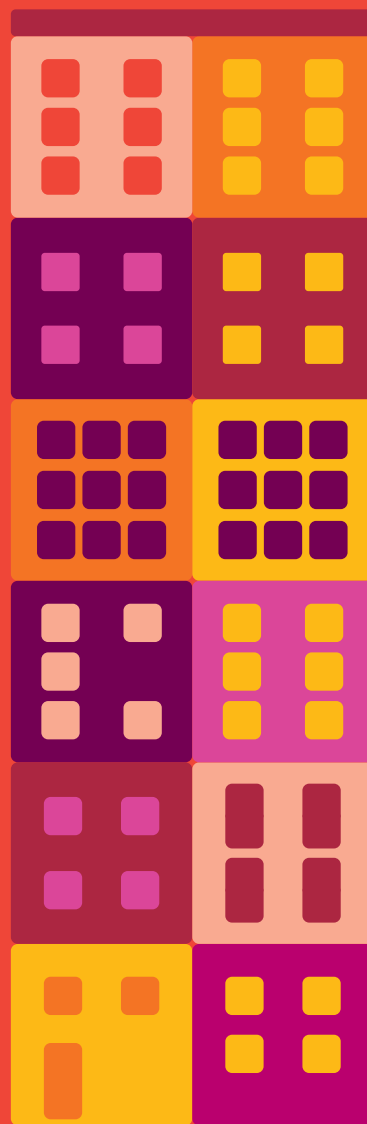
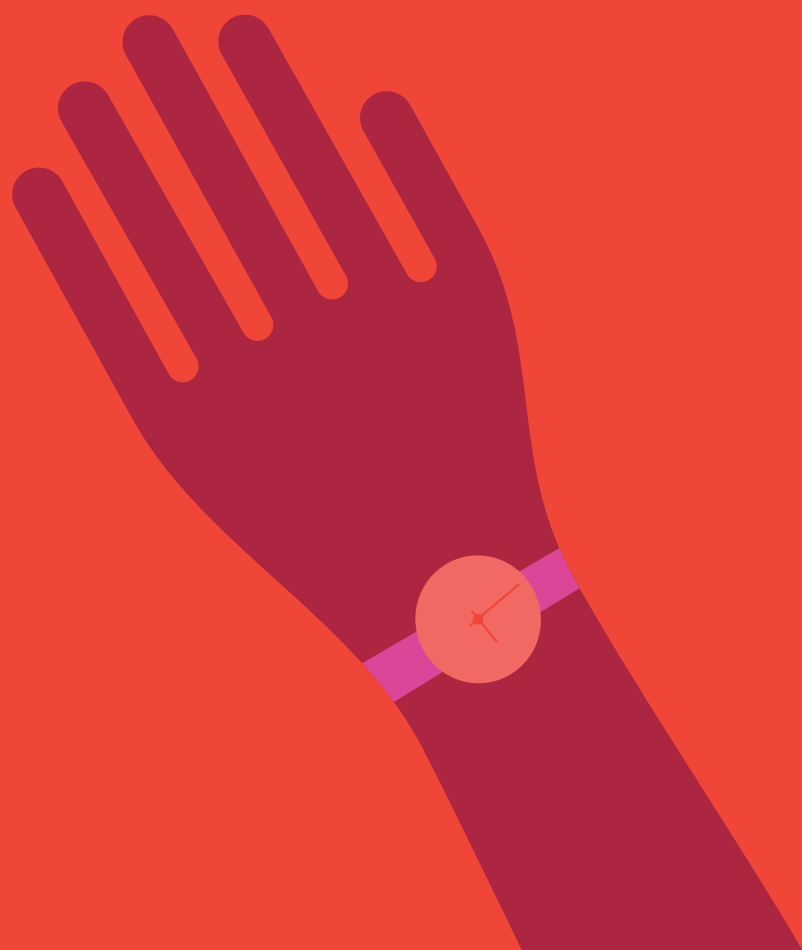


# Elevating Voices



## WHO WE ARE

We are an independent community legal centre based in the inner Melbourne area. Our staff and partners assist clients who experience, or are at risk of, chronic or acute legal crises. IMCL's clients live within an unjust system in which they experience complex forms of social and economic disadvantage and inequality and face structural barriers to accessing justice.

## OUR VISION

We are working towards a future where systemic injustices that affect our target clients are recognised and addressed.

## OUR OBJECTIVE

To create a just society by building fairness and wellbeing in our local community through the legal system.

## WHAT WE DO

- Specialised Legal Services
- Community and Integrated Partnerships
- Law Reform and Strategic Advocacy

## PRIORITIES

### **Public and community housing renters:**

Public and community housing residents have greater access to legal help and improved health, safety and security in their housing.

### **People Experiencing Over and Under Policing:**

People and communities experiencing police misconduct or duty failures have access to legal and advocacy services that specialise in addressing individual and systemic policing harms.

### **People with Mental Illness and AOD-related**

**Challenges:** People with acute or chronic mental illness or who engage in drug use have access to safe and appropriate legal help and experience fairer legal outcomes.

### **People Falling through Legal Service Gaps:**

People who are ineligible for legal aid but cannot afford private legal support have access to tailored and intensive free legal help in criminal and family law and experience fairer legal outcomes.

### **People Experiencing Family Distress and**

**Violence:** People affected by family violence and family conflict have access to safer and more secure outcomes through holistic service provision.

## 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.

# Contents

---

<b>CHAIRPERSON AND CEO REPORT</b>	<b>4</b>
A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN AND STRONGER SUPPORT FOR OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES	<b>4</b>
LOOKING FORWARD	<b>5</b>
<b>WHO WE HELP</b>	<b>6</b>
SNAPSHOT OF OUR CLIENTS	<b>6</b>
<b>WHAT WE DO</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FREE LEGAL HELP</b>	<b>8</b>
SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR'S WORK	<b>8</b>
<b>NAVIGATING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PROTECTING SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE HOUSING</b>	<b>10</b>
PUBLIC HOUSING	<b>10</b>
COMMUNITY HOUSING	<b>12</b>
<b>FIGHTING UNFAIR FINES</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH THE FAMILY LAW SYSTEM</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>PARTNERSHIPS AND PROJECTS</b>	<b>16</b>
PARTNER AND OUTREACH LOCATIONS	<b>16</b>
HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS	<b>17</b>
HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING JUSTICE	<b>18</b>
EDUCATION JUSTICE	<b>20</b>
POLICING JUSTICE	<b>21</b>
<b>WORKING TOWARD FAIRER LAWS AND SYSTEMS</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY ABOUT THE LAW</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>MEASURING OUR GOALS</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>FINANCIAL REPORT</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>THANK YOU FOR THE SUPPORT</b>	<b>27</b>

# Chairperson and CEO report

## A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN AND STRONGER SUPPORT FOR OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

This year IMCL adopted a new strategic plan and redoubled our efforts to support local community members through high quality legal support and strategic advocacy.

Key to this was the renewal of our Kensington office, creating new partnerships in our expanded service catchment, as well as the development of our 2024-27 Strategic Impact Plan.

Developed together with staff and the board, our bold and ambitious plan tackles major justice and inequality issues facing Victorians. As an organisation, we embrace complex policy issues and systems, explicit in our purpose and the social change we seek to achieve.

After careful analysis of community need, our strengths and capacity to influence, our Strategic Impact Plan sets out the social change we believe we can achieve for five priority community groups:

1. Greater access to legal help and improved health, safety and security in their housing for **public and community housing renters**.
2. Access to legal and advocacy services that specialise in addressing individual and systemic policing harm for **over and under policed people and communities experiencing police misconduct or duty failures**.
3. Access to safe and appropriate legal help and fairer legal outcomes for **people with acute or chronic mental illness or who engage in drug use**.
4. Access to tailored and intensive free legal help and fairer legal outcomes for **people falling through criminal and family law legal service gaps** because they are ineligible for legal aid but cannot afford private lawyers.
5. Access to safer and more secure outcomes through holistic service provision for **people affected by family violence and family conflict**.

Throughout the year we began to take steps towards achieving these goals.

We undertook complex and high-profile strategic litigation to challenge unfair policies and processes in support of human rights for public housing tenants. Our public housing tower demolition class action was an important piece of work, building on our previous work around COVID lockdowns and our ongoing litigation against Victoria Police for excessive use of capsicum spray initiated in 2019.

Throughout the year we solidified our position as leading advocates across a broad range of issues. We shone a light on the inferiority of legal rights within community housing, created legal step-changes in infringements, drove police accountability and calls for independent oversight and took on the challenge of identifying and positing solutions for the over representation of groups such as young people and those experiencing mental ill-health within the criminal justice system.

