Impact Report 2026



hume riverina community legal service

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service acknowledges 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'.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first owners of this land and we recognise their right to self-determination and justice. We are committed to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this journey.

This Impact Report has been developed on the lands of Aboriginal peoples across North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales.

Diversity and inclusivity

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

Acknowledgement of funders

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service acknowledges funding from the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Legal Aid, and the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program. We are also funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice through the Community Legal Centres Program administered by Legal Aid NSW.



Breaking down barriers to justice

Every day, we see the difference that timely legal assistance can make in the lives of people facing some of the most complex challenges in our region.

Helping women and children escape family violence, resolving fines and consumer issues, supporting young people to stay connected to education and opportunity, providing Aboriginal community members with culturally safe support, responding to disaster recovery needs, and advocating for fairer laws and systems – access to justice changes lives.

This year, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) helped almost 1,000 people across North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales, to address more than 3,100 legal problems. More than three-quarters experienced multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, highlighting both the complexity of need in our communities and the value of an integrated service model that reaches people facing the greatest barriers to justice.

Behind every number is a person seeking safety, stability, dignity and the opportunity to move forward. As a program of Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC), HRCLS is part of a broader commitment to strengthening individuals, families and communities. Through strong partnerships across the health, family violence, Aboriginal community-controlled, housing and education sectors, we work alongside people to achieve better outcomes and build stronger communities.

This approach is strengthened by UMFC's organisation-wide implementation of the Sanctuary Model, supporting trauma-informed, reflective and responsive practice.

We are particularly proud of the partnerships highlighted throughout this report. Programs such as Bagaraybang bagaraybang mayinygalang (BBM), BRAVE and HALO demonstrate the power of delivering legal assistance in trusted community settings where people feel safe, respected and understood.

While we celebrate the impact achieved together, unmet legal need remains significant. Last year, we were unable to provide legal assistance to more than 1,300 people who sought our help, because we were at capacity or their legal issues fell outside our current practice areas.

We thank our staff, volunteers, partners, pro bono supporters, funders and community members whose commitment makes this work possible. Together, we are reducing barriers to justice and helping more people access the support they need.



Tom Mulvaney
Chief Executive Officer
Upper Murray Family Care



Sarah Rodgers
Director
Hume Riverina Community Legal Service

Who we are

HRCLS is a place-based community legal centre providing legal assistance for more than 25 years, to those who are most in need.

Our service supports the rural and regional communities of 17 local government areas across North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales – an area spanning 8.2 million hectares, which is larger than the state of Tasmania.

We partner with health, community, and family violence services to ensure people facing disadvantage can access our services where they feel safe and receive coordinated, holistic responses that address their legal and non-legal needs together.

We support, contribute to, and drive advocacy on local, state and national issues impacting the communities we serve. Our whole-of-organisation approach seeks to address barriers to accessing justice and contribute to systemic change that supports greater fairness in the legal system.

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) is a service of Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC). UMFC is a locally owned, independent and authentically place-based organisation supporting children, young people, individuals and families across North East Victoria and Southern NSW.

cls@umfc.com.au
www.hrcls.org.au



Legal clinic locations

1. Wodonga
2. Albury
3. Wangaratta
4. Myrtleford
5. Tallangatta
6. Mount Beauty
7. Corryong
8. Deniliquin
9. Corowa
10. Finley

Our values

We share and uphold these values



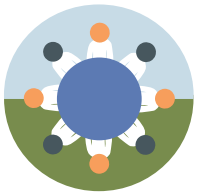
Unwavering integrity



Passionate optimism



Considered empathy



Brave collaboration



Determined advocacy









Our year at a glance

Justice in action

2,513 people helped:

1,999 legal services delivered:

3,143 legal problems addressed:

2,780 referrals to other services due to:

- capacity
- out-of-scope
- conflict of interest
- catchment

993 received legal services

892 legal advices

487 duty lawyer services

3.17 per person (up from 3.06 FY25)

