services. On-demand individual secondary consultations and legal education – delivered face-to-face or through virtual platforms – can help our partners identify legal matters among their clients and to refer them for appropriate legal assistance.

IMCL provided legal education on digital platforms or face-to-face through the School Lawyer Program, which helped teachers to identify issues. We also provided education for students that focused on preventing legal problems arising or escalating, and knowing where to find help. The topics covered included work rights, tenancy rights, and rights when interacting with Victoria Police.

Our multilingual online legal education resource, [ishelp.org.au](http://ishelp.org.au), provided accessible information for international students living in Victoria. The platform was viewed almost 40,000 times over the year. This resource assisted students to understand their housing, work, employment and personal safety rights during the COVID-19 pandemic while students were unable to access financial support from the Victorian Government. The resource has continued to provide valuable guidance now that restrictions have gradually lifted and more international students have returned to Victoria.



# Law reform & advocacy



Informed by our client experiences, throughout the year we advocated for improved laws and government policies.

## COVID-19 FINES AND FINE REFORM IN PANDEMIC LAWS

IMCL has continued to call out the excessive COVID-19 fines issued and the impact the fines have had on communities experiencing poverty and racism. Our advocacy during the drafting of the pandemic legislation led to the inclusion of COVID-19 fine concession scheme backdated to include existing fines; broadening of the definition special circumstances and lowering evidential requirement to demonstrate the nexus between the special circumstances and the offending in the Fines Reform Act, helping to avoid people who experience homelessness, mental illness and other challenging circumstances from being caught up in the fines system. Coordinated work with the legal sector also saw amendments to the pandemic legislation to make it more accountable and fairer, such as removal of provisions which would allow the issuing of discriminatory health orders.

With the support of Victorian Law Foundation knowledge grant, through our Policing Health project, IMCL is investigating the distribution of COVID-19 fines, particularly to see whether racialised communities experienced more fines than other groups. Tamar Hopkins is carrying out this research for IMCL analysing Victoria Police data accessed by FOI for all COVID-19 fines issued in 2020.

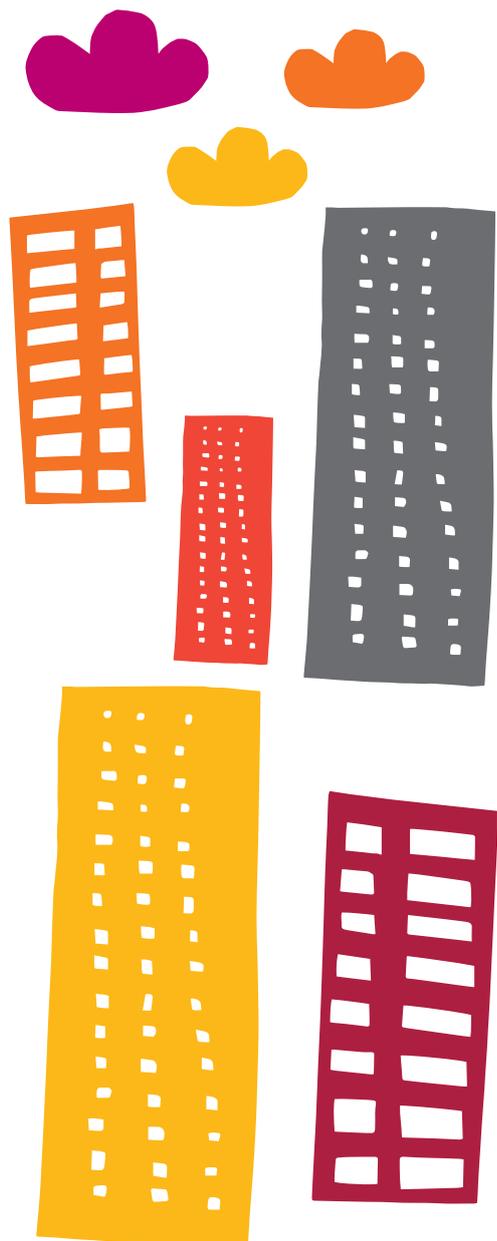
## INDEPENDENT POLICE OVERSIGHT

The PAP had a significant year in advocacy and coordinated a sector-wide coalition that is seeking independent police oversight and improved conduct monitoring mechanisms. PAP has participated in Government consultation on the police oversight system, coordinating the sector's participation and drafted seven papers in response to the oversight review and led a parallel advocacy and media strategy. Through these actions and other advocacy work we continue to push for an accountable stop and search data regime, and an improved strategy to identify and address racialised policing.

