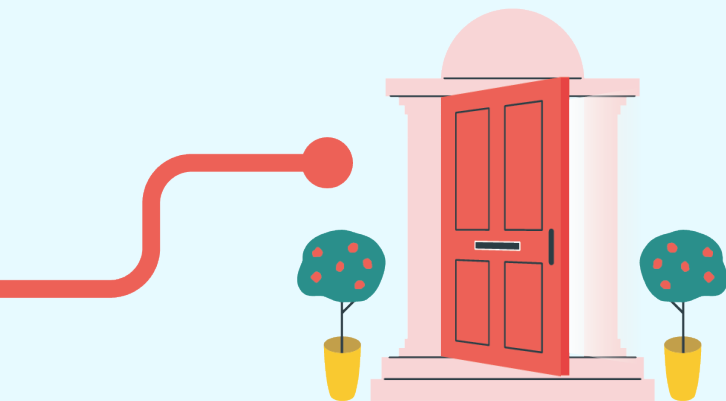
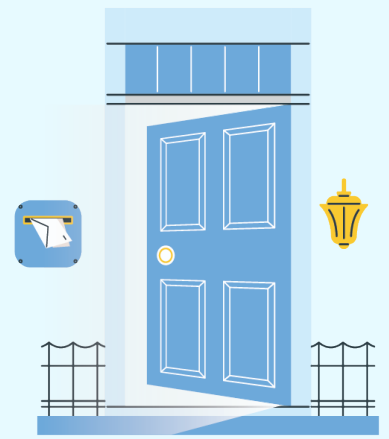
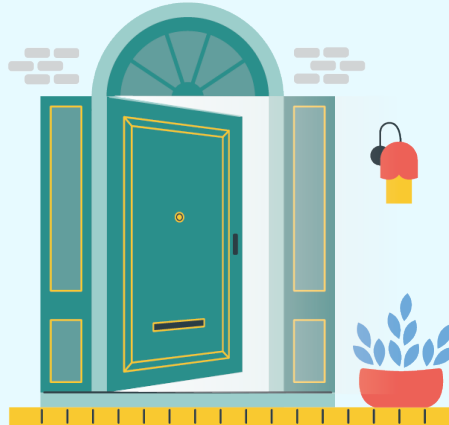


**International
Access to Justice
Forum 2026**
Evidence and Action



Forum guide

Presented by

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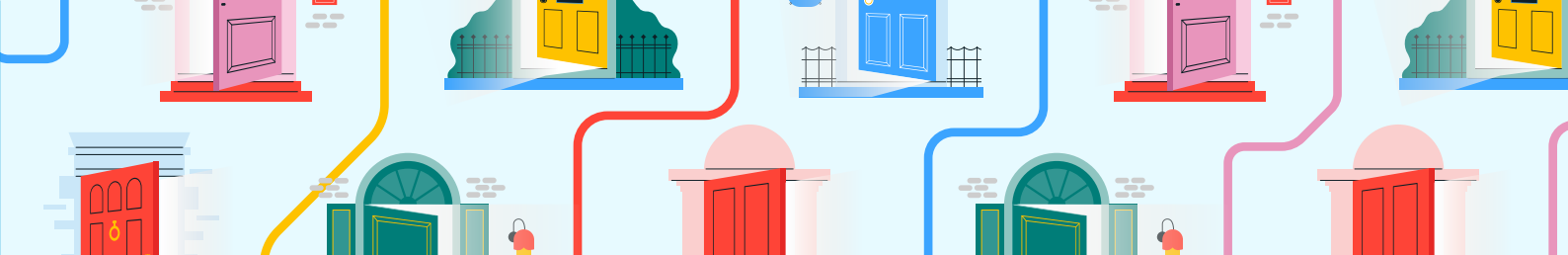


We are proud to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognise their abiding connection to this land, waterways, and community, acknowledging the lands were never ceded.

The venue we meet on today is on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. It is our privilege to pay respects to their Elders, and to all the generations of Wurundjeri people who have nurtured this land for over 50,000 years and continue to do so today.

We believe that acknowledging the past is an essential step in building a better, more equitable future. We recognise the impact of colonisation, its legacy of injustice, and the marginalisation of the Wurundjeri and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As the 2026 International Access to Justice Forum welcomes participants from across Australia and around the world, we also recognise the diverse First Nations and Indigenous Peoples represented among our global community. We honour the deep knowledge, cultural strength, and enduring contribution that First Peoples uphold in their homelands everywhere.



Messages from our Directors



Dr Rebekah Farrell
Executive Director,
Victoria Law Foundation

Welcome to Melbourne/Naarm for the 2026 International Access to Justice Forum.

For nearly 60 years, Victoria Law Foundation has worked to support better justice for the people of Victoria. Over that time, we have become a trusted partner across the justice ecosystem, listening carefully, identifying and responding to need, and focusing on work that is practical, useful and capable of making a meaningful difference.

In partnership with Monash University's Faculty of Law, we are proud to bring this commitment to an international audience as joint hosts of the International Access to Justice Forum.

Across our work, we see a clear pattern: people want evidence they can use and insights that improve service design, strengthen capability and deliver outcomes that matter. We also know that many of the challenges we face are shared across borders. No one has all the answers, but everyone has something valuable to contribute.

This Forum brings those contributions together. It is a space to ask big questions, examine global trends, share learning openly and connect rigorous research with practical experience. At its heart is a commitment to learning from one another and using that knowledge to strengthen Access to Justice.

Over the coming days, I encourage you to share your experience generously, challenge assumptions and build connections that continue beyond the Forum.

On behalf of Victoria Law Foundation, thank you for joining us. I hope the discussions ahead lead to practical ideas, enduring partnerships and meaningful progress towards justice that is more accessible for all.



**Professor
Steven Vaughan**
Executive Dean,
Monash University
Faculty of Law

Welcome to the 2026 International Access to Justice Forum.

Universities have an important responsibility to help build justice systems that are fair, transparent and responsive to the communities they serve.

Our partnership with Victoria Law Foundation reflects Monash Law's belief that rigorous research should inform practice and lead to meaningful outcomes. The challenges facing justice systems are complex and shared; lasting progress depends on researchers, practitioners, policymakers and communities working together.

This Forum creates a valuable space to exchange evidence, test new ideas and learn from diverse experiences across jurisdictions. By bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers and others working across justice systems, it provides an opportunity to turn knowledge into practical action and advance Access to Justice in real and measurable ways.

On behalf of Monash University's Faculty of Law, I warmly welcome you to Melbourne/Naarm. I encourage you to make the most of the conversations, connections and shared learning ahead, and I look forward to the contribution this Forum will make to stronger and more accessible justice systems.

Forum streams

All presentations are organised into seven key streams, each exploring a different aspect of the overarching theme of Evidence and Action.

Evidence foundations	Research practice, measuring access to justice and what works: population surveys, evaluation, ethical research in justice settings and how evidence is translated into action.
How services work	Effective and responsive legal assistance models and design: integrated, multidisciplinary and trauma-informed practice and governance, service design, clinics, intake, referral and navigation and community legal education.
Justice where people live	Community-embedded justice approaches: place-based models, community mediation and restorative practice, Indigenous justice systems, justice navigators and intermediaries, grassroots legal empowerment and rural, regional and remote justice.
Human rights and lived experience voices	Access to justice and system failure: rights-based and restorative approaches, lived experience research and practice, discrimination, gender, disability, racism, young people and prisoners.
Everyday justice	Frontline responses to the legal problems of daily life: housing and renting, work, health and disability, climate disasters, and dealings with government schemes and services.
Courts, tribunals and dispute resolution	Justice institutions and reform: redesigning courts and tribunals, better dispute resolution, regulation, self-represented parties, service ecosystems, safeguards in mediation and the coronial jurisdiction.
Digital justice and AI	The promise and responsibility of digital tools and AI: effective and ethical design, regulation and the speed of change, technology and access to justice, changing institutions and the legal profession

Agenda

Day 1 | Wednesday 28 October

This guide reflects the Forum agenda at the time of printing. For the most up-to-date agenda, please refer to the schedule in the Forum app.

8:45 AM	Welcome to Country			
9:00 AM	Forum welcome and Opening address			
9:45 AM	Plenary 1 and 2: Indigenous Law: not just equity of access, but equity of justice			
11:00 AM	MORNING TEA			
11:20AM	SESSION 1A AUDITORIUM Community justice workers: from systems evidence to community practice –From intake to impact: a case study of social justice navigators in practice –Rural access to justice and community justice work	SESSION 1B AMPHITHEATRE Automating resolution: AI in self-help and dispute resolution –From evidence to architecture: AI-enhanced self-help and the eviction default crisis –AI in Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution –Making sure we're not making it worse	SESSION 1C ROOM 8.03 Access to justice in a changing climate –Access to justice in a changing climate: building adaptive capacity through systemic reform –Beyond emergency relief: access to justice after flooding in the Northern Territory –“Where do we go now?” Renters’ experiences of housing precarity and climate disaster	SESSION 1D ROOM 8.41 Beyond settlement: designing dispute resolution that works for people –Legally Assisted Family Dispute Resolution: a community sector partnership model –Reframing access to justice: embedding appropriate dispute resolution through VCAT’s new Appropriate Dispute Resolution Division –Second thoughts? Evaluating the access to justice impact of a mediation cooling-off period for unrepresented parties.
12:30PM	SESSION 2A AUDITORIUM Pioneering Indigenous community paralegalism in the Guyanese Amazon: community-led justice, participatory action research, and systemic change	No session at this time.	SESSION 2C ROOM 8.03 Very remote, remote, rural and regional justice –Justice where we live. Every community. Every person –Supporting access to justice in regional, rural, and remote areas –Voices from a distance: access to legal services and justice in Australia’s remote and very remote western New South Wales	SESSION 2D ROOM 8.41 Mainstreaming solution-focused justice
1:30 PM	LUNCH + LIVING EXHIBITION AND POSTER DISPLAY			
2:30 PM	Plenary 3 - Taking up the fight: celebrating Dr Hugh m McDonald's research legacy (and the things that riled him up).			
3:20 PM	SESSION 3A AUDITORIUM Community legal empowerment –From practice to evidence: community legal empowerment strategies and what makes them work –Grassroots perspectives: legal empowerment as resistance and/or renewal to democracy; evidence from practitioners in Africa	SESSION 3B AMPHITHEATRE Administrative and service data, demand and unmet need –Mapping community legal centre service reach across New South Wales: a view of access to justice from service data –Measuring unmet legal demand: methodology, findings and responses from community legal Western Australia’s Turnaways study –Hidden need, hidden data: unlocking service insights to improve access to justice	SESSION 3C ROOM 8.03 Discrimination, AI and access to justice at work –Artificial Intelligence and access to justice: Enabling or inhibiting access? –Naming and blaming but why aren’t they claiming? Gaps in empirical evidence about discrimination claims	SESSION 3D ROOM 8.41 The Bugmy Bar Book: expert evidence supporting person-centered justice
4:20 PM	AFTERNOON TEA			
4:40 PM	Plenary 4 - Selling access to justice			
5:25 PM	Closing address			

Day 2 | Thursday 29 October

8:45 AM	Welcome to Day 2			
9:00 AM	Plenary 5 - From fragments to a system: building evidence infrastructure			
10:00AM	SESSION 1A AUDITORIUM Measuring legal need: population surveys and legal capability –Reimagining legal needs and legal capability: findings from the Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use –Legal needs Australia-wide (LAW+) Survey: a critical piece of the evidence puzzle –Using legal needs analysis to drive evidence-based action at Youthlaw	SESSION 1B AMPHITHEATRE Community-embedded responses to discrimination –Restorative justice responses to anti-LGBTIQ+SB hate crimes and incidents –When hate goes unchecked: evidence action, and the challenges of securing justice for Muslim communities	SESSION 1C ROOM 8.03 The promise and possibilities of clinical legal education –Research on legal assistance effectiveness: the promise of clinical programs –How a student-run case file became Victorian Law –Access to justice through clinical legal education partnerships with Victorian courts	SESSION 1D ROOM 8.41 Coronial justice and reform –The forgotten jurisdiction: Coronial courts, preventable deaths, and the access to justice gap –Coronial justice: lawyer perspectives on dispute resolution –Colonial systems and cultural safety: lawyering through coronial inquest for First Nations families
11:00 AM	MORNING TEA			
11:20PM	SESSION 2A AUDITORIUM Measuring what works: frameworks, effectiveness and evaluation –Health justice in action: embedding legal support in community health and homelessness services to address complex need –Investing in organisational strength to improve access to justice: understanding the impact of Victoria's Trust-Based Strong Foundations Grant Program –Transparency as justice: how publishing regulatory complaints data strengthens evidence-based reform	SESSION 2B AMPHITHEATRE Community-led mediation and local justice –Peacemaking: increasing access to justice for people with complex needs –Village Courts and access to justice in Bangladesh: insights from community-based justice practices –Home is where the heart is: community mediation and restorative practice to sustain peaceful relationships	SESSION 2D ROOM 8.03 AI at the front door: navigation tools for underserved users –Can artificial intelligence close the 'access to justice' gap? –From access to evidence: What Hear Me Out's Ffirst year shows about technology, AI, compliance and system reform –Artificial-intelligence-enabled justice tools for refugees in Tanzania: a feasibility study from Nyaragusu camp	SESSION 2C ROOM 8.41 Trauma-informed approaches and practice –Teaching justice where it lives: health justice partnerships as a pedagogy for access –Successful translation of trauma-informed practices: international examples –Complex trauma is a barrier to genuine justice attained through ADR for abuse survivors.
12:30 PM	SESSION 3A AUDITORIUM From access to outcomes: designing and measuring 'lower dose' legal support –Creating conditions for confidence: how self-help resources shape legal outcomes, with evidence-based insights to improve design and delivery –Web design and access to justice: a comparative usability analysis in Chile and Los Angeles –Moving beyond access: building the case for measuring 'lower dose' support	SESSION 3B AMPHITHEATRE Culture at the centre of service design –Access, trust, and advocacy: embedding bicultural expertise –Kaupapa Māori Legal Services: reimagining access to Justice through indigenous community-led practice	SESSION 3D ROOM 8.03 Technology transforming legal institutions –Interdisciplinary evidence-gathering: empowering but not misleading consumers in the age of the LLM – the challenges and opportunities of building LLM based systems. –Digitalization of judicial services in the Horn of Africa region: comparative studies on implications for fair trial and access to justice –The evolution of Victoria Legal Aid's Help Before Court service: practice insights from a client-centred service in a high demand system	SESSION 3C ROOM 8.41 Responsive family violence services - success and challenges –A strategic review of the Mabels Health Justice Partnership: "It couldn't have come at a better time" –Can victims of violence access justice through law? Empirical insights from Buenos Aires and Berlin –Legal Pathways to Recovery: improving access to justice through multilingual legal education for migrant and refugee survivors of family violence
1:30 PM	LUNCH + LIVING EXHIBITION AND POSTER DISPLAY			
2:30 PM	Plenary 6 - From around the world, one shared challenge: reimagining access to justice			
3:20 PM	SESSION 4A AUDITORIUM How women-centred research informed court-led change to strengthen Pacific family violence response –A panel on innovative court-led approaches to improving justice outcomes for family violence survivors in remote areas across Tonga, Vanuatu and Kiribati.	SESSION 4B AMPHITHEATRE Bridging the gap between evidence and impact: knowledge translation for access to justice 	SESSION 4C ROOM 8.03 When rights aren't enough: designing better systems for justice –Locked out: systemic failures to exercising financial equity post separation –Reducing burdens in frontline decision-making –From evidence to action: rethinking legal support for people affected by cancer	No session at this time.
4:20 PM	AFTERNOON TEA			
4:40 PM	Plenary 7 - Digital justice journeys and the AI-inhibited lawyer			
5:25 PM	Closing address			

Day 3 | Friday 30 October

8:45 AM	Welcome to Day 3			
9:30 AM	Plenary 8 - The pro bono paradox			
10:00AM	SESSION 1A AUDITORIUM Reimagining institutions –From indicators to experiences: building a people-centred research agenda on court-based mediation in Brazil –Professional regulation, education and impacts on access to justice –From evidence to action: embedding safety, accessibility and inclusion in the Federal Circuit and Family Courts of Australia	SESSION 1C AMPHITHEATRE Housing justice –Advancing access to housing justice in regional Victoria through systems-thinking and collaborative action –Renting in reality: what is it like to rent your home in Victoria? –Social Housing Legal Program: responding to a changing housing landscape	SESSION 1B ROOM 8.03 Bridging the knowledge gap: responsive CLEI models –Legal preparedness in a time of climate crises: the role of a Climate Resilience Clinic –LIVD Programme –Civics education: why bother?! Bridging the gap between knowledge holders and those who want it.	SESSION 1D ROOM 8.41 Evidence for justice: ethical empirical research in law clinics and community legal centres
11:00 AM	MORNING TEA			
11:20 AM	SESSION 2A AUDITORIUM Levelling uneven playing fields: self-represented parties –Uneven hearings and access to justice: exploring procedural justice in Australian Family Courts –Building a culture of judicial dispute resolution: Victorian courts and tribunals and regional developments –Evidence-based innovation in Singapore's Tribunal Justice System: bridging the legal literacy gap to enhance people-centred justice	SESSION 2C AMPHITHEATRE Gendered justice –Reducing barriers to social housing for Aboriginal women leaving custody: evidence from the Homeward Sisters pilot –Gendered entitlements: barriers to accessing justice for working women –Beyond services: lived experience, relational practice and evidence for women's access to justice	SESSION 2B ROOM 8.03 Responsive justice models –What can be learnt from health justice partnership (HJP): evidence on attributes, capability and workforce wellbeing –Beyond the courtroom: the Hoops4Wealth Program – a case study in people-centred, client-led justice remedies –Access to justice for young adults: lessons from Australia's Young Adult List	No session at this time.
12:30 PM	SESSION 3A AUDITORIUM On the ropes: bringing access to justice to life for young people through theatre	SESSION 3B AMPHITHEATRE Courts under pressure: trust, delay and judicial oversight –Barred role of courts in adjudication of cases of demolition of informal houses in Ethiopia. –Building trust in courts: integrity, governance, and access to justice in emerging systems –Justice delayed, justice denied: case delay and people-centred justice in Sri Lanka	SESSION 3C ROOM 8.03 Young people's legal needs –Rethinking intervention orders against children and young people –When justice opens the school gate: how access to justice strengthens the right to education –Unlocking justice for young people: youth-specific models for meeting legal needs	SESSION 3D ROOM 8.41 Trauma-informed legal services in practice: evidence, implementation and access to justice across Australia.
1:30 PM	LUNCH + LIVING EXHIBITION AND POSTER DISPLAY			
2:30 PM	Plenary 9 - The future of access to justice			
3:15 PM	Closing address			

