

Victoria Law Foundation Report shows need to improve data in the legal assistance sector

First data mapping report released

We are pleased to announce the release of our latest report: *Apples, Oranges and Lemons: The use and utility of administrative data in the Victorian legal assistance sector*.

Data is a powerful tool and increasingly relied upon by organisations and government to design services and inform policy. Legal assistance organisations are among those relying on data as a tool to design effective legal services.

Ultimately, good quality data is needed so that policy settings and legal services across Victoria work as best they can.

The Foundation is hopeful this report will strengthen the resolve of organisations across Victoria to improve data quality, so that it can better answer access to justice questions.

‘Used well, good quality data can be used to understand legal need, to design services and to analyse what works and what doesn’t. This report provides a direction of travel for Victoria’s legal assistance sector to unlock the potential of their administrative data and improve access to justice for all Victorians through better policy and service design.’

said **Executive Director Lynne Haultain**

About the report

This is the first report in the Foundation’s data mapping project. The project examines how administrative data is collected and used in the Victorian civil justice system. The project investigates what data is available, its accuracy and consistency, how data is used and what needs to be done to improve its ability to answer access to justice questions.

The project is in three stages. The first explores the administrative data available in the Victorian legal assistance sector. The second will look at courts and tribunals and the third, dispute resolution and complaint bodies.

Overview of findings

Our findings show that administrative data in the legal sector is used for many purposes in both useful and innovative ways, however there are challenges to using it system-wide for meaningful comparative analysis. Improving the consistency and accuracy of administrative data will help better answer access to justice questions.

Strategies from the report

Strategies required to unlock the utility of administrative included:

- Improved data quality and standardised practices.
- Quality data requires leadership, collaboration and coordination.
- Quality data requires investment in people and time.
- Quality data requires funding.

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Quotes

‘Building a quality evidence base needs strategic thinking and commitment to drive improved data culture and practice. It is vital that legal assistance funders and service providers develop a shared understanding and vision for the role of and use of data, and that there is greater clarity about what service data will and will not be used for. Service providers need an agreed direction of travel as well as the realistic means to get there,’ said

Principal Researcher Dr Hugh McDonald

‘While there is undoubtedly much that needs to be done to improve the nature and quality of Victoria’s legal assistance data, we found a sector that had embarked on a data improvement journey, and was eager to learn the outcomes and impacts of their services,’ said **Principal Researcher Dr Hugh McDonald**

‘The movement to measure outcomes places a premium on data consistency and accuracy. Quality data also requires modern, fit for purpose data management systems that reflect the work and needs of services. Getting to quality data also requires leadership, collaboration and coordination. It does not happen on its own,’ said **Research Director Professor Nigel Balmer**.

‘There are some clear implications from this research. Quality data requires collaboration to deliver consistent standards – from funders as much as service providers. It requires resourcing and investment in better systems and practices. It requires a commitment to the day to day reality of building the evidence base, as much as to the rhetoric,’ said **Executive Director Lynne Haultain**

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said **Executive Director Lynne Haultain**

Dr Hugh McDonald, Professor Nigel Balmer and Executive Director Lynne Haultain are available for interview.

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Download the full report [here](#).

About Victoria Law Foundation

Victoria Law Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation supporting better justice in Victoria through research, education and grants programs.