



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

VICTORIAN STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2009-2010

“Whatever their circumstances, our fairness as a democracy is judged by the way in which our citizens are treated as they pass through the justice system. Is the system just and speedy? Is the system accessible and affordable? Does the system protect the vulnerable such as the disadvantaged or victims of crime?”

Attorney-General's Justice Statement 2, October 2008

DECEMBER 2008

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Introduction

Many people with legal problems have complex needs and multi-dimensional problems. People who cannot resolve their problems often end up in cycles of decline. If problems are not resolved early, they can escalate and become compounded by related legal issues.

The failure to resolve legal problems in a timely manner can lead to loss of employment and income, stress-related illnesses and relationship breakdown. The impact of unresolved legal problems represents a significant cost to government and the community.

Community legal centres (CLCs) play a vital role in helping people resolve their problems and disputes. Attached to this submission, at Appendix 1, is a flow chart drawing on case study to demonstrate the positive impacts of early resolution of legal problems.

CLCs integrate assistance for individual clients with community legal education, community development and law reform projects that are based on client need and preventative in outcome.

CLCs are experts at assisting people with complex needs and multiple legal and social problems. CLCs assess local legal needs and design services to meet the needs of the local populations they serve.

CLCs are incredibly cost-effective. In 2007/08, the joint Federal and State Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) provided around \$14 million in recurrent funding to Victorian CLCs. In return, Victorian CLCs funded by the program delivered over 110,000 information, advice and casework services to Victorians, the large majority of whom were significantly disadvantaged.

The funding investment in CLCs by government is boosted by the commitment of CLC volunteers and pro-bono relationships that contribute at least \$23 million in value to the CLSP nationally.

The Submission

This submission outlines how the Victorian Government can achieve its vision for a Fairer Victoria by strengthening the work of CLCs.

The submission is divided into three parts:

1. Building the core capacity of CLCs;
2. Innovations in service delivery; and
3. Future trends.

The submission draws on the National Association of the Community Legal Centres' (NACLC) publications "Why Community Legal Centres Are Good Value" (2008) and "Community Legal Centres Across Australia – An Investment Worth Protecting" (2007).

The submission is intended to be a summary document only. More detailed information on each initiative is available on request.

Background information about CLCs and the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) is attached at Appendix 2.

1. Building the core capacity of CLCs to deliver access to justice for Victorians

Repeated inquiries into CLCs continue to confirm the critical role played by CLCs in providing access to justice and addressing disadvantage. They also confirm the low funding levels for CLCs and the overwhelming demand for services.¹

The average recurrent funding for a Victorian CLC under the CLSP is around \$357,093. The demands on these services are huge. Increasing rent, wages and travel costs are all impacting negatively on operations. This impact is amplified in rural areas.

The Victorian Government and Victoria Legal Aid have funded important initiatives in CLCs in recent years², however there have been no general increases in recurrent CLC funding. Many centres, and in particular inner-city centres, continue to struggle with very low baseline funding.

Further, recurrent funding continues to be indexed annually at around 2%. CPI for the year to June 2008 was 4.5% (weighted average for eight capital cities). For many centres, in real terms, there is an annual decrease in recurrent funding.

The multi-disciplinary service delivery approach used by CLCs works effectively in disadvantaged communities and is flexible and responsive in targeting services towards areas of need. CLCs need to employ a multi-skilled team to effectively implement this model. The low level of core funding for many CLCs affects their ability to fully adopt this strategic mix of services.

In addition, low core funding results in a disproportionate amount of resources being taken up by infrastructure and administration as opposed to service delivery. Analysis conducted by the 2007 Review of the New South Wales Community Legal Centres Funding Program, found that increasing funding up to and beyond the baseline level for existing CLCs, will have “an exponential effect on the level and range of legal services able to be delivered, and outcomes achieved”³. The analysis found that a doubling of funding for NSW CLCs, would produce more than a three fold increase in service outputs. It further showed that increasing the funding of the lowest funded NSW CLCs up to the average of all centres (a 50% increase), would almost double their outputs.

Low core funding also impacts on centres’ ability to recruit and retain good staff and obtain reasonable and accessible premises. It impacts on centres’ ability to leverage their core funding by seeking philanthropic and other funding or pro bono resources (volunteers and community law partnerships) to extend their services to the community.

