

Impact Report 2021-22

An analysis of the impact Justice Connect achieved for individuals, not-for-profit organisations, and the legal sector.

November 2022

WELCOME

In the face of rising unmet legal need, Justice Connect exists to provide increased access to legal support and progress social justice. Through designing and delivering high-impact interventions, we work to close the justice gap.

We leverage our strengths by designing and embracing the most effective interventions to help people and organisations impacted by legal problems while also working to address the system-level drivers of these problems.

Our [2024 strategy](#) sets out three strategic directions for Justice Connect:

- 01 Extending the reach and impact of our services through digital strategies.**
- 02 Amplifying and extending the impact of our work through strategic engagement to help drive systems-level change.**
- 03 Achieving our purpose in the most effective and financially sustainable way.**

Our 2022 Impact Report looks different from previous ones for good reason. As an organisation committed to taking an impact-focused approach, we have been strengthening how we measure, evaluate, learn from, and iterate our work.

Drawing upon Most Significant Change and Collaborative Outcome Reporting frameworks, this report is the culmination of a new process of reflection and learning across the organisation. It demonstrates our strategic focus on achieving our purpose in the most effective and financially sustainable way.

In previous years, our Impact Report attempted to cover all aspects of our work. This year, we have chosen to share a representative snapshot. Focusing on the moments that mattered most for our clients and stakeholders, we have created a report that makes it easier for you to understand and celebrate our achievements alongside us.

Justice Connect acknowledges the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation and the Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and pay our respects to Elders past and present.



HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

By reading this report, we hope you'll gain insight into our impact for the period 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022 (FY22). Aligned with our [theory of change](#), you'll find stories, insights, and learnings about how we are:



Adapting and growing as an organisation

09



Responding to legal need

12



Improving people's wellbeing

38



Contributing to stronger and more effective community organisations

50



Shaping better laws and policies

58



Looking to the year ahead

67





LETTER FROM CEO

There's a quote from the Victorian Law Foundation at the start of this report that captures the urgency of our work at Justice Connect and perfectly frames the context in which we are operating: "A large slice of the Australian population has already slid further into financial disadvantage, and others are likely to in the coming months. In many cases, dealing with these changes will result directly in legal problems".

This year our community has grappled with a global pandemic, housing crisis, raging inflation and rolling natural disasters — all of which led to suffering and hardship, and are increasing the already significant gaps in access to justice faced by our community. It is also clear that these circumstances place significant pressure on not-for-profit organisations that provide a range of support and underpin community connection. Not-for-profits have grappled with rising community need at the same time as needing to transform their operations, support staff and volunteers and respond to waves of policy and law reform that flow out of this volatile environment.

This report provides an imprint of these difficult times — in how both individuals and community organisations are impacted by COVID-19 and natural disasters — and how Justice Connect is tackling this challenge through a mix of individual services and digital strategies.

OVER THE LAST YEAR, WE SAW A 22% INCREASE IN INDIVIDUAL SERVICES RELATED TO COVID-19 MATTERS AND A 12-FOLD INCREASE IN COVID-19 ENQUIRIES AMONG NOT-FOR-PROFITS.

Our COVID-19 self-help resources had more than 180,000 views equalling almost 50% of traffic across our significant range of self-help tools. People wanted to know how pandemic measures would impact their work rights, their renting rights, their debts and they wanted to know how to respond to mandatory vaccination requirements. These resources were rated 'helpful' hundreds of times by the people who reached out to us.

We have worked hard to build better responses to legal need and have leveraged our strengths — our staff expertise and insights, our strong pro bono partnerships, and our ability to develop impactful digital innovations to reach and help more people. Our Pro Bono Portal is being successfully rolled out around the world — it has over 1,400 users, has been adopted by 20 legal aid organisations, and 533 law firms. This year alone, it has helped increase access to pro bono legal services for people worldwide, connecting 724 individuals with pro bono assistance across 857 matters.



Our pro bono network has also been a key partner in our project to develop an artificial intelligence model that will enable people to describe legal needs in their own English language style or dialect. This innovation will enable us to connect people much more efficiently with information and support. 260 lawyers have participated in our project, annotating thousands of language samples almost 50,000 times. It is an incredible achievement, and our early testing and evaluation of this model shows significantly improved outcomes for the people who have engaged with it.

Again, this year we have worked with our partners to refer hundreds of people for pro bono assistance which has delivered tens of thousands of hours of pro bono help. Our pro bono survey gives positive indications about the number of legal issues resolved and prevented, and most lawyers and barristers we surveyed pointed to good or excellent outcomes for clients. In addition to referrals, in just six months pro bono lawyers provided more than 180 legal advices using our Justice Connect Answers platform, contributing 287 hours of pro bono time at an estimated value of more than \$110,000. And together with our pro bono partners we directly prevented 51 women and children from being evicted into homelessness, delivering around \$1,325,250 in cost savings for the government and broader community.

The scale of assistance is of course important, but it fails to convey the life-changing significance of legal help which comes through in numerous stories shared in this report. Here we share smaller moments and stories of where individual legal help delivered significant impact.

We provided wrap-around support to Hayley — providing civil, criminal, and social work support to assist her to resolve a range of challenging issues — which helped her resolve criminal law matters, regain custody of her child, prevent eviction into homelessness, and secure crucial property repairs. We helped the Lisa Harnum Foundation in its essential work supporting and empowering families affected by domestic violence. We assisted Gabriel on his mission to house people in temporary accommodation following severe flooding in regional towns. We helped put an end to elder abuse perpetrated against Joseph and establish new protective arrangements for him.

This report and the sum of Justice Connect's contributions reflect the work of many hands and deep partnerships — our staff, our board, our pro bono network, our funders, our partners, our clients and more.

THESE STORIES CONTINUE TO BUILD OUR UNDERSTANDING OF BOTH THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGAL HELP, AND THE NEED TO BE CONTINUALLY LOOKING FOR SYSTEMIC ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS SO THAT WE CAN HELP MORE PEOPLE AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS.



Chris Povey
CEO
Justice Connect



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



Outreach

34,625,779

times our outreach posts were seen (impressions)

(▲141% compared to FY21)

1,316,015

pageviews on our websites

(▲14% compared to FY21)



Self-help

724,662

pageviews of our self-help resources

(▼4% compared to FY21)

33,159

people used our digital self-help tools

(▼18% compared to FY21)



Education

299

education and training sessions delivered

(▲6% compared to FY21)

9,817

education and training attendees

(▲4% compared to FY21)



Enquiries & Intakes

21,030

enquiries made by individuals and organisations

(▼4% compared to FY21)

5,852

total intakes of individuals and organisations

(▼28% compared to FY21)



Legal services

7,840

individual services delivered

(▲2% compared to FY21)

53,219

hours of pro bono time contributed

(▲3% compared to FY21)



Holistic support

179

social work services delivered

(▲36% compared to FY21)

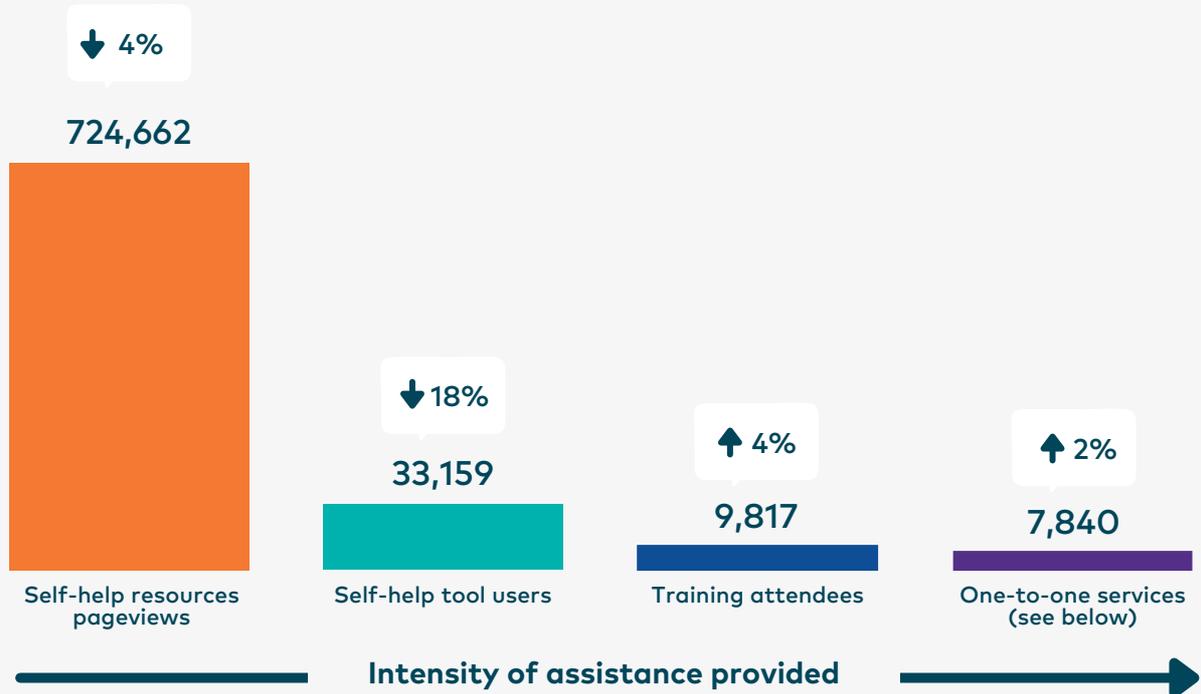
1,315

referrals to non-legal support services made

(▲114% compared to FY21)



Types of assistance provided



Breakdown of one-to-one service delivery



OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK

Justice Connect believes in a fair and just world where people and communities are supported to engage with and fully participate in our legal and social systems and avoid the negative impacts on their wellbeing or organisational health that flow from unresolved legal problems.

We aim to address unmet legal need because the consequential impacts on individuals and the community are significant and unacceptable. The way we've achieved this and the cohorts of people we have focused on have evolved throughout our 30-year history.

Across that time, the unmet legal need has remained stubbornly high for a wide range of individuals and not-for-profit organisations, and the impacts of that unmet legal need have continued to entrench inequality.

We have a number of innovative and impactful Programs working across Justice Connect to implement our [2024 strategy](#) and achieve the outcomes we strive to achieve:

- Homeless Law
- Not-for-Profit Law
- Seniors Law
- Access Program
- Innovation & Engagement.

For each area of law, we strive to deliver a range of services that respond to varying levels of legal need. For each person, we assess the complexity and urgency of their issue and guide them to the appropriate pathway. This allows us to operate at scale to deliver simple interventions that resolve issues early — before they become complex cases — and focus our casework on high-intensity issues that need extra, holistic support.



OUR STRATEGY IN ACTION

Our 2024 strategy is designed to increase our reach, impact, and sustainability. Our strategy guides us to focus on six key pillars of work:



Develop and deliver education and self-help resources

The law can be confusing for many people and organisations. We democratise legal information with helpful, plain language resources and tools. Equipping people with the right knowledge at the right time, we make it easy for people to self-advocate and to solve their legal issues.



Community outreach

In an increasingly digital world, it's imperative that we make sure the people and organisations who need our help know we exist. We use online marketing and outreach strategies to increase our reach, scale our legal services to assist more people, better understand our clients, and inform the design of our services.



Complementary services

Legal problems are life problems. When people miss out on legal help, we know that a cascade of complications often follows, threatening peoples' finances, health, relationships, and housing. To stop these issues from spiralling, we take a holistic and integrated approach to offer legal and non-legal support.



Legal services design and delivery

More people need legal help than ever, at a time when free legal services are stretched desperately thin. The nature of our legal system also makes it hard for people to find the help they need. By thinking differently and using smart service design, we aim to get more help to more people by tailoring the support we provide according to our clients' needs.



Legal sector improvements

We explore how digital transformation and innovation can be used to meet ever-increasing levels of unmet legal need in the Australian community, and beyond. Our digital innovation work is focused on co-designing solutions to improve the experience, efficiency, and impact of access to justice legal services.



Strategic engagement

We focus on strategic engagement because we know that so many of the cases that come across our desks shouldn't have to. System-level solutions can prevent or avoid many of the negative consequences of unresolved or unfair legal problems.



Throughout our Impact Report, you will see the above indicators used to illustrate how the story we are describing fits into our strategy.



CHAPTER 1:

ADAPTING AND GROWING AS AN ORGANISATION



We work in an increasingly challenging and dynamic environment that is driving the rise of legal need, stretching funding, and placing legal service organisations like ours under increasing pressure.

To continue delivering our high-impact legal help to the people and organisations who need it, we focussed our internal efforts on supporting our staff and strengthening our performance and focus throughout FY22. The following are just some of the ways we undertook internal initiatives to reinforce our impact.

Launch of our 2024 strategy

During FY22, we launched [our 2024 strategy](#). The strategy sits alongside our theory of change and our values. The strategy sets our direction, our theory of change explains how we'll get there, and our values define the approach we'll take to our work. Additionally, our strategy is a foundation for decision making and provides transparency for clients and stakeholders.

In addition to launching our Justice Connect 2024 strategy, we have been adding renewed focus and applied learnings through the creation of program-specific strategies, which feed up to support the wider Justice Connect vision. This work was completed against the backdrop of hybrid or fully remote work, limited capacity at times due to recruitment gaps, rising unmet legal need, and continuing instabilities facing the community.

Becoming a more data-driven organisation

Previously our data and reporting procedures were onerous and slow. Often, the data would be months out of date by the time it was ready for consideration and analysis. And while it was still important information, it did not allow us to quickly identify and respond to emerging trends and needs. Throughout FY22, we have made a significant shift towards creating, sharing,



and using analytics dashboards, which enable the organisation to view real-time data. This has been possible due to our previous years' activities in shifting to a new database and developing our case management platform.