 Justice where people live	 Everyday justice	 Evidence foundations	 Human rights and lived experience voices
 Digital justice and AI	 Courts, tribunals and dispute resolution	 How services work	

Living exhibition and poster display

	Title	Presenter	Organisation
1	Embedding the rights of mental health consumers	Natalie Newman	St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne
2	Lived Realities of Guilty Pleas, Plea Negotiations and Legal Aid for Criminalised Women in Victoria	Dr Monique Moffa	RMIT University
3	Toolkit for representing pregnant women and mothers who are imprisoned or at risk of imprisonment	Laura Heffes and Ellen Murphy	The Law and Advocacy Centre for Women Ltd (LACW)
4	Not Quite Through the Door: Entry Obstacles to Aotearoa's Dispute System for Consumers with Lending Problems	Katie de Roo	University of Otago
5	Supporting self-represented litigants through the use of AI	Professor John Zeleznikow	La Trobe University
6	Beyond The Courtroom	Dr Vivi Tan	RMIT Law School
7	Legal Privilege and Integrated Legal Assistance Services	Eve Gallagher and colleagues	Victorian Law Reform Commission
8	Tracing the policy footprint of coronial recommendations: The Recommendation-to-Reform Mapping Framework	Dr Kerry Butler and Katya Eagles	Law and Justice Foundation of NSW
9	International Criminal Court Case on Crimes Against Humanity in Sabah Borneo	Emily Edward	Dayak International Organisation
10	Court Statistics as Public Legal Information: Turning Data into Access to Justice Support	Andrii Koshman	University of Bristol Law School
11	Measuring what matters most: Developing a practical outcomes framework at Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre	Arlia Fleming	Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre
12	Access to Justice Reforms and Vulnerability in Argentina	Federico Gustavo Bartalini	Hiroshima University
13	Designing Access to Justice: Legal Design and Citizen-Centred Regulation in Italian Local Government	Lorenzo Zorzi	Design Rights
14	Rethinking Access to Justice	Meredith Herbert	Rotorua District Community Law Centre
15	The National Redress Scheme: justice-making through the final years and beyond	Mia Nestor and Amy Barrett	Knowmore Legal Service
16	Article Two: the Public Interest Law Crowdfund Developed around Lawyers' Obligations	Daye Gang and Allison Meyer	Victorian Bar
17	Total recall: reference periods in legal needs surveys	Dr Kerry Butler	Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales
18	Bringing CLE theory to life	Nabila Marzouk and Fiona Vuong	South-east Monash Legal Service
19	Australian Local Government Responses to Public Homelessness	Rochelle Jupp	La Trobe University
20	Online Courts: technology for Access to Justice, or compounding digital disadvantage?	Matilda Simpson	RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice
21	Seen and Heard	Dr Cate Banks	Monash University
22	From Notification to Navigation: One Year On from Launching DV Notify	Jeremie Quiohilag and Scott Young	NSW Department of Communities and Justice
23	Creative evaluation of integrated services	Dr Jennifer Davidson	University of Melbourne
24	Is Online Legal Education Part of the Solution?	Bonnie Hough	Access to Justice Network
25	Transitional Justice for LGBTIQ+ Communities in Australia: From Historical Harm to People-Centred Repair	Dr Jeremie Bracka	RMIT University School of Law
26	Reimagining Work Rights for Advanced Breast Cancer	Sarah McHutchison	McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer
27	From Hate to Justice: Community-Led Pathways for Responding to Islamophobia in Australia	Dr Mohamed Haroon Kasim	Alliance Against Islamophobia
28	The Centre for Innovative Justice: Changing lives, changing systems; people centred research in practice	Stan Winford and Dorothy Armstrong	RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice

Presentation abstracts

Plenary 1–9

Wednesday, 9:45 AM, Auditorium

Plenary 1 and 2: Indigenous Law: not just equity of access, but equity of justice

*Rueben Berg, Gunditjmara man, Assembly Member, Gellung Warl
Meena Singh, Professor of Practice, Monash University, Faculty of Law,
Petra Hape, Tumu Māori/Director Māori, Community Law Centres Aotearoa;
Judy Winter, Legal Consultant, South Rupununi District Council (SRDC)*

The opening plenary will start with an introduction to Victoria's Treaty, signed in 2025, and establishing a formal framework for engagement between First Peoples and the Victorian Government.

A panel of speakers from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Guyana, will then explore the question: How does deeply embedded knowledge and practice from Indigenous communities and cultures seek to achieve not just equity of access, but equity of justice?

Some 'new' innovations responding to contemporary issues - cultural burning to manage fire risk, community mobilisation to protect public health during the pandemic - reflect a return to Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing, backed by generations of practice and expertise.

Can access to justice be understood in the same way? While some legal systems are moving towards greater equity of access, based on a recognition that people do not share the same backgrounds, contexts or capacity to engage, many are still failing to produce equity of justice as an outcome, especially for those communities and individuals who are 'made-marginalised'.

Wednesday, 2:30 PM, Auditorium

Plenary 3 - Taking up the fight: celebrating Dr Hugh M McDonald's research legacy (and the things that riled him up).

*Professor Nigel Balmer, Research Director, Legal Services Research Centre, Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner
Suzie Forell, Socio-legal Researcher, Independent
Bridget McAloon, Principal Researcher, Victoria Law Foundation*

Wednesday, 4:40 PM, Auditorium

Plenary 4 - Selling access to justice

Professor Emily Taylor-Poppe, Professor of Law, University of California, Irvine

In the face of democratic backsliding, attacks on the integrity of justice institutions, and retrenchment in public service provision, the public stands as an essential backstop in protecting access to civil justice. But can a politically polarized electorate be relied upon to support access to justice and the rule of law? This project reports on the findings from a nationally representative survey experiment from the United States to address this question. The findings confirm that political orientation structures levels of support for the rule of law and access to justice. However, the study also identifies areas of shared understanding. Building on similar research undertaken by the Law Society of England and Wales, the results offer further comparative insights regarding public reactions to communication strategies. This work offers a timely research intervention, as efforts to mobilize public support for access to justice and the rule of law gain momentum.

Thursday, 9:00 AM, Auditorium

Plenary 5 - From Fragments to a system: building evidence infrastructure

Dr Andrew Pilliar, Research Director, British Columbia Access to Justice Centre for Excellence (ACE)

Recent years have seen a groundswell of increased empirical work around the world to understand the scope and dimensions of access to justice problems as

well as what may help to avoid or alleviate those problems. Still however, this work is often limited by an insufficient institutional architecture to link and scale this work and connect it to policy innovations.

This proposal builds on existing work being done by the British Columbia Access to Justice Centre for Excellence to explore how a national access to justice data strategy could help to fill this institutional gap and thereby lay the foundation for future policy shifts. The presentation will outline the institutional actors in the Canadian context, map some of the efforts to gather and link access to justice data (broadly understood) and identify some potential futures for a national access to justice data strategy. The presentation will also seek to identify obstacles and challenges for a data strategy as well as ways to mitigate or overcome those obstacles.

The project has relevance for those interested in creating space for empirical evidence on access to justice in an ongoing and sustainable way. It will also feature both normative and practical considerations to animate efforts to build justice data infrastructure in ways that enable people-centred justice reforms in the future.

*Dr Bridgette Toy-Cronin, Dean of Law, Director of the Civil Justice Centre, University of Otago
Dr Kayla Stewart, Program Lead, National Civil Justice Observatory, University of Otago*

Access to justice scholarship has generated substantial empirical evidence on unmet legal need, procedural barriers, and systemic inequities. Despite growing demands for policy and practice to be evidence-informed, translation of this evidence into reform remains limited. This paper argues that this gap is due, in part, to a lack of infrastructure to support the coordination, interpretation, and ongoing use of evidence across the civil justice ecosystem. Using Aotearoa New Zealand as a case study, the paper examines two linked initiatives forming part of a broader evidence infrastructure: Wayfinding for Civil Justice, a stakeholder-led strategy, and the National Civil Justice Observatory, an organisation supporting a cross-sector network within a collective impact model. It conceptualises evidence infrastructure as a form of access to justice reform in its own right and suggests that collective impact provides a useful framework for understanding how such infrastructure can enable coordinated action across fragmented systems. It concludes that reform requires investment not only in services and interventions, but also in evidence infrastructure.

Thursday, 2:30 PM, Auditorium

Plenary 6 - From around the world, one shared challenge: reimagining access to justice

*Rebecca Plummer, Chief Executive Officer, JusticeNet
Dr Martin Gramatikov, Director of Knowledge and Research, HiIL (The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law)
Sachin Malhan, Agami*

While people-centered justice (PCJ) has gained global policy recognition and is supported by the OECD, Justice Action Coalition, Pathfinders for Justice, and other global organizations, its operationalization remains a significant challenge. This presentation addresses the "people-centricity gap" by introducing the Justice Services Measure (JSM), a novel, adaptable and scalable framework designed to evaluate justice interventions from the user's perspective. Moving beyond traditional institutional metrics such as case volume and clearance rates the JSM shifts the focus to service-level delivery, measuring four core dimensions of the user experience: outcome quality, procedural fairness, user costs, and service usability. Drawing on pilots in Nigeria and Ethiopia, this research demonstrates the JSM's potential to provide actionable, empirical data that enables justice providers and policymakers to identify friction points and design more responsive, people-centred justice services. The paper presentation by discussing the challenges of implementing user-centred metrics in diverse justice ecosystems and outlines the necessary steps for establishing the JSM as a standardised framework for people-centered justice reform.

Thursday, 3:20 PM, Auditorium

Plenary 7 - Digital justice journeys and the AI-inhibited lawyer

Professor Naomi Creutzfeldt, Professor of Law and Society, University of Kent, UK

Drawing on an empirical project on Digital Justice Journeys, this paper explores everyday experiences of claiming welfare benefits in an increasingly digital welfare state in England. Accessing essential services such as benefits, housing support, healthcare, and debt assistance has become a predominantly online process. This paper examines how individuals experience and navigate a welfare landscape shaped by digitalisation, focusing on the challenges faced by those who encounter technological, procedural, and legal barriers in England. While some users are able to independently complete online forms, locate relevant information, and resolve administrative issues, others experience exclusion through complex digital interfaces, limited digital skills, and the increasing



complexity of legal and regulatory frameworks.

Professor Milan Markovic, Professor, Texas A&M University School of Law

The legal profession has greeted the advent of advanced artificial intelligence with a mixture of enthusiasm and dread. Whereas some lawyers envision a world in which AI assumes much of the day-to-day drudgery of legal practice, others fear that it will diminish professional expertise and undermine their economic prospects. Access-to-justice advocates, for their part, are increasingly hopeful that AI can substitute for attorney assistance or at least allow for the responsible scaling of legal services.

What differentiates AI from earlier technological innovations is that it can both facilitate the delivery of legal services and mediate the relationship between lawyers and clients. However, the understandable focus on AI's potential to assist unrepresented individuals has obscured its impact on attorney representation. A legal profession that primarily conceives of itself as providing oversight to AI-generated outputs will differ markedly from one that leverages AI selectively while preserving the relational dimensions of legal representation. This Article surveys the nascent experimental literature on AI's effects on attorney representation and argues that technology-based efforts to scale and disaggregate legal services must avoid unintentionally undermining the attorney-client relationship.

Friday, 9:00 AM, Auditorium

Plenary 8 - The pro bono paradox

Professor Steven Vaughan, Executive Dean, Monash University, Faculty of Law

This paper examines the evolution of pro bono reporting within large Australian commercial law firms, questioning whether these public-interest access to justice activities mask fundamental tensions between firms' ethical commitments and their commercial mandates. Drawing on longitudinal data (including pro bono hours, reported social impact metrics, and concurrent representation of corporate clients whose activities may undermine those same social goals) the study highlights a growing "pro bono paradox." While firms increasingly use their pro bono portfolios as key pillars of their Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) signaling, there remains a persistent misalignment with their broader commercial practice. The paper argues that the concept of "reputation management" is insufficient to capture the ethical stakes. Instead, it proposes professional integrity (defined as the lived coherence between a firm's public-interest principles and its commercial practices) as a more exacting lens for evaluating the true value of pro bono activity in the modern Australian legal market.

Gabriela Christian-Hare, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Pro Bono Centre

Gabriela will respond to Steven's abstract above, drawing upon her role as CEO, Australian Pro Bono Centre.

Friday, 2:30 PM, Auditorium

Plenary 9 - The future of access to justice

Professor Rebecca Sandefur, Professor, T. Denny Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics, Arizona State University

Matthew Burnett, Director of Research and Programs, Access to Justice Research Initiative, American Bar Foundation

Professor Genevieve Grant, Professor and Director, Warren Centre for Civil Justice, Monash University, Faculty of Law

This presentation assesses the global state of people-centered justice research and data and proposes a shared research agenda for the field. Drawing on a multiyear global study—including literature reviews, expert interviews, and perspectives from more than 50 informants across 20 countries—it examines why people-centered justice matters, how evidence can inform policy, and what we know about effective implementation. It also draws on *Global Perspectives on People-Centered Justice: Exploring the Evidence* (2026), which brings together 17 global experts to examine evidence across 12 themes, from poverty and democratic governance to disability and legal technology. Together, these insights identify key evidence gaps, emerging opportunities, and priorities for strengthening the global knowledge base for people-centered justice.

Day 1 | Wednesday 28 October

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

From intake to impact: a case study of social justice navigators in practice

Carolyn Krahn, Executive Director, Workers' Resource Centre

Across jurisdictions, “justice navigators” are increasingly positioned as a solution to the growing gap between legal systems and the people who need them. Yet, there remains limited clarity on what effective navigation looks like in practice—particularly for equity-deserving communities facing intersecting barriers.

This presentation offers a grounded case study of the Workers' Resource Centre (Canada), a community-based organization providing free, person-centred legal navigation assisting clients in navigating workplace legislation and administrative justice. In its twenty-year tenure, it has returned \$100 million dollars back to Alberta workers with no lawyers involved. Drawing on real-world service delivery, this session examines how social justice navigators can operate as translators, advocates, and system intermediaries across complex areas such as employment insurance, income supports, human rights, and labour standards.

The session will explore how navigation functions not simply as referral, but as relational, trauma-informed, and equity-driven intervention providing clients with hands on advocacy and support throughout the claims process. It will also highlight common system failures encountered by clients, the unintended consequences of fragmented service design, and the risks of under-trained navigation models.

Participants will leave with a practical framework for designing, evaluating, and scaling navigation roles that are responsive, accountable, and grounded in lived realities.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Rural access to justice and community justice work

Matthew Burnett, Director of Research and Programs, Access to Justice Research Initiative, American Bar Foundation

This paper/presentation examines rural access to justice and the role of nonlawyer community justice workers in addressing persistent inequities. Rural communities face distinct structural barriers to justice, including geographic isolation, limited attorney availability, transportation challenges, court centralization, technological gaps, and reduced access to social services. These barriers intersect with poverty, aging populations, Indigenous sovereignty issues, and local economic restructuring, producing complex and context-specific justice needs. It will approach these persistent challenges to rural legal services delivery in two parts:

First, it reviews interdisciplinary empirical research on rural access to justice, examining how geographic, institutional, economic, and demographic factors shape legal need and service provision in rural communities. While access to justice scholarship has expanded significantly in recent decades, rural contexts remain comparatively underexamined and often treated as peripheral to urban-centric models of legal service delivery. The literature identifies multiple, overlapping barriers to justice in rural areas including: legal deserts; long travel distances to courts and service providers; limited public transportation; broadband inequities affecting remote service delivery; and, confidentiality concerns in close-knit communities. Research also highlights how rural legal need is shaped by distinctive socio-legal dynamics, including agricultural economies, resource extraction industries, tribal jurisdictional complexity, and family land issues. Emerging scholarship emphasizes that effective rural legal service delivery requires place-responsive approaches rather than scaled-down urban models. Studies underscore the importance of trust, cultural competence, and sustained community presence in overcoming barriers related to stigma and institutional skepticism.