In short, low core funding negatively impacts on CLCs’ ability to deliver effective and efficient public legal services.

The diagram on the following page outlines our recommended optimal *minimum* core funding for a CLC. Based on this costing, the minimum annual funding for each CLC to most effectively implement the strategic service delivery model is around \$520,000. The minimum core recurrent funding for Victorian CLCs should be raised to this level and increased annually by an amount equal to CPI.

¹ The 2008 Review of the Commonwealth CLSP confirmed that CLCs; assist “clients who are significantly disadvantaged” (p 6); use a “multi-dimensional approach...which is well-suited to assisting people with complex needs and multiple disadvantage” (p 6); and experience “particular problems in meeting demand for services within their current funding allocations” (p 47). Similarly, the Australian Council of Social Services “Australian Community Sector Survey Report 2007” found that CLCs are amongst the service providers with the highest “turn away” rate for clients seeking assistance.

² In 2007-08, the Victorian Government funded 8 family violence and 5 rural and regional lawyer positions in CLCs. Victoria Legal Aid has provided funding for 3% annual salary increases and entitlement increases for staff in many CLCs.

³ See pages 173-175 of the Final Report. The review was commissioned by the Commonwealth and New South Wales Attorneys General.

This baseline funding should have an additional loading of 30% on operating costs for Victoria's seven rural and regional CLCs to recognise the increased costs in relation to travel, communication, technology and recruitment. This loading would amount to \$50,306 using the costings below.

Strategic Service Delivery Model Costings⁴:

Position	Salary	Oncosts	Total Salary Costs	Operating Expenses	Total Position Cost
Manager	68,643	9,474	78,127	33,484	111,611
Principal Solicitor	65,695	9,065	74,760	40,401	115,161
Admin Worker	52,670	7,268	59,938	25,688	85,626
Solicitor	61,260	8,453	69,713	38,238	107,951
Community Worker	61,260	8,453	69,713	29,878	99,590
Total					519,940

Calculated on 13.8% of gross salary

Based on 30% of total position cost

Inclusive of \$8,000 interpreter allowance based upon 100 interviews per annum at \$80.00 per interview

⁴ These costings were developed by the NACLCL in 2007. An additional 4.5% CPI for 07/08 has been added. The salary rates are broadly comparable with Victoria Legal Aid salaries.

2. Innovations in Service Delivery

Victorian CLCs have identified a range of innovative service delivery strategies to build on existing infrastructure and to expand services to disadvantaged Victorians.

Improved access to assistance and representation in civil law matters

Civil law continues to be the greatest area of unmet legal need. The Attorney General's Justice Statement 2 recognises that the "assistance available for civil justice matters was dramatically reduced in 1996 after the Commonwealth reduced its contribution to legal aid."

In its submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission's Civil Justice Review, the Department of Justice recognised that the impact of this reduction:

"was severe. It included the almost complete abolition of legal aid for civil matters so that now grants of legal aid are very rarely made for matters such as discrimination, consumer protection, tenancy law, social security law, contract law and personal injuries. Some of these matters have been picked up by the private profession...but substantial areas of law, particularly poverty-related law, have not been picked up."

The lack of availability of legal aid for civil law matters has impacted significantly on community legal centre work. In 2007/08 around 60% of CLC work was in civil law. This level of civil law work has been consistent for many years. Due to lack of resources, the bulk of this work focuses on advice and information activities, as opposed to casework (ongoing assistance and representation).

The lack of civil law assistance also appears to be reflected in the increasing number of people representing themselves in civil litigation. The VLRC's Civil Justice Review notes that the "increasing level of self-representation in courts at all levels has been observed and documented in a range of contexts". Given the enormous challenges involved in self-representation, it is reasonable to assume that behind the increasing numbers of self-represented litigants, there are far greater numbers of people giving up on their legal rights because they are unable to access ongoing legal assistance and representation.

Lack of access to advice and representation renders people's rights meaningless. It is a source of injustice. In some cases, it may also breach the right to a fair hearing under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

A stark example of this injustice is the lack of representation in Mental Health Review Board hearings. In 2006/07, legal representation was available in only 5.6% of cases before the Mental Health Review Board. Given the vulnerability of clients and the potentially extreme consequences flowing from these hearings, including loss of liberty and forced medical treatment, the lack of representation is profoundly disturbing.