## PUBLIC HOUSING LOCKDOWN

IMCL condemned the immediate lockdown of nine public housing towers during the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020. At that time, the Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass reported the Government's actions were not compatible with the residents' human rights, including their right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty.

[We recommended an apology](#) be issued to public housing towers residents, but that still has not occurred. IMCL has continued and will continue to call on the Victorian Government for an apology that recognises what occurred was wrong and a breach of human rights. All the Government's positive actions since the lockdown have been overshadowed because they have not acknowledged that what happened was wrong and should never happen again.



## SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION REVIEW

Improving outcomes for tenants living in social housing has been a key advocacy aim for IMCL. We believe that everyone deserves a safe, affordable and secure home. IMCL worked closely with Justice Connect, West Heidelberg Community Legal Centre and Tenants Victoria on the Social Housing Regulation Review. We provided a detail [submission](#) and [submitted](#) a [joint reply](#) to the Interim Report. As well as a submission to the Government’s “10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy”.

We were pleased to see the increased appreciation from the review panel of the problems faced by tenants in social housing, particularly the different standards seen by community housing tenants.

The Interim Paper was a vast improvement to the positions provided in the discussion paper and includes key proposals such as developing a policy of zero evictions from social housing into homelessness, improving maintenance and disability policies for tenants, ensuring the Human Rights Charter applies to community housing agencies, and a single complaints system.

We would like to see the Government to make a commitment to implement reforms to create fairer standards and protect the rights of all social housing tenants. Additionally, our clients’ concern with the lack of effective complaint resolution for community housing renters was key to instigating the Victorian Ombudsman’s investigation into the Social Housing Complaints system, which may form part of the Review Panel’s consideration for its final recommendations.

# Measuring our goals

IMCL has helped people in our community to be heard and access legal assistance. The resolution to a legal matter can provide benefits to a person beyond the scope of their problem. It can reduce stress, improve wellbeing and relieve financial pressure. That is why our goal is not only to find a solution to a person's legal problems, but to address the life issues that caused them in the first place.

We monitor and evaluate our work to assess whether we are achieving these goals. In 2021–22, lawyers reported that of their clients with ongoing casework:

**62%** OF LEGAL ISSUES WERE RESOLVED  
and a further 16% resolved in part

LEGAL RESULTS WERE CONSIDERED  
TO BE **FAIR** IN MOST CIRCUMSTANCES

**25%** WERE IN A BETTER FINANCIAL SITUATION  
(including **84%** of clients with fines)

**63%** HAD REDUCED STRESS AND ANXIETY

**35%** HAD AN IMPROVED CAPABILITY TO FOCUS  
ON THEIR HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

IMCL provided accessible legal appointments by telephone for much of the year, however lawyers were able to see more clients face-to-face as COVID-19 restrictions started to be lifted. Client feedback indicated that our services remained accessible and useful:

**100%** SAID  
the phone appointment was  
convenient and accessible

**100%** SAID  
they felt listened to by the lawyer

**89%** SAID  
they understood their legal matter better

**94%** SAID  
they had more confidence

Many clients commented on our lawyers' professionalism and understanding, compassionate manner:

