



2021 COVID-19 Legal Needs Analysis

Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service



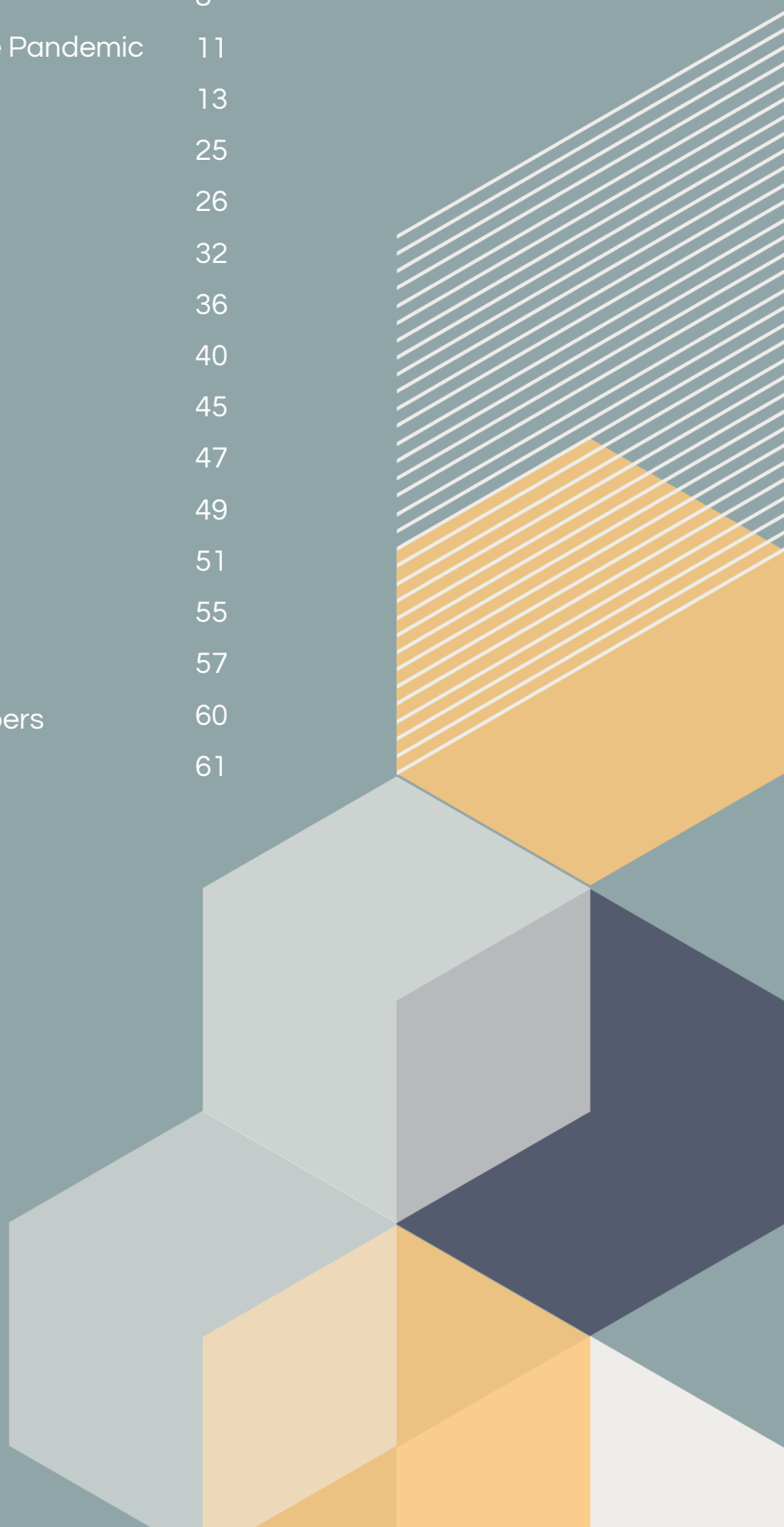
Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the region we service, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connections to land, water and community. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, their Elders past, present and emerging.

This report refers to the period between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2021.

Published October 2021

Contents

COVID-19 Legal Needs Analysis	4
Vision & Values	5
About BGCLS	6
Current Client & Community Services	7
COVID-19 Timeline	8
BGCLS Service Provision Response to the Pandemic	11
Local Government Area Demographics	13
Indicators of Legal Need	25
• Community Disadvantage	26
• Income & Employment	32
• Housing	36
• Families and Family Violence	40
• Age	45
• First Nations People	47
• Cultural Diversity	49
• Health & Disability	51
• Additional Considerations	55
Community Feedback: Service Providers	57
Community Feedback: Community Members	60
Recommendations	61



COVID-19

Legal Needs Analysis

The COVID-19 (SARS—CoV-2) Virus was first identified in December 2019. As it spread quickly across the world, by early 2020 the World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic. The impact of the pandemic has been felt across the globe. Victoria, Melbourne particularly, has recently been given the unenviable title of longest locked down city in the world. This led to significant increases to a broad variety of health social and economic problems.

This legal needs analysis was undertaken to identify areas of need that exist within the Grampian region, using a COVID-19 lens to identify additional legal need that may have arisen, or been exacerbated, by ongoing restrictions. This includes areas such as:

- Family violence
- Family Law
- Employment
- Income
- Housing

To undertake this project, a review of existing service delivery, combined with community feedback from service providers and data from various Government sources, including the 2016 Census provide an overview of the community and areas for service adjustment or improvement.

Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service (BGCLS) gratefully acknowledges funding of State and Federal Government, administered by Victoria Legal Aid, to complete this project.



Vision & Values

Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service strives for an informed community with access to justice through the law.

Our Purpose

Providing high quality professional legal services, education, support and advocacy to promote inclusion and enhance collaboration.

Our Values

- Integrity
- Respect
- Inclusivity
- Confidentiality
- Accountability
- Collaboration



ABOUT BGCLS



**The Grampians
region covers
48,609 sq kms, 11
LGAs, 250,000
people**

Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service (BGCLS) is a community legal centre providing free legal advice, information and community legal education. The service is funded by State and Federal government funds to service the Grampians communities of Victoria.

BGCLS assists in individual legal matters, but also more broadly in community development, community legal education, capacity building and law policy reform projects based on the needs of local community.

BGCLS has a wide range of partnerships with government, Victoria Legal Aid and other publicly funded legal assistance service providers, pro bono contributors, the private legal profession, community services agencies and other community partners to ensure the best outcomes for the community.

It is an accredited service through Community Legal Centres Australia.

BGCLS capture service data using the Community Legal Assistance Services System (CLASS).

CURRENT

Client & Community Services



Client Advice

Free legal advice regarding a range of topics including credit and debt, motor vehicles, family law and employment



Family Violence Court

Representation at Specialist Family Violence Court in Ballarat, and Magistrates Courts at Stawell, Horsham and Ararat family violence court hearings



Priority Client Casework

Legal casework for clients assessed as a priority by state and federal funders.



Law Reform

Submissions and feedback on systemic areas of injustice requiring review.



Community Education

Community legal education delivered online, in person and via written materials on a broad range of topics including youth matters, estates and family law.



Community Development

Working with welfare and justice organisations to improve outcomes for the community.



Client Advocacy

COMPASS program provides individualised non-legal support to assist with the development and implementation of plans to help navigate and access relevant support services.



Funded by:



Australian Government

Administered by:



COVID-19 TIMELINE



COVID-19 Timeline

The COVID-19 (SARS—CoV-2) Virus was first identified in December 2019. The World Health Organisation subsequently declared it a global pandemic.

The effects of restrictions and lockdowns have had significant impacts financially, emotionally and psychologically.



MARCH 2020

- National Lockdown commences. Non-essential business and services shutdown
- Stage 3 restrictions commence.
- JobKeeper wage subsidy payments unveiled by the Federal Government. JobSeeker Covid Subsidy introduced



APRIL 2020

- Move to remote and flexible learning for Victorian schools
- Superannuation withdrawal becomes available up to \$20k to people who lost employment or had their hours reduced



MAY 2020

- Some easing of restrictions



JUNE 2020

- increase in case numbers of COVID 19 due to breaches in hotel quarantine



JULY 2020

- Greater Melbourne Local Government Areas and Mitchell Shire return to Stage 3 restrictions.
- Victorian Government announce Covid Test Isolation payment and Hardship Payment for those in quarantine.



AUGUST 2020

- State of Disaster declared. Melbourne moves to Stage 4 restrictions including curfews and mandatory mask wearing. Regional Victoria moves to Stage 3 restrictions.



SEPTEMBER 2020

- Victorian Roadmap for Reopening Announced
- Regional Victorians can travel across the state, except to Melbourne. Ring of Steel used to stop Melburnians travelling into regional areas.
- JobKeeper extended at a reduced rate.



OCTOBER 2020

- Regional Victorian restrictions significantly eased



JANUARY 2021

- JobKeeper extended until March at a further reduced rate



FEBRUARY 2021

- Snap Statewide Victorian lockdown announced due to Delta variant



MARCH 2021

- End to Federally funded JobKeeper payments



MAY 2021

- Snap seven day lockdown announced with ongoing restrictions due to Delta variant



Whilst the data from this report relates to the two year timeframe between June 2019 and June 2021, it is important to note that the effects of the pandemic have been felt in the subsequent months, with further statewide and local government area specific lockdowns at the time of writing (October 2021).

