



Peninsula  
Community  
Legal Centre

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Submission to  
Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End  
Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)



# Submission: Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)

30 July 2026

## Introduction

1. Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to *Evidence to action: informing direction for the Second Action Plan Consultation Paper in support of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (“Consultation Paper”).
2. We make this submission as a legal assistance sector organisation with expertise gained from working extensively with victim-survivors of family violence for many decades, across a wide range of legal issues and programs and through engagement with the Specialist Family Violence Courts in Frankston and Moorabbin, Victoria.
3. As we prepare this submission, Australia is grappling with the murders of four women and girls in three days between 4 and 7 July 2026 – each allegedly by a man or boy known to them. There have been subsequent murders since that date. Our collective work in ending violence against women and children has never been more urgent. We support action across the spectrum to end violence against women and children, from prevention to early intervention, response and recovery.
4. PCLC supports the statements made by Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) in the Consultation Paper that:
  - “Violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence remain one of the most significant and complex challenges facing Australia. The impacts of this violence are profound, enduring and far-reaching; and disproportionately affect those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Ending this violence requires sustained national effort and a collective commitment to measurable change (ANROWS CEO Foreword, Consultation Paper, p.6).
  - “Ensuring policy and practice across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery is culturally safe, accessible and responsive to diverse communities, including migrant and refugee populations, is of critical importance (Consultation Paper, p.11).
5. We welcomed the National Plan to End Violence Against Women’s (“National Plan”) recognition of legal services as a critical part of the response and recovering and healing systems for victim-survivors, noting the National Plan’s recognition that victim-survivors often interact with the family law system, child protection systems, family violence protection order systems and criminal justice processes. The Plan also highlights the importance of these systems being **safe**,

**trauma-informed and responsive** to victim-survivors' experiences, and that **legal services are part of helping women navigate these systems and secure protection and legal remedies**. As National Legal Aid has stated, "*legal assistance is often the only pathway to safety, stability and justice for victim-survivors and their children. Access to legal assistance is a cornerstone of an effective response to gender-based violence and must be a critical component of this [Second] Action Plan*".<sup>1</sup> As also noted by National Legal Aid, legal assistance not only supports victim-survivors but also plays a vital role in preventing systems abuse and ensuring perpetrators are held to account.

6. Legal assistance sector organisations (including community legal centres and Legal Aid Commissions) are a critical part of overall "legal services" that work with victim-survivors and are at the frontline of the justice system response. Legal assistance sector organisations work to ensure that legal systems are safe, trauma-informed, and responsive to victim-survivors' experiences. We do this both through **direct assistance to victim-survivors** and through **systemic advocacy and reform** aimed at improving how courts, police, child protection, and other legal institutions respond to family violence, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based harm.
7. While legal assistance sector organisations have the specialised services and expertise needed to help victim-survivors to navigate fragmented legal systems and ensure safe and just outcomes, our sector is facing increasing overall demand for our services as well as increasing complexity in our work, as community members grapple with the intersecting impacts of the cost-of-living, housing and family violence crises. In short, **the sector is being overwhelmed with the unmet legal need in our communities**, which is increasingly forming a major barrier to victim-survivor safety and to achieving just and fair outcomes.
8. The 2024 final report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches<sup>2</sup> ("Rapid Review Report") highlighted both the vital role of "public legal assistance" as a frontline response and the need for a significant funding uplift. The authors stated:

*More immediately, the Review recommends that there should be a significant funding uplift in certain frontline areas. Here it is vital that the role of public legal assistance be acknowledged as a frontline response, noting the recent Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership finding about the 'neglect' of this sector. This is not only because legal assistance is an access to justice issue, but because legal assistance can improve safety for victim-survivors, particularly for women and children involved in protection order matters and family law proceedings. Importantly, it can also reduce risk and facilitate compliance with orders by engaging people using violence in a trauma and DFSV-informed way.*

9. We note that the review's call for significant funding uplift for legal services was made in the late stages of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) and before the signing of the National

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<sup>1</sup> National Legal Aid welcomes consultation on Second Action Plan to end violence against women and children, 22 May 2026, <https://nationallegalaid.org.au/news/national-legal-aid-welcomes-consultation-on-second-action-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children>

