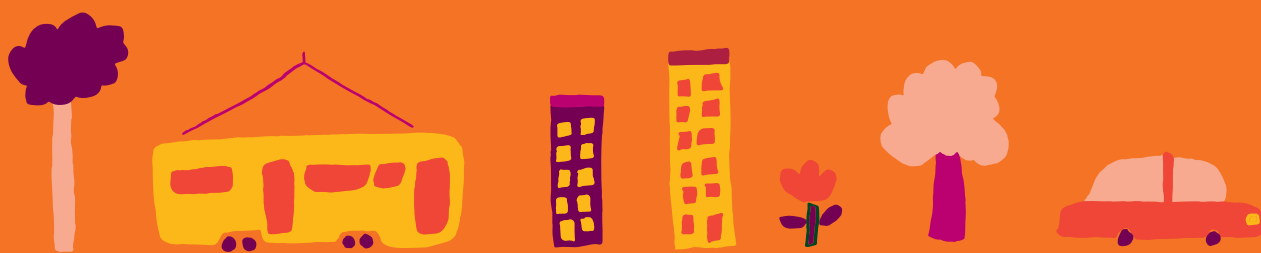


FILLING THE GAP



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.

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.

WHO WE ARE

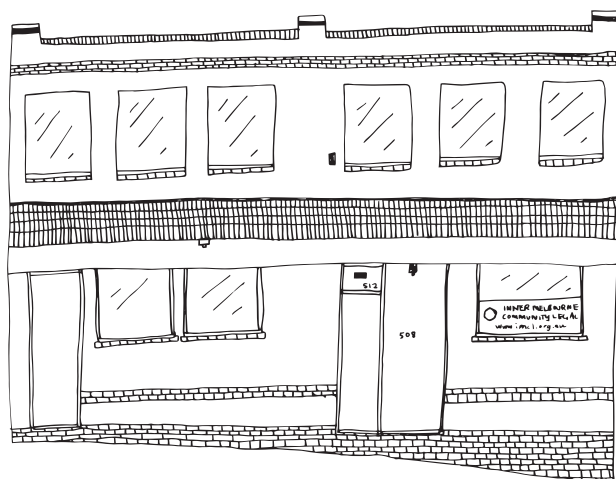
We are an independent community legal centre working for a social purpose, based in the inner Melbourne area. We are part of a large network of community legal centres working in local communities across Australia. Our lawyers are experts in community law, and part of a small, dedicated team of lawyers,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

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 respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin as the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands, rivers and skies within which we have the privilege to work. We pay our respect to their Elders and leaders, past and present, and acknowledge the continuing harm and suffering that colonisation has brought to the world's longest continuing culture. We are committed to playing our role in bringing justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and ensuring this is central to everything that we do. These lands always were and always will be Aboriginal lands - sovereignty has never been ceded.

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CEO report

This financial year marked the first full year of operation as a single entity following the successful merger between Inner Melbourne Community Legal (IMCL) and Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre (FKCLC).

In the 16-months following the merger IMCL has experienced substantial growth, with a 56 percent increase in the number of people we have helped during the last financial year. This demonstrates the benefit of amalgamation to assist more people and in better ways in our expanded catchment area as we move into the future.

Alongside growing our team and an increased ability to assist more people across multiple areas of law, the merger has allowed IMCL to improve our structure, systems and processes. As a larger organisation we can better support our staff to respond quickly and flexibly to address our community's legal needs, as well as to undertake systemic advocacy through enhanced policy and communications capacity. This ability was exemplified by our commitment to assisting our local public housing residents throughout the year. Our legal concierges connected with the residents deeply to better understand the types of common life problems they experience, and we worked to assertively to help them understand and protect their rights concerning the COVID-19 hard lockdown \$5 million class action settlement.

BELOW: IMCL team, September 2023.



This year saw our lawyers work especially hard to fill in the legal assistance gaps in our criminal justice and family law systems. Both our criminal and family law/family violence lawyers represented scores of people who were not eligible for legal aid funding grants and could not afford private lawyers to ensure they had legal representation. Our lawyers also prioritised working with clients who needed tailored time-intensive assistance, often together with other social, health and welfare professionals.

In multiple other ways IMCL continued to work through our partners and projects to increase accessibility to legal help. To explore new accessible service models that take into account our client's unique circumstances, we completed two pivotal projects this financial year. The Community Legal Mental Health Partnership Project (CLMHPP), funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, allowed us to help people in contact with the mental health system address their legal problems earlier in the process and prevent them falling deeper into the legal system. Recognising the value of our Community Legal Advisory Group established during this project, we have continued to engage the group beyond the project's conclusion, which will allow them to inform our work with lived experience input as an embedded part of our way of working.

The second project, the Housing Justice Partnership, allowed IMCL to embed in crisis facilities at Vincent Care's Ozanam House, and the Salvation Army's Flagstaff and Open-Door facilities. We reached almost 300 people experiencing homelessness. An independent evaluation demonstrated that accessible and integrated legal and housing services can improve outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and reduce costs to government across multiple service streams.

The findings from these projects add to the strong evidence base established by our sector for early intervention and integrated practice in a range of community settings.

Adding to these achievements, the Police Accountability Project launched the #PoliceOmbudsmanNow campaign, which called on the Andrews' Government to establish an independent Police Ombudsman. The Project also published a groundbreaking report that examined the use of racial profiling by Victoria Police

during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was widely covered by the media.

Our work is never done. With considerable unmet legal need across Victoria, community legal centres (CLCs) like ours are a safety net, and our dedicated staff are often the only lifeline for people who need legal help. Using our first strategic plan as a merged entity, its key impact priorities will drive our work over the next three years so that we successfully continue to reach the people with the greatest need and provide the highest quality legal help.

We warmly thank all our volunteers, secondees, donors, partners, pro bono organisations, and supporters for your contributions. You have enabled us to have a successful year, and we look forward to another ground-breaking year together. I would also like to extend a special thank you to our staff, who went above and beyond to ensure people with unmet legal needs can be reached and prevented from slipping through service gaps in society.

Finally, thank you to our board members for steering the organisation through another successful year: Caroline Evans (Chairperson), Jenny Si (Secretary), Nick Bubbs (Treasurer), Charlotte Ahearne, Shorna Moore, Daniel Scoullar, Joel Townsend, Tim Lo Surdo and Kenneth Cheng. Importantly, we thank and farewell Caroline Evans as she departs IMCL, whose contributions to the IMCL board for over seven years have been invaluable, including overseeing a successful merger and establishing a new board. We look forward to working with Daniel Scoullar who will be stepping into the Chair role from the start of the 2023–24 financial year and who brings with him extensive experience in advocacy and communications. We also very warmly welcome Elisa Buggy, our incoming CEO since September 2023.

— NADIA MORALES, ACTING CO-CEO

Who we help

SNAPSHOT OF OUR CLIENTS

In our first year following the merger of IMCL with FKCLC, we assisted more people on lower incomes in inner Melbourne and stepped up to make a difference in people's lives when no one else would.

A significant increase in the cost of living has compounded people's legal problems, financial stress, and exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic conditions that often make it difficult to access free legal help.

WE HELPED 1,622 PEOPLE:



What we do

IMCL employs three core streams of legal work to prevent people from falling through funding and service accessibility gaps. This allows us to reach more people that need legal advice and support during a time of unprecedented change, instability and stress.



