

# STRATEGIC PLAN (2015-2018)



## ABOUT EASTERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) has been working with individuals and communities for over 40 years to resolve legal problems, improve laws and legal processes and alleviate socio-economic disadvantage. ECLC's vision is a community that respects and upholds human rights, fairness and justice.

ECLC provides legal services, including information and referral, education, advice and advocacy, primarily to people living in Boroondara, Manningham, Whitehorse, Maroondah, Knox and the Yarra Ranges, as well as some specific services in Monash.

ECLC aims to make legal help available to all those in the community who would otherwise not have access to a lawyer, whilst prioritising services and targeting programs to those who experience acute disadvantage.

## VALUES

The following values reflect ECLC's organisational culture and approach:

- ▶ **RESPECT** – treating ourselves and others with dignity and honesty, and appreciating diversity
- ▶ **COMPASSION** – being non-judgmental, supportive and showing empathy
- ▶ **ADVOCACY** – providing a voice for those who cannot advocate for themselves
- ▶ **SAFETY** – assuring confidentiality and showing courage
- ▶ **JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS** – access, equity, advocacy and empowerment
- ▶ **STRONG GOVERNANCE & ASSURANCE** – open and transparent management and communication
- ▶ **RESOURCEFULNESS & PRACTICALITY** – finding solutions through working collaboratively
- ▶ **INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP** – encouraging and implementing new ideas and strategies.

# PRIORITY COMMUNITIES

## ▷ Children and Young People

The legal needs and issues children and young people face are acknowledged by ECLC and addressed through specific initiatives, both as part of families and individually.

## ▷ People Experiencing or At Risk of Family Violence

Tragically this remains one of the biggest justice issues facing the Australian community. The Centre has a longstanding commitment to addressing family violence and helping those that it effects in a number of innovative service responses that focus the attention on the safety and wellbeing of the victim/survivor. ECLC also develops and supports community prevention and education initiatives, seeking to stop family violence before it occurs.

## ▷ Indigenous Australians

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are one of the most profoundly disadvantaged groups in Australian society. ECLC is committed to ongoing engagement and consultation, providing high quality and culturally appropriate legal services and implementing programs to prioritise community need.

## ▷ Older People

While most older people have vibrant lives and continue to make a strong contribution to the community, some seniors are particularly vulnerable. Over the last five years, ECLC has focused on the emerging issue and impact of elder abuse.

## ▷ People who Experience Language or Cultural Barriers

Community members with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can face a number of barriers understanding the law and accessing legal assistance. ECLC recognises additional steps are needed to ensure these communities are fully included in the work of the Centre and to ensure just outcomes.

## ▷ People Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness

Homelessness is an ever-increasing problem within the community and may either play a causal role or be the unfortunate result of a number of legal problems. ECLC engages with community members both experiencing and being at risk of homelessness through its direct legal services to address underlying legal problems and through agency referral.

## ▷ People with a Disability or Mental Illness

Disability and mental illness are significant barriers to social inclusion and the full and free participation in the community. ECLC recognises the need to deliver accessible, high quality and appropriate legal assistance despite the sometimes significant social and financial barriers facing these community members.

## OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

ECLC has adopted four key objectives and an accompanying 11 strategies to consolidate and leverage the good work the Centre is already doing and to guide the work into the future

### OBJECTIVE 1: PROVIDE QUALITY LEGAL HELP TO COMMUNITIES IN THE EAST AND TARGET INTENSIVE SERVICES TO CLIENTS AND COMMUNITIES MOST IN NEED

Access to expert assistance with legal problems has direct benefits for both individuals and communities. Support to resolve legal problems contributes positively to a person's health and wellbeing, their ability to manage other challenges in their lives and their capacity to contribute to their community. Legal services create positive flow-on effects for the community at large, including reducing the economic cost of escalating unmanaged legal problems.

ECLC will continue to deliver quality legal help and access to legal remedies and to justice for individuals and communities in the East. To ensure that it is directing its resources for the greatest benefit, ECLC will enhance service approaches through evaluating legal need and programs and better targeting its services.

#### **Strategy: Undertake legal needs analyses to ascertain and meet legal need in the East**

Like many regions across Victoria, Eastern Melbourne has a growing and changing demographic. In addition to providing services to those who already know about ECLC, the Centre needs to consider where there may be unmet legal need in the community. It is often the members of the community experiencing the most disadvantage who are missing out on assistance with legal problems, at significant cost to the community as a whole.

