

18 August 2026

Legal privilege and integrated legal assistance services

Submission to the
Victorian Law Reform Commission

Women's Legal Service Victoria
PO Box 559 Flinders Lane PO VIC 8009
www.womenslegal.org.au

Contents

Contents	2
Women's Legal Service Victoria.....	3
Acknowledgement of Country	3
About Women's Legal Service Victoria	3
Foundations of our Submission	4
Recommendations	5
<i>Recommendation 1: Expand legal privilege to cover all employed professionals delivering integrated services within a legal service</i>	5
<i>Recommendation 2: Create a new category of legal privilege incorporating social service professionals</i>	5
Our integrated legal practice	6
Removing the need for 'consent to waiving privilege'	10
Defining Integrated Services.....	11
The need for national reform	12
Appendix A: Women's Legal Services Australia endorsement	16

Women's Legal Service Victoria

Acknowledgement of Country

Women's Legal primarily works on the sovereign lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their role as custodians of Country and pay our respects to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. As a specialist women's legal service, we acknowledge the way Australia's colonial legal and justice system continues to disproportionately harm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. We commit to working in allyship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait organisations and communities to dismantle systems of marginalisation and discrimination. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. This land always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

About Women's Legal Service Victoria

Women's Legal Service Victoria (Women's Legal) is a specialist, trauma-informed, state-wide for-purpose organisation that has been providing free specialist legal services to women since 1982. We work with, and for, women and non-binary people to address legal issues arising from family violence and relationship breakdown.

Women's Legal's vision is that women and non-binary people live free from violence and discrimination in a gender-equitable society. Our unique contribution to this vision – as lawyers, social workers, financial counsellors, advocates and educators – is to work alongside women and non-binary people experiencing disadvantage to promote their rights to live free from violence and make informed choices about their relationships.

Women's Legal specialises in family and sexual violence, family law, migration, child protection, criminal law and victims of crime assistance – recognising the intersection between the jurisdictions. We focus on women's safety, recovery from violence and economic security. We do this by:

1. Providing legal advice and representation to women and non-binary people with a wraparound model of service delivery where they are supported by social workers and financial counsellors, depending on their needs.
2. Advocating for law and policy that respects and promotes the rights of women and non-binary people.
3. Building the capacity of other professionals and communities to identify and respond appropriately to legal need.

Foundations of our Submission

Women's Legal puts women and non-binary people – individually and collectively – at the centre of everything we do. We work with clients to achieve optimal legal and wellbeing outcomes, and we integrate what we learn into our systems change and law reform advocacy to put forward well-informed systemic and structural solutions that will improve the safety and wellbeing of women and non-binary people, and their children, to help eliminate gendered violence.

In the 2025 financial year, 3,291 clients benefited from our free legal help, with 50% of clients receiving more than one service across legal, social work and financial counselling. The clients we worked with faced many barriers, with 54% experiencing economic disadvantage, 24% reporting having a disability, and 28% of clients either at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

Our submission is informed by our practice and casework evidence. Women's Legal lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors were consulted in the development of this submission, and their insights about client needs and experiences are reflected in this submission.

Women's Legal is deeply committed to advocating change that is informed by the lived experiences of women and non-binary people and, as such, client stories are shared in this submission. The stories are included with client consent and have been de-identified to protect the safety and privacy of all persons concerned. We employ a variety of de-identification techniques to meet our legal obligations and ensure client stories are useful to decision-makers.

This submission was prepared by

- Avital Kamil, Director, Legal Services
- Lisa Fowler, Deputy Director, Legal Services
- Suzie Nesbitt, Integrated Programs Manager

This submission and all recommendations are endorsed by Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA), the national peak body representing 13 specialist Women's Legal Services across Australia. A copy of the endorsement is provided at Appendix A.

