

## **Improving access to family law property assistance for victim-survivors of family violence**

Women's Legal Service Victoria (Women's Legal) is partnering with Barwon Community Legal Service, commUnity+ Legal (formerly Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre) and Westjustice, to deliver a new project which aims to improve access to family law property assistance for victim-survivors of family violence.

Victim-survivors and their children often must leave their homes to find safety from family violence, leading to a cascade of consequences including homelessness, poverty, job loss, social disconnection, and disruption of children's education.

A lack of accessible family law property assistance exacerbates the risk of poverty, homelessness, and financial insecurity for victim-survivors.

The *Safe settlements: Family Law and Housing Justice project* – funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program – will address these critical issues by providing intensive family law property assistance to women and non-binary people who have experienced family violence.

By securing fair property settlements, this project aims to prevent homelessness, reduce financial insecurity, and promote long-term stability and recovery for victim-survivors post-separation.

Women's Legal CEO Claudia Fatone said, "This legal support is so important for people's recovery from family violence. We know that family violence is a leading cause of homelessness among women in Victoria."

"Together with our project partners we will be supporting women, non-binary people and their children, who have experienced family violence, to secure and retain safe, long-term and affordable housing through access to free intensive family law property assistance," Ms Fatone said.

Barwon Community Legal Service CEO Bryanna Connell said, "At Barwon Community Legal, we see firsthand how the lack of access to family law property assistance can trap victim-survivors in cycles of poverty and instability. This project is about more than legal support – it's about restoring dignity, safety, and long-term security for women and non-binary people rebuilding their lives after violence. We're proud to be part of this vital collaboration."

commUnity+ CEO Tracy Gaudry said, "With their deep expertise in early intervention and response to family violence, both legal and allied support services, the family law team at commUnity+ Legal are pleased to be part of this important project. In the 2024-25 financial year, commUnity+ Legal secured nearly \$2.5m in property settlements alone for victim-survivors, ensuring they receive the fair outcome that they deserve and can move onto the next chapter of their lives as safely and securely as possible."

Westjustice CEO Melissa Hardham said, "In our catchment alone, 6,202 women needed homelessness services due to family violence in the last financial year. That's 17 people every day. Housing and financial insecurity play a critical role in preventing women from being able to leave violent relationships and find safety. This is why Westjustice's involvement in the *Safe settlements: Family Law and Housing Justice project* is central to ensure access to property settlement for those in our catchment area and, as a flow on effect, ensure safety and a positive impact to those who would otherwise be facing homelessness."

Women's Legal, Barwon Community Legal Centre, commUnity+ Legal and Westjustice have collaborated since 2019 on improved access to family law assistance in Melbourne's west and Geelong region. The *Safe settlements: Family Law and Housing Justice project* is the next step in this ongoing collaboration to respond to consistently high unmet legal need.

As well as providing free family law property assistance to victim-survivors of family violence, the project will track housing and financial security of clients two years post settlement through a longitudinal survey to capture data on the reduced likelihood of other legal issues and supporting victim-survivor's financial recovery post separation, including achieving safe and secure housing.

This project is funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program through their [Advancing Housing Justice grants round](#).