



Inquiry into legal privilege and integrated legal assistance services

Submission to the Victorian
Law Reform Commission

18 August 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Knowmore acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Australia upon which we live and work.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present for their ongoing leadership and advocacy.

Content note

This submission discusses experiences of trauma, including child abuse.

If you need to talk to someone, support is available.

13 YARN – 13 92 76

Blue Knot Helpline – 1300 657 380

1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467

Knowmore provides legal help and related support for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. You can call Knowmore on 1800 605 762.

Summary of our submission

- Integrated legal assistance services with well-developed models of holistic, client-centred support can provide significant benefits for people who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation, including throughout their engagement with legal systems. Knowmore's multidisciplinary, client-centred model represents a best practice approach in providing legal assistance and related support to victims and survivors of child abuse across Australia.
- Integrated legal assistance services face challenges operating in the current legal and regulatory environment, including navigating their clients' right to legal privilege. These challenges can be exacerbated for closely integrated legal assistance services and services operating in more than one jurisdiction.
- It is clear that the current approach to legal privilege is out of step with what is now considered to be best practice legal service provision for people with experiences of trauma and marginalisation.
- It is essential that the legal framework evolves to provide certainty and adequate legal protection for clients of integrated legal assistance services, so that their decision to seek justice and support does not compromise their safety and confidentiality.
- We support reforms to better protect the confidential information and communications of clients of integrated legal assistance services, including within the community legal sector.
- We are generally supportive of reform Option 2 proposed by the Victorian Law Reform Commission and recommend a broad approach to this proposed reform.
- However, it is also important that reforms are implemented nationally to avoid worsening the challenges faced by some integrated legal assistance services and their clients. The Victorian Government should work with other Australian governments to achieve nationally consistent reforms to legal privilege for clients of integrated legal assistance services.

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Knowmore's submission

Our approach to the inquiry

Knowmore welcomes the Victorian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into legal privilege and integrated legal assistance services and the opportunity to provide feedback on the Consultation Paper.¹

Knowmore is a national community legal service providing legal assistance and wraparound support to victims and survivors of child abuse. For 13 years, we have delivered an integrated legal assistance service for victims and survivors across Australia, including in Victoria. We therefore have unique insights into the significant benefits of an integrated legal assistance service for people who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation. We also have extensive experience operating an integrated service model in the current legal environment.

While we see every day the benefits of integrated legal assistance services for survivors, service providers and justice systems, we face challenges navigating the complex regulatory environment and recognise that the law governing legal privilege is out of step with best practice legal service provision for people with experiences of trauma and marginalisation. As a result, there is a lack of certainty and legal protection for victims and survivors accessing these services to ensure that their confidential information and communications are protected. This in turn, can create additional barriers to accessing justice and support.

In our view, it is essential that the legal framework in Victoria evolves to provide certainty and adequate protection for people seeking legal assistance and related support from integrated legal assistance services, so that their decision to seek justice and support does not compromise their safety and confidentiality. This is particularly important for the

¹ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services: Consultation Paper*, 18 June 2026, <www.lawreform.vic.gov.au/publication/legal-privilege-and-integrated-legal-assistance-services-consultation-paper/>.

community legal sector, given the critical support the sector provides to people with experiences of trauma and marginalisation.²

However, as a nation-wide service, we see the impact of nationally inconsistent laws for victims, survivors and support services and the significant challenges they face navigating multiple, often conflicting legal frameworks. In our view, reforms limited to Victoria alone are likely to create further challenges for victims, survivors and support services.

We therefore do not make detailed comments about proposed reforms that would only apply to people in Victoria. A key recommendation of our submission is that the Victorian Government should work with other Australian governments to achieve nationally consistent reforms to legal privilege for clients of integrated legal assistance services.