Free legal help



SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR'S WORK

The number of people we helped increased by 56 percent in the last financial year, which was partly due to the merger expanding IMCL's catchment area. This allowed our lawyers to reach more vulnerable people in our community that cannot afford private lawyers. Our lawyers have also taken on more criminal, housing, family and migration matters. The life problems we assisted with included:

FAMILY ISSUES

- Parenting, child protection, child support, property and divorce

VIOLENCE

- Help to obtain or respond to family violence intervention orders and assistance with breaches of orders, Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and Freedom of Information

HOUSING PROBLEMS

- Evictions, repairs, transfers, bond and compensation claims, reductions and creations of tenancy in family violence situations

POLICING & THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Criminal matters heard at the Magistrates' Court, police complaints and related criminal defence, civil litigation and family violence casework

MONEY PROBLEMS

- Fines, referrals for debts to our embedded Anglicare financial counsellor

MIGRATION

- Visa applications, humanitarian offshore family reunion applications and citizenship applications

WE HELPED 1622 PEOPLE

WE GAVE 1448 INSTANCES OF LEGAL ADVICE FOR PEOPLE ON HOW TO RESOLVE A SPECIFIC LEGAL PROBLEM, WITH THE THREE MOST COMMON BEING:

273 legal advices on family violence protection orders (excluding Duty Lawyer services)
219 legal advices on parenting issues
125 legal advices on housing issues

OUR LAWYERS CARRIED OUT 801 LEGAL TASKS which included further assistance like making a phone call or writing a letter

WE WORKED ON 817 ACTIVE CASE FILES where complex legal matters required more intensive or ongoing support, including legal representation at a court or tribunal

WE ASSISTED WITH 157 REFERRALS to other community services

WE PROVIDED 109 INFORMATION/SECONDARY CONSULTATION SERVICES to assist other professionals to navigate legal issues experienced by the people they assist



NAVIGATING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The justice system can impact our target clients in harsh and disproportionate ways, which is why we prioritise criminal law as an area of practice.

Our lawyers continued to fill a state criminal law funding gap, which would have otherwise left people without adequate legal representation. These cases are primarily summary crime matters that do not carry a risk of imprisonment, and therefore render the person ineligible for Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) funding. This impacts a significantly high volume of individuals across the state, who find themselves unable to afford a private lawyer and would be forced to navigate the criminal justice system on their own. Many of these individuals experience socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation, placing them at greater risk of escalating criminalisation that only further entrenches their social exclusion.

The life circumstances of our clients demand our intensive support before, during and after matters are heard in court. This approach ensures they stay engaged with the process and receive the health and welfare support they need to avoid incarceration and achieve positive, sustained change in their lives. Throughout the year we consistently achieved fair legal outcomes for these clients by having unfair charges dismissed and securing sentences that either avoided a criminal record entirely or avoided a conviction.

The findings of our two-year Housing Justice Project showed us that through this integrated, interdisciplinary model, our criminal lawyers can get better outcomes not only for their clients, but also the social system. Case workers at Salvation Army and Vincent Care have made it easier for lawyers to remain in contact with vulnerable clients and provided them with a stable environment. The assistance provided by our housing partners is invaluable in assisting clients to remain engaged and supported throughout court proceedings. The support letters our partners have provided have also strengthened legal submissions at plea hearing. As an example, we tendered letters that resulted in clients being safely released on bail with a range of supports to address the socio-economic factors and marginalisation that impacted their offending.

SNAPSHOT OF CRIMINAL PRACTICE WORK:

WE SAW 309 PEOPLE

WE OFFERED 255 ADVICE SERVICES

WE OPENED 156 CASES

WE CLOSED 160 MATTERS

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

1. PROHIBITED AND REGULATED WEAPONS OFFENCES
2. ROAD TRAFFIC AND MOTOR VEHICLE REGULATORY OFFENCES
3. ACTS INTENDED TO CAUSE INJURY

OTHER AND MISC. OFFENCES INCLUDE:

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:

1. ADJOURNED UNDERTAKING WITHOUT CONVICTION
2. CHARGES WITHDRAWN IN FULL
3. DIVERSION

BOB'S STORY

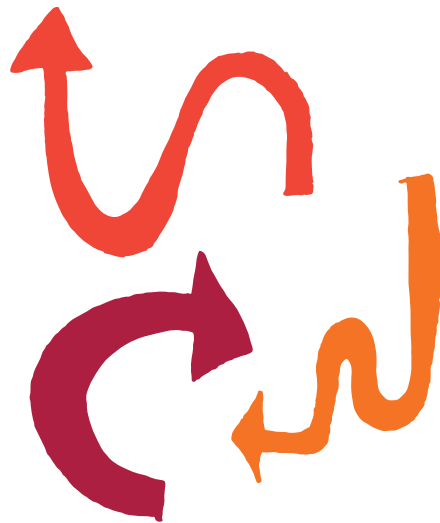
Bob* was homeless and lived in his vehicle to survive. He managed to save some money and decided to purchase several tools from Bunnings to perform work on his car, which served as home. He paid for the goods and started to return to his car. Bob was examining the tools he had purchased while he walked, when he was abruptly stopped by the police.

The police questioned Bob because they alleged that he was using the tools to menace the public. Bob denied the allegation and explained that he was simply examining the tools he had purchased from Bunnings. Bob was drastically overcharged by the police.

Our lawyers reviewed the prosecution's evidence and pointed out the weaknesses in their case in an attempt to have the case dropped. Victoria Police refused to withdraw the charges. We represented Bob at a contested hearing. Both sides presented their evidence in court, and the charges against Bob were dismissed in full, with costs awarded to our office.

Bob was relieved and happy with the result. He appreciated the legal support because he would have been unrepresented without it.

* Name has been changed



JARRAH'S STORY

Jarrah* is an Indigenous man who lives in crisis accommodation. He was out and began jaywalking, when he was stopped and unlawfully searched by Victoria Police officers. As a result of the illegal search, an officer found small quantities of drugs for personal use in Jarrah's possession.

The crisis accommodation referred Jarrah to IMCL, who found the court process to be overwhelming and anxiety inducing. Our lawyers were able to ensure Jarrah had adequate care and support in place as his matter progressed. IMCL liaised effectively with its case workers and was able to keep Jarrah calm, reassured, and engaged in the court process, which consisted of several hearings.

The matter ran to a contest mention, at which our lawyers presented evidence about the unlawful search. The Magistrate agreed in full with IMCL's submission about the lawfulness of the search and the prosecution withdrew all charges against our client.

* Name has been changed

ENSURING SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

Public Housing Estate Integrated Legal Service and Legal Concierge Program

The Public Housing Estate Integrated Legal Services and Legal Concierge Program began in October 2022 to address the barriers that public housing residents can experience when accessing legal services – particularly people from multicultural or multifaith backgrounds. This allowed more residents to get the legal help they either did not know they needed or did not know how to access. Another objective was to support bicultural young people in public housing to enter service professions, including the legal and social support professions.

IMCL and Moonee Valley Legal Service (MVLS) received funding from the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to train and employ young public housing residents as legal concierges – a group of four residents whose role was to raise awareness of and link other residents to their local community legal centre.

One of the concierges said, “Being onsite at the Estate is the best thing we have done. I met a woman who spoke Amharic and she was really happy to know I spoke her language. Having residents hear about IMCL in their own language makes the service more accessible.” Another said, “It’s really important to be out in the community and build connections.”

The concierges actively and innovatively engaged with the community to build awareness of IMCL through a range of initiatives and reach more people. This included weekly onsite outreaches and attending programs that run on the Estate, such as lunch at the older people's building and a cooking class at the North Melbourne Community Centre (NMCC). They worked with other weekly programs like the Big Issue Street Soccer Program, Co-health and their team to reach more residents. The concierges also designed and distributed culturally appropriate material about IMCL's services to the resident's letterboxes and co-organised an Iftar dinner with MVLS.

The concierges also ran successful wills Community Legal Education (CLE) with mothers' groups. IMCL saw an increase in the delivery of legal services to public housing residents following the CLEs, with more than double the number of tenancy services provided in two months compared to the previous six months, and more services provided on wills in one month than in the previous nine months.

During the first six-months of the project, IMCL substantially exceeded the combined yearly targets for both DFFH and DJCS funding streams, demonstrating the effectiveness of the program. It reinforced that CLCs will deliver better legal services to public housing residents if residents learn about or trust our services through culturally safe community engagement.

BELOW LEFT: Legal concierges helping public housing residents.

RIGHT: Legal concierge at a public housing estate.