Some key activities which have enabled this change include:

- Developing our measurement, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework as a guide for designing, delivering and evaluating high impact interventions.
- Developing data literacy and fluency at a program level through targeted professional development and recruitment.
- Setting and monitoring our performance against objectives and key results (OKRs) quarterly.
- Migrating our survey platform to integrate with our CRM and case management system to better capture survey data and measure our direct and long-term impact.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

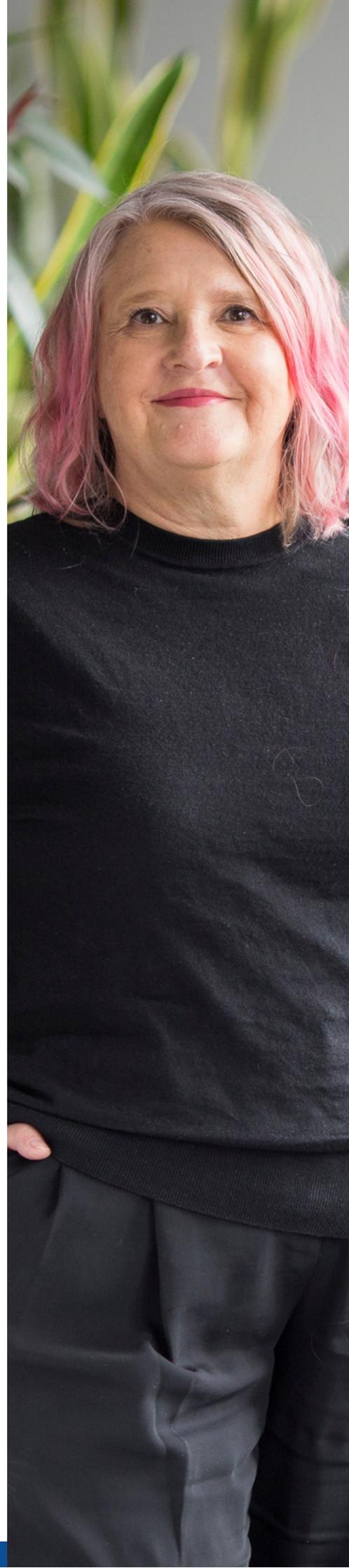
Our vision for Justice Connect is that we are a diverse and equitable organisation; we live our value of inclusion and hold each other accountable for this commitment. We believe in a society where legal systems are accessible and accountable, rights are respected and advanced, and laws are fair for all people, regardless of their race, gender, ability, age, sexuality, religion, or cultural background.

Internally, we are focussed on addressing any existing unconscious bias and promoting psychological safety across the organisation. Many of the projects you will read about in this report have involved people with lived experience who have experienced barriers in access to justice. We make sure we put their voice at the centre of the work we do, and many people have graciously worked with us to share their expertise and insights in ways that suit them and are sustainable.

Equity and inclusion are collective responsibilities shared by all at Justice Connect. Our board, organisational leadership team, and senior leadership team work to ensure our organisation is diverse, our actions advance equity, and that all people feel included.

Our reconciliation action plan

Justice Connect recognises the richness and depth of First Nations cultures, the custodianship of First Nations people of the world's oldest surviving cultures, and the strength and resilience that First Nations people have shown in the centuries since colonisation. We also acknowledge the deep value that participation in the reconciliation journey brings to all Australians.





During the year, we were joined by five First Nations law students who were participating in the King & Wood Mallesons Waiwa Mudena paid cadetship program. Working with all teams across Justice Connect, a tailored secondment experience was designed for five cadets so they could engage with areas of our work that matched their interests and career goals.

In addition to our participation in the Waiwa Mudena program, Justice Connect joined Ngalaya, the First Nations lawyer and law student representative body in NSW and the ACT, as a corporate member. Ngalaya has been active in the legal sector for over 25 years and provides crucial networking opportunities, financial support, and mentoring for First Nations people throughout their legal careers. We hope this membership draws us closer to Ngalaya's important work, highlights ways we can support it, and leads to greater employment opportunities for First Nations lawyers and law students at Justice Connect.

Embedding our values

While Justice Connect has always been a values-driven organisation, our values needed a refresh to fit our evolving organisation. We were seeking a clear framework outlining their purpose and application. We have launched our updated values during the year following an inclusive staff consultation project. These values give us another "why" anchor for decision making, guide recruitment and culture fit, and give us a clear and consistent recognition framework across the organisation.

Supporting staff

With the shift to remote and hybrid work, we faced several embedded problems. A number of our systems and processes simply weren't designed with working from home in mind. Throughout FY22, we have undertaken several initiatives to support our staff to work in ways that meet their needs and preferences. This has included shifting our finance and payroll systems to cloud solutions, implementing several People and Culture systems to support recruitment, compliance, staff goals, and professional development, and standardising our fleet of devices to enhance our security, reduce barriers and pain points for staff, and to provide consistent tools across the organisation to facilitate different ways of working.

CHAPTER 2:

BETTER RESPONSES TO LEGAL NEED



More people need legal help than ever at a time when free legal services are stretched thinner than ever. So, at Justice Connect, we're always thinking of new ways we can improve our reach and impact.

We work to close the justice gap by connecting people and community organisations who need help with the lawyers and the legal assistance they need. Whether it's pro bono firms, healthcare services, or homelessness groups – we collaborate with a range of people and organisations to get the right help to the right people at the right time.

By designing and delivering high-impact legal and social work services that are human-centred and enhanced with digital innovation, we can change what help looks like and make it easier to find.

In this chapter, you'll find examples of this impact focus through:

- [Reaching people online](#) (page 13)
- [Responding to emergencies like climate-fuelled disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (page 15)
- [Matching need with capacity through the power of pro bono](#) (page 21)
- [Helping people identify legal problems with artificial intelligence](#) (page 25)
- [Expanding our Pro Bono Portal to increase global access to justice](#) (page 29)
- [Supporting firms to manage their pro bono practices](#) (page 31)
- [Providing legal advice online with Justice Connect Answers](#) (page 32)
- [Intervening early through health justice partnerships](#) (page 34)





REACHING PEOPLE ONLINE

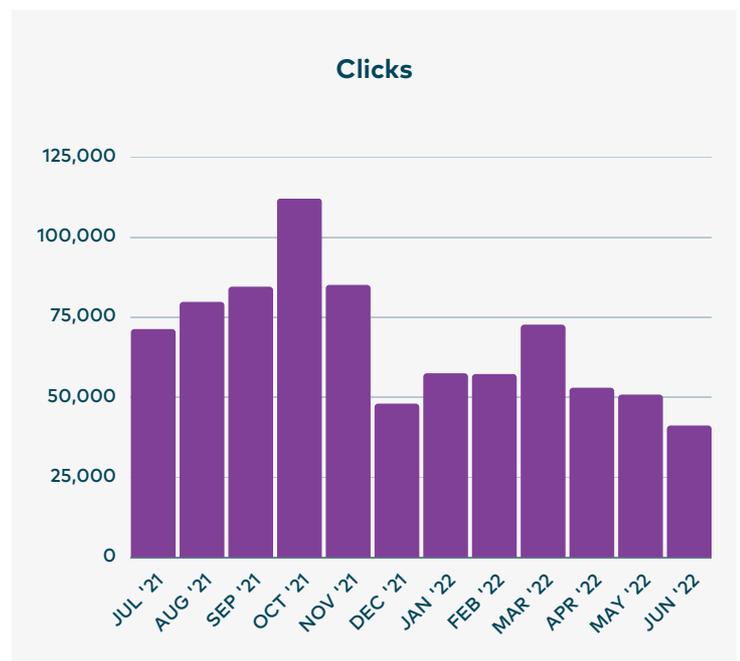
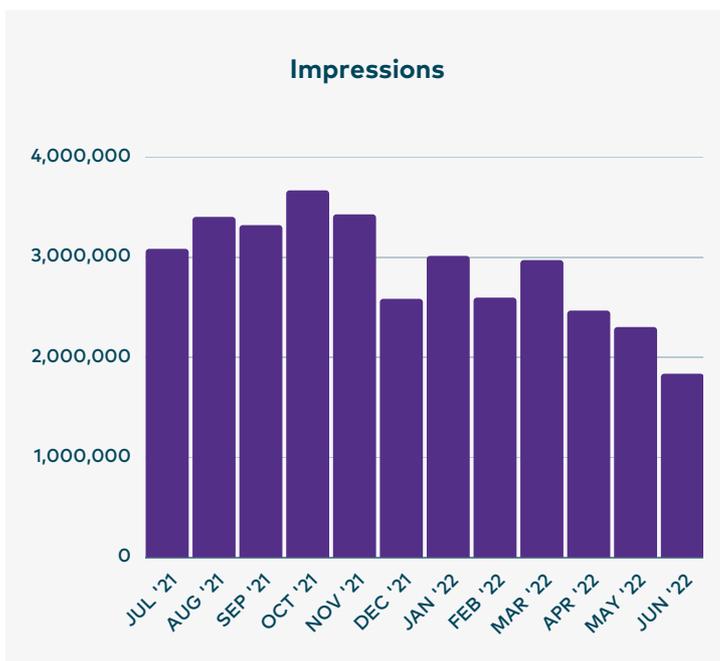
Over the last few years, Justice Connect has been working hard to help people and community organisations find our resources, tools, and services more easily online

In an increasingly digital world, it's imperative that we make sure the people and organisations who need our help know we exist. We use consumer-focused online marketing and outreach strategies to increase our reach, scale our legal services to assist more people, better understand our clients, and inform the design of our services.

This financial year, our communities faced even more compounding crises like climate-fuelled disasters, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, increased pressure on the cost of living, and further cuts to the social safety net.

In these moments of crisis, we were able to harness the digital infrastructure we've been investing in for several years to conduct extensive consumer outreach activities. When given the right tools and support at the right time, people and community organisations can avoid the negative consequences of unresolved legal problems and prevent further legal issues from arising.

Impressions and clicks on Justice Connect's content, per month
FY22



Throughout FY22, we continued to use a multichannel approach across our digital platforms, including paid marketing and organic social media. We were able to collectively reach people 34,625,779 times — a 141% increase on last financial year's 14,343,613 impressions. People clicked on our content 812,035 times — a 149% increase on last financial year's 326,138 clicks.

Some of the key campaigns we ran this financial year include:

- Launching new self-help tools for charities, like our Deductible Gift Recipient (DRG) Tool that helps community organisations understand their eligibility for DGR endorsement or our NSW Constitution Tool for incorporated associations who need to draft a constitution (see page 54).
- Working with diverse communities to ensure our artificial intelligence (AI) technology is responsive and appropriate to their needs (see page 25).
- Promoting our new Easy Read Powers of Attorney self-help resource to migrant communities in NSW (see page 46).
- Encouraging sign-ups to our free and low-cost webinars for not-for-profit organisations and social enterprises to learn about their legal obligations (see page 16).
- Reaching renters in Victoria with our online self-help tool Dear Landlord, designed to help them understand their rights and options if they're behind on rent (see page 39).
- Circulating information about dealing with workplace sexual harassment in the lead-up to end of year work parties.
- Helping flood-affected small businesses and community organisations know where to get legal help after the Eastern Australia 2022 floods (see page 19).

Often, people don't know the problem they're experiencing is one a lawyer or legal organisation can help with. Other times, engaging with institutions is a big step for people navigating their legal journey. We make sure we're meeting people in the digital ecosystems they're already comfortable in to build trust and provide accessible and actionable information.

By mapping the personas and archetypes of people who engaged with us, we were able to better understand their emotional state when trying to resolve their legal problem and tailor our messaging and outreach in response to those needs.





RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES LIKE CLIMATE-FUELLED DISASTERS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As emergencies continue to evolve and emerge, more people need legal help than ever. At the same time, legal services are stretched thinner than ever.

By thinking differently, Justice Connect aims to get more help to more people during times of crisis. We design quick, effective services to adapt to the specific type of legal help communities need, whether they are impacted by severe floods or fires or if they are an organisation swiftly trying to understand a changing pandemic landscape. We mobilise our team of lawyers with deep expertise to specialise our response and shift our approach according to the community's needs.

During FY22, we pivoted our legal services in innovative ways to respond to rising legal need from emergencies:

Helping individuals recover from COVID-19 related legal problems

When public health crises occur, existing legal problems do not go away, and new legal needs emerge. While we have all been living with COVID-19 since 2020, the effects are still being felt in the community and continue to fuel an increase in legal need.

We are also seeing an increase in the "[missing majority](#)", (people who can't afford a lawyer and are ineligible for free public or community legal assistance), which has been a key Justice Connect cohort for several years. As lockdowns, public health orders, and movement restrictions were imposed upon the community, we observed disrupted paths to justice.

Between FY21 and FY22, we saw a 22% increase in one-to-one services delivered on COVID-19 related matters. Meanwhile, our self-help resources relating to COVID-19 received 183,528 unique pageviews, representing 46% of all pageviews across our range of self-help resources.



COVID-19 related self-help resources included a variety of topics such as:

- How does COVID-19 affect Victorian renters?
- What kind of COVID-19 support is available for Victorian renters?
- How does COVID-19 affect my work rights?
- How to respond to debt collection during COVID-19
- NSW COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination Orders

Our entire collection of over 30 self-help resources relating to COVID-19 was rated as "helpful" 372 times.

Through Justice Connect Answers (see page 32), we similarly saw a 27% increase in questions related to COVID-19 and vaccinations (representing 10% of all questions answered). The COVID-19 related questions covered a range of matters involving fines, court appearances, emergency powers, evictions and notice periods, debts, and forced relocation.

Other ways that we continued to adapt and deliver services through COVID-19 include:

- Continuing to use a phone and video model to reduce exposure for staff and clients.
- Adapting Dear Landlord to meet changing conditions, by adding support for the COVID-19 Rent Relief Grant while it was available (see page 39).
- Advocating for and implementing remote witnessing (see page 65).