In addition, we make comments about the following matters:

- the importance of nation-wide services, which reduce gaps in support and legal assistance for people navigating systems that cross jurisdictional borders
- the benefits of closely integrated legal assistance services for people who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation
- the challenges facing closely integrated legal assistance services in the current legal environment, in particular in relation to navigating their clients' right to legal privilege
- our general views on reform Option 2 proposed by the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

² Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria, *'Prevent. Protect. Empower. The case for funding community legal assistance: Submission to the 2026 Victorian Government Budget'*, February 2026, pp 4-7,

<assets.nationbuilder.com/fclc/pages/821/attachments/original/1771192297/Federation_sector_submission_to_the_2026_Victorian_Government_Budget_.pdf?1771192297>.

Reflections as a national community legal service

Knowmore is generally supportive of reforms in Victoria to better protect our clients' right to legal privilege in relation to their confidential information and communications.

However, we also urge the Victorian Law Reform Commission to consider how proposed reforms would impact integrated legal assistance services operating across multiple jurisdictions.

As a national community legal service, we recognise the importance of nation-wide services for people with shared experiences of harm, such as victims and survivors of child abuse. Services of this nature can reduce the risk of people falling through gaps in support and can better help them to navigate legal and support systems that cross jurisdictional borders. Nation-wide services are also well-placed to identify systemic problems and differences, and advocate for consistent, nation-wide reforms to ensure that their clients are treated equally, regardless of where they live.

It is essential that services like ours are able to effectively navigate their legal obligations without added complexity. We recognise that other community legal centres are likely to have similar concerns, including in the following situations

- The integrated legal assistance service supports clients living in Victoria and in other states and territories. In these instances, legal and social service professionals must navigate multiple, complex legal frameworks.
- A client's legal matter relates to the federal legal framework, for example, immigration law or family law.
- A client's legal matter has inter-jurisdictional components. For example, in our practice it is not uncommon for clients living in Victoria to have previously experienced child abuse in another state or territory. As a result, they may seek to access records, claim victims' support, or commence legal proceedings in another jurisdiction.
- Legal and/or social service professionals supporting a client work remotely from other jurisdictions. For example, given the nature of

our service model our clients may receive support from a lawyer and multiple social service professionals, and these staff may not all live in the same jurisdiction as our client.

- The professional obligations applying to the relevant social service professional are governed by national, rather than Victorian, laws or standards.

In light of these challenges, we urge the Victorian Law Reform Commission to recommend that the Victorian Government should work with other Australian governments to achieve nationally consistent reforms to legal privilege for clients of integrated legal assistance services.

Integrated legal assistance services and the benefits for people who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation

In this section, we respond to consultation questions 1 and 2 by outlining:

- our experience implementing a closely integrated legal assistance model in practice
- the benefits of integrated legal assistance services, in particular closely integrated legal assistance services, for clients, service providers and the justice system.

Our experience implementing a closely integrated legal assistance model

As outlined above, we have extensive experience delivering a closely integrated legal assistance service for victims and survivors of child abuse, including victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and Stolen Generations survivors. Our clients engage with our service to seek legal assistance and related support after experiencing trauma, and often complex trauma, in childhood. Too often, they have lived with the devastating and ongoing impacts of their experiences for decades before seeking support. In some instances, their disclosures to our staff are the first time they've told anyone about what happened to them as a child.

In addition, many of Knowmore's clients experience intersectional marginalisation,³ impacting their experience of legal systems. For example, more than half of Knowmore's clients identify as having a disability, and 2 in 5 of our clients identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.⁴ However, many of our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients also live with disability and can face additional, compounding barriers to seeking safety, justice and support.

In response to the complex and intersecting needs of our clients, we have developed a multidisciplinary, client-centred model which brings together lawyers, social workers and counsellors, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander engagement advisors and financial counsellors to provide coordinated, trauma-informed and culturally safe legal assistance and related support. Our model reflects what the Victorian Law Reform Commission classifies as a 'closely integrated legal assistance service',⁵ where practitioners work side-by-side to support our clients in their healing and justice-making.

