

2014 Law help guide

Need legal help?

Where to start



I think I may have a legal problem

Start here

If you have a legal problem, this brochure is the best place to start. It will help you understand the options available to you and help you work out what to do next.

While a private lawyer can help you, you may be able to use other services that are free or low-cost. It is good to know that you have three options for solving your legal problem.

- **Ombudsmen, service commissioners, government schemes ...**
A number of different organisations offer services in this area but only operate in limited dispute areas. These services are generally free but you will usually have to show that you have tried to solve the problem yourself first.
- **Free or low-cost legal assistance**
These services are generally able to provide initial advice or information to anyone for free. More complex services may be restricted to priority clients.
- **A private lawyer**
Anyone can use a private lawyer, but you will have to pay for their services.

Remember, no matter which service you choose, it can take time for legal problems to be resolved.

? What is the best service for me?

The best service for you will depend upon:

- the type of problem that you have
- your personal situation
- the complexity of your case.



Remember, you may have to try a few different services before you find the right one

Ombudsmen, service commissioners, government schemes ...

There are many organisations set up to help you resolve a dispute as quickly and efficiently as possible without having to go to court.

Each organisation usually specialises in a specific area. For example, the Fair Work Ombudsman assists with disputes about employment. Some government organisations deal with a range of different areas, such as Consumer Affairs Victoria, which oversees various issues affecting consumers and businesses.

These services are independent, confidential and generally free. But you usually have to show that you have tried to resolve the problem yourself first.

➔ Turn over for a list of services and the type of disputes they deal with.

Free or low-cost legal services

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) or a community legal centre can give free legal advice or information. If they can't help you, they'll often be able to find someone who can.

Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) provides free legal information, education and advice for all Victorians, focusing on people with low incomes and those experiencing disadvantage.

VLA's Legal Help phone service is a good place to start to find out how to deal with your legal problem. You can speak to someone in English or in your own language.

VLA also has offices in most major metropolitan and regional areas and has lawyers who provide help in many courts, some hospitals, prisons and detention centres.

☎ 1300 792 387
🌐 www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Community legal centres

Community legal centres provide free legal advice, information and representation to the public, with a focus on people experiencing disadvantage. Some centres provide help on a wide range of issues to people who live, work or study in a particular area, while others specialise in a particular field of law or assisting people with specific needs.

The Federation of Community Legal Centres is the peak body for all centres. They can help you find the best community legal centre for your problem.

☎ 9652 1500
🌐 www.communitylaw.org.au

A private lawyer

Using a private lawyer is one way of getting the legal help you need.

If you want to use a private lawyer, you'll need to find one who is experienced in dealing with your kind of problem.

Shop around. Speak to a couple of different lawyers and compare their services and fees. Only use a lawyer you feel comfortable with and can afford.

If you are unclear about the advice given to you, you can ask to have it explained in a way that you understand.

Law Institute of Victoria

The Law Institute of Victoria provides referrals to solicitors across Victoria. Law firms included in the Find Your Lawyer – Legal Referral Service provide a free 30-minute inquiry interview.

☎ 9607 9550
🌐 www.findyourlawyer.com.au

More information

These resources can help you find out more about the law and how it operates in Victoria.

Victoria's Legal System

A compact guide to how laws are made in Victoria and the bodies that make up the legal sector. Order a copy or download at:

🌐 www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/publications

Victoria Legal Aid Public Law Library

Specialist law library in Victoria open to the public. Offers a wide range of print and electronic resources covering a variety of legal topics.

🌐 www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-law-library
🏠 350 Queen Street, Melbourne

Courts and Tribunals Victoria

Information about all courts and tribunals operating in Victoria, including a brief overview of their roles.

🌐 www.courts.vic.gov.au

Department of Justice (Victoria)

Information, forms and links to legal services such as police, courts, prisons and victims services.

🌐 www.justice.vic.gov.au



? What if I still don't know what to do?

If you are still not sure which service to use, or even whether you have a legal problem, call Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help phone service.

☎ 1300 792 387

Ombudsmen, service commissioners, government schemes ...

Complaint or dispute resolution services

Various

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Provides information to help consumers and businesses resolve common problems with the purchase of goods and services in Victoria. Can also help with renting, accommodation, buying and selling a home, scams, product safety and other issues.

☎ 1300 558 181
🌐 www.consumer.vic.gov.au

Disability

Disability Services Commissioner

Helps people resolve complaints with a disability service or service provider.

☎ 1800 677 342
☎ 1300 728 187
🌐 www.odsc.vic.gov.au

Office of the Public Advocate

Provides information and advice on the rights of people with a disability as well as advocacy, guardianship, powers of attorney, and consent to medical and dental treatment.

☎ 1300 309 337 (local call)
☎ 1300 305 612 (TTY)
🌐 www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

Discrimination

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Receives, investigates and helps to resolve complaints about discrimination including sexual harassment and racial and religious vilification.

☎ 1300 292 153
🌐 www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Employment

Fair Work Ombudsman

Gives people information and advice about workplace rights and obligations and helps them to resolve employment-related disputes.

☎ 13 13 94
🌐 www.fairwork.gov.au

Energy and water

Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)

Investigates and resolves disputes between Victorian electricity, gas and water customers and their company.

☎ 1800 500 509
🌐 www.ewov.com.au

Financial products and services

Financial Ombudsman Service

Independent dispute resolution services for consumers and some small businesses with banking, insurance and investment disputes.

☎ 1300 780 808
🌐 www.fos.org.au

Government

Ombudsman Victoria

Investigates complaints from the public about Victorian government departments, statutory authorities and local government.

☎ 9613 6222
☎ 1800 806 314
🌐 www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Health

Health Services Commissioner

Helps people with complaints against health service providers.

☎ 1300 582 113
🌐 www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/

Legal services

Legal Services Commissioner

Receives, investigates and helps to resolve complaints against lawyers and disputes between lawyers and clients.

☎ 1300 796 344
🌐 www.lsc.vic.gov.au

Privacy

Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner

Investigates complaints about breaches of privacy by Victorian government agencies and local councils.

☎ 1300 666 444
🌐 www.privacy.vic.gov.au

Public transport

Public Transport Ombudsman

Deals with complaints about Victorian public transport.

☎ 1800 466 865
🌐 www.ptovic.com.au

Business

Office of the Victorian Small Business Commissioner

Resolves commercial disputes for small and medium businesses. Investigates complaints regarding unfair market practices.

☎ 13 87 22
🌐 www.vsbv.vic.gov.au

Telephone and internet services

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

Independent dispute resolution services for residential and small business consumers of telephone or internet services.

☎ 1800 062 058
🌐 www.tio.com.au

Turn over for more information on other options to solve your legal problem



Open up ...

for a list of ombudsmen, service commissioners and government schemes

What is an ombudsman?

An ombudsman handles complaints in a particular industry, such as telecommunications or financial services.

What is a service commissioner?

A service commissioner handles complaints, undertakes investigations, and acts as a regulator in a particular industry, such as legal services or health services.

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Award of
Distinction