Second, it analyses original empirical evidence from the community justice worker program in Alaska. In Alaska—a vast, majority rural state with many communities off the road system—the program, authorized by the Alaska Supreme Court and hosted by Alaska Legal Services Corporation, trains frontline community members to assist with issues including SNAP benefits, wills, Indian Child Welfare Act cases, intimate partner violence, and consumer debt. Findings from over 1,400 SNAP cases demonstrate both effectiveness and impact. CJWs assisted in recovering \$23.6 million in food assistance benefits, directly serving approximately 850 households and 2,800 individuals. Seventy-three percent of cases resulted in documented receipt of benefits, generating an estimated additional \$14.5 million in community-level economic impact. The workforce expanded rapidly between 2022 and 2024, increasing case service capacity by

more than 1,500 percent and extending services to over half of Alaska's zip codes, including communities with no resident attorneys. Sixty percent of clients were Alaska Native or American Indian.

Based on this evidence, we argue that community justice workers represent a promising rural justice workforce model: locally embedded, culturally responsive, rapidly scalable, and capable of generating substantial return on investment. It concludes by identifying key questions regarding sustainability, outreach, training, and the evolving role of technology in supporting rural justice workers.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

From evidence to architecture: AI-Enhanced self-help and the eviction default crisis

Professor Lois Lupica, Director, Legal Innovation Lab, CEDP; Professor of Law, Emerita, University of Maine School of Law, Community Economic Defense Project (CEDP); University of Maine School of Law

Each year, tens of thousands of tenants facing eviction never appear in court and thus receive default judgments. The harm is severe and largely preventable. MyReply, a digital, rules-based legal self-help tool developed by CEDP in Colorado, was built to change that outcome. It helps tenants draft legally sufficient responses to eviction complaints without an attorney. This presentation examines how MyReply is being transformed by AI, and why that transformation is grounded in evidence from the start. The design draws directly on the Harvard Access to Justice Lab's Financial Distress Research Project (of which I AM a co-Principal Investigator), including randomized controlled trial findings that tested the efficacy of guided self-help tools against other intervention modalities. These findings shaped MyReply's AI architecture: not a chatbot, not a document generator, but structured sidecars that use OCR to read court documents and scaffold legal reasoning without displacing user agency or creating dependency on outputs the user cannot verify. The presentation connects three threads. First, the eviction default problem as a systems failure with documented, measurable harm. Second, the RCT evidence base and the “Self-Help, Reimagined” framework (Greiner, Jiménez & Lupica, 92 Ind. L.J. 1119, 2017), which theorizes when and why self-help tools succeed or fail. Third, the UI/UX and design choices that translate that evidence into a tool serving people under acute legal, economic, and emotional stress, at scale. Participants will leave with a replicable evidence-to-design framework for AI-enhanced legal self-help tools, grounded in RCT findings and real-world deployment, as well as a clearer picture of the regulatory pressures shaping responsible AI-assisted legal guidance in practice.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Making sure we're not making it worse

Luke Thomas, Principal Product Strategist, Portable

People turning to self-help and dispute resolution tools are often under pressure. They need something quick, reliable and easy to use.

We've all seen what happens when people trust AI with legal help it can't give. AI slop and hallucinations are already clogging up courts and dispute resolution services. So how do we make the most of what's promising about AI without causing more harm?

Drawing on Portable's work on AMica, Hear Me Out and Sweep, this session looks at how we decide whether AI belongs in a tool at all. We'll cover choosing the right use case, finding where AI adds real value for users, designing the solution and its guardrails with lawyers and product teams, and testing outcomes thoroughly before and after launch.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

AI in Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution

Professor Susanne Augenhöfer, Professor of Law, University of Innsbruck

The suggested presentation (paper) will examine the emerging role of artificial intelligence in consumer dispute resolution through a comparative analysis of the United States and the European Union. It addresses both alternative dispute resolution (ADR/ODR) mechanisms and consumer dispute resolution before and outside courts more broadly. Against the backdrop of increasing costs, growing case volumes, and limited accessibility of consumer redress systems, the presentation explores whether AI can contribute to more efficient, affordable, and people-centred justice mechanisms in a changing world. Drawing on empirical research for Access to Justice, the presentation maps key public and private dispute resolution entities in both jurisdictions, analyzes their procedural workflows, and identifies existing and potential AI use cases across the dispute resolution lifecycle, including dispute prevention, triage, legal information, case management, negotiation support, settlement facilitation, and decision-making assistance. Particular attention is paid to the economic dimension of consumer

disputes, namely the often disproportionate costs faced by consumers, courts, and Alternative Dispute Resolution bodies in resolving high-volume, low-value claims. Building on comparative legal and institutional analysis, the presentation investigates the principal drivers of AI adoption, including efficiency gains, cost reduction, scalability, multilingual accessibility, and increasing pressure on courts and Alternative Dispute Resolution providers. At the same time, it critically assesses key barriers to implementation, such as concerns regarding procedural fairness, transparency, explainability, bias, accountability, data protection, and regulatory uncertainty. The analysis also highlights differing regulatory approaches in the United States and the European Union, particularly in light of the EU AI Act and diverging conceptions of due process, consumer protection, and platform governance. The presentation ultimately evaluates whether AI-enabled consumer dispute resolution can genuinely empower individual consumers and improve access to justice, or whether it risks reinforcing existing asymmetries between consumers and repeat-player businesses. It argues that AI holds significant potential to reduce costs and procedural barriers and to support more people-centred justice systems, but only where meaningful safeguards, transparency, and human oversight are ensured.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

Access to justice in a changing climate: building adaptive capacity, through systemic reform

Donna Askew, Principal - Climate Justice, Eastern Community Legal Centre
Anna Brazier, Senior Project Coordinator, Climate Justice, Jesuit Social Places, Centre for Just Places;
Dr Kate Clohesy, Director, Strategy and Impact, ARC Justice

Climate change does not merely threaten the natural environment - it undermines the built and social systems upon which individuals and communities depend. Yet the burden of adaptation continues to fall on those least equipped to bear it. This panel interrogates that imbalance by examining the legal, policy, and institutional frameworks that shape how climate-induced legal and related harm is experienced, and how those frameworks must evolve to be flexible.

Focusing on evidence and action, the session foregrounds how evidence is generated through practice, partnership, and lived experience. Central is the Climate Partnerships Project, a partnership between Eastern Community Legal Centre, ARC Justice and Jesuit Social Services - Centre for Just Places. It demonstrates how place-based, cross-sector collaboration produces actionable evidence of emerging legal and related need and effective responses, recognising that harms are systemically related. Drawing together perspectives from policy, human rights, and community-based climate initiatives, the session explores the intersecting pressures placed on natural, built, and social systems — and the equity implications that follow. The panel explores how intersecting pressures across housing, emergency management, and insurance systems create compounding disadvantage. It argues that evidence must not only diagnose harm but actively inform reform — shifting law and policy from reactive, individualised responses to adaptive, system-level frameworks capable of supporting resilience.

Participants will gain three key insights: that climate change is a structural justice issue; that meaningful access to justice requires adaptive, systemic reform; and that collaborative place-based collaboration is critical to and driving action. By sharing implementation insights and community-informed approaches, the session demonstrates how structural reform can strengthen trust in essential systems and deliver more equitable access to justice in a changing climate.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

Beyond emergency relief: access to justice after flooding in the Northern Territory

Hannah Perrins, Senior Solicitor, Environmental Defenders Office
Jessica Black, Lawyer, Civil, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency
Sally Tregear, Lawyer, Civil, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

The 2025-26 wet season brought some of the most severe and prolonged weather conditions experienced in the Northern Territory. An active monsoon season, tropical lows and repeated heavy rainfall events culminated in “unprecedented” flooding. This historic flooding – the worst in 28 years – had (and continues to have) devastating impacts on communities living on the frontline of climate change in Australia. For Aboriginal people living in remote communities, this experience has been compounded, highlighting climate injustices.

We will explore the government’s responses, which have shown how unequal access to essential services deepens the impact of climate events on Aboriginal communities. Reframing access to justice through a climate and disaster lens, the March 2026 Northern Territory floods revealed the barriers implicit in the current framework which, as natural disasters become more frequent, is unsustainable. Agencies must include Aboriginal communities in all disaster response planning and resourcing and recognise these are no longer infrequent events, but that climate change mitigation and adaptation must be prioritised.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

“Where do we go now?” Renters’ experiences of housing precarity and climate disaster

Leah Slattery, Community Legal Education & Research Lead, ARC Justice

Climate disasters worsen existing inequities and create complex legal needs. During the 2022 Victoria floods, displaced renters faced full rent charges, short notices to vacate and a lack of awareness of their legal rights. ARC Justice explored these challenges to improve future responses to regional and rural renters in crises.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.41

Second thoughts? Evaluating the access to justice impact of a mediation cooling-off period for unrepresented parties

Dr Rebecca Edwards

Tribunal-connected mediation is increasingly used to resolve civil disputes, with many participants appearing without legal representation. To improve access to justice, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) introduced a mediation cooling off period in some mediations, allowing unrepresented parties time to seek advice post-settlement and to withdraw from agreements reached at mediation within a specified timeframe. This presentation examines whether that initiative achieved its intended purpose. Drawing on interviews with 47 mediation participants and surveys of VCAT mediators, it finds that the cooling off period provides little practical access to justice benefit. Participants rarely sought legal advice during the cooling off period and seldom withdrew from agreements despite frequently expressing dissatisfaction with settlement outcomes. The presentation concludes by considering reforms that could strengthen meaningful participation for unrepresented disputants in tribunal-connected mediation and inform the design of similar initiatives elsewhere.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.41

Legally assisted family dispute resolution: a community sector partnership model

Jennifer Lindstrom, Legal Practice Manager/Senior Lecturer, Monash University, Faculty of Law

Legally-Assisted Family Dispute Resolution (LAFDR) enables more clients to mediate and avoid court, particularly those unable to participate in traditional FDR due to unequal bargaining power or vulnerability, including clients affected by family violence, for whom LAFDR reduces risks of adversarial processes.

This presentation reports findings from a 2-year study of a LAFDR service run by a Victorian Family Relationships Centre with two Community Legal Centres, which provide free lawyer support through FDR (the “LAFDR-CLC model”).

80% of survey respondents reached agreement through LAFDR, well above their own pre-LAFDR expectations (59%) and above regular FDR rates, despite a clientele with unrealistic expectations or likely to litigate. Clients reported strong satisfaction, especially with lawyer support, feeling guided, reassured and empowered.

These findings position LAFDR as valuable and under-utilised. We consider barriers to expansion and earlier intervention.

Wednesday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.41

Reframing access to justice: embedding appropriate dispute resolution through VCAT's new ADR division

Carol Daicic, Deputy President, Head of the ADR Division, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

James Occleshaw, Senior Advisor to the President, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

In February 2026, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) implemented a fundamental structural reform: the creation of a dedicated Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Division embedded within a new tribunal-wide matrix model. This reform represents a decisive shift in how courts and tribunals can improve access, performance, and user outcomes by placing dispute resolution—not adjudication—at the centre of their work.

The ADR Division operates as both a supporting and operational function across VCAT’s three core divisions, ensuring that ADR is systematically integrated into case management and decision-making. This model aligns with VCAT’s strategic roadmap Towards Excellence, which emphasises accessibility, efficiency, informality, and low-cost justice.

This session will explore how the ADR Division transforms tribunal processes by enabling early resolution, tailoring dispute resolution pathways to different

practice areas, and strengthening accountability through new leadership roles such as ADR Leads and Practice Leads. It will also examine how active case management and strengthened ADR capability contribute to reducing delays, improving user experience, and minimising reliance on formal hearings.

The presentation offers insights into a practical and implemented reform model - not a theoretical framework - for courts and tribunals seeking to improve performance while enhancing access to justice. It demonstrates how a major tribunal has restructured itself to deliver measurable improvements in access and performance, with ADR at its core.

Wednesday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

Pioneering Indigenous community paralegalism in the Guyanese Amazon: community-led justice, participatory action research, and systemic change

Immaculata Casimero, Community Paralegal & Project Coordinator, South Rupununi District Council
Judy Winter, Legal Consultant, South Rupununi District Council (SRDC)
Rehanna Thomas, Social and Cultural Services Officer, Upper Mazaruni District Council (UMDC)
Kirsty Stembridge, Community Paralegal and Community Engagement Officer, North Pakaraimas District Council

We are three Indigenous governance bodies in North Pakaraimas, South Rupununi, and Upper Mazaruni regions of Guyana. Over the past 5 years, we have collectively pioneered community paralegalism in Guyana to advance self-determined justice. First, we launched pilot community paralegal programs focused on legal education, legislative reform engagement, and informed participation in carbon market decision-making. Grounded in community realities, our programs evolved through ongoing learning, experimentation, and iterative design. Recently, we have spearheaded community-led participatory action research to guide the long-term development of our paralegal programs. Supported by a multidisciplinary global civil society network, we have trained about 100 paralegals across 64 villages and translated findings into evidence-based program design. These results will help us create holistic and culturally appropriate paralegal programs to improve justice in our communities. At the International Access to Justice Forum, we hope to share insights from our Indigenous-led justice innovation and to build new solidarity networks that strengthen people-centered justice in Guyana and beyond.

Wednesday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Justice where we live. Every community. Every person

Judy Harrison, Co-convenor, National Regional, Rural, Remote and Very Remote Community Legal Network

Could it make a difference if every national access to justice strategy made access to justice for people in remote, rural and other non-urban areas a cross-cutting theme? And if all legal professional representative bodies required all their efforts, committees and sections to actively focus on improvements for access to justice in 4Rs areas? Could it help if all law schools did likewise, all law student's associations, all judicial associations, and all law related conferences? Could it help if every Attorney-General required attention, expertise and momentum from all areas in their portfolio. Could an international of community of practice focusing on human rights and 4Rs areas help increase justice and access to justice for Indigenous peoples, women, children, young people, older people, people with disabilities, people born overseas, LGBTQI+ people and all others facing disadvantage in 4Rs areas?

Wednesday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Supporting access to justice in regional, rural, and remote areas

Delphine Bellerose, Principal Researcher, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW

People living in regional, rural, and remote (RRR) areas often face barriers to accessing justice, however little evidence exists on how legal services navigate and overcome these barriers. This presentation shares findings from a qualitative research project which explored the highs and lows of access to justice in regional areas of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Through semi-structured interviews with legal practitioners, we delved into what services and supports are available, how legal assistance operates, what facilitates and hinders access to legal services, and the role technology might play in supporting access to justice in RRR NSW. By championing the insights of professionals enacting access to justice in regional areas, this project highlights the need for systemic changes to address conditions which underpin justice inequalities, but also explores targeted sector-level actions to improve access to justice in the regions.

Wednesday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Voices from a distance: Access to legal services and justice in Australia's remote and very remote western New South Wales

Patricia Vagg, PhD Candidate, AgLaw Research Hub, School of Law, University of New England

People in far western New South Wales in Australia cannot always access legal and justice services. This research explores whether legal help exists and whether it meets people's needs. Legal service users and providers were interviewed and the data were analysed for: perception of legal needs; seeking legal services; reaching services; using services; the costs and impact of services; and consequences of using or not using legal services (Levesque et al 2013). The results were presented as composite narratives to convey what can happen when people in western NSW need legal help. These narrative stories raise important questions about spatial justice and access to legal services. Other places in Australia and the world have regions that are similarly remote or even more remote than western NSW. This research could inform policy and practice in Australia and beyond.

Wednesday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.41

Mainstreaming solution-focused justice

Justice Dina Yehia, Justice of the Supreme Court, Supreme Court of NSW
Judge Sophia Beckett, Judge, District Court of NSW
Rebecca McMahon, Barrister, Forbes Chambers

Following the Solution Focused Justice Symposium, we have developed the SFJ Framework for mainstreaming therapeutic and restorative approaches to justice. The session will be focused on criminal law but the Framework has application to other areas of law.

The session will discuss the features of specialist courts and provide an overview of how some of these courts operate. The session will include 2 case studies: the Walama List and the Parramatta West Referral List. We will explain how SFJ involves lawyers, judges, and community members, embedding the following question into the proceedings: What has brought the person before the court and what can be done to address those issues?

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Auditorium

From practice to evidence: community legal empowerment strategies and what makes them work

Maria Guillermina Greco, Access to Justice Program Coordinator, Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ)

Drawing on two decades of action research, this presentation examines what makes community legal empowerment strategies work in contexts of structural exclusion across Latin America. The field has built a substantial toolkit—legal literacy, paralegal training, strategic litigation, participatory advocacy—yet understanding of when these tools succeed, and for whom, remains underdeveloped.

Integrated approaches combining organising, evidence production and legal strategy produce more durable outcomes than single-tool interventions, requiring sustained presence and multidisciplinary teams. Community-generated data is central: it builds collective diagnosis, creates accountability pressure on institutions, and converts lived knowledge into shared understanding—allowing people to see their conditions as systemic patterns.