In our view, a closely integrated service model represents best practice for providing legal assistance and related support to victims and survivors of child abuse while they navigate their legal options for seeking justice, redress and compensation.

In his 2022 book, *Monetary redress for abuse in state care*, Dr Stephen Winter provided the following outline of the support needs of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse:

Survivors need support when preparing and submitting redress applications; they need help through (often protracted) assessment

³ An intersectional approach recognises that individuals may experience multiple forms of marginalisation and that these experiences may overlap to create additional barriers. See for example, United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, *Guidance Note on Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities*, September 2022, p 3, <www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-%2009-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf>.

⁴ For further information, see an overview of the clients we support at Appendix I.

⁵ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services: Consultation Paper*, pp 6-7.

processes, assistance when they receive payments, and afterwards. Large numbers of survivors will have 'low levels of education and varying literacy skills, high levels of mental health issues and a reduced capacity to cope with delays and frustrations' ... The resulting difficulties make good support necessary to survivors and to the effectiveness of any redress programme. Support work is not ancillary, it is part of redress.⁶

Dr Winter noted the effectiveness of Knowmore's service model in meeting these needs, including for people engaging with the National Redress Scheme (NRS):

A community law initiative in Australia offers a promising model for holistic practice. Originally developed to help survivors work with the McClellan Commission (2013–2017), knowmore was well-positioned to support applicants when the NRS began in 2018. Services are free to survivors because knowmore receives block funding from Australian governments. Block funding limits cost-building incentives: because knowmore staff are salaried (and not fee-for-service), they do not profit from individual claims. More importantly, knowmore trains legal professionals to work with survivors. That includes training in Indigenous cultures and workshops on trauma-informed practices (AU Interview 5). As a result, knowmore's lawyers are redress experts with a personal and professional ethos that prioritises the survivors' well-being. And, of course, knowmore's funding structure and ethos limits the prospect of gross malpractice.

knowmore's holistic practice offers counselling and financial advice alongside legal services. It can be difficult to talk about injurious experiences with a lawyer. Some survivors will be difficult clients – they will miss meetings, fail to provide evidence, or have problems managing their emotions. Trauma-informed training can help lawyers learn how to get information from clients effectively in ways that make survivors feel safe and supported (AU Interview 10). At

⁶ Stephen Winter, *Monetary Redress for Abuse in State Care*, Cambridge University Press, part III, 18 November 2022, section 12.1, <www.cambridge.org/core/books/monetary-redress-for-abuse-in-state-care/monetary-redress-for-abuse-in-state-care/2670958350A4774D9D38A92D117IDD0A>.

*knowmore, lawyers and counsellors collaborate to promote survivor-focussed practice.*⁷

The Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme also recognised that Knowmore 'is highly regarded for the quality of their work'.⁸

While we appreciate that a loosely integrated service model may be more straightforward to implement in the current legal environment, it increases the risk of key issues falling through the cracks. For example, the client may only disclose certain information to a social service professional without realising it is also critical information which could impact their legal outcome. A loosely integrated service model may also make it more difficult to adequately respond to a client's intersecting needs.

Whereas, in our view, a closely integrated service model better enables us to meet our clients where they are at, develop a relationship of trust, be flexible and responsive to their evolving needs, better identify and address underlying problems, and achieve more holistic outcomes.

However, creating an effective multidisciplinary team requires significant time, effort and skill. Careful recruitment is needed to bring together people with the right mix of skills, experience, and values. Considerable investment is often required in training, team development, and relationship building. Further, team members need opportunities to understand each other's roles, develop shared ways of working, and build trust.

While this investment can be substantial, for us, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Multidisciplinary teams bring together diverse expertise and perspectives, enabling more comprehensive responses to complex issues, better decision-making, and more innovative solutions. By combining knowledge across disciplines, organisations can deliver more coordinated, client-centred services and achieve outcomes that would be difficult for any single profession to accomplish alone.

⁷ Stephen Winter, *Monetary Redress for Abuse in State Care*, section 12.3.