Contact us

Roj Amedi | Director Policy, Advocacy and Communications

Women's Legal Service Victoria

PO Box 559 Flinders Lane PO VIC 8009

 | womenslegal.org.au | @WomensLegalVic

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Expand legal privilege to cover all employed professionals delivering integrated services within a legal service

Women's Legal recommends the creation of a category of legal privilege that applies to all professionals employed by a legal service to deliver integrated legal assistance.

Where lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors work as employees of the same organisation and provide services through a full integrated model, they should be protected by privilege. In these settings, social work and financial counselling are not separate services operating alongside legal assistance. They are essential components of the legal assistance model and are frequently required to enable clients to obtain legal advice, engage with legal processes and achieve legal outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Create a new category of legal privilege incorporating social service professionals

In addition to Recommendation 1, Women's Legal supports the creation of a broader category of legal privilege incorporating social service professionals who provide integrated legal assistance services through partnership or other non-employment models.

Many integrated legal assistance services operate through co-location arrangements or other collaborative service models where professionals are employed by different organisations. Clients accessing these services face the same risks associated with disclosure of sensitive information and should not receive a lower level of protection simply because services are delivered through a partnership rather than a single organisation.

For this reason, any reform should also extend beyond fully integrated employment models and provide protection for communications occurring within partnership-based integrated legal assistance services.

Our integrated legal practice

Women's Legal's casework model is designed to provide integrated support to women and non-binary people who have experienced family and sexual violence. Lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors work together as a single team, sharing case notes, attending appointments where appropriate, managing risk and safety planning.

Integration is not an end, but a means to delivering better legal outcomes and safety with psychosocial support. This approach responds to the needs of clients which are numerous, complex, and often require interdisciplinary collaboration. Holistic support responds to the whole person and enables the resolution of non-legal issues that place clients in a better position to navigate the legal system and get better outcomes.

Integrated practice is trauma-informed and recognises that fragmented and high-demand services often operate in silos, increasing the risk that clients will not receive the support they need and preventing interventions to address legal harms before they escalate. It reduces the need for clients to re-tell their story to numerous professionals and ensures a client's needs and risks to their safety are collectively managed and understood by all professionals working with them.

Women's Legal's Intersectional Feminist Framework informs all our work. It prompts us to understand people's experiences in the context of intersecting systems, structures and inequalities that shape their lives, rather than through static identities. Through this lens, we recognise that best practice integrated service delivery must respond to the complex and diverse needs of clients who experience a range of multiple and intersecting barriers to safety, justice and equality. An integrated practice is trauma informed because it reduces the need for clients to re-tell their story to numerous professionals and ensures their needs and safety risks are collectively managed and understood.

Recommendation 1: Expand legal privilege to cover all employed professionals delivering integrated services within a legal service

Women's Legal recommends the creation of a category of legal privilege that applies to all professionals employed by a legal service to deliver integrated legal assistance. Where lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors work as employees of the same organisation and provide services through a fully integrated model, all work by those professionals with the client should be protected by privilege. In these settings, social work and financial counselling are not separate services operating alongside legal assistance. They are essential components of the legal assistance model and are frequently required to enable clients to obtain legal advice, engage with legal processes and achieve legal outcomes.

Our specialist family violence financial counsellors are an integral part of the Women's Legal integrated practice. They work alongside lawyers and social workers to identify and address debts, fines and other financial problems arising from family violence that affect client safety,

“I am immensely grateful, as [the team] all provided me with emotional, financial, and legal support. They always showed excellent willingness, kindness, and the empathy my case required ... Thank you for showing me the light in the darkness.” -
Women's Legal client

economic security and legal matters. They advocate with creditors, financial institutions, relevant ombudsman's and government services to secure debt waivers, resolve disputes and reduce liabilities. When financial counsellors work with clients to access these tailored family violence waivers early and before a family law property settlement, the debts are removed from the property pool. Victim-survivors can then dedicate their limited financial resources to their safety and recovery rather than to service fines or debts that were incurred because of economic abuse, coercive control and family violence.

