

Victoria Legal Aid

Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2020–23

Acknowledgement of Country

Victoria Legal Aid acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land where we work and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise their continuing connection to Country and the resilience, diversity and strength of Victoria's Aboriginal Communities.

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Foreword



On behalf of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) we take pleasure in introducing our Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23. This strategy builds upon the achievements we have already made to support diversity and inclusion with our Reconciliation Action Plan 2019–21 (RAP). It reflects our genuine commitment to continue to create a culturally safe and inclusive organisation for all employees and to build a workforce that reflects the rich diversity and perspectives of the Victorian community we serve.

Our Strategy 2018–22 (Strategy 22) is built around three key directions – clients, impact, together. These key directions are intended to act as the foundation for more accessible, client-centred services and a collaborative style of leadership and partnership across the legal assistance sector. We must cultivate a workplace culture that respects, values and embraces the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, enabling us to better deliver legal services for clients across Victoria.

This Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23 reasserts our ongoing commitment to cultural inclusiveness. It provides a three-year strategic roadmap for VLA, with practical actions to implement to support us to address systematic barriers that disadvantage culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) employees. The strategy also builds the cultural competency of our organisation to support a safe and inclusive work environment for staff and culturally safe services for our clients.

We recognise we have a significant and dynamic role to play in leading diversity and inclusion. The launch and implementation of this strategy will embed inclusive approaches, practices and policies into all aspects of VLA, making diversity and inclusion part of our everyday work.

This strategy is a call to action for our organisation to pave the way for cultural inclusiveness and we encourage you all to contribute to making VLA a safe and inclusive place to work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Jaboor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bill Jaboor
Chairperson,
Victoria Legal Aid Board

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Glanville', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Louise Glanville
CEO,
Victoria Legal Aid

Development of Strategy

The Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23 has been developed in collaboration and consultation with Zion Walker-Nthenda of Change Architects (external consultancy group), our People and Culture team and the Cultural Diversity Consultative Committee (CDCC). The CDCC consists of VLA staff with lived experience of cultural diversity and a cross-section of roles and professional experience.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the efforts, commitments and contributions of all who have assisted in the development of this strategy.



We must cultivate a workplace culture that respects, values and embraces the contributions of people of diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, enabling us to better deliver legal services for clients across Victoria.



Bill Jaboor and Louise Glanville





Foreword from CDCC

The Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23 (strategy) is born out of a committed effort by staff of lived experience to advocate for a more inclusive and representative work environment that is safe for people of all backgrounds and experiences. The Cultural Diversity Consultative Committee (CDCC) was formed as a result of culturally diverse staff highlighting the need for more action in relation to cultural diversity. The committee provides a formal voice for people with lived experience of cultural diversity within Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) and plays an active role in planning actions and events to support inclusion.

The CDCC is made up of staff of different cultural backgrounds, experiences, interests and roles who all share a dedication to an organisation that is representative of the community we serve. Throughout our first year, we have learned and shared together about our own personal experiences and also sought to provide a voice for the 42 per cent of staff who identify as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background in developing this strategy.

We will continue to play an important role in monitoring and facilitating the implementation of the strategy and look forward to a renewed commitment organisationally to inclusivity and against prejudice. The endorsement of the strategy from our Senior Executive Team demonstrates willingness to implement meaningful change. We hope that the strategy will encourage all staff at all levels and in all regions to work together. The work of the strategy lies not just on those of lived experience but on all of us.

The Cultural Diversity Consultative Committee members are (L to R):

Alan Dewis, Michelle Veljanovski, Abby Sullivan, Kamna Muddagouni, Gayathri Paramasivam, Alma Mistry, Dawn Teo, Sharika Jeyakumar, Fiona Hiscock, Cihan Soy Turk, Martha Arkalis

Absent: Farah Banihali, Upma Paton, Antonija Kurbalija, Daniel Ajak, Helen Makregiorgos, Anoushka Jeronimus, Jacinta Foley

About Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is an independent statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic). It is funded by both Commonwealth and Victorian governments but operates independently of government.

VLA provides legal representation to those who need it most and provides legal information, legal advice and education with a focus on prevention and early resolution of legal problems. VLA also works to address the barriers that prevent people from accessing the justice system by participating in reforms and ensuring government agencies are held to account.

Our vision

A fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld.

Our purpose

To make a difference for clients and the community, through the provision of effective legal services and collaborative leadership of a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector.



We hope that the strategy will encourage all staff at all levels and in all regions to work together. The work of the strategy lies not just on those of lived experience but on all of us.