⁸ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice* report, November 2024, p 21, paragraph 1.102, <www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Redress_Scheme/Standing/~/_link.aspx?_id=BEC7928668BF4A4EBB8A4330E4041FCA&_z=z>.

The benefits of integrated legal assistance services for clients, service providers and the justice system

Reflections of a Knowmore social worker on the benefits of integrated practice

Through our integrated approach, clients are offered not only a listening ear and more holistic support but also an added sense of accountability. Many of our clients have experienced what it means to have their truth systematically denied, and to not have their matter followed through with integrity.

For our service to offer an additional non-legal professional, to be there for the client's needs in that moment, means we are able to truly stand with our client and ensure their truth is heard and not overlooked or misunderstood. Our integrated approach means we are able to more easily centre the client and be reflexive in our work.

In our experience, a closely integrated legal assistance service can provide significant benefits for people who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation, including victims and survivors of child abuse. These benefits can include

- **Ensuring that a person's engagement with legal services and systems is safe and trauma-informed** – by providing clients with the option to seek support from social workers and counsellors throughout their engagement with legal services and justice systems. For example, our clients have the option to speak with a social worker or counsellor before, during and after legal appointments and while they wait for an outcome on their legal matter. In our experience, having the involvement of social workers and counsellors can be critical to supporting victims and survivors to disclose relevant experiences of abuse in a supportive and safe environment, and to do so on their own terms and at their own pace. It can also ensure that we are better able to recognise and respond to our client's underlying problems and wellbeing needs, including when there is a need for de-escalation or crisis support. Our social workers and counsellors are also able to offer guidance to our clients

on how to better self-manage their personal wellbeing during difficult interactions with the legal system.

- **Ensuring that a person's engagement with legal services and systems is culturally safe and supportive** – providing clients with the option to seek support from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander engagement advisors throughout their engagement with legal services and justice systems. In our experience, this can be critical to establishing trust with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients, supporting them to disclose their experiences of abuse, ensuring that their cultural support needs are understood and met, and that they can better understand and navigate legal options and processes. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander engagement advisors can also provide a safe and trusted entry point into a legal service.
- **Ensuring that people have access to holistic, wraparound support to address both the legal and non-legal impacts of the harm they experience** – for example, providing clients with the option to seek support from a financial counsellor who can help them to manage financial stress or abuse. Financial counsellors can also offer advice and support in relation to managing redress and support payments received through legal processes. In our experience, this can be critical to ensuring that our clients are able to effectively use these payments to support their personal healing and recovery.

A closely integrated practice model can also have significant benefits for legal and social service professionals working with people who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation. For example, these benefits can include

- **Reducing the risk of vicarious trauma and workplace stress** – by creating a more supportive and collaborative environment for practitioners, where staff work together to manage a client's wellbeing and provide support and advice to each other, rather than one practitioner working in isolation.
- **Increasing job satisfaction** – by ensuring that a practitioner's work aligns with their personal values and has a meaningful impact. For example, taking a coordinated and holistic approach to a client's

legal and non-legal needs means that we are better able to address the adverse impacts of child abuse and achieve meaningful and positive outcomes for our clients.

- **Providing opportunities for reflective and reflexive learning** – in our experience, in a closely integrated service, practitioners have the opportunity to continuously learn from each other, gain critical skills, reflect on best practice and better plan for future engagements with clients. For example, through their work with social service professionals, legal practitioners can learn to better recognise how a client is responding to a situation and provide advice at a time when they are ready to receive it.

The challenges facing integrated legal assistance services in the current legal landscape

In this section, we respond to consultation question 3 by addressing:

- the challenges closely integrated legal assistance services face in navigating their client's right to legal privilege generally
- the challenges navigating information disclosure requirements, in particular, obligations to report child abuse and risk of harm.