Financial counselling intervention must often be strategically sequenced before litigation is initiated or contemplated to improve legal and financial outcomes for victim-survivors. Where the property pool is only comprised of debts, a financial counsellor may be able to resolve all the debts without the need for litigation and avoiding ongoing pressure on the legal system.

Our family violence social workers support clients to develop safety plans for attending court or to access family violence brokerage to cover the costs associated with resolving their legal matter, including visa application and related fees. Social work support is client led and connected to their legal matter. The client determines

their own goals. While some goals are directly linked to a legal process, others may not initially appear to be legal in nature but are essential to sustaining a client's engagement with legal assistance and achieving better legal outcomes.

For example, a client may seek legal advice to safely separate from a person using family violence. A lawyer may advise the client about family violence, intervention orders, separation and related legal options, while a social worker works with the client to develop a safety plan for leaving the relationship. This social work support is closely connected to the purpose for which the client is seeking legal assistance.

The client may also need financial assistance to establish a new home after leaving the relationship. The social worker will assist them by applying for a family violence flexible support package and completing a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) risk assessment. This assessment is then shared with the lawyer to inform the legal strategy, support ongoing risk monitoring and enable coordination. Despite the importance of this work to the client's safety and capacity to remain engaged with a legal service, it is less certain whether all related communications and records would satisfy the dominant purpose test. This uncertainty illustrates why the existing test does not adequately reflect the interdependent nature of legal, social work and financial counselling in an integrated practice like Women's Legal's.

Most commonly, financial counselling or social work proceeds with a clear dominant purpose after an initial referral from a lawyer. However, as these professionals develop rapport and form trusting relationships with the client, additional support needs become apparent even after the legal matter is closed. Limiting integrated support to activities that only satisfy the dominant purpose test would not be trauma-informed and could force clients to seek help from external services that are already at significant capacity, have restrictive eligibility criteria and result in further service fragmentation. Legal privilege should extend to all communications and support

connected to the delivery of integrated legal assistance services because they ultimately support clients to remain engaged, to act on legal advice and achieve better legal outcomes.

50 per cent of clients receive more than one legal, social work or financial counselling service from Women's Legal. Importantly as our financial counsellors or social workers progress their work with clients, they too can uncover other legal needs, for example clients needing family law legal support. Our integrated practice enables them to internally refer the client to a relevant Women's Legal lawyer who can take on the matter without the client having to repeat themselves.

“From the very beginning, my financial counsellor has been patient, professional, and deeply supportive in assisting me to close my consolidated loan, which was taken under coercion during a domestic violence relationship. This has been a very difficult and sensitive process for me, and their approach has made a significant difference.” - Women's Legal client

Integrated service delivery and appropriate information sharing reduce the need for clients to re-tell their story and attend multiple appointments. This improves efficiencies and the experience of clients and staff by:

- providing all practitioners with visibility of recent client contact, key conversations and progress across the client's matters
- enabling each practitioner to apply their expertise as part of a coordinated response
- enabling shared case notes about client communications, circumstances and presentation
- improving legal and client outcomes by allowing work to be strategically planned and sequenced, such as progressing financial counselling before litigation to reduce debt in a property pool
- reinforcing consistent messages to clients, including that they are believed and that the family violence is not their fault
- strengthening shared understanding of family violence risk and safety planning
- supporting practitioners to jointly manage client work, share decision-making power and reduce vicarious trauma in the workforce

As employees of a legal service, our social workers and financial counsellors are not mandatory reporters to Child Protection under the Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (CYFA). This is because mandatory reporting is determined by the nature of the role and service a professional works at, not by a person's general qualifications.

The relevant threshold for breaching privilege for all employees of Women's Legal is as specified in Rule 9.2 of the [Australian Solicitors Conduct Rules \(ASCR\)](#). All staff are also bound by their employment contracts, organisational policies and procedures and confidentiality. All client-facing staff in our integrated practice receive regular internal and external supervision and training that supports them to deliver services in accordance with their professional obligations.