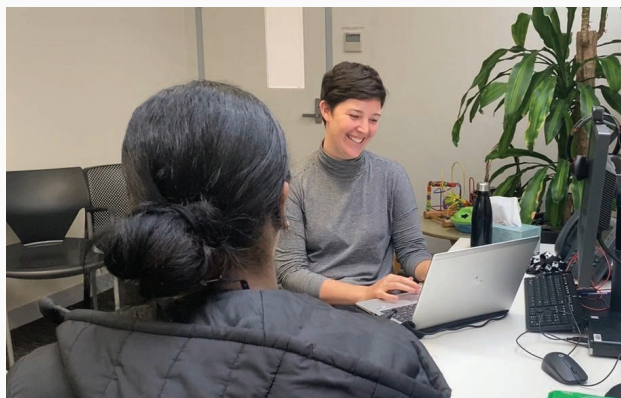


Public Housing Lockdown Settlement

In May 2023, the Victorian Government offered the residents in nine public housing towers a \$5 million settlement to resolve the class action over the COVID-19 hard lockdown in July 2020. The group members in North Melbourne and Flemington took legal action with the help of a private law firm because they were deprived of their human rights during the lockdown, including access to food and medicine.

Our staff identified that many public housing residents either did not know about the class action or the settlement offer; while some did not understand the terms of settlement or their legal rights. IMCL reallocated existing resources and established a rotating roster of lawyers to ensure public residents had access to legal help they needed, with no additional financial or human resources. The firm Johnson Winter Slattery provided pro bono assistance and broke down the complex terms of the settlement into plain language advice that could be disseminated to our clients. They were with us every step of the way as we helped 128 public housing residents understand their options, complete the paperwork and assert their legal rights. The residents may have missed out on compensation without our help.

IMCL distributed flyers to advise residents about the additional legal service and translated the information into 12 languages to ensure we reached the maximum number of public housing residents as possible, and no one fell through the gaps. We also distributed a voice recording of the flyer for people who are illiterate or have another disability.



ABOVE: IMCL lawyer Kate Fitzgerald assisting clients with their class action paperwork.

We continue to call on the Victorian Government to issue an apology for the hard lockdown to the public housing residents in support of the Victorian Ombudsman's recommendation.

Community Housing

Throughout the year IMCL continued to see many community housing renters who face eviction, compliance orders or inadequate maintenance of their homes. We worked hard to connect with these residents through other partnerships with other services, particularly with homelessness services (see [Housing Justice Partnership on page 21](#)). IMCL continued to engage with the Social Housing Regulation Review, which aimed to identify the regulatory changes needed to support the long-term interests of social housing residents. We continue to meet with key stakeholders regarding the review and remain involved with the Social Housing Sub-Committee of the Tenants Working Group to achieve parity of legal rights between community housing renters and public housing renters.

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

1. [REPAIRS](#)
2. [RENT](#)
3. [TENANCY TERMINATION](#) BY LESSOR

Private Tenancy

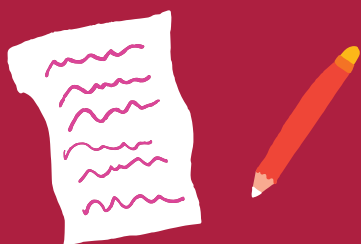
IMCL's lawyers have also noticed an increase in the number of private renters that need free legal help with rent arrears and other issues that have arisen due to financial pressures. One of those pressures was a significant increase in rent prices and a shortage of affordable homes in the last financial year. The DFFH's Rental Report found the Melbourne Rent Index increased by 15.7 percent in the twelve months to June 2023, which it said was the highest annual increase since the report began in 2000. The increase added further to the financial pressure on renting households amidst the current cost of living crisis and the economic recovery following the pandemic.

AAMIRA'S STORY

*Aamira is a single mother of four children who has survived family violence and bravely left her abusive partner. She managed to find safe and affordable accommodation. At a time when Aamira was finding her feet, the rental provider sought to increase her rent by more than \$300 per week. The increase was impossible for our client to afford.

Aamira contacted IMCL for assistance. Our lawyers challenged the validity of the rent increase. The matter progressed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and we appeared on behalf of the renter. The rental provider was forced to withdraw the notice of rent increase. This allowed Aamira to maintain her living arrangements without the added cost, and to focus on her health, safety, well-being and rebuilding her life. Though the rental provider has again sought to increase the rent, our assistance helped give Aamira the much-needed time to assess her living situation and the options available to her.

*Name has been changed



FIGHTING UNFAIR FINES

Receiving an unfair fine can cause people high levels of distress and significant financial pressure, especially at a time where the cost of living is rapidly increasing. Throughout the year we assisted many people who did not know where or how to access help, and our lawyers worked hard to reach those in need. We assisted clients experiencing hardship with their infringement notices and had more than \$127,000 fines withdrawn. Around 73 percent of clients that incurred fines found themselves in a better financial situation after our legal assistance.

Our lawyers have reported that the newly legislated toll fines withdrawal scheme has made a significant difference in the outcomes we can achieve for clients. We can now apply directly to Linkt and Eastlink for special consideration on behalf of clients that experience hardship, which has made the process simpler, quicker and more accessible than through Fines Victoria. The broader interpretation of hardship under the scheme has also helped more people.

Fines Victoria's assessment of applications under the Family Violence Scheme has also improved, largely due to the Infringements Working Group's (IWG) advocacy, which has resulted in better outcomes for our clients. IMCL became a co-convenor of the IWG in January 2023. We will continue our strong advocacy work in this area and work towards making Fines Victoria's special circumstances decisions final and binding so that vulnerable clients do not end up prosecuted in court. IMCL is also working to fill a gap in the Family Violence Scheme with the inclusion of excessive speeding fines incurred by perpetrators under the scheme. This will provide recourse for survivors where abusers incur fines under the victim's name as a method of control and abuse.

Recent legislative change, we helped advocate for, which expanded the definition of special circumstances to include a long-term test has also begun contributing to better outcomes for clients experiencing severe health, housing, and substance use difficulties, although greater consistency in decision-making is required from Fines Victoria in applying the new test.

IMCL have renewed our call for the all COVID-19 fines to be waived after finding that African, Middle Eastern and First Nations people were racially profiled when issued the fines by Victoria Police. We also have also noticed a lack of awareness around the concession scheme for COVID-19 fines, with only 209 applications approved under the scheme at the time of writing this report, which significantly reduces the amount owed, despite the simple process of providing an eligible concession card or evidence of visa status with an application for consideration. At a minimum, there must be more publicity and attention to make eligible people aware of the scheme.

SUPPORT OUR CLIENTS THROUGH THE FAMILY LAW AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SYSTEMS

People that experience family violence can often hide in the shadows of society because they are too afraid to divulge their experience. IMCL's staff continued to work tirelessly to find and support the victim/survivors of family violence as they navigated their way through the legal system to achieve safety for themselves and their children.

Our lawyers are specialists in matters related to family law and family violence due to the volume and intensity of the complex matters we take on. Our family law and family violence lawyers often work with clients for over two to three years on a variety of legal matters. We get to know our client's story and focus on building relationships of trust. These complex matters often require comprehensive wraparound legal and non-legal services to address the safety concerns of our client, assist with to arrange parenting arrangements, or assist with the finalisation of property or financial settlements.

SNAPSHOT OF OUR FAMILY LAW WORK

WE SAW 250 CLIENTS

WE OFFERED 246 ADVICE SERVICES

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

1. PARENTING ARRANGEMENTS
2. DIVORCE/DE FACTO SEPARATIONS/ ANNULMENT
3. PROPERTY SETTLEMENT



IMCL is increasingly dealing with matters where Victoria Police have misidentified the perpetrator of family violence and charged the victim/survivor or subject them to an intervention order. These cases present a range of complexities for our family law and family violence lawyers, which means they require a great deal of time, effort and intensive work to resolve the matter. Our lawyers often assist clients from the Intervention Violence Order (IVO) stage of their matter and continue to represent them until the conclusion of the criminal matter. By using our specialist knowledge of family violence, we have been able to present complex arguments to the Courts to avoid systems abuse and further traumatisation of the victim/survivor.