**“As smooth as could be,  
[the lawyer] was  
so helpful, so wonderful.  
She listened; she was  
understanding.”**

— IMCL CLIENT

**“So grateful that this  
service exists.”**

— IMCL CLIENT

**“Really helped with all  
matters, helped through  
all the hardship.”**

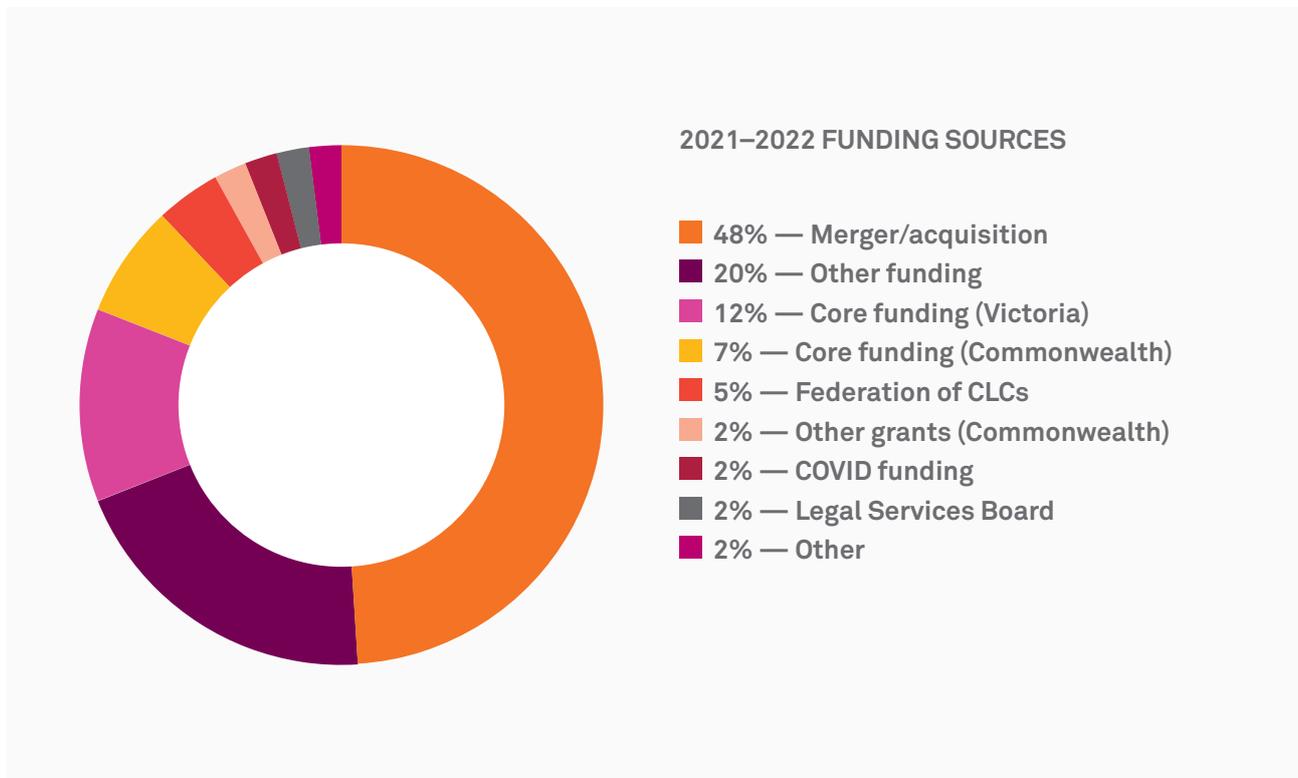
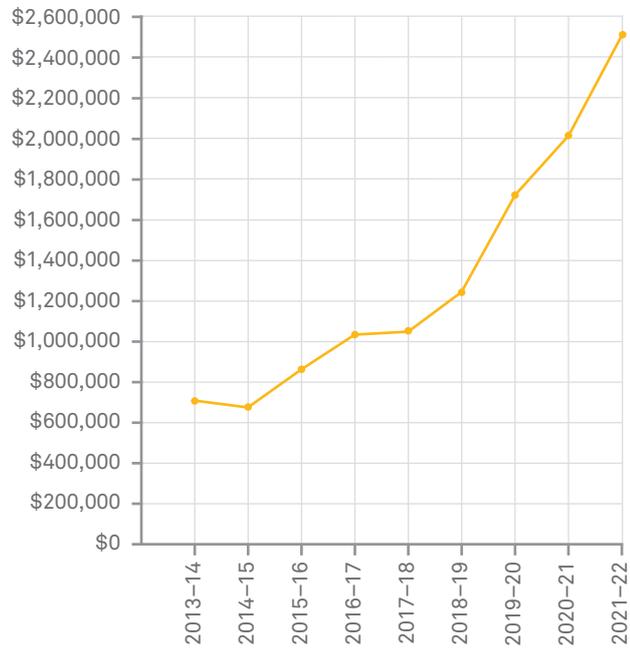
— IMCL CLIENT



# Financial report

The audited financial results for the 2021–22 year show our total income to be \$2,493,390. We are funded by a range of government, statutory, philanthropic and individual sources. This includes the federal and state governments, the Legal Services Board, the Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victoria Law Foundation, Lord Mayor’s Charitable Fund, Exchange House Services Australia and various individual donors.

IMCL’s complete audited financial report can be downloaded from [our website](#).



# Pro bono support

The COVID pandemic has stretched the legal system to its limits and exposed the limited capacity of community legal centres across Victoria. IMCL would not have been able to meet demand without the support and dedication of our longstanding pro bono partners. We have also had the benefit of establishing new relationships with pro bono firms Thomson Geer and Barry Nilsson, who have provided secondees that have helped us to provide further support for our community.