The presentation offers indicators for measuring impact, lessons on when strategies produce durable change, and reflections on making evidence travel.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Auditorium

Grassroots perspectives: legal empowerment as resistance and/or renewal to democracy; evidence from practitioners in Africa

Amina Cheryl Hanga, Executive Director, Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (IWEI)
Dr Wambua Kituku, Executive Director, Kituo Cha Sheria

In an era of increasing systemic barriers, people centred justice particularly legal empowerment has evolved as democratic renewal. Across many contexts, formal justice systems remain inaccessible, costly, and unresponsive to the needs of ordinary people. In response, grassroots legal empowerment approaches have emerged as a critical pathway for advancing people-centred justice. Building on the work of the Grassroots Justice Network and inspired by the 2025 Research Symposium on Legal Empowerment & Autocracy in Ghana, by the Robert & Helen Bernstein Institute for Human Rights at NYU School of Law, particularly the session Grassroots Perspectives: Legal Empowerment as Resistance and/

or Renewal to Democracy, this 2.0 proposed session will present evidence from community-led initiatives that strengthen communities' ability to know, use, and shape the law to deepen democracy. Bringing together experiences from across the African continent, the discussion will explore three distinct yet interconnected approaches to justice, highlighting how grassroots legal empowerment can serve as a tool for resistance, accountability, and democratic renewal.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Amphitheatre

Mapping community legal centre service reach across New South Wales: a view of access to justice from service data

Delphine Bellerose, Principal Researcher, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW

Community legal centres (CLCs) play an important and distinct role within the Australian legal assistance landscape. Supporting and extending their impact requires a clear understanding of who CLCs currently reach and what assistance is provided, so that potential gaps can be identified. To date, analysis of legal assistance service provision has generally relied on incomplete or aggregated data and templated reports, with limited opportunity to explore variations in data collection, definitions, and system use between service providers. In this project, we worked with individual CLCs and collated unit-record service data. The resulting analyses provide both a statewide view of the CLC sector as well as centre-level insights, including client profiles, service and problem types, and geographic reach. They also highlight what current administrative data can and cannot tell us about demand that is met, and practical lessons from building a shared evidence base across providers.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Amphitheatre

Measuring unmet legal demand: methodology, findings and responses from community legal Western Australia's Turnaways study

Joshua Marks, Data and Impact Lead, Community Legal WA
Brianna Domeracki, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, Community Legal WA

What is the scale and nature of unmet demand for community legal services in Western Australia? Community Legal WA's Turnaways Study sought to find out.

Over one week in September 2025, participating services recorded 938 instances where people seeking help could not receive an appointment or service, equating to an estimated 48,450 instances annually.

Beyond counting turnaways, the study examined why people were turned away, the legal issues involved, whether they had previously sought help, and the information, referrals or other support services could provide. It also captured unmet need AMong people who received assistance but needed more support than services had capacity to provide.

By turning frontline experience into evidence, the study provides a clearer picture of unmet legal need and a strong evidence base for sector planning, advocacy and policy responses to improve access to justice.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Amphitheatre

Hidden need, hidden data: unlocking service insights to improve access to justice

Nathalie Gentle, Community Engagement and Evaluation Worker, Mid North Coast Legal Centre

Services need not be intimidated by the data they hold; when paired with frameworks such as PULS and the Legal Needs Framework, routine service data can be leveraged as a low-cost tool to understand community need and design accessible, people-centred services. This session examines a critical access to justice gap: why high-need communities do not consistently translate into high service utilisation. Drawing on a case study from Kempsey LGA in regional NSW, the project explores the disconnect between measurable legal need and low referral pathways into civil legal assistance. Despite outreach, community legal education, and interagency engagement, Mid North Coast Legal Centre (MNCLC) has experienced lower-than-expected engagement in a community characterised by socio-economic disadvantage, a high First Nations population, and elevated rates of domestic and family violence, mental illness, and homelessness. Early qualitative insights indicate unclear service boundaries, particularly eligibility criteria and the distinction between civil and other areas of law, may constrain referral pathways and undermine trust. This is compounded by community worker overwhelm, limiting capacity to engage with and navigate intake processes. The session will present findings and outline a model that shifts towards embedded, relational, context-responsive approaches, alongside practical strategies such as reframing messaging, simplifying referral pathways, and co-designing resources.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Room 8.03

Artificial intelligence and access to justice: enabling or inhibiting access?

Professor Alysia Blackham, Professor, Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne

Artificial intelligence (AI) could become a critical tool for helping to improve access to justice. The Victorian Law Reform Commission has posited that AI could offer new ways for people to resolve their legal problems, and could help people to resolve legal disputes by providing better access to legal information. However, for most members of the public, 'AI' is currently mostly represented by large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, rather than specialist legal tools.

Using LLMs to help people obtain legal information, and to help people understand their legal problems, raises two serious issues. First, LLMs often produce hallucinations, or text that is 'nonsensical' or wrong. When people use LLMs to understand their legal problems, or to help draft legal documents, this can lead to references to non-existent case law and legal precedent. Indeed, LLMs perform particularly poorly on complex legal tasks. Second, LLMs are increasingly seen as 'sycophantic', being excessively agreeable with users. In a legal context, this may lead to LLMs encouraging people to pursue a legal claim that is without merit, or encouraging people to see themselves as having been 'wronged' by others. These two risks are already creating serious burdens for courts and tribunals, as they receive increasing numbers of claims and complaints which have been drafted with the help of LLMs.

This paper critically examines how LLMs might enable or inhibit access to justice, including by reference to evidence from the Fair Work Commission (FWC). The FWC anticipates that its workload will have increased by 70% by the end of 2025/2026, largely due to the growth in claims using AI, and has consulted on a Guidance Note to try to manage this additional workload. From this paper, participants will take away renewed understanding of the current possibilities and risks of AI for access to justice.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Room 8.03

Naming and blaming but why aren't they claiming? Gaps in empirical evidence about discrimination claims

Professor Dominique Allen, Professor, Monash University, Faculty of Law
Gianni Marchetti, Principal Lawyer, JobWatch

Australian law has prohibited discrimination for five decades. Although equality commissions continue to receive complaints about discrimination, courts hear very few cases each year. The vast majority of discrimination claims are resolved through confidential conciliation processes or withdrawn. This is consistent across the jurisdictions. This presentation draws on empirical evidence from lawyers who have represented parties in discrimination claims and staff at equality commissions to identify the barriers to pursuing a discrimination claim. A gap remains in our understanding of this process, namely the complainant's perspective – why are they not claiming? There are ethical and practical challenges to interviewing parties but we need to capture this information if we are to paint a full picture of how the process operates, rather than relying on the impressions of lawyers and equality commission staff.

Wednesday, 3:20 PM, Room 8.41

The Bugmy Bar Book: expert evidence supporting person-centered justice

Justice Rita Incerti, Justice of the Supreme Court, Supreme Court of Victoria
Judge Rose Falla, Judge, County Court of Victoria
Crystal Triggs, Project Director, Bugmy Bar Book

The Bugmy Bar Book is a free, evidence-based resource for lawyers and legal decisionmakers, as well as policymakers and other professionals. The project houses chapters that are accessible summaries of key research about the impacts of experiences of trauma, socioeconomic inequality, structural disadvantage and strengths-based rehabilitation. The Chapters, Expert Reports and Judgements Library assists to provide an evidence base to support legal advocacy and decision-making, and the resources are intended to promote improved understanding of the experiences of people who are brought into contact with the legal system.

Day 2 | Thursday 29 October

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Auditorium

Reimagining legal needs and legal capability: findings from the Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use

Dr Georgie Rychner, Principal Researcher, Legal Services Research Centre, Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner
Professor Nigel Balmer, Research Director, Legal Services Research Centre, Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner

The LULU Survey builds upon a legacy of surveys dating back to the 1930s and draws upon contemporary understandings of legal capability in a reimagining of how legal needs surveys are conducted. In the first longitudinal study of its kind conducted in Australia, LULU provides a uniquely detailed quantitative picture of how law and everyday legal issues are navigated, a new understanding of service use and the way in which people seek to resolve issues, and further evidence of why legal capability matters. This survey also explores what is important to consumers of legal services, and what more is needed to shape services that are people-centred. Findings will highlight opportunities for more effectively matching of service provision to capability, the importance of clear communication, and of retaining multi-channel service provision in an increasingly online-first environment. The study will provide important insights for regulators, policy makers and service providers Amid a swiftly evolving legal service landscape.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Auditorium

Legal needs Australia Wide (LAW+) Survey: a critical piece of the evidence puzzle

Dr Kate Davies, Research Director, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW

Legal needs surveys can reliably measure access to justice issues and potential demand for legal support services, capturing the experiences of people whose legal problems might otherwise remain hidden. The 2026 Legal Needs Australia Wide (LAW+) Survey will ask 20,000 people, online and in person, about their legal problems, their impacts, and help-seeking. It will also examine the role of AI technologies in addressing legal needs, and how legal problems intersect with factors such as income, geographic remoteness, age, disability, and domestic and family violence. However, legal needs surveys are only one part of the evidence needed to understand complex access to justice issues. This presentation explores what legal needs surveys can and cannot reveal and how LAW+ complements service, Census, and qualitative data. It offers internationally-relevant lessons from delivering a national survey to support evidence-based justice policy and practice.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Auditorium

Using legal needs analysis to drive evidence-based action at Youthlaw

Katie Fraser, Manager, Data and Grants, Youthlaw
Lee Carnie, Chief Executive Officer, Youthlaw

This session will discuss Youthlaw's legal needs analysis to show how research and evaluation can move beyond compliance or reporting to directly inform strategic planning, resource allocation, partnership development and service design.

Youthlaw's legal needs analysis used mixed methods research to better understand the met and unmet legal needs of young people in Victoria and identify gaps in service delivery. The project included analysis of CLC service data, reviewing research on the legal needs of young people, reviewing evidence on effective youth legal assistance models including Youthlaw's service evaluations, and undertaking interviews with key stakeholders and young people.

The analysis found that Youthlaw's existing resources are concentrated on delivering intensive casework to young people in crisis – a highly effective service model that reflects best practice. However, the analysis also identified significant gaps in service delivery, including limited assistance for common legal problems young people face such as employment, housing, and consumer / debt issues, and common legal problems experienced by Youthlaw's clients, such as financial assistance for victims of crime. It also highlighted insufficient resourcing for community legal education and sector partnerships, and limited capacity for systemic advocacy. This research has enabled strategic planning that is genuinely evidence-based.

Participants will leave with practical ideas for undertaking their own legal needs analysis projects on a budget and using findings to better align services with legal need.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Amphitheatre

Restorative justice responses to anti-LGBTIQ+SB hate crimes and incidents

Phoebe Barton, Restorative Justice Facilitator and Project Manager, Open Circle, Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University
Rach Chapman, Director, Q+Law, Fitzroy Legal Service

Victoria has experienced a rise in anti-LGBTIQ+SB hate crimes and incidents, impacting people's safety, wellbeing, and connection to community. LGBTIQ+SB community members may not feel safe accessing police and criminal justice responses due to historic and ongoing criminalisation, over-policing, and discrimination; lack of culturally competent or affirming support; not being recognised by police as victims; and not wanting punitive responses that risk further trauma or fail to support meaningful behaviour change and prevention.

Drawing upon the practice experience of Open Circle at the Centre for Innovative Justice and Q+Law, and research on best practice, this session will explore how community-based restorative justice (RJ) principles and practices might meet the justice and healing needs of people impacted. Presenters will discuss the development of a specialised RJ model in collaboration with LGBTIQ+SB community. This session is for lawyers, academics, policymakers, advocates, and service providers seeking to strengthen access to justice.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Amphitheatre

When hate goes unchecked: evidence action, and the challenges of securing justice for Muslim communities

Maryum Chaudhry, Director, the Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, Collective Group
Aishah Ali, Executive Director, Islamophobia Register Australia
Yousseff Bairdoun, Action Against Islamophobia, Australian National Imams Council Initiative

This presentation brings together Islamophobia Register Australia and Action Against Islamophobia to explore how community-led organisations can strengthen pathways to justice for Muslim communities when formal systems fall short in providing adequate protection and accountability.

Recent evidence highlights escalating Islamophobic hostility across public, private and online spaces, including incidents involving threats against mosque worshippers referencing AK-47 firearms, explicit death threats directed at mosques, and Muslim women being pursued and intimidated in public. These incidents reflect a broader pattern of underreported anti-Muslim hostility, institutional mistrust and a growing societal tolerance of Islamophobia.

Following the Bondi attack, Islamophobia Register Australia recorded a 740% increase in reported incidents within a fortnight, highlighting the alarming escalation in anti-Muslim hostility. Yet these figures reveal only part of the problem, as fear, distrust and concerns about institutional responses continue to discourage victims from reporting incidents and seeking justice.

Against this backdrop, community-led organisations play a critical role in documenting incidents, supporting victims, advocating for accountability and facilitating access to justice. This presentation examines how evidence, advocacy and community-led action can address systemic barriers, strengthen institutional accountability and rebuild trust, while empowering Muslim communities to seek protection, justice and meaningful change.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.03

Research on legal assistance effectiveness: the promise of clinical programs

Professor Joel Townsend, Director, Monash Law Clinics, Monash University, Faculty of Law
Ashleigh Newnham, Chief Executive Officer, South East Monash Legal Service

The case for a program of research on the effectiveness of legal assistance, including the better use of existing service delivery data, and the use of controlled trials where appropriate, is compelling. In other fields, such as medicine and education, the impact of interventions is subjected to rigorous quantitative testing. Resources for legal assistance are limited. Legal problems correlate with substantial personal hardship.

Properly testing how to use limited resources to address legal problems to greatest effect should be a public policy imperative. While there are methodological and ethical barriers to conducting rigorous quantitative research, including controlled trials, these can be overcome. They have been, elsewhere. Community legal centres are an obvious site for testing the effectiveness of legal assistance. They offer comparable, yet distinct, sites of service delivery. Student programs at community legal centres are particularly promising candidates.



Thursday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.03

How a student-run case file became Victorian Law

Dale Clough, Chief Executive Officer, Anika Legal

In 2024, Anika Legal published Broken Bonds, an action research report on rental bond disputes in Victoria. Four months later, key recommendations were adopted into government policy. In 2026, they were signed into law. This session opens with that outcome and asks the question: how was the evidence produced? Rather than running a separate research program, the evidence came from Anika's own casework: hundreds of rental bonds matters run by student interns. This is the output of a service model deliberately designed so that clinical legal education (CLE), casework, and systemic advocacy reinforce rather than compete with one another. Intentional use of tech, structured workflows, and remote delivery architecture are the connective tissue that makes the model viable at scale.

This presentation follows a single matter from intake through to its contribution to the Broken Bonds dataset and onward into the legislative outcome. We share outcome data across the loop: the 1:30 lawyer-intern supervision ratio; an all-time student Net Promoter Score of 89; 100% of recent interns reporting that the program left them better prepared to contribute to access to justice in their careers; and the Broken Bonds-to-legislation pathway as proof of systemic impact. Participants will leave with an understanding of how CLE can produce impact at scale for students, clients, and the system as a whole.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.03

Access to justice through clinical legal education partnerships with Victorian courts

Rebecca Tisdale, Clinical Solicitor, Deakin Law Clinic
Dr Nicole Siller, Clinical Solicitor, Deakin Law Clinic

This project examines how partnerships between courts and universities can strengthen access to justice through clinical legal education programs operating within family violence and civil jurisdiction settings. The project focuses specifically on three models of partnership piloted by Deakin Law Clinic – first, a Family Violence Duty Lawyer Service at Geelong Magistrates' Court; secondly, an Intervention Order (IVO) appeal advice clinic in the Appeals and Post Sentence Applications List of the County Court of Victoria; and finally procedural assistance referral service from self-represented litigants undertaking Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the Commercial List of the County Court of Victoria.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.41

The forgotten jurisdiction: Coronial courts, preventable deaths, and the access to justice gap

Dr Kerry Butler, Principal Researcher, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW

Coronial courts investigate unexpected and unnatural deaths, identify systemic failures, and empower coroners to recommend legislative, regulatory, and operational reforms to prevent future fatalities. Yet, the coronial jurisdiction is largely absent from access to justice scholarship and advocacy. This paper argues that omission reflects a significant blind spot, and that the coronial system raises concerns that have gone largely unexamined.

For families who have lost someone to a preventable death, the inquest process carries a particular promise: that what happened will be formally examined, that systemic failures will be named, and that the findings will prevent future deaths. The coronial system is built around that promise. Yet coronial recommendations are non-binding, response frameworks are voluntary, and whether findings translate into reform has until now been largely unmeasured. The gap between what the coronial system is empowered to do and what actually happens as a result sits squarely within the access to justice field. It raises fundamental questions about institutional accountability and whose deaths generate the political will to act.

This paper introduces Recommendation-to-Reform Mapping, a structured qualitative method developed to trace policy influence of coronial recommendations over time. The method integrates documentary policy analysis, policy sequence analysis and process tracing to reconstruct the sequence of policy developments that may follow from coronial findings.

The method is illustrated through its application to the study "From Inquest to Impact", a mixed-methods empirical study examining how coronial recommendations issued in NSW since 2009 contributed to legislative, regulatory and policy reform, and whether those reforms are associated with measurable reductions in preventable deaths.

