

Position description

Position title:	Lawyer, New Lawyers Program
Reports to:	Deputy Managing Lawyer
Program area:	Pathways Programs, and various Placement Stream directorates
Location:	Various VLA offices
Classification:	WVR 3.2 – 32LO3C

Position Summary

The New Lawyers Program (NLP) is a structured two-year professional development pathway designed to equip early-career lawyers with the skills, experience and resilience to become confident and competent lawyers in Victoria Legal Aid (VLA)'s unique and challenging legal practice.

As a participant in the program, you will undertake three set placements across a variety of legal practice areas, such as criminal law, family law, child protection, youth crime, civil justice and human rights law, administrative law, and services designed to increase access to justice.

Each placement will involve delivering direct legal services to priority clients, under supervision by experienced mentors and a development framework designed to accelerate your capability across technical legal practice, client-centred advocacy, and leadership of self.

You will support a diverse and often highly vulnerable client base who face complex and intersecting legal and social issues, including experiences of complex trauma, family violence, child protection involvement, disability, mental health issues, substance dependency, and systemic disadvantage.

This work requires critical interpersonal and reflective skills as part of working collaboratively in a multidisciplinary team. Each placement requires you to manage emotionally demanding work, adapt to change, and advocate ethically and effectively.

This is a unique opportunity for lawyers who are passionate about access to justice and who are committed to building a sustainable, socially impactful legal career.

Responsibilities

Through training and experience, new lawyers will build confidence and develop the skills across various practice areas to undertake the following duties as a VLA lawyer:

Legal Practice

1. Deliver quality legal services by conducting casework under supervision including taking instructions, undertaking research and analysis, preparing documents and submissions and acting as an advocate, and providing appropriate referrals to other agencies or services where required.
2. Appear as a lawyer in various courts and tribunals across Victoria as required, including the Magistrates' Court, Children's Court, Family Law Courts, VCAT, AAT and the Mental Health Tribunal, to effectively advocate for legal aid clients.

3. Work across different modes of service delivery including in-person, custody-based, outreach, phone/video and court-based models.
4. Apply VLA policies, procedures and guidelines to manage VLA funds responsibly, ensuring services are targeted to our priority clients and that your workload remains appropriate.
5. Exercise ethical judgment, seek supervision appropriately, and apply critical thinking to legal analysis and client needs.

Client-centred Practice

6. Build respectful and effective working relationships with clients, including those with complex needs, trauma histories or who may present in distress.
7. Communicate legal advice and processes in a clear, accessible and culturally responsive manner.
8. Recognise the influence of social disadvantage and discrimination on client outcomes and tailor your approach accordingly.
9. Work alongside client-facing non-legal staff (e.g., Information and Referral Officers, Aboriginal Community Engagement officers, integrated Remand Support Service) to provide integrated support.

Collaboration and Development

10. Contribute positively to multidisciplinary and cross-practice teams, including sharing responsibility for challenging work and supporting team wellbeing.
11. Actively develop own legal and advocacy skills, knowledge and capability, including maintaining currency of relevant legal developments, court procedures and issues impacting the justice system:
 - Seek out constructive feedback and coaching to support on-the-job learning.
 - Actively participate in all structured professional development activities and mentoring opportunities offered through the program.
 - Continuously reflect on feedback and experiences to improve practice, build resilience, and increase self-awareness.
12. Support law reform, community legal education or service design projects relevant to your placement areas.
13. Actively contribute to the wellbeing and resilience of self, remain calm and in control under pressure, defuse difficult interactions, participate in individual and team debriefing, and seek support from colleagues and appropriate services as required

Essential standards and capabilities

The following standards and capabilities are mandatory and are required to perform the duties and responsibilities of this position.

- A current Australian practising certificate which entitles you to practise in Victoria as a government legal practitioner.
- Entitled to practise in federal courts and courts exercising federal jurisdiction (entry on the High Court's Register of Practitioners).
- At the time of application, you must have no more than 12 months' post-admission experience in a role requiring a practicing certificate.

- You must have the right to work in Australia (i.e., be an Australian or New Zealand citizen, permanent resident, or hold a valid visa).
- All appointments are subject to reference checks and pre-employment misconduct screening.
- This role requires you to hold a valid Victorian Working With Children Check at all times.
- You may be required to undertake a police check during pre-employment screening or at any point during employment with VLA.
- It is a requirement that all VLA employees reside in Victoria, or a nearby border community, and can attend for office-based days at their primary work location (both the relevant VLA Office and Courts), which will change during each program placement. Due to the nature of this role's duties and the New Lawyers' Program's development orientation, working remotely or hybrid work arrangements may be reduced or unavailable for this role, as determined from time to time by your Host Manager and/or Early Careers Specialist. Employees may also be required to work additional days in the office depending on the operational needs of the role and team.
- Ability to independently travel to various office locations, meeting venues, outreach services, courts and tribunals across Victoria to deliver quality services to our clients, for meetings, professional development and other purposes as required.

