



Working Women's
Centre Vic.

Supporting workers today, changing the system for tomorrow

IMPACT REPORT

2024—2026

Our first two years



Acknowledgement of Country

Working Women's Centre Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land where we work, and First Peoples language groups and communities across Victoria and Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We celebrate the people, traditions, culture and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the fight for survival, justice and Country. We thank the Traditional custodians for caring for Country for thousands of generations. Working Women's Centre Victoria recognises the ongoing impact of colonisation, dispossession and racism. As a Centre focused on workplace rights, we acknowledge the history of exploitation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered working in the colony, denied access to their wages which were often simply stolen by corrupt officials and employers, and the ongoing exploitation and discrimination many First Nation people still experience at work today. We recognise that Sovereignty was never ceded and that this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

With thanks to our funders

The Working Women's Centre Victoria is funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, under the Working Women's Centre Grant Program, and by the Victorian Government through the Office for Women at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, as part of the Safe Workplaces for Women Initiative. We thank both governments for the investment that makes this work possible.



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Four centres working as one



**Working Women's
Centre Vic.**

Two years ago, four community legal centres made a collective decision. Instead of each of us doing parts of this work alone, or only one of us doing all of the work, we chose to build something together and create a statewide specialist hub - collectively, the Working Women's Centre Victoria (WWC Vic).

The Respect@Work inquiry made the case plainly: women experiencing harm at work need holistic support, advice and advocacy. We knew delivering that across Victoria would require place-based legal services and specialist women's legal expertise working together. Northern Community Legal Centre, South-East

Monash Legal Service and Westjustice joined with Women's Legal Service Victoria to combine local reach with specialist expertise - supporting workers, helping employers prevent harm, and advocating to change the laws and systems that perpetuate gender inequality.

The partnership model is a core part of our approach to increasing access to justice and redress and improving outcomes for working women and non-binary people. Each partner brings trusted relationships with different communities, meaning people can access specialist workplace support through the service they already know. Because our centres also provide legal help across areas such as family violence, migration and tenancy law, clients with multiple legal issues can receive coordinated support in one place, without having to retell their story. Legal issues are addressed with consideration of the whole context of a person's life, rather than addressing individual issues in isolation.

We work directly with women and non-binary people who are being failed by laws and systems meant to protect their rights at work. Because we act for workers when the law is failing, we can see inside workplaces, hear people's stories, understand and analyse the legal nuances and

gender-based discrimination people are encountering and work with decision-makers on how to better protect people.

We are proud of what we've built, but it's only the beginning - there is much more work to do. The communities need is far greater than our current services can meet, and the WWC Vic is still growing. With continued investment, we can build on the foundations of this service by expanding our reach into the communities and regions that need it most and turning two years of frontline evidence into lasting change.

Thank you to the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments for making this possible, and to the women and non-binary people who trusted us with their stories.

WWC Vic provides expertise in areas such as family violence, migration and housing,

A core part of our approach is to increase access to justice and redress, and improve outcomes for working women and non-binary people.

"...we can see inside workplaces, hear people's stories, understand and analyse the legal nuances and systemic issues people are encountering."

On behalf of the Working Women's Centre Victoria consortium:



Ashleigh Newnham
Chief Executive Officer
South-East Monash
Legal Service



Claudia Fatone
Chief Executive Officer
Women's Legal
Service Victoria



Jenni Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Northern Community
Legal Centre



Melissa Hardham
Chief Executive Officer
Westjustice

Executive Summary

Delivering real impact for Victorian working women and non-binary people

Since August 2024 we have helped 1,762 women and non-binary people and provided 2,739 legal services, returning more than \$1.3 million in unpaid wages, entitlements and compensation to the people we helped. The people seeking help from WWC Vic are often not supported through other pathways, such as union membership or existing legal assistance. For many, WWC Vic provides their first opportunity to receive free, specialist advice about a workplace problem. By responding early, we improve access to justice, help people make informed decisions and reduce the risk that workplace harm will escalate or compound existing disadvantage.

We have shared information about workplace rights in more than 78 community legal education and community engagement sessions across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria to more than 1,767 people, drawn more than 344 downloads of our prevention resources for employers, and delivered 24 advocacy and law reform activities – including leading advocacy and informing the design of legislation limiting the use of non-disclosure agreements that is now written into Victorian law. Behind every one of those achievements is a woman or non-binary person who was heard, and helped, at a moment when the system was failing them.

“Behind every one of those achievements is a woman or non-binary person who was heard, and helped, at a moment when the system was failing them.”

We reach women and non-binary people who face the greatest barriers to justice. We prioritise delivering education and advocacy to women and non-binary people who are: migrant workers, on temporary visas, from culturally and racially marginalised communities, are family violence victim-survivors, are living with disabilities themselves or caring for those with disabilities, and living in rural and regional Victoria. More than half of the people we helped were experiencing financial disadvantage, limiting their ability to access legal help.

Workplace sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence, and our response recognises the complexity of that harm. We provide trauma-informed legal assistance alongside access to interpreters, safety planning, and financial counselling support.

Since August 2024 we have helped 1,762 women and non-binary people and opened 2,739 legal matters. People who seek help are often not supported through other pathways.

We operate across four interconnected levels at once:

- ▶ **We help the person who has been harmed**, providing specialist legal assistance alongside holistic support.
- ▶ **We bring workplace rights education into communities**, including communities that face significant barriers to accessing legal information and assistance.
- ▶ **We work with employers to prevent harm before it happens**, including through our workplace prevention training series developed with experts and regulators.
- ▶ **We turn frontline evidence into systemic change**, using what our casework shows us to advocate for stronger laws, policies and workplace systems.

Our four interconnected levels of operations are: helping the individual, education among communities, prevention of harm in workplaces, and systemic change.

Clear patterns are emerging from the evidence of our casework: workplaces treating pregnancy and new motherhood/parenthood as a performance problem; wage theft hidden behind cash-in-hand pay and missing payslips; visa status used as leverage against workers who speak up; and particular risks for women in regional and outer-suburban workplaces. These patterns are setting our advocacy and prevention priorities.