Managing a client's ability to maintain legal privilege

The Consultation Paper outlines the challenges closely integrated legal assistance services face in navigating their clients' right to legal privilege.⁹ Many of those challenges resonate with us, in particular:

- the lack of certainty in relation to the scope of legal privilege in the context of closely integrated services, where legal and social service professionals work side-by-side to support clients, may be jointly or individually present in critical appointments, and may have access to shared information and records
- the lack of certainty in situations where a client meets with a social service professional without a lawyer present, including where a client's initial engagement with the service is with a social service

⁹ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services: Consultation Paper*, Chapter 4.

professional and they subsequently decide not to speak with a lawyer

- the lack of certainty in situations where the client would benefit from support by a third party while engaging with the legal service, including by having a person close to them or an external support worker attend their appointments
- difficulty providing accurate and adequate information about legal privilege to clients experiencing trauma and marginalisation, including children, and determining whether the client truly understands the information and comprehends possible, future risk
- difficulty navigating the different legal and professional obligations of staff involved in the client's matter (which we discuss further in the following section).

Managing obligations to report child abuse and risk of harm

As detailed in the Consultation Paper,¹⁰ individual professionals working in integrated legal assistance services may have different legal and regulatory obligations in relation to reporting child abuse and risk of harm. For example, individual practitioners may have a duty to report under:

- mandatory reporting obligations prescribed by child protection legislation in the relevant jurisdiction¹¹
- reporting duties prescribed by the criminal law of the relevant jurisdiction, including the criminal offence of failing to disclose child sexual abuse¹²

¹⁰ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services: Consultation Paper*, pp 33–35.

¹¹ We note there are significant differences in mandatory reporting obligations across jurisdictions. In Victoria, mandatory reporting obligations are outlined under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and arise where there is a reasonable belief that the child is at risk of significant harm due to physical injury or sexual abuse. This obligation applies to certain professionals mandated under the Act. See Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services: Consultation Paper*, p 33.

¹² In Victoria, the failure to disclose offence came into effect in October 2014 and applies to any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed (or attempted) by an adult against a child. See Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services: Consultation Paper*, p 35.

- professional obligations prescribed by their professional registration body and/or practice standards.¹³

Integrated legal assistance services may also be subject to additional regulatory frameworks and reporting obligations that apply at an organisational level, for example, under reportable conduct schemes and working with children check frameworks.

As a service dedicated to preventing and responding to child abuse, we recognise the significance of these measures, including mandatory reporting frameworks, to our national efforts to combat the widespread and ongoing problem of child abuse. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse also recognised the importance of individual mandatory reporting obligations arising under both child protection and criminal legal frameworks. The Royal Commission made several recommendations to make those obligations more effective and nationally consistent.¹⁴

The Royal Commission also recognised the considerable barriers that victims and survivors of child sexual abuse face in disclosing abuse and concluded that there are good reasons, in some circumstances, for third parties to take action to prevent further abuse, stating:

these reasons recognise the great harm that child sexual abuse can cause to victims. The impact of child sexual abuse on individual victims may be lifelong, and the impact on their families and the broader community may continue into subsequent generations. These reasons also recognise that, unlike other categories of crime, child sexual abuse is often not reported and stopped at the time of the abuse because the child victims face such difficulties in disclosing or reporting the abuse. When a perpetrator is not

¹³ For example, social workers and counsellors working in integrated legal assistance services have separate professional obligations and can face disciplinary action by their national professional body if they fail to report child abuse and risk of harm.

¹⁴ See Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 7, Improving institutional responding and reporting*, <www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/improving-institutional-responding-and-reporting>; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Criminal justice report: Executive summary and parts I and II*, recommendations 32–35, <www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/criminal-justice>.

discovered and stopped from abusing a child, they may continue to abuse that child and other children.¹⁵

Given the nature of our integrated legal assistance service, we are often required to consider whether client disclosures and communications enliven mandatory reporting obligations. In these instances, we discuss these obligations with our clients and support them to make an informed decision about whether to self-report. In our experience, many of our clients are willing to self-report, and we are able to offer support to them throughout the process.