While grounded in NSW, the analytical framework is applicable across any jurisdiction where investigative bodies produce prevention-focused recommendations, offering a tool for examining whether and how investigative findings enter the policy process at all.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.41

How a student-run case file became Victorian Law

Dr Naomi Burstyn, Lecturer (Teaching and Research), Monash University, Faculty of Law

This session examines access to justice in Australian coronial appeal and review litigation, exploring both the barriers to pursuing such litigation and the quality of justice experienced by those who do. Drawing on empirical research, it considers whether Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) might offer more equitable and humane pathways in this high-stakes context.

The session speaks directly to the Forum theme of Evidence and action by grounding its analysis in two bodies of evidence: a quantitative study of 169 decided coronial cases (1993–2022), and qualitative findings from 11 legal practitioners. Together, these reveal a troubling picture — rising self-representation, declining applicant success rates, and growing dissatisfaction — and point toward actionable reforms.

The empirical profile of coronial litigation provides the quantitative foundation, while practitioner insights offer a nuanced view of what ADR can and cannot achieve in this setting. Practitioners cautioned that traditional mediation models risk exacerbating power imbalances and undermining judicial review principles, particularly in superior court proceedings. However, they identified specific conditions under which ADR could be beneficial: disputes between legally represented, non-coronial parties; conciliation-style models with transparent documentation; and mediation facilitated by judicial officers equipped with the authority and skill to reach realistic outcomes.

Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of the structural access-to-justice challenges in coronial litigation, a critical appreciation of ADR's limitations and possibilities in this unique context, and practical insight into what a modified, coronial-specific ADR model might look like. The session ultimately invites participants to think carefully about how legal processes can be adapted to better serve grieving families and other stakeholders navigating one of the most emotionally demanding areas of law.

Thursday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.41

Colonial systems and cultural safety: lawyering through coronial inquest for First Nations families

Sharna White, Senior Associate (Pro Bono), Gadens
George Newhouse AM, Chief Executive Officer and founder; Adjunct Professor of Law, Macquarie University and UTS, National Justice Project

Coronial inquests are often described as truth-seeking processes to aid in the provision of justice and provide closure. However, for First Nations families these processes can reproduce the very structural inequalities and colonial legacies at the heart of the inquiry. This panel draws together lawyers and practitioners who have worked on First Nations coronial inquests to critically examine how legal professionals can navigate — and challenge — a system that was not designed for the communities it impacts the most.

The session would explore the structural and cultural barriers embedded within the coronial process: its adversarial underpinnings, its colonial legacies, and the limitations it places on achieving meaningful outcomes for families. Panellists from NJP and VALS will share practice-based insights on how they approach lawyering in this space — including strategies for ensuring cultural safety, limiting re-traumatisation, centring the voices and needs of families, and balancing client wellbeing with the procedural demands of the law. An academic panellist could provide a broader analytical framework, situating these experiences within scholarship on structural inequality and the justice system's treatment of First Nations peoples.

This session would speak directly to the Forum theme of Evidence and Action. It would draw on the direct experience of legal practitioners who work at the intersection of coronial law and Indigenous justice, combining reflective practice with critical analysis of systemic shortcomings. The panel would look at moving beyond identifying problems to discussing practical approaches: what does culturally safe lawyering look like in a system that resists it?

Participants will gain insight into the unique challenges of coronial advocacy for First Nations families, practical strategies for trauma-informed and culturally safe legal practice, and a deeper understanding of why systemic reform of the coronial process is essential to achieving equitable access to justice.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Health justice in action: embedding legal support in community health and homelessness services to address complex need

Charlotte Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Legal Centre
Dee Loader, Homeless Persons Program Manager, Bolton Clarke
Nadu Dove, Company Director and Principal Consultant, Dove Ideal Project Solutions

Since its commencement in October 2015, the Mental Health Legal Centre's (MHLC) Partners in Community program has demonstrated the transformative potential of collaboration between legal and health professionals in addressing the unmet legal needs of people experiencing mental ill health, psychosocial disability and homelessness.

Developed in partnership with the Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, this innovative health justice partnership began with one lawyer working alongside four community health nurses. By embedding lawyers within existing health outreach teams, the program brings legal assistance directly to people who face significant barriers to accessing justice, including those experiencing homelessness and those living in institutional or coercive environments.

This presentation will explore the partnership's model of integrated service delivery, highlighting how trust, flexibility, shared learning and interdisciplinary collaboration enable earlier identification of legal issues, improved access to justice and more coordinated, person-centred support. It will consider the program's independently evaluated impact, including its contribution to health and wellbeing, the prevention of escalating legal problems, and the identification of systemic issues requiring broader legal and policy reform.

The presentation will also examine how the lessons learned through Partners in Community have shaped MHLC's broader service delivery, informing the expansion of outreach services, prison-based programs, tribunal representation and targeted initiatives addressing housing insecurity and disadvantage. Through practical examples, the presentation will demonstrate how health justice partnerships can generate meaningful outcomes for individuals while influencing service design and systemic change.

Ultimately, Partners in Community illustrates the value of bringing legal and health professionals together in the places where people live and receive support, recognising that access to justice is integral to health, dignity and wellbeing. It is a model grounded in a simple but powerful principle: we achieve more when we work together.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Investing in organisational strength to improve access to justice: understanding the impact of Victoria's Trust-Based Strong Foundations Grant Program

Linda Gyorki, Director - Consulting, Allen and Clarke Consulting
Katrina Webster, Grants Program Lead, Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner

Victoria's 51 community legal centres collectively provide more than 170,000 services each year to at least 75,000 Victorians experiencing disadvantage, including many victim survivors of family violence, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people at risk of homelessness. Despite this reach, CLCs have long operated within a constrained, project-based funding landscape that limits organisational sustainability and, ultimately, access to justice.

In 2024, the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner (VLSB+C) launched the Strong Foundations Grant Program, a trust-based funding model that invites grantees to direct funds toward their own strategic priorities rather than prescribed project deliverables. Given this unique funding model, Allen and Clarke Consulting was engaged to independently evaluate the program. This presentation brings together two perspectives: the VLSB+C as the funding agency that designed and administers the program, and Allen and Clarke as the independent evaluator - offering a rare dual view of trust-based funding in practice.

Following a co-designed monitoring and evaluation framework developed with the first two cohorts of grant recipients, this presentation shares preliminary findings from the 18-month evaluation showcasing independent evidence of the impact of trust-based funding for the Victorian community legal sector. The mid-term evaluation shows that flexible, trust-based funding is producing measurable organisational change: grantees report strengthened financial resilience, expanded workforces, improved internal systems, greater advocacy capacity, and the ability to leverage the grant to attract additional funding.

Participants will leave with practical insights into how funding design shapes access to justice; a transferable mixed-methods evaluation framework; and evidence to inform grant-making in their own jurisdictions.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Transparency as justice: how publishing regulatory complaints data strengthens evidence-based reform

Sarah Panckridge, Senior Research and Policy Advisor, Consumer Policy Research Centre

Regulators hold some of the most powerful datasets for improving access to justice, yet across Australia these insights remain largely inaccessible. The Consumer Policy Research Centre's Am I the Only One? report shows how frequent, consistent and detailed publication of complaints data by regulators can expose harmful business practices, guide enforcement, and help policymakers, researchers and consumer advocates understand emerging problems.

Most Australian consumer law regulators currently release only minimal information on complaints received in annual reporting. This lack of transparency prevents identification of systemic harms, including which people are most affected and who may face barriers to reporting.

Where meaningful data is published, the benefits are clear. NSW Fair Trading's complaints register, for example, enables early detection of problematic traders, supports targeted regulatory action, and allows independent analysis of trends.

Publishing complaints data also strengthens justice institutions. Accountability and consistency improve when regulators make their performance visible. Accessible formats such as interactive dashboards, searchable databases and regular trend reports build public trust and encourage more responsive regulatory action. International ombuds schemes already show the value of this approach, routinely releasing granular data that shapes industry behaviour and informs consumer decision-making.

Transparent complaints data enables rigorous evaluation and highlights emerging problems. Expanding data publication is a practical, high-impact reform that makes justice systems more equitable, evidence-driven and accessible, so no person is left asking, "Am I the only one?"

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Peacemaking: increasing access to justice for people with complex needs

Louise Bassett, Senior Manager, Prevention & Community Programs, Neighbourhood Justice Centre

Anita De Blasio, Peacemaking Service Manager, Neighbourhood Justice Centre

The Neighbourhood Justice Centre's (NJC) peacemaking service increases access to justice for people with complex needs. Individuals with complex needs living in high density public housing are often in conflict with their community – whether with their neighbours, other residents and housing agencies. There are few resources within the community, the justice system and other systems to help them. They are frequently excluded from conflict resolution services at the assessment stage, because of the challenges they are experiencing. If they do manage to access conflict resolution services, often the root causes of their conflicts are not addressed. These combined factors diminish their access to justice and put them at risk of eviction, increased contact with the justice system, and ongoing difficulties for themselves and those they are in conflict with. The NJC is Australia's first community justice centre. Its Peacemaking Service uses a number of facilitated processes to assist people to resolve conflict and increase their justice options. It has carefully designed this service to include people with complex needs and increase their access to justice.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Village Courts and access to justice in Bangladesh

Dr. Md. Hashibul Alam Prodan, Professor, Department of Law, University of Rajshahi

Access to justice remains a central challenge in Bangladesh, where formal courts are often loaded with case backlogs, procedural delays, huge expenditure, and limited reach to rural communities. In this context, Village Courts, established under the Village Courts Act -2006, represent a substantial innovative community-based justice delivery to resolve minor civil and criminal disputes. This session examines the role of Village Courts in Bangladesh to reduce case backlogs and expand access to justice for vulnerable people in rural areas. The focus is on how Village Courts function with a participatory structure to strengthen social cohesion and reduce the burden on formal judicial institutions by emphasizing reconciliation, restitution, and compromise rather than punitive measures. The purpose of the session is to highlight both the promise and the challenges of these courts in delivering timely, affordable, and culturally relevant justice to marginalized communities. Aligned with the Forum theme "Evidence and Action", the session draws on empirical evidence from rural Bangladesh, policy analysis, and field-level experiences to demonstrate how Village Courts represent a promising way toward inclusive and restorative justice, particularly



when supported by institutional capacity-building and stronger linkages with national legal frameworks. At the same time, the discussion will address persistent challenges in the functioning of village courts, including limited citizen awareness, inadequate training of local officials, political influence, weak enforcement, and the need for greater gender sensitivity and integration with formal justice systems, which often undermine their effectiveness. Participants will gain practical and evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of Village Courts in advancing access to justice in Bangladesh. Through this session, they will also be informed about the actionable recommendations for village courts reform, including strategies to strengthen institutional capacity, enhance community participation, improve gender responsiveness, and foster stronger coordination between government agencies, NGOs, and civil society.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Home is where the heart is: community mediation and restorative practice to sustain peaceful relationships

*Dr Serge Loode, Director, Peace and Conflict Studies Institute Australia
Dennis Kuiai, Deputy Secretary, Department of Justice, Police and Legal Services, Autonomous Bougainville Government*

We propose a collaborative conversation between two experienced peace practitioners comparing experiences with community mediation and restorative practice in Bougainville and Australia. Dennis Kuiai is a former fighter for the Bougainville Revolutionary Army who turned peacebuilder and is today one of Bougainville's leading mediators working on strategies to increase social order and sustain peaceful relationships. Dennis works on sorcery accusation related violence, land disputes, trauma-related violence and public dialogue. Serge Loode has more than 20 years of experience in community mediation in Australia and Bougainville. He mediates highly escalated neighbourhood disputes often involving violence in Australia and has facilitated several important community engagement and peacebuilding projects with participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Dennis and Serge will discuss how vital free and accessible community mediation and restorative practice is to sustain peaceful societies and allow for constructive transformation of deep-seated conflicts. The conversation will focus on the need to have community mediators embedded in local communities and connected to courts to enhance access to justice. They will share practical examples and engage with the audience through a question and answer session.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.41

Teaching justice where it lives: health justice partnerships as a pedagogy for access

Dr. Cate Banks, Associate Professor, Monash University, Faculty of Law

This presentation examines preventative law in action through a practice-based legal education model embedded within a health service setting, drawing on the partnership between Monash Law Clinics and cohealth, a Victorian community health service. The premise is simple but underexplored: most legal problems experienced by people facing disadvantage are predictable, patterned, and escalate in foreseeable ways. A model that intervenes before escalation, rather than at crisis point, changes both what legal services can achieve and what students learn law is for.

Within the clinic, students work in multidisciplinary teams alongside a lawyer, health professionals, social work and mental health specialists, and family violence practitioners. They learn to identify legal needs early, often before clients themselves recognise a problem as legal, and to respond while options remain open and harm can still be averted. Preventative law is not an add-on to this model: it is built into the pedagogy, shaping how students learn to see, to ask, and to act. Trauma-informed practice, grounded in specialist scholarship and clinical work at Monash Law Clinics, supports this preventative orientation by structuring the service around clients' lived experience of compounding disadvantage.

The presentation draws on three sources of insight from the partnership: student reflections and supervisor observations suggesting that working in an integrated health justice setting shifts how students understand the role of law in clients' lives; case examples illustrating how early, integrated legal intervention can avert escalation and support client health and wellbeing; and patterns in the legal needs presenting through the clinic that become visible only through a holistic, preventative lens.

It closes with a provocation: what if pedagogical design is itself a preventative intervention? When law schools and community legal centres co-design preventative legal education within integrated health justice settings, they do more than treat legal problems earlier. They create the conditions for anticipating them and for teaching a generation of lawyers that the highest form of legal practice may be the problem that never materialises.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.41

Successful translation of trauma-informed practices: international examples

Jennifer Chen, Manager I With You Training Project I Client Service, Legal Aid NSW

Small changes make a difference for clients with trauma histories and Australian legal assistance services are well placed for trauma-informed, systemic reform.

This presentation draws on Jennifer's 2024 Churchill Fellowship, including 78 interviews with 111 participants from the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Scotland, and Canada. Jennifer interviewed lawyers from civil, criminal and family law practices from private practice, community legal centres and government. She interviewed lived experience advocates, judges, allied professionals, leaders, policy makers, mental health professionals and researchers.

This session translates these international lessons for the current Australian context of funding pressures, widespread staff burnout and vicarious trauma risk, and rising volume and complexity of client needs. Through case studies and practical recommendations, practitioners, leaders, and policymakers will leave with changes they can implement immediately and into the future.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.41

Complex trauma is a barrier to genuine justice attained through ADR for abuse survivors

Dr Louise McDonald, Principal Consultant, Independent formerly Griffith University (Doctoral studies completed and conferred Oct 2025)

Mediation or settlement conferences, are the most likely venue where survivors of institutional child sexual abuse will attain their justice outcomes. Litigation for the profound harm caused by sexual harm perpetrated by trusted members of institutions charged with the responsibility to care for children has grown exponentially since the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse reforms were adopted around the country. My Doctoral research, a multidisciplinary socio-legal study, exposed significant barriers related to the emergence of trauma symptoms in the mediation and settlement conferences of civil compensation for institutional child sexual abuse. Results showed that effective participation in ADR was undermined without a trauma-responsive ADR environment, demonstrably affecting the quality of survivors ADR outcomes and experiences. My approach to delivering the topic will be to outline the rationale, methods, and convey the results of the study, giving voice to what survivors have said they need from their lawyers and the justice system to support their just outcomes. The analysis connects neurobiology underling trauma to everyday legal practice. The research identified that survivors have justice needs related to trauma which need to be met if justice is actually available. The significance of trauma-informed legal practice is underlined in the results, and a conceptual model to understand the impact of trauma at ADR has emerged. Safeguards in ADR were also examined.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

Can artificial intelligence close the 'access to justice' gap?

Dr Art Cotterell, Postdoctoral Fellow, Faculty of Law & Justice, University of New South Wales

Persistent unmet legal need and increasing demand for assistance from community legal centres (CLCs) and other 'legal aid' organisations are well-documented. As AI becomes mainstream in private practice, parts of the sector are also exploring AI to close the 'access to justice gap'.

To evaluate potential AI use cases in CLC service delivery, this session considers what we know about CLC clients and how services are delivered to meet their needs, and what must be considered about client capabilities to ensure AI is appropriate in CLC service delivery.

Our research reviews policy documents, CLC AI use, academic and grey literature, and secondary analysis of empirical data on client capabilities, structural inequalities, legal need, service accessibility and the ability to self-assist. We develop principles for CLC AI use cases, drawing on our interdisciplinary backgrounds in law, sociology and community lawyering, and show why AI should augment, not replace, CLCs' service delivery.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

From access to evidence: ‘What Hear Me Out’ first year shows about technology, AI, compliance and system reform

George Newhouse AO, Chief Executive Officer and founder; Adjunct Professor of Law, Macquarie University and UTS, National Justice Project
Kert Stavorn, Project Lead, Hear Me Out, National Justice Project

Hear Me Out is a free AI-powered digital complaint-navigation platform developed by the National Justice Project to help people understand where to make a complaint, what process may apply, and how to take the next step. This session uses Hear Me Out’s first year as a practice-based case study in how technology can expand access to justice while turning real-world usage into early evidence for reform. Complaint systems often expect people to understand the system before the system will help them. A person may know that something harmful, unfair or unlawful has happened, but still be faced with a fragmented system where each body applies different rules, thresholds, time limits, remedies and processes. Hear Me Out was built for that first access point: the moment where confusion either becomes action, or the complaint is lost. The session will draw on emerging themes from HMO’s first annual report, including the types of issues users are raising, the complaint bodies most commonly recommended, and what these early patterns may suggest about unmet need, pathway confusion and future reform. It will also explain the practical architecture behind HMO’s work: structured complaint-body mapping, AI-supported triage, human review, plain-language guidance and complaint-writing support. The session focuses on the relationship between evidence and action: how early usage evidence from a live access-to-justice tool can inform safer technology design, stronger referral pathways, university clinic models and future systemic advocacy. It will also examine the safeguards required when using AI in justice contexts, including legal accuracy, privacy, plain language, human oversight and clear limits on what the tool should do. Participants will leave with a practical model for using technology to improve individual access while responsibly building an evidence base for people-centred justice reform.

