OUR THEORY OF

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To contribute to a fair and inclusive society that promotes and protects human rights and equality before the law, by:

- Helping to empower individuals and communities
- Contributing to an effective safety net of legal and other services
- Helping to create fair laws, legal system and institutions

THE PROBLEMS AND NEEDS THAT WE ADDRESS

Legal issues are widespread in the community. People who are vulnerable and disadvantaged are more likely to experience legal problems, and have less capability to adequately resolve them. They often lack access to legal assistance and representation relevant to their needs, due to poverty, lack of knowledge and marginalisation. People experiencing disadvantage are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Members of regional and rural communities may have increased disadvantage due to geographic, social and economic barriers.

Unresolved legal problems have potential social and financial costs for the community, as well as very significant impacts on individual wellbeing. Legal problems will often escalate if not dealt with in a timely manner.

Individual legal problems are complex. People aren't always able to manage their own legal issues and often don't have a full understanding of their rights and responsibilities, or the options available to them. People who are vulnerable often find it difficult to achieve just outcomes without legal education or assistance.

People experiencing legal issues often also have related non-legal issues that affect their wellbeing, for example debt, mental health, housing or substance use issues. If these issues are not addressed together, legal problems are more likely to recur.

Other professionals working with people experiencing disadvantage may also have limited understanding of the law, and of how to assist people to obtain legal help.

Laws and the legal system (including legal processes) at times contribute to unjust outcomes for people experiencing disadvantage, and create barriers to accessing justice. There is a need to identify and address these systemic issues so that laws and their implementation are fairer.

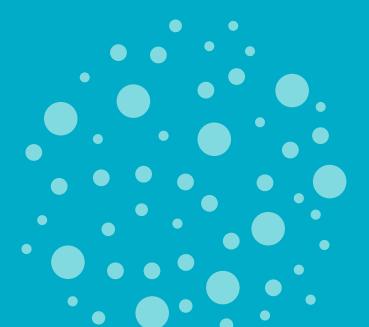
OUR CONTEXT

Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that has been providing free legal services since 1977. PCLC is one of the largest community legal centres in Australia. The catchment area for the general legal program covers six local government areas, spans over 2,600 square kilometres and a population of almost one million people, catchment areas for some programs are larger. PCLC's head office is located in Frankston, branch offices are located in Cranbourne, Rosebud, Frankston North and Bentleigh East. The Centre provides visiting outreach services elsewhere in the catchment. PCLC's catchment includes areas of significant disadvantage, along with some relatively affluent areas.

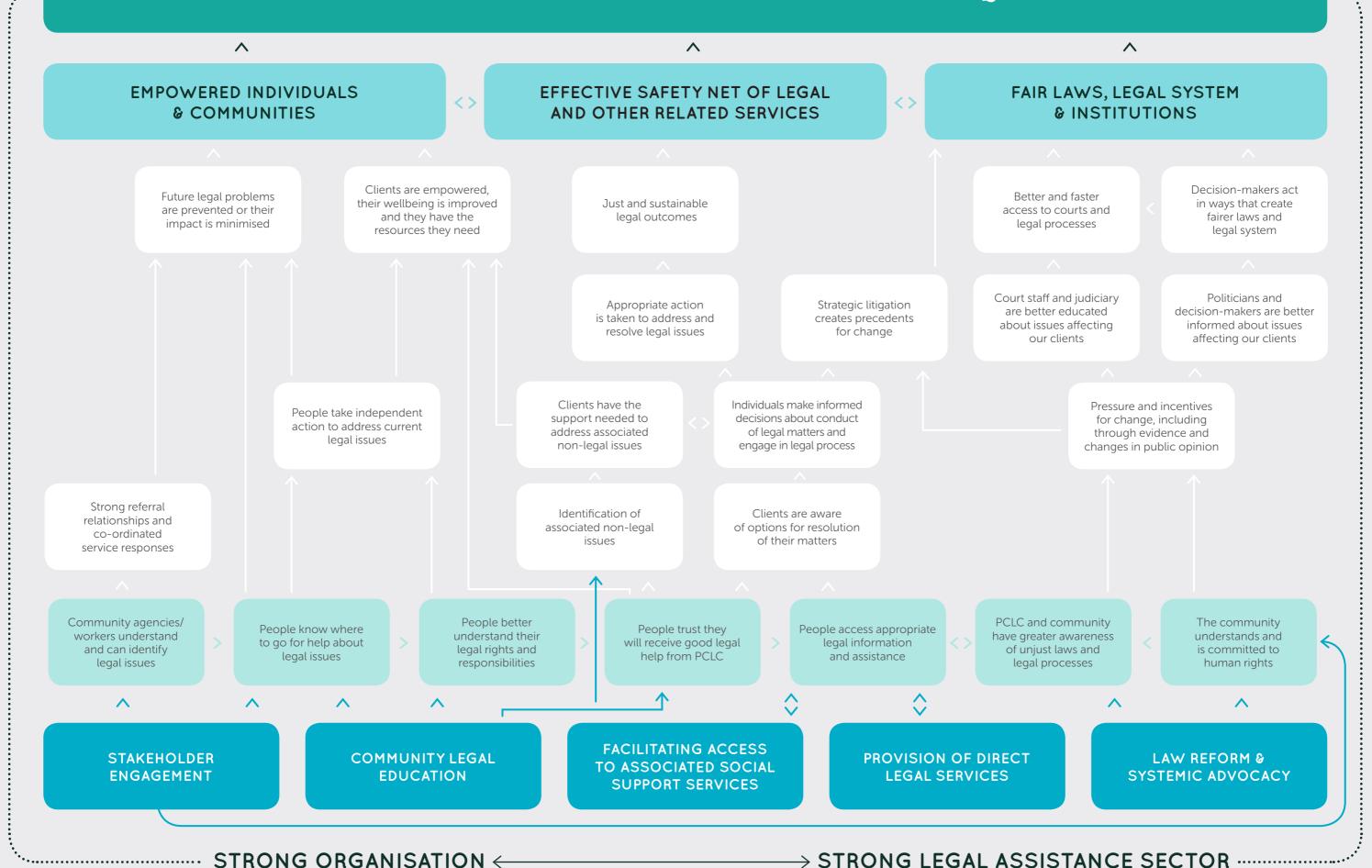
PCLC offers a range of legal services including legal advice; casework and representation targeted to vulnerable and disadvantaged clients; specialist family law, family violence, fines, tenancy; duty lawyer and duty advocate services; rooming house support services and integrated social work support. PCLC also undertakes a range of community legal education, community engagement, law reform and systemic advocacy activities. PCLC has over 40 paid staff and around 150 volunteers.

