



All the Latest in Legal News from Northern Community Legal Centre

September 2020

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From the Team at NCLC



Welcome to our September edition of the NCLC newsletter.

After a winter of being in lockdown, we hope that our partners and community members are staying safe and well as we see out our last few weeks of severe restrictions, and welcome the spring sunshine in Melbourne.

We know that many people have been experiencing extreme hardship during this period, and that legal need is likely to have increased as a result. In response we are increasing the number of legal clinics provided to our community, including two new clinics:

- **International Student Clinic**

With support from Moreland Council, this dedicated clinic for International students experiencing hardship will provide legal advice in relation to housing, employment, fines, and other legal matters.

- **COVID-19 Clinic**

With support from the Victorian Attorney-General, this clinic will target community members impacted by legal issues arising from COVID-19 including

child contact arrangements, family violence, police powers, renting rights, employment rights and financial assistance.

These clinics will operate in tandem with our other priority clinics including:

- Family violence duty lawyer service and clinics
- Our youth clinics
- Our refugee and newly arrived clinics
- Our fines clinic

For further information about NCLC programs and clinics please see our website at www.northernclc.org.au

AT NCLC OUR LAWYERS CONTINUE TO PROVIDE LEGAL SERVICES BY
TELEPHONE DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS.

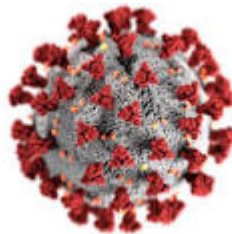
FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE PLEASE CONTACT US BY TELEPHONE ON:

(03) 9310 4376

OR BY EMAIL AT:

admin@northernclc.org.au

COVID-19 Legal Updates



We are continuing to update our COVID-19 Legal Fact Sheets, to bring them up to date with the latest legal changes. The fact sheets are available via the button below.

COVID-19 Legal Facts and Info

COVID-19 Restrictions

The Victorian Government has announced the COVID-19 roadmap to reopening, which is available [here](#). Under this plan, Victorians will continue to face strict COVID-19 restrictions, and large fines for alleged non-compliance, for some time.

We are continuing to see a number of cases where people are being issued these large fines. In circumstances where we believe that clients have not breached the restrictions, we can assist clients to challenge these infringements.

Our fact sheet on police powers and COVID-19 fines is available [here](#).

Tenancy Protections

The Victorian Government has announced that the current residential tenancy legal protections in place will be extended until March 2021.

These laws place a moratorium on most evictions, prevent rent increases, and allows tenants to negotiate a rental reduction if they have been financially impacted by COVID-19. A summary of these protections is available on our Renting Rights fact sheet, available [here](#).

We have seen a number of clients that have lost income due to COVID-19, including some that are not entitled to Centrelink payments, and have seen first-hand the positive impact of these laws.

We have used these laws to successfully prevent a number of evictions, and have been able to help clients negotiate affordable rental payments, allowing them and their families to keep a roof over their heads during these difficult times.

Introducing Morgan, Our Mental Health Support Coordinator

Northern Community Legal Centre has recently employed a Mental Health Support Coordinator, and Morgan has commenced in this role. Morgan has vast experience in the community mental health sector and is working to ensure that people in our catchment are able to get appropriate legal and non-legal support services.

Northern CLC is able to offer a streamlined referral process for clients experiencing mental health issues or cognitive disabilities. Please reach out to us at admin@northernclc.org.au.

An Interview with Morgan



- **Why is it important to provide mental health support to people accessing legal services?**

Going to court, getting a fine, being threatened with eviction, and dealing with police are all potentially stressful and distressing experiences. These events often increase feelings of mental-ill health for our clients. It also goes the other way: when you're experiencing mental ill health you may be more prone to getting into legal difficulty or not in a space where you could be reasonably held accountable for your conduct. Understanding this, we appreciate that many people with mental health concerns commonly experiencing re-occurring legal problems and that people's legal, housing, mental health, and other needs are closely intertwined.

During COVID-19 restrictions, people are likely to be experiencing significant social stressors, and corresponding mental health concerns as we grapple with the isolation of lockdown periods compounded by financial distress.

NCLC has a history of providing holistic, wraparound support for our clients, and my role as Mental Health Support Coordinator is an extension of this practice.

- **How does NCLC assist people with legal issues and co-occurring mental health concerns?**

Clients coming to our legal service come from all different backgrounds and experiences, and commonly require medium to long-term mental health support. As well as providing direct support to clients and coordination of referrals, my role will support NCLC lawyers to respond to the mental health needs of clients, whilst also formalising partnerships with established Mental Health Service Providers so that referrals can be quickly assessed and supported. We are also working with mental health support agencies to integrate legal health checks into their intake processes, ensuring that we

provide a collaborative and integrated approach where clients have both their legal and non-legal needs met simultaneously.

- **What do you enjoy about working in this space?**

I love working with people. People's stories of resilience never cease to inspire me and cultivate a strong sense of compassion for others in me. I have worked in community mental health for 6 years and during that time I was never tired of holding hope for others and supporting them to achieve goals that they did not believe to be possible. I saw first-hand the incredible impact my life could have on others and their recovery. Creating a positive impact in the lives of others no matter how big or small to me is a life well-spent.

Besan's Story

Besan's story

Besan's story demonstrates the great outcomes that can be achieved when community legal services work closely with community mental health services.

We saw Besan at a co-location site after he was referred by a community mental health practitioner. The community mental health practitioner attended all the appointments with Besan and was able to assist conveying more sensitive issues with Besan's consent. The practitioner provided a background report regarding the childhood trauma suffered by Besan, which ensured that he did not have to recount this traumatic experience.*

We were able to assist Besan with numerous legal issues, including a \$4,000 debt with a phone company, which we had waived; a \$27,000 debt with a finance company, which we had waived; and a Victims of Crime Assistance Application which saw Besan receive \$10,000 as well as ongoing counselling and other expenses to assist with his recovery.

The community mental health practitioner assisted Besan with follow up work for his legal matters and wrote letters of support which greatly assisted with his legal issues. This is an example of working in a truly integrated practice.

**Name changed*

Incorporating Legal Health Checks into Practice – Free Training Available

A legal health check is a simple tool that can assist practitioners across all community sector programs to identify legal issues their client may be

experiencing as part of their triage and case-management practice, ensuring that referrals for legal support are timely and effective.

Northern CLC is seeking to partner with agencies wishing to implement this practice, and will adapt the tool to ensure suitability to the service context, as well as suitability for different cultural and language groups, where possible. Free training is provided to organisations as part of the implementation process.

For further information, contact Partnerships and Community Development Manager, Tania McKenna, at tmckenna@northernclc.org.au

Northern Community Legal Centre acknowledges and respects the traditional custodians whose lands we are fortunate to live and work on, and we pay our respects to all Elders past, present, and future.

Northern Community Legal Centre

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