This is a service still in its first years, and the need is far greater than what we can currently meet. With secure, ongoing investment from Government, WWC Vic can move from establishment to maturity: extending our reach into the regions and communities that need us most, directing prevention efforts to the industries where harm is concentrated, measuring impact through our evaluation framework, and translating two years of frontline evidence into lasting change for working women and non-binary people.

Four clear patterns have emerged from our casework: new parenthood, wage theft, visa status as leverage and risks for women outside metropolitan areas.

The need for our services is far greater than we can currently meet without ongoing investment.

At a glance

Level	What we do	What we have delivered since August 2024	Where it leads
 Individual	Holistic, trauma-informed and place-based legal assistance and integrated support for women and non-binary people experiencing workplace issues.	1,762 people helped. 2,739 matters, and more than \$1.3 million recovered in wages, entitlements and compensation. More than half were facing financial hardship, and many were migrant workers, on temporary visas, living with disability, or facing family violence.	Women and non-binary people have timely, equitable access to justice and redress in modes of services and in locations they can easily access, and are able to restore their financial, social, psychological and physical wellbeing.
 Community	Community legal education and engagement, delivered with communities and with the workers and professionals women turn to first, including through regional roadshows.	78 community legal education and community engagement sessions reaching more than 1767 people. Delivered in languages including English, Arabic and Dari.	Women and non-binary people understand their rights at work, can make informed decisions about how to respond to workplace issues, and know that free legal help exists and where to find it.
 Workplace	Education and training for employers on their legal obligations, including the positive duty.	344 downloads of our prevention resources, and a new 11-part training series for employers on preventing sexual harassment, delivered with seven partners and regulators.	Victorian workplaces are safe, respectful, inclusive and equitable, with the policies, systems and practices in place to keep them that way.
 Systems	Advocacy for changes to workplace laws, policies and systems, informed by what we see in casework.	24 advocacy and law reform activities. An amendment we drafted on non-disclosure agreements, work on the Disability Discrimination Act, National Employment Standards and wage theft, and national coordination with Working Women's Centre Australia.	Workplace laws and systems prevent harm in the first place, and the barriers that stop workers from obtaining justice are removed.

Achieving our vision and mission

Our vision

Victorian workplaces are safe, respectful, inclusive, and equitable, and women and non-binary people who experience workplace issues have timely, equitable access to justice – including legal remedies to uphold their rights, and redress for any harm caused.

Our mission

To deliver holistic, trauma-informed legal assistance, prevention and advocacy that helps women and non-binary people uphold their rights and restore their safety, dignity and wellbeing.

Legal assistance services are the heart of our Centre

Why we exist

In March 2020, the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report revealed an unacceptable reality. Too often, women and non-binary people who have been harmed at work are then placed with the burden of enforcing change themselves. The Respect@Work report called for this to change, Recommendation 49 urged the Australian Government to provide

increased and recurrent funding to Working Women's Centres. The Australian Government accepted this recommendation, recognising that women and non-binary people need accessible, specialist support to understand and enforce their workplace rights, and paving the way for the Working Women's Centre Victoria.



An 'unacceptable reality': the Respect@Work national inquiry recommended increased and recurrent funding to Working Women's Centres to reduce the risk of workplace harm for women and non-binary people.

A gender-based violence service

Some forms of violence and discrimination are gendered in nature. While they can be experienced by anyone, women and non-binary people are disproportionately affected by gender discrimination, sexual violence, sexual harassment and family violence. These harms occur within and outside the workplace and can profoundly affect a person's safety, financial security and capacity to engage in work. Workplace sexual harassment sits on this continuum of gender-based violence. This understanding shapes our theory of change and how we work with individual workers, communities,

employers and law makers. Our service is trauma-informed and culturally safe, with interpreters available as a matter of course and safety planning embedded in our response.

Gender-based violence expertise is built into the Centre's design. Specialist family violence and sexual violence expertise sits alongside employment law expertise in our core partnership, shaping how we understand workplace harm and support the people who experience it.

WWC Vic's model has been strategically designed to cover more area and provide greater expertise across the entire state - in particular, regional Victoria.

Who we help

We help women and non-binary people in Victoria with the legal problems that arise at work:

Sexual harassment	Discrimination	
Underpayment	Wage theft	
Unfair dismissal	Family violence	
Migration	Housing	Debt
Safety issues		

We also help with the issues that so often arrive alongside, or underpin, workplace problems, such as family violence, migration, housing, debt and safety issues. Our service is free and confidential. It asks for no membership, no fee and no qualifying period, and it is independent of employers, of government and of the workplace where the harm occurred. A woman or non-binary person can contact us today, and receive help right away.

We help women and non-binary people with issues that often arrive alongside, or underpin, workplace problems, such as family violence, migration, housing, debt and safety issues.

Our commitment to gender inclusion

We provide safe and inclusive support to women, including cis and trans women, and to non-binary people. Gender is not binary, fixed or biological, and our commitment to affirming a person's gender and sexuality is foundational to their safety, dignity and human rights.

We provide support to women, including cis and trans women, and non-binary people.

Our unique approach to addressing gendered harm in the workplace

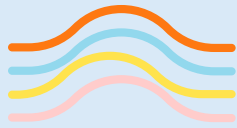
Discrimination, sexual harassment and other unlawful conduct remain common in Australian workplaces. They are driven by, and in turn reinforce, gender inequality and other forms of structural disadvantage, and they cause lasting physical, psychological and financial harm.

Too many women and non-binary people who experience these harms cannot access justice, and the barriers in their way compound the harm and let the same patterns repeat.

Our response is to work across four levels at once: with individuals, in communities, inside workplaces, and on the system itself. We help the person in front of us, and at the same time we work to prevent the same harm reaching the next person. These are not four separate programs. What we learn through legal assistance informs our education, prevention and advocacy, and the outcomes we achieve at each level strengthen the others.