However, we also acknowledge the complexities integrated legal assistance services face in navigating different legal and regulatory reporting frameworks and their interaction with legal privilege. These challenges can include

- There is a lack of clarity surrounding how these obligations apply to information disclosed in closely integrated legal assistance service settings, where legal and/or social service professionals may be present when disclosures are made and may also have shared access to relevant client communications and records.¹⁶
- There is a lack of consistency, including national consistency, in the relevant legal frameworks. We note in particular that:
 - most of the relevant regulatory frameworks are complex in their own right and this is only compounded when the interactions between them are considered
 - supposedly equivalent frameworks are often inconsistent across jurisdictions
 - there is a lack of clarity in relation to who the frameworks apply to and in what circumstances.

¹⁵ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Criminal justice report: Executive summary and parts I and II*, p 49.

¹⁶ We particularly recognise that disclosure may be an ongoing process throughout the person's engagement with the legal service.

- In some situations, it can be difficult to provide accurate and adequate information about reporting obligations to clients who have experiences of trauma and marginalisation, including children.¹⁷
- In some instances, there may be a tension between different professional approaches and obligations.
- There is a risk that social service professionals may face disciplinary action from their professional registration body for failing to report certain information.
- It can be difficult navigating situations where a client, including a child or young person, is at risk of harm but does not want information to be reported.

Reforming legal privilege

In this section, we respond to consultation questions 4–7 by addressing:

- the need to enhance legal protections for communications between clients, lawyers and social service professionals in integrated legal assistance service settings
- the reform options proposed by the Victorian Law Reform Commission, in particular, reform Option 2.

The need to enhance protection for communications between clients, lawyers and social service professionals in integrated legal assistance service settings

As outlined above, it is clear that the current approach to legal privilege is out of step with what is now considered to be best practice legal service provision for people with experiences of trauma and marginalisation. As a result, there is a lack of certainty and legal protection for individuals accessing these services to ensure that their confidential information and communications are protected.

¹⁷ For further discussion, see Knowmore, *Quality and safety of Australia's early childhood education and care system: Submission to the Education and Employment References Committee*, 3 October 2025, pp 18–20, <knowmore.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/submission-quality-and-safety-of-australias-early-childhood-education-and-care-system-cth.pdf>.

In addition, the risk that a third party may seek to access this information is not insignificant. We are increasingly concerned by practices which enable perpetrators of violence to seek subpoenas in order to access a survivors' confidential information and use it against them in legal proceedings. This is one of the many ways in which the legal system can be weaponised against victims and survivors. This can result not only in further harm to the individual but also harm to the integrity of the justice system. Where perpetrators escape accountability, there is also an increased risk of harm to others in the community.

In our view, it is essential that the legal framework in Victoria evolves to provide certainty and adequate legal protection for people seeking legal assistance and related support from integrated legal assistance services, so that their decision to seek justice and support does not compromise their safety and confidentiality. However, as outlined above on pages 7-8, we emphasise the critical need for a nationally consistent approach to reform.

Our general comments on the proposed reform options

We note that the Victorian Law Reform Commission has outlined two proposed options to ensure that clients of integrated legal assistance services are better able to assert their right to legal privilege. As only Option 2 relates to closely integrated services like ours, we have only commented on that option.

We note that Option 2 proposes the creation of a new category of legal privilege which could attach to confidential communications made between a client, lawyer and social service professional for the purpose of accessing integrated legal assistance services. We are generally supportive of this option if it would provide more certainty and protection for our clients in Victoria, and if the reforms are grounded in the existing and evolving work of closely integrated legal assistance services.

In our view, for this to be effective, the Victorian Law Reform Commission should recommend that the new category of legal privilege include the following elements

- The privilege should attach to communications with a broad range of social service professionals that may be employed by an integrated legal assistance service. This should include social

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workers and counsellors, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander engagement advisors and financial counsellors, irrespective of whether a lawyer is involved in the relevant communication.