<sup>2</sup> *Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence*, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/unlocking-the-prevention-potential-4.pdf>

Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP) Agreement. PCLC welcomed the NAJP and extended our sincere appreciation to Hon Mark Dreyfus KC, former Attorney-General, for his leadership in securing this agreement and increasing funding to support the legal assistance sector to improve access to justice. Unfortunately, despite this significant commitment and investment, the legal assistance sector continues to face a critical funding crisis, and the current funding level is not enough to meet the escalating demand for legal assistance across Australia, leaving many individuals and families unable to access timely legal support. As also noted in the Rapid Review Report “**requests for increased funding have only short-term value**”, calling for more permanent funding pathways after an analysis of unmet response needs.

10. Despite recognising that victims-survivors need to be able to access legal responses, and recognising current challenges in the justice response such as the complexity of legal systems and misidentification and systems abuse, the First Action Plan 2023–2027 does not contain clear references to the leading and significant role of legal assistance sector organisations in improving safety and reducing risk, including the risk of homicide, holding perpetrators accountable and obtaining just outcomes. **In summary, one of our key recommendations is that the Second Action Plan contains clear and strong language about the critical role legal assistance sector organisations (including community legal centres and Legal Aid Commissions) play, and this recognition be accompanied by long term, sustainable investment to ensure the legal assistance sector organisations can meet growing demand and continue to delivering these essential services.**

11. This limited submission focuses on:

- **Primary prevention and early intervention.**
- **Improving police responses and the justice system** to better support victim-survivors through the provision of trauma-informed, culturally safe supports that promote safety and wellbeing, and hold people who choose to use violence to account.
- **Improving access to short-term, medium and long-term housing** for women and children experiencing violence, including those living in institutional settings, and support women to safely stay in their own homes when they choose to do so.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That the Second Action Plan incorporates the eight key asks of Melbourne’s Promoting Respect and Equity Together (PRET) partnership outlined on page 6 of the PRET submission, aimed at recognising, resourcing and connecting what already works.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Second Action Plan contains clear language about the leading and significant role of legal assistance sector organisations in improving safety and reducing risk, including the risk of homicide, holding perpetrators to account and obtaining just outcomes.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Second Action Plan includes clear language about the need to strengthen and resource legal assistance sector organisations in a long-term, sustainable way to ensure they are accessible.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Second Action Plan contains clear reference to further improving and streamlining the family law system for victim-survivors, including expanding free and low-cost family law services, simplifying documentation in family law proceedings, simplifying divorce processes, and improving the operation of the Commonwealth Cross-Examination Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Second Action Plan contains clear reference to continuing to address misidentification and systems abuse in all systems victim-survivors interact with, noting recent reforms to the Victorian family violence intervention order system which could serve as a model to other state and territory jurisdictions to progress this action.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Second Action Plan refers to the importance of access to free and comprehensive tenancy programs to assist victim-survivors with tenancy issues arising from family violence, including ending leases, removing perpetrators from tenancies, challenging evictions and advocating to protect victim-survivors from unfair bond and compensation claims resulting from damages caused by perpetrators.

**Recommendation 7:** That the Second Action Plan refers to programs that may assist some victim-survivors to maintain home ownership after family violence, including the establishment of specific shared equity schemes (in Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions) targeted at supporting victim-survivors of family violence, including women who are permanent residents as well as Australian citizens.

**Recommendation 8:** That the Second Action Plan continues to focus on the need for sustained recovery and healing programs for victim-survivors, including young victim-survivors, with funding models that recognise recovery may take years rather than months.