Although not always as publicly visible, our broad legal information, advice, casework and representation assistance for individuals continued to be a central pillar of our annual work.

Our specialist legal practice provided scores of people with access to justice, while at the same time helping them understand the interplay between their experiences and the often unfair and poorly operating laws and systems that govern our lives. In this way, none of our work was siloed, happening in isolation from other areas of legal practice or policy reform.

## LOOKING FORWARD

With clear impact priorities, the pathway for our work ahead is clear. We will focus on initiatives that lead to improved and sustained life outcomes for our clients that steer them away from the justice system and towards health and social welfare assistance, while concurrently reducing government service costs.

We will:

- Push for safe, secure and sustainable housing for those at the most acute end of housing instability, including by expanding our social housing practice and working to obtain ongoing funding for our positively evaluated Housing Justice Project with homelessness services.
- Expose and target discriminatory and heavy-handed policing and other forms of misconduct, especially among black and brown communities, protesters and people experiencing family violence.
- Pursue initiatives aimed at reducing the criminalisation of young people and those experiencing mental ill-health, alcohol and other drugs by working to change prosecutorial practices and elevate health and other social responses in partnership with schools and health services, consistent with the findings of our research and project evaluations.
- Provide tailored, intensive wraparound help to those not adequately served by legal aid service guidelines, particularly in criminal and family law and intersecting areas of practice such as migration law.
- Harness new family law amendments to reduce the incidence of systems abuse by users of violence.

As the costs of living increase and the need for services becomes more acute, we will actively contribute to sector-wide funding efforts aimed at meeting the escalating demand for our services by ensuring we can maintain an adequately resourced and supported workforce, and continue our proven model of integrated, intensive and wraparound legal help.

We warmly thank all of our talented and dedicated staff, volunteers, funding bodies and supporters for their commitment to our work this year and beyond. It goes without saying that we would not be able to achieve our goals without you.

— DANIEL SCOLLAR, CHAIR  
— NADIA MORALES, ACTING CEO

“I would like to thank IMCL. You changed my life.”

“I don’t have the words to express my gratitude.”








“(Your training) empowers us to better support our vulnerable clients.”

“A fantastic outcome for me.”

# Who we help

## SNAPSHOT OF OUR CLIENTS

Of the 1692 people we helped this year:

 <p><b>81%</b> EXPERIENCED FINANCIAL DISADVANTAGE</p>	<p><b>49%</b> WERE BORN OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA (FROM 97 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES) TOP 3: ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA, CHINA</p> 
 <p><b>62%</b> FACED MORE THAN ONE BARRIER TO ACCESSING LEGAL HELP</p> <p><b>39%</b> FACED MORE THAN TWO BARRIERS TO ACCESSING LEGAL HELP</p>	<p><b>44%</b> WERE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY (OF WHICH 32% HAD A PSYCHOLOGICAL DISABILITY)</p> 
	<p><b>44%</b> WERE IMPACTED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE</p> 
 <p><b>54%</b> IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE</p> <p><b>40%</b> IDENTIFIED AS MALE</p> <p><b>6%</b> IDENTIFIED AS NEITHER OR DID NOT STATE A GENDER</p>	<p><b>30%</b> SPOKE A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME TOP 3: SOMALI, ARABIC, VIETNAMESE</p> 
	<p><b>18%</b> EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS AND A FURTHER 9% WERE AT RISK</p> 

## What we do

IMCL employs three areas of strategic activity to achieve our goals:

- free specialised legal services
- community and integrated partnerships
- law reform and strategic advocacy.

### SPECIALISED LEGAL SERVICES

We provide specialist wrap-around legal help that:

- Supports individual and family safety.
- Provides housing security.
- Helps us to provide holistic assistance to individuals to achieve long lasting change in their lives.
- Minimise the adverse impact of criminal charges, fines and harmful policing.

**MORE INFORMATION:**  
[page 8](#)

### COMMUNITY AND INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIPS

- We adopt a whole person approach to help with legal and non-legal needs.
- We collaborate with community partners to engage with our clients when they are using critical care services so we can build trust and reach people who may not otherwise seek legal help.
- We achieve this through a combination of co-location, legal education and secondary consultations.
- We establish and strengthen education justice, housing justice and health justice partnerships.

**MORE INFORMATION:**  
[page 16](#)

### LAW REFORM AND STRATEGIC ADVOCACY

- We listen to our clients and their communities to elevate their voices and speak boldly about the need for change to reduce the impact of unfair laws and policies.

**MORE INFORMATION:**  
[page 22](#)

# Free legal help

## SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR'S WORK

We assisted people with various life problems including:

### FAMILY ISSUES

- parenting
- child protection
- child support
- property
- divorce.

### VIOLENCE

- help to obtain or respond to family violence intervention orders
- assistance with breaches of orders
- Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal
- freedom of information.

### HOUSING PROBLEMS

- public housing
- 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
- family violence casework.

### MONEY PROBLEMS

- fines
- referrals for debts to our embedded Anglicare financial counsellor.

### MIGRATION

- visa applications
- humanitarian offshore family reunion applications
- citizenship applications.

WE HELPED 1692 PEOPLE WITH LEGAL ASSISTANCE ENCOMPASSING information, minor tasks, advice, casework and court representation

WE GAVE 1522 INSTANCES OF LEGAL ADVICE for people on how to resolve a specific legal problem, with the three most common being: 710 family violence intervention orders (including 508 Duty Lawyer services) 141 parenting issues 208 housing issues

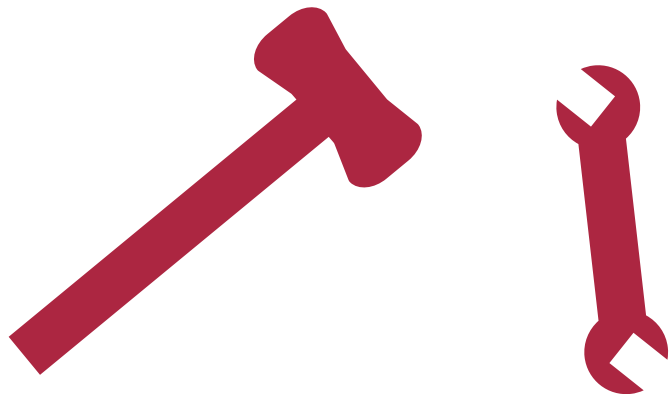
OUR LAWYERS CARRIED OUT 863 LEGAL TASKS to bolster people's ability to self-help, which included further assistance like making a phone call or writing a letter

WE WORKED ON 769 ACTIVE CASE FILES where complex legal matters required more intensive or ongoing support, including legal representation at a court or tribunal. The most frequent casework was for:

- criminal matters, especially theft, road/traffic offences and acts intended to cause injury
- fines
- tenancy matters and family violence orders

WE ASSISTED WITH 195 REFERRALS TO OTHER COMMUNITY SERVICES

WE PROVIDED 74 INFORMATION/SECONDARY CONSULTATION SERVICES to assist other professionals to navigate legal issues experienced by the people they assist





# Navigating the criminal justice system

Our clients typically experience complex forms of social and economic disadvantage, inequality and structural barriers to accessing justice. It is accepted that the system routinely criminalises people instead of rehabilitating them. IMCL has represented people in the criminal justice system and fiercely defended their rights during the last financial year.

## Upholding the right to legal representation

Our lawyers have continued to **fill a state criminal law funding gap** that would have otherwise left people without adequate legal representation. IMCL has made it a priority to represent people who are ineligible for legal aid grants but cannot afford private legal support. We have aimed to enable better access to tailored and intensive free legal help in criminal law to promote fairer legal outcomes.

We represent people across the spectrum of matters in the summary stream, with a particular focus on mental health, family violence and over policing. We try and keep matters in-house, and only work with a barrister for matters of the highest complexity.

## Integrated practice

Our successful integrated, interdisciplinary and holistic [Housing Justice Partnerships](#) with Flagstaff and Ozanam House have continued to facilitate better outcomes for our clients. Case workers at Salvation Army and VincentCare play a vital role in maintaining contact with vulnerable clients and ensure they have a safe, stable and secure environment while we help them navigate a complex justice system. This support allows our clients to fully engage in the court process and we can focus on defending their criminal charges. The Housing Justice Partnership supports clients commit to long-lasting solutions to their life problems, while also leading to cost savings across the legal, health and social services systems. Refer to [page 20](#) for more information.