Thursday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

Artificial intelligence enabled justice tools for refugees in Tanzania: a feasibility study from Nyaragusu camp

Dr Sarah Stephens, Associate Professor, University of Sussex

Refugees in Tanzania face significant barriers to accessing justice, arising from legal uncertainty, restricted mobility and limited access to reliable legal information. This project explores the potential for adapting Dada Wakili, a digital legal information service originally developed for communities in Tanzania, to support access to justice in refugee settings. Drawing on key informant interviews and a targeted literature review, the study examines the opportunities, ethical considerations and operational challenges associated with deploying digital justice technologies for a highly vulnerable population in Kigoma, in North West Tanzania. The findings suggest that carefully designed digital legal information services can strengthen legal capability and improve access to trusted legal information when embedded within existing justice ecosystems. The project also contributes to the development of the Justice Technology Acceptance Model (JTAM) and offers practical lessons for policymakers, humanitarian organisations and justice practitioners.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

Creating conditions for confidence: how self-help resources shape legal outcomes, with evidence-based insights to improve design and delivery

Melanie Saunders, Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning Lead, Justice Connect

Justice Connect’s latest research studies the effectiveness of online legal self-help resources. By evaluating existing resources, this research responds to the difficulties attributing legal outcomes to resource usability and introduces practical ways of improving resource design to maximise reach and impact.

The research succeeds in demonstrating how person-centred resource design can measurably improve users’ ability to engage with legal information, identify relevant pathways and develop the capability to address their legal problem. The research identifies confidence as the key mechanism linking useability, comprehension and action. Likewise, it proposes an emphasis on fostering user confidence as a way of bridging the gap between traditional useability evaluation and outcome-centred measurement techniques. Additionally, it shares practical evidence of how embedding co-design into resource development improves resource effectiveness and supports scaled access to justice outcomes.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

Web design and access to justice: a comparative usability analysis in Chile and Los Angeles

Dr Ricardo Lillo, Faculty Director, People-Centered Justice Lab, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Chile

This article examines how websites have improved citizens’ access to justice, specifically through the lens of user-centered design. While it is true that websites have become one of the primary points of access to legal information for individuals—thus constituting a significant lever for strengthening the right of access to justice—there has been comparatively little research on the quality of these platforms, particularly regarding usability, design, simplicity, and accessibility. The study focuses on the Chilean context, applying heuristic evaluations to various websites that provide free and open legal information to the public. The same analytical exercise is then conducted with the websites of the Los Angeles Superior Court in the United States, with the objective of exploring the potential development of a benchmark or minimum standard that legal-information websites should meet. The article concludes with recommendations for the development of websites containing legal information for the public, based on the standards derived from the study.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

Moving beyond access: building the case for measuring ‘lower dose’ support

Bridget McAloon, Principal Researcher, Victoria Law Foundation

Research by the Victoria Law Foundation (VLF) has been building a detailed picture of legal need, capability and what works to meet need. Its most recent publication, Measure for Measure, took an exploratory approach, developing an operational model of people-centred justice informed by on-the-ground strategies seen to effectively meet legal need across the Victorian justice system.

Measure for Measure grounds existing knowledge about people-centred practice while identifying questions for further investigation. One deceptively simple question it brings us back to is how much legal support is enough? The research explored context-specific initiatives providing legal support of varying intensities, but there remains limited evidence about how much and what type of support is enough to achieve a meaningful outcome, for whom and under what circumstances.

A legal dosage framing offers one way to pursue these questions. It shifts attention from a hierarchy of services towards understanding how support can be matched and combined according to need and capability. In particular, we know relatively little about when lower-dose interventions — such as information, education and advice — are enough to effectively meet legal need, and for whom. Measuring whether and when ‘less’ is enough is therefore an important next step in understanding what works.

This presentation explores an initial conceptual framing for measuring ‘lower dose’ support. Building this evidence is one piece of the broader Access to Justice puzzle: potentially enabling more effective matching of support, better use of finite resources, and justice ecosystems better able to provide the right combination of help to different people and problems.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Amphitheatre

Access, trust, and advocacy: embedding bicultural expertise

Laura Cashman, Social Worker and Community Lawyer, Moonee Valley Legal Service
Kowther Youssuf, former MVLS bicultural worker and JD graduate

The Bicultural Worker Program is an evolution of the Legal Concierge program that Moonee Valley Legal Service (MVLS) initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic. This program was a response to the breakdown of trust and access to institutions in the Flemington area during the ‘hard’ lockdown in July 2020. It was also out of an understanding that there was a high number of racially marginalised communities, living particularly in Flemington public housing, who were likely not having their legal needs addressed by MVLS. The success of the Legal Concierge program led to the development and design of the Bicultural Worker Program, to embed the lessons from the Legal Concierge model.

This BCW program intentionally employs bicultural workers at MVLS. These are workers who have expertise in language, culture and a lived experience with the communities we work with. The program does three main pieces of work: It Educates, Navigates and Advocates. These three functions drive the work to support communities who have been traditionally disenfranchised by official systems.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Amphitheatre

Kaupapa Māori Legal Services: reimagining access to justice through Indigenous community-led practice.

Petra Hape, Tumū Māori/Director Māori, Community Law Centres Aotearoa
Hiria Rolleston, National Coordinator, Kaupapa Māori Legal Services, Community Law Centres Aotearoa

This presentation will share the development and implementation of Kaupapa Māori Legal Services (KMLS), a national pilot delivered through Community Law Centres Aotearoa across Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

KMLS was established in response to long standing inequities experienced by Māori within the legal and justice systems. It explores what access to justice can look like when Indigenous worldviews, relationships, community leadership and local context are not added to an existing legal service, but form part of the starting point for service design and delivery.

Rather than focusing solely on legal transactions or individual casework, KMLS is grounded in kaupapa Māori values and approaches that prioritise relationships, trust, collective wellbeing, accessibility and long-term community connection. Delivery includes outreach and legal services within marae and community settings, alongside broader organisational systems and change across the Community Law movement.

Drawing on the experience of a live national pilot operating across diverse communities, the presentation will share practical learning about implementing Indigenous-led approaches within a national legal assistance framework, balancing community responsiveness with funding, accountability and evaluation requirements, and navigating the opportunities and tensions that arise when kaupapa Māori approaches are embedded within existing legal services.

The session will contribute and Indigenous, community-led and practice based perspective to international access to justice conversations. It will invite participants to consider a broader question - “whose worldview is their justice service designed around, and what becomes possible when communities have greater authority to shape the answer?”

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.41

A strategic review of the Mabels Health Justice Partnership: “It couldn’t have come at a better time”

Marika Manioudakis, Director - Family Violence Initiatives, Eastern Community Legal Centre
Yvette Clarke, Manager, Policy and Reform, Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University

Mabels is a Health Justice Partnership between Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), Boordawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service and three Victorian councils, which provides early intervention legal support to women experiencing family violence within the Maternal and Child Health context.

After celebrating 10 years of service delivery and a series of evaluation reports highlighting the success of the model, ECLC and the Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University (CIJ) have collaborated to undertake a Strategic Review of the program.

The Mabels Strategic Review highlights the role that multidisciplinary legal programs can play in providing critical support to women experiencing or at risk of family violence as part of the broader family violence response system.

To inform broader family violence systemic reform, the review has identified the unique elements and core components of the model that are critical to its effectiveness and success.

In a panel presentation ECLC and CIJ seek to present the insights gained through the Mabels model to explore the role of Health Justice Partnerships in People-Centred Justice.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.41

Can victims of violence access justice through law? Empirical insights from Buenos Aires and Berlin

Paula Edling, Doctoral Candidate, Research Associate, Berlin Social Science Center (WZB)
Dr Julieta Marotta, Assistant Professor, Maastricht University / United Nations University

This presentation draws on two empirical socio-legal research projects on access to justice for victims of domestic violence in Buenos Aires and Berlin. Both projects center victims’ lived experiences, focusing on how they navigate and perceive the judicial system as one AMONG several formal and informal responses to violence. By comparing findings across jurisdictions, the presentation examines how legal responses are shaped not only by rights frameworks, but also by social structures, institutional practices, and access to legal aid and support services. The Buenos Aires project (Julieta Marotta) explores how access to justice can empower victims and contribute to conflict resolution, drawing on 54 in-depth interviews and interviews with legal and psychosocial professionals. The Berlin

project (Paula Edling) investigates access to sustainable protection under the German Protection Against Violence Act, based on court files, interviews, field observation, and stakeholder workshops. Together, these projects link empirical evidence to practical questions of legal protection.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.41

Legal Pathways to Recovery: improving access to justice through multilingual legal education for migrant and refugee survivors of family violence

Yasmin Ildes, Managing Lawyer – Migration Law and Legal Projects, Intouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds experiencing family violence often face significant barriers to accessing legal information and support, including language, geography, and service accessibility. The Legal Pathways to Recovery Project was developed to address these barriers through the delivery of free, multilingual online legal education webinars across migration, family law, intervention orders, financial assistance, and related legal issues. Initially piloted within Intouch Women’s Legal Centre for evaluation purposes, the project also engaged partner organisations, enabling staff to build legal capability and support clients and patients to access culturally responsive legal information. This session will explore the project’s development, implementation, and evaluation, highlighting key lessons learned, participant outcomes, and the opportunities and challenges of delivering innovative, accessible legal education to strengthen access to justice for diverse communities.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Interdisciplinary evidence gathering: empowering but not misleading consumers in the age of the LLM; the challenges and opportunities of building LLM-based systems.

Aria Nguyen, Principal AI Engineer and Justice Technologist, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers
Oscar McLaren, Principal Lawyer, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers

Morry is Maurice Blackburn’s Large Language Model (LLM)-based legal AI assistant, built by The Foundry — a multidisciplinary team of lawyers, engineers and product strategists. It helps people understand their legal situation and reach reliable legal information in a regulated environment. Unlike general-purpose chatbots that produce fluent but unverified language, Morry combines trusted legal sources, structured conversational workflows, guardrails and lawyer-led review.

A core focus is evidence: how do we measure whether an AI tool meets the standard legal information demands? The team built a custom LLM monitoring dashboard, large-scale human-in-the-loop testing, and continuous evaluation — surfacing where standard tech-sector measures of success need rethinking to meet legal requirements for accuracy and accountability. The project shows how legal practitioners and technologists can work together, quantifying an AI system’s limits and engineering deliberately within them so the tool performs reliably where it counts.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

The evolution of Victoria Legal Aid’s Help Before Court service: practice insights from a client-centred service in a high demand system

Tamsin Mildenhall, Associate Director, Summary Crime, Victoria Legal Aid

Help Before Court was designed to provide people with early legal advice and support before attending summary crime hearings in the Magistrates’ Court, reducing the stress and confusion often associated with court-based interactions and enabling earlier resolution of legal issues. The service has been shown to support greater engagement in legal matters and to reduce pressure on at-court services and court backlogs resulting in a 50% reduction in adjournments and 45% increase in diversionary outcomes when compared to VLA’s at court Duty Lawyer service.

Since Help Before Court was established, demand has consistently exceeded resourcing and capacity, creating both operational pressures and opportunities for innovation. The Help Before Court project has used client insights and feedback, practitioner experience and service data to inform the model’s evolution. Evidence gathered through implementation and day-to-day practice has been translated into practical service improvements, including approaches to accessibility, triage, and client engagement. The service has been able to be scaled up and provided in a resource effective and client-centred way across the state.

Thursday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Digitalization of judicial services in the Horn of Africa region: comparative studies on implications for fair trial and access to justice

Milkiyas Butcha Abdi, Lecturer, School of Law, Ambo University
Judge Eshetu Yadeta Temesgen, Judge, Supreme Court of Oromia

This study examines the wave of digitalization of judicial services in selected countries in the Horn of Africa region, focusing on the challenges and prospects of implementing digitally technology-based judicial services. The researchers examine the regulation that establishes ICT-based judicial services from the perspectives of domestic constitutionally guaranteed procedural justice and international human rights law standards. Digital justice benchmarks from developed countries (USA, Canada, France, and Germany) and developing nations (South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda) were comparatively reviewed from technological infrastructure reliability to delivering digitalized judicial services. The study explores vital questions: What are the challenges and prospects of implementing digital justice in the Horn of Africa region's judiciaries? Is the ICT-based judicial service enabling act compatible with constitutionally guaranteed procedural justice and fit human rights standards? How does the full and forced digitalization of judicial services ensure fair trial guarantees and access to justice? The study employs a qualitative approach using a combination of doctrinal and empirical data, including interviews, observations, and focus group discussions with legal professionals and non-professionals interacting with the courts. The study was led by the rule of law and a human rights-based approach as an analytical theoretical framework. The study uses thematic and contextual analysis methods.

The findings of the study reveal that while technology has enhanced judicial service delivery systems and improved access to justice, it does not replace critical fair-trial guarantees such as public hearings. The enabling regulation that copiously and forcibly digitalizes judicial services in the Horn of Africa regions, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya lacks robust constitutional support and conflicts with essential constitutional principles, including the right to a fair trial and public hearings. Moreover, the regulations weaken the judiciary's mission, relying on inadequate technological facilities that hamper reliable judicial service delivery. The wave of legislating judicial services to be entirely based on ICT and digitalization fails to contemplate the needs of vulnerable groups—the poor and uneducated, who struggle with technology. As a way forward, the study recommends a wide-ranging policy and legal review and implementation of digital justice that ensures not only respect for fundamental rights but also alignment with the country's technological capabilities.

Thursday, 3:20 PM, Amphitheatre

Bridging the gap between evidence and impact: knowledge translation for access to justice

Olivia Nguy, Director, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW,
Lottie Turner, Chief Executive Officer, Health Justice Australia,
Marie Baird, Senior Research Advisor, Victoria Law Foundation

At a time of increasing pressure on justice systems, evidence-informed policy, practice and decision making matters more than ever. There is a rich and growing body of access to justice evidence showing what's working, what's not and who is being left behind. But translation of research insights into meaningful change can be slow and limited. How do we move from evidence to action?

Join panellists from Health Justice Australia, NSW Law and Justice Foundation and Victoria Law Foundation for a discussion of the enablers and challenges of translating access to justice insights into real impact and the role different parts of the justice system have to play. This is an interactive session drawing on the expertise in the room – we want to hear from you!

Thursday, 3:20 PM, Auditorium

How women-centred research informed court-led change to strengthen Pacific family violence response

Chief Magistrate Anna Laloyer, Chief Magistrate, Judiciary of Vanuatu
Principal Magistrate Dimitry Murdoch, Principal Magistrate, Kiribati Magistrates' Court; Senior Magistrate Ane Tavo-Mailangi, Senior Magistrate, Tonga Judiciary
Dr Carolyn Graydon, Human Rights and Access to Justice Advisor with the Pacific Justice Sector Programme

This panel features the innovative work of Pacific Courts to build responsive, accessible court services for women and child survivors of family violence in remote areas. These targeted services were designed based on findings of women-centred research, identifying the key justice aims of family violence survivors when they reach out for help to stop family violence. The session highlights the important work Pacific Courts are doing to lead wider processes of coordinated dialogue and change with customary and church community

leaders, women's organisations, police and legal aid services, so justice services are better coordinated and more relevant to the needs of Pacific communities, especially the most vulnerable members. Magistrates from Courts in Vanuatu, Kiribati and Tonga will share their work in leading these important processes of legal and social change and the lead researcher will present key findings from the women-centred research underpinning this body of work.

Thursday, 3:20 PM, Room 8.03

Locked out: systemic failures to exercising financial equity post separation

Jenni Smith, CEO, Northern Community Legal Centre

This presentation examines how family law systems fail women escaping family violence by making access to property justice conditional. Although legal entitlement to family property exists, it is often inaccessible due to legal costs and the lack of enforceable dispute resolution pathways. National data shows 69% of women fleeing partner violence leave property and assets behind because processes are unaffordable and perpetrators can delay or disengage without consequence (AIHW 2025). Drawing on Northern Community Legal Centre's Financial Divide Project Evaluation (2025), the session shares evidence from a lawyer-assisted property mediation pilot for victim-survivors with small property pools. It highlights how supported mediation can secure modest settlements critical to housing security, while also showing how voluntary participation and limited litigation options leave many women in crisis accommodation or homelessness. Participants will gain evidence of systemic barriers, insights into financial and systems abuse, lessons from an evaluated intervention, and reform options including enforceable mediation and publicly funded litigation.