“We help the person in front of us, and at the same time we work to prevent the same harm reaching the next person.”





Working Women's Centre Vic.



Individual

We help the
person harmed

We provide holistic, trauma-informed legal assistance and integrated support to women and non-binary people experiencing workplace issues. This gives them timely, equitable access to justice and redress, and the means to restore their financial, social, psychological and physical wellbeing. Every matter also teaches us something about how the workplace and the law are failing, which is where the other three levels begin.



Community

We help people
know their rights
before harm
escalates

Through community legal education and engagement, we work directly with communities and the trusted services and professionals they often turn to first. This builds awareness of workplace rights, helps women and non-binary people make informed decisions, improves access to free legal assistance, and helps ensure workplace harm is recognised and addressed earlier. Our regional roadshows extend this work beyond metropolitan Melbourne, bringing free legal education and services directly to regional and rural communities where access to specialist employment law services can be limited. By meeting people where they are, we help ensure workers have the knowledge and confidence to recognise workplace harm and seek help early.



Workplace

We help
employers
prevent harm

We educate and train employers on their legal obligations, including the positive duty to eliminate sexual harassment. This helps Victorian workplaces implement the policies, systems and practices needed to create safe, respectful and equitable working environments, preventing harm before it results in an investigation, legal claim or the experiences reflected in this report.



Systems

We help change
the rules that
produced the harm

We advocate for changes to workplace laws, policies and systems based on what we see every day in our casework. This works towards a system that prevents harm, removes barriers to justice and responds more effectively to workers' experiences. Grounded in frontline evidence, our advocacy shows where the system is failing and what needs to change.



Individual



Community



Workplace



Systems

We deliver integrated, trauma-informed services where the need is greatest

From 1 August 2024 to 30 June 2026



1,762

women and non-binary people helped



More than

\$1.3M

returned to workers



78

community legal education and community engagement activities



344

downloads of prevention resources



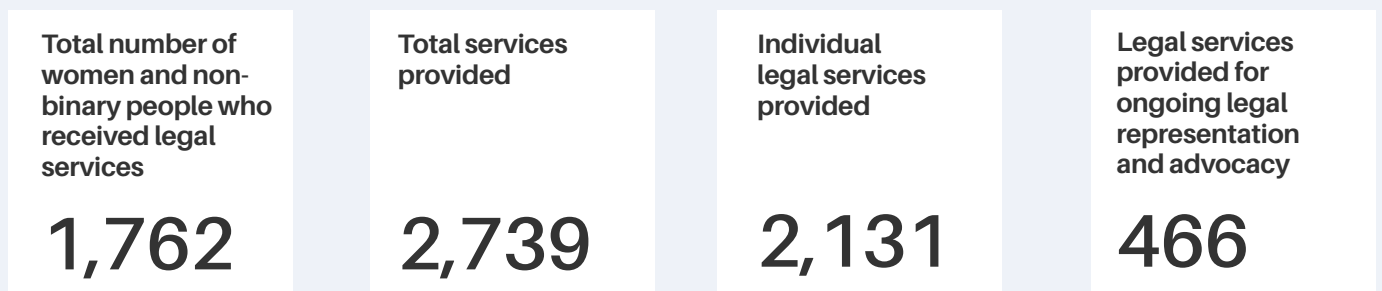
24

advocacy and law-reform activities

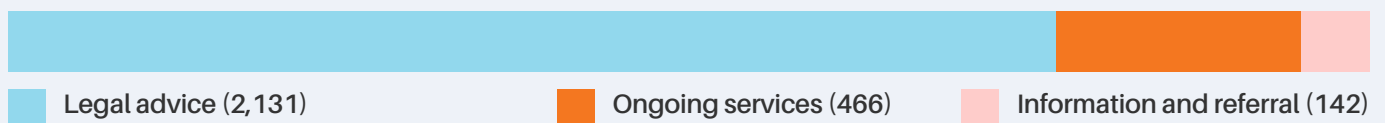


- ▶ A legislative amendment drafted by WWC Vic written into Victorian law
- ▶ Provided expert evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the National Employment Standards