The Victorian Law Foundation has explained the link between COVID-19 and increased legal need, saying:

Events increasing vulnerability to legal need include sudden onset illness, loss of employment and housing, and change in family and business circumstances. A large slice of the Australian population has already slid further into financial disadvantage, and others are likely to in the coming months.

In many cases, dealing with these changes will result directly in legal problems (e.g. dealing with loss of employment), though they will also indirectly trigger many others (e.g. difficulty accessing welfare benefits, difficulty paying rent).

Balmer N and McDonald M, (2 April 2020), '[COVID-19, Legal need and access to justice](#)', Victoria Law Foundation, accessed 14 October 2022

Supporting not-for-profit organisations to understand COVID-19 legal obligations

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have supported not-for-profit community organisations grappling with complex issues as they face remote working, service closures, employment law, and safety concerns.

In FY22, we received twelve times as many enquiries relating to COVID-19 amongst not-for-profit community organisations, compared to FY21.

Public health orders on vaccinations emerged as a key issue area for this cohort. Our multi-channel, multi-intensity approach saw us deliver one-to-many webinars, self-help resources and tools, and a targeted legal advice service response for vaccine-related issues. We have provided legal information and clarity to over 7,000 community organisations across Australia.

An example of our rapid response can be seen through our mandatory vaccines webinars and self-help resources. In late 2022, governments in several states released new public health orders requiring many community sector workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Tens of thousands of not-for-profit workers were impacted by these orders, and we began hearing high levels of uncertainty and anxiety about how community organisations should deal with impending legal issues around mandatory vaccinations. This anxiety came on top of

not-for-profits already juggling increased demand and service delivery during lockdowns.

Within one week, we designed and ran a free webinar, which received 675 registrations to attend. The webinar contained information and guidance to help community organisations navigate the maze of issues, so they could get back to delivering vital services to their community.

This webinar was just one of nine COVID-19 focused training events run over just a few weeks, which together received 2,265 registrations to attend. Feedback from participants of the training included:



Thanks so much for making this information available to NFPs as we all make our way forwards in this new "living with Covid" world!



Hadn't thought about the legal ramifications of COVID-19 vaccination requests and refusal... Glad to know what can and can't be done.



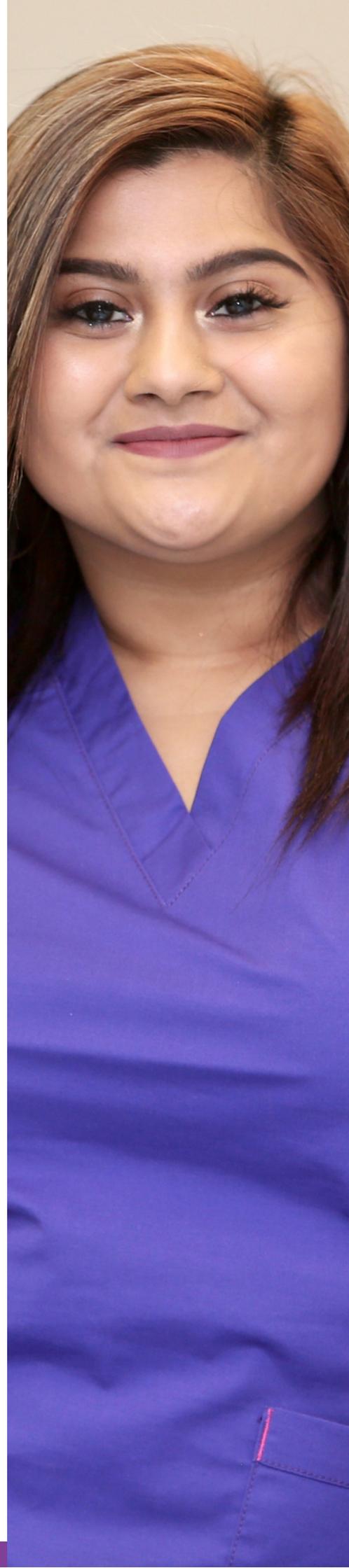
Clarified so many confusing areas with simple language and examples... A really useful resource; thank you for holding this webinar.

Amongst the participants surveyed, 83% (n=252) agreed that the training helped them feel more confident to address vaccine-related legal issues in their organisation. Additionally, 95% (n=252) agreed that their knowledge about vaccine-related legal issues had increased because of the training.

Along with making the COVID-19-related webinars available to watch on-demand, ten new and updated self-help resources were also made available for community organisations via a [COVID-19 hub](#).

These included the creation of a new webpage, [Managing vaccines in the workplace](#), which contained a fact sheet on Volunteers and the COVID-19 vaccine, along with two flowcharts: 'Can you require an employee to get vaccinated?' and 'What can you do if an employee refuses to get vaccinated?'

Since its launch, this webpage has been extremely popular, with 11,496 unique pageviews (between October 2021 and June 30 2022).





CLIENT STORY: LISA HARNUM FOUNDATION

COVID-19 has been felt by community organisations in a number of ways. For the Lisa Harnum Foundation, it impacted their ability to fundraise at a critical time.

The Lisa Harnum Foundation Ltd is a small charity that supports and empowers families affected by domestic violence while striving to prevent and end the cycle of abuse through education and social change. The Foundation's source of funding is exclusively donations. As Frank Sedmak, Chairperson and Foundation director, said, "We never know when and where the next dollar will come from so we depend totally on the generosity of the community."

Last year, the Foundation planned on hosting a fundraising event for 300 people. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the event had to be cancelled. Unfortunately, the operator of the venue where the Foundation planned on having the event, refused to refund the deposit that the Foundation had paid. It was at that point that Frank got in touch with the Not-for-profit Law team at Justice Connect. Frank said that he found the Not-for-profit Law team to be "quick, courteous and knowledgeable and made us feel that our problem was important to them."

After reviewing the Foundation's enquiry, one of our lawyers decided that the matter would be best dealt with by way of a pro bono referral. We quickly referred the Foundation to one of our member law firms for advice on what recourse the Foundation may have against the venue operator to recover the refund. Frank commented that, because of the pro bono referral, the "Lisa Harnum Foundation received thousands of dollars' worth of expert legal advice, which delivered an outcome we would not have otherwise achieved on our own."

When asked whether he would recommend Justice Connect to other organisations, Frank responded, "I would not hesitate to recommend Justice Connect to any small charity like ours who requires expert legal advice delivered in a wonderfully customer focussed way."



Leveraging technology to connect people with free legal help after disasters strike

In the wake of disasters, people, small business owners, and not-for-profit organisations can face unexpected legal problems. If left unresolved, these legal problems can have serious consequences for people's financial stability, relationships, health, and wellbeing.

Justice Connect formally coordinates the pro bono legal response to disasters across Victoria and NSW and provides assistance across Australia in more limited circumstances. Due to the common delay between disasters occurring and related legal problems emerging, Justice Connect continues to provide assistance well into the recovery period.

In FY22, through our Digital Consumer Outreach Program (see page 13), we reached 874,587 people with targeted messages about legal help available in disaster-impacted communities. Our messages across social media and search platforms are designed to help people identify common legal problems they may be at risk of and the support options available to them. Our content was clicked on 7,695 times. Similarly, our disaster response website pages for individuals were viewed 4,493 times by 3,716 users.

We continue to receive referrals through our online referral tool (including through a bespoke pathway that was developed specifically to support disaster response work) from frontline services and other community organisations responding to disasters for people, small business owners, and not-for-profit organisations impacted. These requests for assistance are triaged by Justice Connect and either assisted directly by our lawyers or matched with pro bono assistance via our Pro Bono Portal, which matches and refers clients to our network of over 160 law firms and over 10,000 pro bono lawyers using built-in algorithms (see page 29). By helping to connect people with free legal help quickly and simply, we're strengthening the pro bono response to disasters while also increasing access to justice for those impacted.

Once matters were placed on the Portal, they were swiftly matched with free legal help. In FY22, average wait times for individuals was seven days for bushfire-related matters and 24 days for flood-related matters. By comparison, in FY21, it took an average of 51 days for bushfires and 46 days for flood-related matters, representing an 86% (▼44) and 48% (▼22) reduction in waiting time for bushfire and flood-impacted people and demonstrating the responsiveness of our pro bono member firms this year.

We're working closely with other organisations such as legal aid commissions, community legal centres (CLCs), and law societies to ensure that people can access legal help as quickly and seamlessly as possible. Our Pro Bono Portal is an award-winning platform that makes referring pro bono matters easier. Our CLCs on the Portal project pilot worked to make this critical infrastructure available for CLCs to use for free. This allowed them to post matters and connect directly to law firms with their pro bono matters rather than going via Justice Connect or other clearinghouses. 106 staff from CLCs have been able to share 47 opportunities with 12 participating law firms offering pro bono assistance. In FY23, the pilot is being expanded to be available to more CLCs and all 160 law firms already using the Pro Bono Portal. CLCs and frontline organisations can continue to use the referrer tool to make referrals to Justice Connect if this is their preference rather than using the Portal.

The strength of our disaster response work was recognised through newly-secured and significant funding streams to continue this work.





CLIENT STORY: GABRIEL

Along with those directly impacted by disasters, we provide free legal assistance to people and organisations who are on the frontline providing emergency support.

After severe flooding in a regional town, many community members were left homeless. Justice Connect was approached by Gabriel*, who had started a volunteer-led community initiative facilitating the use of campervans by community members seeking temporary accommodation.

It was thought that having formal arrangements in place for both the campervan lender and borrower would remove barriers to sharing the vans. Gabriel was seeking pro bono assistance to draft a template agreement to support this initiative, and was also seeking advice on personal liability that may arise.

Lander and Rogers accepted Gabriel's matter as a pro bono referral from Justice Connect. They assisted Gabriel in drafting agreements that gave protection to moveable home owners and potential renters, and released Gabriel from any liability arising out of the agreements.

The documents are assisting the community initiative to make a difference in the lives of those impacted by the floods. As of September 2022, thousands of people are still displaced by flooding in regional areas. There is potential for the documents provided to be used in other situations where people are displaced due to natural disasters.

Lander and Rogers valued the opportunity to contribute to an impactful and responsive pro bono project, including the opportunity for junior lawyers to develop skills in managing client relationships and drafting skills in a new context.

** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*





MATCHING NEED WITH CAPACITY THROUGH THE POWER OF PRO BONO

Without the support of our large pro bono network, Justice Connect would be unable to keep up with the rising unmet demand for legal need and progress social justice.

Justice Connect has 55 member firms and a network of over 10,000 pro bono lawyers. We also work with a broader group of 160 law firms in our disaster response coordination (see page 15). Justice Connect's pro bono network accepts referrals to assist people and community organisations who could otherwise not access appropriate legal assistance, as well as providing lawyers to participate in our clinics and assisting other strategic projects.

In the past 12 months, assistance provided by our pro bono network included:



Collectively in FY22, pro bono lawyers delivered 53,219 hours of direct pro bono legal assistance, an increase of 3% (+1,620) from FY21, equalling \$20,584,322 of contributions.

While we are still in the process of strengthening the ways we evaluate pro bono assistance, we are excited to see some positive early findings. In a recent survey conducted with barristers and lawyers in Justice Connect's pro bono network, we asked them to reflect on the most recent matter they had assisted with:

- 56% (n=16) of barristers said they had helped to resolve the client's legal problem. Of matters where the problem was not resolved, 43% (n=7) indicated the matter was still ongoing, while 14% said they had instead prevented a matter from escalating. Where the legal problem had been resolved, barristers indicated they had achieved a good or excellent outcome for their client in 89% (n=9) of the matters.



- 74% (n=19) of lawyers said they had helped to resolve the client's legal problem. Of those remaining, 40% (n=5) they said they had instead prevented a matter from escalating. Where the legal problem had been resolved, pro bono lawyers indicated they had achieved a good or excellent outcome for their client in 100% (n=14) of the matters.

We have also assisted other organisations to better access pro bono through our Pro Bono Portal projects in Australia and globally (see page 29).

Pro bono projects supported by our member firms

At Justice Connect, we're focused on ensuring that the impact of pro bono time is understood and maximised. This year, we have continued to develop new ways to deploy pro bono efforts:

- Artificial intelligence project (see more on page 25): Over the last 18 months, we have worked closely with pro bono lawyers from our member firms to carefully annotate thousands of language samples for our AI project. Our partners then used these annotated language samples at the University of Melbourne to train our AI model. So far, over 260 pro bono lawyers have participated. They have annotated 8,970 language samples 45,267 times, with 203,353 highlights of legal areas. This extraordinary contribution has assisted us in delivering a working model with over 85% accuracy across 11 legal categories and is estimated to be over \$19,912,000 of pro bono assistance.
- Self-help resources: Pro bono lawyers have also helped our teams to develop and maintain our extensive library of self-help resources. In the past 12 months, pro bono lawyers have responded to 104 requests for assistance in updating or creating self-help resources, which were collectively viewed 396,315 times in FY22.
- Justice Connect Answers (see more on page 32): Pro bono lawyers have also been trialling our new online legal clinic, Justice Connect Answers, which enables people to get tailored information and advice on their legal problems. In FY22, 183 questions were answered by pro bono lawyers, contributing 287 hours of time (valued at \$114,434).



In total, pro bono assistance provided through referrals and clinics, in addition to project work equates to more than 103,507 hours of time contributed. This is estimated to be valued at over \$40,600,000.





CLIENT STORY: BENJAMIN

By matching legal need with existing capacity in our pro bono network, we extend our impact. These connections ultimately saved Benjamin's* home.

Benjamin* is an older man in poor physical health and low legal literacy. About five years ago, he started casual work in a company owned by his son. At his son's request, Benjamin agreed to become a director of this company. He had no previous experience as a director and did not understand his responsibilities. A few years later, Benjamin's son secured a short-term loan for the company from a financier.