We previously outlined a funding gap identified in our criminal law service area. Our family law and family violence lawyers have also been required to fill another void in the system in circumstances where clients cannot afford a private lawyer but are ineligible for legal aid funding because they earn a minimal income. This leaves many clients at risk of being unrepresented and exposed to poor or unfair decisions made against them. We fill this gap by acting for the clients without legal aid funding, supported by pro bono assistance from law firms and barristers.

387 DUTY LAWYER SERVICES FOR 355 CLIENTS

EARLY INTERVENTION LEGAL SERVICES (EILS):

49 EILS FOR 29 CLIENTS

6 INFORMATION PROVISION AND REFERRAL

26 LEGAL ADVICES

4 LEGAL TASKS

6 PROGRESSED TO OPEN CASES

EARLY RESOLUTION SERVICES (ERS):

123 ERS FOR 84 CLIENTS

1 INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

88 LEGAL ADVICES

25 LEGAL TASKS

5 CASES (COURT/TRIBUNAL + OTHER REPRESENTATION)

IMCL's family law and family violence lawyers often identify related legal matters that we can assist with in-house rather than referring to another organisation. This is highly beneficial for clients who have built a strong relationship with their lawyer over many years and prevents re-traumatisation because people do not have to recount their abuse or long history.

Family law and family violence lawyers also work closely with our partners and family violence organisations to ensure clients are safe throughout the court process. This can include arranging for safe passage from the Magistrates' Court, or making applications for the suppression of information, and arranging security or safety rooms for clients. Our client's emotional and physical safety is IMCL's paramount consideration in all our work.

AMBER'S STORY

Amber* is the primary carer and mother of three children, who separated from her partner due to a long history of family violence. When Amber fled to the United Kingdom with her children, her former husband issued proceedings to have the children returned to him.

Upon returning to Australia, Amber was homeless. Her ex-partner had the children in his care, and he refused her access to them. Amber had to pay for a private lawyer using the funds provided by the Government under the Family Violence Flexible Support Package so she could see her children. Once she exhausted her funds, the private lawyer refused to act for her.

Amber came to IMCL without money, housing or contact with her children. She eventually got a job and was not eligible for legal aid. Because IMCL is flexible with our services, we were able to continue to assist her. Within four months, we turned her case around and got an equal shared care arrangement and helped her find housing near her children's school.

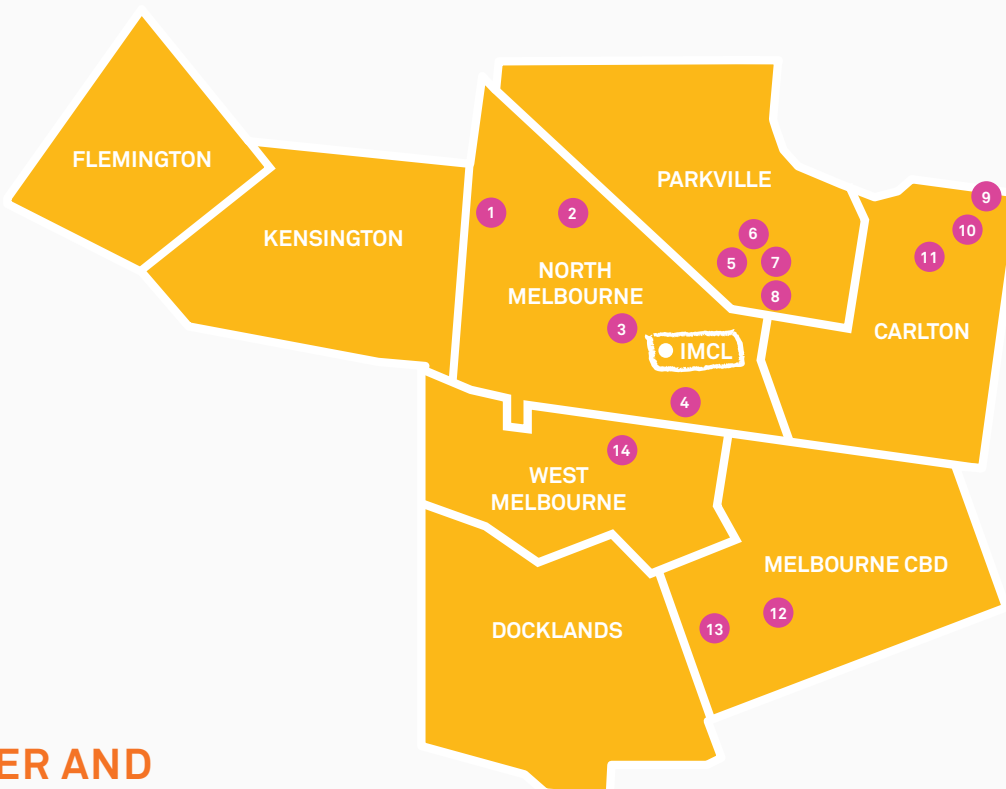
Amber wrote to IMCL recently and said, "I am so grateful to have you representing [me] through this difficult time in my life. There are no words to describe how thankful I am. All I can say for now is, thank you from the bottom of my heart."

* Name has been changed



Partnerships and projects

A consistent key to our success is the integrated practice service models we operate with our partners and outreach locations in health, youth services, education, housing and homelessness and court settings.



PARTNER AND OUTREACH LOCATIONS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 North Melbourne Language and Learning Centre 2 Ozanam House 3 St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre 4 The River Nile Learning Centre 5 Royal Women's Hospital (including the Allied Health Department, the Women's Alcohol and Drugs Service [WADS] and the Centre Against Sexual Assault [CASA House]) 6 Inner West Area Mental Health Service [IWAMHS], including a range of hospital in- and outpatient units 7 Royal Melbourne Hospital (including Royal Park Aged Care and Rehabilitation Units) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre 9 Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, including the Open Door (the 480 Outreach Hub) 10 Carlton Learning Precinct 11 The Drum Youth Services 12 Melbourne Magistrates' Court Family Violence Duty Lawyer Service 13 Hester Hornbrook Academy 14 Salvation Army – Flagstaff Accommodation and The Open Door |
|--|---|

HEALTH

IMCL assisted more clients than ever before across our three Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) at **Royal Women's Hospital**, **Royal Melbourne Hospital** and **Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre** (Peter Mac).

The increase in our service delivery to patients is a testament to the strength of our partnerships, relationships with social work teams at each hospital and the ability of our lawyers. Clients can be in or outpatients receiving medical care at Royal Women's Hospital, Royal Melbourne Hospital 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 violence intervention orders, child contact, wills, and powers of attorney.
- **Royal Melbourne Hospital** primarily saw family violence intervention orders, wills and powers of attorney, and acts intended to cause injury.
- **Royal Women's Hospital** most commonly saw registration, family violence intervention orders and child contact orders.

At Royal Women's Hospital, we were able to continue providing legal help through the Cornelia Program, which provides pregnant women that are experiencing homelessness or insecure housing with safe accommodation and psychosocial support. At Royal Women's Hospital, IMCL participated regularly in family safety advocates training, which helps train health care professionals to identify and respond to family violence in clinical settings. There has been a consistent increase in family violence cases each year among our clients from Royal Melbourne Hospital, with 56 percent 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 226 PEOPLE ACROSS ALL HJPS

120 CLIENTS AT ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

69 CLIENTS AT ROYAL MELBOURNE HOSPITAL

37 CLIENTS AT PETER MAC

WE OPENED 77 CASES

WE CLOSED 100 MATTERS

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION ORDERS

CHILD CONTACT ORDERS

WILLS/POWER OF ATTORNEY

THE TOP OUTCOMES ACHIEVED WERE:

DIVERSION

ADJOURNED UNDERTAKING WITH CONVICTION

56% OF OUR 266 HJP CLIENTS EXPERIENCED OR WERE AT RISK OF EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

13% OF PEOPLE WERE HOMELESS, WITH 12% AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS



AMIR'S STORY

Twenty-five-year-old Amir* was walking in Melbourne's Central Business District while experiencing acute mental distress. He stopped a person to ask for the time. The person took out their phone to tell Amir the time when he attempted to take the mobile. A struggle ensued and the victim was pushed to the ground. Amir ran away with the phone.