## SNAPSHOT OF CRIMINAL PRACTICE WORK:

WE SAW 253 PEOPLE

WE OFFERED 215 ADVICE SERVICES

WE OPENED 158 CASES

WE CLOSED 159 MATTERS

## MOST COMMON PROBLEMS:

1. Traffic and vehicle regulatory offences
2. Acts intended to cause injury
3. Prohibited and regulated weapons

## TOP OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

1. Charges withdrawn in full
2. Adjourned undertaking without conviction
3. Adjourned undertaking with conviction

## Reducing criminalisation

People that experience mental or emotional distress often need legal help to understand and exercise their basic rights. IMCL's lawyers strongly advocate for our clients and promote their voices at a time when they feel they are not being heard.

Victoria Police often attend callouts when a person experiences a mental health crisis. Police have the power to apprehend or transport a person to hospital. Their presence and any use of force can escalate the situation and amplify mental distress.

Our lawyers have approached the defence of clients with a mental impairment in a more systematic way during the financial year. Building on our Community Legal Mental Health Partnership Project, IMCL is working through advocacy responses to situations where criminal charges (often trivial) have been laid against our clients while they experienced a mental health crisis. These situations require a considered, holistic, well-being centered response instead of criminalisation to avoid further harming and disempowering people in emotional distress. Well-being based responses will also save taxpayer money and reduce the number of matters before the courts.

# Protecting safe and sustainable housing

## PUBLIC HOUSING

Victorians' need for safe, secure and sustainable housing is more important than ever. The cost of food, fuel, and utilities rose to record highs during the last financial year. House prices increased substantially, while the median weekly rent in Victoria also increased significantly. These economic pressures have contributed to the public housing list continuing to balloon, with around 60,000 people on the waiting list. IMCL worked to protect and enhance the rights of public and community housing residents during this time and continued to demand further investment in this vital government service.

### PHO'S STORY

The Victorian Government reached a \$5 million settlement in the COVID-19 lockdown class action that affected more than 3000 public housing residents. The settlement was divided between the people who started the class action, the residents subject to lockdown in North Melbourne, Flemington and Kensington and their children.

The Supreme Court of Victoria set strict deadlines for people to opt into the settlement. There was much confusion around the terms, while some people did not know about it. Our lawyers assisted scores of individuals, including Pho\*. Pho came into IMCL's office after a community member told her about the class action.

Pho had missed the deadline to opt-in, and her son could not sign legal documents because he has autism. Pho, who is his full-time carer, could not sign anything on her son's behalf because she was not the power of attorney. This limited Pho's ability to opt into the settlement on behalf of her son.

We assisted Pho in completing a statutory declaration with the help of an interpreter. Our lawyers also assisted with the Notice of Claim Form, scanned identification documents and added Pho's son to her claim. This assistance resulted in Pho receiving her share of the class action settlement despite the deadline having passed.

\*Name has been changed

### SNAPSHOT OF HOUSING WORK:

WE DELIVERED 102 ADVICE SERVICES

WE OPENED 15 CASES

### THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WE ADDRESSED FOR PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS:

1. Assistance in accessing the lockdown class action settlement
2. Immigration (refugee/humanitarian and visitor are highest within immigration)
3. Fines
4. Tenancy/housing other
5. Parenting arrangements, divorce, wills/power of attorney

### COVID lockdown settlement

Our lawyers continued to assist residents in the settlement to resolve the class action over the COVID-19 hard lockdown in July 2020. A private law firm ran the class action on behalf of the group members in North Melbourne and Flemington.

Ensuring the public housing residents understood the settlement and what the outcomes meant for them was a complex job, that required connection with the community. While we were not a party to the class action, IMCL staff provided free legal help to many public housing residents to ensure they understood their rights regarding the settlement. We helped submit additional information to the government and assisted with the paperwork to ensure residents did not miss out on compensation.

We continued to reallocate existing resources to ensure public housing residents had access to the free legal help they needed, with no additional funding from a law firm or government. The commitment of our lawyers is a stellar example of the important role community legal centres can play in society. IMCL's staff rallied together and their tireless efforts elevated the voices of public housing residents.

## The Victorian Government's plan to demolish public housing towers

IMCL filed a historic class action against the Victorian Government in the Supreme Court to protect the human rights of public housing residents in high-rise towers, who were told in September 2023 that their homes would be progressively demolished by 2051 as part of Victoria's Housing Statement.

The residents in the North Melbourne & Flemington towers argued in Court that Homes Victoria did not make the decision to demolish the towers properly and it did not appropriately consider their human rights. They have further submitted that the decision to demolish their homes was made without regard to the policies and procedures that Homes Victoria is obliged to follow, and therefore the decision should be remade.

IMCL's managing lawyer of housing and tenancy, Louisa Bassini, worked indefatigably with pro bono counsel to prosecute the public housing resident's argument. Ms Bassini has led the IMCL team, supported by Stephanie Price from West Heidelberg Legal Centre, that has dedicated countless hours to the protection of human rights. They also worked to ensure the Victorian Government heard the message that public housing residents want investment in their homes, not for them to be destroyed.

The court process has been complex, and our staff made it a priority to provide information and support to public housing residents through regular community meetings, social media and WhatsApp. We provided access to free legal help to ensure public housing residents understood the proceedings and had a forum to voice any concerns.

The media was also used to give residents an opportunity to be heard in their own words. This engagement was an important tool to raise awareness about the government's decision and the downstream effects of its plan on human rights and the future of public housing in Victoria. The class action received domestic and international media coverage, which highlighted the historical significance of this case and IMCL's groundbreaking work in the public housing sector.

IMCL also committed to coordinating the community legal sector response to the government's plan to demolish 44 public housing towers, given the first homes to be destroyed are within our catchment area.

The significance of this class action cannot be overstated. Adequate housing is a basic human right. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes that every person has the right to adequate housing, which includes the legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, accessibility, habitability, location and cultural adequacy. This international law is enshrined domestically in Victoria's *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)*, requiring public authorities, such as Victorian state and local government departments and agencies, and people delivering services on behalf of government, to act consistently with the human rights in the Charter. A successful outcome in court may halt the government's plan to destroy 44 towers, which are home to 10,000 Victorians, and protect this human right.

The class action's success would also secure the legal rights that flow to residents as public housing renters, such as lower rent and access to disability modifications. Importantly, it would preserve the communities that have been established in our area over many years. Our clients need a guarantee that there will be no loss of public housing, which is owned and managed by the government, which ensures that proper safeguards for people and families in need remain in place.

The court case aims to not only pause the Victorian Government's plan to demolish the public housing towers in North Melbourne and Flemington but set a precedent for other community legal centres that have vowed to protect public housing in their catchment areas. It is essential that we keep these vibrant communities together and with secure, well-maintained housing, so they can grow and thrive.



**ABOVE** Managing Lawyer, Louisa Bassini, addressed the media ahead of an injunction hearing in May 2024.

## COMMUNITY HOUSING

The Victorian Government has used the words ‘social housing’, ‘public housing’ and ‘community housing’ interchangeably, which has led to significant confusion about the rights of residents. IMCL has worked to raise public awareness about the differences between the terms, correct any misinformation and improve understanding about the gaps in community housing rights and regulations.

IMCL has also strongly advocated on behalf of residents to assert their rental rights. There are dozens of community housing providers in Victoria, and they each have different policies, procedures and rental conditions. The providers should be bound to the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (Vic), but a lack of regulation and enforcement of these rights continues to be a major hurdle.

We have also noticed that some public housing residents have been moved into community housing because of the Victorian Government’s plan to demolish the towers. This move may have eroded their rental rights, putting them at risk of:

- Having to pay 30 per cent of their income in community housing instead of 25 per cent in public housing
- Having to pay additional management and service fees
- Being less protected from unfair evictions into homelessness
- Being unable to modify community housing homes for disability and safety needs
- Being unable to take six months of absence on substantially reduced rent if a person needs to go into residential rehabilitation, mental health care, prison
- Being less able to effectively pursue complaints procedures

The IMCL team will continue to fight for stronger protections for residents and better regulation of the community housing sector.

## JACK’S STORY

Jack has lived at Unison’s Elizabeth Street Common Ground since 2010. He was relieved to have a roof over his head in the community housing complex, which was designed to support people that experience chronic homelessness and social disadvantage.

In 2018, Jack’s relief turned into despair when his apartment became infested with cockroaches. They would crawl out of his computer, across his desk and on the floor. IMCL assisted Jack and took the matter to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), where Unison was ordered to conduct pest control.

Jack’s apartment became infested with bed bugs in 2020. He would wake up in the middle of the night with bites all over his body. The insects infested his wheelchair. They were everywhere and nothing helped.

IMCL assisted Jack again, another court order was issued for the provider to conduct pest control because they were in breach of their duty to keep the resident’s room and the rooming house in good repair. However, the bed bugs returned.