The loan agreement listed Benjamin as a company director and signatory and was secured against any property owned by the company. Not long after, the company fell into financial distress. It failed to repay funds under the loan agreement and was placed into liquidation in January 2020. Benjamin's son entered voluntary bankruptcy.

Earlier this year, the financier initiated breach of contract proceedings in the County Court of Victoria against Benjamin. The financier sought possession and sale of Benjamin's home, despite there being no reference to his personal property as security in the loan agreement. The financier also began a campaign of threatening calls to Benjamin's personal phone, leaving him deeply concerned and confused.



When Benjamin reached out to Justice Connect for assistance, we performed a detailed intake, obtaining his court case file and significant evidentiary documentation. We formed a view that Benjamin had a strong legal case against the financier taking possession of the proceeds from the sale of his house. However, Benjamin needed to take immediate legal steps to protect his position. Justice Connect was able to step in quickly and, through a series of unbundled appointments, assist Benjamin in filing a defence against the financier's claim.

To accommodate Benjamin's lower legal capability, Justice Connect then referred Benjamin's matter to a large commercial law firm for ongoing pro bono assistance in the proceedings. Justice Connect also secured senior pro bono counsel. This task involved significant work in terms of coordination and thorough briefing of the legal practitioners. Justice Connect played a vital role in facilitating discussions between Benjamin, who had no access to computer technology and very little understanding of the legal procedure, and the file lawyers at the pro bono law firm.

The enlistment of pro bono lawyers caused a swift change in the trajectory of the dispute. The financier stopped contacting Benjamin with threats and demands and ultimately withdrew the proceedings on the agreement that each party bear their own costs.

Benjamin's matter is an example of our multi-channel, multi-intensity approach. With a mix of swift but carefully selected unbundled and pro bono interventions, we were able to help Benjamin avoid a dire legal outcome.



** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*



HELPING PEOPLE IDENTIFY LEGAL PROBLEMS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Research shows that when people search for legal help, they often struggle to correctly articulate their legal problem.

This challenge is exacerbated in an online context where people often use different syntax or slang when communicating. This poses a major challenge for legal assistance organisations trying to connect them with the right information and services.

Instead of expecting people to build the capacity to technically explain and categorise their problem, Justice Connect, in partnership with the University of Melbourne, has developed a natural language processing artificial intelligence (AI) model. This model can assist people in identifying the nature of their problem and better engage with legal services in both online and offline contexts. By using artificial intelligence to assist people to correctly categorise their legal problem, we're removing a bottleneck in connecting people to legal help. With the potential of individual assessments no longer being tied to a legal professional, we're able to explore better matching people with the right assistance, at scale.

This year, we have mobilised our extensive pro bono network to help us train the AI model. A key challenge in natural language-based AI projects is collecting appropriate language samples and then carrying out resource-intensive and usually costly annotations of the dataset. Justice Connect has access to an invaluable bank of natural language samples collected through our online tools. In response to the annotation challenge, our in-house Innovation team built a Training AI Game (TAG) that presents language samples to participating pro bono lawyers and provides a quick and easy interface through which the lawyers can annotate the samples in several ways. The samples can then be exported in an annotated format and provided to the University of Melbourne team, helping to train the AI model.

As of June 2022, over 45,267 annotations had been applied to language samples, with nearly 203,353 test highlights applied. TAG has facilitated a collaborative effort from the pro bono sector, with over 260 lawyers from eight law firms annotating samples using the platform. In January 2022, we integrated our AI model into our online intake tool in a control-tested study. Those who engaged with the AI tool (about 25% of users, approximately 5,954 people) experienced significantly improved outcomes, with people 8% less likely to abandon when they use the AI. Those who used the AI tool were also 14% less likely to select the "something else" category when asked to identify their legal problem. This option is often selected when a user is unsure of the legal category that applies to their problem.



We have also focused on improving the model's performance fairness. Analysis carried out by the University of Melbourne identified, expectedly, that the model performs less accurately for First Nations people and older Australians. This is due to diverse linguistic presentations in these cohorts. We have run a project to collect further language samples from these groups and have supplied annotated samples to the University of Melbourne to carry out targeted model training to address the model's current underperformance

While we continue to refine and strengthen our AI model, our ultimate goal is to share it with the wider legal assistance sector through an application programming interface (API). In doing this, other community legal organisations will be able to use the technology and improve the experience of seeking legal help for everyone.

How we built it

Our AI project combined the expertise of Justice Connect, our network of pro bono lawyers, and partners at the University of Melbourne. Below (and online, [via a webinar](#)) is an overview of the journey we have taken together:

Collection

A lot of high-quality data is needed to train an AI model. For our AI project, this meant descriptions of legal problems in everyday language. Because we have been helping people make applications for legal help online for many years, we found a ready source in our online intake tool. After taking measures to ensure this collection was done with consent and done ethically (more information below), we collected almost 10,000 samples of descriptions of legal problems to help train the model.

Deidentification

Before we passed the data over to the University of Melbourne, we needed to make sure that it was safe to share — meaning it would not breach anyone's confidentiality and wouldn't be identifiable in any way. For each of the language samples, Justice Connect staff went through a deidentification process, replacing any identifiable language with flags.

This was an important step in preparing the data from a training perspective because the model needs to understand the syntax of the language. We also made sure none of the samples we used were highly sensitive, regardless of the deidentification process (for example, a novel case or a matter that had been on the news).

Tagging

Once we had a dataset that was de-identified and safe to use, we needed to annotate it. Annotation is how an AI

Hi my name is Jane Smith and I work at 123 Bourke Street 3000. I think I have a legal issue and I'm hoping you can help me. My email address is Jane.Smith@justiceconnect.org.au



Hi my name is [First Name 1] [Last Name 1] and I work at [Address Line 1] [City] [Postcode]. I think I have a legal issue and I'm hoping you can help me. My email address is [Email Address 1].



learns how to process data, and so, in this case, that meant asking a lawyer to look at the sample and say which areas of law were likely to apply. Each sample was annotated by five different lawyers to ensure we heard a range of views.

To collect these samples, our Innovation team created a game called TAG and, along with staff, recruited over 260 lawyers from our pro bono network as users of the game. By making the process of annotating quick and easy, TAG enabled our annotations to be efficiently gathered while still providing high-quality insights.

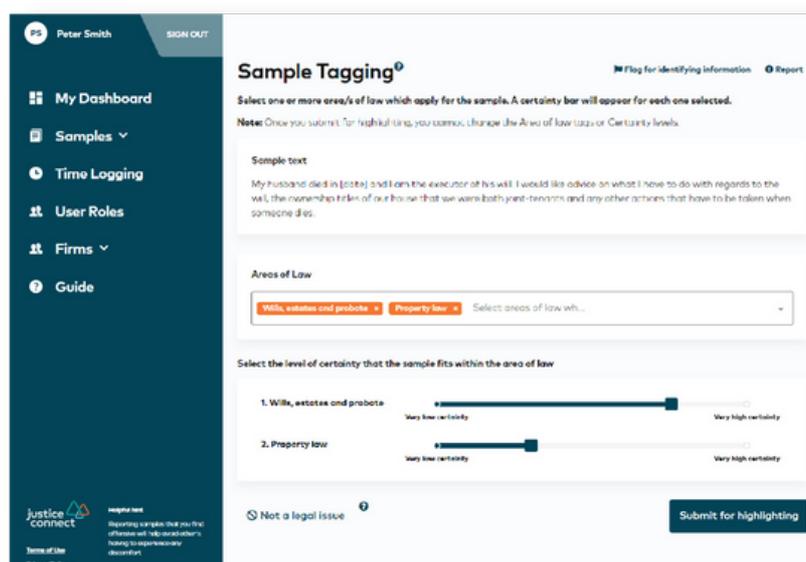
Lawyers were also asked to add a confidence rating to their selections. This helped the model better understand language patterns and the connected legal problems and ultimately enabled the AI to develop its own confidence ratings in its outputs.

Training

There are many layers involved in getting an AI model to work. In natural language processing, you don't start from a blank canvas. A range of natural language processing models already exist, which have been trained on millions of words (like books in the public domain and swathes of Wikipedia articles) to understand the relationship between words, sentences, and meaning.

Through testing, the University of Melbourne decided on a base data layer (a framework of language) and a model layer (a framework for decision making) as the best starting place for us. We then added our unique data set and annotations to the model to train it to be highly specialised in identifying legal problems: this is what we now call the Justice Connect AI natural language processor.

The working model was able to classify with 85% precision in select areas of law, with an overall average of 77.7% precision on all matters.



Briefly tell us your legal about problem

🔗 How does it work

Our smart assistant will suggest relevant categories based on the description of your problem that you provide below.

What is your legal problem?

Integration

Once the model gained sufficient accuracy, we tested it with people seeking legal help from Justice Connect through our online intake tool. Approximately 25% (5,954) of people using our online intake tool use the AI, and we are tracking the data and performance to ensure that it provides an improved experience and does not impair their application in any way. We have made minor changes to the integration along the way to maintain this standard, and we are looking at the data to inform how we can continue to improve the integration.

Performance fairness

We know that AI can be biased, and at Justice Connect, we want to ensure we are correcting biases that may be in the model quickly and early. There is a direct connection between the precision of the AI model and the amount of data samples it has access to for a particular area of law or a particular way that people use language.

[Research undertaken by the University of Melbourne](#) showed that our AI model was less accurate when used by First Nations people and older people. Because of this, we're now undertaking a data diversification project, in which we're actively seeking natural language samples from a diverse range of people, including older people, First Nations people, people with a disability, people with mental health issues and chronic illness, people with HIV, people without tertiary qualifications, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ people, and people who have recently migrated to Australia. This is so the model will work well regardless of a person's language style, age, background, and cultural context.

Your matching categories

Matching Categories

Below are the categories that may relate to your legal problem.

Select your categories

Tenancy and Eviction

Criminal law

📘 Bigger circles are more likely to be relevant to your problem

Something missing?

Browse all categories +

0 categories selected

← Previous



EXPANDING OUR PRO BONO PORTAL TO INCREASE GLOBAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE



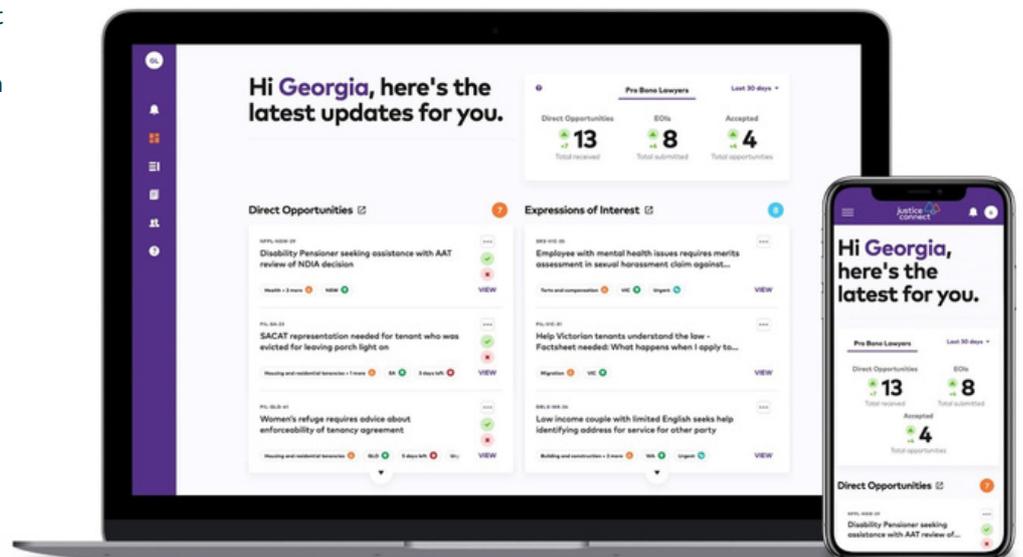
Justice Connect's Pro Bono Portal was launched in Australia in 2019, and has been supporting Justice Connect and community legal centres to connect with pro bono resources of 160 law firms.

In 2020, we undertook extensive research worldwide to better understand the interest in, and need for, our Pro Bono Portal in other jurisdictions.

We identified that the same inefficiencies in the clearinghouse model we had surfaced in Australia were present in most clearinghouses internationally. A reliance on traditional communication like emails and phone calls to make referrals to law firms and only basic record keeping systems and systems to track pro bono capacity. International firms told us they had far more pro bono hours to give if clearinghouses could supply more matters to them.

Based on our research, we were able to attract international philanthropic funding in 2020.

This supported us to build extra functions and configuration options into the platform, and we then commenced rolling out the platform internationally in FY21.





Throughout FY22, we have been evaluating the impact of the Portal through surveys and workshops with users from legal aid organisations and firms. Feedback gathered both in Australia and overseas has shown that the Portal reduces the time taken to find a suitable pro bono lawyer, improves the experience for those seeking legal help, and streamlines the process of engaging in pro bono work for law firms.

For legal aid organisations, users reflected that the Portal assisted them to interact with firms with a higher degree of professionalism. Meanwhile for law firms, users reflected that the Portal smoothed the process of taking on pro bono referrals, exposed the firm to a broader range of opportunities and expanded their practice areas.

This year, we have continued to strengthen pro bono ecosystems around the world. So far, the platform has been adopted by clearinghouses New Zealand (through Te Are Ture), the United Kingdom (through LawWorks), Ireland (through PILA), Hong Kong (through PILnet and Equal Justice), Germany (through UPJ) and the Philippines (through the Bar Association). A number of other organisations are also in the process of adopting the platform. The platform has been used in a wide range of ways by the different organisations including:

- To broker referrals of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with law firms in the United Kingdom.
- To support inter-clinic referrals in the United Kingdom.
- To match undocumented migrants in Ireland with pro bono assistance through the PILA Regularisation Scheme.
- To support the matching of Ukrainian refugees in Germany with legal assistance, at scale.
- To support the creation of a clearinghouse in New Zealand, where the system has been in use since the inception of New Zealand's first clearinghouse.