ECLC will undertake research and analysis to identify communities within its catchment that are not getting the legal help they need.

Where required, ECLC will adapt its practices and target service delivery to address these gaps.

#### **Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ A documented legal needs assessment relevant to one or more of the catchment areas, or issue of legal need
- ▷ Appropriate, flexible and targeted service approaches informed by a legal needs assessment.

**Strategy: Develop and embed triage systems that ensure access to help for the clients experiencing the most disadvantage and that target service levels appropriately**

Delivering an accessible service across the East becomes unviable if ECLC defaults to offering the same level of service to every client. An approach that recognises different levels of need and tailors services accordingly, is a more efficient use of resources.

ECLC will develop and embed its triage framework, which supports the capacity of clients with less complex needs to self-manage their legal issues, so that more resources can be directed to providing intensive support to clients with complex needs.

**Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ A documented triage framework that guides ECLC in managing client expectations, building client capacity and targeting intensive services to clients with high need
- ▷ Enhanced referral policies and practices
- ▷ Service data that reflects a consistent application of the triage framework.

**Strategy: Evaluate programs and services**

As well as ensuring that its services are targeted to those who need it most, ECLC is committed to continuously improving the quality of services to the community, modelling better service standards and approaches and demonstrating the cost-benefit value of services.

ECLC will embed evaluation processes that allow it to check whether services are delivering outcomes and that inform changes towards best practice.

**Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ Development and implementation of an evaluation framework relevant to one or more programs
- ▷ Evaluation becomes an integral part of the lifecycle of programs
- ▷ Appropriate changes are made to programs and services.

## OBJECTIVE 2:

**COLLABORATE WITH THE HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SECTOR, GOVERNMENT AND OTHER SERVICES, TO DELIVER PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS TO PRIORITY COMMUNITIES**



Preventing legal problems through education and other strategies and intervening to address problems at the earliest opportunity when they do arise, is a cost effective approach to delivering legal services. Effectively addressing legal problems at the earliest possible opportunity is an important component of preventing other social problems, such as chronic ill health and financial stress and their associated costs.

The reach and impact of assistance, especially for acutely disadvantaged members of the community with multiple needs, is enhanced when services co-locate or partner to make a range of assistance more readily accessible.

**Strategy: Develop and deliver community development and legal education projects and programs to priority communities, in partnership with other services**

Community development and legal education are key prevention strategies. Alongside direct advice and advocacy services, community development and legal education make up ECLC's core service mix.

ECLC will work with communities and target programs to priority client groups to build capacity for understanding legal rights and responsibilities, navigating the legal system and both avoiding and addressing legal problems.

**Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- Joint community development and legal education projects and programs that target the needs of priority client groups.

**Strategy: Provide legal advice and assistance, in partnership with other service providers, where clients from communities experiencing the most disadvantage are most likely to access help**

ECLC knows from its own experience and from feedback provided by other services, that an effective model of service delivery is place-based – that is, locating and delivering services where clients first access support, whether for legal or non-legal problems.

ECLC already delivers services from a range of outreach locations and is committed to further integrating and coordinating service delivery across the East, including through delivering services on site in other service settings and in service hubs.

**Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- Service alliances with key agencies, including Victoria Legal Aid, health and social services
- Increase in appropriate referrals from key agencies, including government, health and social services.



### **OBJECTIVE 3:**

**CONTRIBUTE EXPERTISE TO STRATEGIC  
ADVOCACY AND LAW REFORM  
TO ENHANCE THE WELLBEING  
OF COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE  
EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE**

ECLC has expert knowledge of the legal system, including where it is effective and where it falls down. ECLC is proximate to communities and the issues that impact them. ECLC has a pragmatic understanding of how inequality compounds to deplete collective capacity and prosperity and where interventions that mitigate this can best be targeted. ECLC has applied knowledge of governance, policy development and public administrative processes.

The interfaces of the work ECLC does means that it is well placed to inform social and legal change that can ameliorate disadvantage and its associated costs. In addition to providing direct legal services to individuals and communities, ECLC is committed to contributing on a larger scale.



**Strategy: Be part of the conversation in key social, economic and legal decision-making forums**

Where ECLC is made aware through its work of inefficiencies and deficiencies in systems that have a disproportionately adverse impact on its clients, it will be proactive in communicating these issues to key stakeholders and working collaboratively towards solutions.