Creating a new category of legal privilege that extends to all employed professionals delivering integrated support within a legal service would provide better protection for privileged client information and remove significant barriers to effective integrated practice. It would enable legal services to reduce unnecessary information barriers and support lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors to share information appropriately and securely, improving coordination and legal outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Create a new category of legal privilege incorporating social service professionals

Women's Legal also supports the creation of a broader category of legal privilege incorporating social service professionals who provide integrated legal assistance services through partnership or other non-employment models.

As outlined above, the services delivered by our specialist family violence financial counsellors and social workers are critical to the safe and accessible provision of legal assistance at Women's Legal.

Many integrated legal assistance services operate through co-location arrangements or other collaborative service models where professionals are employed by different organisations. Clients accessing these services face the same risks associated with disclosure of sensitive information and should not receive a lower level of protection simply because services are delivered through a partnership rather than a single organisation.

For this reason, any reform should extend beyond fully integrated employment models and provide protection for communications occurring within partnership-based integration. To operate effectively, the definition of 'confidential communications' made between a client, lawyer and social service professional for the purpose of accessing integrated legal assistance services must be broad to encompass 'all communication' so that clients and professionals can easily engage in an integrated way without having to self-censor or misunderstand the scope of the protections.

While we acknowledge that such a category will displace reporting obligations of third parties where integrated legal assistance is being provided, with the exception of imminent risks under the ASCR, the creation of a new category of legal privilege incorporating social service professionals provides more clarity for workers and clients accessing legal services in collaborative or partnership models.

Even where a service is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity under the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) under Part 5A of the [Family Violence Protection Act 2008](#) (Vic), professionals generally cannot share information that constitutes communication between a client and a lawyer that is protected by privilege unless relevant exceptions apply.

Where a client has disclosed information indicative of a family violence risk or to the safety and wellbeing of children in their care, Women's Legal seeks the victim-survivor's consent before supporting them to access appropriate family violence and risk management services including Child Protection, Police or other services as appropriate under the FVISS. Social workers contribute specialist expertise by identifying the client's protective factors and resources and informing other integrated practitioners' assessment of risk. Sharing this analysis helps lawyers support clients' safety, well-being, and engagement with the legal service while informing legal strategy. A new category of privilege should facilitate this integrated work while preserving client agency and clearly defining the limited circumstances in which information may be disclosed.

A client's consent to share family violence risk information with other services for the purposes of further risk assessment or risk management does not mean that the client is waiving privilege or that the lawyer-client relationship needs to cease.

While working with clients in the integrated legal practice, Women's Legal professionals will consider the communication in question, and the impact of sharing or not sharing family violence risk information to determine whether such communication should be excluded from FVISS.

As part of this decision-making process, where we cannot get consent to share and the risk is imminent, Women's Legal will assess whether we need to breach client confidentiality.⁹ As far as possible, Women's Legal will work with the client to protect the professional relationship and avoid a breach of privilege situation where the client may lose access to legal representation. Working in an integrated way with other professionals who can help manage and de-escalate risk is critical.

Removing the need for 'consent to waiving privilege'

Under both of our recommendations, clients should be able to consent to receiving integrated legal services, rather than being asked to waive privilege. This approach better supports client agency and informed choice.

Clients should not be required to choose between retaining 'legal privilege' and receiving integrated legal service assistance. Instead, they should be able to provide informed consent to receiving integrated services and to appropriate information sharing among the practitioners supporting them.

Requiring clients to accept the potential loss of privilege as a condition to accessing integrated services fails to recognise the limited choices available to many people who access free legal assistance. Clients experiencing disadvantage and multiple barriers may have no realistic alternative source of legal, social work or financial counselling support. It places an unreasonable burden on clients to understand and assess future consequences of losing privilege in circumstances where the application of privilege is legally complex and often uncertain.

