

# **Economic Reform Roundtable**

**23 July 2025**

# Health justice partnerships

Health justice partnerships embed legal help into health care services and teams to improve health and wellbeing for:

- individuals, through direct service provision in places that they access
- people and communities vulnerable to complex need, by supporting integrated service responses and redesigning service systems around client needs and capability
- vulnerable populations through advocacy for systemic change to policies which affect the social determinants of health.

HJPs support populations that are particularly at risk of poor health and justice outcomes, 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.

**These are just some of the many legal issues that people can face in life. By integrating legal services into health settings, we can improve access to justice, address the social determinants of health and increase wellbeing.**

## Health Justice Australia

Health Justice Australia is a national charity and centre of excellence supporting the effectiveness and expansion of health justice partnerships through:

- Knowledge and its translation: developing evidence and translating that evidence into knowledge that is valued by practitioners, researchers, policy-makers and funders.
- Building capability: supporting practitioners to work collaboratively, including through brokering, mentoring and facilitating partnerships.
- Driving systems change: connecting the experience of people coming through health justice partnerships, and their practitioners, with opportunities for lasting systems change through reforms to policy settings, service design and funding.

Health Justice Australia (HJA) welcomes the Australian Government's interest in pursuing a productivity agenda at the upcoming Economic Reform Roundtable. The focus and understanding of productivity should not be limited to economic growth but must holistically consider other elements such as health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> Prevention and health equity are fundamental to supporting a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable society and so must be central to discussions about Australia's productivity.

It is evident the government understands this, as shown in the Measuring What Matters framework, introduced in 2023. Continued implementation of this framework is an important contribution to the dialogue about productivity.<sup>2</sup> Further to this, government must commit to strengthening its approach to prevention. As a first step, by fully funding and implementing the National Preventative Health Strategy (NPHS), which provides a valuable starting point to drive action in response to the strong evidence, which demonstrates the benefits of prevention and early intervention for long-term wellbeing, and therefore the budget bottom line and economy.

The Productivity Commission<sup>3</sup> has highlighted the need for new collaborative and integrated approaches to delivering care services and a national framework to support investment in prevention to drive higher quality and more cost-effective budget outcomes in the care system and more broadly. With these features in mind, integrated service models such as health justice partnership (HJP) contribute to fulfilling the government's vision for its productivity agenda across service systems.

HJP is one example of a collaborative integrated approach that improves service responses to complexity. In HJPs, legal help is brought into healthcare and other social support settings, to support people with intersecting health, legal and social problems – including housing, employment, discrimination, debt and family issues. This approach is a response to evidence of the impact of economic and broader determinants on health, as well as evidence of unmet legal need that can drive or exacerbate poor health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Collaboration as a foundation for productivity***

The purpose of service collaborations is to improve how services respond to complex needs among the people they help. The Productivity Commission has reported on the wide-ranging benefits of integrated service delivery, recognising an important role for holistic service design in the provision of legal assistance.<sup>5</sup> Multi-sector collaboration is also recognised as a key principle to address the social determinants of health, which is embedded across key government priorities in domestic and family violence, suicide prevention and the NPHS.

HJP is a well-established integrated service model, which uses partnership and collaboration across service sectors to reduce service fragmentation and to provide tailored and responsive support for service users. For instance, health clinics seeking to address repeat hospital admissions for respiratory problems are poorly equipped to tackle underlying drivers such as poor-quality ventilation in public housing, but they can partner with legal or other services who have that capability. HJP can enhance effectiveness through:

- enable services to coordinate holistic and effective care for people with complex needs, bringing different expertise together
- reshaping services around the needs of the people they assist and in the places people need it, making it easier for people to navigate complex systems
- reducing inefficiencies caused by siloed service systems, enabling services to do more with what they have
- building on existing local infrastructure and relationships to improve service responsiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> See discussions in Jason Staines, Croakey, If productivity is about people, health expertise must be in the room, 20 June 2025, <https://www.croakey.org/if-productivity-is-about-people-health-expertise-must-be-in-the-room/>

<sup>2</sup> Health Justice Australia submission available at <https://healthjustice.org.au/resource/submission/submission-to-treasury-measuring-what-matters-consultation/>

<sup>3</sup> Productivity Commission, 2025, Pillar 4: Delivering quality care more efficiently, <https://engage.pc.gov.au/projects/quality-care/page/pillar-4-responses>

<sup>4</sup> See HJA's website for information on HJP operating across Australia, <https://healthjustice.org.au/health-justice-partnership/health-justice-partnerships-across-australia/>

<sup>5</sup> Productivity Commission, 2014, Access to Justice Arrangements Inquiry Report No 72, p 178.