Thursday, 3:20 PM, Room 8.03

Reducing burdens in frontline decision-making

Professor Amy Widman, Professor of Law, Rutgers Law School

In this qualitative study of frontline decision makers determining benefits applications, I describe how frontline decision-making works in the US at the federal level. Additionally, drawing on administrative burden literature, the descriptions and interviews here develop a specific type of burden that is borne by claimants interacting with the frontline decision makers who ultimately are tasked with translating claimant experience into legality. The article labels the burden as one of legitimacy, and grounds this burden in the misalignment of a top-down structure with the need for frontline discretion. Interviews with frontline decision makers, administrative judges, advocacy groups, and innovation teams reveal both recognition and reliance on the discretion and expertise of frontline decision makers.

Analyzing this burden alongside due process and sociolegal theories allows us to better understand the relational gap that this understanding of a legitimacy burden fills. We can then connect which structural elements are both working and not working to create administrative justice at the frontline stage of record development. Specifically, the swivel role that frontline decision makers play can, if structured properly, reduce this particular type of legitimacy burden. Ideal structural conditions should recognize and legitimize the translation function of a frontline decision maker as bridging the gap between a claimant's life experience and the formal structure of law in which these programs operate. By centering the relational aspect of legitimizing a claim, specific frontline characteristics come into view: the role of community ties, the substance of the interactions between claimant and frontline decisionmaker, and the forms of lay expertise that bear on the process.

Thursday, 3:20 PM, Room 8.03

From evidence to action: rethinking legal support for people affected by cancer

Tarishi Desai, Manager - Treatment & Supportive Care, McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer at Cancer Council Victoria

People affected by cancer experience legal problems, including workplace challenges, discrimination, debt and difficulty accessing insurance and social security, at a time of significant physical, financial and emotional strain. Family and other unpaid carers are affected with responsibilities including acting as substitute decision-makers and executors of estates. In Victoria, Australia, many of these issues emerge or are addressed late, at crisis points. With global rates of cancer incidence, survivorship and caring rising, these are urgent issues to address.

This session draws on research funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program, exploring the legal needs and access to justice experiences of Victorians affected by cancer. The study combines quantitative data with insights from lived experience interviewees. Together, this evidence highlights unmet legal need and broader access to justice challenges. By examining law reform opportunities and service design improvements, this session offers practical insights into advancing access to justice for people experiencing serious illness, like cancer, and their carers.

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Friday, 10:00 AM, Auditorium

From indicators to experiences: building a people-centred research agenda on court-based mediation in Brazil

Andressa Scorza dos Ramos, Researcher, FGV Direito SP
Beatriz Carvalho Nogueira, Researcher, FGV Direito SP

Brazil's national policy on consensual dispute resolution – established by Resolution 125/2010 of the National Council of Justice, the federal body responsible for judicial governance – created a nationwide network of court-based mediation and conciliation centres (CEJUSCs) across all 27 state courts. Fifteen years later, we conducted a mixed-methods empirical study assessing the current state of this policy through quantitative and qualitative analysis of two national administrative datasets, structured questionnaires administered to the 27 Permanent Centers for Consensual Dispute Resolution Methods (NUPEMECs), and focus groups with approximately 40 mediators, conciliators, and court staff.

The quantitative findings reveal significant structural disparities AMong courts and a governance model driven by numerical targets that measure only settlement rates, leaving unexamined the quality of the process, the experiences of users and professionals, and outcomes extending beyond mediation sessions. The focus groups exposed dimensions obscured by quantitative indicators: participants described a system that renders invisible the work of rebuilding dialogue, undervalues frontline professionals, and places performance targets in tension with the principles of appropriate dispute resolution.

Building on these findings, the next stage of the project turns to qualitative inquiry guided by the OECD People-Centred Justice Framework, shifting the lens from what institutions provide to what people actually experience and need. By the time of the Forum, this new qualitative phase will have progressed sufficiently to allow presentation of both the structural diagnosis and the methodological choices underpinning the people-centered inquiry. The project thus moves from institutional assessment toward understanding how justice policies are experienced and produced by those they are intended to serve.

Participants will gain a replicable methodological framework for integrating court data with qualitative access-to-justice research, substantive findings on the lived experience of large-scale ADR policies, and evidence-based recommendations applicable to jurisdictions facing tensions between measurable outputs and meaningful access to justice.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Auditorium

Legal services reform: is this really about access to justice?

Professor Robert Lapper KC [he/him / they/them], Professor - David and Dorothy Lam Chair, Law and Public Policy, University of Victoria, Canada, Access to Justice Centre for Excellence, Faculty of Law, University of Victoria, Canada

Since the late 1990s, many jurisdictions have undertaken major reviews of and reforms in the regulation of legal services and in the education and competencies required for accreditation of legal services providers. A common justification of these measures suggests that they will improve access to justice. This project seeks to interrogate the question of whether they in fact achieve that.

In 2025, the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London England, in collaboration with the Access to Justice Centre for Excellence, University of Victoria, Canada, and legal research partners in the UK, Australia and Canada proposed a multi-jurisdictional study to consider the question - How do systems of legal education, accreditation and regulation impact access to justice? Our project seeks to advance research on this through cross jurisdictional and comparative studies of recent reviews and reform initiatives. It will examine how access to justice objectives are framed in them, what actual or expected access to justice impacts might result from them, and how those impacts are measured and evaluated.

Professor Robert Lapper, KC will outline the preliminary work undertaken to develop this study and invite conference participants to discuss their knowledge and experience of these questions in their own jurisdictions, issues that might benefit from further investigation and comparative research, and how and whether they might participate in this study and future research collaborations that emerge.

This research collaboration holds promise to systematically address the access to justice impacts of current and proposed reforms with a view to enhancing the understanding of their effectiveness. It will lay a foundation for considering beneficial practices in understanding and evaluating access to justice impacts in these areas, and gaps and missed opportunities that might need to be addressed to further the elimination of barriers to access to justice.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Auditorium

From evidence to action: embedding safety, accessibility and inclusion in the Federal Circuit and Family Courts of Australia

Wajiha Ahmed, Judicial Registrar, Director - Cultural Language Diversity and Inclusion, Director - Cultural Liaison Officers, Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia
Hayley Foster, Director, Family Violence; Director, Access, Equity and Inclusion, Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia

Hear directly from Judges and senior leaders of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) who are leading system-wide reforms to deliver safer, more accessible and inclusive justice outcomes. This session will explore how the Court is translating evidence into action through initiatives designed to better meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalised court users, including First Nations peoples, family violence survivors, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, migrants and refugees, and people living with disability. Participants will gain insight into the Court's strategic reforms, including trauma-informed and safety-focused practice, dynamic risk assessment and safety planning, culturally responsive service delivery, and innovations that strengthen procedural fairness while improving user wellbeing. The presentation will highlight the expansion of specialist services, enhanced migration jurisdiction capability, and the development of accessible resources and ethically governed technologies, including AI-enabled initiatives that support participation, communication and access to justice. Drawing on lived experience, research, operational data and cross-sector partnerships, the session will demonstrate how evidence-based practice is driving measurable improvements in safety, accessibility and outcomes. It will also examine the Court's emerging approach to research, ethics and innovation governance, and how continuous learning, evaluation and translational reform are being embedded across the organisation to support long-term, sustainable change.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.03

Legal preparedness in a time of climate crises: the role of a Climate Resilience Clinic

Associate Professor Brad Jessup, Associate Professor, Monash University, Faculty of Law
Associate Professor Kate Fischer Doherty, Director, Melbourne Law School Clinics, Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne

In just two years, the Climate Resilience Clinic has found itself an agile part of the Victorian community-led legal sector that is seemingly in a persistent state of responding to climate impacts and weather extremes. The clinic has adopted a unique intermediary role, connecting communities, community legal centres, law firm pro bono legal support, and law students. It has facilitated the provision of extensive first-of-kind research, reform proposals, and community legal education, AMongst its early work. Stepping back from the day-to-day work of the clinic, this paper examines the role of a clinic like the Climate Resilience Clinic to build what is coming to be known as “climate legal preparedness”. By using plural narratives and perspectives of preparedness, drawn from students, teacher reflections, sectoral lessons, and clinical evaluations, the paper will both add to the nascent definitions and conceptualisation of climate legal preparedness and argue that a preparedness framework is critical to enduring climate justice collaborations.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.03

LIVD Program

Dr Dalila Viol, Diretora Executiva, ID Global

The LIVD Program (Living Indigenous Languages in Law – “Língua Indígena Viva no Direito”) is an innovative access to justice initiative that addresses language barriers faced by Indigenous peoples in accessing legal information. Through a participatory methodology co-developed with Indigenous communities, the Program combines the translation of key legal instruments into Indigenous languages with community-based legal empowerment initiatives. The first edition translated and community-validated the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, ILO Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into Tikuna, Kaiowá and Kaingang. Indigenous language communities representing more than 126,000 Indigenous people in Brazil. Developed in partnership with Indigenous organisations and Brazilian public institutions, LIVD demonstrates how multilingual legal empowerment can strengthen Indigenous rights, cultural preservation and meaningful access to justice.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.03

Civics education: why bother?! Bridging the gap between knowledge holders and those who want it

Darryn Aitchison, General Manager, YouthLaw Aotearoa (New Zealand)

Waha is an innovative approach to civics education made by YouthLaw Aotearoa (New Zealand). Both a civics education Program and a law reform strategy, Waha uses games, videos, and beautiful design to help young people see they have the power to change the world – and gets them doing it!

Waha exists because for forty years YouthLaw Aotearoa has seen the harm caused by the failure to make children's rights a reality. We believe real change can come if children and young people have a louder voice within our democracy. But to engage in civic life, they need to see it is relevant and their voices will make a difference.

Making Waha was a journey of imagination, discovery, creativity and collaboration. Codesigned by young people, teachers, justice professional and designers – it involved a deep exploration of the barriers young people face engaging with civics.

By tracing how Waha was made, this session will explore the benefits of collaborating beyond the justice sector and embedding lived experience in the design of justice solutions.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Amphitheatre

Advancing access to housing justice in regional Victoria through systems-thinking and collaborative action

*Kate Phillips, Policy and Project Manager, Collaborate for Change Project Lead, ARC Justice
Dr David Boarder Giles, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, Deakin University*

This project is a collaborative research, practice, and systems-change initiative involving Victoria's six Regional, Rural and Remote Community Legal Centres and the Deakin HOME Strategic Research and Innovation Centre. The collaboration brings together stakeholders across the housing, homelessness, legal, and broader health and community service sectors to strengthen cross-sector capacity, identify shared barriers, and generate coordinated opportunities for action and reform. Through a mixed-methods methodology, including Deakin's distinctive Systems-thinking In Community Knowledge Exchange (STICKE) method and platform, the project adopts a relational and systems-thinking approach to housing justice. Rather than framing housing injustice as solely individual or structural, the research examines the dynamic relationships between individual, local, and structural factors that shape housing insecurity and access to justice. Key project outputs include six regional profile reports and an overarching comparative analysis, highlighting both region-specific conditions and recurring patterns across regional Victoria. Additional project activities include legal education initiatives, strengthened referral pathways, improved data-sharing practices, and collaborative action planning processes designed to enhance service integration and reduce barriers to housing justice.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Amphitheatre

Renting in reality: what is it like to rent your home in Victoria?

Sarah Panckridge, Senior Research and Policy Advisor, Consumer Policy Research Centre

Most people who rent in Victoria will experience at least one rental challenge over a 12-month period (79%), but close to half will not make a complaint. CPRC's 2025 research with 1,000 Victorian renters and 300 landlords reveals renting is taking a financial, mental and physical toll on 70% of renters. Families facing hardship are faring the worst when renting, including more challenges, and longer dispute timelines.

Victoria has some of the strongest legal protections for renters in Australia. However, renters report high levels of financial difficulty, poor relationships with their landlords or agent, unreasonable requests for excessive personal information, low confidence in exercising their rights, and fear of retaliation.

Weaknesses in the Victorian rental market are diminishing renter confidence and are creating barriers to taking action. Two in five renters give up, move house or do nothing and endure a bad renting situation they should not have to tolerate. Landlords, many of whom inherited the property or did not intend to be a landlord, may have renters' best interests in mind but often lack confidence in and knowledge of their legal obligations.

In this session we will discuss the first Renter Confidence Index in Australia, that bridges the gap between real renter experiences, and the need for systemic improvements to the private rental market. We share our insights into who the major cohorts of landlords are; a first in Australia. We will discuss key

mechanisms that could be applied, including better regulation of rent increases, stricter enforcement of housing standards, compensation for landlord breaches, protections against unfair evictions, and improved access to timely redress. We will share changes Government has embarked on in light of this research, and what role consumer advocates and legal representatives can play to support renters and rental providers.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Amphitheatre

Social Housing Legal Program: responding to a changing housing landscape

Stephanie Price, Manager Community Legal Services, West Heidelberg Community Legal (Holstep Health)

The Social Housing Legal Program is a joint initiative of Inner Melbourne Community Legal and the West Heidelberg Community Legal, developed in response to the rapid transformation in the delivery of social housing in Victoria from the public sector to not-for-profit community organisations.

There are fewer rights and protections for renters than public housing, service charges are often high and unclear, disability modifications can be difficult to obtain and options to challenge or review decisions by landlords are more limited. Eviction rates are higher in community housing, leading to homelessness.

We have identified gaps in legal knowledge and services for those living in community housing, which we intend to address through the SHLP. The aim of the program is to help social housing deliver on its mission to provide sustainable homes for Victorians through best-practice regulation and accountability.

Friday, 10:00 AM, Room 8.41

Evidence for justice: ethical empirical research in law clinics and community legal centres

*Professor Genevieve Grant, Professor and Director, Warren Centre for Civil Justice, Monash University, Faculty of Law
Sally Latter, Lecturer and Clinical Supervisor, Monash Law Clinics
Emily Singh, Principal Lawyer, Monash Law Clinics
Dr Cate Banks, Associate Professor, Monash University, Faculty of Law*

Community legal centres (CLCs) and university law clinics generate vital (and often untapped) insight into civil justice. Despite the growing demand for this evidence, the research ethics of turning client experiences into systemic change remains largely unexamined. Ethical research isn't box-ticking, it's a reckoning with power: who produces knowledge, whose voices count, and who truly benefits.

This session brings together experienced researchers and practitioners to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of doing empirical civil justice research ethically, including: navigating power asymmetries between lawyers, clients and students; client consent frameworks for administrative data analyses; developing sustainable research capacity and infrastructure; centring lived experience; using data to drive advocacy; and ensuring research serves communities rather than just institutional and academic purposes. The session will provide participants with practical strategies for building the evidence base ethically in the context of law clinics and CLCs.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Uneven hearings and access to justice: exploring procedural justice in Australian Family Courts

Dr Jessica Mant, Senior Research Fellow, Warren Centre for Civil Justice, Monash University, Faculty of Law

In this paper, I explore the phenomenon of "uneven hearings", namely: proceedings in which one party is represented by a lawyer while the other appears without legal representation. There is already a wealth of existing international evidence about the causes and prevalence of self-representation in civil and family proceedings, the challenges faced by self-represented litigants appearing in those proceedings, and the difficulties that this creates for the efficient running of court systems. Drawing this together, I argue that uneven hearing dynamics represent an important but overlooked site for empirical exploration of how all of these tensions come together to create a perfect storm of systemic inefficiency and perceived unfairness. I will then outline the design of my ongoing 3-year empirical project, funded by the Australian Research Council, which focuses specifically on building an empirical picture of how uneven hearings are currently managed in Australian family courts. I will present some emerging findings from observations of 'uneven' hearings undertaken as part of the first Phase of this project. Using a lens of procedural justice, I will reflect on the utility (and limitations) of voice, trustworthiness, respect, understanding, helpfulness and neutrality for understanding uneven hearing dynamics, and how this fits with what we already know about self-representation in civil justice.



Friday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Building a culture of judicial dispute resolution: Victorian courts and tribunals and regional developments

Judge Sharon Burchell, County Court of Victoria

This paper examines the developments in Judicial Dispute Resolution (JDR) in Victoria whereby Courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) are seeking to build a culture of JDR in Victoria to bring timely and cost-effective dispute resolution to users, particularly in the context of increasing numbers of unrepresented litigants, gaps in equitable access to justice, doubling of caseloads, and decreasing resources. The JDR program is actively integrated into the Commercial Division of the County Court of Victoria's case management system to encourage early resolution of proceedings. In the Supreme Court of Victoria and the County Court, judicial mediation is provided by judges, associates judges and judicial registrars, as well as registry lawyers. The Magistrates' Court of Victoria undertakes mediation in civil matters and at VCAT, any of the almost 200 members may conduct a compulsory conference or mediation. On 2 February 2026, a new ADR division was established at VCAT. The paper next undertakes a comparative analysis of the procedural frameworks and institutional designs governing DR in England & Wales and Ireland measured against the Victorian context, to identify features of international best practice in JDR. In particular, attention is given to the importance and relevance of work done in other judiciaries in the region and the sharing of lessons learnt in how to strengthen the rule of law and enhance access to justice through effective methods of voluntary and mandatory DR.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Auditorium

Evidence-based innovation in Singapore's Tribunal Justice System: bridging the legal literacy gap to enhance people-centred justice

District Judge Winston Man, Group Manager, Community Courts and Tribunals Cluster, State Courts of Singapore, Judiciary of Singapore

The Community Courts and Tribunals Cluster ("CCTC") of the State Courts of Singapore has adopted a systematic approach to enhancing access to justice for self-represented persons ("SRPs") through evidence-based innovation. This session presents our journey of designing and implementing practical interventions aimed at bridging the legal literacy gap and improving access to justice for the communities that we serve.