The injustice flowing from lack of civil law legal assistance affects Victorians facing foreclosure on their mortgages; Victorians who cannot obtain representation in coronial inquests into the deaths of their loved ones; Victorians whose landlords are seeking to evict them from rented homes; Victorians who have been discriminated against; who are at risk of bankruptcy; who have been ripped off, sacked from their jobs or who are owed wages and entitlements.

Alongside initiatives to reduce the cost of civil litigation, streamline civil procedure and provide increased support for self-represented litigants, greater funding is urgently needed to increase access to ongoing legal assistance and representation in civil law matters.

There are a range of initiatives that the Victorian Government could pursue to address this significant unmet civil law need.

Below, we suggest four initiatives to address civil law need in the specific areas of discrimination, victims of crime, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and prisons.

More broadly, greater funding is needed for a wide range of civil law matters. Given that the large bulk of CLCs' work is in civil law, increases in the core funding of CLCs will help to address this need. An additional option is to establish a network of civil lawyers across relevant specialist and generalist CLCs, targeted towards providing ongoing assistance and representation in priority areas of civil law need. A pilot network of eight civil lawyers would be an important step towards realising Victorians' civil law rights.

Outcomes:

- Victorians' civil law rights realised;
- Government policy initiatives made more effective through improved enforcement;
- Improved confidence in the justice system; and
- Improved efficiency in the administration of justice.

Cost:

An investment of around \$856,000 per year would fund the establishment of a pilot network of eight civil lawyers in CLCs across Victoria, providing ongoing assistance and representation in priority areas of civil law need.

Eliminating discrimination in Victoria

The 2008 Equal Opportunity Review Final Report "An Equality Act for a Fairer Victoria", made important recommendations to modernise and improve Victorian anti-discrimination law.

In the context of access to justice, the Final Report recognised that the "lack of availability of early strategic advice" was "repeatedly raised in consultations". At page 76, the Report noted the very limited number of grants of legal aid funding for discrimination matters.

The Report also referred to research conducted in 1999 by the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission that found that 72% of people who experience discrimination "do nothing about it".

If people cannot access proper legal advice and representation to deal with discrimination, the policy intent behind anti-discrimination laws is undermined. A legal system that does not properly address discrimination creates economic and social costs to individuals, to organisations, to the broader community and to the economy.

The Final Report recognised that access to legal advice and representation promotes fairness, efficiency and effectiveness. Recommendation 31 of the report was to:

Establish a legal service either within VLA [Victoria Legal Aid] or in a single community legal centre that can develop specialised expertise in relation to discrimination and equal opportunity law. The service should, among other functions, be a source of early strategic advice.

This initiative would implement this recommendation, by establishing this service either in an existing CLC, or by boosting the resources available to existing CLCs with expertise in discrimination law.

Cost:

The cost of this initiative would depend on the model chosen to implement the recommendation. Recurrent funding of \$520,000 per year would provide the minimum core funding needed to most effectively implement the CLC strategic service delivery model for a new service. Additional lawyer positions could be added to increase the capacity of existing CLCs with expertise in discrimination law for around \$108,000 per position.

Improving access to justice for victims of crime

Crimes compensation under the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996* (Vic) (VOCAT Act) provides important support and assistance to victims of crime to help them to recover from the physical, emotional and financial impacts of the crimes committed against them.

Yet it is becoming increasingly difficult for victims of crime to access justice through VOCAT applications. This is occurring because of the increasing reluctance of the legal profession to conduct VOCAT work, due to its unprofitability.

Lawyers can only recover fees for VOCAT work through an award of costs from the Tribunal. They cannot otherwise charge clients for preparing VOCAT applications. This means that while victims of crime do not themselves have to pay for legal costs associated with the VOCAT claim, their lawyers can only recover those costs that are awarded by the Tribunal.

The low level of costs being awarded by the Tribunal, compared with the amount of work involved in a VOCAT application, is resulting in lawyers increasingly withdrawing from this area of practice. It also increases the likelihood of lawyers avoiding complex cases or clients with complex needs, and increases the prospect of poorly prepared applications.