## About Peninsula Community Legal Centre

12. Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that has been providing free legal services to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Melbourne's outer southeast since 1977. We are one of the largest community legal centres in Australia, serving a population of over one million people across six local government areas. PCLC's head office is in Frankston, with branches in Cranbourne, Bentleigh and Rosebud, and 18 visiting services across our large catchment area.
13. We are committed to a client-centred, trauma-informed and rights-based approach, including securing the right to live free from violence. We place a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention, and our community legal education and engagement efforts are aimed at building legal capability across a broad spectrum of settings and community partners.
14. PCLC assists community members with legal issues such as family law, family violence, tenancy, criminal and civil law, fines, and rooming house advocacy. The most common legal problems for our clients are family law and family violence. Family law services made up 31% of our Centre's work in 2024-2025, with most of those clients being victim-survivors of family violence. However, noting that victim-survivors often need help with multiple and intersecting legal problems (particularly tenancy, debt and fines), we provide integrated referrals between family violence, family law and other PCLC legal programs to provide wrap-around support. In 2024-2025, 47 per cent of our total of 6,610 clients reported being affected by family violence.

## Complex work

15. Contrary to some beliefs, community legal centres such as PCLC undertake significant and complex casework for their clients, particularly in family law matters with risk factors such as family violence, mental health issues, and/or alcohol and substance abuse issues, or in family violence matters where there is systems abuse by a perpetrator. In some family law matters, we may have our clients with us for a period of 2-3 years as their family law matter progresses through the Court, with some clients even returning after final court orders are made if there is further family violence, contravention of orders or other child welfare concerns.
16. PCLC provides Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) duty lawyer services at the Dandenong Registry of the FCFCOA. Demand has steadily increased, particularly for urgent and complex matters including those with related immigration issues such as Airport Watch List orders. Service demand continues to grow and is generally met, although not all clients can be assisted immediately.
17. PCLC provides Family Violence Duty Lawyer services at the Specialist Family Violence Courts in Frankston and Moorabbin. These services play a critical role in ensuring victim-survivors can access timely legal assistance, have their rights protected, and participate effectively in the court process. Unsurprisingly, the volume of referrals has occasionally challenged our capacity to accept all cases.

## Overwhelming need for legal casework

18. We note the increasing complexity of our legal matters means matters are becoming more resource intensive and having a greater impact on individual lawyers. At the same time, community members are grappling with the cost-of-living and housing crises and are increasingly unable to afford to pay for legal assistance, increasing the pressure on the sector. **There is an overwhelming need for family law casework and representation to assist victim-survivors to achieve appropriate outcomes, including safe parenting arrangements.** It is also particularly difficult to meet the huge need for family law property settlement casework in our communities, potentially leaving many victim-survivors without housing and/or economic security after experiencing family violence.

## Our family violence-related programs

19. Preventing and responding to family violence, including systems abuse, is a core part of our legal practice.
20. PCLC's family violence work spans duty lawyer services, outreach services, family law advice and casework, specialist assertive outreach programs, youth prevention work (see further information below), targeted community legal education, and integrated partnerships with The Orange Door and other community services for early-intervention clinics.
21. Our Family Violence Program, General Family Law Program, Family Violence to Family Law Continuity Program (FV2FL), Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS), Orange Door service, maternal and child health services, migration law clinic and family violence refuge program are

key specialist programs focusing primarily on victim-survivors. Additionally, our REACHHer program is an integrated housing justice and economic security program designed to help women affected by family violence and multicultural women experiencing financial disadvantage to resolve family law property issues and sustain housing. A summary and descriptions of PCLC's main programs and services relating to family violence is included at **Attachment One**.

22. To provide a snapshot of the scale of services we deliver, in 2024-2025 we delivered the following services (please note our 2025-2026 data is currently being compiled and was not available before this submission was finalised):
  - Our family violence lawyers assisted **2,018** clients, providing **1,547** legal advice services, **2,617** duty lawyer services and **479** ongoing case (representation) services.
  - Our family lawyers assisted **1,734** clients, providing **2,043** legal advice services, **515** duty lawyer services and 392 ongoing case (representation) services.
23. As part of our place-based model of delivering legal services, PCLC has a cooperative, coordinated relationship with our local Victoria Legal Aid office (Peninsula region). As part of this model, to avoid creating conflicts of interest that would leave parties without legal assistance, victim-survivors in family violence and family law matters are generally referred to PCLC, and alleged perpetrators referred to Victoria Legal Aid.
24. PCLC delivers a range of programs aimed at preventing family violence before it occurs by increasing awareness, building respectful relationships and improving understanding of legal rights. These include:
  - Youth theatre programs, including *On the Ropes*, an interactive production for secondary school students that addresses:
    - family violence
    - coercive control
    - consent
    - relationship boundaries
    - digital image-based abuse
    - young people's legal rights.
  - School Lawyer Program, which provides:
    - classroom legal education
    - confidential legal advice in schools
    - education about consent, family violence, cyberbullying, digital citizenship and young people's rights
    - early identification of legal and safety issues affecting young people.
  - Targeted community legal education delivered through community-based settings and partner organisations to build legal capability and awareness.
25. PCLC also leverages our frontline evidence to influence laws and systems, ensuring that individual client experiences drive meaningful systemic reform. We are active in law reform activities related to family violence, with the aim of addressing systemic issues and improving legal systems for victim-survivors.