We thank our valued partners:

- **Moray & Agnew** who provided a permanent secondee lawyer Anya Saravanan that supported RMH and RWH patients with summary crime and family violence matters.
- **VGSO** who provided a full-time secondee for 14 years, with Georgia Suhren as secondee this year who assisted with summary crime and family violence matters.
- **Herbert Smith Freehills** who provided secondee Georgina Ingleton and has also provided corporate legal advice, including with respect to the merger, as well as a very generous financial donation which supported the development of our Housing Justice Project impact measurement frameworks.
- **Thomson Geer** who has provided secondee Yeon Lee, who assists with tenancy, powers of attorney and wills.
- **Barry Nilsson** who has provided Stephen Somerville who assists with summary crime and family violence matters, and Luana Harris who assists with family law and family violence matters.
- **Clayton Utz** a pro bono partner for over 21 years who has accepted client referrals and assisted with covering some of IMCL's costs.
- **Lander and Rogers** who also provided assistance with complex family law and employment law matter referrals.

A number of other firms have also offered their time, resources and expertise to assist with referrals in the areas of employment, family, wills, property, estates, taxation, criminal and family violence matters, including: Ryan Carlisle Thomas, Hall & Wilcox, Colin Biggers & Paisley, Johnson Winter Slattery, DLA Piper, MinterEllison, King & Wood Mallesons and Slater and Gordon.

## MARILYN'S STORY

Marilyn\* was with her partner for several years before everything changed. "He became controlling, aggressive and angry after we married," she said. The couple had a child together and the situation escalated.

"He controlled the money and I had to ask for permission to buy anything – even a baby blanket for our child." Marilyn became estranged from her extended family because of her partner's behaviour. "I became isolated, alone and could not voice my opinion. He would punch holes in the wall when angry and wouldn't let me go anywhere alone," she continued.

Marilyn was going to leave her husband when he took their toddler without her consent and an intervention order was put in place. "I couldn't see my child for three weeks. They returned to me in poor health and in need of hospital care," she said.

The legal battles continued, which resulted in the accumulation of more than \$20,000 in debt. Marilyn's problems mounted when she was diagnosed with cancer. "I became eligible for a Legal Aid grant, but they stopped representing me one week before we were supposed to return to court," she said.

Marilyn was turned away from multiple legal services before a social worker at Peter Mac put her in touch with Inner Melbourne Community Legal. IMCL contacted pro bono partners to assist with the complex matter. "It has been so emotionally draining and exhausting. I'm so grateful to IMCL and Barry Nilsson because the matter will hopefully be over soon."

\*name has been changed

# Future of our funding

In mid-2022 we were pleased to receive confirmation that the state government would extend our Early Resolution Service funding until 30 December 2022, meaning we can continue to provide critical before-court assistance to family violence list parties. Evaluations have already shown the value of this model and we will continue to work with Victoria Legal Aid and other service delivery partners to demonstrate its ability to improve court processes and client outcomes. We also welcomed the extension of our Community Legal Centre Family Violence and Assistance Fund funding. This funding will enable us to continue our early intervention and duty lawyer services, our police accountability criminal defence work, as well support us to deliver legal services to Carlton public housing residents through to June 2023.

In 2023, our Community Legal Mental Health Partnership Legal Services Board + Commissioner pilot funding will come to an end. Using the findings from this project, we have been working closely with the Federation of Community Legal Centres to develop an evidence-base and recommended service model for the inclusion of integrated legal services within the Local Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs, a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Mental Health. We thank the Federation for their advocacy, and acknowledge the excellent work of Simon Katterl. We will also seek to maintain our Community Legal Advisory Group, so that it becomes an embedded part of our way of working.

During the upcoming year, we will enter year two of our Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation funded Housing Justice Project 'demonstration project'. Using the project's Theory of Change and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework developed by an expert in the field, we will measure the project's outcomes and deliver a final report to show how the provision of generalist legal services supports individuals to transition from homelessness. We will use our findings to advocate for ongoing funding for this proven integrated practice model.

We will continue to vigorously pursue funding for areas of our work where sufficient or long-term funding is yet to be secured. We will unite with our fellow community legal centres and peak bodies to call for adequate core funding so we have a solid foundation from which we can sustainably meet rising legal need, as well as have the agility to continuously improve in order to deliver best-practice and innovative legal services.

We will ensure the momentum of our 1-year funding for public housing engagement will not be lost, by advocating for a timely state government commitment to a longer funding period. Without this, we know community trust may be lost, impacting the realisation of the government's positive objectives.

We will continue to promote the well-established value of our Youth Outreach & School Lawyer programs so the most disadvantaged young people in our area can go to school without being worried about staying safe, finding somewhere to live, or having to go to court.

And significantly, to strengthen the transformative Police Accountability Project and its state-wide reach, we will use its refreshed strategic plan to steer philanthropic funding applications.





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