In addition, there have been concerns expressed over:

- the quality of applications being brought before the Tribunal (and in particular ensuring that victims receive their full entitlements under the legislation);
- the need to develop a body of knowledge and best practice resources for VOCAT matters;
- the need to conduct law reform around victims of crime legal issues; and
- the need for better community legal education on victims of crime issues.

This initiative would address these issues by providing funding to establish specialist community legal services to improve access to justice for victims of crime. The funding would be used to provide a range of services in relation to VOCAT applications, but also to more broadly address legal issues relevant to victims including the implementation of the *Victims Charter Act 2006* (Vic), support around criminal justice processes, rights to compensation under the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic) and advice about civil law.

Outcomes:

- Greater assistance for victims of crime;
- Improved recovery by victims from the effects of crime;
- Reduction in the community costs of crime;
- Improved confidence in the justice system; and
- Improved awareness of victim's rights.

Cost:

The cost of this initiative would depend on the model chosen to deliver increased services. Recurrent funding of around \$730,000 would enable:

- the establishment of a centralised service within an existing CLC, providing legal advice and casework, community legal education and policy work and pro bono and volunteer coordination; and

- a pilot of four lawyers to be located in generalist community legal centres, two in metropolitan Melbourne and two in rural and regional Victoria.

Additional lawyer positions could be added for around \$108,000 per position. Additional positions would expand the scope of the service, particularly in rural and regional Victoria.

Addressing disadvantage in culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Newly arrived and some settled migrants face significant challenges in understanding and interacting with the Victorian legal system. The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) recognizes the right to a “fair hearing” for all Victorians. Some of the fundamental elements of this right include access to legal advice and representation, equal access to the courts and, where necessary, access to an interpreter.

Community legal centres are experts in working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Victoria. This initiative would assist the Government to meet its commitment to providing accessible justice for all Victorians and help make the right to a fair hearing a reality for Victoria’s CALD communities.

The initiative would fund five specialist CALD legal workers based at key CLCs in high need areas. The workers would employ a community development approach to provide local CALD communities with the skills and resources to better interact with the Victorian legal system. There would be a strong emphasis on community legal education, integrated service delivery with non-legal providers and outreach. The network of CALD workers would provide a specialist resource for other CLCs in their region and would collaborate on joint state-wide projects.

Outcomes:

- Improved compliance with laws through greater awareness;
- Reduced enforcement costs through early legal intervention and resolution of issues; and
- Improved social cohesion through better understanding of the Victorian legal system.

Cost:

Recurrent funding of approximately \$530,000 would establish five ongoing positions.

Safe, humane and accountable Victorian prisons

Access to justice for Victorian prisoners is not only a welfare and human rights issue, it is a community safety issue. Safe, humane and accountable prisons help to reduce reoffending. Prisoners subjected to violence, mistreatment and abuse in jail are more likely to offend on release. Prisoners who leave prison without proper support around financial issues, housing, employment, health and education, are more likely to offend on release.

A human rights based approach to prison management, with proper scrutiny and accountability, is the safest and most effective way of managing prisons.⁵ Legal assistance for prisoners promotes accountability and human rights in prison. It helps prisoners to properly arrange their affairs in anticipation of their release – to deal with debts, maintain family connections and to access health, education and housing services.

Yet, it is incredibly difficult for prisoners to obtain legal assistance in prison for non-criminal law matters.

⁵ See for example; Coyle, A “A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management”, International Centre for Prison Studies, 2002

Victoria Legal Aid provides important legal services in Victoria's prisons, but these services focus on criminal law, with some family and immigration law services. There is a strong unmet demand for legal services to deal with prison issues such as access to health care, education and rehabilitation services, use of force, placement decisions, deaths in custody, disciplinary hearings, property, parole, debt issues and family visits. The inability of Victorian prisoners to access legal services to deal with these civil and administrative law issues increases the likelihood of poor practices, mistreatment and human rights abuses. It impacts negatively on prisoner rehabilitation in custody and on release.

CLCs and other providers have struggled to meet the demand for these services. For at least six years, the Federation's State Budget Submission has unsuccessfully advocated for State Government funding for the establishment of a specialist prisoners legal service.

