



PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 20

Regional community legal services unite to tackle housing crisis

Six regional Victorian community legal services have welcomed \$2.7 million in funding for a new project that will map the unique housing challenges facing regional, rural and remote communities, enhance service co-ordination and advocate for evidence-based investment.

The *Collaborate for Change: Advancing Housing Justice in Regional Victoria* project yesterday received funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's Advancing Housing Justice Change Grant program.

The project brings together ARC Justice, which has community legal centres in Bendigo and Shepparton, Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service, Barwon Community Legal Service, Gippsland Community Legal Service, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service and Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre.

A key feature of the two-year project will be a regional housing summit in 2026, where the place-based legal services, community organisations and decision-makers will come together to share insights, identify solutions and strengthen the push for systemic change in support for regional Victorians who are impacted by the housing crisis.

ARC Justice CEO Damian Stock said the funding recognises that housing pressures in regional Victoria require locally driven solutions.

"Housing stress and homelessness are growing in regional Victoria, but the solutions aren't one-size-fits-all. This funding will allow regional legal and other community services to map the challenges in their communities and work together to push for meaningful change," Stock said.

Each of the six community legal services will have a Housing Collaboration Co-ordinator to drive regional action plans, ensuring housing justice responses reflect the realities of local communities. The project will also fund a Project Lead and an Impact and Evaluation Co-ordinator.

With this funding, the community legal services will work closely with local organisations to develop stronger partnerships and service co-ordination. The project will also build an evidence base that can be used to advocate for better outcomes and funding tailored to regional needs.

Barwon Community Legal Service CEO Bryanna Connell said that by working together, the sector will be able to transform how decision-makers understand the impact of the housing crisis on regional communities and push for long-term solutions.

"This funding is a game-changer. It recognises that the best way to tackle housing injustice in regional Victoria is to listen to the people and organisations on the ground and ensure they have the resources and collaboration needed to drive real change," Connell said.

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About the project

Collaborate for Change: Advancing Housing Justice in Regional Victoria is a two-year project bringing together six regional community legal services to address housing challenges. It will map local issues, strengthen advocacy and host a regional housing summit in 2026. Funding will support dedicated roles to drive community-led solutions and push for better housing policies.

About the project partners

- **ARC Justice** is a rights-based, for-purpose organisation incorporating the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and Housing Justice, a specialist renter support program based in Bendigo, and the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre in Shepparton. www.arcjustice.org.au



- **Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service** is a for-purpose organisation with offices in Ballarat and Horsham that provides free legal services, community legal education, law reform and integrated services. www.bgcls.org.au
- **Barwon Community Legal Service** provides free legal information, advice and casework to the Greater Geelong, Bellarine Peninsula, Surf Coast and Colac Otway communities. www.barwoncommunitylegal.org.au
- **Gippsland Community Legal Service** is a Morwell-based Community Legal Centre and service of Anglicare Victoria. It also has lawyers based in Bairnsdale and Wonthaggi. www.gcls.org.au
- **Hume Riverina Community Legal Service** is a service of Upper Murray Family Care and offers free legal advice to people in North-East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales. www.hrcls.org.au
- **Mallee Family Care Community Legal Centre** is a place-based, integrated practice serving communities in the Mallee region. It provides services in Mildura Swan Hill, Kerang and Robinvale. www.mfclegalcentre.com.au

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