

REPORT TO

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY OF ALBURY WODONGA 2025



Photo: Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service 20th Anniversary



Albury Wodonga
Aboriginal Health Service



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



Bunmabunmarra (to show, help and assist) by Dan Bundadhaany Clegg (comissioned in 2018)

We acknowledge the traditional custodians and Elders past and present, who have raised children, taught them about the world around them and gave them the gift of culture and language. We recognise our part in bringing fairness to our Indigenous brothers and sisters and creating a community where all children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can 'grow up strong'.

We acknowledge:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first owners of this land. Their cultures and human rights suffered after colonisation.
- The important connection to the land that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel and how it flows with deep respect through their distinct cultures, languages, customs, arts and laws, as part of Australia's heritage and identity.
- The right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, to fair participation in the community and just access to resources and services.
- The positive and unique contributions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that have been made to Australia and its communities.
- The role our service will play in reconciliation and commitment to engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We support diversity and inclusivity and welcome all people to our service, regardless of race, religion, gender or sexuality.

Artist Story: Bunmabunmarra

This painting demonstrates the often complex pathways to knowledge and direction through Elders and Snr Law Men/Women based on Wiradhuri learning models. It tells of a journey for knowledge in law (and lore), social instruction and cultural conduct.

It shows individuals and groups across varying degrees of initiation and ceremony connecting with Elders and Snr Law Men/Women along the river. This is where much learning and ceremony took place and are special areas for cultural continuity. Rivers were also sometimes described as 'highways' - along these flowing waters, knowledge could travel and journey across Country to be shared. A river has also been used here to indicate that support services offered by the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service are available on both sides of the river in NSW and Victoria.

Seeking out higher level Elders with the right knowledge was vital to expanding one's own knowledge and finding direction through a sometimes complex system of living and social/spiritual interaction. It allowed personal and family growth while providing the means by which one could navigate unknown or even hostile environments.

This story has also drawn on Buugang, the Bogong Moth, to embody the coming together of people and the setting aside of differences. In traditional times, many people from different first nations would gather at a large site by the big river (Murray) in the local area. All conflicts were put aside and business was conducted peacefully including resolution of outstanding political issues. The men and male initiates would travel to the high country to feast on the buugang before returning to their own homelands.

The colours used in the creating of this painting are based on the Wiradhuri custom and representative of the different levels of knowledge and initiation (with white indicating Snr Law Men/Women). Blue has been used for the bila (river) but also to complete the concept of coming together in reconciliation through the use of both the Aboriginal and Australian flag colours.



ABOUT OUR HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP



Photo (left to right): Anthony Nguyen, Dr. Liz Curran, and Gabby Maginness.

WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE DO?

We are the Bagaraybang Bagaraybang Mayinygalang (BBM) Health Justice Partnership. Our team includes a senior lawyer and a community engagement coordinator from the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS), working side-by-side with staff at the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS). Together, we support the local Aboriginal community by providing free legal help that strengthens social and emotional wellbeing.

BBM helps people with a range of everyday legal issues, including fines, housing problems, family violence, debts and money troubles, consumer issues, Centrelink, victims of crime, credit and debt, discrimination, police complaints, and other civil law concerns. Our aim is to help people understand their rights, feel confident to speak up, and make informed choices about their lives.



A big part of our work is being present in community. We attend cultural events, run workshops and information sessions, and work closely with trusted health staff so legal support fits naturally alongside health and wellbeing care. We also deliver training for AWHS staff and other service providers to help them recognise when someone may have a legal issue and how to support them safely.

Most importantly, we take the time to build trust. We listen, explain things in clear and simple language, and never judge people for their situation. We create a safe, culturally respectful space where people feel comfortable sharing their stories, asking questions, and getting the support they need in a way that feels right for them. We also work with community and partner organisations to speak out about unfair laws and systems, and to amplify Aboriginal voices.