- Melbourne has been subject to Stage 4 Lockdowns, including an overnight curfew
- The City of Ballarat and Moorabool Shire Council have moved between significant restrictions and lockdowns, with both LGAs having been in lockdown on eight separate occasions since March 2020.
- Vaccination rates have increased dramatically in the three months from June, however, this may, in part, to be due mandatory vaccination orders for essential workers, the education and construction industries. Community Legal Centre, JobWatch, has experienced a substantial rise in advice regarding the legality of mandatory vaccinations.
- Protests in Melbourne led to a high number of public health order breaches being issued and a number of virus spreading incidents. This protest followed a two week closure of the construction industry in locked down areas
- International borders remain closed for overseas travel and caps on arrivals mean a number of citizens have been stranded overseas. State borders between New South Wales and Victoria are closed.

Response to the Pandemic

Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Service continued to operate throughout the increased restrictions and lockdowns. The delivery model shifted to majority telephone and online appointments, consistent with Chief Health Officer orders. Drop-in legal clinics were unable to continue and court appearances were moved to a virtual format with clients unable to attend court in person as determined by the Magistrates' Court Practice Directions.

The inability to attend face to face appointments may have provided a barrier for some community members in seeking

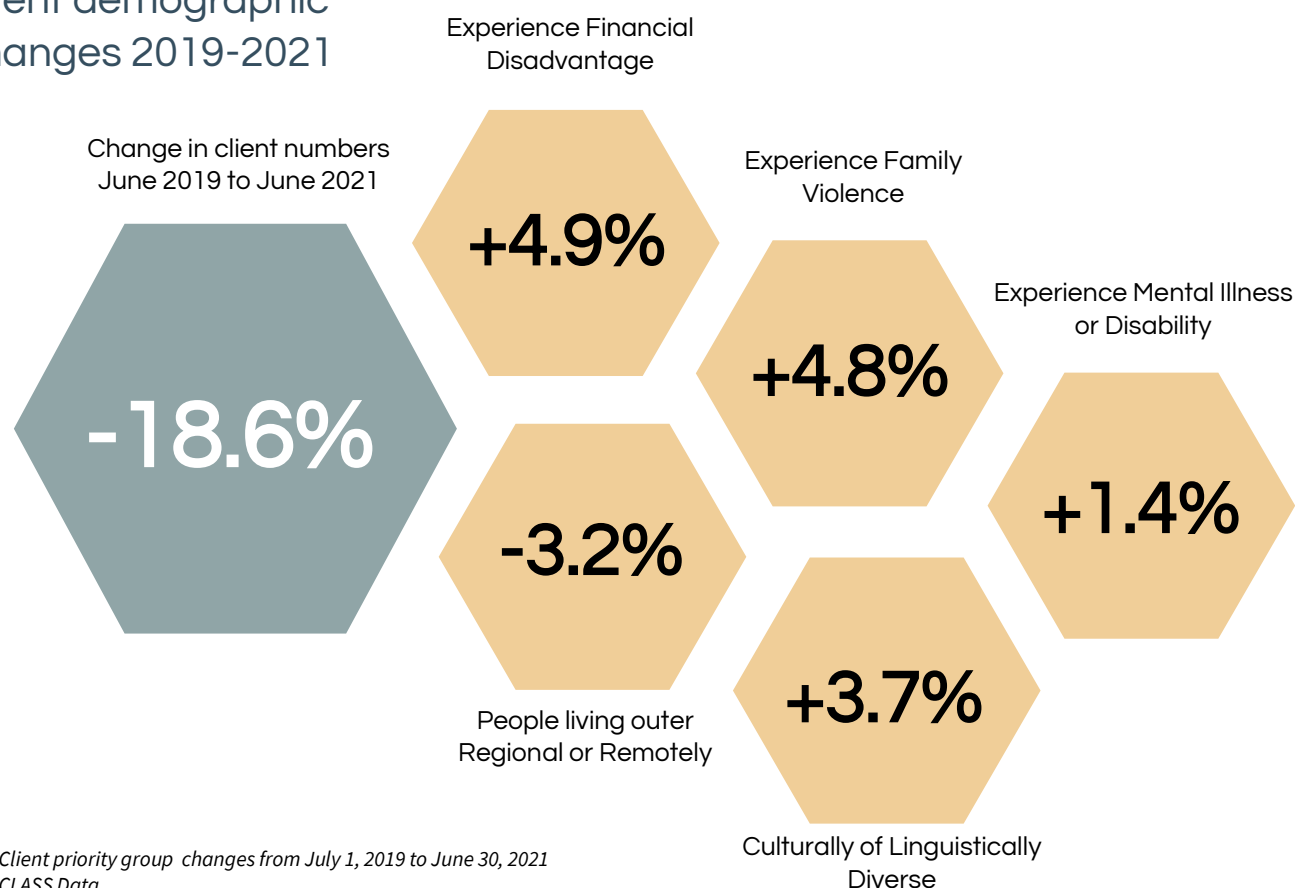
assistance. Numbers between 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 did not fluctuate greatly, however, there were **320 less clients in 2020/2021 compared to the pre-pandemic, full 2018/2019 Financial Year.**

A telephone and virtual drop in clinic commenced in the 2020/2021 financial year, providing clients with opportunities to book a 'first in, first served' appointment during specified times. All clients were subject to the usual conflict checks and casework guidelines. Numbers were capped, dependent on lawyer capacity, but have been booked to capacity throughout the pandemic restrictions.

1,403 clients were supported with legal assistance in 2020/2021.

Family Violence work made up 42% of services provided in 2020/2021, up from 25% in 2019/2020.

Client demographic changes 2019-2021



In 2020/2021, **83% of all clients experienced financial disadvantage**. Almost two thirds of those clients were in receipt of a welfare payment. Another 17% did not qualify for a Centrelink benefit, but experienced financial difficulties.

BGCLS Services Provided	Number of Services Provided	
	2019/2020	2020/2021
Information	15	22
Referral	402	466
Legal Advice	964	1248
Non-legal support	19	25
Legal Task	91	101
Duty Lawyer	547	577
Other representations—opened	191	240
Court or Tribunal—opened	25	37
Community Legal Education	21	13

Services provided by BGCLS from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021
CLASS Data

CLIENTS WITHOUT MEANS TO PAY FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE



2%

2018/2019
Financial Year



13%

2019/2020
Financial Year



17%

2020/2021
Financial Year

.....
Clients who do NOT receive DSS payments but do not have means to pay for legal assistance
2020/2021 CLASS Data

Partnerships and Networking

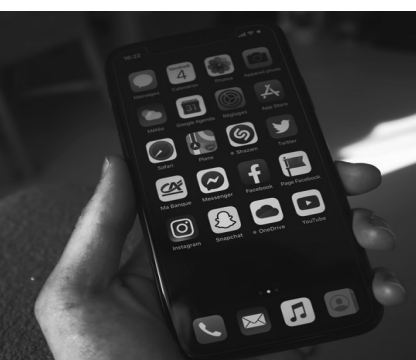
COVID-19 presented significant challenges in creating new strategic partnerships and maintaining ongoing stakeholder engagement. Many service providers adjusted their service to incorporate remote delivery whilst also experiencing unprecedented demand, from a broader group of clients than they had traditionally assisted. This was especially true for welfare organisations and those providing essential items such as food and toiletries.

Restrictions of meetings and face to face attendance saw a pivotal shift to networking through virtual attendance at team meetings and electronic communication. By early 2021, restrictions had significantly eased, with increasing ability to meet face to face. Consistency was, however, disrupted by regular, circuit breaker lockdowns in the first half of 2021.

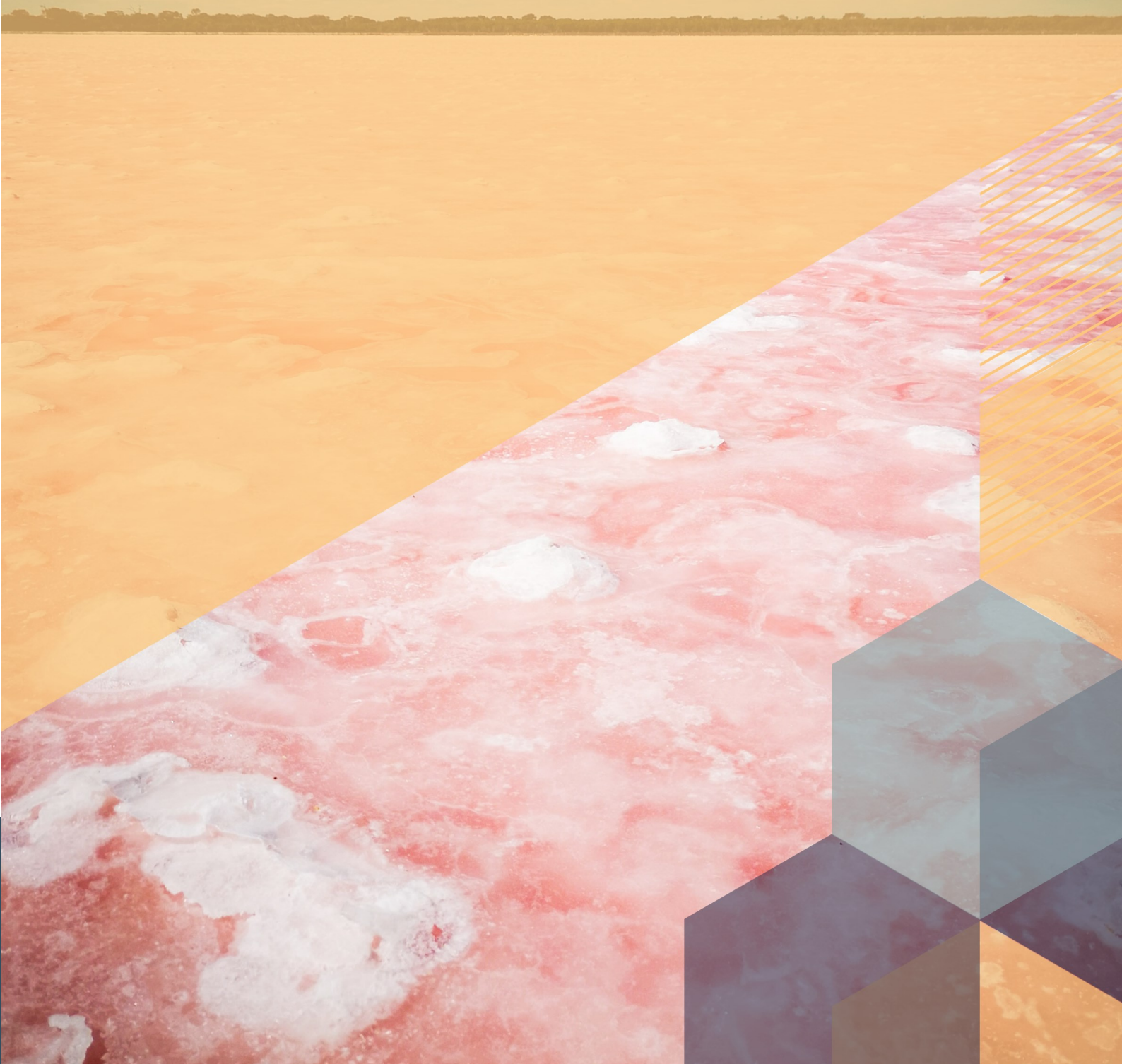
Stakeholder Engagement activities in 2019/2020: **53**
Stakeholder Engagement activities in 2020/2021: **167**