## Reforms welcomed

### Commonwealth

26. We commend the Australian Government on its continued commitment to address violence against women and children, and specifically commend the following improvements to Commonwealth systems:

- **Significant changes to the *Family Law Act*** in relation to both parenting and property, which aim to better address family violence in family law matters, including:
  - **Simplifying the "best interests of the child" factors**, with a stronger focus on protecting children from family violence and other harms and protecting carers from family violence.
  - **Removing the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility**, which is particularly important in family violence matters where joint decision-making may expose victim-survivors to ongoing control or conflict.
  - **Providing greater information sharing about family violence and child protection concerns**, making it easier for the family law courts to obtain information from child protection agencies, police, family violence services and other relevant bodies to assist the court to identify risks earlier and make safer parenting orders.
  - **Providing explicit recognition of economic and financial abuse**, specifically recognising forms of abuse such as controlling access to money, preventing employment or study, forcing debts onto a partner, withholding financial support and dowry abuse.
  - **Significant expansion of the consideration of family violence in financial matters**, including the impact of family violence on a person's ability to contribute financially or non-financially and the effects of violence on future earning capacity.
  - **Providing stronger powers to address systems abuse**, giving courts enhanced powers to manage proceedings where a party uses legal processes to harass, intimidate or continue abuse after separation.
- **Signing of the National Access to Justice Partnership Agreement** between the Australian and state governments to provide legal assistance services over five years.
- **The expansion of the of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia's Lighthouse Program and Evatt Lists**, to identify family violence risks early and create a more efficient pathway through the family law system for those at high-risk.
- The **ongoing audit of key Commonwealth systems to identify and prevent their weaponisation** by perpetrators of family violence, including the family law, child support, immigration, and taxation systems.

- The \$183 million funding over four years and package of measures to **prevent the weaponisation of the child support system** and protect parents and children from financial abuse.

## Victoria

27. Victoria continues to be a leader in addressing violence against women and children and the dedicated, State-wide system reform is making change in the rates of violence in our jurisdiction. We note the Consultation Paper states:

- “While most states and territories show reduction in some forms of some forms of violence between 2016 and 202-2022 ..., Victoria has shown the most consistent change across most forms of violence” (p.27).
- “The evidence shows incremental progress in Victoria ahead of other jurisdictions, suggesting focused attention can lead to improvement. Victoria is the only jurisdiction showing decreases in all forms of violence against women measured at the jurisdictional level” (p.28).

28. We commend the Victorian Government for recent reforms to the family violence system in the form of the Women’s Safety Package, a suite of legislative and policy reforms. The reforms enacted through the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Act* will strengthen protections for victim-survivors by:

- Broadening the legal definition of family violence to formally include stalking, systems abuse, and animal cruelty.
- Introducing a presumptive minimum two-year duration for final family violence intervention orders.
- Requiring police and courts to more carefully consider factors associated with misidentification of victim-survivors as perpetrators (reducing misidentification has been a major advocacy priority for Victoria’s community legal sector and family violence services).
- Making clear young people will continue to be protected by an intervention order even if they turn 18, preventing the so-called “ageing out” of orders (an issue examined by the Victorian Law Reform Commission in 2025).
- Setting a minimum age of 12 for children named as respondents on intervention orders, providing alignment with the age of criminal responsibility in Victoria (noting that community legal centres advocate for the age of criminal responsibility and minimum age for respondents to be 14 years).
- Allowing Victorian courts to make intervention orders even where the family violence occurred outside Victoria, helping victim-survivors in border towns or those who have moved away for safety reasons.