Under both of our recommendations, consent should support client agency rather than operate as a mechanism of transferring the risks associated with integrated service delivery to the client.

Clients should be supported to consent to information sharing between their lawyer, social worker, financial counsellor and other support workers to ensure a coordinated trauma-informed approach to their casework and legal strategy.

Clients should receive clear and accessible information about how personal details and files are collected, stored and shared by practitioners; which communications may be legally privileged, and the limited circumstances in which information may be disclosed to certain entities without their consent (for example, in order to prevent imminent physical harm). Services should explain how they will respond to subpoenas and other requests for client information, including by asserting privilege and challenging disclosure where there is an appropriate legal basis to do so.

Lawyers and other professionals should support a client's agency by explaining proposed disclosures in accessible language and seek a client's instructions before sharing information wherever possible and throughout the life of a matter. For example, a financial counsellor may seek a client's approval before providing a letter containing personal information to a creditor. This approach reinforces the client's control over decisions affecting their information and supports their agency while receiving an integrated service.

Defining Integrated Services

Women's Legal is an integrated legal service. Lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors work as a unified team to provide coordinated and strategically sequenced assistance based on each client's legal, safety, wellbeing and economic needs.

Women's Legal recommends that the reforms extend to:

- fully integrated legal services in which a legal assistance organisation employs lawyers and other social service professionals, including social workers, financial counsellors, cultural support staff, counsellors and advocates, to provide coordinated assistance; and
- partnership-based integrated legal assistance services in which legal and social services are employed by different organisations but provide coordinated assistance through a formal service model.

The relevant definition should focus on the nature and purpose of the service rather than the employment arrangements alone. It should require that legal assistance is a substantive component of the service and that participating professionals work together to support people experiencing disadvantage to address interconnected legal and non-legal needs.

The definition should be sufficiently broad to recognise different integrated service models while remaining clearly confined to the legal assistance sector. This would protect clients accessing partnership-based services without inadvertently extending proposed privilege to multidisciplinary commercial practices that do not share the same access to justice purposes.

The need for national reform

Clients accessing services have interconnected legal problems spanning across state and federal jurisdictions.

A client may have family violence, victims of crime or child protection matters governed by Victorian law while also responding to intersecting family law or migration matters governed by Commonwealth law. Different privilege protections across jurisdictions would be difficult for clients to understand and for integrated services to administer. This is particularly concerning where practitioners cannot know at the beginning of an integrated service which legal or other proceedings may later emerge.

The VLRC should consider how any Victorian reform will interact with Commonwealth law and federal proceedings, as well as the consequences for clients whose legal matters cross jurisdictional boundaries. The reform should be designed, as far as possible, to avoid fragmented protections and provide clear guidance about its jurisdictional operation.

Women's Legal also supports nationally consistent reform to protect communications made in integrated legal assistance settings. National consistency would provide greater certainty for clients and professionals and reduce the risk that a client's information is protected in one legal context but exposed in another.

Sadia's story

Sadia* is a 47-year-old woman from Pakistan with Australian permanent residency, living in Melbourne's southeast in a private rental. Sadia has two children, Hassan (aged 18) from her first marriage, and Aisha (aged 4) from her second marriage, who was born in Australia. Sadia is a victim-survivor of family violence used by her second husband.

At the time of engagement with Women's Legal, Sadia was socially isolated and had little contact with her daughter. Aisha was in Pakistan with her father, Sadia's second husband. Hassan was also living with his maternal grandparents in Pakistan.

Sadia had also been misidentified as the respondent on a police application for a family violence intervention order (FVIO), while her husband was listed as the affected family member.

Sadia was married to her husband in 2017 in Pakistan via arranged marriage, on the basis that he would support Sadia to become an Australian citizen.

From 2017 until 2023, Sadia's husband would occasionally and on a whim bring Sadia to Australia on a visitor visa. He would become aggressive if Sadia brought up applying for Australian citizenship. With the assistance of family and legal services, Sadia gained permanent residency in Australia.