40%

of clients responding to a recent Client Satisfaction Survey would like to see a continuation of phone or video based services



LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA DEMOGRAPHICS



SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Ararat

Djab Wurrung Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

11,965



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$991 P/W

GOVERNMENT
SUPPORT
RECEIPIENTS

3,710



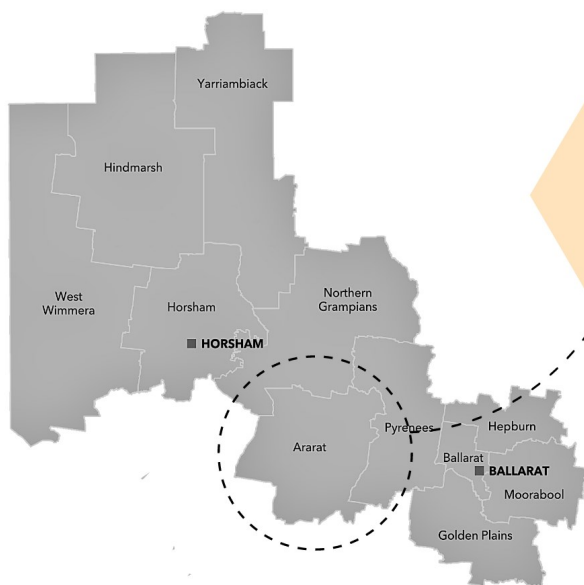
SEIFA INDEX

942



MEDIAN AGE

46



AREA

4,211 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS

Ararat
Lake Bolac
Willaura
Moyston
Pomonal



Ararat Rural City

DEMOGRAPHICS



23%

of residents are aged
65 and over

432

single parent families with
dependant children



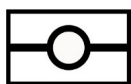
2,606

residents have
a disability



79%

of single parents
are women



1.5%

of residents identify as
First Nations people

3.7%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



11.1%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



331

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



12.3%

increase in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Ballarat

Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

111,361



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$1,160 P/W

GOVERNMENT
SUPPORT
RECEIPIENTS

31,472



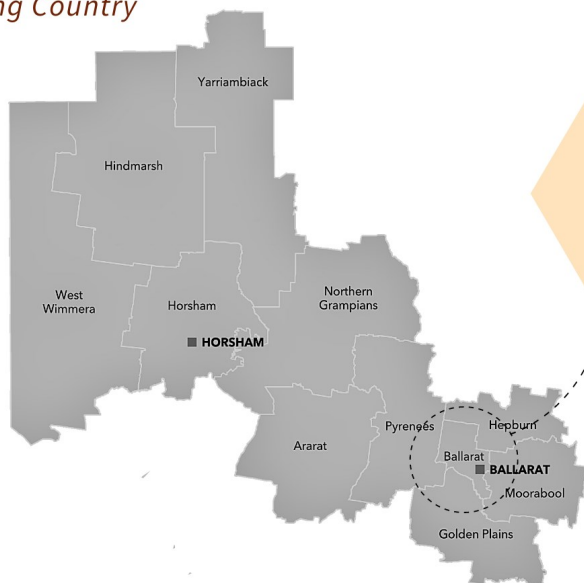
SEIFA INDEX

980



MEDIAN AGE

42



AREA
739 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS
Ballarat & surrounding
suburbs
Buninyong
Miners Rest
Learmonth



DEMOGRAPHICS



17%

of residents are aged
65 and over

4,817

single parent families with
dependant children



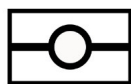
22,097

residents have
a disability



82.7%

of single parents
are women



1.5%

of residents identify as
First Nations people

5.4%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



20.9%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



2,369

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



13.6%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Golden Plains

Wadawurrung and Eastern Marr Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION
24,249



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME
\$1,448 P/W

GOVERNMENT
SUPPORT
RECEIPIENTS
4,562



SEIFA INDEX
1035



MEDIAN AGE
39



AREA

2,703 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS

Bannockburn
Smythesdale
Haddon
Teesdale
Ross Creek



DEMOGRAPHICS



13%
of residents are aged
65 and over

644

single parent families with
dependant children



4,284

residents have
a disability



77.1%

of single parents
are women



1%
of residents identify as
First Nations people

3%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



33.8%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



186

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



4.7%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Hepburn

Dja Dja Wurrung Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

16,057



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME
\$996 P/W

GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS

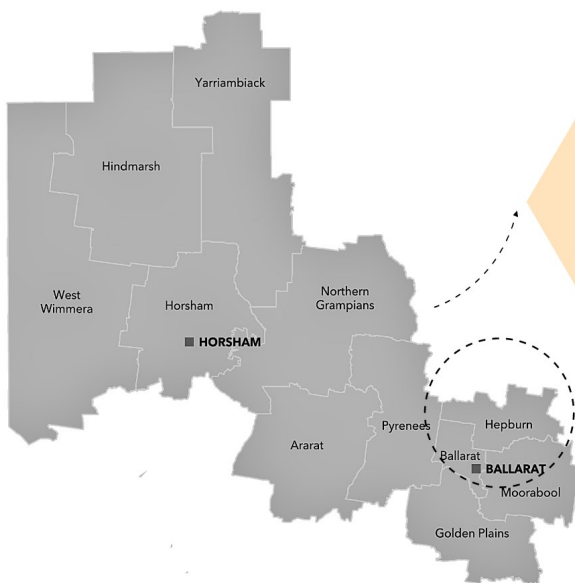
4,830



SEIFA INDEX
995



MEDIAN AGE
50



AREA

1,473 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS

Daylesford
Hepburn
Trentham
Creswick
Clunes

Hepburn
SHIRE COUNCIL

DEMOGRAPHICS



25%

of residents are aged
65 and over

591

single parent families with
dependant children



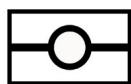
3,814

residents have
a disability



82.2%

of single parents
are women



1%

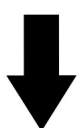
of residents identify as
First Nations people

6.6%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



9.2%

decrease in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



168

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



33.6%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Hindmarsh

Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali,
Wergaia and Jupagulk Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

5,592



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$907 P/W

GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS

1,868



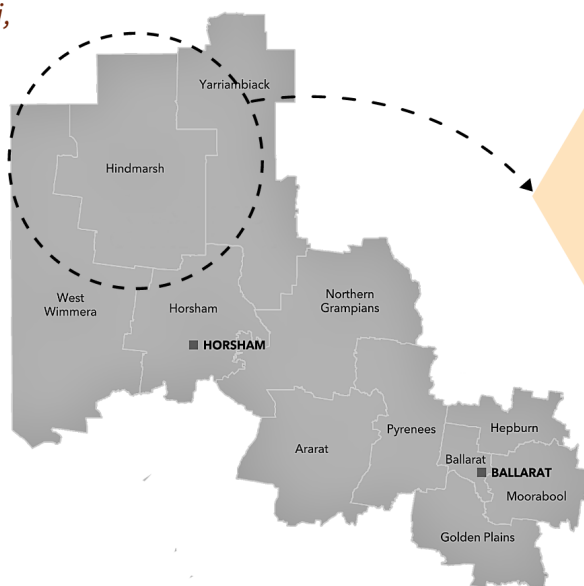
SEIFA INDEX

945



MEDIAN AGE

50



AREA
7,524 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS
Dimboola
Nhill
Rainbow
Jeparit

 **Hindmarsh**
Shire Council

DEMOGRAPHICS



27%

of residents are aged
65 and over

174

single parent families with
dependant children



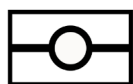
1,286

residents have
a disability



79.3%

of single parents
are women



1.4%

of residents identify as
First Nations people

5.5%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



96.4%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



110

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



22.7%

increase in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Horsham

Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagulk,
Jaadwa and Jadawadjali Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION
20,018



