

Case for Support



HUMAN RIGHTS
FAIRNESS
JUSTICE



Acknowledgement of Country

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) acknowledges the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Centre community lives and works and pays deep respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

ECLC also acknowledges those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including Elders, who came to live on Wurundjeri land as a result of dispossession from their homelands and in more recent times through choice.

ECLC deeply appreciates and celebrates the people, stories, traditions, culture and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is honoured when they work together with the Centre. ECLC recognises that colonisation is the significant cause of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal peoples, and that justice cannot be realised without ensuring the human rights of all Aboriginal peoples.*


*ECLC acknowledges the Oonah Health & Community Services Aboriginal Corporation as the basis for key elements of this statement, used with permission.

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Nearly half of all Victorians will have a legal problem in the next 12 months, and nearly one-third will have more than one legal issue.*

Everyone deserves access to justice

Every day, the law touches people's lives. Whether it's buying a house, getting married, applying for a job or buying insurance – our rights exist within a complex legal system which applies to all aspects of daily life.

Often we forget these rights until a problem occurs, the vast majority of which can only be resolved legally. It could be a violent partner, a relationship breakdown, car accident or property damage. In any of these events, everyone needs access to legal help.

Yet the reality is that this is not true for majority of people – and for many reasons. It could be due to unaffordable costs, a lack of understanding of the law, fear of the system, or complex life challenges which create barriers. This is when navigating the legal system becomes difficult and creates inequity – often for those who need help the most.



“Let us also consider the reality that true legal representation is out of reach for the majority.”

– Rosie Batty AO – Family Violence Campaigner and 2015 Australian of the Year. Domestic Violence in Australia Report 2015

“I felt helpless because I had no idea what to do. It felt like my life was on hold.”

– Barbara age 65

Evidence ⁽¹⁾ shows that people experiencing complex and intersecting life challenges such as unemployment, long-term illness or disability, mental distress and low income are more likely to report multiple problems and large clusters of problems.

Systemic barriers related to language, culture and identity also creates disadvantage.

In these instances people representing themselves, or people avoiding legal processes, often lead to stress, poor health and far worse legal outcomes – sadly with major personal impacts. Others will simply give up and accept injustice.

“When I received the letter from the Courts, I felt so anxious, and it played on my mind every day. As a single mum, there was no way I could afford a Lawyer”

– Deepali age 38

The legal system is complex and hard to navigate. It is challenging for people to make informed choices without professional legal help. Frequently people most in need of assistance cannot afford lawyers and do not qualify for legal aid. Over 70% of people seeking legal assistance have an income of less than \$32,000 per year ⁽²⁾.

However, helping people resolve their legal problems early and effectively can reduce the devastating impact they have on a person’s life. This not only improves individual wellbeing outcomes, but can also avoid significant costs and alleviate pressure on other parts of the public system.

Source:

1. Balmer, N.J., Pleasence, P., McDonald, H.M. & Sandefur, R.L. (2023). The Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) Volume 1: Everyday Problems and Legal Need. Melbourne: Victoria Law Foundation.
2. Based on Eastern Community Legal Centre client CLASS data.



Eastern Community Legal Centre

Community legal centres play a unique role in the Australian legal system, assisting the majority of people who cannot afford private services but don't meet the threshold for legal aid.

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) is one of the largest multidisciplinary legal centres in Victoria which provides free legal information, advice, representation, casework and education.

Operating across three offices and a number of outreach locations, ECLC prioritises people who face additional barriers accessing legal help due to their mental health, racial or cultural background, age, disability, sexuality or gender identity, or geographical remoteness. Services are tailored to individual needs and often come with wrap-around and holistic support.

The Centre started as a community driven movement in 1974 to ensure those facing social and economic disadvantage had a fair chance to protect their rights and could access the legal system with ease. In the early years ECLC operated entirely with volunteers before very gradually growing its staffing.

Almost 50 years later, the Centre has provided over **50,000 free services** to help over **46,000 people** access human rights, fairness and justice and although much bigger, still relies on the generosity of volunteer students and pro bono lawyers.