In 2008, Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre has been conducting a pilot prisoner legal service, visiting Port Phillip Prison and Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, 2 of Victoria's 13 prisons. There has been huge demand for the service, however funding is due to expire in June 2009. The Centre has also completed a project outlining a model for a specialist prisoner legal service in Victoria. Mental Health Legal Service has also commenced a pilot service to increase legal assistance to prisoners with mental illness.

This initiative would deliver funding to establish a Victorian prisoner legal service providing civil and administrative law services to Victoria's prisoners.

Outcomes:

- Improved rehabilitation of prisoners;
- Reduced rates of reoffending and consequent reduction in the community costs of crime;
- Better human rights compliance in Victoria's prisons; and
- Safer and better managed prisons.

Cost:

The cost of this initiative would depend on the model chosen. Recurrent funding of \$520,000 per year would provide the minimum core funding needed to most effectively implement the CLC strategic service delivery model. Additional lawyer positions could be added for around \$108,000 per position. Additional positions, either located in the new service or in existing CLCs, would expand the ability of existing CLCs to deliver services to prisons located in rural and regional Victoria.

CLC attracting the best law graduates through a Law Graduate Program

The capacity of CLCs to deliver effective public legal services is heavily linked with their ability to attract and retain excellent staff. This in turn, relies significantly on CLCs' ability to attract the best law graduates exiting university.

For many law students, the motivation behind their decision to study law was a desire to work for social justice. Yet, by the time these students finish their degrees, many undertake their articulated clerkship (now traineeships) at commercial law firms. While they may later explore different legal careers, the low salary levels offered by CLCs mean that commercial lawyers with several years experience would need to take a large pay cut to work in a CLC.⁶ Understandably, this is a significant disincentive.

⁶ A 2006 comparison of award-based remuneration levels in CLCs against the equivalent salary scales in the Australian and NSW public sectors found that CLC wages rates were 29-38% below the market. This gap is wider when CLC salaries are compared with private sector rates.

CLCs' ability to increase salaries and conditions are hampered by their low funding levels. Some improvements are being made, particularly in relation to conditions of employment such as parental leave and portable long service leave. The support of the Victorian Attorney-General in establishing the Community Law Partnerships scheme has also assisted the sector through secondments from law firms to CLCs.

However, to attract the best law graduates, CLCs need to offer accessible and attractive pathways from university to work in a CLC.

Currently, these pathways are limited or non-existent. Only one Victorian CLC offers a recurrent articulated clerk/trainee position. Every year it receives an overwhelming number of applications. The demand for places is there, but the places are not available in CLCs. Across Victoria, the CLC sector currently employs around 170 lawyers. A sector of this size needs to offer more positions for law graduates.

Without additional resources and support, CLCs cannot offer these positions. What is needed is a structured scheme, potentially in collaboration with Victoria Legal Aid, to create a law graduate program establishing new trainee positions across CLCs.

The successful Western Australian Country Lawyers Program provides a good model on which to base a Victorian scheme. The Graduate Stream of this initiative is a 4 year program under which graduates undertake their articles at WA Legal Aid, and then commence fixed term regional placements, usually of around 12 months, at participating agencies including CLCs, across the state. A structured and coordinated training program supports the graduates in their placements.

The Western Australian scheme is specifically targeted at addressing the acute shortage of lawyers in regional Western Australia. A Victorian scheme could have a broader focus that seeks to place graduates in positions in both metropolitan and rural and regional CLCs.

Outcomes:

- Greater capacity in CLCs to deliver access to justice;
- Improved sustainability of the CLC sector;
- Improved effectiveness of CLC services; and
- Greater collaboration between legal assistance agencies (CLCs and Victoria Legal Aid).

Cost:

Recurrent funding of around \$480,000 per year would create an additional 5 law graduate positions in CLCs, supported by effective training and coordination.

Stronger support and coordination of Victorian CLCs

The Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic), as the peak body for Victoria's CLCs, works to build a stronger and more effective Victorian community legal sector. Greater support and coordination for the sector through the following initiatives, will deliver improved public legal services.

Website support

This initiative would establish a dedicated support position at the Federation for the community law website. The website receives around 100,000 visits each year and is currently ranked number 1 on "Google" for the search term "legal advice victoria". The Federation receives no dedicated funding to maintain this website. There are significant opportunities for providing better information and referrals to the Victorian public through the site which are being hampered by the lack of dedicated support.