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME
\$1,100 P/W

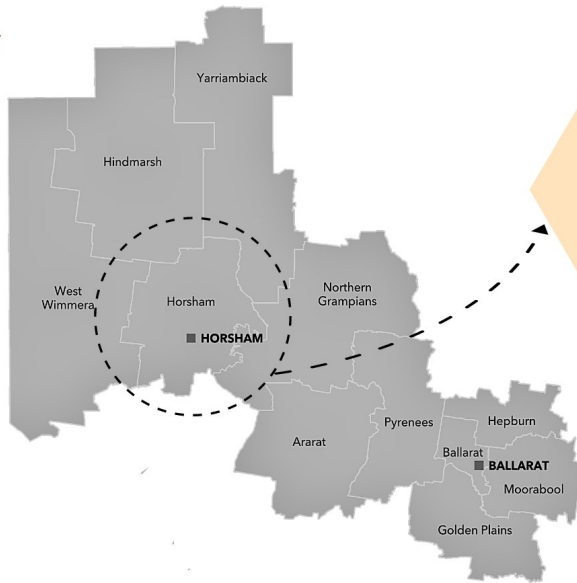
GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS
4,830



SEIFA INDEX
980



MEDIAN AGE
42



AREA
4,267 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS
Horsham
Natimuk
Haven
Quantong
Riverside



DEMOGRAPHICS



20.1%
of residents are aged
65 and over

807

single parent families with
dependant children



3,934

residents have
a disability



81.3%

of single parents
are women



1.5%
of residents identify as
First Nations people

3.8%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



1.3%

decrease in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



543

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



1.4%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Moorabool

Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, Wadawurrung
and Dja Dja Wurrung Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

36,013



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$1,391 P/W

GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS

7,496



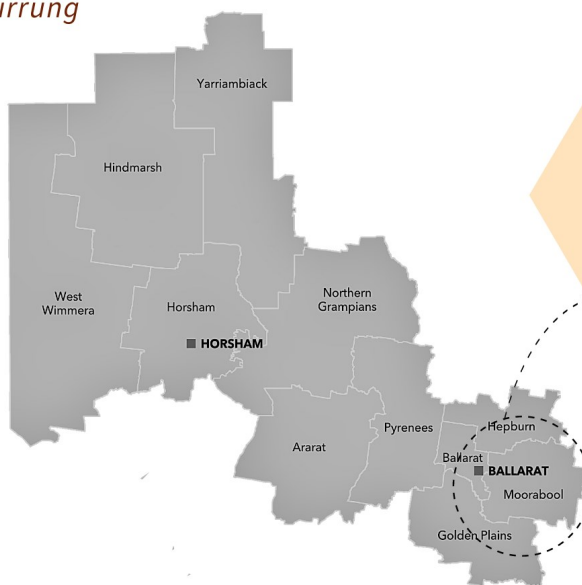
SEIFA INDEX

1,010



MEDIAN AGE

40



AREA
2,111 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS
Bacchus Marsh
Ballan
Gordon
Elaine



DEMOGRAPHICS



15.6%
of residents are aged
65 and over

1,321

single parent families with
dependant children



7,650

residents have
a disability



80.6%

of single parents
are women



1.1%
of residents identify as
First Nations people

5.3%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



6.0%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



509

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



16.7%

increase in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Northern Grampians

*Djab Wurrung, Jardwadjali
and Dja Dja Wurrung Country*



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

11,403



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$931 P/W

GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS

4,247



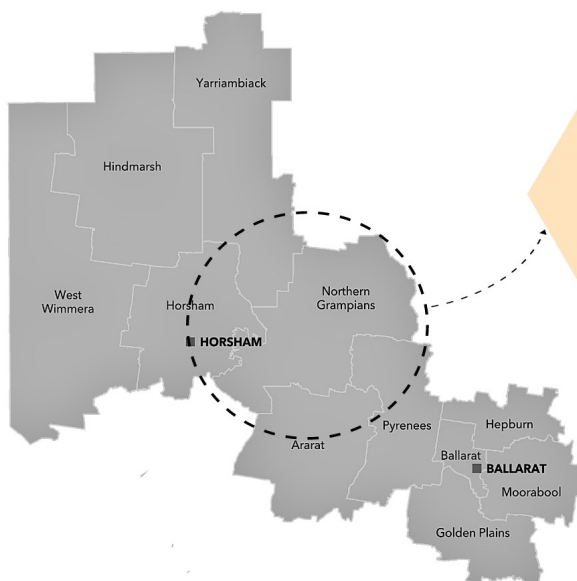
SEIFA INDEX

937



MEDIAN AGE

48



AREA
5,730 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS

Stawell
St Arnaud
Halls Gap



DEMOGRAPHICS



22%

of residents are aged
65 and over

406

single parent families with
dependant children



2,567

residents have
a disability



80.8%

of single parents
are women



1.5%

of residents identify as
First Nations people

3.9%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



25.6%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



299

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



15.7%

increase in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Pyrenees

Wadawurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wotjobaluk
and Eastern Maar Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

7,555



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$876 P/W

GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS

2,659



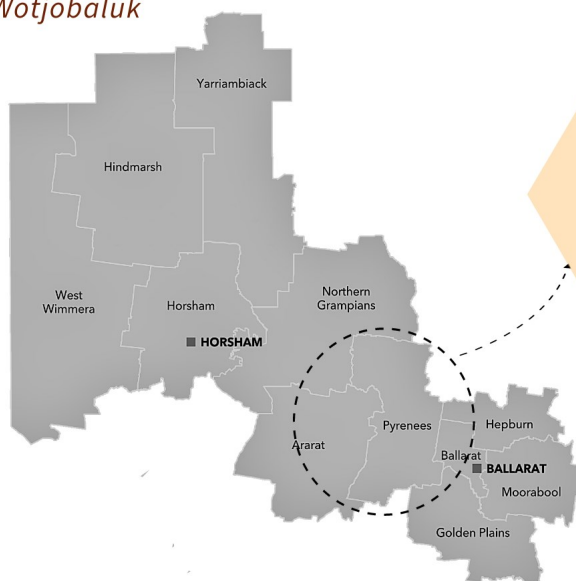
SEIFA INDEX

952



MEDIAN AGE

50



AREA
3,435 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS

Beaufort
Avoca
Lexton
Trawalla



Pyrenees
Shire Council

DEMOGRAPHICS



24.7%

of residents are aged
65 and over

230

single parent families with
dependant children



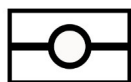
1,961

residents have
a disability



79.7%

of single parents
are women



1.9%

of residents identify as
First Nations people

3.6%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



20.4%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



112

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



5.8%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

West Wimmera

Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali,
Wergaia and Jupagulk Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION

3,810



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME

\$987 P/W

GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS

1,066



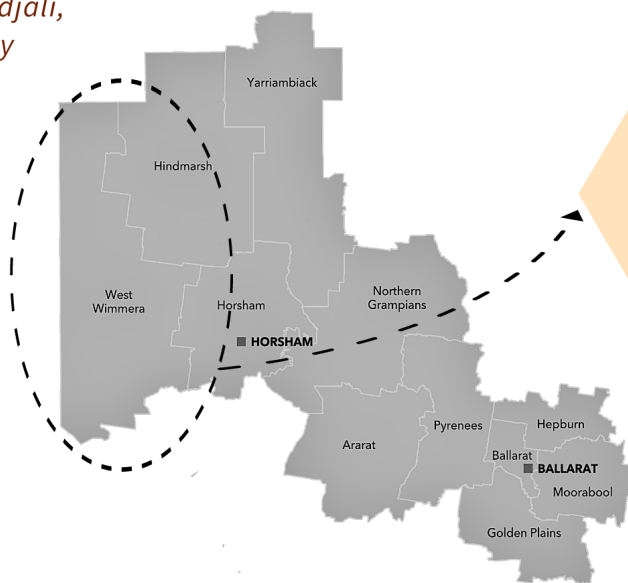
SEIFA INDEX

985



MEDIAN AGE

48



AREA

9,108 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS

Edenhope
Kaniva
Apsley
Goroke
Serviceton



DEMOGRAPHICS



24.7%

of residents are aged
65 and over

103

single parent families with
dependant children



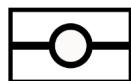
728

residents have
a disability



78%

of single parents
are women



0.9%

of residents identify as
First Nations people

3.6%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



20.0%

increase in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



42

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



11.8%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Yarriambiack

Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali,
Wergaia and Jupagulk Country



ESTIMATED 2020
POPULATION
6,588



HOUSEHOLD
MEDIAN INCOME
\$885 P/W

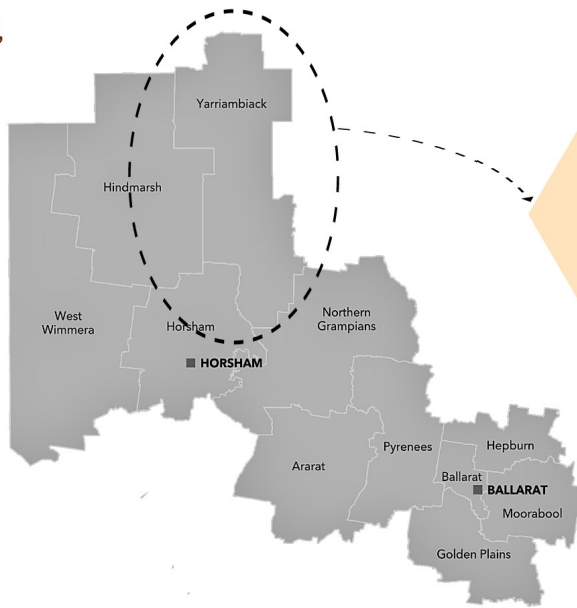
GOVERNMENT
PAYMENT
RECEIPIENTS
2,568



SEIFA INDEX
941



MEDIAN AGE
50



AREA
7,326 SQ KMS

MAJOR TOWNS
Hopetoun
Murtoa
Minyip



DEMOGRAPHICS



27.3%
of residents are aged
65 and over

247

single parent families with
dependant children



1,787

residents have
a disability



76.6%

of single parents
are women



1.2%
of residents identify as
First Nations people

2.4%

of residents speak a
language other than English



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



7.9%

decrease in family violence
incidences (June 2020 to
June 2021)