SUPPORTING FIRMS TO MANAGE THEIR PRO BONO PRACTICES

Around the world, clearinghouses work to match people and organisations experiencing legal need with lawyers wanting to contribute for free. Many law firms also directly manage requests for assistance from individuals and organisations.

After the successful rollout and adoption of the Pro Bono Portal at a range of clearinghouses, some law firms requested that we consider a separate set of features that would assist them in coordinating pro bono work across their firms and across multiple jurisdictions.

Firms identified that the commercially driven systems used at their firms were not configured to manage pro bono work and track the impact of pro bono contributions.

Justice Connect partnered with two key member law firms, and designed a new Portal add-on, named the Firm Manager. Our aims were to develop a product that would support firms to do more pro bono and communicate more clearly about pro bono. We aimed to develop the product in a way that was modular and flexible so that it could be configured for different needs and approached.

Drawing on Justice Connect's expertise in human-centred design, we've worked closely with the firms to gather their input on workflows, features, and practical considerations regarding firm processes.

After launching the module with the two original firms, we then piloted expanding the product's distribution, with a further three firms committing to purchase the module. This process has confirmed our hypotheses: there is an unmet need at firms that Justice Connect is able to meet through our new product, and our product has been developed in a way that enables us to configure the product to suit different types of pro bono practices.

We will be running evaluation of the platform in late FY23 to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the platform is having on the firms that have adopted it, focusing on understanding if the platform is supporting more pro bono contributions and better insight into the impact of pro bono work.





PROVIDING LEGAL ADVICE ONLINE WITH JUSTICE CONNECT ANSWERS

Justice Connect Answers is an online legal clinic adapted from the Find Legal Answers platform that enables people to have their legal questions answered by a lawyer online.

This project closely aligns with our strategic pillars of achieving our purpose in the most financially sustainable way and scaling up our services with a focus on digital strategies. Enabling people to submit legal questions online removes systemic barriers, including but not limited to geographic remoteness, cost of legal services, and access to legal services. People can register to ask their questions about legal issues including:

- Housing and homelessness
- Financial issues
- Work and employment law for employees (for employees only)
- Personal rights and safety
- Reviewing government decisions
- Guardianship.

Once the question has been posted, lawyers from our member firms provide tailored and specific legal advice directly via the platform. Pro bono lawyers benefit from being able to provide legal advice in their own time and in areas of law with which they have expertise. Between July and December 2021, 177 individuals received tailored advice to 183 questions. The responses came from four member firms, who contributed 287 hours of pro bono time at an estimated value of \$114,434.





While the sample size of survey responses from clients is relatively small, survey results are promising, with an average rating of 3.9/5 (n=8) given by those surveyed. One person commented:



I appreciate the details, manner and sequence you have presented your message to me. I have found your message easy to read and understand. It has also given me a bit (well, more than a bit) of relief knowing that I have rights and can use them.

— Justice Connect Answers user

Similarly, responses from firms were positive with key reflections focusing on:

- The benefits of providing advice in a bite-sized way, at any time and in a format that suits the lawyer.
- The reduction of barriers to pro bono work and enabling early-career lawyers to gain pro bono experience.
- The ability for lawyers to choose which questions to respond to based on subject matter expertise and specialty areas.
- The platform being accessible, user-friendly, and providing diverse opportunities to assist.

Justice Connect is looking to scale this service and already has expressions of interest from other member firms wanting to deliver pro bono assistance post-pilot in a sustainable and effective way.





INTERVENING EARLY THROUGH HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIPS

Older people can often face complex legal problems, including various forms of elder abuse, without realising that their challenges could be resolved with the help of a lawyer. In many cases, older people also can't afford the legal help they need.

We provide legal help to older people, with a specialist focus on addressing the abuse of older people. Through health justice partnerships (HJPs), our lawyers are embedded within hospitals and community-based health services in Sydney and Melbourne.

HJPs create critical pathways for older people to get legal help in times of crisis. Through training, we empower healthcare workers to identify legal risks early and connect patients with us to provide the right legal help before problems escalate.



[Justice Connect] helped me to draft a document to revoke the appointment of an attorney who was abusing me and put a new attorney in place. They had been grooming me to abuse me. This was the result that I needed. I didn't expect it, and it came at just the right time.

— Client feedback

Due to the nature of our HJPs, tailored to our older clients' needs and settings, services were significantly impacted by COVID-19. We had responded to the pandemic by adapting our services to be largely delivered remotely (via phone or online) until February 2022, when our lawyers gradually returned on-site to our health partners.

Despite these challenges, we continued to deliver tailored training on a range of topics. In FY22, we ran 72 educational events for health care professionals (with 1,073 attendees) and 32 events for older people at risk of or experiencing elder abuse (with 485 attendees). This represents a 5% increase (+5) in training events and a 29% increase (+347) in attendees compared to FY21.



Amongst healthcare professionals surveyed, 88% (n=114) said they had a better understanding of elder abuse, and 87% (n=123) said they felt more confident to refer older people to get legal help after the training.



[The training] helped me understand more about elder abuse in general, as well as learn more about [Justice Connect] and the processes involved at the hospital when there were concerns about elder abuse/ legal matters.

— NSW health staff member

104

total educational events run

1,558

total attendees at our education events

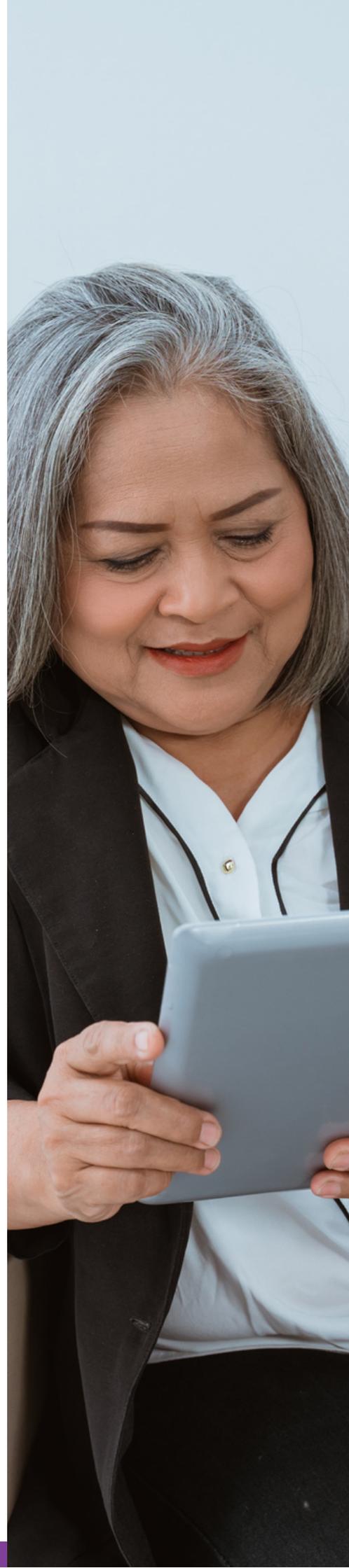
We also delivered 790 secondary consults through health justice partnerships, an increase of 3% (+23) compared to last financial year. Secondary consults are conversations between a healthcare worker and a lawyer to:

- Help the healthcare worker identify whether an older patient or client is experiencing a legal problem.
- Provide legal information to the healthcare worker that can guide their next steps or be passed on to a patient or client.

This collaborative work makes our services and guidance available to a broad range of healthcare workers. Over time, this gives healthcare workers the ability and confidence to identify legal issues associated with elder abuse and make referrals to help services early.

To further empower healthcare workers to identify elder abuse early, this year, we also developed an Elder Abuse Screening Tool. An adaptation of the National Aging Research Institute's (NARI) screening tool (the Australian Elder Abuse Screening Instrument (AuSI)), the tool was co-designed with older people, nurses, doctors, social workers, and NARI researchers.

The screening tool is anticipated to build awareness of elder abuse, increase capacity to identify elder abuse, and encourage referrals to support services. The tool also has the capacity to expand to other teams and hospitals, ultimately contributing to a better understanding and identification of elder abuse across Australia.





CLIENT STORY: JOHN

Everyone deserves to live free from abuse. John* didn't know he had a legal problem, but our lawyers were in the right place to provide assistance when he needed it most.

When John* moved interstate to be with his son, Bill*, he thought it would be a fresh start. Having separated from his wife several years ago, John was excited to spend time closer to his grandchildren. As his health was also starting to decline, John hoped Bill would be able to support him with his health decisions and money.

Shortly after moving, however, John and Bill's relationship changed. Bill requested that John's Age Pension be paid directly to him as rental payment. John was hesitant to do so but felt pressured by his son and eventually transferred the payments over to him.



Bill is an alcoholic and began drinking heavily again shortly after John's move. One evening, while intoxicated, Bill physically assaulted John. While Bill had been verbally abusive towards John in the past, he had never imagined his son capable of physically harming him. Fearing for his safety and wanting to be in familiar spaces again, John fled back to his home state where he was admitted into hospital.

Scared, isolated and overcome with emotion, John disclosed what had happened to a social worker at the hospital. The social worker knew that an Apprehended Violence Order might help to keep John safe in future and referred him to our lawyers for advice about the process. Our lawyers quickly realised that John's safety could be further safeguarded through creating a Power of Attorney and Enduring Guardian Appointment. As John had never heard of these before, our lawyer explained to him that they were important documents, which would enable someone he trusts to make decisions on his behalf.

Deciding that he trusted his daughter to make decisions in his best interests, with the support of our lawyers, John drafted the documents appointing her as his guardian and attorney. Our lawyers also supported John to rewrite his will, removing Bill as executor and appointing his daughter instead.

Once the documents were in place, John could rest easy knowing his finances were protected from his son, and that his daughter would be able to make decisions on his behalf, if he was not able to. John also felt reassured that his personal possessions would be distributed according to his wishes when he passed.

After leaving hospital, John was assisted by his daughter in moving to an aged care facility, close to his family, where he now lives free from the psychological, financial, and physical abuse perpetrated by his son.

John expressed gratitude to our lawyers for helping him to regain control over his decisions and wellbeing, and for helping him learn about the importance of appointing trusted people through legal documents.



** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*

CHAPTER 3:

IMPROVED INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING



When people experience a legal problem, it can affect their wellbeing in a myriad of ways. Feeling overwhelmed, confused, and alone in legal systems can exacerbate or cause mental health and physical health issues.

One of the biggest barriers to people accessing justice are the costs involved, which can place financial burdens on many, including those in the "[missing majority](#)" (people who can't afford a lawyer or access free public or community legal assistance). Access to justice has also been shown to have a dramatic impact on people's housing stability, personal safety, and relationships.

At Justice Connect, our interventions are measured on their ability to resolve or prevent legal problems and their impact on personal wellbeing in these key areas.

In this chapter, you'll find examples of this impact focus through:

- [Assisting renters to better understand their rights with Dear Landlord](#) (page 39)
- [Preventing homelessness for women and their children](#) (page 42)
- [Making it easier for older people to plan for their future](#) (page 46)
- [Empowering people to represent themselves in court](#) (page 48)



ASSISTING RENTERS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR RIGHTS WITH DEAR LANDLORD



People who fall behind on their rent, or facing eviction, are often unaware of their legal rights and can feel overwhelmed. That's why we designed Dear Landlord; to support renters through the process with accessible information and practical steps.

Building on more than 20 years of expertise in tenancy, housing, and homelessness, [Dear Landlord](#) scales our reach and helps renters in Victoria resolve their rent concerns.

The current version of Dear Landlord is an online self-guided tool that can help renters write a letter to their rental provider requesting a payment plan, prepare for VCAT hearings, understand the eviction process in plain language, and get guidance on where to seek further financial and legal support.

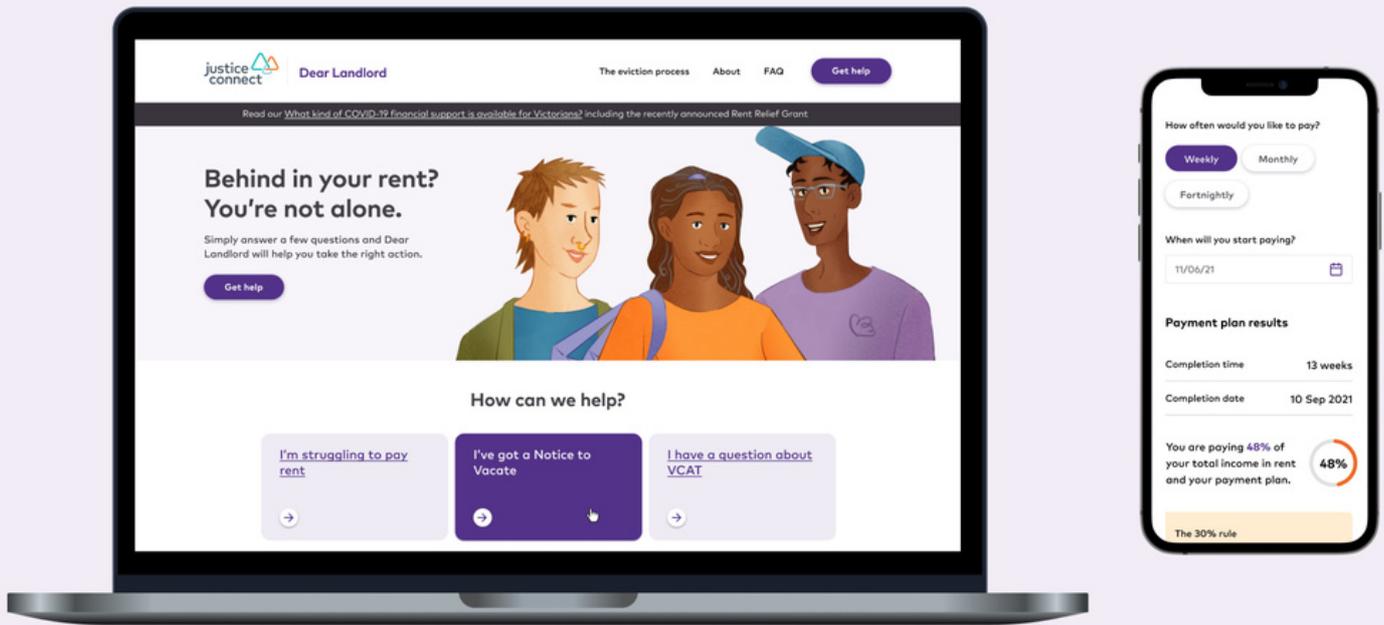
Throughout FY22, Dear Landlord has been expanding its reach, with 44,976 total users of the tool since launching in 2020 (24,044 users in FY22). This highlights the trend of people utilising online tools when searching for legal advice and information, particularly during COVID-19. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of our coordinated digital consumer outreach strategy (see page 13).