Our lawyers identified that the infestation was a problem across the building in multiple apartments at the Elizabeth Street Common Ground. This information was provided to the court and the VCAT ordered that an independent pest company audit the building. It confirmed 46 out of 125 apartments inspected had a bed bug problem. The insects were also found in common areas, including a counselling room on level one and three.

The results of the audit prompted the treatment for bed bugs in all other affected units and common areas. Jack was temporarily relocated and his belongings either disposed of or put in storage while the bed bug treatment was underway. There have been multiple rounds of pest control, and the matter has finally been resolved.

You can read more about Jack’s story and the myriad of other issues he experienced in his community housing home [on our website](#).

## Fighting unfair fines

Fines disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community. Infringement notices can compound cost of living pressure, leave people financially crippled, cause stress and anxiety, exacerbate pre-existing mental and physical ailments, drive people to self-harm, and in many cases criminalise poverty.

IMCL's work aims to alleviate this pressure and support people that find themselves against the vast resources of the State. We support our clients to understand their rights, elevate their voices and pave a way out of financial hardship. **This work resulted in at least \$442,036.04 in fines either being withdrawn or waived last financial year.** This huge achievement has helped eliminate the stress and financial burden that unnecessary fines placed on our clients.

**This year, through strategic casework, we reduced the potential for individuals to be imprisoned for unpaid toll fines.** Victoria is the only state or territory in Australia that continues to use the legislative power to imprison people for unpaid fines. When one of our clients, a mother experiencing poor mental health, was arrested for unpaid toll fines our lawyers stepped in to help. Our lawyers ran public interest strategic litigation which expanded the applicability of recent legislative reforms to the *Melbourne City Link Act 1995 (Vic)* and *EastLink Project Act 2004 (Vic)* which allows for the withdrawal of toll fines for people experiencing hardship. The case settled prior to hearing and was successful in extending the availability of toll fine withdrawals to people whose infringement warrants have been 'executed', meaning they have been arrested and have court hearings scheduled.

This work will benefit Victorians that incur toll fines because it makes it a legal requirement for toll fines to be withdrawn, including at court, where a person's hardship has been accepted. Although currently the court still must formally strike these matters out, we hope eventually this will result in fewer toll fines hearings proceeding to court and unnecessarily clogging up a justice system that is already overwhelmed. This development will also significantly reduce the risk of imprisonment for many toll fine recipients across Victoria.

### AYAAN'S STORY

Ayaan\* came to IMCL with 166 fines that accumulated to a debt of more than \$50,000. This debt exacerbated pre-existing problems in her life including financial instability, high cost of living, mental illness and family issues.

"I was worried. I was very concerned because the fines were so big, and I had to go to court. I will never forget what I went through because it had an impact on me. I was not able to sleep, I was stressed out," Ayaan said.

Ayaan could not read the parking signs or the reminder notices. She also did not know people had to pay to use some roads as she drove across the city to take her children to school and the doctor. Ayaan did not know there was a problem until the Sheriff turned up on her doorstep to arrest her.

IMCL ran public interest strategic litigation to test whether Victoria Police had an obligation to withdraw toll road fines when requested by the toll road company if the person had been arrested.

It was argued imprisonment would be excessive, disproportionate and unduly harsh given Ayaan had taken proactive and appropriate steps to address the fines when she understood what had occurred and the consequences. Ayaan's limited English proficiency, poor system literacy, mental illness and other special circumstances contributed to her lack of understanding about the law and rapidly accumulating fines.

Our lawyers successfully negotiated with Victoria Police and Fines Victoria to withdraw \$26,000 in toll road fines. This decision had an impact on everyone in Victoria who has a court case about toll road fines or is in a similar situation.

"I am happy that you helped me, and I am happy that this decision can help other people as well. I would like to thank IMCL. You changed my life," Ayaan said.

The remaining \$25,000 in fines were heard at the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, and the judge agreed with our lawyer's submission that they would be discharged in full.

"It's been a huge change. I am reborn now. We are very happy. Now I can spend my small income on my family, and I am not stressed or worried all the time so I can devote myself to my kids," Ayaan said.

\* Name has been changed

## ZOE'S STORY

Zoe\* is from Chile and was in Australia on a student visa when she met her ex-partner. During their relationship, he was physically and emotionally abusive. Zoe became pregnant and they separated. He didn't want any involvement in the baby's life and refused to support Zoe in any way. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the Chilean Government offered Zoe a repatriation flight home. She wanted to have her baby among family, so she returned to Chile for around 1 year.

Zoe had to return to Australia to complete her studies and she brought her baby, Anna\*, with her. Returning to Australia on a student visa created new challenges for Zoe and Anna. Zoe had to juggle being a single mum, studying and complying with her visa conditions and the increase in the cost of living. Zoe and Anna were not entitled to Medicare or Centrelink so living in Australia was costly. On one occasion, Zoe had to pay \$5,000 for a hospital admission for Anna, plunging Zoe into debt. Her ex-partner refused to contribute or link Anna to his Medicare card. Zoe had to work to pay for her and Anna's basic needs and repay her debts which meant she could not attend her studies. The education provider threatened to report Zoe to the Department of Home Affairs because she had to discontinue her studies which would result in an immediate cancellation of their visas.

Suddenly, Zoe's ex-partner wanted to meet Anna. He issued proceedings in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) to place Anna on the Australian Federal Police's Watch List to prevent her (and Zoe) from returning to Chile. Zoe and Anna were stuck in Australia and living in poverty. Zoe's student visa was about to be cancelled meaning she could not work legally and be at risk of deportation.

IMCL represented Zoe in the specialist division of the FCFCOA. Uniquely, the case centred on whether the Australia court system had the power to decide parenting arrangements for Anna who was born in Chile but living in Australia. Her lawyers, Charlotte and Indya, prepared lengthy court documents and legal submissions. The case prepared by IMCL was so extensive that Zoe's ex-partner withdrew his application. Zoe and Anna were able to immediately return to the support of their loving family and start a new life in their home country.

\*Name has been changed



## Supporting our clients through the family law system

Recent data collected by Victoria Police indicate that more than 98,000 family-related incidents occurred during the financial year, which is the highest figure in five years.<sup>1</sup> This means more people are entering the legal system for family violence and family law related issues. In a system already strained by lengthy delays and complex safety concerns, the demand for community legal centre support has increased exponentially.

### Complex family law proceedings

In the last financial year, IMCL expanded its team, and we are back to full capacity for the first time in almost three years. This allowed our legal centre to meet the increase in demand and focus on complex matters that align with IMCL's strategic priorities.

IMCL is one of the few community legal centres who are appointed to the Victorian Legal Aid Family Law and Family Violence Panel (Panel Firm). As a Panel Firm, our lawyers can provide ongoing representation in complex litigation matters including international relocation, parenting determinations for LGBTQIA+ families, and cross-border jurisdictional matters.

Many IMCL clients experience intersecting issues like poor mental health, substance dependency and high-risk safety concerns which impact their family law proceedings. With our increased staff capacity, our lawyers can provide additional support to clients with varying vulnerabilities including women and children living in refuge, interstate, or in hiding.

Our team is trained in providing extensive and specialised service, sometimes without legal aid funding. IMCL lawyers appear in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia in contested hearings against Barristers where there is not a legal aid grant. This highlights our team's commitment to providing everyone with safe, equal and supported access to the legal system.

### Expansion of our duty lawyer service at the Specialist Family Violence Court

IMCL also expanded our legal service offering at the Specialist Family Violence Court in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court, which is designed to provide people affected by family violence with free, safe and confidential legal support on the day of the hearing. Melbourne Magistrates' Court invited IMCL to expand our highly regarded specialist family violence service and we are now onsite for four days.

### Growing existing partnerships and making new ones

Recognising a high level of legal need within maternal and child health services – including for refugee and migrant women and those experiencing family violence or relationship breakdown – we now offer a dedicated legal program accessible to the City of Melbourne's seven Family Services sites, including co-location at Narm Ngarrgu and Carlton Learning Precinct, often supporting refugee and migrant women with their legal problems.

In 2024, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency invited IMCL to partner with them as their preferred non-Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation to provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. The partnership will commence in 2025.