Where ECLC has expertise and can add value, it will contribute to strategic advocacy and law reform discussions and proposals. This includes providing leadership on key issues, working in partnership and endorsing the initiatives of other organisations that are advocating better outcomes for communities and people experiencing disadvantage.

**Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- Contributing evidence-based knowledge to strategic advocacy and law reform initiatives
- Collaborating with other organisations and agencies to address complex social problems
- Seeing good ideas implemented by government and the sector.

**Strategy: Capture and promote project successes and learnings**

Too often in high demand work environments significant effort is invested in initiatives that are implemented once and then lapse or are forgotten. Promoting successful projects has a myriad of positive flow-on effects, including attracting ongoing investment and facilitating economical innovation across the sector.

ECLC is committed to maximising the value of its project investments by building a knowledge bank of its successful initiatives. These initiatives can then be re-purposed and leveraged, both by ECLC and others in the sector, to benefit broader communities and address other social problems. The costs of duplicating initiatives or constantly 'reinventing the wheel' can also be avoided.

**Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- The design and implementation of key projects are recorded and evaluation is embedded in the lifecycle of key projects
- The design, implementation and impacts of key projects are communicated to stakeholders through a variety of media.



## OBJECTIVE 4:

MAINTAIN A VITAL  
ORGANISATION TO  
SUPPORT EXCELLENT  
CLIENT SERVICE

ECLC's greatest asset is dedicated and passionate staff and volunteers. The last two years has seen a period of significant growth for ECLC. It is important to ensure that as the organisation develops, a culture of innovation, resourcefulness, workplace health, strong governance and dynamic leadership continues to be fostered, to ensure that its personnel can focus their energies and talents on providing excellent legal services to communities in the East.

To consolidate achievements and continue to build on successes, ECLC will strengthen its resource base, upgrade infrastructure and mature its operational and management protocols.

#### **Strategy: Continue to diversify funding streams to strengthen ECLC's resource base**

ECLC's communities have benefited from numerous services, programs and projects that ECLC has led or delivered in partnership with others. ECLC wants to leverage existing services and programs to increase their impact and implement new projects that will decrease legal and social obstacles for communities in the East.

Diverse investment in ECLC's work facilitates the sharing of knowledge and expertise across the sector and demonstrates the value of legal help as a core community service.

#### **Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ Development of an investment plan relevant to one or more programs
- ▷ New investments and partnerships secured to drive key projects.

#### **Strategy: Upgrade technology to better coordinate service delivery across catchment areas**

ECLC now delivers services from three offices and multiple outreach locations. ECLC wants to ensure that no matter where a member of the community accesses ECLC, they can be directly linked to the most appropriate office, service, program or appointment. ECLC also wants to enhance the capacity to provide the same level of service that is available from the offices at locations where people are most likely to access help.

ECLC will invest in new technology to improve client access and the quality and efficiency of mobile services.

#### **Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ Upgraded client intake and booking systems
- ▷ Technological support to enhance service provision at outreach locations.

#### **Strategy: Support leadership development and pathways across the organisation**

ECLC is an employer of choice – it attracts and retains excellent legal, community development and administrative staff. It is essential, in the challenging environment that ECLC operates within, to ensure that staff health and wellbeing continues to be promoted and supported. Management approaches that are responsive to the expanded workforce are also necessary so that ECLC can continue to operate efficiently.

ECLC is committed to nurturing the next generation of leaders so that it remains a sustainable, vital and effective organisation into the future.

#### **Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ Development and implementation of a succession and leadership framework
- ▷ Documenting and developing staff health and wellbeing framework
- ▷ Development of continuous quality improvement and management reporting frameworks

#### **Strategy: Enhance volunteer arrangements to make optimal use of this resource**

A considerable and growing number of community and professional volunteers support the work of ECLC. To maximise the benefits to the community of this valuable resource, ECLC needs to be more strategic in managing and utilising volunteers' diverse pool of skills.

#### **Indicators that ECLC is achieving this strategy include:**

- ▷ Development of a volunteer workforce allocation, supervision and development framework
- ▷ Targeted volunteer placements.

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Outreach to: Lilydale, Yarra Junction and Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

*ECLC acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of lands on which we live and work. We pay deep respect to Elders past and Present.*



[www.eclc.org.au](http://www.eclc.org.au)

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