Dear Landlord helped me create a payment plan that my landlord was able to agree with, and we are extremely happy with the outcome. We have stuck to the payment plan and haven't missed a payment since.

— Dear Landlord user

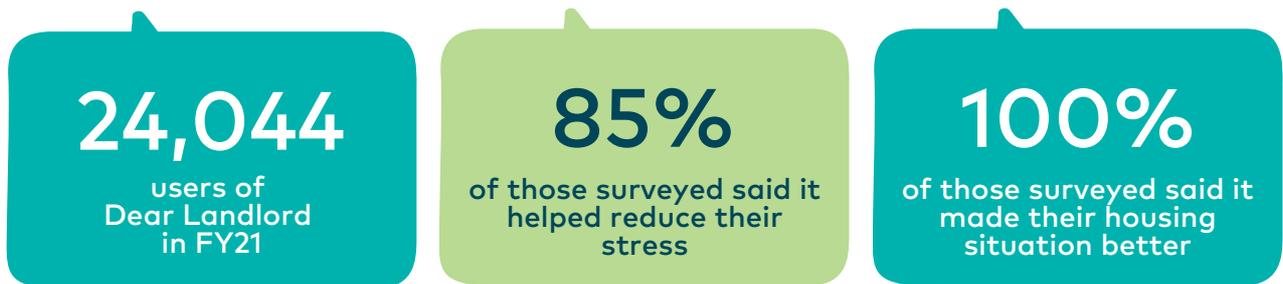




User feedback from Dear Landlord has shown that online tools can provide access to legal support quickly, easily, and effectively. Amongst those surveyed, 85% (n=13) said Dear Landlord helped them to take action to improve their situation, reduced their stress levels, and ultimately helped them to get a good outcome.

Along with short-term outcomes, we're conducting ongoing research to better understand the long-term impact for people using Dear Landlord (between three to six months after they have used the tool). While data is limited, the early findings are promising: 100% (n=4) said Dear Landlord helped resolve their rent concerns and made their housing situation better.

In October 2021, Dear Landlord's innovative and human-centred design approach was recognised with a Good Design Award, receiving Best in Class in Social Impact.



Great integration of all aspects, from the identification of an area of opportunity / need the iterative approach to design that allowed for testing and refinement with the target user, but doing all of this with an eye for what makes the delivery of the work scalable and more cost effective at the same time. This strong human-centred design approach has resulted in a smart, accessible solution that meets renters' needs.

— The Good Design Awards jury





CLIENT STORY: HAYLEY

Our wrap-around intensive support, coupling legal and social work, enabled Hayley* to avoid homelessness and regain custody of her child.

Hayley* has a long-term history of experiencing family violence, homelessness, substance dependence issues, and chronic mental health conditions. When Hayley engaged with Justice Connect, she was on the brink of eviction back into homelessness after a reduction in her COVID-19 Centrelink Jobseeker income. Hayley was also facing multiple minor criminal charges directly connected to her mental health decline brought on by the pandemic outbreak.

Our specialised lawyers advised Hayley about her rights and options and connected her with our integrated social worker. When the social worker began intensively helping Hayley, her child had been removed from her care by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), and her key priority was family reunification. She also mentioned her struggle to engage with services, so the nominated social worker supported Hayley for over 12 months by case-coordinating with her mental health, alcohol and other drugs (AOD), and family supports. This provided Hayley with a trusted and clear voice and ensured her continued progress. The social worker also secured vital material aid for Hayley so that she could prioritise spending her limited resources on rent.

Our lawyers and social worker collaborated closely throughout Hayley's legal matters; this included the social worker providing key supporting evidence about Hayley's complex circumstances and reporting on recent positive development through increased engagement with services. This wrap-around advocacy included ongoing negotiations with Hayley's residential rental provider and representation at multiple VCAT and Magistrates' Court hearings. Due to our multi-disciplinary interventions, Hayley received a 14-month adjourned undertaking without conviction for her criminal matters, avoided eviction, and obtained both a COVID-19 rental reduction and an order for essential repairs at her property.

Through our extensive, tailored supports and the positive outcomes achieved by our criminal and tenancy lawyers, Hayley has now also regained full custody of her child, with the resolution of her legal matters ensuring that they will have a secure home together.

** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*





PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS FOR WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

The majority of people accessing homelessness services in Victoria identify as women, and family violence continues to be a primary driver of homelessness¹.

Our Women's Homelessness Prevention Project (WHPP) is dedicated to keeping women and children in safe housing. Women experiencing domestic and family violence are ten times as vulnerable to legal problems as the rest of the population². These legal issues include housing and tenancy, debts, family law, and victim of crime issues. With family violence a key factor leading to women entering homelessness, our WHPP provides integrated legal and social work supports to break the connection between homelessness, family violence, and financial hardship.

153

women and children received wrap-around support in FY22

100%

success rate³ in matters resolved

51

women and children prevented from being evicted into homelessness

In the period after the residential tenancies law in Victoria ceased to offer protection under the COVID-19 'eviction moratorium', our team faced practical challenges assisting clients at risk of homelessness. These were compounded by the growing issue of declining rental availability and affordability. In March 2022, Anglicare completed their annual Rental Affordability Snapshot, reviewing 18,934 properties advertised for rent across Victoria. Of the properties advertised, less than 0.1% were affordable for a single parent receiving Parenting Payments or a single person receiving a Disability Support Pension. There were no properties in Victoria which were affordable for a single parent receiving Jobseeker payments. Reduced protection against eviction and a lack of affordable housing means the women we help continue to need more intensive, integrated supports for longer periods.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020-21](#), AIHW, Australian Government, 2022.

2. Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales (LJFNSW), [Women experiencing domestic and family violence face a myriad of legal problems](#) [media release], LJFNSW, 3 June 2019, accessed 14 October 2022.

3. We consider a matter successful when either homelessness has been prevented or a debt or fine has been resolved.





Throughout FY22, our social workers provided 263 referrals to other support services, including to WHPP partners and family violence supports. These figures represent only the new referrals. Our in-house social worker services have also been involved in working closely with existing service providers to support re-engagement and coordination for past clients. In FY22, our social workers made 150 referrals to financial brokerage, demonstrating the increased financial pressures caused by COVID-19.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with 90% (n=41) of clients rating the quality of the service as either "excellent" or "good" and 98% (n=41) saying they better understood their legal options as a result of the assistance.

This year, we also welcomed this high-impact work being featured in the [Australian Pro Bono Centre's 20 years of pro bono celebrations](#).

“

I can't express how much I appreciate the support, knowing I'm not alone in this.

— WHPP client feedback

“

It has been an absolute pleasure working with you over the past three years. I have found your tremendous commitment to [your] clients really inspiring — and it has certainly made my life much easier acting as the file lawyer.

— WHPP pro bono lawyer feedback



CLIENT STORY: NATASHA

Protecting women and their children from abuse, and advocating for safe and affordable housing, meant we could help Natasha* and her children escape family violence and find a happy home.

Natasha* is a single parent with three young children, who is a family violence victim-survivor with diagnosed depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and physical health issues. Natasha's ex-partner perpetrated extensive family violence against her, and he had been incarcerated. In this context, Natasha was not receiving child support payments and was struggling to budget on a Centrelink single-parenting payment.

When Natasha first spoke with Justice Connect during COVID-19, she had just signed a new 12-month lease for her private rental property. Soon after, Natasha found out that her ex-partner

had been released from prison. Natasha and her children were unsafe at the property, and she wanted to terminate their tenancy as soon as possible.

Our lawyers advised Natasha about her legal rights and options. We worked closely with Natasha's intensive support team, focusing on her and her children's safety by helping them to obtain refuge accommodation. The lawyers substantively negotiated with Natasha's rental provider, which led to the early termination of her lease without any lease break or other costs.

Our social worker also successfully advocated with the rental provider to resolve local council issues involving the property so Natasha's safety was not placed at further risk by having to return. We also sourced other funding towards a rubbish skip service, which significantly reduced the burden on Natasha when she was vacating the property.

At the same time, Natasha also felt the impacts of Victoria's rental crisis in her regional community, having made over fifty unsuccessful rental applications since she entered refuge accommodation. Our social worker directly advocated with a potential rental provider, which led to Natasha and her children obtaining an affordable private rental property. As part of this, we provided brokerage to cover her rent in advance, which was vital given Natasha's financial hardship.

Thanks to our wrap-around legal and social work assistance, Natasha and her children avoided homelessness during COVID-19 and moved into a safe new property. This critical stability ensures that Natasha can prioritise the wellbeing of herself and her young family, having recently enrolled her children in a new school. She expressed being "so thankful... I haven't seen the children this happy... thank you so much."



** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*



MAKING IT EASIER FOR OLDER PEOPLE TO PLAN FOR THEIR FUTURE

One in six older Australians has experienced elder abuse¹, including psychological, physical, financial, sexual abuse and neglect.

There are plans and legal documents people can put in place to protect their wishes as they age. From our work with older people, we know that planning for the future (such as creating Powers of Attorney and Enduring Guardianships) can help prevent elder abuse. Planning for older age can be hard, but it is an important and empowering process.

A key part of Justice Connect's strategy is developing self-help resources and education to complement our intensive services to address elder abuse. As such, following extensive research and a literature review spanning 15 years, we embarked on a co-design process consisting of five workshops with a diverse cohort of older people and ten one-to-one interviews.

From this, we produced three comprehensive and plain language Conversation Guides to facilitate discussions about older people's wishes and decisions. One guide was for the Vietnamese community, another for the LGBTQIA+ community, and the last guide was a general guide for any older person. We tested the guides with 85 members of the target audience across Victoria and New South Wales. Of the 17 people who responded to our surveys:

94%

said they better understood future planning and were more likely to plan for their future, after using our Conversation Guide

88%

said they know more about where to get help to plan for their future, after using our Conversation Guide



[The resources guide] you and makes the process understandable. It also made me think about a few more 'what ifs'.

Participant feedback

1. Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), [National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Summary report](#), AIFS, Australian Government, 2021.



Another way we provided impact this financial year was by developing an Easy English guide to understanding Powers of Attorney.

Collaborative research between Justice Connect and our member law firm, Norton Rose Fulbright, revealed a lack of resources for culturally and linguistically diverse older women. Easy English guides were identified as a crucial resource for these women. These guides were also identified as being of use to assist older women with declining cognition, lower English literacy, or intellectual impairment.

Additionally, it was noted that these guides could be easily printed by service providers supporting people who have limited or no digital engagement.

Justice Connect engaged with Easy Read experts, Information Access Group, to help us produce the new guide to best serve the community.

We also worked with Ethnic Community Services Cooperative to coordinate and facilitate a multicultural focus group of older women with limited English proficiency to test and provide feedback on the effectiveness of an early draft.

Key results so far include:

- Members of the Sydney & East Sydney Elder Abuse Collaborative (including three local councils and a range of other organisations that support older people) are promoting the resource via digital displays at libraries and other council facilities, at neighbourhood houses, and service provider reception areas; and on community transport. It was noted that trips on community transport are similar to hospital stays in that they provide windows of opportunity away from a perpetrator when an older person can seek information or help.
- Waverley Council and Ethnic Community Services Co-operative have provided funding to translate our Easy Read Guide into Russian, the most prevalent language spoken at home by older people in the Waverley Local Government Area.



It's a fantastic resource, and I encourage you to use this to better inform anyone about the role of Powers of Attorney.

— New South Wales Ageing and Disability Commission



EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO REPRESENT THEMSELVES IN COURT



Representing yourself in court is daunting, and a little legal help can go a long way.

We provide legal help to self-represented litigants across matters in NSW, ACT, Victoria, and Tasmania, to navigate and effectively engage in the court process, to understand and advocate for their rights, and to improve their chance at a fair outcome.

We connect people with information and legal assistance through self-help resources and one-hour appointments with lawyers. At these appointments, lawyers provide people with task-orientated assistance in preparation for court.

This year, our one-to-one appointments assisted 158 people, 71% of whom were first-time users of any of Justice Connect's services. Through these one-hour appointments, our staff and volunteers provided 119 legal information services and 222 legal assistance services. In complex matters, we offered more intensive legal assistance, referring 31 matters on for free legal help from a barrister or pro bono lawyer.

Online, our library of over 30 self-help resources for self-represented litigants received 78,987 unique pageviews. These resources cover a range of topics to help people prepare for self-representation, such as:

- Preparing documents for court
- Preparing for remote court hearings
- Understanding when and how to make appeals
- Processes and information for financial issues like bankruptcy.

Feedback from self-represented clients showcase our ability to help people navigate the legal system, better understand their rights and outline the options available to them to resolve their legal issue quickly. From those surveyed (n=16), 88% said that the service helped them to better understand the law, 75% said they better understood how to deal with their situation, and 81% said that the assistance given helped their matter proceed with fewer problems.

Based on the success of the model and outcomes achieved, a multi-year funding agreement was entered into this year, to continue this important work for self-represented litigants in Victoria.