CDCC

Our values

Fairness

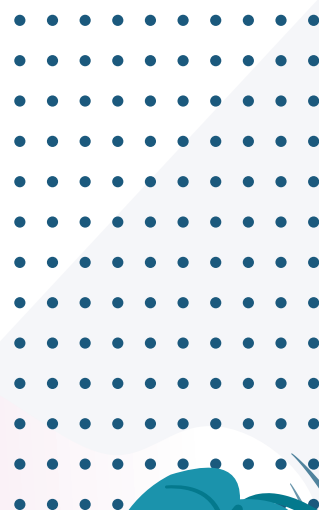
We stand up for what is fair. We aim to be fair when making choices about which people we help and how we help them.

Care

We care about our clients and the community in which we live. We look out for and take care of each other.

Courage

We act with courage backed by evidence about what is best for clients and the community. We act with courage to be the best we can be.



What do we mean by cultural diversity and inclusion?

Cultural diversity is the characteristics and differences that make us unique and includes aspects of a person's culture, ethnicity, race, national origin, language and life experiences – noting that this can overlap or intersect with other characteristics such as age, ability, gender, gender identity and sexuality. It is informed by a person's lived experience and includes an experience of speaking a language other than English at home or having a cultural identity that is from a non-English background. We acknowledge that being culturally and linguistically diverse can be self-determined and therefore includes anyone who defines themselves as being culturally and linguistically diverse.¹

Cultural diversity and inclusion is the recognition, respect and acknowledgement of the diversity of cultures that exist within an organisation.² It celebrates and promotes people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, while respecting each other's individual differences, perspectives and views. It is only through inclusion that organisations can make the most out of its cultural diversity.

Culturally safe workplaces are ones that provide an environment where all staff feel comfortable, supported and respected in a way they can be their authentic self. It also creates a workplace where everyone can examine their own cultural identities and attitudes and be open-minded and flexible in their own attitudes towards people from cultures other than their own. This emphasises the role of cultural awareness for all staff and continued learning to promote cultural competency.



We acknowledge that being culturally and linguistically diverse can be self-determined and therefore includes anyone who defines themselves as being culturally and linguistically diverse.¹



¹Data collection purposes may require a closer adherence to an Australian Bureau of Statistics definition

²The term 'Culture' refers to the shared language, beliefs, values, norms and customs of a particular society and/or social group.

Why cultural diversity matters to us

We recognise the value that staff from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds add to our work through skills, experiences and perspectives.

Cultural diversity creates richness in opinions leading to greater innovation, improved decision making and better outcomes for the organisation. People thrive and are more innovative in working environments that are free from racism, bias, discrimination and where diversity of experiences and views are encouraged.

As the largest legal service provider in Victoria, we have the responsibility to accurately reflect the rich diversity and perspectives of our community. An inclusive culture allows us to perform better, attract and retain the workforce we need, and deliver services that best support the communities we serve.

Our commitment for cultural diversity and inclusion

We aim to develop an overarching Diversity and Inclusion Framework in line with expectations to be set out in our new Enterprise Agreement 2020–24. The framework will include an overarching vision for diversity and inclusion at VLA. This Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy should be read in conjunction with other VLA diversity and inclusion initiatives such as our Reconciliation Action Plan (2019–21).

The Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23 is our commitment to creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace for everyone, by embracing the differences in skills, perspectives and experiences our people bring to the organisation.

We are further committed to providing culturally safe and responsive services to our clients by reflecting the rich diversity and perspectives of the Victorian community we serve.

Our cultural diversity

Victoria is home to a culturally diverse society. In 2016, nearly half (49.1 per cent) of Victorians were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas.³

We recognise that people from CALD backgrounds face significant barriers in getting affordable legal assistance and understanding their legal options. People from CALD backgrounds currently constitute 25 per cent of our overall clients,⁴ reinforcing the need to focus on culturally inclusive policies and services.

In 2018, we conducted our first Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Survey with a purpose to establish a baseline for the lived experiences of our employees with regards to gender, diversity and inclusion.

Of the 70 per cent of staff who completed the survey, 42 per cent disclosed having a CALD background – a figure which is higher than our overall CALD client base (25 per cent) and significantly higher than the data collected by our payroll team (22 per cent). Whilst this diversity is positive for VLA, cultural diversity in an organisation will not be able to flourish without an inclusive culture. The key themes of the survey highlighted that we have work to do in how we create an environment that is truly inclusive and safe for all employees.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census.

⁴ Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) Annual Report 2018–19. This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Our strategy

Our Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23 has been informed by the establishment of our first Cultural Diversity Consultative Committee (CDCC). The CDCC was formed in January 2019 as a result of culturally diverse staff expressing the need for formal mechanisms to embed cultural diversity and inclusion within our organisation.

Our strategy aims to embed diverse and inclusive practices, systems and approaches into all aspects of our work. It is about creating and sustaining an environment that is respectful, fosters inclusiveness, promotes cultural diversity and embraces the individual differences, perspectives and qualities of all our employees.