OUR VISION

HUMAN RIGHTS
FAIRNESS
JUSTICE



There are 22 geographically based Community Legal Centres (CLCs) in Victoria



ECLC's catchment area has a number of areas with significant disadvantage. The cities of Whitehorse, Maroondah and Knox host large migrant communities and the Yarra Ranges has a high indigenous population.

50+ COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Networks that enable delivery of education and primary prevention work focused on addressing underlying systemic drivers that lead to inequality, discrimination and very often, legal problems.

3 HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS

A collaborative service delivery model to address the interrelated legal and social needs of patients or clients in a healthcare setting.

3 INTEGRATED PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS

A practice model which brings together professionals from different fields to collaborate, innovate and work in the same team so clients are seen as a whole person.

Leading the way

ECLC recognises that problems in people's lives are intersecting and rarely have only a legal component. To meet this need, the Centre was one of the first in Australia to deliver services in a progressive and innovative way.

ECLC introduced a collaborative integrated practice model which works with key health and community services. This means ECLC multidisciplinary teams are often found at other locations like hospitals, schools and health centres.

The Centre focuses on providing legal education in our communities, to help people understand their rights and responsibilities, and advocate for changes to laws to make outcomes fairer, based on the lived experiences of the people we assist.

In a relatively short period, ECLC has formed or extended partnerships with multiple health and community services and has become recognised as a national leader in integrated legal, health, financial and social support models.

“ECLC has been at the forefront of Australia's efforts to tackle Elder Abuse and has engaged in policy, advocacy and community education on Elder Abuse for many years.”

– Attorney General Mark Dreyfus 2023

Providing legal help

Assessment, Intake, Referral, and Response (AIRR) Team – Provides a person – centred, trauma informed enhanced intake and triage process, where community members needs are assessed and identified before being supported into appropriate pathways to legal assistance and other relevant social and financial support services.

Community Law – Community law practice including a volunteer – led evening service, generalist appointments, Duty Lawyer Service (at Ringwood Magistrates’ Court) and a free legal service at Deakin University.

Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) – Specialist family violence Community Lawyers provide representation at Ringwood Magistrate’s Court.

Early Resolution Service – Legal assistance to clients with family violence legal needs prior to their court hearings and resolve them where possible.



IN 2022-2023 AIRR TEAM RESPONDED TO 5,747 ENQUIRIES

ECLC utilises a prevention continuum framework to plan and provide programs and services for each of the Centre's priority communities . Adapted from the health and family violence context, the continuum engages three stages:

1. PREVENTION

Preventing legal problems before they occur and addressing the root causes.



2. EARLY INTERVENTION

Taking action on early signs and raising awareness about the legal problem.



3. RESPONSE

Intervening after the legal problem has occurred and providing clear pathways to accessing justice.

Preventing legal problems

Community Legal Education – Providing training and information resources to empower communities on their legal rights and addressing the drivers of inequity such as Gender Inequality, Elder Abuse, Discrimination and Racism through primary prevention activities.

Sector Training Programs – ECLC, in partnership with Safe and Equal and with the support of Family Safety Victoria, developed and delivers the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) training adapted for community service professionals in the legal assistance sector.

Advocacy and Law Reform – Strategic advocacy and campaigning with community partners to drive reform and change to make justice more accessible.



TERTIARY PREVENTION OR RESPONSE

Supports survivors and holds perpetrators to account (and aims to prevent the recurrence of violence)

SECONDARY PREVENTION OR EARLY INTERVENTION

Aims to ‘change the trajectory’ for individuals or higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence.

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Whole-of-population initiatives that address primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence that lead to legal problems.

Our landmark programs

ECLC has become a national leader in a range of family violence and elder abuse approaches, from prevention and gender equality campaigns to integrated practice, health justice partnerships and sector training programs. Staff and volunteers are trained to provide a trauma-informed response and work across the continuum of primary prevention, early intervention, and crisis response.

SUPPORTING WOMEN IMPACTED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE

WELS – Early intervention for women accessing maternity services during pregnancy, a time when they are at increased risk of experiencing family violence.

Mabels – Award-winning early intervention program for women experiencing family violence.

SAGE – Longer term response for women experiencing family violence with complex needs and additional barriers to access.