Family violence prevention program coordination and support

The Victorian Government has shown strong leadership on the elimination of family violence. In 2007, the Government provided funding for 8 new family violence lawyers across Victorian CLCs. With philanthropic funding, the Federation supported this network of lawyers, providing professional development, program support and coordination services. This philanthropic project funding has ended, but the need for ongoing support and coordination continues. This initiative would establish a coordination and support program, based either at the Federation or within a specialist CLC such as Women's Legal Service Victoria, providing program support, professional development, mentoring, debriefing and other services for the network of CLC family violence programs.

Funding access support

This initiative would establish a position at the Federation to assist centres to access funding sources beyond the CLSP. CLCs are well-placed to build upon the base funding provided by the CLSP by accessing philanthropic and other funding to expand services. However, CLCs report barriers in accessing this funding including lack of information about funding sources and processes and lack of resources to prepare and manage the grants. This position would assist Victorian CLCs to identify and access potential funding sources and assist with the preparation, management and acquittal of grants. It would result in better co-ordination of CLC funding.

Outcomes:

- Increased availability of legal information to the Victorian public;
- Better access by the Victorian public to legal services;
- More effective family violence legal services by community legal centres – reducing family violence and promoting safety; and
- Increased philanthropic and other contributions to the community legal sector (resulting in more cost-effective Victorian Government funding).

Cost:

Approximately \$345,000 recurrent funding.

3. Future trends – legal needs analysis and greater collaboration

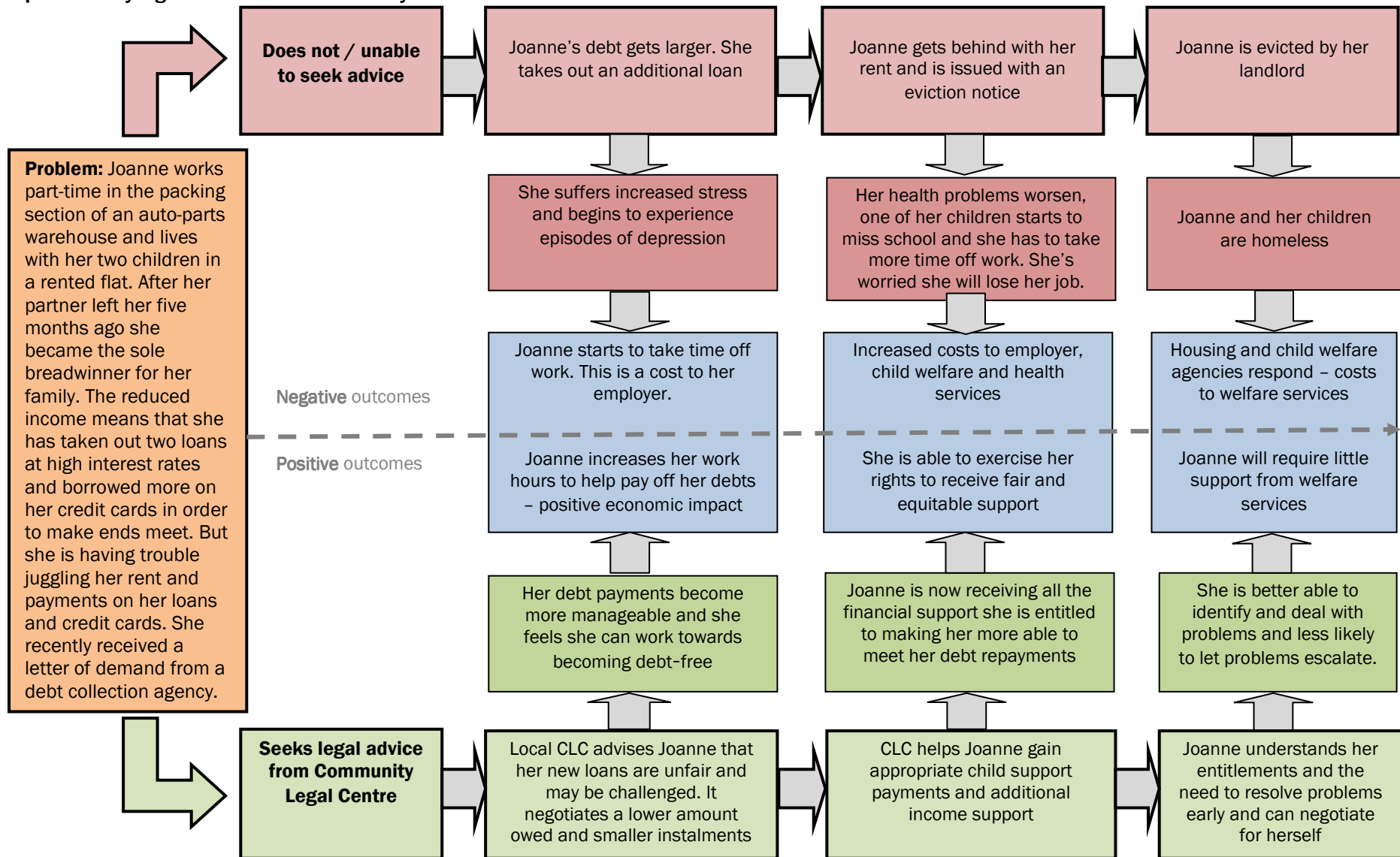
The Australia-wide legal needs survey currently being undertaken by the NSW Law and Justice Foundation, funded by Australian legal aid commissions, will establish an important evidence base that will help CLCs and government better target their services towards addressing legal need. The survey analysis should be available towards the end of 2009 or early 2010.