1520 received referrals

349 legal tasks

271 casework services

Helping people experiencing barriers to justice

92% of clients faced 2 or more known barriers to accessing justice:

90% financially disadvantaged

77% affected by family violence (or at risk)

48% sole parents

34% experiencing poor mental health

23% homeless (or at risk)

16% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

12% aged over 65 years

11% aged under 25 years

"My recent interactions with HRCLS have been amazing. Without them I wouldn't have had the legal knowledge or understanding to make informed decisions regarding the safety and wellbeing of my children." — FY26 client survey

Making a difference for our clients

Our FY26 client survey shows the difference HRCLS makes for clients:

100% better understand their rights and responsibilities

100% better understand how to deal with their legal problem

100% know where to get help for legal problems in the future

90% can more easily recognise legal issues

Our programs

Partnering to deliver integrated support

- **Bagaraybang bagaraybang mayinygalang (BBM): Empowering and Alleviating** – a partnership with Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS)
- **Building Rights, Advocacy, Voice and Empowerment (BRAVE)** – a partnership with UMFC Strengthening Families and Centre Against Violence (CAV)
- **Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach (HALO)** – a partnership with Gateway Health
- **Integrated family violence partnership with Women's Centre for Health and Wellbeing**
- **Integrated family violence partnership with Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service**
- **Overcoming the Invisible Hurdles to Justice for Young People Program (Invisible Hurdles)** – a partnership with Flexible Learning Centre, Northeast Support and Action for Youth and AWAHS

Strengthening regional access to justice

- Outreach program
- Duty lawyer services (legal representation to victim survivors in family violence matters at the Magistrates' Court of Victoria)
- Disaster Recovery Program
- Collaborate for Change: Advancing Housing Justice in Regional Victoria
- Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program



Building legal capability, multiplying impact

We build legal capability in our community so people can understand their rights, make informed decisions and feel better equipped to protect themselves and their families in the future.

We do this through direct client support and through legal education. Building legal capability puts greater power in people's hands and makes justice easier to access.

We build our partners' legal capabilities and confidence through close collaboration, consultation, knowledge-sharing and tailored training.

This strengthens their ability to understand the complexity of their clients' circumstances, spot legal issues early, share accurate legal information and make timely legal referrals – helping more people access justice.

138 community members attended

11 legal education sessions

374 partner staff trained

33 training sessions delivered

"I didn't know debt was a legal issue and didn't think help was available."
— Client (FY26 survey)

Topics include: Legal Health Checks, Renters' Rights, Scams, Property in marriage and defacto relationships.

Letter of thanks from Gateway Health CEO to HRCLS HALO program lawyer:

"We have greatly appreciated your collaborative approach, your generosity in sharing your expertise, and your genuine commitment to building the capability of our staff. The strong relationships you have fostered across Gateway Health have helped embed HALO as a trusted and effective part of our service system."

Integrated partnerships

We partner and co-locate with a range of health, community, family violence and education organisations in our community, working together to meet people's interconnected needs.

As a program of UMFC, HRCLS is uniquely placed to understand the interconnected issues affecting people's lives and design coordinated responses. Through outposts at UMFC service centres and undertaking joint outreach with other UMFC services, our lawyers work alongside financial counsellors, child, family and family violence practitioners, mediation services and more.

This integrated approach ensures holistic and person-centred care is provided by the right experts at the right time, without clients having to retell their stories.

Integrated partnerships enable transformative changes in people's lives – stability and safety for family violence victim survivors, recovery and resilience in disaster affected communities, agency and improved mental health for young people. These are but a few of the outcomes we see when we work together, connecting people to multiple supports in one familiar place.







Bagaraybang bagaraybang mayinygalang

Empowering and Alleviating

Bagaraybang bagaraybang mayinygalang (BBM) is a Health Justice Partnership (HJP) co-designed by Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) and Hume Riverina Community Legal Service that aims to improve justice and social determinants of health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing.

