

Partnerships for health and justice in Victoria

**A Briefing on Health Justice Partnerships in Victoria
January 2017**



What is a Health Justice Partnership (HJP)?

Across Australia, over one in five people will have three or more legal needs in a given year (Legal Australia Wide survey, [Law & Justice Foundation of NSW 2012](#)). Among them, people living with disabilities, sole parents, people living in disadvantaged housing and people who rely on income support payments are highly represented.

Many of these people are far more likely to raise their legal needs with a trusted health professional like a GP, community nurse or social worker, than to seek out a lawyer.

That's why health justice partnerships (HJP) bring legal services into health settings. HJP support collaboration between lawyers and health workers to better identify and respond to the legal needs that can undermine people's health.

HJP support populations that are particularly at risk of poor health and justice, like people experiencing domestic and family violence, people at risk of elder abuse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people experiencing poverty and inequality.

Health justice partnerships provide legal support across a wide range of needs, such as:

- Advocating for public housing tenants needing repairs to address untreated mould, or having handrails and other aids installed to continue living independently in their own homes;
- Assisting people with accumulated fines or debt that cause stress or act as a barrier to meeting health costs like filling prescriptions; and
- Advising on wills, powers of attorney and custody – the legal needs that can present at the most unexpected times, like following a diagnosis of serious illness.

By integrating legal services into health settings, we can improve access to justice, address the social determinants of health and increase wellbeing.

About Health Justice Australia

Health Justice Australia is the national centre for health justice partnerships. We support the effectiveness of health justice partnerships in Australia through:

- brokering, mentoring and facilitating partnerships;
- building a body of evidence about health justice partnership through evaluation and research;
- developing resources that support the practical elements of partnership between practitioners; and
- achieving lasting change, connecting the issues identified through specific health justice partnerships to policy advocacy and reform.

Improving responses to family violence in Victoria: the role of Health Justice Partnerships

Health justice partnerships bring lawyers together with doctors and other health professionals to respond to legal needs that affect people's health. For example, women are at heightened risk of domestic and family violence during pregnancy. Health justice lawyers work in antenatal care and child and maternal health settings to help health professionals identify affected or at-risk patients and provide effective responses across health and legal services.

Health justice partnerships build capability in human services, providing doctors and health workers with training and advice to help them identify and respond appropriately to health-harming legal needs, particularly for vulnerable patients, as well as providing trusted referral pathways for those legal needs.

Although some Australian legal services have been working in health settings for years, there has been a movement of people and organisations committed to the particular expansion of health justice partnerships since 2012.

The following list of 26 services in Victoria indicates a spectrum of approaches to addressing legal needs in health settings, ranging from outreach and co-location to more fully integrated partnerships.

Service name	Partners	Area/s of Focus	Impact
A HJP for Seniors – Transforming the Social Model of Health	Justice Connect & Caulfield Hospital, Alfred Health	Elder Abuse	Aims to reach the most vulnerable older people who are experiencing abuse by someone they know and trust earlier, achieving better legal and health outcomes. Commenced November 2016.
Acting on the Warning Signs	Royal Women's Hospital, Inner Melbourne Community Legal	Family Violence. Generalist legal service provided on-site.	IMCL on-site 5 times per fortnight. 370 staff trained. 478 instances of advice provided on-site. Since 2012, free legal advice to over 330 clients and 150 cases opened. 50% of clients experiencing/at risk of family violence, 20% of clients had a disability, 25% of clients experiencing/at risk of homelessness, almost 80% on low-no income. Evaluation due 2017.
Ballarat Community Health	Federation University Australia, Central Highlands CLC & Ballarat Community Health	Youth (16-25)	Servicing Sebastopol, Wendouree and Lucas. 56 young people received service in the first 6 months.
Brimbank Melton CLC	Brimbank Melton CLC & Moorabool Shire Council	Family Violence	Brimbank Melton CLC is a program of commUnity Plus. The service partnership operates through the Early Years Service of Moorabool Shire Council. Service commenced May 2016.
Connecting the Dots	Royal Children's Hospital & Inner Melbourne Community Legal	Any issue impacting upon the child or family's capacity to care for the child.	Generalist legal service provided on-site IMCL on-site once a week. 62 clients seen on-site. 70 instances of advice provided. 25% of clients seen had a disability, 27% experiencing or at risk of homelessness, 30% experiencing or at risk of family violence, 74% on a low income.
Dandenong Hospital	InTouch Legal Centre, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers & Dandenong Health	Family Violence	280 community project participants; 185 health/social work professionals trained; 31 referrals; 500 hospital staff trained.
Darebin Legal Health Clinic	Darebin Community Legal Centre & Mercy Hospital for Women	Family violence	Training sessions to date have reached over 100 staff. Opened late 2016. Located at Heidelberg.