29. These reforms closely align with priorities that the legal assistance sector has been advocating for over many years, particularly around the need for safeguards against misidentification, and could serve as a useful model for other jurisdictions.

30. We note that the Victorian Government is also proposing to introduce a standalone coercive control criminal offence in Victoria, which is generally not supported by the legal assistance sector due to lack of evidence it will increase victim-survivor safety and concern about unintended consequences, including the potential for increased misidentification and systems abuse. An important factor in the Victorian legal assistance sector's view is that Victoria has a well-developed family violence system and is already better equipped to deal with coercive control issues than other Australian and international jurisdictions that we are compared to.
31. Despite these significant improvements to the justice response, there is still considerable room for improvement in many areas and strong action required. PCLC would welcome further measures to improve safety, access to justice and outcomes for victim survivors.

## **From the frontline of the justice response**

32. Current issues we are seeing in our legal practice relating to victim-survivors include:

### **Family violence**

- Consistently high rates of police-reported family violence incidents.
- Ongoing high demand for family violence duty lawyer services at the Specialist Family Violence Magistrates' Courts in Frankston and Moorabbin, sometimes challenging our ability to accept all cases referred to us.
- Due to demand, the need to prioritise victim-survivors facing vulnerabilities such as high levels of trauma, language and cultural barriers, and urgent safety issues.
- Challenges meeting the demand for family violence casework services.
- Regularly handling complex cases, including some contested family violence intervention order hearings and County Court of Victoria appeals, particularly in cases where perpetrators misuse legal processes to further perpetuate abuse (noting that there is no duty lawyer service for family violence intervention order appeals and community legal centres are not funded to assist with these appeals).

### **Family law**

- Demand for PCLC's family law advice and casework continues to grow and is generally met, although not all clients can be assisted immediately.
- An overwhelming demand for family law property/financial settlements for victim-survivors of family violence who cannot afford private legal representation.
- An increase in family law clients with more complex needs, particularly complex mental health needs.
- Many of our family law matters continue to involve alcohol and substance abuse issues, family violence and concurrent criminal proceedings, or a combination of these factors.
- An increase in the number of family law matters where the family violence is of a more overtly violent nature, including violence against animals.
- An increase in the number of documents to be prepared for a family law case since 2021 reforms, making matters more complex and time-consuming for lawyers, and making it harder for unrepresented litigants to navigate requirements and complete forms.

- Also, since 2021 case management reforms, many matters are now listed for Interim Defended Hearings, creating additional workload and costs, including preparation of a Case Outline and often briefing Counsel to appear.
- There is a greater need for legal support for divorce applications, including with increased requests by the Court for additional information such as supplementary affidavits, or for assistance with complex service issues (noting that victim-survivors are often the ones who may struggle to serve their divorce application or may have increased safety risks when serving a divorce application). Many victim-survivors cannot afford even the reduced fee for *Application for divorce* of \$390, which can serve as another real barrier to ending their marriage formally.
- Problems with s102NA orders and Commonwealth Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme, which are meant to protect victim-survivors from further trauma by preventing the alleged abuser from questioning them directly in court. We have assisted victim-survivors who have been let down by this scheme, including misuse of the scheme by alleged perpetrators to perpetrate systems abuse (noting access to this legal representation is not subject to a means test or a merits test and unmeritorious claims may be funded), and lawyers appointed under a s.102NA grant doing sub-standard legal work or preparation.