“THEIR PRESENCE HERE IS INCREDIBLY TRANSFORMATIVE FOR EVERYONE AT EVERY LEVEL... IT’S SO SEAMLESS. IT’S MAKING SUCH A DIFFERENCE TO OUR CLIENTS’ LIVES.”

- INTERVIEW WITH HEALTH STAFF

“THEY CALL IN, KEEP IT SIMPLE AND TELL US IN BLACK AND WHITE... THEY DON’T OVER COMPLICATE IT LIKE OTHER LAWYERS DO.”

- YARNING CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Our goal is to provide free legal advice and assistance to those who need it most, especially people facing mental health challenges. By working together, we ensure that everyone can get the help they need in a safe and supportive environment.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Workshops & Community Legal Education — Sharing Knowledge in Safe Spaces

In 2024-25, we ran several workshops to help community members and support workers learn more about the law. One focused on family violence intervention orders (IVOs) and was delivered in partnership with Invisible Hurdles. We held sessions at Burrinja Cultural Centre and NESAY in Wangaratta, inviting staff from AWAHS, VACCA, NESAY, and Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre. The workshops helped people understand how IVOs work and how to support clients through the process.



Photo (left to right): Taylor Smith-Stephens and Gabby Maginness.

A second education session was a part of our Wills Day, we were guest speakers at AWAHS Healthy Ageing workshop focused on end-of-life planning. This session was designed especially for older Aboriginal community members and was delivered in a yarning circle where we shared stories, answered questions, and had open conversations. This approach helped people feel safe, respected, and confident to ask about things they didn't understand.

“THIS HELPS ME HELP THE CLIENT. IT HELPS CLIENTS BECOME MORE SELF-EMPOWERED TO KNOW WHAT TO DO. IT'S BRILLIANT.”

- INTERVIEW WITH HEALTH STAFF

Our Partners



Birth Certificate Day — Helping People Access What They Need

In November 2023, we held our first Birth Certificate Day at AWAHS and helped 32 people apply for 69 certificates for free. In December 2024, we held our second Birth Certificate Day, this time at the Burrinja Cultural Centre. We helped 33 people apply for 57 certificates, including some for children and others that needed full birth registration.

These documents are important because they help people access healthcare, education, Centrelink, and jobs. We have worked closely with AWAHS, the First Peoples Outreach Team at Births Deaths & Marriages Victoria, CLSD Program, Legal Aid NSW, and the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages.

First Nations Cadetship — Supporting Future Community Lawyers

In July 2025, we proudly hosted our first university student through the CLCNSW First Nations Cadetship Program. During their placement, they gained hands-on experience in community legal work, learned about culturally safe practice, and saw how legal services can support Aboriginal communities in meaningful ways.

Hosting a cadet was important because it was a key recommendation from Dr Liz Curran in earlier evaluation reports. BBM is committed to creating strong pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students interested in social justice, and we hope to keep offering these opportunities so more First Nations people can join the community legal sector and help shape the future of justice in our region.

“STORIES SPREAD LIKE A VIRUS THROUGH COMMUNITY ABOUT HOW THE LEGAL TEAM HAS HELPED. AND THEN OTHERS WILL SEEK HELP.”

- INTERVIEW WITH HEALTH STAFF

Wills Day — Planning for the Future, Together

In August 2023 we held our first Wills Day at AWAHS to support Aboriginal community members with preparing their Wills. In May 2024 we ran our second event and added Power of Attorney and Enduring Guardianship documents. Our most recent Wills Day was in May 2025, this time including Advance Care Directives thanks to support from Murray PHN and the AWAHS Chronic Disease team.

Over the three years, we have helped **47 people** prepare **67 end-of-life planning documents**, all at no cost thanks to our generous partners. Wills Day gives people a safe and respectful space to talk about their wishes and plan for the future in a way that feels comfortable and culturally safe.