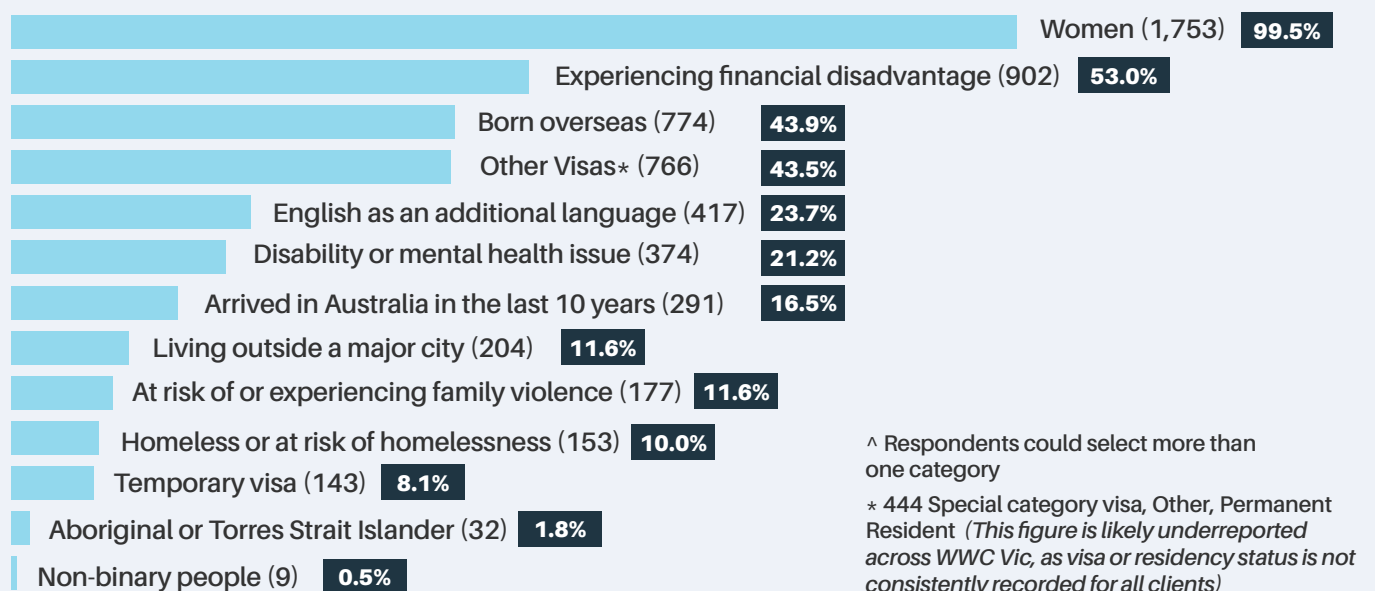
Number of services delivered



Composition of total services delivered



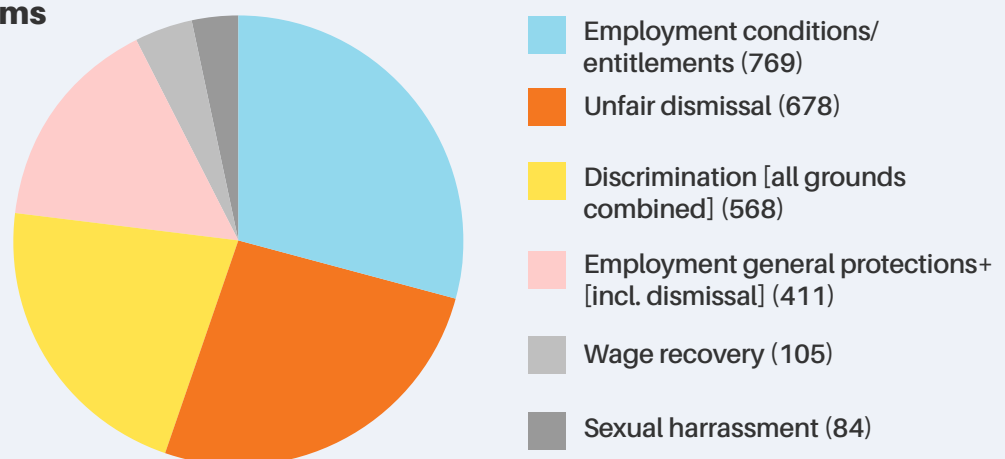
Who we helped[^]



[^] Respondents could select more than one category

* 444 Special category visa, Other, Permanent Resident (This figure is likely underreported across WWC Vic, as visa or residency status is not consistently recorded for all clients)

Types of legal problems we addressed



+ General protections includes 193 matters involving dismissal. A matter may involve more than one legal problem.

Addressing more than one legal problem

People rarely come to us with just one problem. Many of the people we work with are also experiencing family violence, homelessness, disability, financial hardship or insecure visa status. These overlapping circumstances require a holistic response.

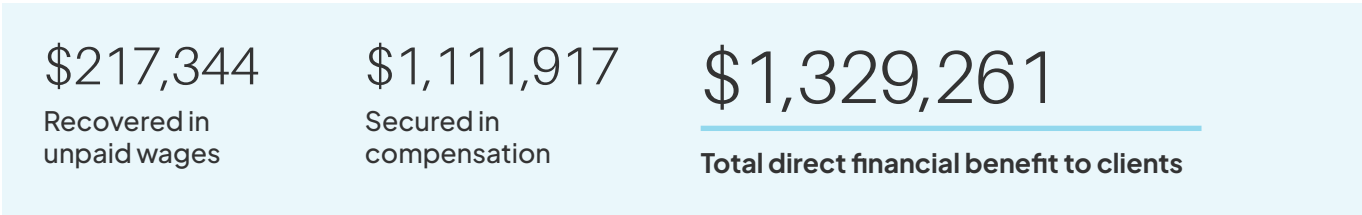
Whether these issues are addressed can determine if someone can safely make a complaint, participate in an investigation or return to work at all. The legal problems we see are similarly interconnected. A discrimination claim is tied to power, disadvantage and workplace culture. Sexual harassment and sham contracting rarely occur in isolation: they often come with risks to a woman’s safety, and sometimes contact with the criminal justice system. Legal information about bringing a claim in the Fair Work Commission is not enough for someone also facing homelessness, or in the aftermath of sexual harassment.

This is what our service model makes possible. By addressing a range of legal, safety and financial issues together, we can respond to the legal processes and the person’s broader circumstances at the same time, rather than one after the other or by sending someone elsewhere to start again and retell their story. That is the difference between closing a file and helping someone stay safely out of crisis.

When different types of legal matters sit in one place, the legal outcome and the person’s safety can be handled together.

By addressing a range of legal, safety and financial issues together, we can respond to the legal processes and the person’s broader circumstances at the same time.

More than \$1.3 million returned to our clients



Read alongside our community education and employer training, these numbers show a service working at both ends of workplace harm, reaching people before it escalates, and winning real redress for those already harmed at work.

“I have walked away equipped and empowered, knowing what my options are. It truly was a productive time, and thank you for your genuine care.”

— A WWC VIC CLIENT

A statewide service in action

In just two years, we built new systems, referral pathways and relationships to support consistent, place-based service delivery, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation across Victoria. Underpinning this work is our model that brings together complementary expertise, established community connections and place-based reach. These foundations enable WWC Vic to tailor services to local contexts while embedding best-practice responses to gendered violence throughout our work.

Our statewide reach and coordinated referral pathways connect more women and non-binary people with the legal and non-legal support they need. The relationships we have built strengthen community engagement, service promotion and advocacy, while our monitoring and evaluation framework allows us to better understand who we are reaching, the outcomes of our work and where unmet need remains.