### The new family law landscape

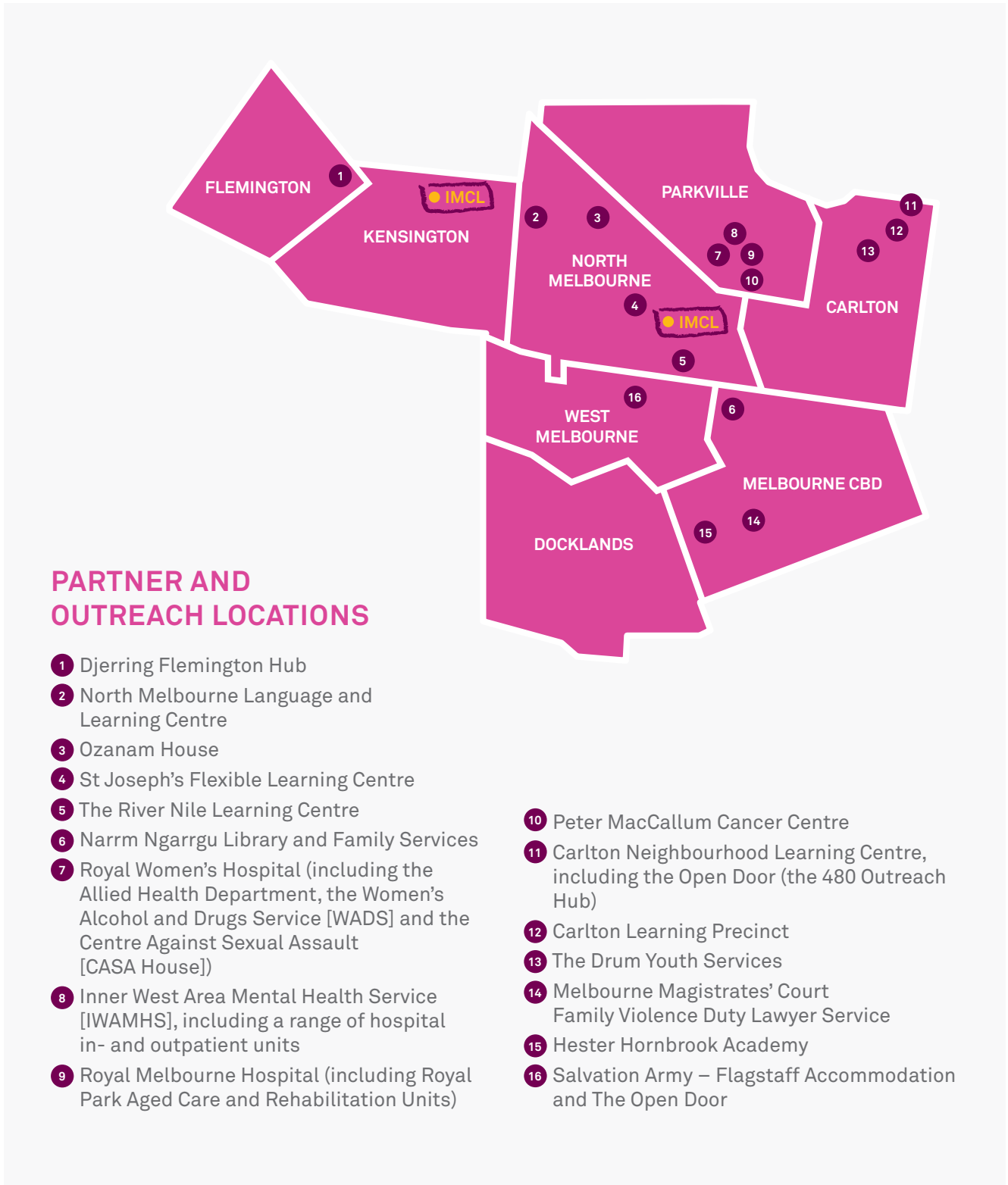
In May 2024, the first tranche of the amendments to the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) came into effect. The changes come after 20 years of campaigning from women's and child safety services.

IMCL offered each of its partner organisations a 3-hour bespoke professional development session on the changes and how the changes could impact on the individuals engaged with their respective services.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-victorian-crime-data/family-incidents-2>

## Partnerships and projects

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







## HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS

IMCL achieved great outcomes for clients across our three Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) at **Royal Women's Hospital, Royal Melbourne Hospital and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (Peter Mac)**. We helped people resolve their legal problems and our lawyers strongly advocated to ensure their voices were heard. This allowed our clients to focus on their health and recovery.

**The outcomes we have achieved through our Health Justice Partnerships assisted in securing another three years of funding**, which is a testament to the strength of our partnerships, relationships with social work teams and the ability of our lawyers.

The multi-year funding arrangement will allow IMCL to focus on expanding our services and ensure we can evolve to meet societal demands. One of those services is a pilot program for child protection and establishing a protocol for early intervention work. Expectant mothers will have access to free legal help and the right support will be put in place to assist them in navigating the system before their situation escalates. This early intervention can prevent traumatic situations down the track, such as the removal of a child.

IMCL also released its findings from a three-year [Community Legal Mental Health Partnership project](#) that investigated the best way to deliver legal support to people experiencing a mental health crisis or psycho-social distress. The project found people often interact with Victoria Police as first responders, which can cause or exacerbate mental ill-health and result in adverse criminal proceedings. One of the key recommendations of the report concluded callouts should be led by health professionals. It also found embedding legal support within mental health services can create better outcomes for people.

We also celebrated our 10-year partnership with Royal Melbourne Hospital this financial year. Thank you to all the incredible staff who have selflessly served our local community, and we look forward to continuing our work with you.

WE OPENED **46** CASES

WE CLOSED **44** MATTERS

**42%** of our **208** people experienced or were at risk of experiencing family violence

**14%** of people were homeless and **14%** were at risk of homelessness

### WE SAW 208 PEOPLE:

**57** AT ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

**60** AT ROYAL MELBOURNE HOSPITAL

**50** AT PETER MAC

**41** MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

### TOP OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

1. Fines withdrawn
2. Charges withdrawn in full

### MOST COMMON PROBLEMS:

1. Family violence intervention orders
2. Parenting
3. Wills/PoA

### MOST COMMON PROBLEM BREAKDOWN: ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

1. Parenting
2. Family violence intervention orders
3. Child support

### ROYAL MELBOURNE HOSPITAL

1. Family violence intervention orders
2. Wills/Power of Attorney
3. Parenting

### PETER MACCALLUM CANCER CENTRE

1. Wills/ Power of Attorney
2. Family violence intervention orders
3. Parenting

### MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

1. Family violence intervention orders
2. Parenting
3. Child support

## MARY'S STORY

Mary\* was connected to our service at the hospital through our Health Justice Partnership. It was identified that she had been victim of assault by her ex-partner and Victoria Police had not taken a statement from her, nor had they sought an intervention order for her protection, despite the medical evidence of significant injuries which were linked to the assault.

Like most of our mis-identification cases, Mary was identified as the 'aggressor' and police sought intervention order against her, despite her consistent version of events being that she only acted in self-defence and the very minor nature of her ex-partner's injuries.

Our lawyers at the Beyond Survival Project provided Mary with urgent advice to guide her through the next steps. Mary applied for her own intervention order while in hospital and then we successfully advocated for prosecution to withdraw the intervention order against Mary and obtained consent orders against her ex-partner. Mary was later charged with assault, but they were also dropped.

We are currently assisting Mary to lodge a complaint about the police duty failures which, in our experience, were the product of systemic racism and poor understanding of the gendered nature of family violence. The police mistreatment exacerbated the significant physical and psychological harm caused by the assault from her ex-partner and has decimated any trust Mary had in the police or public authorities.

Our lawyers had initially filed a complaint with Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's (IBAC) single incident focused police complaints pilot, however IBAC were not able to further investigate the matter given it was 'too complex'. This experience has only further highlighted the deficiencies with the police oversight mechanisms and its failure to respond to family violence survivors.

\*Name has been changed

## HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING JUSTICE

The latest Census data showed homelessness in Victoria was 24 percent higher than five years ago compared to the national increase of five percent.<sup>1</sup> People that experience homelessness can often feel unseen, unheard and may struggle to access legal help until we reach out to them through our strong partnerships. A fifth of our clients, and a quarter of outreach clients, experienced homelessness.

IMCL's catchment area includes several homeless services that provide essential support to a high number of disadvantaged people. We run regular outreach clinics at Ozanam House, Flagstaff and The Open Door to help with family violence matters, custody problems, fines and court appearances, among other life problems. These partnerships deepened and expanded through our 2021–2023 Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation project.

Despite the absence of ongoing dedicated funding in 2024, we continued to prioritise delivering scaled-back services within this settings, maintaining regular meetings with key stakeholders to identify unmet legal needs, understand the barriers to justice and work together to improve access to support. IMCL also delivered tailored workshops to our partners to support them with the identification of legal issues and increase their capacity to make appropriate referrals. This early intervention avoids escalation of legal problems and can be vital in ensuring a safe and sustainable resolution.