Sadia experienced serious family violence perpetrated by her husband while in the relationship. This included frequent physical violence and strangulation, financial abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, visa abuse, and a high level of coercive control. Sadia took photos of her injuries to report to police, but her husband found the photos and smashed her phone. Sadia was forced to do all domestic labour and was not allowed to seek employment. She was very socially isolated and had no friends or family support. When Aisha was born in 2021, her husband weaponised this against Sadia, stating that her "place" was in the home looking after the baby.

Sadia was eventually allowed to get a cleaning job, but her husband kept her earnings and controlled her bank account. Sadia was forced to beg him for items like clothing and needed to access services to meet her basic needs.

In February 2025, Sadia, Aisha and her husband travelled to Pakistan together. While overseas, Sadia realised that her husband had cancelled their return flights to Australia. She believes this was done to jeopardise her visa status in Australia. Due to the ongoing economic abuse, Sadia was only able to purchase a flight for herself back to Australia and was forced to leave Aisha behind.

Her husband retaliated by withdrawing all access to her finances and prevented any communication between Sadia and Aisha for three months.

Upon returning to Australia, Sadia experienced further family violence, including systems abuse by her husband, who reported her to police. The police misidentified Sadia as the predominant aggressor of family violence and applied for a FVIO naming her husband as the protected person.

Legal assistance through duty lawyer service

Sadia was referred to Women's Legal for assistance with the FVIO hearing at the Magistrates' Court, after police had misidentified her as the predominant aggressor. A Women's Legal lawyer represented Sadia to challenge the order wrongly made against her.

Integrated practice support

Sadia's Women's Legal lawyer referred her to a Women's Legal social worker to support Sadia with the other impacts of family violence she had experienced.

The family violence related issues that Sadia needed help with included:

- Financial insecurity arising from economic abuse: Sadia was in casualised employment and struggling to pay her bills and meet her basic needs. She relied on foodbanks to eat and was experiencing difficulty finding suitable employment. She wasn't receiving any government income support.
- Possible debt arising from financial abuse: Sadia was referred to a Women's Legal financial counsellor for assistance to identify and address possible debts associated with utility bills and telephone accounts.
- Tech-facilitated abuse and coercive control: Sadia was concerned that her telephone may have been compromised and that her husband may have been monitoring or tracking her, as the account had originally been registered in his name. She was particularly concerned because of his advanced qualifications in IT, which escalated the likelihood of him accessing her contacts and tracking her.
- Misidentification and difficulty navigating court processes: Police had misidentified Sadia as the predominant aggressor in an application for a FVIO. She found the process of understanding and contesting the application stressful and needed wrap around support to continue to engage in the process.

Sadia received the following supports from our integrated practice to resolve these issues and support her recovery from family violence.

The social worker:

- Made referrals to employment services, Sisterworks and Fitted for Work, to support Sadia to find additional or alternative employment and improve her financial stability and independence
- Provided food vouchers from Women's Legal brokerage to address her immediate material needs
- Created a safety plan (including tech safety) with Sadia to improve her safety, emotional wellbeing and manage her family violence risk
- Provided a new phone through Wesnet and support to set it up, further increasing safety and independence
- Worked collaboratively with the financial counsellors at Women's Legal to provide options about safely removing Sadia from utility accounts and making payment plans
- Facilitated advice and assistance from a Women's Legal migration lawyer for Sadia to sponsor her oldest son to travel to Australia.

Legal and other casework outcome

Sadia achieved positive outcomes through the coordinated assistance provided by Women's Legal's integrated service.

The family violence lawyer represented Sadia in the FVIO proceedings, and police withdrew the application that wrongly identified her as the respondent. The integrated social worker provided emotional and practical support, including arranging transport to court, which helped Sadia remain engaged in the proceedings.