With these foundations now established, we're ready to deepen its reach and impact. The following examples show what this looks like in practice across individuals, communities, workplaces and systems.

We have forged new systems, referral pathways and relationships - and we're ready to deepen our impact.





Example

Tailoring community legal education

When delivering a workplace rights education session, our educators identified that participants had varying levels of understanding of gender diversity and inclusive workplaces. In response, we drew on the expertise available across WWC Vic to develop gender-inclusive guidance and practical resources. These resources help educators confidently navigate conversations and respond to participants' questions. This strengthened the delivery of community legal education and helped ensure sessions were inclusive, accessible and relevant to participants' diverse experiences.

Example

Delivering holistic advice and advocacy

We developed practical resources to help women and non-binary people experiencing family violence understand their employment rights and make informed decisions about their work and financial security. The resources also support lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors to identify employment law issues early and connect people with specialist assistance.

Drawing on the complementary expertise and service connections available through our consortium model, we can connect specialist employment law assistance with family violence, financial and other legal support. This provides clients with a more holistic response without requiring them to navigate multiple services themselves.

Example

Coordinating referrals to increase access to justice

When a client requiring urgent workplace legal advice could not be assisted because of a conflict of interest, we used our coordinated service network to quickly identify another service with capacity and facilitate a warm referral. The client was connected with a lawyer and received the urgent advice they needed within the relevant timeframe, without having to navigate multiple services themselves.

This pathway is enabled by our consortium model, which allows conflicts and capacity constraints to be managed across the four partners. It provides clients with a coordinated pathway to assistance when time is critical and reduces the burden of finding another service.



Lived experience drives our advocacy and systems change work

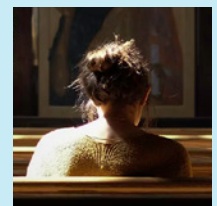
We listen to people who seek support from WWC Vic and work to understand what they need to feel heard and have their issue meaningfully addressed. The experiences shared through our frontline work provide vital evidence about where workplace laws, policies and systems are failing women and non-binary people.

With consent, we use this evidence to inform workplace prevention, advocacy and systems reform. We recognise that seeking support and sharing an experience of harm can be difficult. We are committed to

handling these experiences with care and ensuring they contribute to practical action and lasting change. Pseudonyms have been used to protect identity.

Maria's story

A young international student is sexually assaulted, discriminated against and underpaid, and finds a service that can help address all of these issues at the same time.



Maria came to Australia to study and experienced sexual assault, discrimination and wage theft. After seeking help from the police, Maria came to us frightened and unsure whether she had any rights as a non-citizen. Her workplace problems crossed employment, discrimination and migration law, and her insecure visa status created an immediate barrier to seeking justice.

We coordinated legal and social work support tailored to her needs. We pursued recovery of underpayment in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA), sexual harassment and discrimination claims at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)

under the Equal Opportunity Act, and certification for a Workplace Justice Visa. This allowed her to stay in Australia safely while her legal matters were addressed. Throughout this process, an integrated social worker helped Maria navigate the practical and emotional challenges surrounding her legal matters. By addressing her workplace, migration, financial and safety needs together, WWC Vic improved Maria's access to justice and reduced the risk of further harm.

"I felt scared to ask for help. I'm not a citizen. I'm an international student. I didn't know if I mattered." — MARIA

What it changed:

With WWC Vic's support, Maria understood that she had rights at work and could access legal assistance in Australia regardless of her residency status. Alongside pursuing her legal matter, she received practical and wellbeing supports to address the impacts of the sexual assault and start her journey to recovery. With her immediate needs supported and a greater confidence in her workplace rights, Maria was able to move forward and find new employment.

Zara's story

After 30 years of work, a Deaf woman faces her first workplace investigation and pressure to sign away her right to tell her story.



Zara, a member of the Deaf community, had worked for more than 30 years when she suddenly faced misconduct allegations. Confronted with an unfamiliar and deeply distressing process, she was given a short deadline to respond to the allegations and pressure to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Zara came to WWC Vic in shock. With the support of an Auslan interpreter and a trauma-informed lawyer, she was able to understand her rights, consider her options, and make informed decisions at a pace that met her needs, rather than one dictated by her employer. She achieved a negotiated outcome that protected her reputation and wellbeing, and led her to securing a new role.

"The lawyer helped me stay calm. She spoke to me in a manner that was, 'Okay, we've got this,' and she made me feel alright." — ZARA

What it changed:

WWC Vic's accessible and culturally informed support enabled Zara to participate meaningfully in the investigation process and make decisions about her future. She has since secured a new role and received an award recognising her work in her field.

Experiences like Zara's also inform WWC Vic's systems advocacy. Evidence from the Centre's casework contributed to its submission to the Australian Government's Review of the Disability Discrimination Act, which argued that workplace investigation processes should be accessible by design, rather than relying on individuals or their lawyers to request adjustments after a process has begun.

Mei's story

On a working holiday, paid cash in hand with no contract, payslips or superannuation, Mei only learned she was being underpaid when her colleagues told her to seek advice.



Unfamiliar with Australian workplace laws, Mei did not realise she was being underpaid until other migrant workers encouraged her to seek advice. With her visa due to expire, the WWC Vic provided urgent employment law advice alongside support from our migration-law partners. This coordinated response helped Mei understand her rights, act within the limited time available and recover more than \$13,000 in unpaid wages and superannuation before returning home.

"Thank you for all you've done... It was one of my darkest days in my life." — MEI

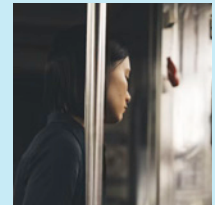
What it changed:

Mei recovered wages and superannuation owed to her and returned home with a clearer understanding of her workplace rights. By identifying her intersecting employment and migration law needs early, WWC Vic reduced the barriers she faced in pursuing her matter and helped her access justice before her visa expired.