105

family violence incidences
reported, predominately
against women



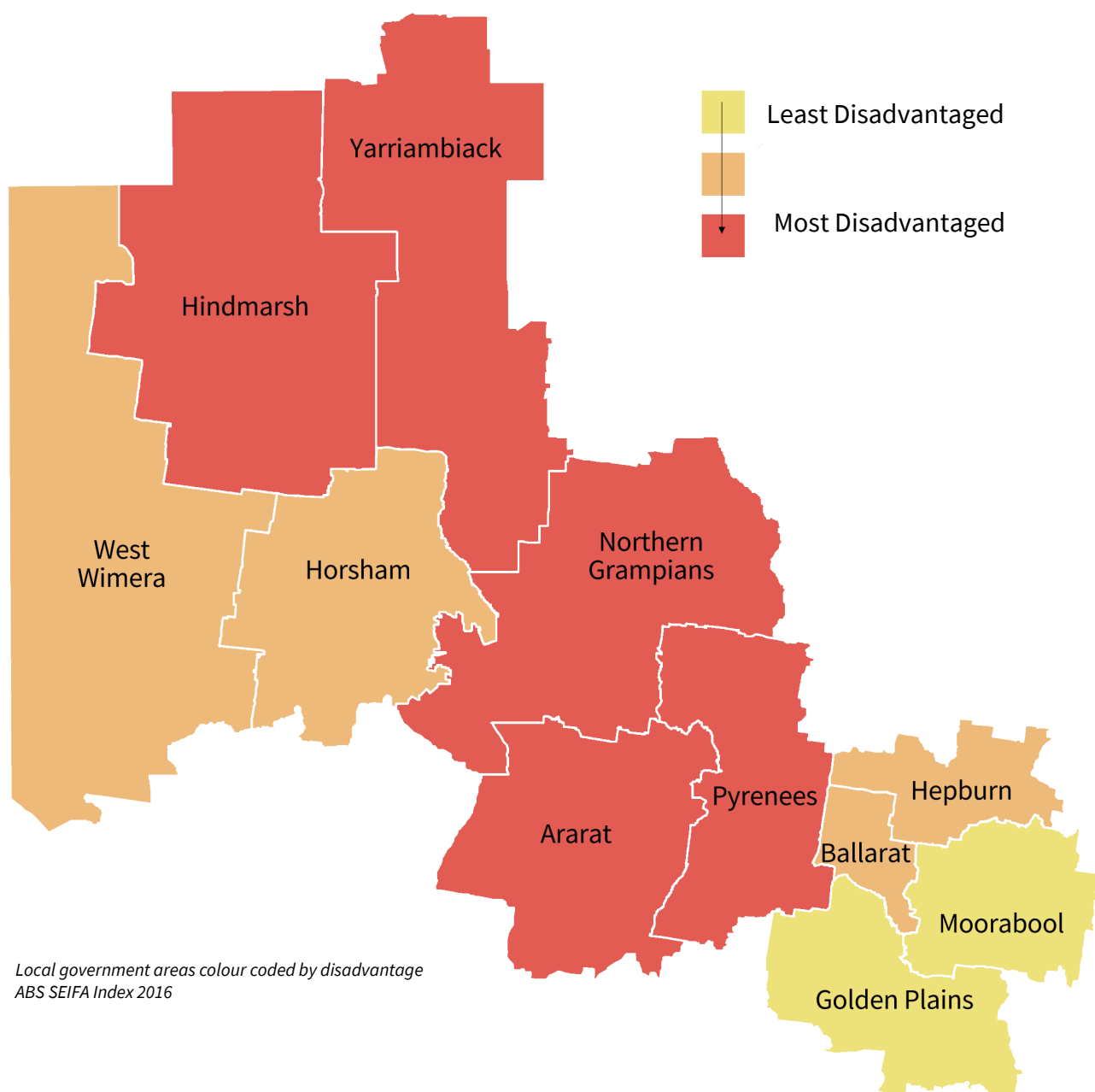
15.8%

decrease in criminal incidences June 2020 to
June 2021

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

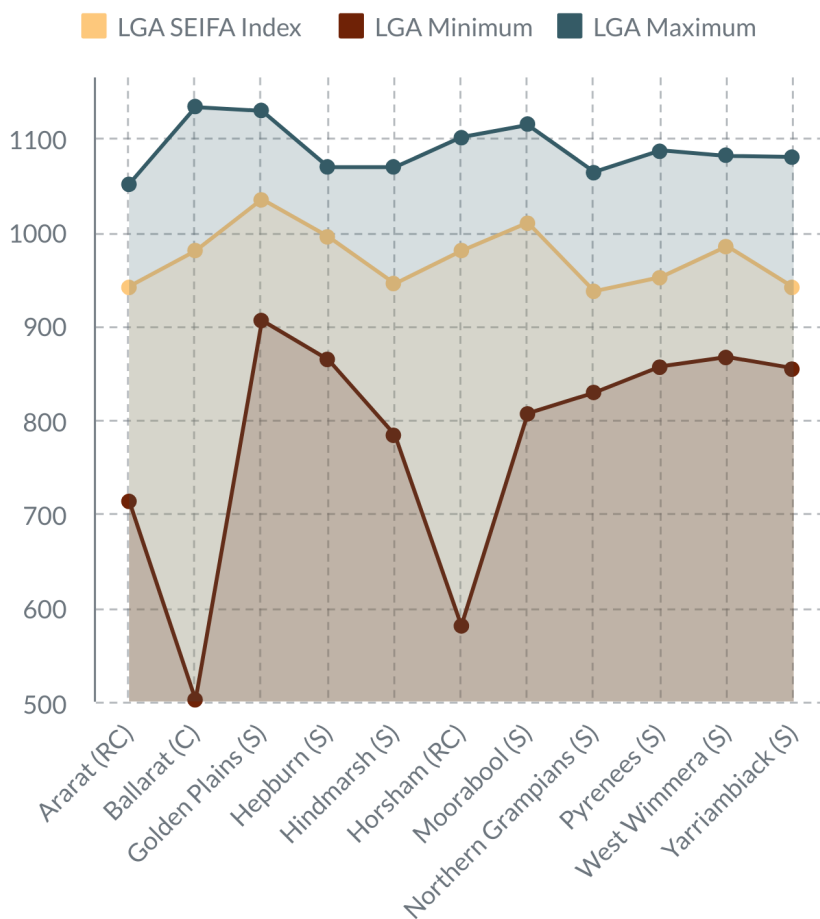


Community Disadvantage



Local Government Area	SEIFA Score	State Ranking	Local Government Area	SEIFA Score	State Ranking
Ararat	942	8	Moorabool	1010	53
Ballarat	980	29	Northern Grampians	937	6
Golden Plains	1035	61	Pyrenees	952	17
Hepburn	995	44	West Wimmera	985	33
Hindmarsh	945	10	Yarriambiack	941	7
Horsham	980	30	Grampians Average	973	

Local Government Area SEIFA Score and State Ranking
ABS SEIFA Index 2016



The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) is a commonly used tool, created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to rank communities according to the level of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. This tool is often used by governments and other organisations to drive funding decisions. A higher SEIFA Index number indicates a higher level of advantage.

Throughout the Grampians region, SEIFA Index values vary widely between local and government areas from LGA to LGA and also between smaller statistical areas within LGAs.

The graph to the left provides a visualisation of the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) across the region. As indicated in red, the level of disadvantage in some LGAs drops dramatically, whilst advantage has a significantly lower variation.

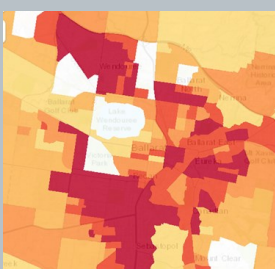
Research indicates that higher levels of disadvantage often indicate higher levels of legal need. Consideration should be given to the fact that in higher SEIFA Indexed LGAs, there remain pockets of significant disadvantage.

Towns and Suburbs within the Grampians with a SEIFA Index under 925

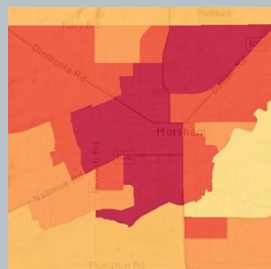
Wendouree	Meredith	St Arnaud	Warracknabeal
Sebastopol	Cape Clear	Ararat	Darley* ^{SSA}
Redan	Linton	Jeparit	Murtoa
Eureka	Stawell	Goroke	Clunes

Whilst overall data may appear favourable to a specific local government area, all areas have residents experiencing greater disadvantage. The images below demonstrate how disadvantage can be spread across and town or region.