Sadia's financial security improved after she was referred to employment services and secured additional work. The vouchers from Women's legal brokerage provided by the social worker prevented her from incurring further debt to meet her basic needs.

Sadia's safety increased and family violence risk was reduced by the safety planning completed by the social worker, including assisting Sadia to access safe new devices, addressing her concerns about possible monitoring and tech-facilitated abuse.

The financial counsellor reviewed Sadia's utility arrangements and advised her that staying as the account holder was the safest available option, then negotiated a reduced payment plan to ensure Sadia could make repayments. She was then provided information about the National Debt Helpline (NDH) so she could seek further assistance if needed.

The migration lawyer addressed Sadia's additional needs by assisting her with the process of sponsoring her son to come to Australia.

Sadia was less socially isolated after being referred to Sisterworks to participate in social and cultural activities.

Benefits of integrated legal assistance

Women's Legal's integrated and holistic response to Sadia's family violence experience recognised the broad ranging impacts of family violence and improved Sadia's legal outcomes and recovery from the violence she had experienced.

By ensuring that the legal issues affecting our client were addressed alongside the underlying social, financial and safety issues, Sadia was able to effectively engage in the legal process and prevent other problems from escalating.

In Sadia's case, the collaboration between the family violence lawyer, social worker, financial counsellor and migration lawyer enabled her to safely participate in court proceedings, access practical support, and address barriers created by family violence, economic abuse and financial insecurity.

Working with a social worker and financial counsellor also meant that some of Sadia's problems were able to be resolved through non-legal pathways.

By providing wraparound support, Women's Legal's integrated service strengthened Sadia's capacity to engage with legal processes, provide relevant information and act on legal advice. The coordinated assistance also addressed the safety, financial and social barriers affecting her legal matter and contributed to sustainable outcomes.

Reflecting on the support provided by her Women's Legal lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors, Sadia said she had been "protected from disaster".

**Client story has been de-identified to protect privacy and confidentiality.*

Appendix A



21 August 2026

The Hon. Anthony North KC
Chairperson
Victorian Law Reform Commission
Via email: legal.privilege@lawreform.vic.gov.au

Dear Chairperson

Legal Privilege and Integrated Practice Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a short response to the above inquiry.

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) is the national peak body for 13 specialist Women's Legal Services across Australia, including two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations. We provide a national voice for Women's Legal Services to influence policy and law reform, and advocate to increase access to gender-specialist, integrated legal services for women.

Integrated service models, whether operated internally through direct employment arrangements or through partnership models with other services, are core to the way that our members operate across Australia. These models are trauma-informed and person-centred and achieve better outcomes for clients, with legal and non-legal issues resolved in collaborative and coordinated ways under one roof.

We note that one of WLSA's members, Women's Legal Service Victoria, has provided a submission to the inquiry in which they recommend:

1. Expanding legal privilege to cover all employed professionals delivering integrated services within a legal service – this might include social workers, cultural support staff, counsellors, advocates and financial counsellors working together to provide coordinated assistance; and
2. Creating a new category of legal privilege that incorporates social service professionals – to cover circumstances in which integrated practice is delivered through partnership and other non-employment models.

Women's Legal Service Victoria's submission also stresses the importance of:

- Clients being asked to consent to receiving integrated legal services, rather than being asked to waive privilege, as an approach that better supports client agency and informed choice.

- Defining integrated services in a way that focuses on the nature and purpose of the service (recognising the different models of integrated service delivery) rather than employment arrangements alone, and with legal assistance being a substantive component of the service.
- A nationally consistent approach to reform, recognising that many clients will require assistance across intersecting state and federal laws and across state boundaries.

WLSA endorses the recommendations in Women's Legal Service Victoria's submission. In addition, as a national peak body, we emphasise the need for a nationally consistent approach and note that reform in one jurisdiction is likely to have implications for how legal professional privilege in integrated service settings is interpreted in other jurisdictions.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Yours sincerely,



Adrianne Walters
Executive Director