Our understanding of the nature and effectiveness of HJP in supporting service user outcomes can be drawn from evaluations of individual HJPs.<sup>6</sup> Creating impactful change for service users can look different, depending on the context and the issue under focus, but various evaluations have found positive effects on quality of life, empowerment and healing, and levels of wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> These outcomes are important to understand individual benefits that can drive productivity, as well as the system-level economic gains, for example through downstream budget cost savings.

### ***Timely and early support and intervention***

Integrating legal assistance into healthcare and other support settings through HJP provides an opportunity to provide early support for service users, who may be experiencing multiple, intersecting issues. This could, for example, include the complex needs that arise within families where persistent disability and mental ill-health is present or intersecting health and legal issues for women, children and families experiencing domestic and family violence, and family breakdown.

HJP can provide holistic support in a timelier way, particularly where legal help is not typically provided. Through this, HJP can help to prevent or reduce the likelihood that legal issues will escalate to crisis, at which point, they can compound ill health and systemic disadvantage, for individuals and within families. In addition to improved outcomes for service users, this can also result in reduced government budget costs across service systems, such as health and justice, but also in areas such as housing and social services.

HJA has seen the benefits of this in our work as part of the Centre of Research Excellence in Childhood Adversity and Mental Health. Initial findings from our work supporting the integration of legal assistance into Child and Family Hubs has identified the potential for HJP to better address the underlying health, legal and other problems that face families, responding to the early signs of problems or challenges and intervening before issues compound or get worse. Further insights from this work are available via our [website](#) and insights paper.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Workforce capability***

As a collaborative response, HJP builds the capability and capacity of practitioners and the services they work within, to identify and respond to complex intersecting need more effectively, by supporting capability across workforces of otherwise-siloed service settings. It does this by building the knowledge, skills, mindset, resources, remit and connections of practitioners to provide more comprehensive person-centred care to people with complex intersecting legal and other need. This includes the need for relationships and trust built between legal, health and social service practitioners, which are in turn strengthened by co-location, shared goals, activities and governance. In this way, HJP supports the efficiency of investment across government by increasing the capability and understanding of health and non-legal staff to know where to go when legal issues arise, thereby increasing the reach of interventions.

A recent evaluation of a HJP in Victoria, Evaluating the Outcomes of First Step Legal's Health Justice Partnerships,<sup>9</sup> highlights the value of collaborative ways of working for workforce effectiveness. The evaluation demonstrated the importance of partnership to improve the capability of workers to respond to service user complexity. This translated into higher job satisfaction, which provides potential insights to address burnout across service settings.

### ***Value of HJA***

HJA is uniquely positioned to support the productivity agenda through our role in driving the effectiveness, sustainability and expansion of service responses that improve health and justice outcomes. As government considers options, HJA is well-placed to provide practical expertise on partnerships and collaboration and evidence-based insights that contribute to service system efficiencies and innovation.

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<sup>6</sup> See examples in Appendix C: Integrated Service Evaluations in Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria, 2023, National Legal Assistance Partnership Review, Response to Issues Paper: The Victorian Community Legal Sector Perspective.

<sup>7</sup> See Scott, S. & Forell, S., 2024 Sustaining Health Justice Partnerships: Learning from the experience of the Integrated Services for Survivor Advocacy partnership, Health Justice Australia, Sydney.

<sup>8</sup> Chia, J (2023) Health justice partnership as early support for children and their families, Health Justice Australia, Sydney.

<sup>9</sup> First Step Legal & University of Melbourne, 2025, Evaluating the outcomes of First Step Legal's Health Justice Partnerships, <https://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/resources/first-step-legal---evaluation-report>



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