The Federation welcomes this initiative and stands ready to work with government and stakeholders to more effectively to address legal need. The Federation also supports the work being undertaken by the NALC with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department to develop principles around the allocation of new CLC funding and to better target resources and services towards areas of legal need.

The Federation is currently exploring models to enhance collaboration in the legal assistance sector, including a proposal to establish a Victorian Legal Assistance Forum modelled on the forums operating successfully in NSW, Queensland and at the national level. There is also merit in establishing local area collaborative mechanisms between legal assistance providers which could be modelled on the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Model currently being used in NSW.

Appendix 1

Impact of early legal intervention – case study:



Appendix 2: **About community legal centres**

Community legal centres are independent community organisations that provide free legal services to the public. Community legal centres provide free legal advice, information and representation to more than 100,000 Victorians each year.

Our clients are those who face economic, social or cultural disadvantage and whose life circumstances are often severely affected by their legal problem. Our clients are often unable to access other legal services. We are experts in working with these clients.

Generalist community legal centres provide services on a range of legal issues to people in their local geographic area. There are generalist community legal centres in metropolitan Melbourne and in rural and regional Victoria. Specialist community legal centres focus on groups of people with specific needs or on particular areas of law (eg; mental health, disability, consumer law, environment).

State and Federal Government funding provides the main source of most community legal centres' funding. This is supplemented by funding from a variety of sources including local government, philanthropic foundations, pro bono contributions and donations. Centres also harness the energy and expertise of hundreds of volunteers across Victoria.

Community legal centres provide effective and creative solutions to legal problems based on their experience within their community. It is our community relationship that distinguishes us from other legal providers and enables us to respond effectively to the needs of our communities as they arise and change.

Community legal centres integrate assistance for individual clients with community legal education, community development and law reform projects that are based on client need and preventative in outcome.

Community legal centres are committed to collaboration with government, legal aid, the private legal profession and community partners to ensure the best outcomes for our clients and the justice system in Australia.

The day to day work of community legal centres reflects a 35 year commitment to social justice, human rights, equity, democracy and community participation.

Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc

The Federation is the peak body for over fifty community legal centres across Victoria. The Federation leads and supports community legal centres to pursue social equity and challenge injustice.

The Federation:

- provides information and referrals to people seeking legal assistance;
- initiates and resources law reform and policy work to develop a fairer legal system that better responds to the needs of the disadvantaged;
- works to build a stronger and more effective community legal sector;
- provides services and support to community legal centres; and
- represents community legal centres with stakeholders.

The Federation assists its diverse membership to collaborate for justice. Workers and volunteers throughout Victoria come together through working groups and other networks to exchange ideas and develop strategies to improve the effectiveness of their work.

More information can be found at www.communitylaw.org.au