## Our priorities for the Second Action Plan

33. Based on our practice experience, we advocate for the following:

### Recognising, resourcing and connecting prevention

- PCLC is a member of the Promoting Respect and Equity Together (PRET) partnership (coordinated by Women's Health in the South East), which brings together around 40 organisations across Melbourne's Southern Metropolitan region, collectively serving approximately 1.56 million people across 10 local government areas.
- Regional coordination turns generational, whole-of-population change into a scalable, replicable practice – provided it is backed with funding and measurement architecture that matches its ambition.
- PCLC endorses PRET's submission to this Consultation, including the eight key asks:
  - Treat primary prevention as a distinct national priority.
  - Fund regional prevention infrastructure, including the place-based leadership role of local government.
  - Build a measurement architecture fit for prevention's strengths.
  - Resource the prevention workforce as the skilled specialists they are.
  - Embed lived experience as primary prevention infrastructure.
  - Back culturally embedded, in-language community-led prevention.
  - Extend accountability across the whole community, building on the

**Recommendation 1:** That the Second Action Plan incorporates the eight key asks of Melbourne's Promoting Respect and Equity Together (PRET) partnership outlined on page 6 of the PRET submission, aimed at recognising, resourcing and connecting what already works.

### **Strengthen legal assistance as a core response to violence:**

- Without accessible, specialist legal services, legal rights for victim-survivors cannot translate into safety or recovery.
- Recognise community legal centres and Legal Aid Commissions as critical frontline services that improve safety, hold perpetrators accountable and reduce homicide risk.
- Demand for legal assistance services is rising, and unmet legal need remains significant.
- Provide additional and increased funding for community legal centres and Legal Aid Commissions for family violence and family law programs, including expansion of programs such as the Family Advocacy and Support Service and the Family Law to Family Violence Continuity Program, as well as other programs that assist victim-survivors (including tenancy, civil and criminal law, fines) to enable them to better respond to the level of unmet legal need.
- Sustainable funding must support early advice and duty lawyer services, as well as ongoing casework and representation (particularly for family law parenting and property matters).
- The Current Action Plan contains a fairly vague reference to “capacity building” for sector stakeholders including legal services, but is otherwise silent about ensuring the legal assistance sector can meet demand.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Second Action Plan contains clear language about the leading and significant role of legal assistance sector organisations in improving safety and reducing risk, including the risk of homicide, holding perpetrators accountable and obtaining just outcomes.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Second Action Plan includes clear language about the need to strengthen and resource legal assistance sector organisations in a long-term, sustainable way to ensure they are accessible.

### **Further improvement of family law responses**

- Acknowledging the significant reforms to the Family Law Act in relation to parenting and property, the family law system is still complex and overwhelming for many victim-survivors.
- Some actions to further improve family law responses include:
  - Expanding free and low-cost family law services.
  - Reducing onerous amount of documentation required for family law matters.
  - Improving affordability and accessibility of divorce for victim-survivors including expanding hardship exemptions for divorce filing fees, simplifying service for divorce (allowing electronic service and dispensation of service more easily where safety is at risk), and separating parenting arrangements from divorce applications.
  - Improving operation of the Commonwealth Cross-Examination Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme to prevent weaponisation by perpetrators and ensure that it provides strong and effective representation for victim-survivors.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Second Action Plan contains clear reference to further improving and streamlining the family law system for victim-survivors, including expanding free and low-cost family law services, simplifying documentation in family law proceedings, simplifying divorce processes, and improving the operation of the Commonwealth Cross-Examination Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme.

#### **Continuing to address misidentification and systems abuse**

- Noting the significant reforms in both the family law system and the Victorian family violence intervention order system, we advocate for a continued focus on addressing misidentification and systems abuse in all systems victim-survivors interact with.
- Recent reforms to the Victorian family violence intervention order system could serve as a model to other state and territory jurisdictions.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Second Action Plan contains clear reference to continuing to address misidentification and systems abuse in all systems victim-survivors interact with, noting recent reforms to the Victorian family violence intervention order system which could serve as a model to other state and territory jurisdictions to progress this action in relation to family violence systems.