Key selection criteria

1. Ability to deliver legal advice, casework and advocacy under supervision, or capacity to quickly develop these skills, including in contested and duty lawyer settings. Interest or experience in legal aid, community or social justice law settings is desirable.
2. Good understanding of, &/or capacity to quickly develop knowledge in relevant areas of law, including criminal law, family violence, child protection, youth crime, administrative &/or civil justice law. Can research, analyse and apply different areas of law as required.
3. Strong interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to:
 - Communicate clearly and respectfully with people experiencing distress, trauma or disadvantage
 - Adapt your approach to diverse audiences and stakeholders
 - Engage in difficult or high-conflict interactions calmly and professionally
4. Proven ability to work collaboratively in a team environment, contribute to shared goals, assist with team workload management, and demonstrate accountability for your own role and contribution.
5. Demonstrated resilience and emotional intelligence, including:
 - ability to adapt to frequent change, including change in office location, area of law and at times, extended travel
 - ability to effectively cope with distressing legal material or confronting client and stakeholder interactions and presentations
 - Willingness to reflect, learn from feedback and seek support as needed, adapting to changing circumstances and client needs
 - Commitment to self-leadership and ability to manage own wellbeing in a demanding role
6. Demonstrated understanding of our clients' diverse and complex needs and the range of underlying systemic issues and barriers to justice that contribute to clients' legal issues, including:

- An understanding of the barriers to accessing justice faced by First Nations people, and the ability to work in a culturally safe and responsive way
- Knowledge of the important role external organisations, community and welfare groups play in providing appropriate services

7. A knowledge of the general business of VLA and a commitment to our vision and values.

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

Victoria Legal Aid is a cornerstone of Victoria's justice system, delivering essential legal services to the community.

We provide legal advice, dispute resolution, representation, information and advocacy services to hundreds of thousands of Victorians each year for criminal, civil, family violence, child protection and family law problems. We ensure people have access to legal services close to where they live, across metropolitan, suburban and regional locations.

Through non-legal, early intervention and dispute resolution services, we support people to understand their rights, participate in decision-making and resolve matters. We work closely with partners to influence policies and challenge unfair laws and practices to make our society fairer for everyone.

By coordinating legal assistance and information, resolving issues early and supporting people through court processes when necessary, we help prevent problems escalating and reduce harm. We target our efforts and limited resources to help those with the greatest need.

New Lawyers Program

During the program, you will undertake three, eight-month placements in different locations &/or areas of law, to prepare you for an ongoing role in your Home directorate.

You will also participate in a comprehensive induction and training program while learning on the job.

You will practice under supervision and work closely with expert lawyers, allowing you to learn and experience what it is to be a VLA lawyer.

For lawyers with placement pathways based in metropolitan locations, you may get the opportunity to substitute one planned 8-month placement to instead practise in one of our regional offices (Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Morwell, Shepparton, Warrnambool or Wodonga). This placement will expose you to a diverse range of legal issues and develop the breadth of your legal skills. It is an excellent opportunity for you to experience legal practice in a rural area and assist with community access to the legal system and social justice.

To best prepare you for practice as a VLA lawyer you will participate in comprehensive training covering a range of professional skills including:

- negotiation and alternative dispute resolution

- client communication
- advocacy
- cross cultural awareness and communication
- mental health first aid
- safe and effective client interactions.

Our VLA vision and values

Vision

Fair and inclusive justice where people have access to help, and laws and systems work for everyone.

Purpose

To help Victorians resolve legal problems and protect their rights, and to work with partners to improve laws and systems so they are fairer and more accessible.

Values

Our values are central to how we make decisions and deliver services. They guide our everyday actions, influence how we respond to legal need, and shape the way we work with clients, partners and each other.

Fairness

We are committed to fairness in society and facilitating fair and equitable access to legal and related support.

Care

We care about our clients and the community, and we approach our work with an awareness of the effects that trauma and discrimination can have. We treat each other with kindness and respect.

Courage

We approach our work with strength and confidence. We are guided by our values and what matters most to our clients and society.

Inclusion

We provide an inclusive environment for clients, staff and partners.

VLA is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce.

We strongly encourage people from diverse backgrounds and abilities, including First Peoples and refugees to apply for positions within our organisation. We will make reasonable adjustments to enable everyone to participate in our recruitment processes and to work productively and safely.

It is a key priority of VLA to support principles of self-determination by increasing employment of First Peoples across all areas of VLA. We recognise that our workforce can benefit from the unique

knowledge, skills and expertise of a diverse workforce including First Peoples and in achieving a culturally safe and responsive service for our clients.

VLA is a Child-Safe organisation

VLA is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and recognises that children's rights need to be respected, their views welcomed and valued, and their concerns taken seriously. We additionally acknowledge and appreciate the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Australian First Peoples children, which we respect and value.

Other relevant information

- As part of the program, you will be placed in different practice areas and/or office locations every eight months. These placements can be at any regional or metropolitan location and within any of VLA's practice areas. Whilst placement pathways are set in advance, locations or practice areas may change, based on operational needs and available Legal Supervision.
 - The program will commence 22nd February 2027.
 - All appointments are subject to reference checks and pre-employment misconduct screening. A preferred candidate with an adverse conduct history or criminal record will not necessarily be precluded from employment with VLA and each application will be considered on its merits.
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Position Description approved by People and Workplace Services

Position Title: Early Careers Specialist

Date approved: 26 August 2026