WHAT HAPPENED?

During her pregnancy Helen's partner had intense mood swings and acted aggressively when he felt stressed. After sharing her concerns at an antenatal appointment, she was referred to the WELS program.

In a confidential appointment with an ECLC lawyer, Helen disclosed her partner's violent and controlling behaviour towards her and her unborn baby, including a recent scary incident. Her lawyer advised Helen on her legal options in seeking safety from family violence, specifically parenting rights if she left the relationship, how to apply for an Intervention Order and how to register her baby's name at birth.

As her pregnancy progressed, Helen decided to separate from her partner. She was able to see her lawyer again at short notice and go through the steps she wanted to take, including seeking and obtaining a Family Violence Intervention Order for her protection.

WHAT CHANGED?

At all times, Helen remained in control of her situation and made informed choices that were right for her. By seeking advice and support early in her pregnancy, Helen was empowered with knowledge about her legal rights and how to keep herself and her baby safe. Through WELS, Helen felt confident she had a safe space to easily get advice at critical times during her pregnancy and relationship.



More than legal help

SUPPORTING SENIORS IMPACTED BY ELDER ABUSE

ELSA – Legal, social and financial support for people experiencing elder abuse in partnership with Eastern Health.

ROSE – Legal, social and financial support for people experiencing elder abuse in partnership with community organisations including Oonah Health & Community Services Aboriginal Corporation.



WHAT HAPPENED?

Andrea lived with her adult son, who she had raised as a single mum after becoming a young widow. Her son Don was experiencing mental ill-health and substance misuse problems and refused medical treatment. He also repeatedly stole money from her. Whilst in hospital for a knee replacement, Andrea shared her concerns about returning home to a social worker. She was referred to the ELSA program and received a visit on site from an ECLC Lawyer, Advocate and Financial Counsellor.

She confided that because of Don's stealing, she couldn't pay her bills and that he made no contributions to the household. She also felt intimidated by his escalating threatening behaviour and she said that he refused to move out.

The ELSA team advised that this was elder abuse and helped Andrea come up with steps to take if she ever felt unsafe. Her Lawyer also advised on legal options such as applying for an Intervention Order or sending a letter outlining how she felt and requesting Don leave.

Andrea felt Don would be at risk of being homeless if she applied for an Intervention Order so she opted to write a letter with her lawyer instead.

WHAT CHANGED?

Andrea felt safe sharing her worries in the Hospital setting, empowering her to seek legal advice. After receiving the letter, Don moved out to live with a friend and Andrea's relationship with him improved. The ELSA team also helped Andrea access a \$650 utilities relief grant and access home and garden maintenance services through a My Aged Care assessment.



Taking the journey together



SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

HEAL – A holistic program with a Client Advocate working alongside Community Lawyers to resolve inter-related legal and support needs for people with complex needs.



WHAT HAPPENED?

Mark has an intellectual disability and an underlying mental health condition. He had been trying to see a psychologist and GP but there was a long wait list.

Mark lived with his mum Alice and was referred to ECLC following an argument with her, after which she called the police to make him stop. Alice told them Mark would often have outbursts when he didn't get his way and alleged that he had caused substantial damage within the family home.

Police issued a Family Violence Safety Notice excluding Mark from his home for two weeks and applied for an Intervention Order.

Mark stayed with friends at first, but this wasn't a permanent solution. Mark wanted to return home as he had never lived independently. Mark was referred to the Heal program by ECLC's Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS).

WHAT CHANGED?

Mark felt better supported in his legal and mental health problems. The matter proceeded before the Magistrate and ECLC represented Mark and explained his complex health needs to the Court. Alice was also represented and informed the court that she was not fearful of her son. As a result, the Magistrate decided to make an Intervention Order that allowed Mark to return home in a safe way.

Community need

Independent research and ECLC's experience confirms that some people within the community are more likely to confront persistent barriers to accessing help and managing legal problems. ECLC prioritises delivering comprehensive advice and advocacy services to these community members, whilst also working to address the root cause of the disadvantage they experience.