#### **Continuing to address the housing crisis**

- One of the most important factors impacting the ability of victim-survivors to leave a relationship is access to housing and longer-term financial security.
- As stated in the current Action Plan, unaffordable, unavailable, inaccessible and insecure housing are major barriers for victim-survivors leaving violence, and for recovery and healing after violence.
- Housing insecurity may force women and children to relocate from their community, leaving family, friends, schools and other support networks behind, further impacting recovery.
- Improving access to safe and secure housing for victim-survivors is critical, including crisis accommodation to longer-term sustainable social and private housing, including access to affordable rental and owner-occupied homes.
- For victim-survivors in the private rental market, access to tenancy programs offered by community legal centres (such as PCLC's Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program) can assist victim-survivors with tenancy issues arising from family violence, including ending leases, removing perpetrators from tenancies, challenging evictions and defending unfair bond/compensation claims caused by perpetrators.
- Women leaving family violence often fall between home ownership, private rental and social housing systems. Some victim-survivors may be able to stay in their own owner-occupied homes if provided with integrated supports, including family law legal services, financial counselling, psychosocial supports and appropriate financial products such as tailored mortgages and shared equity schemes.
- Establishing shared equity schemes as targeted programs for victim-survivors of family violence, including women who are permanent residents as well as Australian citizens, could boost housing and economic security for some victim-survivors.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Second Action Plan refers to the importance of access to free and comprehensive tenancy programs to assist victim-survivors with tenancy issues arising from family violence, including ending leases, removing perpetrators from tenancies, challenging evictions and advocating to protect victim survivors from unfair bond and compensation claims resulting from damages caused by perpetrators.

**Recommendation 7:** That the Second Action Plan refers to programs that may assist some victim-survivors to maintain home ownership after family violence, including the establishment of specific shared equity schemes (in Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions) targeted at supporting victim-survivors of family violence, including women who are permanent residents as well as Australian citizens.

### **Improving long term recovery supports**

- We welcomed the First Action Plan's acknowledgement that victim-survivors often experience lifelong impacts of trauma and require support that goes beyond crisis accommodation, police responses, and immediate legal interventions.
- Although not a legal practice issue as such, our work with victim-survivors reveals there are insufficient long-term recovery and support programs for victim-survivors, including for young victim-survivors, and these need to be greatly expanded.

**Recommendation 8:** That the Second Action Plan continues to focus on the need for sustained recovery and healing programs for victim-survivors, including young victim-survivors, with funding models that recognise recovery may take years rather than months.

### **Further information**

For further information, please contact:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## Attachment One: PCLC Programs and Services

### Core Family Violence Program

- Daily duty lawyer services at the Frankston and Moorabbin Specialist Family Violence Courts (the Magistrates' Court of Victoria has a number of Specialist Family Violence Courts that specialise in family violence matters).
- Pre-court legal advice, casework, representation and ongoing legal assistance for people affected by family violence.
- Accessible intake and response services delivered through PCLC offices and outreach locations.

### Family Violence Outreach Services

- Legal appointments and outreach via:
  - **The Orange Door** (integrated legal service delivered in partnership with Victoria Legal Aid, supporting victim-survivors accessing Orange Door services and providing secondary consultation to workers).
  - Local government **Maternal and Child Health services** (providing legal clinics for women through partnerships with Maternal and Child Health services, designed to deliver legal help in a safe, trusted setting before problems escalate).
  - A **women's health clinic**.
  - A **local family violence refuge**.

### Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) – family law duty lawyer service for unrepresented parties affected by family violence

- Providing a specialist family law duty lawyer service at the Dandenong Registry of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Funded by Victoria Legal Aid, our FASS service operates from a dedicated office at the court 5 days per week.
- FASS provides legal assistance to unrepresented family law litigants who are affected by family violence.
- FASS lawyers commonly assist with family law matters where family violence is a significant factor, recovery of children and Airport Watchlist orders to prevent children being taken overseas.

### Family Violence to Family Law (FV2FL) Continuity Program

- Providing family-law representation and casework where family violence issues intersect with family law parenting matters.
- Supports clients through family dispute resolution and litigation to achieve safer outcomes for families (funded by grants from Victoria Legal Aid).
- The Program assists victim-survivors with comprehensive legal support from an early stage of their legal matter (often when they are seeking protection from a family violence intervention order in the Magistrates' Court) throughout their entire family law proceedings – providing continuity, strong representation and stability for clients.