Mei's experience also demonstrates the importance of accessible legal information and early assistance for migrant workers, particularly those in insecure work who may not receive the records they need to identify wage theft or enforce their rights. Protecting every worker from exploitation helps raise the standards for all Australian workplaces.

Bianca's story

When Bianca's pregnancy made her commute hard, her request to work from home was initially refused. Within months, she was dismissed.



Bianca developed severe pregnancy symptoms that made commuting difficult. Her GP recommended she work from home, but her manager initially refused the request and agreed only after Bianca escalated the matter to HR. Within weeks, Bianca began receiving negative performance reviews. Five months into the role, she was dismissed, with her manager explicitly citing her pregnancy as the reason. We supported Bianca to bring a claim to the Fair Work Commission. The matter resulted in the employer acknowledging wrongdoing and paying Bianca more than \$10,000 in compensation.

"I truly believe that if I hadn't spoken with you, I might have let so much slide, missing out on my right pay and even my maternity leave."

— BIANCA

What it changed:

With specialist legal assistance, Bianca understood her rights, challenged her dismissal, secured both an admission of wrongdoing from her employer and more than \$10,000 in compensation. Her experience also contributed to a pattern emerging through WWC Vic's casework: pregnancy and new parenthood can become a trigger for discrimination and adverse treatment at work. This frontline evidence informs our systems change work, and will enable us to advocate for stronger protections, and safer, more equitable workplaces.

What these stories tell us

Each story is different, but together they point to the same lessons:

- ▶ Many workers do not know their rights, or are too frightened, isolated or financially vulnerable to enforce them without specialist holistic support
- ▶ Our services can improve access to justice by reaching workers who don't have existing legal or union support
- ▶ Workplace and regulatory systems often fail to prevent or respond effectively to workplace harm, leaving workers to navigate complex legal processes to enforce their rights alone
- ▶ Gender inequality is compounded by other barriers, including visa status, disability, regional isolation and limited English proficiency, making it harder for many workers to access justice.



Creating lasting change through prevention and gender equality strategies

Bringing rights into communities

We ran more than 78 community legal education and community engagement sessions across metropolitan and regional Victoria, reaching at least 1767 people.

Our work reached the people who face significant barriers to accessing information and assistance about workplace rights, including migrant and refugee women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, people with disability, trans and non-binary people, and young people. We delivered sessions in English, Arabic and Dari in places where communities already gather, including neighbourhood houses, financial wellbeing hubs, settlement services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and youth mental health services.

In all, we reached seven regions across the state including Latrobe/Gippsland, Goulburn (Seymour, Shepparton), Grampians (Ararat, Horsham, Stawell, Ballarat), Barwon South West (Geelong, Warrnambool), Loddon (Bendigo), Hume/North East (Wodonga, Wangaratta) and Mildura.

The impact extended beyond attendance and participation. Two people at Latrobe Community Health Service sought legal assistance immediately after their sessions. The SEED Project in Seymour requested a second session in

response to demand. At Brotherhood of St Laurence's Jobify program, participants reported learning something new, and reported feeling much more confident about identifying workplace issues and where to seek help. Other participants told us they had learned for the first time about the minimum wage, payslips and their right to speak up at work. We continue to receive requests for further sessions from organisations and regional services, reflecting the ongoing need for accessible and trusted workplace education.

“Although we never met face to face, your support and kind words helped build my confidence to stand up for myself. I am thankful there is somewhere to support women in industries that have long been male-dominated.”

— A WWC VIC CLIENT

Sessions were run across the state in English, Arabic and Dari, and were held at places where people commonly gather within their communities.

Several organisations requested that we return; a clear sign of how much need this work has only just begun to meet.

Community education at a glance

78

community legal education sessions, workshops, stalls and engagement activities delivered

12+

regional and metropolitan locations across seven Victorian regions

1,767

people reached directly, plus significant additional reach through stalls and drop-in engagement

Sessions were delivered in:

- ▶ English
- ▶ Arabic; and
- ▶ Dari

Referrals

Two same-day referrals into legal assistance (Latrobe Community Health Service) were made

Increased Demand

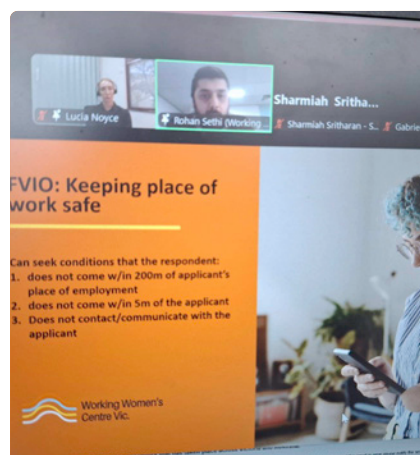
Repeat sessions were delivered by demand (The SEED Project, Seymour)

Additional engagement

Multiple partner organisations requesting ongoing or tailored engagement



WWC Vic staff delivering Community Legal Education





WWC Vic Jennifer Jones at the *Small Steps: Safe Workplaces Sexual Harassment Conference*.

Facilitator feedback



Helping employers prevent harm

Our Commonwealth funding enables us to do more than respond to individual legal problems. We also help employers understand their legal obligations and prevent workplace harm before it occurs.

Our online resources and training provide practical guidance on employer's positive duty obligations, identifying and managing workplace risks, responding to workplace sexual harassment, and building inclusive and safer workplace cultures. These resources are designed for managers, organisational leaders, human resource professionals and others responsible for preventing and responding to harm at work.

Between August 2024 and June 2026, our central prevention hub recorded 19,325 page views, seven practical guides and templates received a further 344 downloads, with the guide for managers and supervisors being our most popular resource. This is an important audience because managers and supervisors are often among the first people workers approach when raising a workplace concern.

In April 2026, we launched an 11-part online training series to help employers prevent workplace sexual harassment. In its first three months, the series attracted 190 views across the videos, with 30 people registering to complete the full series. It brought together seven partner organisations and regulators, including Respect Victoria, WorkSafe Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. This gave employers direct access to practical guidance from experts with distinct roles in promoting safe and respectful workplaces.