Victoria Police located Amir and charged him with robbery, theft and unlawful assault. Amir was referred to IMCL through our partnership with Royal Melbourne Hospital, who had been providing mental health support to him for almost 12-months before the incident. Amir was seeking treatment because his experience of migrating and settling in Australia had caused trauma and episodes of poor mental health.

IMCL was able to focus on building the best possible defence because our partners at Royal Melbourne Hospital ensured Amir was well-supported and remained engaged with both his treatment regime and the court process. Amir's doctors outlined his progress in a supporting letter that our lawyers could submit to the court. We could provide the Magistrates' Court with details of his treatment regime, Amir's commitment to the process so far, and the resulting progress since the incident.

Our lawyers could argue that Amir was an educated young man capable of contributing to the community with no criminal record and he had a good chance of rehabilitating in the community if the Magistrate took these mitigating factors into account. We were successful and the charges were discharged, no conviction was recorded, and a diversion plan was granted.

Amir apologised to the victim, was placed on a good behaviour bond and made an undertaking to continue his treatment. This has allowed Amir to focus on his recovery and get his life on track without the fear that the incident will be revealed to the public or any future employer. The outcome saved the community the costs of incarceration and ensured Amir could fulfil his potential.

* Name has been changed

MENTAL HEALTH

People living with mental ill health or experiencing mental health crisis are more likely to experience legal issues — including criminalisation — but there are barriers to finding accessible and safe support to address those legal issues. Legal assistance services are not designed with the needs and preferences of mental health consumers in mind. Mental health consumers routinely experience the law in contexts of involuntary treatment, punitive justice responses and rights violations.

In December 2018, IMCL received a multi-year grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner to explore and develop a specialised legal assistance model to people in contact with the Police and Clinician Emergency Response (PACER) unit, comprised of police and mental health clinicians who respond to callouts where people are experiencing mental health or situational distress. The underlying aim of the Community Legal Mental Health Partnership Project was to reach people experiencing mental ill-health or in contact with the mental health system who have legal problems early before the problems impact their mental health further and before they fall deeper into the legal system and become entrenched.

IMCL established a collaborative service delivery model with PACER partners from Victoria Police and Melbourne Health providing us with the opportunity to trial, test and learn from our frontline client matters when we were assisting people experiencing mental health crisis. As the project progressed, we identified that referrals were most effective when made beyond the immediacy of a PACER interaction, from in-patient and out-patient units. Following more assertive engagement with these units, we saw a marked growth in client numbers, including from John Cade, an acute inpatient unit.

Criminal law matters made up a significant proportion of matters where IMCL helped people, particularly in circumstances where we could assist them to avoid a criminal record or further escalation within the justice system. We saw that other less obvious legal issues can also escalate due to delays in accessing help, including power of attorney, tenancy matters relating to evictions for arrears or alleged behavioural issues, debts escalating, and employment law issues concerning potential dismissal.

Key findings of the project were:

- Legal assistance models and interventions in the context of clients experiencing mental health crisis require specialised operational principles, with multiple entry points. They must also be designed to enable self-referrals.
- Lived experience co-design is critical to get both mental health reform and legal service models right. Peer workers also play an essential role in improving referral pathways.
- To reduce adverse impacts and criminalisation of consumers when they do have contact with police, the Victoria Police Manual should be amended to reduce the instance of individuals experiencing mental health crisis from being charged for conduct that occurs during a crisis. Consumers should also be afforded the opportunity to speak with independent lawyers in advance of police contact within mental health settings.
- The mental health sector would benefit from additional training and closer engagement with the legal assistance sector, so that legal needs can be more readily identified by health care professionals as causes of and contributors to presentations of crisis and distress.

CLOSED CASE OUTCOME SURVEY DATA: ASSESSMENT OF THE LAWYER

69% OF CLIENTS EXPERIENCED
REDUCED STRESS/ANXIETY

53% HAD AN IMPROVED CAPABILITY TO FOCUS
ON HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

31% HAD IMPROVED EMPLOYMENT
PROSPECTS/CONDITIONS

15% HAD IMPROVED PERSONAL SAFETY

15% HAD IMPROVED HOUSING SECURITY

23% WERE IN A BETTER FINANCIAL SITUATION

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

1. **FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDERS**
2. **IVO BREACH**
3. **THEFT AND RELATED OFFENCES**

Project outcomes

Referrals come from multiple sources within Melbourne Health's Inner West Area Mental Health (IWAMH) which includes the John Cade Unit for acute psychiatric patients, PACER and two post discharge mental health support programs (Engage and HOPE) as well as CoHealth's Homelessness Outreach Mental Health Service.

YEAR	CLIENTS ASSISTED
2019 ¹	2
2020	11
2021	22
2022	38
2023 (1 Jan–24 Apr)	11
TOTAL	84

SERVICE TYPE	SERVICES PROVIDED 1 Jan 2019– 24 Apr 2023
Advices	90
Tasks	60
Cases (with court representation)	74 (45)
TOTAL	224

¹ Recording of specific referral source for Melbourne Health referred matters was not as advanced in 2019, so likely the actual number attributable to these pathways was higher.

STEVEN'S STORY

Steven* first had contact with mental health services in 2007 after an intentional overdose but it wasn't until 2021 that he was diagnosed with a mental health condition. Following an incident with his partner in 2022, Steven was charged with intentionally causing injury, recklessly causing injury and common assault. Police also initiated an application for an Intervention Order (IVO) against Steven for the protection of his partner.

He did not have a clear memory of what happened on the evening of the incident. Steven reports not feeling himself on the day of the assault but does not recall what occurred beyond sitting on a couch with police officers in attendance. He learned that an alleged assault on his partner had occurred, and he was taken into custody. He has little memory of what happened next.

The police assessed that Steven was experiencing a mental health episode and transferred him to hospital for assessment under the Mental Health Act. He was admitted to the John Cade Unit at Royal Melbourne Hospital and placed on an Involuntary Treatment Order.

Steven's social worker at John Cade Unit referred him to IMCL after police attended on him in hospital to serve an application and warrant for the IVO, also foreshadowing that he should attend the police station after his discharge to be interviewed in relation to criminal charges. IMCL spoke with Steven to give him legal advice and arranged to represent him the following week at the Magistrates Court for the hearing of the IVO.

After further contact from police, IMCL gave Steven pre-interview advice to prepare him for attending the police station, where he was subsequently charged with criminal offences arising from the incident. IMCL immediately started to gather medical evidence. Steven's treating team, with his consent, liaised with IMCL lawyers to provide information regarding his mental state at the time of admission to hospital.

After reviewing medical evidence about Steven's hospitalisation which showed that he had been experiencing a deterioration in his mental health in the weeks before the incident, and based on the clinical opinion that he was experiencing a significant episode of mental ill health at the time of the incident which led to his behaviour, his lawyer sought to negotiate with Victoria Police prosecutors to consider withdrawing the charges on the basis of mental impairment.

Police were unwilling to withdraw the charges over a number of months, despite providing a significant volume of medical material to prosecutions confirming Steven's mental state, requiring the matter to be adjourned to a contested mention. As a result, IMCL obtained a further psychological report which confirmed the view that he was experiencing a mental impairment at the time of the incident which led to police attendance.

Ultimately, police accepted the report and withdrew the charges against Steven, and costs were awarded to IMCL. This allowed Steven to focus on his medical treatment and rebuilding his relationships and ensured that he was not criminalised for conduct that occurred whilst he was profoundly unwell.

* Name has been changed



HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

It is important that people experiencing homelessness have access to free legal help to stop their life problems from escalating and to ensure they do not fall through welfare gaps. The Housing Justice Partnership allowed IMCL lawyers to embed in crisis facilities at Vincent Care's Ozanam House, and the Salvation Army's Flagstaff and Open-Door facilities.

The partnership demonstrated that accessible and integrated legal and housing services can improve outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This saved the Victorian Government more than half a million dollars in health, justice and welfare costs alone.