OUR PRIORITY COMMUNITIES:

- Children and young people
- People experiencing or at risk of family violence
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Older people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer people
- People who experience language or cultural barriers
- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- People with a disability or mental illness
- People impacted by climate change (disasters and extreme weather impacts)



FUNDING FOCUS

- Family Violence
- Elder Abuse
- Climate Justice
- Child Safety
- Discrimination
- Mental Health

ECLC is committed to removing barriers to justice for communities in Melbourne/Naarm's East and effectively responding to the needs of those in the community who need help the most. As the population grows, the challenge is managing service demand whilst maintaining quality. In an ever-changing funding environment, we will continue to provide legal services that are responsive to the needs of our community.



Theory of change

ECLC has adopted the Victorian Community Legal Centre's outcomes framework which focuses on the change occurred, not just services and outputs. This multi-faceted approach aims to achieve justice for all through five key pillars.

Access to Justice for All - People experiencing disadvantage have increased access to justice

Empowered Communities - Community members have increased capability to understand and address their legal issues

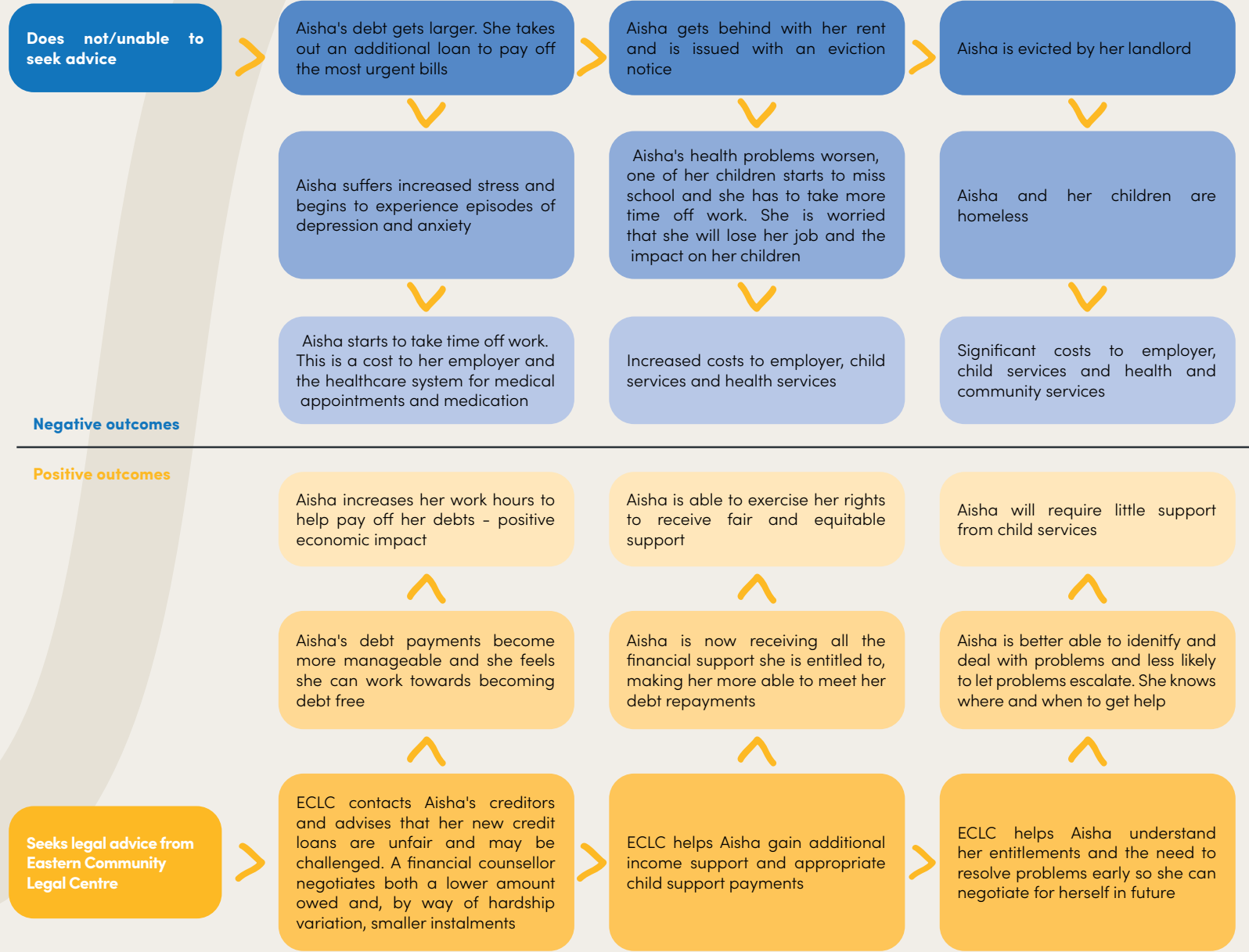
Holistic Responses to Needs - CLCs and stakeholders have increased capability to provide integrated responses to the needs of people experiencing disadvantage