CLIENT STORY: LAVENDER

Navigating the legal system can be difficult. Our self-representation service helped Lavender* resolve a long-standing property dispute and recover costs.

Lavender* lives by herself and had been saving her whole life to purchase a home. She bought and moved into a suburban Melbourne home about ten years ago. The following year, new neighbours purchased the adjacent property and soon commenced a dispute over a small strip of land on the boundary of their properties. The neighbours argued that the long-established fence on the boundary was several centimetres onto their property and demanded a new fence be built. Rival surveys were commissioned by Lavender and the neighbours that provided differing contentions.

With the dispute persisting many years later, Lavender filed an application with the Registrar of Titles to obtain title by possession of this small strip of land and hopefully conclude the dispute. The neighbours responded by filing an injunction in the County Court but failed to file the required documents. Lavender retained private lawyers at great personal expense to advise her in the matter and file her appearance. The case remained on foot for over one year, with multiple vacated and adjourned administrative mentions caused by the neighbour's failure to file the required documents. Eventually, the case was struck out, and Lavender was left with a large legal bill. She had run out of money to seek advice about obtaining costs and came to Justice Connect seeking assistance.

We provided Lavender with two appointments, the first to assist her in drafting a letter of demand to the neighbours and the second to help seek costs. Lavender successfully obtained a favourable costs order from the Court. The neighbour later applied to challenge this order with the help of their own lawyers. Lavender returned to Justice Connect and we provided her with a third appointment that meant she could defeat the application and retain her cost order.

This was an essential outcome to reimburse Lavender for her significant legal bills in the matter, and she confirmed that she would not have been able to do this without Justice Connect's support.

** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*



CHAPTER 4:

STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS



Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program is a national legal service offering free and affordable legal supports for not-for-profit organisations and social enterprises.

With over 12 years' of experience, and being a charity too, Justice Connect understands the context in which community organisations operate. For some, complying with complex laws can be daunting. For others, it is prohibitively expensive and resource intensive. That's why we provide timely and appropriate legal support — to help community organisations make sense of the law, stay legally compliant, thrive within complexity, and achieve good governance.

By helping not-for-profit organisations become stronger and more effective, we're enabling them to better deliver on their objectives and continue delivering vital services to those that need them. In this chapter, you'll find examples of this impact focus through:

- [Increasing the accessibility of online legal help for not-for-profits](#) (page 51)
- [Delivering customised legal support with online self-help tools](#) (page 54)
- [Improving governance with customised health checks](#) (page 56)



INCREASING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF ONLINE LEGAL HELP FOR NOT-FOR-PROFITS



For over 12 years, we've played a central role in helping not-for-profit organisations across Australia achieve good governance and make sense of the law, as well as advocating for improvements to the regulatory environment on behalf of the community sector.

Over the last two years, this has reached new heights with increasing demand for our services due to significant legal need faced by 600,000 not-for-profit organisations and their volunteers, many of them smaller organisations with limited resources.

Each year, we deliver tailored resources, training, and individualised advice services to reach thousands of organisations and their staff, volunteers, and boards. To make our work accessible to even more not-for-profits, we relaunched our [Not-for-profit Law website](#) in March 2022.

The website houses a library of more than 300 free online legal resources, including fact sheets, guides, templates, and self-help tools, to assist at all stages of a not-for-profit's lifecycle. It also allows people to book interactive webinars, enquire about customised legal training, access tailored legal support services, read news about the latest law and policy updates, and learn about our law reform work.

The strategic redevelopment of our Not-for-Profit's website created clearer pathways to access our legal services, and gave visitors faster access to the resources they need. Championing a user-centred design methodology, we have enhanced the visual design, installed powerful search functionality, rethought how we structure and present our legal resources guided by best practice techniques, and refreshed the structure and navigation of the website.

By working with our diverse target audience, we had the opportunity to understand the legal challenges faced by not-for-profit organisations and the people who work or volunteer within them, as well as test and iterate before launching.



Feedback gathered from website users before the redesign highlighted that it was "a little overwhelming as a newcomer" and "difficult to navigate". Since the redesign, users have said:

- "I can find topics much more easily. It's a cleaner look, too."
- "It is easy to navigate, and the resources are so relevant and informative."
- "Clear, easy to read and to understand."
- "I found exactly what I was looking for straight away."
- "It was good before, but it just seems easier to get to what I'm looking for."

The website redesign, and coordinated relaunch campaign, have also led to an increase in reach, seen through a 106% increase (45,570) in users in the three months after launching, compared to the three months before launch. Organic search traffic has also increased from 24,514 sessions pre-launch to 46,425 sessions post-launch, an increase of 89%.

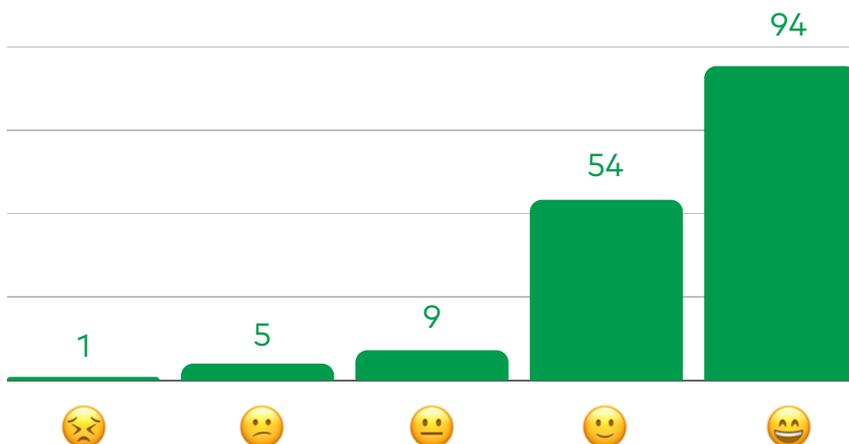
Feedback collected through our annual web user survey has shown that the website's many self-help resources enable people and community organisations to:

- Find information relevant to their legal problem (97% agreed, n=176)
- Better understand the law and how it applies to their organisation (94% agreed, n=176)
- Better understand how to take action (69% agreed, n=174)
- Feel confident to take action (83% agreed, n=173).

Further, from those surveyed who said they were using self-help resources to take action with a current legal problem (rather than as a preventative measure), 42% (n=12) said the resources had helped them to resolve that problem fully, with the remaining 58% saying it had resolved it a little, or for now.

91% (n=46) of those who used self-help resources to prevent a future legal problem said they felt their problem would be prevented. Of those, 59% indicated it was fully prevented, and 32% indicated it was prevented for now.

Responses to the question, overall how helpful have you found our online resources?





CLIENT STORY: MYND INITIATIVE INC

We helped MYND Initiative navigate several complex legal matters so they could focus their attention on addressing systemic mental health issues.

MYND Initiative Inc is a mental health promotion charity that created to respond to this systemic issue, by addressing mental health barriers at the grassroots level. The organisation was founded by two individuals who saw various cultural and social barriers evident in their own communities that prevented a genuine understanding of mental health issues. MYND Initiative Inc is a New South Wales incorporated association that is charity-registered and eligible for deductible gift recipient status.

In the first six months of 2021, MYND Initiative Inc sought legal advice from Justice Connect concerning a series of important legal issues central to MYND Initiative Inc's programs and operations, including copyright, record-keeping, confidentiality, and privacy.

Fortunately, we had the breadth of subject-matter expertise to appropriately support MYND Initiative Inc with these queries. It was supported through a number of free legal resources, specialist in-house legal advice, as well as multiple pro bono referrals to our member law firms.

“

Justice Connect has given me a better understanding of the legal system in Australia, as well as wonderful specific legal advice pertaining to the matters raised. They are extremely prompt about referrals and providing legal advice, which has guided some of the decisions we have made as an organisation to date.

— Hsui Yang Wong
Chief Operations Officer, MYND Initiative Inc



DELIVERING CUSTOMISED LEGAL SUPPORT WITH ONLINE SELF-HELP TOOLS



Establishing and running a not-for-profit organisation can be overwhelming.

There are many legal requirements that need to be understood by the people running the organisation, when they are often resource constrained and focused on the impact they are trying to have in their community.

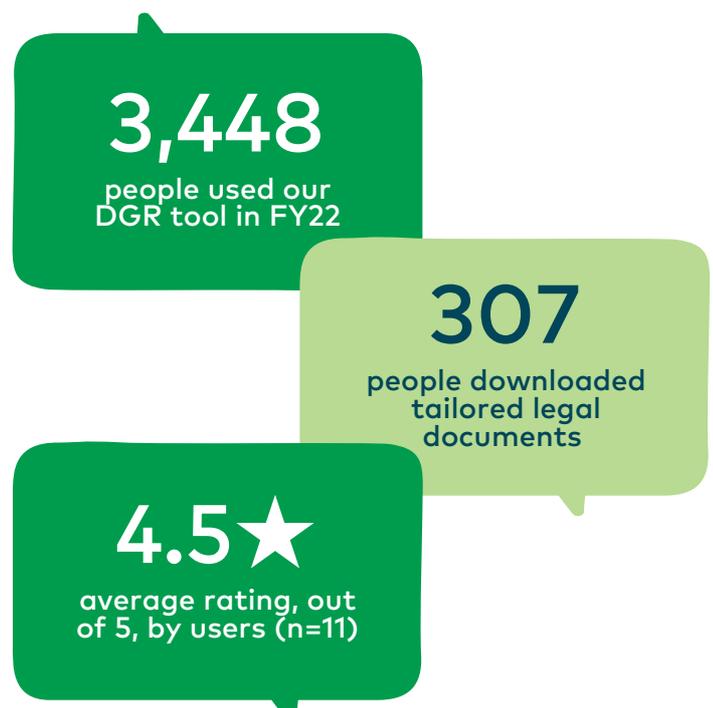
Essential things like setting up a constitution (a rule book for running an organisation) or understanding whether you're eligible for deductible gift recipient (DGR) status can be confusing and time consuming. For DGR applications, the legal requirements are complex, the tax laws are complicated, and the language is old-fashioned and daunting. When drafting a constitution, often, the model constitution doesn't fit an organisation's unique needs. But drafting constitutions that are simple, clear, legally compliant, and meet an organisation's needs is no easy feat. Our digital tools help make these processes easier and more accessible for community organisations at scale.

During the last year, Justice Connect launched two new online tools to assist organisations: our DGR Tool and NSW Constitution Tool.

DGR Tool

Launched in July 2021, our DGR tool helps organisations to understand the meaning and benefits of DGR endorsement, whether their organisation meets the eligibility requirements for DGR endorsement, and DGR categories that may be relevant to their organisation.

Taking less than 20 minutes to complete, our online tool asks all the questions a lawyer would – in simple, plain English – then generates a tailored, downloadable report that summarises the information given.





NSW Constitution Tool

Launched in September 2021, our NSW Constitution tool educates organisations on specific required or recommended clauses, how adding clauses can promote good governance, and provides guidance on including clauses for organisations eligible for tax exemptions or concessions.

Taking about 20 minutes to complete, the tool asks a series of questions about how an organisation would like to operate — in simple, plain English — then generates a downloadable, customised constitution that they can edit or vote to adopt.

3,448

people used our
NSW Constitution
tool in FY22

160

people downloaded
tailored legal
documents

3.9★

average rating,
out of 5, by users
(n=14)

“

I am simply amazed at what an awesome experience that just was!

— NSW Constitution Tool user

“

Easy to read and something I think we could trust. There is not much at all these days that you feel you could trust.

— NSW Constitution Tool user

IMPROVING GOVERNANCE WITH CUSTOMISED HEALTH CHECKS



Governance and compliance for not-for-profits can be more complex than for for-profit organisations. Our experience shows that community organisations often struggle to find the time to self-assess how they 'measure up' or even work out where to start.

Our Governance Health Checks help organisations stay on top of their legal and governance obligations so they can focus on delivering more vital services to the community.

Through our Governance Health Checks, our lawyers individually assess an organisation's governance and legal processes and obligations and provide recommendations for any areas of improvement. By providing one-on-one support, our lawyers help organisations manage risk and embed good governance practices, as well as improve their skills and knowledge to identify and deal with legal issues and avoid penalties.

Since launching our New South Wales Governance Health Checks, we have received 243 expressions of interest from community organisations interested in participating. Over the past 12 months, we've delivered Governance Health Checks to 58 organisations.

Feedback from participating organisations has been overwhelmingly positive. Amongst the 35 organisations who gave feedback, 77% rating the Governance Health Check as "excellent", with the remaining 23% rating it as "good".





Further, after the Governance Health Check, organisations agreed that they felt better able to:

- Identify their organisation's legal needs (97%)
- Manage risk (94%)
- Embed good governance practices (91%).

We have also received interest in the Governance Health Check from several sector organisations and peak bodies for their members and stakeholders.

Feedback from organisations who participated in a Governance Health Check has included:



[Justice Connect] gave us excellent guidance and each recommendation has been implemented already and we have already recommended the Governance Health Check to other organisations.



As a new and first-time CEO, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in this Governance Health Check. It gave me a lot of reassurance that we are on the right track while also highlighting areas for improvement and assisting me to prioritise that which is most important.



I found the process was very valuable for our service, it highlighted areas for improvement and explained what action we needed to take. Approachable, friendly and answered all questions clearly. Support was provided following our session. Recommend this process to other organisations.

CHAPTER 5:

BETTER LAWS AND POLICIES



Many legal problems are preventable. Many legal system issues are resolvable. We know that the problems we're helping people resolve through our services will continue to increase if we don't address their root causes.

As such, we focus on preventing legal problems and people's difficult experiences navigating the legal system by addressing the systemic drivers of unmet legal need and improving the legal and justice system.

Through our extensive casework, data, and experience of our subject matter experts, we use insights to drive system-level change. By contributing to better laws and policies, we aim to benefit many based on the lived experiences of those we help.