- The privilege should attach to a broad range of communications and confidential information, having regard to the complex and intersecting legal and related support needs of people with experiences of trauma and marginalisation. For example, we would support the privilege applying to all communications, records, case notes and safety plans.
- The privilege should extend beyond court proceedings, to apply to proceedings of tribunals, investigative and administrative bodies, in recognition of the various legal systems our clients may interact with.
- The privilege should protect disclosures to third parties in certain circumstances. For example, in situations where a client is receiving ongoing support from an external support service and it is critical for information to be shared with that support service. The privilege should also apply in situations where a social service professional, such as a financial counsellor, needs to disclose certain information to third parties, including government agencies, in order to effectively advocate for the client.
- The privilege should apply to integrated legal assistance services, including closely integrated legal assistance services, operating in the community legal sector. It should also apply to partners of integrated legal assistance services, for example, within the context of health justice partnerships. Given the complexity of the current regulatory environment in which we operate (discussed above on pages 14–18), we do not support the introduction of an additional accreditation or application process to determine which service settings the privilege applies to.
- The privilege should not weaken existing legal protections for clients of integrated legal assistance services. While we support the Victorian Law Reform Commission considering the possibility of a ‘safety exception’, we are of the view that the proposed reforms should alleviate, rather than exacerbate, the challenges facing closely integrated legal assistance services and their clients.

Beyond the legal scope of the proposed new category of legal privilege, we also support the introduction of training requirements for legal and social service professionals working in integrated legal assistance services, to support them to understand their obligations and their clients' rights in relation to confidentiality and legal privilege. This should include training to support professionals to respond appropriately to disclosures of abuse, and to assist clients to self-report where appropriate.

Appendix: about Knowmore

Our service

Knowmore legal service (Knowmore) is a nation-wide, free and independent community legal centre providing legal information, advice, representation and referrals, education and systemic advocacy for victims and survivors of child abuse. Our vision is a community that is accountable to survivors and free of child abuse. Our aim is to facilitate access to justice for victims and survivors of child abuse and to work with survivors and their supporters to stop child abuse.

From 2013 to 2018, our service assisted people who were engaging with or considering engaging with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission). From 1 July 2018, Knowmore has delivered legal support services to assist survivors of institutional child sexual abuse to access their redress options, including under the National Redress Scheme. Since 2022, Knowmore has also assisted survivors who experienced child sexual abuse in non-institutional settings, and provided legal and financial counselling support to people engaging with the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme.

Knowmore has also been providing legal and financial counselling support to people who have received a redress offer from the Western Australian Stolen Generations Redress Scheme, which commenced in 2025.

Knowmore uses a multidisciplinary model to provide trauma-informed, client-centred and culturally safe legal assistance to clients. Knowmore has offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Darwin. Our service model brings together lawyers, social workers and counsellors, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander engagement advisors and financial counsellors to provide coordinated support to clients.

Knowmore is funded by the Commonwealth Government, represented by the Departments of Attorney-General and Social Services and the National Indigenous Australians Agency, and the Western Australian Government.

Our clients

In our Royal Commission-related work, from July 2013 to the end of March 2018, Knowmore assisted 8,954 individual clients. The majority of those clients were survivors of institutional child sexual abuse. Almost a quarter (24%) of the clients assisted during our Royal Commission work identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

