# Position description

**Position title:** Senior Civil Lawyer

**Reports to:** Managing Lawyer, South Coast region

**Program area:** Services and Innovation

**Location:** Warrnambool

**Classification:** VLA4

**Position type:** Ongoing

## Victoria Legal Aid’s Reconciliation Action Plan

Victoria Legal Aid is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce and we strongly encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for positions within our organisation. It is a key priority of our[Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-21](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/sites/www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/files/vla-reconciliation_action-plan-july-2019-21.pdf)to support principles of self-determination by increasing Aboriginal employment across all areas of VLA. We recognise that our workforce can benefit greatly from the unique knowledge, skills and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in achieving a culturally safe and responsive service for our clients.

## Position Summary

To act as an advocate by providing high quality legal services including advice and casework and lead the development of our civil justice practice in the South West region to assist disadvantaged clients access legal help and to act as a mentor to less experienced lawyers.

## Responsibilities

1. Develop the civil justice practice in the South West region by designing and implementing services that will assist us to reach disadvantaged clients, including through outreach, stakeholder partnerships and community engagement.
2. Provide expert legal advice and conduct casework in civil law matters in areas that most affect people’s rights (including mental health and disability law, tenancy, fines, discrimination and social security).
3. Appear as a lawyer in various courts and tribunals to advocate for clients with civil and human rights issues, including VCAT and the Mental Health Tribunal.
4. Assist the Managing Lawyer in advocating for systemic changes to law and policy to improve access to justice with a focus on our civil justice practice areas.
5. Lead community legal education projects and other innovative means to deliver legal assistance services.
6. Supervise and mentor civil law staff and where appropriate assist with the development and training of other lawyers in civil law service delivery.
7. Build and maintain knowledge of issues affecting access to justice, legal assistance service delivery and substantive civil law. Centres, Aboriginal legal services, government agencies and family violence specialist services to promote VLA’s family violence legal services.

## Key selection criteria

1. Demonstrated capacity to develop and implement legal assistance services to disadvantaged clients, including through innovative means.
2. Demonstrated capacity to liaise and develop positive working relationships with external stakeholders and organisations to promote the access to justice.
3. Knowledge and practical experience in civil law in VLA’s areas of practice, including a demonstrated capacity to provide advice and casework and advocate before courts and tribunals.
4. High level of interpersonal and communication skills and the demonstrated ability to communicate effectively with clients who are socially and economically disadvantaged.
5. Ability to supervise, mentor and train staff and contribute to the development of individuals and their knowledge and skills in civil law.
6. Ability to work collaboratively with others and fosters a co-operative and supportive team environment.
7. Demonstrated understanding of the issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the demonstrated ability to effectively communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
8. A knowledge of the general business of VLA and a commitment to our vision and values.

## Qualifications/experience

* A current Australian practising certificate which entitles you to practise in Victoria as an employee of a law practice (mandatory).
* Entitled to practise in federal courts and courts exercising federal jurisdiction (entry on the High Court’s Register of Practitioners) (mandatory).
* Demonstrated experience and understanding of cultural norms in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island clients (desirable).

## Other relevant information

* To be eligible to apply for this position you must be an Australian or New Zealand citizen, permanent resident or hold a valid work permit or visa.
* You may be required to undergo or hold a current Working with Children Check.
* From time to time you will be required to travel between various office locations to deliver quality services to our clients or for professional development.
* This position may require you to independently travel to outreach services, courts and tribunals including Warrnambool, Hamilton, Portland, Camperdown and Melbourne.
* Occupational health and safety responsibilities at Victoria Legal Aid:
  + All staff at VLA are expected to champion proactive and positive health and safety practices in the workplace by raising health, safety and wellbeing issues or concerns with managers and colleagues. Staff are required to observe all safe work procedures, rules and instructions, and take all reasonable care for their own safety and for the safety of work colleagues by always operating in a safe and appropriate manner.

## Organisational context

## Our in-house practice is divided into four programs: Criminal Law, Family Law, Civil Justice and Access and Equity. It is one of the largest legal practices in Victoria employing 270 plus lawyers in locations across the State. As well as its individual casework, VLA conducts strategic advocacy building on our practice experience.

## VLA has 14 regional offices. Five are situated in metropolitan Melbourne, (Broadmeadows, Dandenong, Frankston, Ringwood and Sunshine) and 8 in regional Victoria (Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Morwell, Bairnsdale, Shepparton, Warrnambool and Mildura). Each office is supervised by a Managing Lawyer and supported by an Administrative Services Manager (ASM).

## Each regional office provides a full range of legal services and is involved in community education about the law and legal aid.

## The work mix of each office varies according to the needs and characteristics of the region in which it operates. All regional offices provide a comprehensive range of legal aid services including legal advice (in most areas of the law), duty lawyer services, casework in most Victorian courts and tribunals and community legal education.

## Civil Justice Program

## The Civil Justice Program includes the Mental Health and Disability Advocacy, Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA), Migration, Commonwealth Entitlements, Social Inclusion and Equality Law Service subprograms and provides opportunities for broad advocacy with and on behalf of marginalised members of the community, influencing systems and culture change and building competencies in appropriate dispute resolution matters.

## Warrnambool Civil Justice practice

## Victoria Legal Aid has run an expanded Civil Justice practice in the South West region following the closure of Community Connections Victoria in 2012. The practice focuses on civil law issues that most affect people’s rights, including through interactions with government and public authorities, such as mental health law, infringement fines, Centrelink and tenancy issues. A key priority of the civil justice practice in the next two years will be reaching members of the community who are least likely to proactively seek help from lawyers, including though outreach and stronger community partnerships.

## Our vision and values

### Our vision

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

### Our purpose

To make a difference in the lives of our clients and for the community by:

* resolving and preventing legal problems.
* encouraging a fair and transparent justice system.

### Our values

#### Fairness

We stand up for what is fair.

We aim to be fair when making choices about who and how we help people.

#### Care

We care about our clients and the community in which we live.

We look out for and take care of each other.

#### Courage

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

We act with courage to be the best we can be.

VLA is an Equal Opportunity Employer and is committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce. We encourage people from culturally diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to apply for positions within our organisation. We will make reasonable adjustment where possible for people with disabilities.

Position Description authorised by Strategic Resourcing and Remuneration Manager.

Date approved: 25 June 2020