## **Core Family Law Program**

- Provides free legal advice and assistance with parenting arrangements, child support, property settlements and divorce.
- Helps people navigate family law disputes, reach agreements where possible, and access representation in appropriate cases through VLA family law grants and pro bono support, with a particular focus on supporting members of our community experiencing vulnerability, particularly victim-survivors of family violence who may not be eligible for other legal programs.

## **REACHHer program**

- REACHHer = Recover, Empower, Advocate, Collaborate, House.
- REACHHer is an integrated housing justice and economic security program designed to help women affected by family violence and financial disadvantage resolve family law property issues and sustain housing.
- REACHHer is a partnership between PCLC, South East Community Links and Southside Justice, funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C).
- Provides assistance with family law property settlements, legal and financial issues linked to family violence; debt and fines assistance, financial counselling and advice, support to build financial independence, including connections to training and income-building opportunities; and integrated "wrap-around" support aimed at maintaining or securing housing.
- Since its inception in August 2025, the program has successfully settled numerous family law matters and secured over \$3 million in financial settlements on behalf of clients, enabling many women to retain their homes and build a more secure future.

## **Migration Clinic for victim-survivors on temporary visas**

- For many victim-survivors on temporary visas, their right to remain in Australia is tied to their abusive partner. Visa-related abuse and threats are common forms of family violence and can prevent people from leaving unsafe relationships.
- Supports culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) clients holding or applying for partner visas who have experienced family violence.
- Delivered in partnership with FCG Legal, the Clinic focuses on providing legal advice and assistance in relation to applying under the complex family violence exemption provisions in Australia's Migration Framework.
- In 2023-24, we expanded this work to create an online tool that aids community partners and support workers to help their clients navigate the family violence exemption provisions. The team worked with Legal Tech Helper to develop the *Guide to Safety* tool, funded by the Victoria Law Foundation.

## **PCLC's youth theatre project – tackling consent, coercive control, and family violence**

### ***Current theatre project: On the Ropes***

- An interactive play, *On the Ropes*, developed in collaboration with the acclaimed Red Stitch Theatre and written by Dan Giovannoni.

- Aimed at year 8 to 11 students and based on real experiences from young people, our production tackles the issues that matter most: family violence, coercive control, consent, and the legal realities teenagers face today.
- The touring production uses compelling storytelling followed by guided discussions to help students understand legal rights, digital image-based harm, and relationship boundaries.
- In 2026, we're bringing this life-changing experience to over 5,000 students across secondary schools in our area.
- The original production (called *This is not who I want to be*) was funded by the Victoria Law Foundation, with additional major grants for the current production from the Victoria Legal Services Board.
- In November 2024, Peninsula Community Legal Centre received a Bronze Award in the Community-Led Category of the 2024 Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards for *This is not who I want to be*, which provided legal education to secondary school students about family violence and forced marriage, particularly within multicultural communities.
- Insights from the original production directly informed the development of our School Lawyer Program, enabling us to embed regular legal education about youth law issues within schools (more information below). This integrated approach strengthened our early intervention efforts, helping young people identify and address legal problems before they escalate.

#### **School lawyer program – prevention and early intervention for young people**

- Provides confidential, culturally safe legal advice in schools, addressing legal issues like family violence, fines, sexting, consent, cyberbullying and police interactions.
- Enables us to enhance our preventative work with young people so that their legal problems, including family violence, are identified and managed earlier.
- Also runs classroom legal education sessions on topics such as young people's rights, criminal responsibility and digital citizenship.
- We operate our school lawyer program in partnership with Cranbourne Secondary College and, more recently, McClelland College in Frankston.

#### **Related Specialist Programs Commonly Assisting Victim-Survivors:**

- **Tenancy Program**, including assistance with tenancy issues arising from family violence, including ending leases, removing perpetrators from tenancies, challenging evictions and defending unfair bond/compensation claims caused by perpetrators. PCLC continues to identify and respond to risks, ensure risks are addressed, and facilitate appropriate referrals in accordance with the principles of the Victorian Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM).
- **Fines and Transport Law Program**, including assistance with Family Violence Scheme applications to have family violence-related fines withdrawn.
- **Criminal Law Program**, particularly assisting victim-survivors who may face criminal charges for breaching family violence intervention orders where there has been misidentification or systems abuse.