Our lawyers worked with 292 clients between July 2021–May 2023, providing 637 instances of legal assistance. More than 88 percent of clients were experiencing or at risk of homelessness, or otherwise had previous experiences of homelessness.

More than 77 percent of closed legal matters were 'satisfactorily resolved' or 'resolved in part'. Fines (84 percent), Criminal (78 percent), and Tenancy (72 percent) matters had the highest 'satisfactory resolution' rates. Clients also demonstrated improved knowledge of their legal rights, responsibilities and options, and had reduced criminal justice system involvement through the Partnership.

Nearly 70 percent of clients were reported to have reduced stress after engaging with the Partnership, while 17 percent had improved housing security overall, and 38 percent had physical and psychological health improvements.

The Partnership Evaluation demonstrated that an accessible, integrated practice model to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness improves both legal and non-legal outcomes for them, it also improves service system capacity through improved worker knowledge and skills.

129 CLIENTS AT VINCENT CARE'S OZANAM HOUSE

54 CLIENTS AT SALVATION ARMY'S FLAGSTAFF ACCOMMODATION, THE OPEN DOOR AND OUTREACH SERVICES

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE:

1. FINES
2. HOUSING
3. PROHIBITED AND REGULATED WEAPONS

THE TOP THREE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED WERE:

1. ADJOURNED UNDERTAKING WITH CONVICTION
2. ADJOURNED UNDERTAKING WITHOUT CONVICTION
3. FINES WITHDRAWN



How did the Housing Justice Partnership change lives?

“[They] explained the cops can’t arrest me because my matter is on hold while the Work and Development Permit is being investigated. I understand my rights if the police contact me. I learned all this from [Lawyer].” — **Client**

“I have made referrals for several clients; clients are always contacted really quickly and receive great support on site here.” — **Laywer**

“Before clients just saw being arrested and going to jail as a given. I’ve noticed a recent change in mindset from my clients. Now they recognise there are other things they can do.” — **Housing Worker**

“I felt respected and listened to...they understand me, understand addiction...I don’t feel judged or criticised for my situation.” — **Client**

“In terms of what we can do to reduce the harm the [criminal justice] system imposes, providing information on client rights and police powers is a big one. Stopping arrest is massive.” — **Laywer**

“Secondary consult and information sessions have greatly improved my understanding of client legal issues.” — **Housing Worker**

“It’s quite palpable the change in demeanour after their matter is resolved. They have a whole new outlook on life, they can work on other things.” — **Housing Worker**

“These one-hour sessions, all online, were very successful, the staff loved them. We want more education as opposed to just delivering the clinic.” — **Housing Manager**

“I’ve had more withdrawn charges in the first year at IMCL than in my previous four years. The ability to contest matters to a criminal standard is really important. In May [2023] I had four matters; three were withdrawn.” — **Laywer**

“The sooner we help them [clients] get to a Lawyer the less time they are exposed to the legal system and the less time their fines are increasing.” — **Housing Worker**

“Yes, better housing outcomes is the main thing I can report on. Avoiding eviction is huge. Also, indirectly through managing external issues like fines, clients can concentrate on their housing.” — **Housing Worker**

“[The Housing Justice Partnership is] the most integrated project we have working with us. We work together really well, mainly because we have familiarity with them. They get us and we get them.” — **Housing Worker**

“Getting legal help really helped, because before I was depressed, there was guilt and shame [about what I did]. The [Lawyer] helped me see it wasn’t just my fault.” — **Client**

“The lengths they have gone to are amazing. They have been able to work with some of most complex adults. I can’t say that for all the lawyers I’ve worked with.” — **Housing Worker**

“[They] really went in to bat for me, I feel like [they’re] in my corner. It’s a massive relief because before it was a stalemate.” — **Client**

POLICE

Over the past year the Police Accountability Project has built on its long-term advocacy, casework and outreach work to address racialised policing, family violence policing harms, excessive use of force, and the need for independent police oversight.

WE SAW 65 PEOPLE

WE OFFERED 60 ADVICE SERVICES

WE OPENED 25 CASES

WE CLOSED 30 CASES

THE THREE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED WERE: (BY ADVICE ONLY)

1. FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDERS
2. COMPLAINTS AGAINST VICTORIA POLICE
3. INAPPROPRIATE FAMILY VIOLENCE RESPONSE AND POLICE MISIDENTIFICATION IN FAMILY VIOLENCE (EQUAL NUMBER OF ADVICES)

Outreach worker and criminal defence for over policed communities

The Police Accountability Project's outreach worker engaged with young people and over-policed communities through external hubs and support services. We attended regular youth drop-in services and provided know-your-rights training to improve safety for individuals that experience contact with police. We also provided training and secondary consultations to support workers, assisting them to recognise and respond to excessive police contact experienced by their clients. Our criminal defence lawyer acted for clients who experienced unwarranted and targeted over-policing, criminalisation and excessive use of force. This case work feeds into and responds to our knowledge of systemic issues and advocacy work. This past year we have been involved in two police contact deaths, the over and under policing of people of colour, and wrongly charged family violence survivors.



The Police Accountability Project's Beyond Survival lawyer, in partnership with Flat Out Inc, provides a holistic family violence casework service. We acted for and supported victim survivors of family violence whom police have failed to protect or misidentified as perpetrators.

The program frequently responds to police perpetrators who have leveraged their position to get intervention orders against - and criminalise - their female relationship partners. The Police Accountability Project assisted clients through chain-of-command advocacy with Victoria Police, by defending and applying for intervention orders, and by defending family violence criminal charges. For example, we successfully defended breach of intervention order charges for our client whose police officer ex had reported their accidental meeting in a shopping centre.

Addressing systemic police harm via civil litigation and class action

The Police Accountability Project addresses systemic police harm through targeted personal injuries civil litigation in the Supreme Court. Often cases are settled before trial, this year we settled a case in which our client, a child, alleged a racialised and excessive-use-of-force police stop and search at gunpoint. Another case we settled was an allegation that a police officer had engaged in predatory sexual behaviour by using his position to groom our client and perpetrate family violence.

The Police Accountability Project also partnered with law firm Phi Finney McDonald to file a class action against the State of Victoria over the police use of capsicum spray against protesters at the International Mining and Resources Conference (IMARC) in October 2019. The class action seeks to address and set limits on Victoria Police's increasing usage of capsicum spray as a tool of coercion and compliance. It also responds to the increasingly militarised and chilling police response to public protest in Victoria.

System reform police oversight and complaints

Through the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner funding, we have greater staff capacity to advocate, and plan a service response, for the implementation of a new Victorian police complaints body. The Police Accountability Project continues to lead a coalition of legal and social service providers addressing the absence of independent police oversight in Victoria.

The Police Accountability Project also participates and responds in an ad hoc manner to external bodies and media in our areas of focus and influence. This included media on Tasers, protective services officers (PSOs) and police in schools. We were also involved in forums like that held by The Age to set its 2022 election coverage agenda, and we spoke with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent when they visited Australia in December 2022.



BELOW: Police Accountability Project's Advocacy Co-Ordinator, Ilo Diaz, at the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent meeting on 14 December 2022.





ABOVE: Doctor Tamar Hopkins speaking to the media about the COVID-19 report on 27 June 2023.

Working toward fairer laws and systems

Community lawyers are the frontline of the legal system and witness the systemic injustice. IMCL's advocacy is based on identifying the problems our clients experience through unfair laws and systems. We work in partnership with allies to strengthen our clients' voices.

Police Ombudsman Now

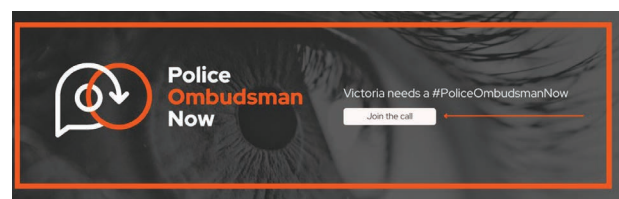
In October 2022, we launched the #PoliceOmbudsmanNow campaign through an open letter with 28 Aboriginal and other community organisations, which called on the Andrews' Government to establish an independent Police Ombudsman.