Our Partners



HarrisLieberman
solicitors

PogsonCroninKerr
SOLICITORS & NOTARY

NLG
Nevin Lenne Gross
LAWYERS

Kell Moore
LAWYERS & CONVEYANCERS



HOW DO WE KNOW BBM WORKS?

We know BBM is making a difference because we listen to community and check our work in many different ways. In April 2025, Dr Liz Curran visited Albury Wodonga and spent time on Country, having a yarn with Aboriginal community members, health workers, legal staff, and managers from HRCLS and AWHS. These yarning circles created a safe space for people to share what's working well, what has changed, and what still needs attention. Their voices continue to guide how we understand the impact of BBM.

Dr Curran has now written a report based on three years of feedback, staff reflections, and data. She looked at what community told us through the yarning circles and compared it with other information—such as referral patterns, secondary consultations, client numbers, and the types of legal issues people bring. We also use client journey maps to see how early legal help reduces stress, improves wellbeing, and prevents problems from getting worse. Other tools include staff reflective journals, workshop surveys, and our Community Engagement Report.

Together, these tools give us a clear picture of how BBM is working. When we see the same patterns appearing—like increased trust, more people coming for help, and better outcomes for clients—it shows this approach is making a real difference. All parts of the evaluation followed strict ethics processes and honoured Aboriginal data sovereignty, ensuring community voices were respected and information was handled with care and used in ways that benefit community now and into the future.

“WHAT IS REPORTED BACK TO US IS THAT THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY FEEL THAT THEY ARE BEING TREATED LIKE A HUMAN BEING, WHICH, IS NOT THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH PRIVATE LAWYERS.”

- INTERVIEW WITH MANAGER

EVALUATION TOOLS



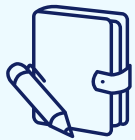
Program data

We collect data on referrals in and out, type of legal work, legal problem types, secondary consultations and partnership activities.



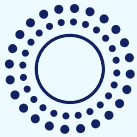
Surveys

Surveys are conducted before and after both Community Legal Education and Professional Development.



Reflective Journals

Reflecting on breakthroughs as well as barriers, designed to shape our practice as well as our project.



Yarning Circles

Community dialogue around a case study which is facilitated by Dr Liz Curran.



Interviews with Health Staff

Individual interviews with a range of staff from AWAHS.



Interviews with BBM Staff

Individual interviews with program staff and management from HRCLS and AWAHS.



Reflective Conversations

Joint reflective practice conversations guided by Dr Liz Curran with management from both HRCLS and AWAHS.

SNAPSHOT 2024-25

MORE THAN **TWO THIRDS** OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE EVALUATION IDENTIFIED AS **ABORIGINAL**



(24 OUT OF 34 PARTICIPANTS)

IN THE **12 MONTHS** LEADING UP TO THE EVALUATION, OUR TEAM COMPLETED

118

LEGAL ADVICES

50

TASKS

30

FILES

OF THE **111** PEOPLE THAT WE ASSISTED



CLIENTS PRESENTED WITH AN AVERAGE OF

3.2 PROBLEMS

TOP 10 PROBLEM TYPES

VICTIMS OF CRIME 65

FAMILY LAW 56

HOUSING 38

CREDIT & DEBT 37

OTHER CIVIL 35

FAMILY VIOLENCE 27

GOV'T COMPLAINT 27

CHILD SUPPORT 18

FINES 17

CONSUMER 17



WE RAN 2
COMMUNITY EVENTS
AND ASSISTED
CLIENTS WITH

23

END-OF-LIFE DOCUMENTS

57

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

WE RESPONDED TO

91

QUESTIONS FROM STAFF
(**SECONDARY CONSULTATIONS**)

COMMUNITY
LEGAL **EDUCATION**
SESSIONS

5

\$446,831
FINANCIAL RELIEF
ACHIEVED FOR
COMMUNITY
SINCE **JULY 2024**

\$351,308
COMPENSATION AWARDED
\$95,523
FINES & DEBT WAIVED

FINDINGS

FROM DR LIZ CURRANS REPORT



People know more about their rights



Mob are getting help earlier



Trust leads to honest conversations



Working together makes a difference



BBM is working



Photo (left to right): Gabby Maginness, Deanne Stewart, Corrine Maxwell, Patricia Cerminara, and Jessica Kellahan.