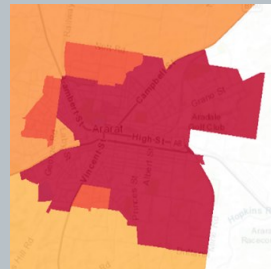
Ballarat



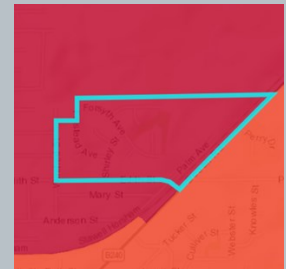
Horsham



Ararat



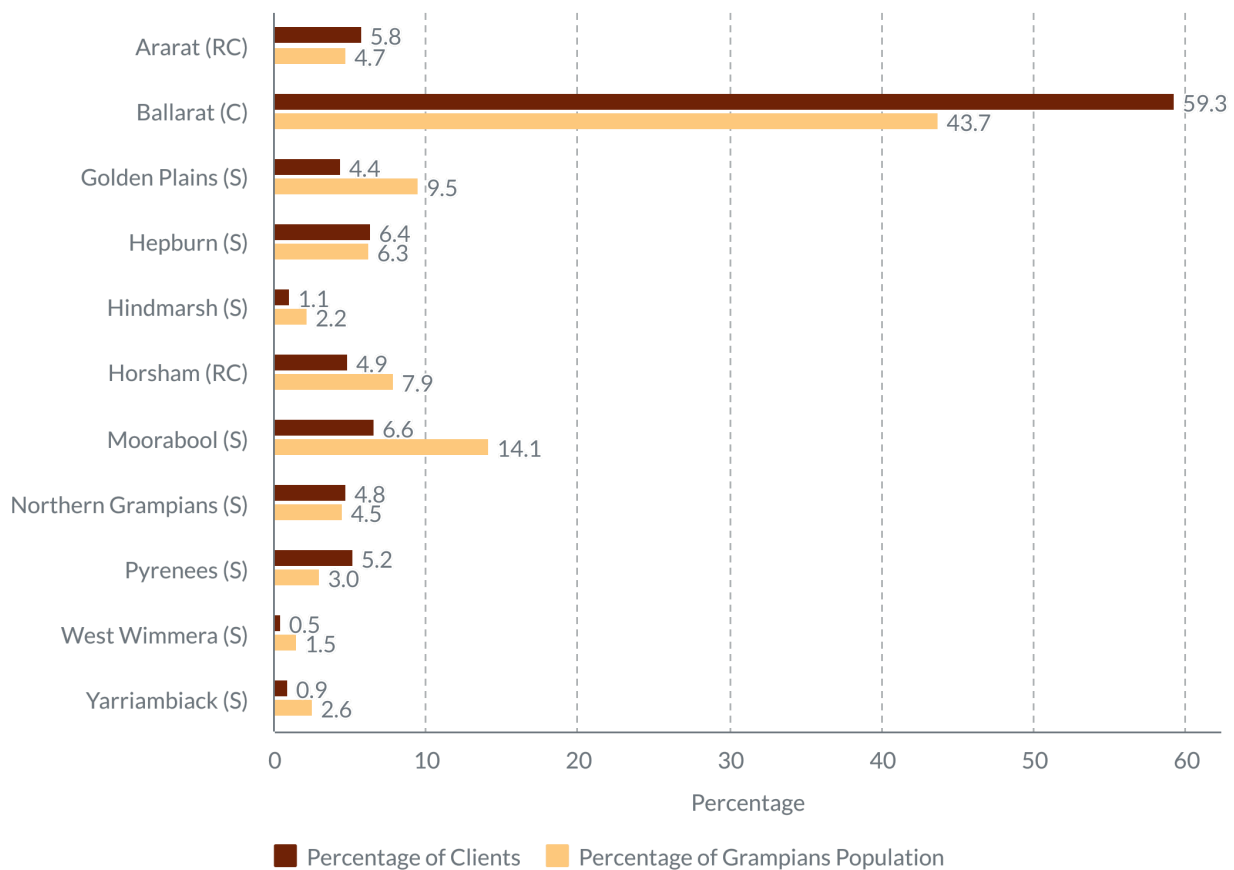
Horsham—SA1



Met Legal Need

The below graph provides a visualisation of the percentage of clients assisted, according to their residential local government area. This is compared against the overall percentage of residents in the Grampians. Almost 60% of BGCLS clients live in the Ballarat area, despite it making up only 43.7% of the Grampians population. This is, in part, due to the office location being accessible to Ballarat residents. It is possible also, that the Specialist Family Violence Court will also contribute to increased numbers of Ballarat clients.

Areas close to Ballarat, or where BGCLS travels, such as Hepburn, Ararat and Stawell have a level of service from BGCLS a level of service on par with the population. In areas such as Horsham, and surrounding local government areas, the level of service is well below the population rate. The absence of physical service provision is a barrier to people seeking BGCLS assistance. Following the discontinuation of the Health Justice Partnership between BGCLS and Grampians Community Health in 2020, clients numbers reduced significantly. Ongoing networking, partnership development and opportunities to be more physically present in Horsham should see an increase in client numbers.



Graph: Clients of BGCLS by Local Government Area compared to Local Government Area population percentage.
Data: CLASS Reports; ABS Census 2016; Estimated Residential Population 2019

A review of data from 2016 compares the work of community legal centres, (including BGCLS and statewide services such as Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service), Victoria Legal Aid and private solicitors for legal matters such as family law, crime and family violence.

As can be seen from the table to the right, all aLGAs receive a level of assistance from all three service providers. In the Pyrenees, clients are much more likely to be engaged with a community legal centre. This is contrasted against Horsham, where only 4.5% of matters receive assistance from a community legal centre.

	Community Legal Centres	Victoria Legal Aid	Private Lawyers
Ararat	434	848	114
Ballarat	1936	4906	931
Golden Plains	501	403	62
Hepburn	542	524	57
Hindmarsh	63	254	19
Horsham	84	1771	12
Moorabool	598	1291	97
Northern Grampians	467	606	55
Pyrenees	751	174	14
West Wimmera	40	118	7
Yarriambiack	77	359	26

*Services provided by Legal Professionals—2016
Tableau Data—Victoria Legal Aid*

Next steps...

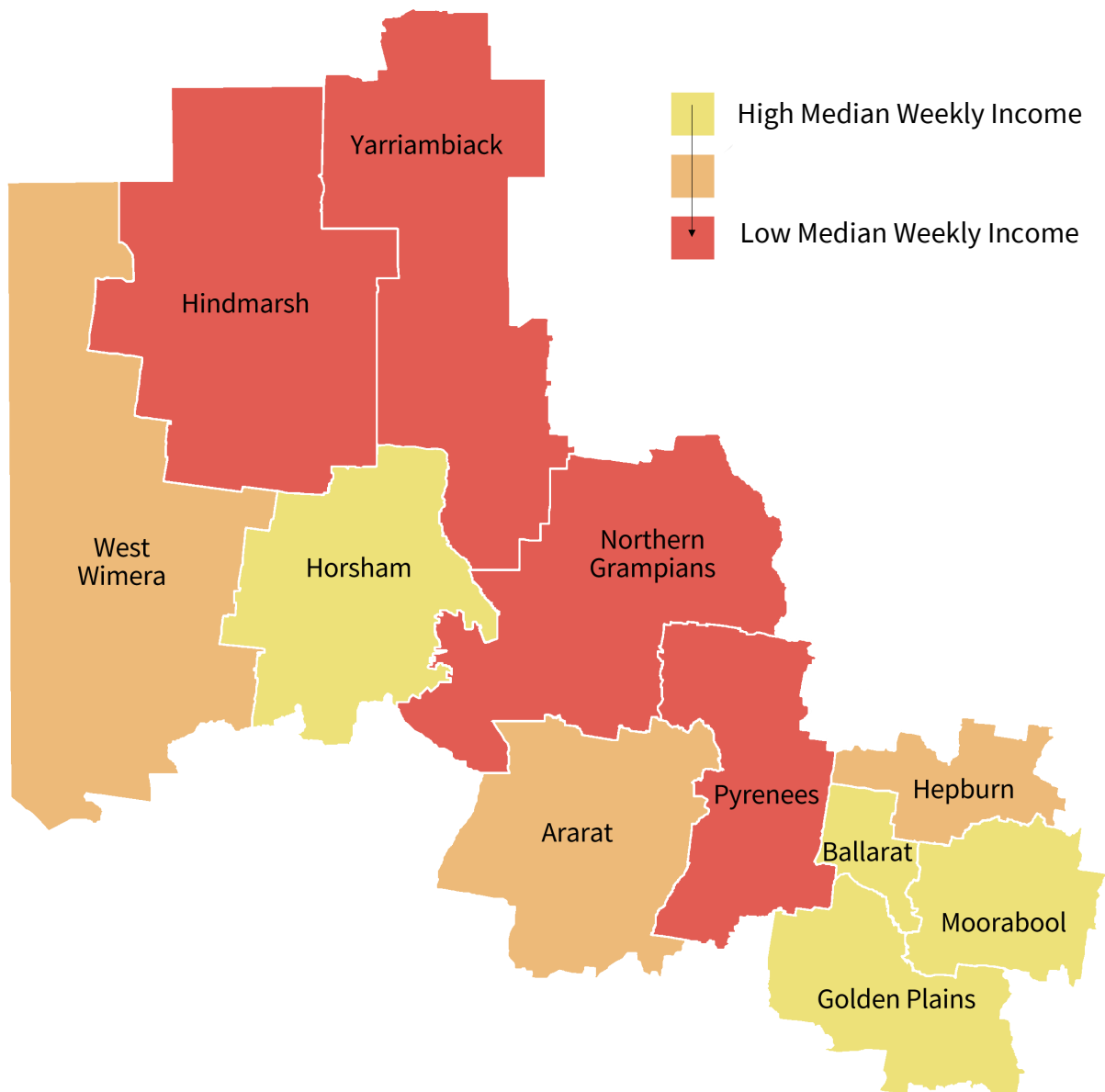
- Conduct a review of SEIFA data following the release of 2021 Census data from mid-2022.
- Conduct an in-depth review of smaller suburbs and statistical areas where disadvantage is known. This is especially important in Horsham and Ballarat where SEIFA indexes can vary widely.
- Increase marketing to regions west of Ballarat, particularly of remote services, such as telephone appointments.
- Verify clients address for all data entered into CLASS to ensure clients are allocated an administrative boundary for reporting purposes.
- Increase service marketing & provisions to more disadvantaged areas.