In common with the rest of the CLC sector, PCLC operates in a context of high demand, limited resourcing and strong regulation. Members of the public can sometimes have low levels of trust of legal services. The overall legal system can be complex and hard to navigate.

PCLC is part of the broader community sector and values partnerships with a range of local service providers.



A FAIR & INCLUSIVE SOCIETY THAT PROMOTES & PROTECTS HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW



OUR PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

PCLC ensures that direct legal services are accessible to people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. We do this by providing free and low-cost legal services at accessible locations and times. We educate the community and local service networks about legal rights and responsibilities and the existence of legal assistance services. This helps to raise awareness within the community about the nature of legal issues, and how to access legal help. We foster coordinated service responses through our stakeholder engagement and partnership building work. All these activities help people to access legal assistance in a timely manner, and to take appropriate action of their own to address legal issues. This helps to prevent and minimise the impact of legal problems.

Through advice, casework and duty services, people receive clear information and assistance on their specific legal circumstances. This helps them to make better informed decisions about their legal matters, and to engage more effectively with legal processes. Where appropriate, people are assisted with advocacy, negotiation, preparation of documentation and representation. Our assistance ensures that matters are handled effectively and strategically, leading to more appropriate action being taken to resolve legal issues. This increases the chances of just and sustainable legal outcomes. We also assist people to access non-legal supports. These activities contribute to increased empowerment, improved wellbeing and reduced disadvantage for the people we assist.

Through our work we also identify systemic issues including unjust laws and legal processes. We promote community understanding of and commitment to human rights. We raise community awareness, undertake strategic litigation and advocate to decision makers about issues affecting our clients. These activities create precedents for change and place pressure on decision makers and key stakeholders, who use their influence and roles to improve the fairness of laws and legal processes.

The foundations of our work are a strong organisation and a strong legal assistance sector, and we work in partnership with others to develop and maintain both.



EVIDENCE BASE AND ASSUMPTIONS

Our Theory of Change is based on certain assumptions, which need to be further tested and evidenced. These include:

- People understand the information we provide.
- People are able to act on the information we provide.
- If people try to access our services we will be able to respond to them in a timely manner.
- People want to be empowered.
- Vulnerable and disadvantaged people will have better legal outcomes if they receive legal advice and/or representation.
- Better legal outcomes lead to sustainable gains in wellbeing for those assisted.
- Decision makers are amenable to pressure and influence from the community.
- People can learn to trust legal services.
- Support services for non-legal needs will be available when required.
- PCLC is able to identify which groups within the community that have the greatest level of need and disadvantage, and is able to reach these groups.
- PCLC is able to identify which changes to law and legal process will ultimately benefit people experiencing disadvantage.

CONTACTS

HEAD OFFICE

441 Nepean Highway, Frankston, Vic 3199 t: 03 9783 3600 f: 03 9770 5200 Free Call: 1800 064 784, DX 19953 Frankston e: pclc@pclc.org.au Hours: Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm

BENTLEIGH BRANCH

82 Brady Road, Bentleigh, Vic 3165 **Hours:** Mon & Thurs evening

CRANBOURNE BRANCH

Bella Centre, Suite 12, 33-39 High Street, Cranbourne, Vic 3977 Hours: Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm

PINES BRANCH

28 Mahogany Avenue Frankston North, Vic 3200 **Hours**: By Appointment

ROSEBUD BRANCH

1375 Point Nepean Road, Rosebud, Vic 3939 Hours: Mon, Wed & Thurs, 9am – 5pm