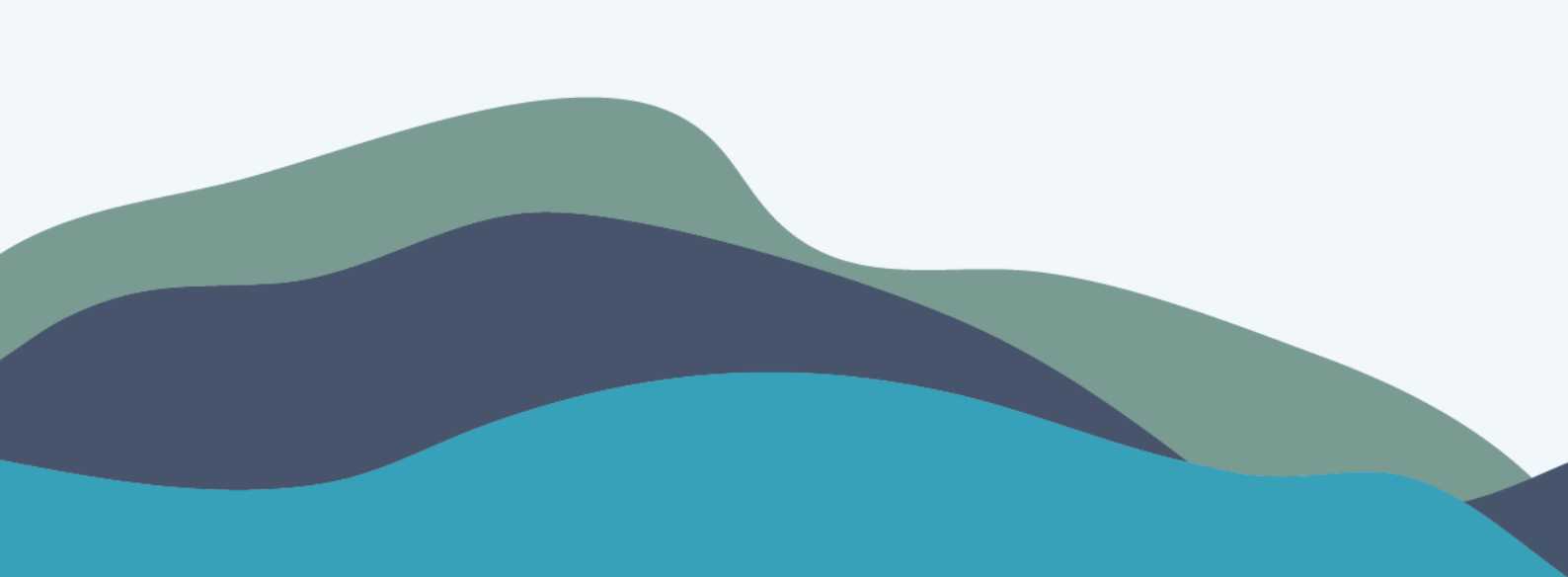
Since the commencement of the National Redress Scheme for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse on 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2026, Knowmore has received 256,697 calls to its 1800 telephone line and has completed intake processes for, and has assisted or is currently assisting, 27,083 clients.

2 in 5 clients (40%) identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. More than half of our clients identify as having a disability (54%). 1 in 10 clients (11%) are currently experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Further, about 1 in 10 clients (9%) are classified as priority clients due to advanced age and/or immediate and serious health concerns including terminal cancer or other life-limiting illness.

100% of clients we assist with the Territories Redress Scheme identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our clients in Victoria

Knowmore has a significant client base in Victoria – 13 per cent of our clients reside in the state. We therefore have a strong interest in how the legal framework in Victoria interacts with the integrated services we provide to victims and survivors of child abuse.



Knowmore

Legal Service

Free advice line: 1800 605 762 **Email:** info@knowmore.org.au **Web:** www.knowmore.org.au

ADELAIDE SA

Level 1, 99 Gawler Place
Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 1305
Adelaide SA 5001
t: 08 7092 2740

DARWIN NT

Level 2, 13 Cavenagh Street
Darwin City NT 0800
GPO Box 413
Darwin NT 0801
t: 08 7918 8455

PERTH WA

12 Newcastle Street
Perth WA 6000
PO Box 277
Perth WA 6849
t: 08 6117 7244

BRISBANE QLD

Level 20, 144 Edward Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
PO Box 2151
Brisbane QLD 4001
t: 07 3218 4500

MELBOURNE VIC

Level 7, 607 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
PO Box 504
Collins Street West VIC 8007
t: 03 8663 7400

SYDNEY NSW

Level 15, 175 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box 267
Darlinghurst NSW 1300
t: 02 8267 7400