We engaged with government ministers, secured significant media exposure and launched a dedicated website and petition in relation to the issue (which the public were invited to join). We also held a forum in partnership with the Australian Lawyers Alliance, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Doctor Tamar Hopkins, and lived-experience advocate Emma. We will continue to work with academics in the field to call for change to police oversight.

Policing COVID-19 – exploring the impact of race in issuing fines

Combining IMCL's advocacy on COVID-19 fines and the Police Accountability Project's work on racial profiling by Victoria Police, IMCL received a grant from Victoria Law Foundation to investigate the Victoria Police data on the 37,405 COVID-19 fines issued in 2020.

We worked with researchers Doctor Tamar Hopkins and Doctor Gordana Popovic to publish the ground-breaking report, *Policing COVID-19 in Victoria: Exploring the Impact of Perceived Race in the Issuing of COVID-19 Fines During 2020*. The work was supported by a steering committee made up of the Police Accountability Project, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Youth Law.



The report found evidence that people of African and Middle Eastern appearance were 5.4 percent more likely to be issued with a fine that required questioning/active investigation than white people. The authors determined the difference in treatment is evidence of racial profiling by Victoria Police against African/Middle Eastern people.

Some police units (including highway patrols and public transport operations) issued up to 40 percent of COVID-19 fines to people of African and Middle Eastern appearance. Certain police stations issued between 10 to 30 percent of all the COVID-19 fines to First Nations People.

The report makes 20 recommendations, including the waiving of all COVID-19 fines; mandating public data reporting on who police stop, search, question or move-on; ensuring Victoria Police are not exempt from the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) in their treatment of suspects; and, the creation of an independent Police Ombudsman to investigate complaints about racial profiling in culturally safe and victim centred way.

Community Housing

IMCL's tenancy lawyers fight tirelessly for residents in public and community housing but the struggle for those in community housing is often much more difficult because the laws and regulations that hold community housing providers to account are so weak and inferior compared to those for public housing.

One community housing client has been told they must pay to remove the bedbugs that have infested their apartment, even though residents throughout the building have the same problem. This is a marked deviation from usual practices in high density dwellings managed by DFFH. This same client, who is wheelchair bound, was also stuck in his community housing unit for a week because the two lifts that service his building were broken. The residence is supposed to be suitable for people with disabilities.

Another client in community housing, whose son is disabled, and was unable to have care workers attend the house due to limited space. The home could also not accommodate the harness and other equipment to safely care for him. The disability modifications were not possible and yet the family had struggled for a transfer. After IMCL provided legal assistance, a transfer was arranged.

These stories are common and form the basis of our law reform submissions. Following on from an investigation which heard some of our clients' stories, the Victorian Ombudsman tabled their investigation into complaint handling in

Victorian Social Housing sector, which issued a call for change. Last year's final report of the Social Housing Regulation Review to which we contributed was delivered to the Government in May 2022, but over a year later still has not been made publicly available. While the Housing Registrar has reviewed its Key Performance Measures for community housing, there remains a lack of transparency in the outcomes for community housing renters.

Victoria needs more public housing and to strengthen the rights for renters in community housing and we will continue to fight to achieve this goal.

Fines

As a result of the sector's advocacy, the Victorian Government has steadily implemented the Fines Review Advisory Board (FRAB) recommendations which seek to improve the administration of the collection and enforcement of fines, streamline the review process, reduce the burden on courts, deter fine avoidance, and support the vulnerable and disadvantaged through social justice initiatives.

Through the IWG, IMCL has called for the implementation of binding enforcement reviews to round off the Government's work. Under the current system, if Fines Victoria agrees to cancel the enforcement of a fine, the fine is then sent back to the issuing agency to decide whether they will withdraw the fine, issue an official warning, or issue a charge and summons for the offence. If the issuing agency chooses to issue a charge and summons, the matter is heard as a criminal matter in the Magistrates Court. This can be a huge deterrence for clients to submit an application to Fines Victoria, as they do want to risk criminalisation. One of our clients, who is a migrant, was issued a COVID-19 fine incorrectly, but he was too scared to ask for Fines Victoria to review his fine because he feared that Victoria Police may take the matter directly to court, which could impact his visa status.

People should be able to have their fines reviewed without the fear of the matter escalating and, if the review by Fines Victoria is successful, that should be the end of the matter. IMCL, alongside Justice Connect, released a briefing paper: *Proposals to reduce the Magistrates' Court Backlog: through binding enforcement reviews*. With the Infringement Working Group we have also continued to meet with key stakeholders to push for this sensible reform.

Family Law and Family Violence

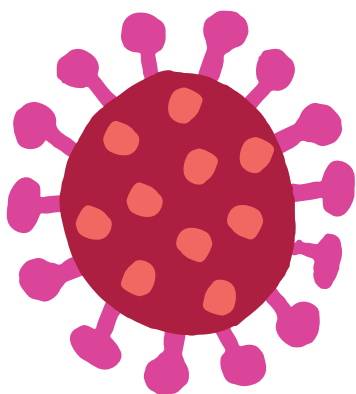
Cases in family law often take years, and clients face hurdle after hurdle for justice and safety. The Federal Government is amending the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) to prioritise the best interests of the children and place them at the centre of the family law system, which will remove the presumption of equal share parental responsibility that has been harmful to many of our clients and their children. To strengthen the bill, IMCL made a submission to the Attorney General's Department consultation on the Family Law Amendment Act exposure draft and the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Bill. The key intention is to enhance the family law system and to make the best interests of children a priority.

Additionally, we worked with the community legal sector to ensure the second round of Specialist Family Violence Courts were properly funded and supported, which is critically important to provide the effective duty lawyer service alongside Women's Legal Service and VLA at the Melbourne's Specialist Family Violence Court.

Long COVID

The social workers at the Royal Melbourne Hospital witnessed the struggle their patients experienced with long COVID. The fatigue meant many had reduced work hours or had to stop work altogether – medical expenses built up alongside childcare, transport costs for appointments, and ordinary household bills.

We made a submission with Royal Melbourne Hospital Allied Health to the Commonwealth Parliament Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections and worked with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to call for easier access to social security benefits, childcare subsidies and the reimbursement of travel expenses through a long COVID healthcare card.



Educating the community about the law

Individuals and professionals cannot always identify legal problems, which can delay their resolution and compound life issues.

IMCL provides legal education for our partners that is tailored for the work they deliver in hospitals, schools or homelessness services. This helps our partners to identify the legal matters among their clients and refer them to the appropriate legal assistance before those issues become unmanageable.

Our lawyers delivered on-demand individual secondary consultations and legal education – face-to-face or through digital or virtual platforms – to our partners. The topics covered included work rights, tenancy rights, and rights when interacting with Victoria Police.

We also provided legal education to the public to help people better understand their rights and allow them to make good choices. Our increased presence in the public estate towers through the Public Housing Estate Integrated Legal Services and Legal Concierge Program also helped educate people on how to identify legal problems, where to seek assistance and on topics such as wills.

IMCL has a heavy focus on delivering legal education to young people to ensure they not only understand their rights, but know potential consequences to their actions. The topics included group offending, weapons and harm minimisation, police powers and cyberbullying.

Our multilingual online legal education resource, ishelp.org.au, continues to provide accessible information for international students living in Victoria. The platform was viewed almost 20,500 times over the financial year. This resource has continued to help international students to understand their housing, work, employment and personal safety rights.



Measuring our goals

IMCL continues to help people in our community to be heard and access legal assistance. We work towards finding the best resolution to the legal matter our clients may be facing.

We know that resolving a legal matter can bring benefits for a person beyond the legal problem, in reducing stress and anxiety for them, relieving financial pressure and helping to improve their wellbeing more broadly.

We consistently resolve or partly resolve almost 80 percent of all clients' matters. Almost two thirds (62 percent) of client matters were fully resolved this reporting period, with a further 16 percent resolved in part – for example, where repairs were partially completed, a transfer is confirmed but not finalised before the end of the reporting period, or where some fines were withdrawn but not all.