It outlines how we will address systematic barriers that disadvantage our CALD employees as well as create and implement initiatives that build the cultural competency of our organisation. Inclusion is imperative for hiring, attracting and retaining a culturally diverse workforce.

The strategy acknowledges that organisational change takes time, commitment and resourcing. We have committed to defined goals and practical actions in this plan to implement over a three-year period, using a phased delivery approach.

All staff have a role in delivering this strategy. It is ultimately the commitment, actions and behaviours of all our people that will determine how successful we are at creating a work culture that is inclusive and safe.

This strategy is a corporate priority under our Corporate Plan 2019–20 and sits alongside the following organisational plans and initiatives, aimed at supporting diversity and inclusion:

- Our vision and values
- Our Strategy 2018–22 (Strategy 22)
- Our Reconciliation Action Plan 2019–21
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2019–22
- Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Survey
- Cultural Diversity Consultative Committee (Terms of Reference).



Our four goals for cultural diversity and inclusion

GOAL O1

Workforce Diversity

This goal is to ensure the recruitment, retention and progression of our workforce is reflective of the diversity of our community, including our clients.

GOAL O2

Workforce Capability

This goal is to develop and maintain workforce skills and capabilities that are aimed at providing culturally safe and inclusive environments for staff and services for clients.

GOAL O3

Organisational Capacity

This goal is to increase organisational capacity to identify, reflect on and address barriers to cultural diversity and create inclusive processes, policies and practices that meet the diverse needs of the community.

GOAL O4

Reporting and Evaluation

This goal is to monitor, report on and evaluate our progress in relation to cultural diversity and inclusion and propose further diversity strategies as appropriate.

First 12 months

(March 2020–June 2021)

During the first year, we will focus on how we respond to cultural diversity and inclusion.

GOAL

01

Workforce Diversity

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
1.1 Establish a Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Champion on the Senior Executive Team (SET) who supports the work of the CDCC and champions change for issues affecting culturally diverse staff	Senior Executive Team	March 2020
1.2 Review VLA's recruitment protocols including Key Selection Criteria and interview processes to embed cultural diversity and inclusion, and a plan to commence implementation has been developed	People and Culture	June 2021
1.3 Ensure involvement of CDCC members in the recruitment process for pathway programs. This may include reviewing and providing feedback for job advertisements, job referrals and shortlisting of candidates	People and Culture	June 2021
1.4 Consult with the CDCC on CALD recruitment, retention and professional development strategies, and propose further strategies if appropriate	People and Culture	Existing-ongoing
1.5 Target relevant CALD communities to promote pathways from education to employment, including promoting the career pathways at VLA such as the Australian African Legal Network	People and Culture	Existing-ongoing
1.6 Advocate for cultural diversity on VLA's Board and Senior Executive Team	Board and Senior Executive Team	Ongoing

GOAL

02

Workforce Capability

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
<p>2.1 Develop and implement a communications plan to raise awareness of the Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and other organisational initiatives that support and promote cultural diversity and inclusion</p>	Strategic Communications	March 2020
<p>2.2 Review and update VLA's Corporate Induction Program to ensure it highlights our workforce's cultural diversity profile, the benefits of a culturally diverse organisation and VLA's diversity networks</p>	People and Culture	June 2020
<p>2.3 Identify and develop a three-tiered learning model for our staff to increase cultural competency progressively, ensuring it aligns with the Aboriginal Cultural Learning Strategy being developed as part of VLA's RAP and the Client-first strategy. The three tiers include:</p> <p>1. Tier 1 (Foundational training for all staff)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful workplace behaviour (existing) • Cultural diversity training (to be developed) • Unconscious bias training (to be developed) <p>2. Tier 2 (Targeted training for specific roles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with interpreters (existing) <p>3. Tier 3 (Leadership based training)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful workplace behaviour for managers (existing) • Unconscious bias for managers (to be developed) 	People and Culture	Staggered deployment from December 2020–December 2022 Learning offerings to be built into our learning and development calendar to promote ongoing development
<p>2.4 SET to model and champion inclusive behaviours and cultures, including completion of relevant cultural awareness and competency training</p>	Senior Executive Team	Ongoing
<p>2.5 Managers understand the People Management Delegations Framework and integrate diversity and inclusion in their people management responsibilities through attendance at Manager Induction and Manager 101 training</p>	All People Leaders and People and Culture	Existing–ongoing