Fair Laws and Systems - Decision makers address systemic injustices

Effective CLCs - CLCs are capable, sustainable and able to respond to the legal needs of people experiencing disadvantage

Benefit Model

Aisha works part-time as a carer and lives with her three children in a rented unit in Box Hill. Her partner and father of her children left four months ago, leaving her on a single income. Aisha has had to take out two loans at high interest rates and borrow more on her credit cards in order to make ends meet. But she is having trouble paying her rent and managing re-payments on her loans and credit cards. Recently she received a letter from a debt collection agency demanding payment within 30 days.

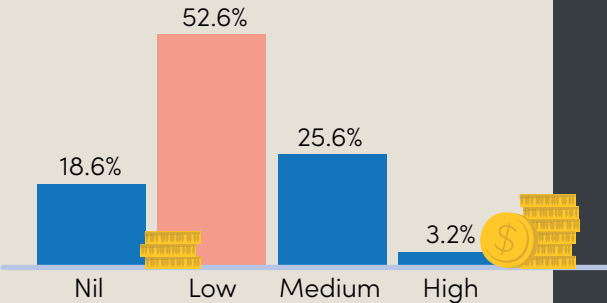


Our clients (FY23)

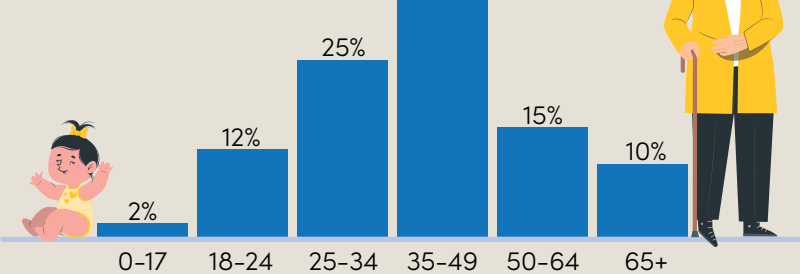
DISADVANTAGES



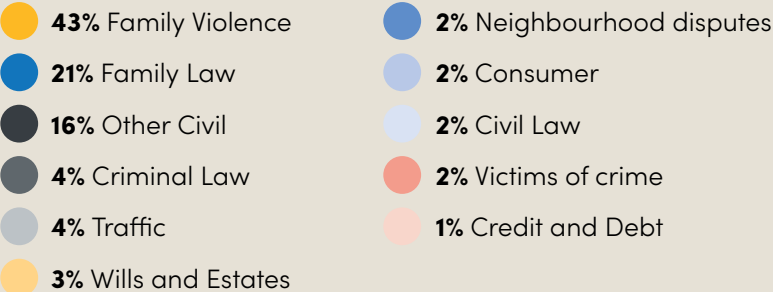
INCOME (%)



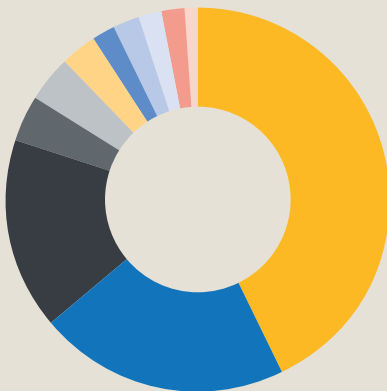
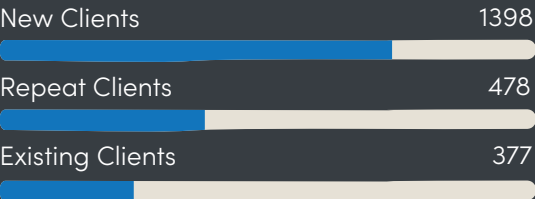
AGE (%)