In this chapter, you'll find examples of this impact focus through:

- [Leveraging our expertise for strategic engagement and advocacy](#) (page 59)
- [Campaigning to #FixFundraising](#) (page 61)
- [Preventing the criminalisation of homelessness through advocacy](#) (page 62)
- [Breaking down barriers through remote witnessing](#) (page 65)



LEVERAGING OUR EXPERTISE FOR STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

Justice Connect has access to an extraordinary depth and breadth of insights into system-level issues through our casework, data, and the professional experience of our subject matter experts.

This financial year, we continued to shape policy with strategic and sustained communications strategies on our key issue areas, including preventing the criminalisation of homelessness, establishing a single national scheme to #FixFundraising, strengthening the legal response to disasters, preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, and introducing safeguards to address and prevent the abuse of older people.

We made 13 submissions to governments, inquiries, commissions, and intergovernmental organisations. Each submission was grounded in rich insights and data from our casework, which allowed us to shine a light on the stories of the people and organisations we help, and the policy solutions we can propose to fix unfair laws.

Our campaign website pages were viewed 10,137 times this year — a decrease of 6% (▼623) since last year.

Our strategic engagement blog posts received 11,486 unique pageviews — an increase of 289% (▲8,531) since last year. This increase is due to increased frequency of publishing our law reform positions, and promoting these posts across our various social media channels to strategically enter the broader public conversation.

Our social media posts about our strategic engagement campaigns were seen 174,582 times, and received 5,109 engagements and 2,058 link clicks. In total, there were 127 posts during the financial year period.

By leveraging the insights, evidence, and expertise gained through our casework, we advocated to increase awareness of system-level issues, reduce the incidence of legal problems, and progress social justice.



Our submissions in FY22



July 2021

Submission to Federal Attorney-General Department's National Register Enduring Powers Of Attorney Consultation

August 2021

Submission to the Treasury on developing a Transparency Code

August 2021

Submission on the Secrecy Provisions in the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012

September 2021

Submission to the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

December 2021

Submission to the Victorian Government's Parliamentary Inquiry on Support for Older Victorians from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

June 2022

Submission to the Federal Treasury on Crypto asset secondary service providers

July 2021

Submission to the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety on sexual harassment in the workplace

August 2021

Submission to the NSW Government on Part 3A of the Charitable Fundraising Act 1991

September 2021

Submission to the Victorian Government's Social Housing Regulatory Review

November 2021

Submission to the United Nations on the decriminalisation of homelessness

January 2022

Submission to the Federal Attorney-General's Department's Privacy Act Review – Discussion Paper

April 2022

Submission to the Federal Treasury on DGR Category for pastoral care services

June 2022

Submission to the Queensland Government's inquiry into the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022



A copy of all our submissions can be found and downloaded via our website: justiceconnect.org.au/about/our-impact/submissions-archive





CAMPAIGNING TO #FIXFUNDRAISING

Currently, Australia's fundraising laws are complex, out of date, and ineffective.

If charities or (in some states) other not-for-profit groups want to raise money online, they need to apply for a fundraising licence in every state. A research report published in [May 2021](#) showed that the majority of the 600 charities and not-for-profit organisations involved in the survey found fundraising registration complex, more than half are being significantly impacted by Australian fundraising law compliance, and 39% are unaware of the regulations that apply to online fundraising.

Our campaign to #FixFundraising has long advocated for charities to be able to focus on the vital services they exist to deliver, like helping communities affected by floods, patrolling our beaches, or delivering life-changing community services, instead of sinking resources into complying with outdated, expensive, and complicated regulations.

Justice Connect is not the only organisation recognising the burden these laws place on the community sector. It's been made clear by the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, earlier Senate Committee and Productivity Commission Reports, and other independent inquiries spanning decades.

The need to #FixFundraising ramped up with COVID-19. Public collections and fundraising events (like fun runs or sausage sizzles) were cancelled, leading to more charities conducting fundraisers online.

Utilising over ten years of learning and advocacy, we've been calling for a single set of rules across the country to help ensure ethical fundraising practice. We call these the [Australian Fundraising Principles \(AFPs\)](#).

In December 2021, we were pleased to welcome the Federal Treasurer's announcement that the Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR) has made charitable fundraising rules reform one of its top ten priorities for 2022. Led by the Commonwealth and Victoria, a proposal for a national framework will be developed for the CFFR's consideration. Once implemented, this could finally fix the current minefield of overlapping and out-of-date regulations.

This year, we've also celebrated wins across Australia, with fundraising registration and reporting now happening in all states and territories via the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

With these changes comes the hope that further change will happen, reducing red tape for our community organisations, and enabling not-for-profit organisations to serve the community in the most sustainable way.





PREVENTING THE CRIMINALISATION OF HOMELESSNESS BY ADVOCATING FOR BETTER LAWS AND POLICIES

Due to living their lives in public places, people experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to interactions with police and enforcement officers and are at a greater risk of being fined or charged.

From running Victoria's specialist free legal service for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and spending 20 years holistically helping people with poverty-related fines and charges, we know that enforcement-based responses to homelessness don't work.

Relying on the justice system to respond to homelessness entrenches disadvantage, compounds housing insecurity, and further burdens an already stretched justice system.

Our recent campaigns on preventing the criminalisation of homelessness include:

- Reducing reliance on the justice system in responding to homelessness.
- Diverting people facing homelessness out of the justice system.
- Closing the revolving door between prisons, the justice system, and homelessness.
- Asking for change: Calling for a more effective response to begging in Victoria.



Timeline of key FY22 moments for our work preventing the criminalisation of homelessness

September 2021

We provided [evidence](#) at the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System. This presented a unique opportunity to ensure that people are diverted from the justice system and to make prison an option of last resort.

July – December 2021

In the last six months of 2021-22, our senior criminal lawyer and integrated social worker provided integrated legal and social work supports to six clients with 22 criminal law charges through the pilot Homeless List in the Victorian Magistrates' Court. This list provides our clients with an opportunity to have their criminal charges heard before a Magistrate with an understanding of homelessness. All clients who attended the pilot also received our specialised assistance for their civil legal needs, such as fines and debts. Through these multi-disciplinary supports, our clients could access therapeutic outcomes, such as improved mental wellbeing, helping them to exit or avoid homelessness in the long term.

November 2021

We provided a [submission](#) in response to the United Nations call for input on the decriminalisation of homelessness and extreme poverty.

November 2021

Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Bill is passed in Victoria. Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Bill 2021 is passed in Victoria. The bill contained two fines reform we advocated for:

1. To reduce COVID-19 fines for individuals experiencing financial hardship and,
2. To expand the special circumstances test for all fines.

March 2022

The Victorian Government tabled the Final Report from Victoria's Inquiry into Criminal Justice, containing 100 recommendations to reduce our current reliance on the justice system to respond to poverty and homelessness. Many of the Inquiry's recommendations, which aim to reduce justice-system interactions and divert people out of the criminal justice system, directly reflected our own evidence and recommendations in our comprehensive submission, including:

- Recognition of the role of integrated legal services in preventing people from entering the criminal justice system.
- Reducing unnecessary police interactions.
- Reviewing the Summary Offences Act to reduce reliance on the justice system.
- Diverting people out of the criminal justice system.
- Reforming the current bail laws.
- Access to housing for people in the criminal justice system.



The Homeless List made me feel more comfortable attending court... There wasn't as much judgement. I felt like the court was working with me, not against me.

- Homeless List client feedback





CLIENT STORY: ISABELLE

Sleeping rough can perpetuate and exacerbate other legal problems. By intervening early, through pilot projects such as our Homeless List in the Victorian Magistrates' Court, we can help people like Isabelle* avoid conviction and continue her recovery with a clean slate.

Isabelle* has spent large parts of her life sleeping rough. She recently received extensive support from Homeless Law's community and health partners, including through the 'From Homelessness to a Home' program during COVID-19.

Through her supports, Isabelle had secured transitional housing, but after her home was broken into multiple times, it was deemed that the accommodation was not secure. Isabelle left and returned to street homelessness.

While sleeping rough, Isabelle was charged with begging and possessing cannabis. Through extensive legal advocacy, as part of the specialised pilot Homeless List in the Victorian Magistrates' Court, our lawyers secured police approval for both charges to be listed for Diversion, meaning that Isabelle was able to avoid a conviction and be diverted out of the criminal justice system to receive the social work supports she needed.

Our social worker also provided vital supports, including material aid, for Isabelle before and after her hearing. The therapeutic outcomes achieved through this innovative model have given Isabelle a clean slate as the COVID-19 recovery phase continues.

** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*





BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS THROUGH REMOTE WITNESSING

Traditionally, the law has required solicitors to be physically present to witness the making or revoking of documents.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted and continues to impact, all facets of society. Older Australians, who rely heavily on community supports, have found themselves at a heightened risk of abuse due to growing pressure on families and increased isolation.

Witnessing documents has been increasingly difficult, if not impossible, during the pandemic as community movement has been limited and restrictions have prevented lawyers from meeting with their clients in person.



When safeguards are in place, digital witnessing of documents is an effective way to prevent elder abuse and increase access to legal advocacy. Increased use of digital platforms to witness documents has provided deep benefits to the community. While originally the need stemmed from preventing elder abuse, we have seen uptake by many cohorts that previously had difficulties commuting and accessing courts or their lawyer's office. Witnessing documents remotely increases equal access to justice for people who live in regional areas or for whom commuting brings about other issues (family commitments, disability, transport or limited financial resources).





CLIENT STORY: JOSEPH

Remote witnessing breaks down barriers in accessing legal help and ensuring appropriate documents are in place. With the support of Justice Connect, Joseph* was able to protect his interests and regain control.

Joseph* is a 75-year-old Aboriginal man who was referred to us by a social worker through one of our health justice partnerships. Joseph had been experiencing financial and psychological abuse by his son, Dan*, who had borrowed money from him over the years and never repaid it. More recently, Dan had sold Joseph's car without his permission.

Joseph's daughter, Zoe*, who lives with Joseph and is his carer, had always been responsible with money and had her father's best interests at heart. After talking with our lawyer, Joseph decided to appoint Zoe, whom he trusts and has the skills and integrity to look after his money and health if he isn't able to do it himself, as his attorney and guardian.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our lawyer could not visit Joseph at his home to execute his legal documents. However, with the help of the social worker who visited Joseph at home, our lawyer was able to witness Joseph sign his legal documents using New South Wales Health's secure videoconferencing platform.

Joseph was relieved to have these documents in place and be assured that his son Dan would not be able to make financial, legal, or health decisions on his behalf. Thanks to our legal intervention and training provided to healthcare workers, Joseph regained his dignity and control of his life.

** All names in this story have been changed to protect their identity.*



CHAPTER 6:

LOOKING TO THE YEAR AHEAD



In putting together our 2022 Impact Report, we undertook a process of reflecting on the year with staff across the organisation.

Together we identified the moments we were proud of, the moments that taught us the most, and what we'd change going into the year ahead. Here is a brief overview of some of the trends that emerged and what we'll be carrying forward into FY23.

Strengthening relationships

Many of the achievements captured in this report would not be possible without the support of our pro bono partners, stakeholders, and funders. And while we're proud of what we've achieved together so far, we know there's room to strengthen our key relationships further. Our staff identified further opportunities to explore, such as more collaboration and transparency, better defining roles and expectations between organisations, better understanding the drivers behind effective collaboration, and leveraging the power of technology to create expanded networks.

Culture changes

Like most organisations, over the past two years, we've realised the strength of what we do isn't defined by where we are or what we have, but the relationships and culture we've created. While we have adopted and adapted to new ways of working, we know that best practice is an endless journey, and we will continue to evolve the way we work in the years ahead. Some areas for growth identified by staff include embedding a "critical friend" approach, ensuring our workplace and policies are attracting and retaining good people, cultivating more spaces and permission for staff to fail and learn, investing in developing good leaders, and creating a safe and meaningful workplace with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.



Closing the loop between learning and doing

This report demonstrates the many and diverse ways we're helping to close the unacceptably large justice gap in Australia. As an organisation that does a lot, and that is constantly adapting to meet changing needs, it can be difficult to remember to stop, reflect, learn, celebrate, and share what we're finding. Our staff identified opportunities to improve how we informally learn from others across the organisation, how we use data (including external sources) more regularly, how we tailor our services to meet client needs, and how we capture and share learnings from past and current projects.

Making space and time for the quiet things

The past few years have been anything but normal, and our teams have gone to extraordinary lengths to meet increased legal need in the community. Our staff reflected on some of the small changes that have had a big impact on their ways of working. Trends identified included making time for incidental or informal relationship building across teams, creating opportunities to reflect on our processes and systems, embedding our values in how we work, being mindful of how we are using our time, and exploring ways of collaborating (for example, through surveys and asynchronous collaboration tools).

Nurturing alignment and meaning at all levels

With the launch of our 2024 strategy, and the development of our measurement, evaluation, and learning frameworks, we've strengthened the way we purposefully move together as a united organisation. Like all new things, it can take time to observe tangible change. Our staff identified the following as opportunities for us to improve on in FY23 and beyond: better illustrating our multi-channel, multi-intensity services in action with impactful client stories, ensuring our planning cycles are resilient to interruptions from external factors, and helping all staff join the dots between their work and our theory of change as well as our 2024 strategy.





THANK YOU

The outcomes and impact captured in this report would not be possible without the expertise, collaboration, dedication and support of many different organisations and individuals. So, we say thank you to our:

- Staff
- Volunteers
- Patrons
- Board
- Members
- Secondees
- Funders
- Partners
- Supporters
- Community.

We recognise your many and varied contributions that make our work possible, and help us to fulfil our purpose of increasing access to legal support and progressing social justice.



For more information about supporting Justice Connect please contact us via:

giving@justiceconnect.org.au
justiceconnect.org.au/donate



For more information about our finances, please refer to our 2022 Annual Report:

justiceconnect.org.au/about/annual-reports



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