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

Income and Employment

Income and employment are good indicators of legal need. Residents on low incomes (particularly Centrelink benefits) are much more likely to require legal assistance and often suffer from multiple layers of disadvantage.

Based on the 2016 Census, the image below provides a visualisation of the differences in median income across the region. A lower median income may be an indicator of potential legal need, particularly in areas of credit and debt, housing and tenancy. There may also be an increase in other areas of need such as access to care and services and food security. Areas of lower median income often indicate a higher level of reliance on government support payments, which can place residents close to, or below the poverty line.



15,061
of residents receive a
Carer Payment or
Disability Support
Pension



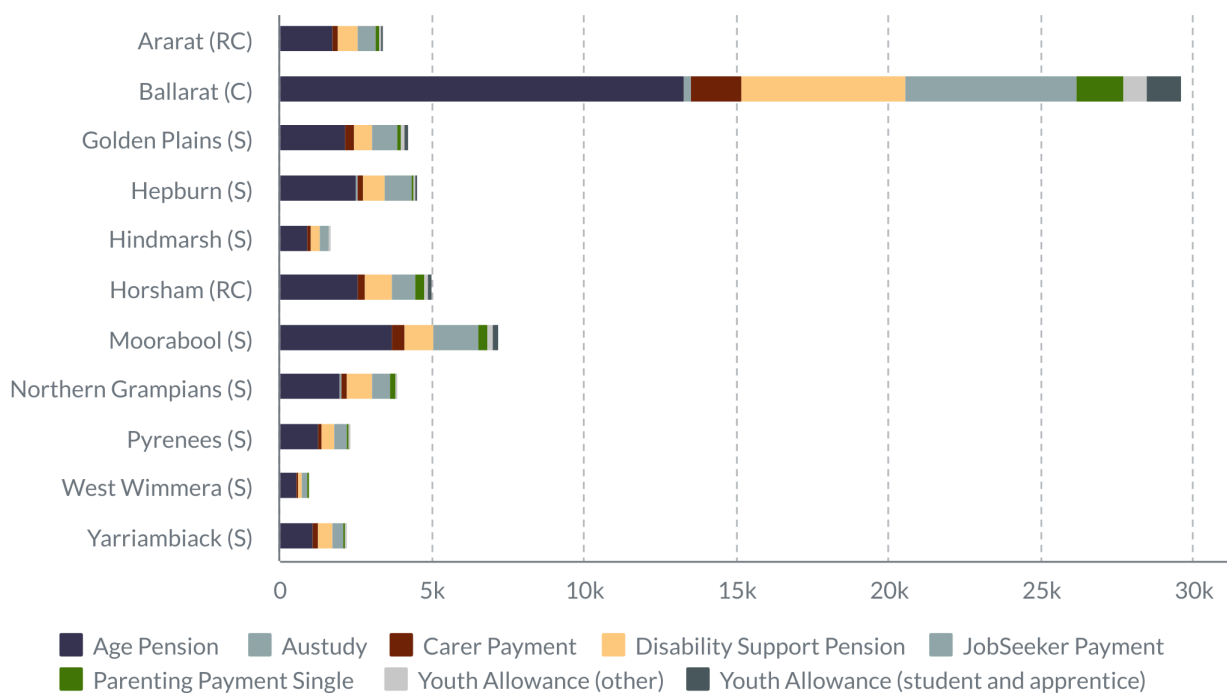
2,881
of single parents
receive Single
Parenting Payment



32,039
of residents receive
an Age Pension

During the pandemic, national and state-based lockdowns have led to a rapid and significant changes to how business is conducted. While many, more professional based sectors have been able to pivot their operations to work from home, those in traditionally more casualised and unstable industries are likely to experience a rapid and immediate decrease in income. This includes industries such as retail, hospitality and tourism. The number of residents receiving government supports has increased in the past 12 months.

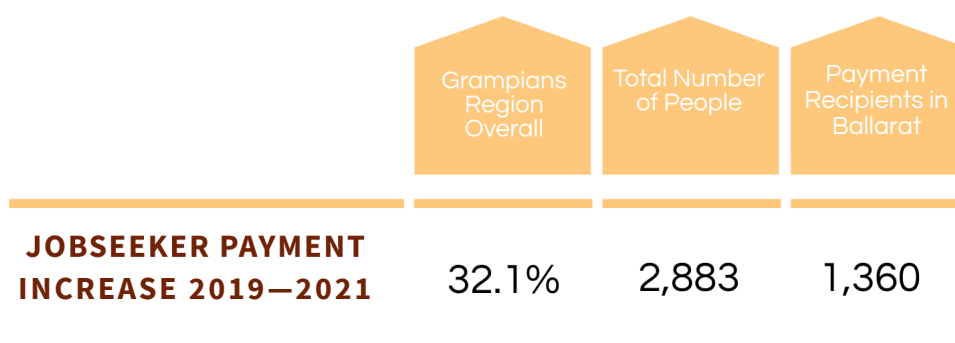
This graph provides a breakdown of the distribution of government support payments in each local government area, by payment type. By far, the largest recipients of payments are in the largest population centres of Ballarat, Moorabool and Horsham. The Age Pension forms the highest single payment, with disability and JobSeeker payments also ranking highly.



DSS payment Data at June 2021

The pandemic has led to an increase in the numbers of people receiving JobSeeker (formally Newstart). A total of 11,860 people received a JobSeeker payment in June 2021, an increase of 2,883 since June 2019. This increase may be in part due to COVID, but also migration to the region, particularly in fast growing areas in Moorabool and Ballarat.

JobSeeker is available to people who are unemployed and looking for work, and people who are sick or injured and can't complete their usual work or study.

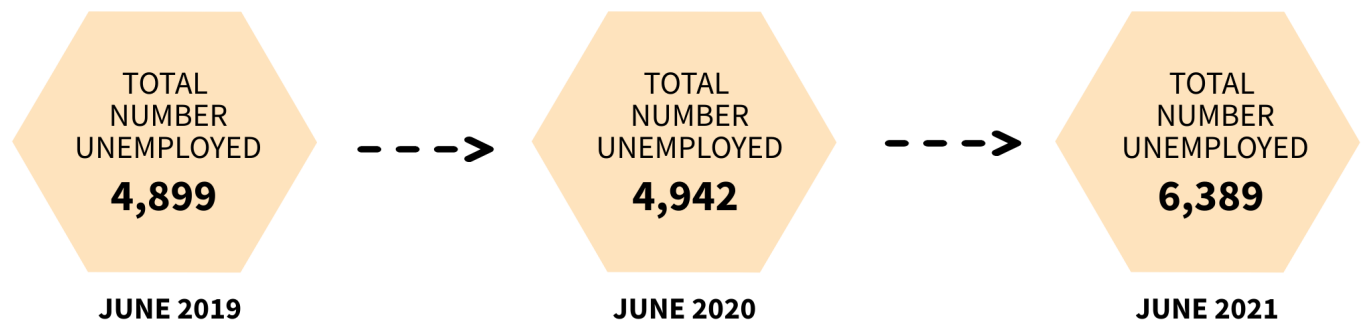


DSS Payment Demographic Data 2021

Workforce Participation

Unemployment rates provide an indicator disadvantage. People may transition between paid work and government payments. They may also have outstanding employment issues related to termination, redundancy and entitlements. Depending on the length of unemployment and the speed at which unemployment came, credit and debt matters may also become a matter of concern.

The graphic below provides an overview of the total number of people seeking work who were unemployed across the Grampians.

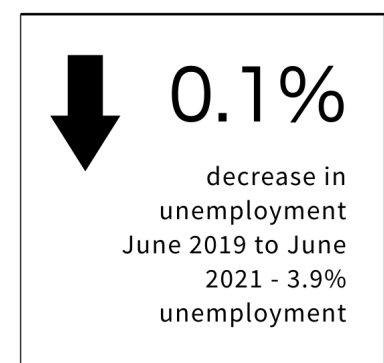


Local Government Area	June 2019	June 2020	June 2021	Change 2019-2021
Ararat (RC)	256	213	157	-99
Ballarat (C)	2,160	2,229	3,391	1,231
Golden Plains (S)	366	299	434	68
Hepburn (S)	222	248	438	216
Hindmarsh (S)	104	89	67	-37
Horsham (RC)	388	314	237	-151
Moorabool (S)	839	1,033	1,184	345
Northern Grampians (S)	242	218	157	-85
Pyrenees (S)	133	145	209	76
West Wimmera (S)	57	49	35	-22
Yarriambiack (S)	132	105	80	-52

ABS, Workforce Participation accessed August 2021

Whilst the official unemployment rate of 3.9% is an improvement on the June 2019 figure, a more accurate indicator when assessing legal need is the total number seeking employment, **which has risen by 1,490 people**. The significant majority of that rise has been in Ballarat (1,231 people). Other areas of increase include Hepburn, Moorabool and Pyrenees.

The unemployment rate also does not account for people experiencing under employment, which given the impact of casualization on workforces affected by ongoing lockdowns, is likely to be higher than normal. Underemployment may also lead to increases in legal need.