GOAL

O3

Organisational Capacity

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
3.1 Create a Diversity and Inclusion intranet page which provides information and links to relevant policies, diversity champions and networks	Strategic Communications	March 2020
3.2 Commitment to FTE that supports People and Culture's capacity to implement and deliver on the full life cycle of the Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Senior Executive Team	Ongoing
3.3 The CDCC's expertise is sought and embraced, ensuring members have an opportunity to provide input into the design and delivery of service delivery initiatives, programs and policies	Organisation-wide	Existing-ongoing
3.4 Continue inclusion of events which promote cultural diversity in our internal calendar of events including Cultural Diversity Week and ensure these events are held in offices outside of Melbourne	Strategic Communications	Existing-ongoing
3.5 SET to model and champion inclusive behaviours and cultures, serving as positive role models in attending and encouraging staff to attend CALD events	Senior Executive Team	Ongoing
3.6 Ensure that legal information on VLA's external website is in plain English and a targeted/evidence-based approach is utilised when translating resources for CALD communities	Community Legal Education and Strategic Communications	July 2021 and ongoing
3.7 The Associate Director of Aboriginal Services is consulted in relation to any cultural diversity and inclusion initiatives that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific policies and initiatives	Services and Innovation	Existing-ongoing

GOAL

O4

Reporting and Evaluation

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
4.1 Analyse the People Matter Survey and any other relevant surveys to understand data to inform further cultural diversity strategies	People and Culture	December 2020
4.2 Include questions about cultural safety in VLA's exit survey after consultation with CDCC and other diversity networks	People and Culture	December 2021
4.3 Report annually on progress of implementation of action items in the Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	People and Culture	March annually

Next two years

(July 2021–December 2023)

For the next two years, we will focus on the following key actions from the four goals.

GOAL

01

Workforce Diversity

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
1.7 Establish and support a CALD staff network in addition to the CDCC for staff to be able to discuss lived experience, inclusion and equity	People and Culture and CDCC	September 2021
1.8 Develop a network of resources for CALD staff aimed at pathways for development which may include mentoring components	People and Culture	September 2022

GOAL

02

Workforce Capability

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
2.6 Increase awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity across VLA through the delivery of informal cultural learning sessions and resources on the Learning Hub	People and Culture	June 2022–ongoing
2.7 Review the Legal Practice Essentials: Cultural Diversity working with interpreters module in consultation with the CDCC to identify and address any concerns	Professional Legal Education	June 2022
2.8 Identify and promote leadership development opportunities for culturally diverse staff in the wider public sector	People and Culture	September 2022–ongoing
2.9 Develop guidance resources on cultural diversity and tool kits for inclusive language and practice to be included on the Learning Hub	People and Culture	September 2022
2.10 Develop guidelines for staff organising VLA events, forums and/or meetings to promote culturally inclusive practices and the participation of culturally diverse speakers and panellists	Strategic Communications	September 2022
2.11 Develop a support framework for CALD staff ensuring that it addresses the barriers that CALD staff face in metropolitan and regional offices (e.g. mentoring program, buddy system and list of relevant contacts)	People and Culture	June 2023
2.12 Review and promote resources for lawyers on court processes and CALD clients	Legal Practice	December 2022–ongoing

GOAL

03

Organisational Capacity

Action	Responsible	Timeframe
3.8 Explore the opportunity for VLA to join the National Anti-Racism Partnership, Racism. It stops with me	People and Culture	June 2022
3.9 Conduct a review of all People and Culture policies including complaints handling processes and identify and address barriers to cultural diversity	People and Culture	December 2022
3.10 Examine processes and any perceived barriers for CALD staff to access leave for cultural and religious holidays and other supports	People and Culture	December 2022
3.11 Review the existing Contact Officer model and identify and address barriers to cultural awareness and safety	People and Culture	December 2022
3.12 Ensure that VLA's client surveys include relevant and tailored questions that seeks to understand the experiences of our CALD clients	Research, Evaluation and Library	December 2022
3.13 Support project managers and sponsors for new projects to embed cultural inclusiveness in their work (i.e. project design and delivery). Examples can include but not limited to, cultural diversity prompts in project management templates	Project Management Office	December 2022
3.14 Include a regular 'Celebrating Diversity' feature in our weekly all staff e-newsletter, Comet, highlighting cultural diversity initiatives, achievements and events across VLA	Strategic Communications	September 2021-ongoing

GOAL

O4

Reporting and Evaluation

Action	Responsible	Timeline
4.4 Explore ways to identify gaps in representation of culturally diverse staff in legal and non-legal roles at all levels	People and Culture	December 2022
4.5 Share information on best practice of diversity and inclusion across VLA's stakeholders	Strategic Communications	Ongoing
4.6 Final report at end of Strategy to review and commit to actions that continue to progress cultural diversity and inclusion at VLA	People and Culture	September 2023

Victoria Legal Aid's Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23 can be downloaded from our website www.vla.vic.gov.au in pdf format and an accessible Word version.

If you have any questions, suggestion or comments about our Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–23, contact Dawn Teo, Learning, Diversity and Inclusion Consultant, People and Culture, Victoria Legal Aid
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