1 <https://chp.org.au/article/new-data-shows-true-state-of-victorias-homelessness-crisis/>

## Housing Justice Partnership Evaluation

In 2021, with the generous support from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, IMCL was able to embark on a comprehensive exploration of the potential impact of expanded legal services in homelessness settings. IMCL published the [Housing Justice Partnership Evaluation](#) in November 2023, which was an independent evaluation of the Housing Justice Partnership between July 2021 and May 2023 led by Rogers Consulting.

Our lawyers worked with 292 clients during the evaluation period and provided 681 instances of legal assistance. More than 88 percent of clients were experiencing or at risk of homelessness, while more than 93 percent of clients were engaged at one of three housing and homelessness programs in inner Melbourne. **More than 77 percent of closed legal matters were 'satisfactorily resolved' or 'resolved in part'**. Fines, criminal, and tenancy 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, improved housing security overall, and physical or psychological health improvements after engaging with Housing Justice Partnership. The partnership conservatively saved the Victorian Government over \$650,000 in health, justice and welfare costs.

The Housing Justice Partnership demonstrated that an accessible, integrated practice model to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness improves both legal and non-legal outcomes, it improves service system capacity through improved worker knowledge and skills and there are substantial cost savings to government through earlier and more coordinated service provision.

The demand for services through our partnerships with homelessness organisations remains high, however we lack specific funding to adequately address the need. During 2023-24 we were forced to reduce the service delivery intensity that was made possible with dedicated philanthropic funding through the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation. We are actively looking for sustainable funding for such a valuable program for our community.

## JAMES' STORY

James\* became an IMCL client through our strong partnership with a homelessness support service. James is an Aboriginal man with a long complex history of family violence, familial loss, drug use and homelessness.

As a teenager James started using drugs to deal with the trauma of his parents' passing and his experience of abuse. He had a daughter, Tiffany\*, during this period. Child protection was involved several times and eventually placed Tiffany in the care of another family member.

As an adult, while he maintained a relationship with his daughter for a period, it ultimately ceased. This loss spurred James to address his addiction and mental health issues.

James approached IMCL when in remission and wanting to rebuild a healthy relationship with Tiffany. IMCL assisted him to initiate parenting proceedings in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. During this time, child protection and the Children's Court intervened.

James' lawyer, Indya, assisted him in the Children's Court, extending our generalist practice into child protection. Through Indya's advocacy, James was granted permission to have supervised visits with Tiffany. Their relationship flourished. He taught his daughter about caring for country and they connected over their Aboriginal heritage. Indya helped James to engage with another Aboriginal organisation to help advocate for the growing relationship with his daughter.

Their relationship continued to strengthen when Tiffany was able to commence unsupervised time with her father. James set up a room for Tiffany at his public housing home, purchased her a new bed and games. They started to cook together and spend time with James' dog.

Child protection noticed Tiffany's mental health improve in James' care and she attended more and more school. IMCL successfully advocated for James to be Tiffany's primary carer, and the change was supported by a range of agencies.

IMCL walked with James for almost 5 years in his legal journey towards reuniting with his daughter. He is now drug-free, works full-time, has secure housing and lives with his daughter. Tiffany's mental health and school attendance has significantly improved, and the pair are planning a family holiday.

\*Name has been changed

## **BELINDA'S STORY**

Belinda\* was under 18 years of age and spending time with her friends. While at the shops, they peeled back the sticker on a product. The Victoria Police Public Order Response Team (PORT), the riot squad responsible for public order events or incidents across the state, attended the scene.

Belinda was subjected to an aggressive and unlawful arrest. The minor was left injured on the ground and then detained for an extensive period. The incident had a profound negative impact on Belinda's mental health, her comfort in the city and at school.

Our lawyer at the Police Accountability Project assisted Belinda with her police complaint, which eventually led to court proceedings against Victoria Police for the way she was mistreated. The case is another example of police misconduct and unnecessary harm that exceeded lawful limits.

Belinda and her family felt strongly vindicated when awarded a significant settlement despite the court process being drawn out.

\*Name has been changed

## **EDUCATION JUSTICE**

Providing free legal help to marginalised young people can change the direction of their lives. The work of the youth outreach lawyer at Hester Hornbrook Academy has remained strong, with an expansion into a third campus in South Melbourne. The regular presence of a lawyer on a set day increases familiarity and provides access for both staff and students when needed, either for a legal consultation or a casual chat for further information. We can access young people at risk of incarceration and entrenchment in the criminal legal system and who are commonly experiencing major hardship and exclusion such as chronic homelessness, child protection system involvement and family violence.

IMCL has built the capacity of school staff to better understand and identify legal problems. This means students are better supported and remain engaged with their education. Having early legal help can improve kids' interaction with the legal system. The collaboration between the school and lawyers can help students achieve the best possible outcomes in terms of contact with police, the courts and other institutions. This benefits not just the students and their families, but has long term benefit for everyone, as it prevents further interactions with the law and saves government costs.

## **FLAGSTAFF CRISIS ACCOMMODATION (SALVATION ARMY)**

**47 PEOPLE**

### **MOST COMMON PROBLEMS:**

1. Fines
2. Traffic and vehicle regulatory offences
3. Acts intended to cause injury

## **OZANAM HOUSE (VINCENTCARE)**

**138 PEOPLE**

### **MOST COMMON PROBLEMS:**

1. Fines
2. Family violence intervention orders
3. Housing

### **TOP THREE OUTCOMES:**

1. Fines withdrawn
2. Adjourned undertaking with conviction
3. Adjourned undertaking without conviction



## POLICING JUSTICE

The **Police Accountability Project** continued its strategic engagement, advocacy and casework in the priority areas of family violence, racialised policing and excessive use of force.

Through our community engagement officer, project lead, specialist criminal, family violence and civil litigation lawyers, the Police Accountability Project was able to provide our clients with a holistic, wraparound service tailored at tackling police accountability from all angles. This case work feeds into and responds to our knowledge of systemic issues and advocacy work to ensure we can continue elevate the voices of our clients so they can be heard.

### Beyond Survival Project with Flat Out Inc

Multi-year funding was secured for the Police Accountability Project's Beyond Survival lawyers, which ensures we can continue to provide a holistic family violence and criminal defence casework service in partnership with Flat Out Inc.

We continued to act for and support the victim survivors of family violence whom police have failed to protect or misidentified as perpetrators. This included the facilitation of consultations between survivors and the IBAC about police perpetrated family violence. We contributed to the Federation of Community Legal Centre's submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry into Improving Justice Responses to Sexual Violence on the issue of compliance with police procedures.

Our partner, Flat Out Inc, was recognised by the Australian Lawyers Alliance with the 2024 Victorian Civil Justice Award for its integrated socio-legal family violence support model delivered through their the Beyond Survival Project.

### Civil litigation

The class action against the State of Victoria over the police use of capsicum spray against protesters at the International Mining and Resources Conference in October 2019 has continued to progress through the Supreme Court, with a trial date set for February 2025.

## Advocacy and community engagement

The Police Accountability Project has led the development and implementation of sector-wide advocacy strategies through convening and driving the activities of a state-wide advocacy working group. We facilitated the Police Oversight Working Group, which comprises of community lawyers, private practitioners, advocates and academics to share knowledge and build capacity in the sector.

We continued to build sector capacity through the Community of Practice workshops with practitioners and barristers working in criminal defence and civil litigation around police misconduct on topics of defending charges of police misconduct. These workshops were well received, with more planned.

Our call for Police Ombudsman Now has continued in 2023-24. We hosted a workshop with La Trobe Academics and Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service on the best model for a police oversight and complaints system, consulting around 60 police accountability experts on designing a new independent body. We participated in IBAC's consultation on their new priority community complaints pilot.

Police Accountability Project has continued to engage with critical decision-makers and stakeholders to advocate for systemic change in response to our clients' needs.

WE SAW 111 PEOPLE

WE OFFERED 131 ADVICE SERVICES  
(74 WERE IN THE BEYOND SURVIVAL PROGRAM)

WE OPENED 40 CASES

WE CLOSED 32 CASES

3 PUBLIC INTEREST OR TEST CASES CIVIL LITIGATION CASES IN THE COUNTY OR SUPREME COURTS (INCLUDING ONGOING)

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

1. Complaints against police
2. Inappropriate Family Violence response
3. Family violence intervention order

# Working toward fairer laws and systems

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) are in a unique and important position to advocate for law change. We are witness to the impact unfair or unjust laws can have on lives. We are uniquely placed to identify structural and systemic issues, and our experience can help develop meaningful solutions to these barriers to justice.

## Public Housing Towers

In September 2023, IMCL committed to coordinating the community legal sector response to the Victorian Government's plan to demolish 44 public housing towers given the first homes scheduled to be destroyed fall within our catchment area. The sector response included joint letters sent to decision makers and a sector-wide focus on the need for more public housing.

