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## **Funding boost to legal assistance services will support vulnerable Victorians: Jesuit Social Services**

The Victorian Government's \$17.5 million funding boost to frontline legal assistance services including Victoria Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal legal services will ensure that vulnerable Victorians will have access to vital services during the COVID-19 pandemic, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We welcome the Victorian Government's announcement of additional funding to frontline legal assistant services which support vulnerable people with pressing issues that affect their everyday living, including family violence, employment and housing-related matters," says Jesuit Social Services' Acting CEO Sally Parnell.

"Community legal services ensure that vulnerable people are protected by the law and supported to improve their situation. Ultimately, this work prevents people from cycling through the criminal justice system and helps them to flourish and become productive members of society."

Funding announced by the Victorian Government will also support legal services to upgrade technology so that people can receive legal assistance remotely and digitally at a time where face-to-face contact is limited.

"The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has serious implications, both directly and indirectly, for many of the marginalised members of the community we have worked with for 43 years at Jesuit Social Services. This includes people with mental illness and substance abuse problems, people who experience and perpetrate violence and people who do not have safe and secure housing," says Ms Parnell.

"Sadly, many of these problems are likely to be exacerbated by the extremely challenging circumstances being faced at the moment. It is clear that the work being performed by community legal centres every single day is as important now, if not more so, as it has ever been."

Jesuit Social Services also welcomes the \$575,000 funding boost for Justice Connect, WEstJustice and Refugee Legal to deliver projects that support groups including women and children who experience homelessness, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

"These groups of people may experience significant and complex legal challenges that require the type of effectively and timely support offered by the community legal sector," says Ms Parnell.

"We are pleased to see the Victorian Government provide additional funding to ensure vulnerable Victorians have access to crucial legal services during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can support them to flourish on the other side of this situation."

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