Service name	Partners	Area/s of Focus	Impact
Family violence legal assistance clinic	WEstjustice (Western CLC) & Werribee Mercy Hospital	Antenatal and post-natal patients and other high-risk women patients	
First Step Legal	First Step, St Kilda	Addiction	1040 secondary consultations in year 1; representation provided in 84 matters; evaluation underway (evaluation period ends 31 December 2016).
Goulburn Valley	[See last column]	Addiction	Partnership between Goulburn Valley CLC, Primary Care Connect (Shepparton) & Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative. 58 clients in first year of service.
Health Agency to Court	WEstjustice (Western CLC) & Werribee Mercy Hospital	Infringements and debt	The service provides infringements and debt legal assistance to inpatients of the mental health unit. 31 clients assisted since May 2016; 12 mental health staff trained.
Health Works Lawyer Project	Brimbank Melton CLC & Health Works (Footscray)	Addiction	5 month data review shows 24 clients provided with legal services or referrals in relation to 75 distinct legal issues. Health Works is a program of CoHealth. Service commenced in July 2016.
Hume Riverina	[See last column]	Youth/ Family Violence	Partnership between Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service, Flexible Learning Centre, North East Support & Action for Youth.
Independent Mental Health Advocacy		Mental Health, statewide	Non-legal advocacy to people who are subject to compulsory treatment under the Mental Health Act 2014. Services include providing information about the law and rights, assisting people to participate in treatment decisions, and referrals to other services (including legal services)
Justice & Health Come Together in North West Melbourne	Justice Connect & coHealth	Elder Abuse	Improvements in workforce capacity to identify and address abuse; to engage disadvantaged clients earlier on; and in the allocation of resources to promote sustainability.

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MABELS	ECLC, BWAHS, EDVOS, Maroondah City Council & Yarra Ranges Council	Family Violence	Dramatic increase in referrals; 30 nurses trained. Partnership between Eastern CLC, and partners Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, Eastern Domestic Violence Service, Maroondah City Council & Yarra Ranges Council.
Melbourne Legal Care	Royal Melbourne Hospital & Inner Melbourne Community Legal	Preventative law.	Generalist legal service provided on-site. IMCL on-site once a week. 48 instances of advice provided. Over 1/3 experiencing or at risk of homelessness, 42% experiencing or at risk of family violence, 81% had a disability, 83% on no-low income.
Mental Health Legal Centre	Mental Health Legal Centre & Royal District Nursing Service	Mental Health/ Homelessness	Addressed legal needs of 77 clients in first year of operation. High service demand, responsive and flexible project delivery, tangible and positive outcomes for clients and professional skills exchanged.
Mental Health Legal Centre	RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice; RMIT Social Work	Mental health/female prisoners/general support	Multidisciplinary practice in CLC. 65 clients referred in 4 months.
Mortgage Wellbeing Service	Djerriwarrh Health Service, WESTjustice (Western CLC) & Brimbank Melton CLC	Mortgage Stress	Integrated legal, financial counselling and social work assistance to clients in mortgage stress. Assisted 184 clients in mortgage stress in first 18 months of service, as well as undertaking advocacy and system reform to address the causes of mortgage stress.
Springvale Monash Legal Service Inc.	Monash Health & Springvale Monash Legal Service		Monash Health & Springvale Monash Legal Service targeting needs in Dandenong, Springvale & Cranbourne.
St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Elder Abuse HJP	Justice Connect & St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne	Elder Abuse	Improving health outcomes for older patients with a focus on the prevention of, and response to, elder abuse. Commenced January 2016; funding for evaluation currently being explored.
Sunraysia Community Health Service (SCHS)	SCHS and Victoria Legal Aid ('VLA')	Anticipated areas are child protection, mental health, tenancy and Cth entitlements.	Service estimated to commence May/June 2017. VLA will establish an office at SCHS in Mildura, with three lawyers and an Aboriginal Community Engagement officer.

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The Alfred Hospital	The Alfred Hospital & Maurice Blackburn Lawyers	General	492 clients in first 2 years.
Western Hospital	Brimbank Melton CLC & Sunshine Hospital Outreach	Family Violence	Service commenced 2016.
You'll Never Know if you Never Go	Banyule Community Health & West Heidelberg Community Legal Service	Tenancy	Addressing risk of homelessness due to VCAT non-attendance. 2-year project to conclude in May 2017.

Client experience: how HJP achieve better health and justice outcomes¹

Rahni disclosed the family violence she had been experiencing for the first time to her trusted health professional. Whilst she was keen to learn about her options for redress, she was reluctant to see an unfamiliar lawyer or family violence advocate. With Rahni's consent, her health professional arranged for an appointment with a health justice lawyer at the health service's office, where the health professional would also be present. Here Rahni accessed family violence advice and support for the first time.

Jana was a young woman who was not allowed to leave her house alone except for medical appointments. Her health professional was able to make Jana an appointment at her health clinic with their health justice partnership lawyer and family violence advocate to seek advice, should she wish to end the relationship. Her health professional also provided Jana with a medical report that she could use to show her partner she had been at a medical appointment.

Michelle was referred to a health justice lawyer after her partner had taken out an intervention order against her, despite still being in a relationship together. Michelle was confused and distressed about the situation. The health justice lawyer represented Michelle at court to reduce the conditions of the intervention order so she could return home. The lawyer also explained the process and the implications of the intervention order, helping Michelle calm down and come to terms with the situation.

Yasmin had experienced significant violence at the hands of her ex-husband, Frank. While pregnant with her fifth child (to a new partner), Yasmin went to the Middle East to care for her sick father. Frank followed her there and continued to perpetrate significant violence against her. Yasmin eventually managed to return to Australia and was immediately hospitalised due to pregnancy concerns. This was when she was referred to the health justice lawyer attached to her hospital. The health justice lawyer assisted Yasmin to apply for an intervention order against Frank. When Frank contested the intervention order, the health justice lawyer arranged for a barrister to appear on a *pro bono* basis on Yasmin's behalf. Ultimately, Yasmin received a full intervention order to protect her and all her children against Frank. Her health justice lawyer also arranged a referral to a private lawyer who provided her with significant *pro bono* family law assistance.

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¹ Examples drawn from health justice partnerships in Victoria.