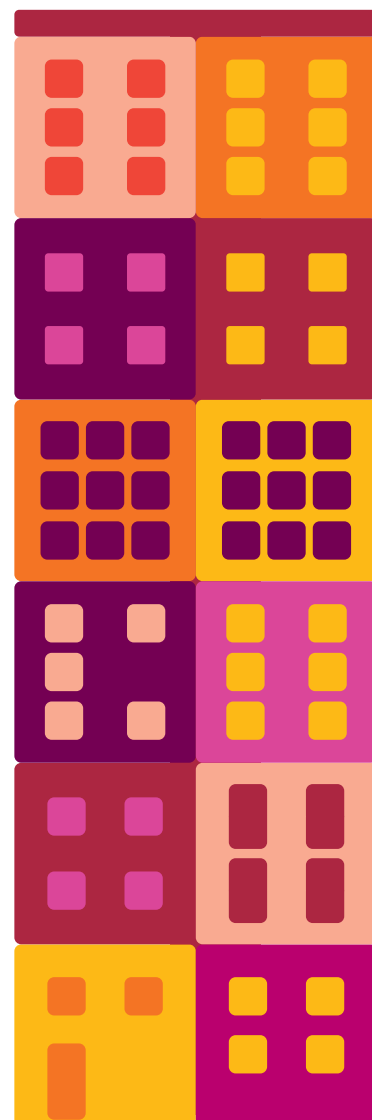
The unfortunate reality is the announcement to demolish the towers in North Melbourne and Flemington is only phase one of the Victorian Government's plan. There are another 39 towers and thousands of public housing renters who will be impacted across Melbourne. The sector must work together to protect the rights and living standards for public housing residents.

Our longstanding work to increase public housing and improve the rights for renters living in community housing led to an invitation from Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner to speak on the panel for the launch of the Advancing Housing Justice Report.

## Racialised policing

The conduct of Victoria Police towards First Nations people has been a significant issue for the Yoorrook Justice Commission. In partnership with Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, IMCL made a submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission on racialised policing. It included the findings from our report, *Policing COVID-19 in Victoria: Exploring the impact of perceived race in the issuing of COVID-19 fines in 2020* (COVID-19 report).

A key recommendation made in the COVID-19 report was for the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Census to collect data on racial appearance. IMCL expanded its work in this area and provided a submission to the consultation on the questions that should be included in the 2026 Census. We were disappointed that, despite growing calls to include racial identity in the Census, the ABS did not adopt our recommendation.



## Pushing for law reform

IMCL continued to co-convene the Infringements Working Group (IWG). Some of the group's top priorities have been addressing the ongoing risk of people being imprisoned for fines when they have defaulted on court-imposed payment plans. The IWG continued monitoring and advocating for effective and lawful implementation of recent reforms like the 'long term special circumstances test', and strategically responding to ongoing challenges with Fines Victoria's administration of the fines system.

We convened meetings with the Police Oversight Working Group which is comprised of colleagues from regional and metropolitan CLCs, private law firms undertaking civil litigation work and human rights advocacy organisations. We contributed to a few Federation of Community Legal Centres working groups. IMCL met with numerous politicians and decision makers to push for law reform in social housing, mental health and additional funding for community legal centres.

[IMCL made submissions](#) to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis that focused on the affordability of private rentals and cost of living pressures, its impact on public and community housing demand, and the need for enforceable rights and protections for social housing renters to prevent homelessness.

We contributed to the Review of the Spent Conviction Legislation 2021, which addressed issues such as adjourned undertaking without conviction, the barriers that affect accessibility to the court, improving procedural fairness, the use of spent conviction information by media and whether the legislation is achieving its objectives of removing unfair discrimination and barriers to rehabilitation.

IMCL contributed to the Victorian Legal Aid and Federation of Community Legal Centres submissions to the Australian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into justice response to victims of sexual violence. IMCL worked with victim-survivors advocates to successfully amend the *Justice Amendment Legislation (Police and other matters) Bill 2023* to provide protection for whistle-blowers who provide information to the IBAC.

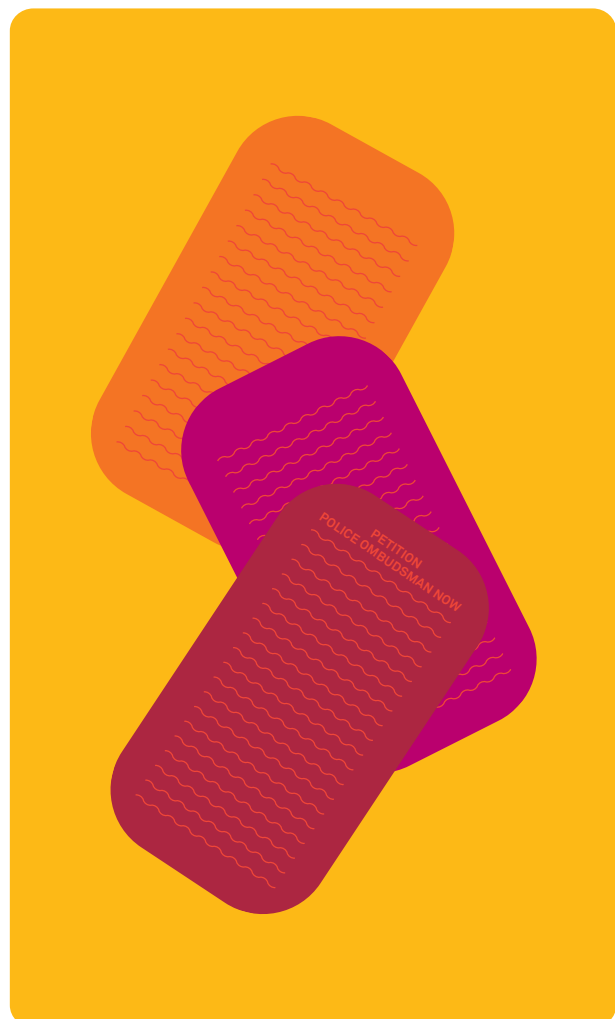
Our team also addressed the over representation of certain groups in the youth justice system through a presentation to the IBAC practice branch, the TJ Hickey 20-year memorial, and at the launch of Working Together Smart Justice for Young People's action plan.

## Police Ombudsman Now

Consultation to the Victorian Government's Systemic Review into Police Oversight concluded in February 2022. Still no outcomes or recommendations have been announced, and a new police oversight and complaints body has not been implemented. We launched the [Police Ombudsman Now](#) campaign last financial year to push for the change that is so desperately needed.

We have continued to implement strategies as part of our push for independent police oversight, which included the launch of a petition on [policeombudsmannow.com.au](https://policeombudsmannow.com.au), which has more than 1,300 signatures.

We promoted the call for a Police Ombudsman with the Minister of Police, Members of Parliament, advisers to the Attorney-General's office, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of IBAC.



## Educating the community about the law

People cannot always identify a legal problem occurring in their lives. This can delay a resolution and compound a person's problems.

### Legal education for non-legal professionals

IMCL provides regular **legal education for our partners in hospitals, schools or homelessness services**. It is tailored to assist them in identifying legal matters among their clients and referral pathways. This allows people to seek legal assistance before their issues escalate.

We have been fortunate to expand these services with the addition of our inaugural Community Connections Coordinator and Research, Engagement and Education Officer, who assist with identification of legal education needs among community services within IMCL catchment and supports lawyers with the delivery of workshops, consultations and legal education.

This has included, for example, professional legal education to support social workers and volunteers with citizenship applications, as well as training on police powers, accountability, contact de-escalation, navigating public spaces and reducing criminalisation.



**ABOVE** The Police Accountability Project's principal lawyer, Gregor Husper, delivering a talk at Monash University.

### Legal education for members of our local community

We also provided **legal education to the public to help people better understand their rights and responsibilities and how to seek help when they need it**. For example, IMCL delivered legal education and presentations to young people as part of our youth outreach work, which included topics like cyberbullying, group offending, weapons and harm minimisation. The education sessions highlighted legal issues IMCL can assist with, and many students approach the service immediately following a session for individual assistance.

### Public housing residents

Awareness of our legal services has also become more widespread among the public housing community due to our sustained engagement with this community, in particular since the COVID-19 hard lockdown in July 2020. This year, IMCL has developed and shared resources to raise awareness among public housing residents about their rights during the relocation process and legal support available to navigate this complex time.

Our multilingual online legal education resource, [ishelp.org.au](https://ishelp.org.au), continues to provide accessible information for international students living in Victoria. This resource has continued to help international students understand their housing, work, employment and personal safety rights.



