



Artwork: *Kinaway tar-wan* by Bitja (Dixon Patten Jnr)

Position description

Position title:	First Nations Advocate, Independent Mental Health Advocacy
Reports to:	First Nations Senior Advocate, Independent Mental Health Advocacy
Program area:	Legal Practice, Civil Justice, Legal Help
Classification:	WVR 3.2 – 32AO5C
Position type:	Fixed Term (12 months)

Position Summary

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) is a non-legal advocacy program that is staffed and led by professionals with mental health consumer experience and/or backgrounds in community development, consumer advocacy, mental health advocacy, community sector advocacy, social work, mental health service provision and similar fields.

This role provides representational advocacy to First Nations people at risk of or on compulsory treatment orders, assists people to understand and exercise their rights and to enable them to participate in decisions about their treatment, care, and recovery. It also provides expert advice to staff regarding engaging and working with First Nations communities.

The role will work closely with IMHA and Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) staff, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers (ACEO), Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) staff, as well as Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers (AHLO), Social and Emotional Wellbeing officers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO).

Responsibilities

1. Provide high-quality non-legal advocacy services to First Nations people on compulsory treatment orders to enable them to participate in decisions about their treatment, care, and recovery by:
 - a) Listening, clarifying, and understanding what the person wants.
 - b) Assisting the person to understand their rights and what processes are available to exercise these rights and the consequences of choices.
 - c) Supporting the person to self-advocate, or as directed, represent their views or preferences to others.
2. Make and receive referrals and respond to inquiries from First Nations consumers of the program, mental health organisations and services including, but not limited to, VALS, ACCO, AHLO and Social and Emotional Wellbeing officers and other hospital services, peer support workers, social workers, lawyers, caseworkers and other advocates.
3. Contribute to the implementation and continuous improvement of the IMHA program including the development and review of policies, procedures and guidelines that improve the service delivery, cultural safety and responsiveness to First Nations consumers and communities.

4. Contribute to positive engagement with First Nations consumers, organisations and consumers to ensure First Nations consumer voices, cultural safety and needs are at the centre of service delivery.
5. Participate in public promotion and information sessions for First Nation consumers and community members, ACCOs and mental health stakeholders to understand the IMHA service and the role of an advocate and consumer rights.
6. Contribute to the health and wellbeing of self and others by participating in individual and team debriefing and mentoring as well as accessing First Nations specific supports and resources.
7. Participate in individual and team professional development and keep up to date with relevant policies, legislation and maintain an understanding of issues impacting the broader mental health sector.
8. Collaborate with VLA staff including the First Nations Staff network, ACEO program and contribute to the VLA strategy and broader organisational forums, projects and events.

Essential standards and capabilities

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

- This position is only open to First Nations people.
 - VLA considers that being a First Nations person is a genuine occupational requirement for this position under subsection 26(3) or section 28 of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic).
- 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 will 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 attend for office-based days at their primary work location. From time to time you will be required to travel to meeting venues, outreach services, courts and tribunals to deliver quality services to our clients or for meetings and/or professional development.

Key selection criteria

1. Excellent interpersonal and communication skills and demonstrated ability to liaise and communicate effectively with First Nations consumers, various First Nations stakeholders and organisations as well as mental health services.
2. Sound knowledge of the issues affecting First Nations consumers and experience in supported decision making and representational advocacy.
3. Proven ability to work collaboratively with others and foster cooperative and supportive work relationships and team environment.
4. An ability to understand individual situations and environments, and to negotiate and influence as required to create effective solutions.

5. Openness to learn about relevant policy and legal frameworks including the Mental Health Act 2022 (Vic), Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and how they inform practice.
6. Experience in community development, consumer advocacy, mental health advocacy, community sector advocacy, social work, mental health service provision or other similar fields (desirable).
7. A qualification in a relevant field such as health, community development, community health, community mental health or social work (desirable).
8. Mental health consumer lived experience (desirable).
9. Lived experience and/or experience in working with lived experience experts to co-produce or co-design services and resources. An understanding of the challenges impacting on First Nations people and communities experiencing mental health issues accessing mental health and other related systems (desirable).
10. A knowledge of the general business of VLA and a commitment to our vision and values.

Occupational health and safety responsibilities at VLA:

- 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.
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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.

VLA's [Strategy 30](#) outlines our strategic directions, that also align with long-term sector strategies with our legal assistance sector partners, state government, and the national legal assistance partnership.

Civil Justice

The Civil Justice program consists of sub-programs including Mental Health and Disability Law, Independent Mental Health Advocacy, Migration, Economic and Social Rights, and the Equality Law Program.

The Civil Justice program's vision is a fairer, stronger and more inclusive community. We advocate for equality, enable people to protect their rights and promote accountability of systems. Together with our partners in the legal and community sectors, and with our clients and consumers at the centre, we use the law so people can access justice and secure better, fairer outcomes in relation to issues that affect their lives, including their housing, income, mental and physical health, visa status and ability to live and work free from discrimination.

Independent Mental Health Advocacy

This program is the first of its kind in Victoria and is funded by the Department of Health. The IMHA program is not a legal service. It is a serious step for people to be detained and to receive mental health treatment against their will. It is vital that people subject to compulsory treatment have a say about their treatment, care, and recovery, are supported to express their treatment preferences, and have their wishes considered, respected and where possible, followed.

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.

Position Description approved by People and Workplace Services

Position Title: Senior Recruitment and Retention Consultant

Date approved: 8 October 2026