We will share how we identified barriers faced by SRPs and translated those insights into targeted innovation. This session demonstrates that meaningful access to justice reforms need not be complex. Simple and well-designed interventions can often yield significant results.

Drawing on our experience, we will present concrete examples spanning technology deployment (including generative AI applications), procedural design improvements, and enhanced information support. These initiatives encompass efforts to improve the accessibility of information to support SRPs in understanding tribunal and court processes, thereby strengthening their ability to participate meaningfully in proceedings.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

What can be learnt from health justice partnership (HJP): evidence on attributes, capability and workforce wellbeing

Lottie Turner, Chief Executive Officer, Health Justice Australia

Health justice partnership (HJP) is a collaborative, cross-sector service model that embeds legal assistance within health and social service settings to address the interconnected legal, social and health issues that compound disadvantage and impact wellbeing. While HJP approaches vary, they are associated with improved outcomes for individuals and families through stronger service integration.

Evidence in Partnership (EiP) is a multi-site research project examining outcomes across 11 HJP approaches in Victoria and NSW. Drawing on insights from health and legal practitioners, the project is building evidence about what makes HJP effective and for whom.

This session presents findings from the first two EiP studies: the Attributes of HJP Framework, which identifies 12 key attributes across five domains, and research exploring frontline practitioner experiences related to capability, capacity and workforce sustainability. The session will discuss implications for policy, service design, partnership development and workforce support, highlighting evidence-based approaches to cross-disciplinary, person-centred practice.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

Beyond the courtroom – the Hoops4Wealth Program: a case study in people-centred, client-led justice remedies

Nicki Lees, Special Counsel, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers

What happens after compensation payments are made? For many participants in the Northern Territory Youth Justice Class Action, consultations with class members identified a need for post-litigation support that addressed not only financial capability, but also the impacts of trauma and properly understanding the outcome of the litigation. In response, Maurice Blackburn and First Nations-led organisation Hoops4Health worked directly with class members to develop Hoops4Wealth, a culturally safe and trauma-informed program combining financial capability education and ongoing community support. Funded through a Financial Capability Reserve established by Order of the Federal Court as part of the class action settlement, the program demonstrates how evidence gathered through legal processes and lived experience can be translated into person-centred justice outcomes. This presentation explores how participant feedback informed the program's design and evaluation, and the role lawyers can play in achieving access to justice beyond the courtroom.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Room 8.03

Access to justice for young adults: lessons from Australia's Young Adult List

*Rachel Powning, General Manager, Neighbourhood Justice Centre
Kevin Nguyen, Community Lawyer, Fitzroy Legal Service*

Young adults aged 18-25 offend at higher rates than older adults and in different ways. They have a greater disposition towards risk taking and impulsive behaviours. There is mounting scientific evidence that young adults are developmentally distinct from older adults and should be treated accordingly by the criminal justice system. Early intervention and diversion is critical in changing the trajectory of a young adult's offending behaviour. Whilst there are numerous community-based services that respond to the specific needs of this cohort, these young people are treated as adults under the law. The Victorian justice system offers limited alternatives tailored to the neurological and psychological development of young adults, particularly for those who have aged out of services and sentencing dispositions managed by Youth Justice.

The Young Adult List (YAL) was developed in 2019 at the NJC to address the above issues. It aims to provide a more developmentally appropriate and rehabilitative response to young adults appearing before the court, and to enhance community safety by assisting young adults to mature out of further offending. The YAL hears criminal matter for 18-25-year-olds and operates outside of the mainstream court list to focus on creating a procedurally accessible and therapeutic environment by engaging in age-appropriate language, etiquette and approach; emphasising sentencing principles/propositions tailored to youthful offenders; and early and timely intervention through partnerships with local youth agencies.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Reducing barriers to social housing for Aboriginal women leaving custody: evidence from the Homeward Sisters pilot

*Jessica Bell, Senior Project Officer, Planning and Review, Legal Aid NSW
Merinda Dutton, Senior Solicitor, Aboriginal Services Branch, Legal Aid NSW*

This session presents findings from an evaluation of the Homeward Sisters pilot, an initiative designed to improve access to social housing for Aboriginal women leaving custody in New South Wales. Aboriginal women exiting prison face persistent systemic barriers in accessing housing, with significant consequences for reintegration, stability and long-term justice outcomes.

The Homeward Sisters pilot, launched in February 2025, sought to address these barriers through a coordinated, cross-agency approach involving Legal Aid NSW, Corrective Services NSW and Homes NSW. It introduced shared decision-making principles and a streamlined referral pathway to support more transparent and culturally informed access to housing.

The session will share key evaluation findings and insights, demonstrating how targeted, evidence-based interventions can translate into practical improvements in access to justice. Drawing on quantitative service data, stakeholder interviews and participant case studies, the evaluation shows how the pilot contributed to improved housing outcomes, including resolving legacy barriers such as housing debt, removing negative classifications and accelerating access to priority waitlists.

Importantly, the session will also reflect on the limits of pilot-scale reform, highlighting the structural barriers that remain and the implications for system-

level change. This speaks directly to the Forum’s theme of Evidence and action – showing both what works in practice and what is required to move from localised success to broader reform.

Participants will gain practical insights into designing and evaluating cross-agency initiatives, using evidence to influence policy and improving service pathways for people experiencing complex disadvantage.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Gendered entitlements: barriers to accessing justice for working women

Leigh Gordon, Solicitor, Working Women's Centre, Women's Legal Service NSW

While workplace entitlements are nominally available to all workers, their reality remains inherently gendered. Women are disproportionately reliant on entitlements such as family and domestic violence leave, parental leave and flexible work arrangements, yet face distinct barriers, stigmatisation and career penalties when accessing them. Rather than serving as neutral protections, entitlement uptake often triggers further workplace discrimination, harm and precarious employment. Women are caught in a gendered double bind, where exercising their entitlements triggers professional marginalisation and career penalties. Addressing gender inequity in the workplace requires a three-fold structural shift: stronger employer education, incentives and penalties to dismantle access barriers; a cultural change in relation to the inevitability of gender-based violence and radically unequal caregiving burdens; and proactive prevention obligations regarding sex discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Friday, 11:20 AM, Amphitheatre

Beyond services: lived experience, relational practice and evidence for women's access to justice

Tricia Ciampa [she / her], Executive Officer, Women and Mentoring

Jo van Twest Farmer [she/they], Director, Rooftop Social

Rachael Hill, Lived Experience Advocate, Women and Mentoring

This session explores how lived experience advocacy, relational mentoring and community-based practice can strengthen access to justice for women and girls experiencing contact with legal and justice systems.

Drawing on Women and Mentoring’s (WAM) practice, evaluation and lived experience initiatives, the session examines how justice needs are rarely isolated legal issues. They are often shaped by interconnected experiences of trauma, family violence, housing instability, poverty, workforce exclusion, substance use and disengagement from systems. Traditional justice responses can struggle to address these intersecting realities.

The panel will draw on WAM’s evaluation framework, They Don’t Make It Easy workforce re-entry report and Lived Experience Framework to explore how participatory approaches can generate rigorous evidence grounded in the realities of criminalised women.

The discussion will consider how lived experience can shape service design, evaluation, advocacy and systems reform; barriers created by interconnected social determinants of justice; challenges in measuring outcomes in complex social and justice contexts; and how dignity, trust and meaningful participation can be embedded in justice responses.

Participants will gain practical insights into combining lived experience evidence with evaluation data to inform policy, service design and more people-centred approaches to justice.

Friday, 12:30 AM, Auditorium

Barred role of courts in adjudication of cases of demolition of informal houses in Ethiopia

Judge Eshetu Yadeta Temesgen, Judge, Supreme Court of Oromia

Milkiyas Bulcha Abdi, Lecturer, School of Law, Ambo University

In the newly established Shaggar City, rapid peri-urban restructuring has led to large-scale demolitions of residential structures. The article examines the role of regular courts in adjudicating cases arising out of the demolition of informal houses and the legal challenges surrounding judicial oversight of these executive actions. The primary objective is to investigate the “justice gap” created when administrative measures bypass the judicial scrutiny guaranteed under the FDRE Constitution. Utilizing a qualitative framework, the article analyses semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with legal experts and affected residents, triangulated against Ethiopia’s constitutional and legislative frameworks.

The study identifies three systemic failures: the use of informal circular letters to restrict court filings; the legislative ouster of jurisdiction via Article 28 of Proclamation No. 721/2011; and the lack of institutional impartiality when grievances are heard by the same administrative bodies executing the demolitions. These findings suggest that demolition often functions as a “final judgment,” effectively bypassing the right of access to justice stipulated under Article 37 of the FDRE Constitution.

The suspension of judicial oversight erodes public trust in the rule of law. The study recommends a robust adherence to constitutional principles supported by legislative framework to restore the judiciary’s power of review over administrative actions.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

Building trust in courts: integrity, governance, and access to justice in emerging systems

Silveria Anair Da Silva Vieira, Senior Advisor for Administration and Management, Office of the President, Supreme Court of Angola / High Council of the Judiciary

Public trust in courts is essential to the rule of law and meaningful access to justice. Yet in many emerging systems it is weakened by procedural delays, limited institutional capacity, administrative inefficiencies, unequal resource allocation and perceptions of insufficient integrity. Using Angola as a case study, this presentation examines how judicial governance, internal court management, transparency, accountability and user-centred service delivery shape citizens’ confidence in formal justice. It highlights four dimensions critical to strengthening trust: administrative capacity, operational transparency, institutional integrity and user orientation. The presentation proposes practical reform pathways, including data-informed management, improved resource allocation, simplified workflows, preventive ethics mechanisms and accountability models compatible with judicial independence.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

On the ropes: bringing access to justice to life for young people through theatre

Tiernan Mennen, Director, Center for Global Law and Justice, Northeastern Law School

PCLC’s Youth Theatre Project is a new theatre production developed by Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) in partnership with the acclaimed Red Stitch Theatre. It’s the next chapter in our successful legal education initiative, following ‘This Is Not Who I Want to Be’, which uses live theatre to help young people understand family violence and its drivers.

This powerful theatre experience was delivered directly to students across local secondary schools throughout 2026 reaching over 5,000 young people aged 13-17, using live performance as an engaging entry point to PCLC’s broader legal education strategy.

Set in a home affected by family violence, our production follows the story of two 16-year-olds, navigating a coercive romantic relationship while facing bullying at school. A moment of violence escalates, leading to serious legal consequences.

Based on real stories from young people, the play is emotional, thought-provoking, and ultimately hopeful. It tackles critical issues including technology-enabled coercive control, consent and peer pressure, bystander responsibility, legal consequences, and pathways to safety and support.

Live theatre creates what traditional education cannot: an immediate, emotional truth that stays with students long after the performance. Through this immersive experience, students move beyond intellectual understanding to develop genuine empathy, critical thinking skills, and the confidence to recognize and respond to real-world situations.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Auditorium

Justice delayed, justice denied: case delay and people-centred justice in Sri Lanka

Tiernan Mennen, Director, Center for Global Law and Justice, Northeastern Law School

Case delays in Sri Lanka have become a serious problem, which deprives the Sri Lankan people of a fair, people-centered justice system and hampers investment and economic activity. Sri Lanka ranks 161 out of 189 in enforcement of contracts. The data compiled by this study involved intensive, individual review of case files and criminal and civil court records across lower and high courts across four jurisdictions in Sri Lanka. Analysis of the data reveals a series of bottlenecks at the administrative, procedural, and substantive level that caused the severe delay in Sri Lanka courts. Courts take an average of 1,000 days to complete a trial



and 1,318 days to enforce a civil contract. There has been measured progress in recent years to reduce the delay, including efforts by key institutions such as the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Judicial Services Commission (JSC), but court congestion and long case delays continue to deprive the Sri Lankan people of access to justice. This paper analyzes data from various Sri Lankan courts (civil and criminal) to identify the most critical causes of delays and proposes solutions to address them. The analysis and recommendations of this paper offer lessons for other countries experiencing debilitating court delays and for justice systems operating with antiquated procedural traditions and substantive law.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.41

Trauma-informed legal services in practice: evidence, implementation and access to justice across Australia

Dr Chris Maylea, Professor of Law; Chief Investigator, Supporting Trauma Informed Legal Services, La Trobe University
Bowzer Scharka, Lived Experience Project Officer, With You Project, National Legal Aid
Clare O'Donnell, Associate Director, Family Law, Legal Aid NSW
Jane Irwin, Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission
Lucy Adams, Director, Civil Justice, Victoria Legal Aid

This session presents early findings from the Supporting Trauma-Informed Legal Services (STILS) project, a collaboration between La Trobe University and Legal Aid Commissions in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory. STILS is one of the first empirical studies internationally to evaluate the implementation of trauma-informed lawyering in family, civil and criminal law practices. STILS focuses on legal services working with First Nations communities, people experiencing mental distress, and people facing intersecting forms of disadvantage and systemic exclusion.

This session focuses on the practical conditions required for trauma-informed legal practice to succeed, including organisational readiness, reflective supervision, leadership, cultural safety, partnering with people with lived experience of trauma and integrated practice. The session will also examine implementation barriers, including high workload, under-resourcing, high staff turnover, etc. The session is for researchers, legal practitioners, policymakers and leaders interested in ensuring legal services are safe and effective for clients and staff.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Rethinking intervention orders against children and young people

Alma Mistry, Strategic Advocacy and Policy Manager, Family Youth Children's Law, Victoria Legal Aid
Katie Bates, Churchill Fellow / Manager, Child Protection Projects, Churchill Trust / Victoria Legal Aid

Intervention orders (IVOs) are increasingly being made against children, but they often don't change children's behaviour or leave families and the community feeling safer. VLA's report, *Feeling Supported not stuck: rethinking intervention orders for children and young people*, examines the experiences of child respondents to family violence intervention orders (FVIOs) and personal safety intervention orders (PSIOs) across Victoria.

We analysed VLA's service data, court and police data, reviewed 100 closed legal files and spoke to children and their families to create a systemic picture of the IVO system as it relates to children. Our data confirmed that between 2018 and 2024 VLA saw a 34% increase in children coming to us for help with IVOs.

This year Katie was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to explore international alternatives to restraining orders for children, with a focus on restorative justice, mediation, diversion and community-based responses. Katie will share these international lessons with Victoria, with a focus on how children can be offered earlier, accessible and proportionate responses before conflict escalates into court proceedings.

In 2025 Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) undertook research into the use of intervention orders (restraining orders) involving children and young people, including their impacts, limitations and gaps. We found an increasing number were being applied to children experiencing conflict in school settings. Our research highlighted the need for earlier, restorative and relationship-based responses that sit alongside or in place of formal court orders. VLA found that while schools have policies about resolving disputes between students using restorative practice models, they rarely happen in practice due to teachers limited capacity. Previously, the

Dispute Settlement Centre provided mediation for young people with Personal Safety Intervention Order matters. However, VLA lawyers report that this rarely happens in practice. In 2025, Katie was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to explore international alternatives to restraining orders for children, with a particular focus on culturally appropriate restorative justice, youth mediation, diversion, and community-based responses. As part of this research, she will visit Canada, Scotland, the Netherlands and Norway in May and June 2026, to observe alternative models including youth justice committees, restorative justice and school-based mediation. She will share her findings as a presentation or panel discussion with educators, justice professionals, and policymakers. This comes at an important time, as major changes to the youth justice system will begin in September 2026 under the Youth Justice Act 2024. These changes include a new Violence Reduction Unit, based on the Scottish model, and more opportunities for restorative justice for young people.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

When justice opens the school gate: how access to justice strengthens the right to education

Kim Richardson, Principal Solicitor, Youth Law Australia
Meredith Hagger, Principal Solicitor, Youth Law Australia

Australia's international commitments recognise the right to education and children's access to justice, and recent global developments highlight the growing focus on how these rights interact. This session explores how access to justice and the right to education reinforce one another and create opportunities for system-level improvement. Drawing on experience from a national child-rights legal centre, it examines how advocacy in exclusion matters, discrimination complaints, and administrative review processes can strengthen educational outcomes, and how education itself builds legal capability for young people. The session outlines key legal frameworks, considers what the right to education looks like in practice, and reflects on research and casework showing the consequences when systems fail. It also discusses tensions at the justice–education intersection, before identifying opportunities for reform and shared learning.

Friday, 12:30 PM, Room 8.03

Unlocking justice for young people: Youth-specific models for meeting legal needs

Riley Ellard, Associate Director, Research, Advocacy and Policy, Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University

This presentation will draw on multiple research and evaluation projects conducted by the Centre for Innovative Justice which considered or specifically examined the legal, informational and justice needs of young people coming into contact with civil and criminal legal systems. This includes young people listed as the respondents on intervention orders, young people with interrelated experiences of family violence and homelessness, and incarcerated young people. Drawing on in-depth interviews with young people, as well as other research methods such as case file reviews and practitioner focus groups, it will identify common threads across projects to better understand the developmentally distinct legal and justice needs of young people; how service design and delivery can respond to these needs; and, potential outcomes and trajectories when young people's legal needs are appropriately met or, conversely, remain invisible and unaddressed.