An HRCLS lawyer and engagement worker are embedded in AWAHS, working onsite and in close collaboration with AWAHS staff giving people timely access to trauma-informed, responsive legal assistance that is integrated with support for mental health and other cultural/social needs.

Addressing legal issues is part of healing

In FY25, through the BBM HJP, HRCLS provided:

158 tailored legal services:

82 legal advices

39 legal tasks

37 casework services

to **91** clients

"The BBM Health Justice Partnership stands as a different way forward—one shaped with community and accountable to community. It centres culture, relationships, trust and truth-telling. It shows what becomes possible when services meet our people where they are, listen deeply, and work in our spaces and at our pace." — Craig Taylor, Chair AWAHS, BBM Final Report (2026)

"Finding out about those robbers in payday lending. We didn't know about it… Getting in there early with risks of loans and debt prevents poverty spiralling. It is closing the gap. Legal literacy and health literacy they're both connected."
— Community member, BBM Final Report (2026)

"Many Aboriginal people experience trauma, multi-generational distress and have significant social and economic difficulty, as well as feeling that their voice is not heard. In addition, systems and solutions are often alien to their lived experience or not designed to incorporate their diverse situations. This can trigger or exacerbate poor mental health." — BBM First Report (2023)

AWAHS frontline staff observed changes in clients

Frontline staff reported these changes:

100%
saw clients develop a
greater sense of hope

90%
saw improvement in their
clients' stress, anxiety, resilience, confidence and legal knowledge and skills



Jayden's story

Jayden (not his real name) is a young Aboriginal man living with complex disabilities, literacy challenges and longstanding housing instability.

Throughout his life he has experienced both personal and systemic barriers to justice and safety, including discrimination, social isolation and violent assaults. Jayden was facing multiple legal issues, including debt that arose when a former partner encouraged him to take out loans that were beyond his means.

HRCLS worked closely with staff from partner and local organisations to provide Jayden with coordinated support that reflected his goals and priorities and addressed the interconnected issues he was facing. Together the services advocated for stable housing, tackled problem debt and supported Jayden to make a victims of crime claim.

Through Jayden's ongoing engagement, and HRCLS's advocacy, more than $7,000 in debt was waived and he received $5,000 in Victims of Crime compensation.

Integrated legal assistance and strong community partnerships helped Jayden address immediate financial pressures and make progress towards greater stability and wellbeing.

Voice and safety for women and children experiencing family violence

Building Rights, Advocacy, Voice and Empowerment (BRAVE)

BRAVE brings together HRCLS, Centre Against Violence (CAV) and UMFC Strengthening Families to provide coordinated support for women and children experiencing or at risk of family violence.

By embedding legal assistance in services clients already access, BRAVE reduces barriers to legal help and supports earlier identification of legal issues.

CAV and UMFC connect clients with an HRCLS lawyer for help across a range of legal issues, including family violence intervention orders, family law, tenancy and debt. Together, legal and family violence practitioners provide responsive support that addresses both legal and non-legal needs.

BRAVE supports clients to better understand their legal rights and options, navigate court processes, and make informed decisions about their future. Clients report feeling heard, validated and supported during what is often a highly stressful and challenging time.

226
legal services

121
clients supported

"Your support has made me feel like I am not alone and that I have someone on my side." — BRAVE client





Regional women and children are almost twice as likely to experience family violence as those in metropolitan Melbourne[1] and they face significant barriers to getting help – distance, limited local services, financial disadvantage and housing insecurity.

Emily's story

Concerned about her child's behaviour, Emily (not her real name) sought help from UMFC Strengthening Families program.

Ongoing engagement enabled practitioners to identify family violence and provide education, support and validation, that helped Emily recognise and make sense of her experiences. Separation was discussed, but ongoing abuse and controlling behaviour by her partner had led Emily to fear that separating would mean losing her family home and contact with her children.

UMFC practitioners referred Emily to HRCLS for legal information and advice about parenting arrangements, property settlement and family violence intervention orders. HRCLS supported Emily to understand her options, including staying safely in her family home if that was her preference.