Our prevention work also extends beyond employers. Through training of professionals across the community sector, we build the capability of trusted services that women and non-binary people may approach before seeking legal assistance. Helping those services recognise workplace legal issues and connect people with specialist assistance extends the reach of early intervention, including across regional Victoria.

Together, this work strengthens prevention from both directions: supporting employers to meet their legal responsibilities and equipping trusted community services to recognise workplace problems and connect women and non-binary people with earlier help. This extends WWC Vic's impact beyond responding to harm, towards prevention and early intervention.

A professionally filmed and edited 11-part online training series was launched for employers on preventing sexual harassment at work.

Our work builds prevention at both ends - shifting the legal focus from response to prevention and early intervention.

Employer training at a glance

Measure	Total
Downloadable prevention resources[^]	
Views of the central prevention hub	19,325
Downloads across 7 role-specific guides	344
Most viewed guide	Preventing sexual harassment for managers (114 views)
Online training series for employers[*]	
Total episode views	190
Registrations	30

[^] Launched July 2025 - total downloads cover 01/07/25-30/06/26

^{*} Launched April 2026 - total views and registrations cover 1/04/26 - 30/06/26



Casework is the foundation for our advocacy and law reform activities

Our advocacy is grounded in direct casework with workers experiencing exploitation, discrimination and unsafe workplaces. Our frontline evidence helps governments understand how laws and workplace systems operate in practice and where reform is needed to improve outcomes for working women and non-binary people.

During the reporting period, WWC Vic made three formal submissions to government inquiries, contributed to national submissions and campaigns, appeared before a parliamentary inquiry and participated in expert roundtables. Industrial Relations Victoria sought our advice on changes to non-disclosure agreement (NDA) laws, and our contributions to those reforms was acknowledged in Parliament.

WWC Vic has built relationships with State and Federal government ministers, parliamentarians, regulators and other decision-makers. These relationships create opportunities to bring frontline evidence directly to decision-makers and contribute to the development and implementation of workplace laws and policies.

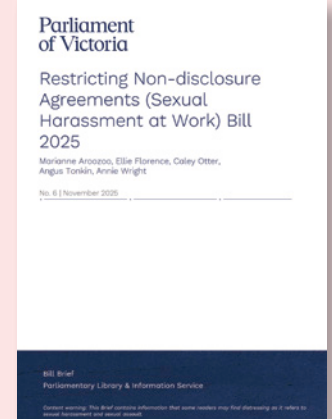
Our casework helps governments understand how laws and workplace systems operate in practice.

Victorian NDA reform: from casework to legislative change

In September 2024, WWC Vic made a submission to Industrial Relations Victoria containing 33 recommendations to ensure NDAs supported the agency and choices of victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment, rather than placing restrictions on them.

Following the introduction of the Restricting Non-Disclosure Agreements (Sexual Harassment at Work) Bill 2025 (VIC), we had 10 of our recommendations fully adopted, two partially adopted and four forming part of our ongoing advocacy. We also identified a

remaining key risk that workers could be pressured into entering an agreement. In response, we drafted an amendment requiring employers, not just the victim-survivor, to confirm that the legal preconditions for an agreement had been met. Through active briefing and advocacy, our amendment was moved in the Legislative Council by Georgie Purcell MP and passed with government support. Ms Purcell acknowledged WWC Vic in Parliament for proposing the amendment, recording our contribution Hansard.



10 of our recommendations were fully adopted following the introduction of the Restricting Non-Disclosure Agreements (Sexual Harassment at Work) Bill 2025 (VIC).

The reforms commenced on 1 July 2026. This nation leading laws restrict the use of NDAs, establish conditions that must be met before an agreement can be entered into and strengthen protections against victim-survivors of sexual harassment being pressured into silence. We continue to provide feedback to government on the resources and implementation of these laws, and help workers to understand their rights.

These reforms implemented a recommendation of the Victorian Ministerial Taskforce and followed sustained advocacy from the union movement and legal assistance sector. WWC Vic is now bringing our experience of the Victorian reforms to the national conversation by supporting our national body, Working Women's Centre Australia's, advocacy for stronger and more consistent protections across Australia.

Disability Discrimination Act

WWC Vic made a submission to the Australian Government's review of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and endorsed the parallel submission from Women with Disabilities Australia.

Our recommendations were grounded in evidence from 154 disability discrimination matters handled during the reporting period. This enabled WWC Vic to show how existing protections operate in practice and identify changes needed to make workplaces and workplace processes more accessible.

National collaboration

WWC Vic makes deliberate decisions about when to lead, collaborate on or support advocacy. We avoid duplicating work already underway and focus on ensuring the experiences of women and non-binary people are represented in industrial relations advocacy.

Through collaboration with the legal assistance sector and direct engagement with the government, WWC Vic contributed recommendations into sector platforms (Federation of Community Legal Centres Policy Platform - Action for Justice: A Roadmap for Change) and supported national campaigns led by Working Women's Centre Australia.

National Employment Standards and wage theft

WWC Vic made a significant contribution to Working Women's Centre Australia's response to the parliamentary inquiry into the National Employment Standards. We helped develop the national submission and gave evidence in person alongside Victorian Women Lawyers, the Centre for Future Work and Victorian Trades Hall Council.

Our contribution drew directly on evidence from 775 pay and conditions matters and 688 unfair dismissal matters handled during the reporting period. This casework evidence helped demonstrate how gaps in workplace protections affect women and non-binary workers in practice.

From individual matters to systemic change

WWC Vic does more than resolve individual legal matters. Casework creates a body of frontline evidence about how workplace laws, policies and systems affect women and non-binary people. Our advocacy brings that evidence to governments, inquiries and sector campaigns to support practical law and policy reform.