LEGAL PROBLEM

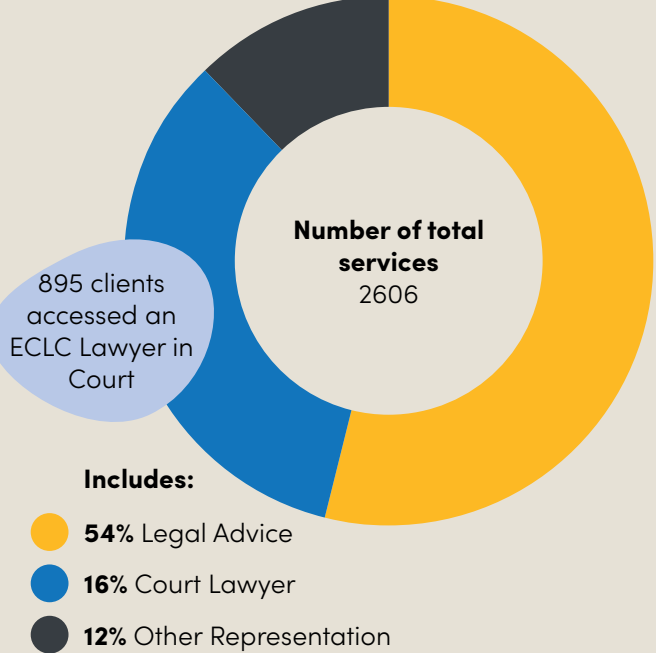


TOTAL NUMBER OF CLIENTS: 1857



Impact in the community (FY23)

CLIENT SERVICES



On average, a first appointment with an ECLC Lawyer saves a community member \$350 in legal fees.

ASSESSMENT, INTAKE, REFERRAL, AND RESPONSE (AIRR) TEAM

Responded to **5747** interactions (excl. specialist programs)

Arranged **1590** appointments

Provided **2529** external referrals



COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Reached **2450** students across **9** campuses and **65** people in out-of-school settings

UNMET LEGAL NEED

900

Over 900 external legal referrals were made because the Centre did not have capacity to assist – at all, or within a reasonable timeframe

A Call To Action

“ The legal system should be the cornerstone of society and democracy. Yet every year, thousands of people who face legal issues cannot afford legal help to access justice. For those with the fewest resources, justice becomes a burden, hard to reach and only for the wealthy.

Community legal centres exist to address this inequity. ECLC’s unique multidisciplinary approach focuses on intervening early, avoiding the escalation of legal problems and providing holistic support in partnership with other community service professionals. But the high demand for legal assistance in the eastern region is more than our staff and volunteers can meet.

Whilst we are fortunate to receive core funding from government, this has not kept up with increasing demand. Through this Case for Support, we seek advocacy and support to help re-build capacity and strengthen our unique service model to meet increasing demand in the eastern communities.”

Michael Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Eastern Community Legal Centre

For every \$1 spent on Community Legal Centres, the benefit to the Community amounts to \$18

(Economic Cost Benefit Analysis of Community Legal Centres, June 2012, National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc.)



Why we need your support

At Eastern Community Legal Centre we believe **legal rights are human rights.**

Our dedicated team of volunteers; community lawyers; advocates, social workers; financial counsellors and educators work hard to provide a first-class **legal service on a budget.** Despite this, the vast majority of people we turn away is due to capacity.

Whilst ECLC receives government funding to cover core services, demand continues to outstrip Centre resources.

Worryingly, **unmet legal need** will only escalate problems as the impacts of the pandemic, disasters and widening inequality continue to be felt.

Through the generosity of donors, sponsors, supporters and volunteers, we can work together to **change this.**

Support us to reach our vision for human rights, fairness and justice.



All donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR CURRENT FUNDING NEEDS PLEASE CONTACT:

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