RECOMMENDATIONS

FROM DR LIZ CURRANS REPORT



BBM Should Be Expanded

Community said there is a strong need for BBM to grow so it can offer more help in areas like family law, criminal law, child protection, and mental health tribunals. Expanding the program would make sure people can get this support in person and in community, early and without added stress.



Protecting Stolen Generations Reparations

Community raised concerns about Stolen Generations reparations being taken by debt collectors. Protecting these payments is important so they can support healing and serve their true purpose.



Starting Legal Knowledge Early

People said young people need more chances to learn about the law in schools and health settings. Understanding rights early builds confidence and helps young people make safer, better decisions.



Better Legal Support for Community

Community and staff want legal services across the system to be trauma-informed, respectful, and culturally safe. This includes ongoing work with private lawyers, courts, and services so Aboriginal people feel heard and treated with dignity.



Reaching Those Who Miss Out

Not everyone can come into AWAHS or attend events, so outreach remains important. Going to people who are isolated, unwell, or unsafe helps reduce harm and improves access to support.



Speaking Up for Fairer Systems

Community and staff want to keep advocating together for fairer laws and systems. By speaking up, BBM and AWAHS can help amplify Aboriginal voices and work toward better outcomes for everyone.

THANK YOU



Dr Liz Curran,
Associate Professor,
Nottingham Law School.

In conclusion, a BIG THANK YOU to all the Aboriginal community participants and staff. You have always made me feel so welcome, answered my questions when I was uncertain what to do, and been such good wise counsel. Thank you so much for sharing your stories and I hope and pray I have honoured your voices and perspectives. I hope this report will improve outcomes in the lives of the community and others will learn from its findings help us do better to improve social justice outcomes. As always, I am in awe of Aboriginal communities. You know too well what needs improving and it is time that you were listened to and heard. I hope the Final Report goes some way towards this.

Dr Liz Curran Nottingham Law School
24 October 2025



Craig Taylor,
Chair,
AWAHS Board.

This work reflects the strength, knowledge and lived experience of our Aboriginal community across the border region, and the commitment of our partners to walk alongside us in a way that is respectful, accountable and culturally grounded...

Across the three years of this study, our community members, Elders and staff have shared openly about trauma, structural barriers, and the everyday pressures that impact health and wellbeing. Their wisdom is the foundation of this report. This is data sovereignty in practice, and it is community control in action...

AWAHS is proud of what has been achieved through BBM, but even more proud of the courage shown by the community members who participated in this study. Their stories and guidance have shaped this report, and must continue shaping the path ahead...

On behalf of the AWAHS Board, I thank all who contributed to this study and to the BBM program. Most importantly, I acknowledge our Elders—past, present and emerging—whose leadership, resilience and cultural authority continue to guide this partnership and our service.

Thank you to those who participated in this research for enabling us to do this study and to learn about ways in which Aboriginal people can be better supported.

Many people don't understand the sorts of problems that might have a legal solution or that lawyers can help by providing other options that might not be known.

The learning from this study, including your participation and views, is shaping how the legal service will operate to ensure that you are able to know about, access, and ensure your human rights in a place of cultural safety.



Photo (left to right): Anthony Nguyen, Gabby Maginness, and Debi Fisher.

If you would like to read Dr Curran's more detailed report, please visit the website of Hume Riverina Community Legal Service at <https://www.hrcls.org.au/hrcls-publications/>

For more information, please feel free to contact:
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**Nottingham
Law School**
Nottingham Trent University

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We are a service of  Upper Murray Family Care