AS A RESULT OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE, OF OUR CLIENTS WITH CASEWORK:

27% WERE IN A BETTER FINANCIAL SITUATION
(73% OF CLIENTS WITH FINES)

66% HAD REDUCED STRESS AND ANXIETY

42% HAD AN IMPROVED CAPABILITY TO FOCUS
ON THEIR HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

FEEDBACK FROM OUR CLIENTS HAS SHOWN THAT OUR SERVICES REMAIN ACCESSIBLE AND USEFUL FOR THEM:

92% SAID THE APPOINTMENT – BY PHONE
OR IN PERSON – WAS ACCESSIBLE

93% SAID THEY FELT LISTENED TO BY
THE LAWYER

86% SAID THEY UNDERSTOOD THEIR LEGAL
MATTER BETTER

71% SAID THEY HAD MORE CONFIDENCE
REGARDING THEIR LEGAL MATTER

“[the lawyer was] very
transparent from word go.”

“Had confidence in IMCL
and the legal advice.”

“[the lawyer] made sure I
knew what was going on.”

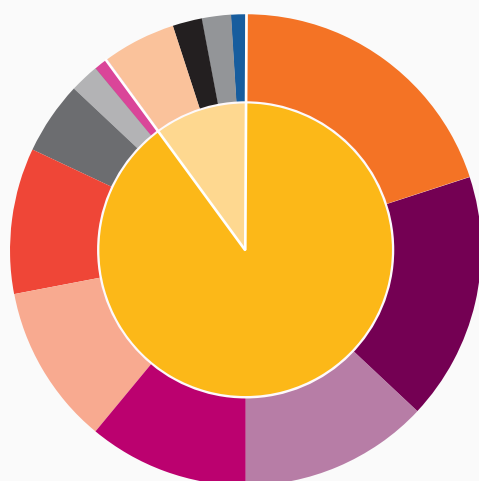
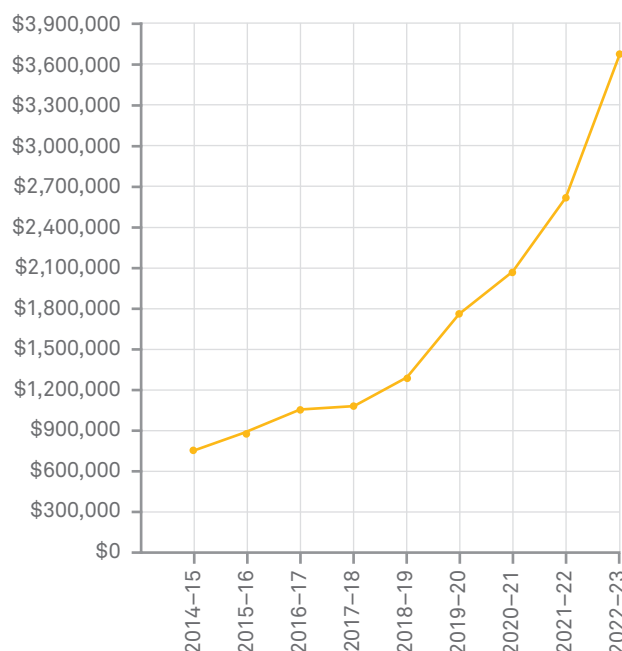
“I felt comfortable with
[the lawyer].”

IMCL is part of the Evaluation and Impact Community of Practice, a group of CLCs who meet regularly to share and discuss developments in evaluation within the sector and how to improve what we do. IMCL has also been working with the VLA, FCLC, VLF and other CLCs in the Sector Outcomes Pilot to improve our outcomes measurement through sharing knowledge on what works in the specific setting of the community legal centre. The pilot has been exploring what is feasible, appropriate and useful to measure the outcomes for our clients. We are progressively incorporating recommendations as they arise, placing us at the forefront of M&E developments within the sector.

Financial report

The audited financial results for the 2022–23 year show our total income to be \$3,674,724, which is a 47 percent increase on the year before.

We are funded by a range of government, statutory, philanthropic and individual sources. This includes the federal and state governments, Legal Services Board, Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victoria Law Foundation, Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund, and various individual donors. IMCL's complete audited financial report can be downloaded from [our website](#).



2022–23 FUNDING SOURCES

- 20.8%** — Federation of CLCs
- 17.0%** — Core funding (Victoria)
 - Department of Industry Grant
 - Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund
 - Victoria Law Foundation
 - Brotherhood of St Laurence
 - Hester Hornbrook Academy SLP
 - Moonee Valley Legal Service
- 13%** — Other funding
 - Department of Industry Grant
 - Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund
 - Victoria Law Foundation
 - Brotherhood of St Laurence
 - Hester Hornbrook Academy SLP
 - Moonee Valley Legal Service
- 11.5%** — Core funding (Commonwealth)
- 10.9%** — Other grants (Victoria) (CLC FVA / ERS / Victims legal Service / Merger via VLA)
- 9.6%** — Other grants (Commonwealth) (HJP Via VLA)
- 5.0%** — Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program
- 2.1%** — Department of Justice (includes Public Housing)
- 0.3%** — City of Melbourne
- Subtotal 90.2%**
- 4.6%** — Other revenue, adjustments to prior years, MALS Auspice, La Trobe
- 2.3%** — Costs recovered + Salaries reimbursed + PAP Litigation
- 1.9%** — Donations
- 1.0%** — Interest received
- Subtotal 9.8%**
- TOTAL 100%**

Thank you to our partners

IMCL could not have met service demand without our incredible funders (listed opposite), dedicated pro bono partners and the support of donors.

A special thank you to the Wallace Scott Trust Fund for a \$10,000 donation to the PAP in memory of Scott Wallace, who established the trust to support victims of police violence, harassment and mistreatment, and to fund programs that are dedicated to this cause. The PAP would also like to thank Debbie Jacobs, who continues to support the project with generous donations.

We would also like to extend a special thank you to Johnson Winter Slattery for their assistance with the public housing towers class action settlement. Our relationship with the law firm began in 2021, when they began assisting IMCL to understand how group members could benefit from the class action. Over a three-year period, Johnson Winter Slattery continued to work with us, which culminated in them providing detailed advice on the settlement. We were able to assist 128 clients to understand their options in language because of the law firm's assistance, and to provide access to practical help including how to complete forms and provide information to the scheme administrator. They also helped IMCL to understand what practical steps we could take with the plaintiff firm to secure extensions of deadlines. Without their persistence and dedication, we would not have been able to provide timely and effective access to legal help for affected residents.



We would also like to thank our other valued pro bono partners including:

- **William Roberts Lawyers** who supported Senior Associate Joseph Braverman to provide advice to group members of the public housing towers class action and assisted residents to draft their objections to the proposed settlement.
- **Robinson Gill Lawyers** for funding the #PoliceOmbudsmanNow website that has enabled the Police Accountability Project to launch a petition, share resources and information, and provide the public with an opportunity to join the call for police accountability.
- **Phi Finney McDonald** for partnering with the Police Accountability Project to file and run the capsicum spray class action against the Victorian State Government at the Supreme Court of Victoria.
- **Moray & Agnew** who fund an ongoing secondee role within our organisation, substantially adding to our overall legal capacity.
- **Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO)** who provided a full-time secondee to IMCL for the 15th year, which allowed IMCL to address more summary crime and family violence matters
- **Herbert Smith Freehills** who provided secondee lawyers and assisted IMCL with internal legal advice
- **Thomson Geer** who provided IMCL with secondee lawyers
- **Barry Nilsson** who provided IMCL with secondee lawyers
- **Clayton Utz** who assisted IMCL with internal legal advice and took on several referral matters
- **Lander and Rogers** who also assisted IMCL with internal legal advice and took on several referral matters
- **Slater and Gordon** who have assisted with several referral matters, including matters at the Coroners Court of Victoria
- **West Carr Harvey** who assisted IMCL lawyers with a taxation matter.

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