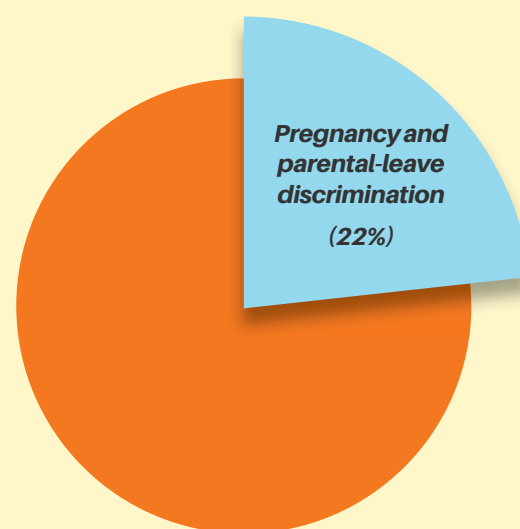
This means the experiences shared with WWC Vic can contribute, with appropriate consent and safeguards, to change beyond an individual matter. Patterns identified through casework inform our advocacy priorities, strengthen our recommendations and help ensure reforms respond to the realities of working people's lives.



Securing ongoing investment means we can continue to deliver

What we are seeing early

Some clear patterns are already emerging in our casework. The clearest is pregnancy and parental-leave discrimination: a recurring pattern of managers treating pregnancy or new motherhood/parenthood as a problem to manage away. Pregnancy discrimination runs through around 22 per cent of the cases we have handled and will be a priority for our future systems change and law reform advocacy.



Additional patterns emerging:

- **Visa status used as leverage:** Migrant workers and women on temporary visas are told, in effect, that speaking up could cost them their right to stay, and they often run out of time before a visa expires.
- **Wage theft hidden in plain sight:** Cash-in-hand pay, no payslips and unpaid superannuation, common in fast food and hospitality, leave a worker with no way to know they are underpaid until someone independently checks.

- **Regional and outer-suburban workers:** Far from specialist help, and often the only woman in a small workplace, these clients carry a particular risk when they raise a complaint.
- **A significant gap in accessible support:** A snapshot of just one month's intake illustrates the scale of unmet need. Of the 190 intake calls received, 171 (90%) were from workers who were not represented by a union. This demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of workers seeking help rely on specialist community legal services to understand, enforce and protect their workplace rights.

Pregnancy and parental-leave discrimination runs through almost one-quarter of our cases.

Our work builds prevention at both ends - shifting the legal focus from response to prevention and early intervention.

What we will do next

Advocacy

We will keep advocating for the reforms our casework points to: harmonising non-disclosure agreement laws nationally; stronger protections for workers with disability; better-enforced national employment standards and action on wage theft; advancing reforms to address pregnancy-related redundancies and discrimination on return from parental leave; strengthening protections for temporary migrant workers who are currently the easiest to exploit; and ensuring services are recognised and funded for the unique role they play in identifying and responding to systemic workplace harm.

Prevention

We will expand our employer training through facilitated workshops, leadership education and role-specific resources, targeting industries through our casework. We will prioritise workplaces where workers have limited access to union support, workplace rights education or existing prevention initiatives to avoid duplication, extending prevention efforts to those who may otherwise be missed.

Community

We will deepen community legal education in the regions, partnering with neighbourhood houses, settlement services and community organisations that women engage with before they ever reach a lawyer.

Evidence

Our monitoring, evaluation and learning framework is now live. It will help us measure how often a client comes to us with more than one legal problem, and how many people we have to turn away.



Above L-R: WWC Vic staff Ash and Azin, Milly and Tahera

The case for continuing the investment

In less than two years we have built a statewide specialist service, helping 1,762 women and non-binary people, returning more than \$1.3 million to workers, reaching communities across six regions, helping employers prevent harm, and contributing to new protections in Victorian law.

In less than two years we have built a statewide specialist service, helping 1,762 women and non-binary people, returning more than \$1.3 million to workers, reaching communities across seven regions, helping employers prevent harm, and contributing to new protections in Victorian law.

Without continued investment, Victoria risks losing a specialist state-wide service that recognises workplace harm as gender-based violence. WWC Vic brings together legal assistance, social work, prevention and systems change advocacy to address that harm at multiple levels. Underpinned by a consortium model, WWC Vic draws on the expertise, reach and community connections of four community legal centres to expand access to justice and ensure frontline evidence informs systemic reform.

With secure, ongoing investment, WWC Vic can move from establishment to maturity. We will strengthen outcomes measurement through our monitoring, learning and evaluation framework, deepen our reach into regional and outer-suburban Victoria, target prevention efforts towards the highest-risk industries, and advocate for stronger protections against pregnancy, reproductive and parental leave discrimination.

The Victorian Government funds the Safe Workplaces for Women Initiative

as an ecosystem, unions delivering training and outreach, employer bodies delivering employer education, and the WWC Vic expanding further into the regions to provide legal assistance. Each part of this ecosystem has a distinct and important role in improving access to justice- and redress for working women and non-binary people.

WWC Vic's impact extends beyond Victoria. As part of the national network of Working Women's Centres, we contribute frontline evidence to coordinated advocacy, shared policy development and national law reform. Together, we are building the evidence needed to strengthen workplace protections, improve access to justice and create safer, more equitable workplaces for women and non-binary workers across Australia.

Investing in the next phase of the WWC Vic means supporting a service that responds to workplace harm and works to prevent it. Continued funding will support stronger evidence, better laws, safer workplaces and a future where every woman and non-binary worker can access the specialist support they need to enforce their rights and participate safely and equally at work.

Continued investment is needed to continue providing specialist expertise for workplace harm as gender-based violence.

"Government needs more funding for the Working Women's Centre to help more vulnerable people like me."

— MARIA

Investment in the next phase is an investment in response and prevention of workplace harm.



Above: WWC Vic staff Jennifer Jones and Sharmiah Sritharan (second and third from left) at the National Employment Standards Inquiry.



Images: (L) WWC Vic staff; (R) WWC Vic staff Thea and Jenn with Zhenia and Susan from Working Women's Centre ACT.



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