# Measuring our goals

IMCL has continued to help people in our community to be heard, access legal assistance and find long-term holistic solutions to their life problems.

Our lawyers know that the resolution of a legal matter can change someone's life. It can reduce stress, alleviate anxiety, heal family relationships, reduce financial pressure and improve an individual's well-being.

## AS A RESULT OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE, WITH CASEWORK:

**34%** WERE IN A BETTER FINANCIAL SITUATION (89% OF PEOPLE WITH FINES)

**67%** HAD REDUCED STRESS AND ANXIETY

**49%** 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:

**80%** SAID THE APPOINTMENT — BY PHONE OR IN PERSON — WAS ACCESSIBLE

**92%** SAID THEY FELT LISTENED TO BY THE LAWYER

**92%** SAID THEY UNDERSTOOD THEIR LEGAL MATTER BETTER

**77%** SAID THEY HAD MORE CONFIDENCE REGARDING THEIR LEGAL MATTER

## WHAT OUR CLIENTS AND PARTNERS SAY ABOUT US:

“My lawyer did an outstanding job.”

“I don't have the words to express my gratitude.”

“My lawyer was thorough, very transparent from word go.”

“A fantastic outcome for me.”

“My lawyer went above and beyond.”

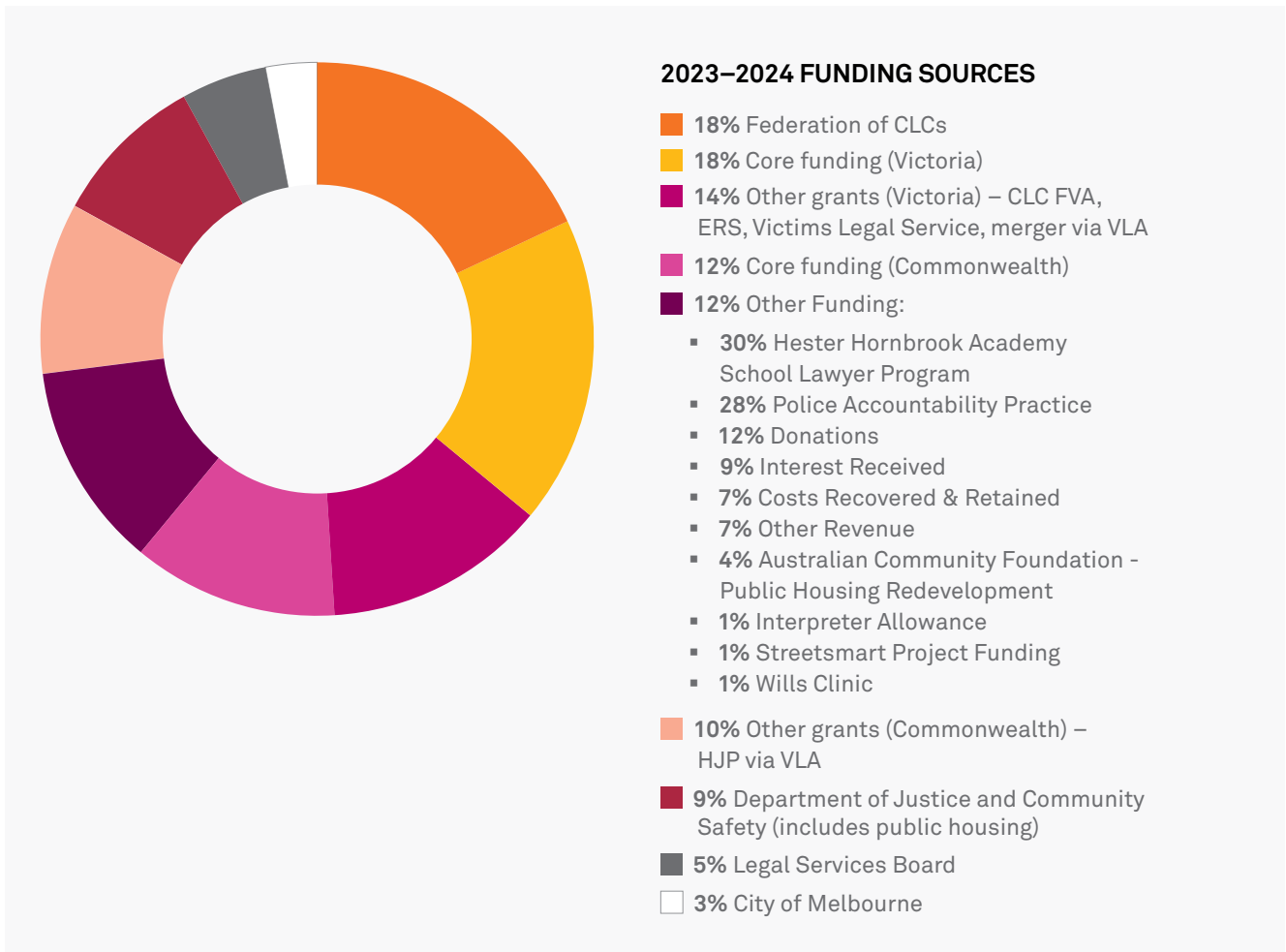
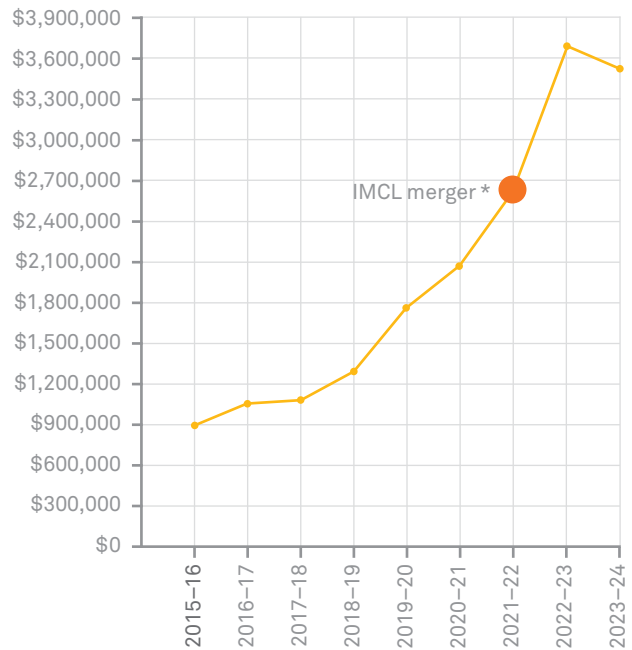
“The team was outstanding to deal with, empathetic, understanding.”

# Financial report

The audited financial results for 2023–24 show our total income to be \$3,594,712.

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, and various individual donors. IMCL's complete audited financial report can be downloaded from the IMCL website.

\* Merger with Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre (FKCLC) February 2022.



# Thank you for the support

Community legal centres across Victoria continue to struggle to meet service demand due to the limited state and federal funding we receive. It is an ongoing issue that our sector is campaigning to resolve sooner rather than later. This makes it harder for centres to retain good lawyers and provide them with secure ongoing employment. It also makes it harder to build the services we can deliver and provide the legal representation that people increasingly need.

Our incredible funders, dedicated pro bono partners and supportive donors often help us fill the gaps. IMCL would like to say thank you for your timely and effective advice, representation and administrative support. A special thank you to Lizzie O'Shea and Lorne Franks from Maurice Blackburn, and Matthew Chuck at Echo Law for your advice on the public housing class action. It has been invaluable, and we could not have met the demand for services without your help. It has equipped us to hold decision makers accountable and changed people's lives.

IMCL thanks law firms that have 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: Norton Rose Fulbright, Ryan Carlisle Thomas, Hall & Wilcox, Colin Biggers & Paisley, DLA Piper, MinterEllison, Wotton Kearney, K & L Gates and Barry Nilsson.

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

- **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 have maintained a long-standing relationship with IMCL providing secondees for more than 15 years, which has allowed us to address more summary crime and family violence matters.
- **William Roberts Lawyers** who provided support to group members of the COVID-19 lockdown class action.
- **Robinson Gill Lawyers** for funding the #PoliceOmbudsmanNow website and their ongoing support of the Police Accountability Project.
- **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.
- **Herbert Smith Freehills** who provided secondee lawyers, host many of our events, made a substantial donation to support our project work and assisted IMCL with internal legal advice.
- **Thomson Geer** 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.





INNER  
MELBOURNE  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL

2/508 Queensberry Street  
North Melbourne

22 Bellair Street  
Kensington

**03 9328 1885**  
**[www.imcl.org.au](http://www.imcl.org.au)**