Through BRAVE, family services and legal services provided coordinated support that helped Emily better understand her rights, increase her safety, and make informed decisions for herself and her children.

"Dear Kristi, Thank you for taking the time to listen to me about the abuse I have experienced. It has meant a great deal to feel heard and to have my experiences acknowledged and validated in a way that helped me feel understood. I am also very grateful for the way you have guided me through all of my questions about the court process. You have consistently explained things clearly and patiently, which has helped keep my mind at ease during what has been a very stressful and overwhelming time. Most importantly, you have made me feel like someone will genuinely fight for me. It has been a long time since I felt that level of support and reassurance, and it has made a real difference in how I have been able to cope day to day... Thank you again for everything you have done."

BRAVE multiplies the reach and impact of HRCLS's legal expertise. Shared learning opportunities are a key feature of BRAVE – social learning sessions, secondary consultations and working collaboratively. These build practitioners' confidence in identifying legal issues and strengthen referral pathways, enabling better informed and coordinated support to women and children experiencing family violence.

9 training sessions to:

25 partnership practitioners

68 secondary consultations

"[I'll] be able to support families at an earlier point in their separation and make referrals sooner."
— BRAVE learning session feedback

1 ABC News, 4 December 2024

Fairer laws and systems for our regional community

Helping clients and collaborating with local organisations, we see the impacts of complex and systemic issues on people's lives – reduced safety, intergenerational disadvantage, and financial hardship, to name a few – and gain insights that shape solutions.

We advocate both independently and alongside other organisations, for fairer laws and systems for regional and cross-border communities.

Key actions toward change:

23
research initiatives contributed to ...

17
advocacy alliances participated in ...

7
campaigns supported or led ...

6
written submissions to decision makers



FY26 highlights:

- In a submission developed in consultation with key partners, HRCLS drew government attention to the distinct housing pressures experienced in rural and regional areas. HRCLS was cited twice in the Senate Select Committee on Intergenerational Housing Inequity's final report (pp. 58 and 90).
- HRCLS's Civil Law Practice identified patterns of exploitative sales and finance practices involving local car dealers, solar providers and credit providers, and lodged complaints with regulators. This contributed to investigations, compensation and reports (e.g. Lifting the bonnet: ASIC's review of car loans), and helped spotlight practices later subject to ASIC enforcement and the Federal Court's responsible lending decision.
- In a joint submission with CAV and UMFC, HRCLS's principal lawyer shared her expertise in Federal Parliament, giving evidence to an inquiry into the links between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide (8 April 2026).

Supporting a more equal future

HRCLS are poised to do more. Together with our partners and supporters, we have the potential to transform how people in rural and regional communities experience justice.

In FY26, we were unable to provide legal assistance to more than half the people who sought our help. That's 1,313 people who knew they needed legal help, knew how to find us, but missed out because we had reached capacity or because their legal issues fell outside the scope of our service.

Growing our proven programs and developing further, innovative new approaches, would enable us to reach people who don't yet know our support is available, while helping more of those who turn to us for assistance.

Together with our partners, allies and supporters, we can create a future where access to justice is within everyone's reach, regardless of where they live or the barriers they face.

Help us place justice within everyone's reach.







Stronger together

The impact of our place-based service depends on strong partnerships and the ongoing commitment of our supporters. We extend our thanks and deep appreciation to:

Our stakeholders & partnerships

Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service
Centre Against Violence
Corryong Health
Flexible Learning Centre
FoodShare
Gateway Health
Intereach
Mt Beauty Neighbourhood House
Northeast Support and Action for Youth
Tallangatta Health Service
Vinnies
Women's Centre for Health and Wellbeing
Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services

Our pro bono partners

Clayton Utz
Adaptbl
Maddocks
Justice Connect
Berrill & Watson
Hall & Wilcox

Peak bodies

Community Legal Centres Australia
Community Legal Centres NSW
Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria



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hrcls.org.au
cls@umfc.com.au