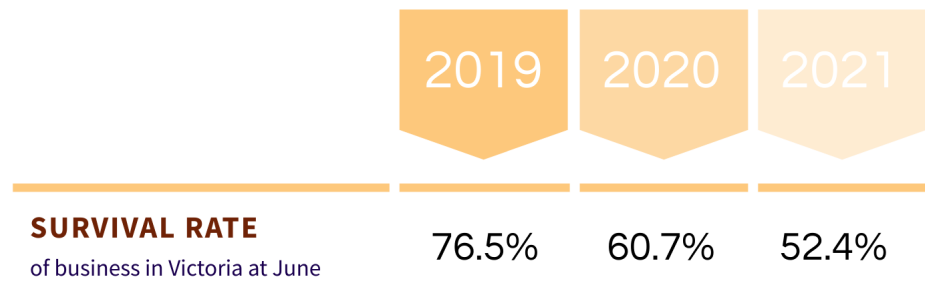


Small Business

Small businesses across Victoria has expressed concern about their capacity to continue operating in an a continually uncertain commercial environment of lockdowns and restrictions. The Victorian Small Business Commission (VSBC) received a significant increase in enquiries between March and June 2020, particularly regarding commercial rent relief due to the COVID-19 situation.

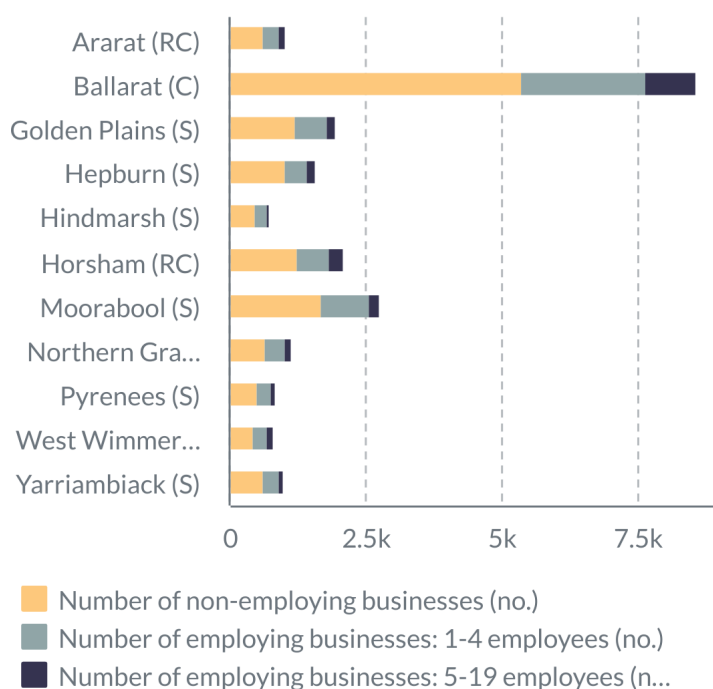
Other issues of concern identified were:

- small businesses not being paid
- disagreements over details in a signed contract
- poor quality goods and services, or items not delivered.



8165.0 Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, June 2017 to June 2021

Sole proprietors nationwide were the least likely to have their businesses survive in 2021 (43%, down from 71.7% in 2019)



Top 3 Small Business Industries in the Grampians



ABS Regional Data by LGA 2011 - 2019

The graph above shows the number of sole proprietor and small Grampians businesses that employ up to 19 people. The bulk majority of small businesses are sole proprietors or employ no more than four people.

The Victoria Small Business Commission provides limited business related assistance to organisations, however, it does not cover individual legal matters. As many small retail or food and hospitality based small businesses (2,125 across the Grampians in 2019) struggle to survive, there is significant potential for the legal needs of those owners to increase into areas such as contracts, credit and debt and employment matters. Many business owners may not be familiar with, or have previously been ineligible for free legal assistance.



COVID Initiatives

JobKeeper

JobKeeper was announced by the Federal Government in April 2020 as a wage subsidy of \$1,500 per fortnight to support businesses to maintain staff in employment, this was available to businesses impacted by closures and restrictions in the early stages of the pandemic that could demonstrate a decline in turnover.

Initially slated to end in September 2020, the scheme was extended twice, at a reduced rate until March 28, 2021.

Employment matters are a potential area of legal need arising from this program.

Superannuation Withdrawal

In April 2020, the Federal Government announced the Superannuation early Release Scheme for people who could demonstrate a loss of income. This was available in two separate applications of up to \$10,000 each in the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 financial year.

ABS Household Financial Resources indicates the majority of people used their funds to pay rent, mortgages and other household bills (April, 2021). This is supported by further research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies which indicate most people used the superannuation withdrawal to assist their family with the financial effects of COVID.

The potential legal need include coercion by a family member to withdraw funds (family violence). Use of funds for the purposes of gambling or non essential spending may result in potential financial disadvantage into the future.

JobSeeker COVID Supplement

In addition to the above initiatives, the Federal Government introduced a \$550 per fortnight Coronavirus Supplement to support Jobseekers and assist with economic stimulus.

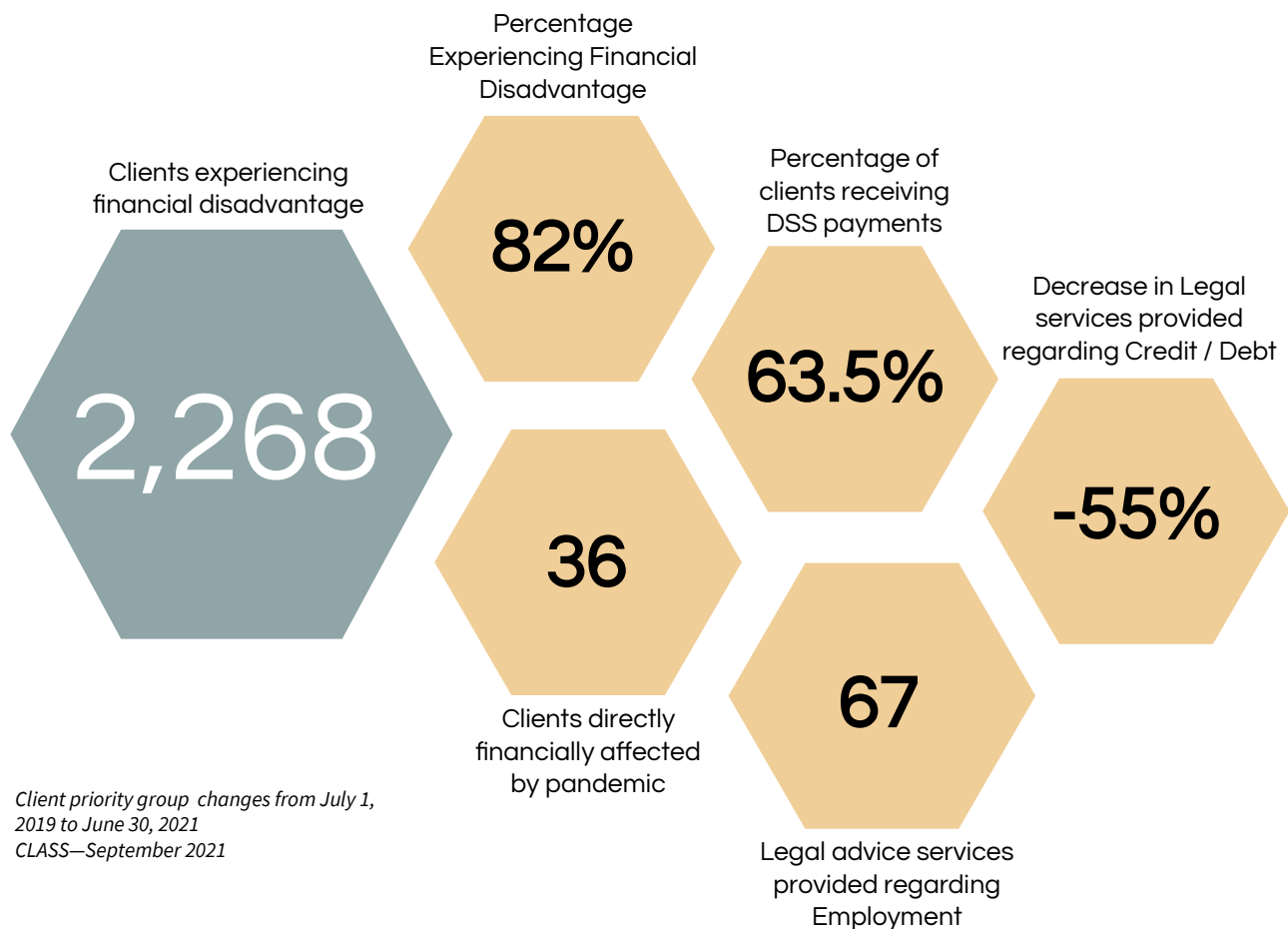
The payment was reduced to \$250 per fortnight from September 28, 2020 and phased out by March 2021, reducing Jobseekers back to around half the amount they received from March to September in 2020.

Legal need risks of this increase (and subsequent decrease,) include credit and debt matters, tenancy and issues with Centrelink.

Met Legal Need

Over two thirds (68.7%) of BGCLS services have been delivered to clients from Government identified priority groups, which includes people experiencing financial difficulty and in receipt of Department of Social Security payments. CLASS data indicates:

- Clients experiencing financial disadvantage increased
- Assistance for employment matters did not vary greatly from the two years prior to the pandemic.
- Matters regarding credit and debt reduced by over half. This may be, in part, due to people accessing their superannuation or utilising the COVID Supplement to manage their financial situation.



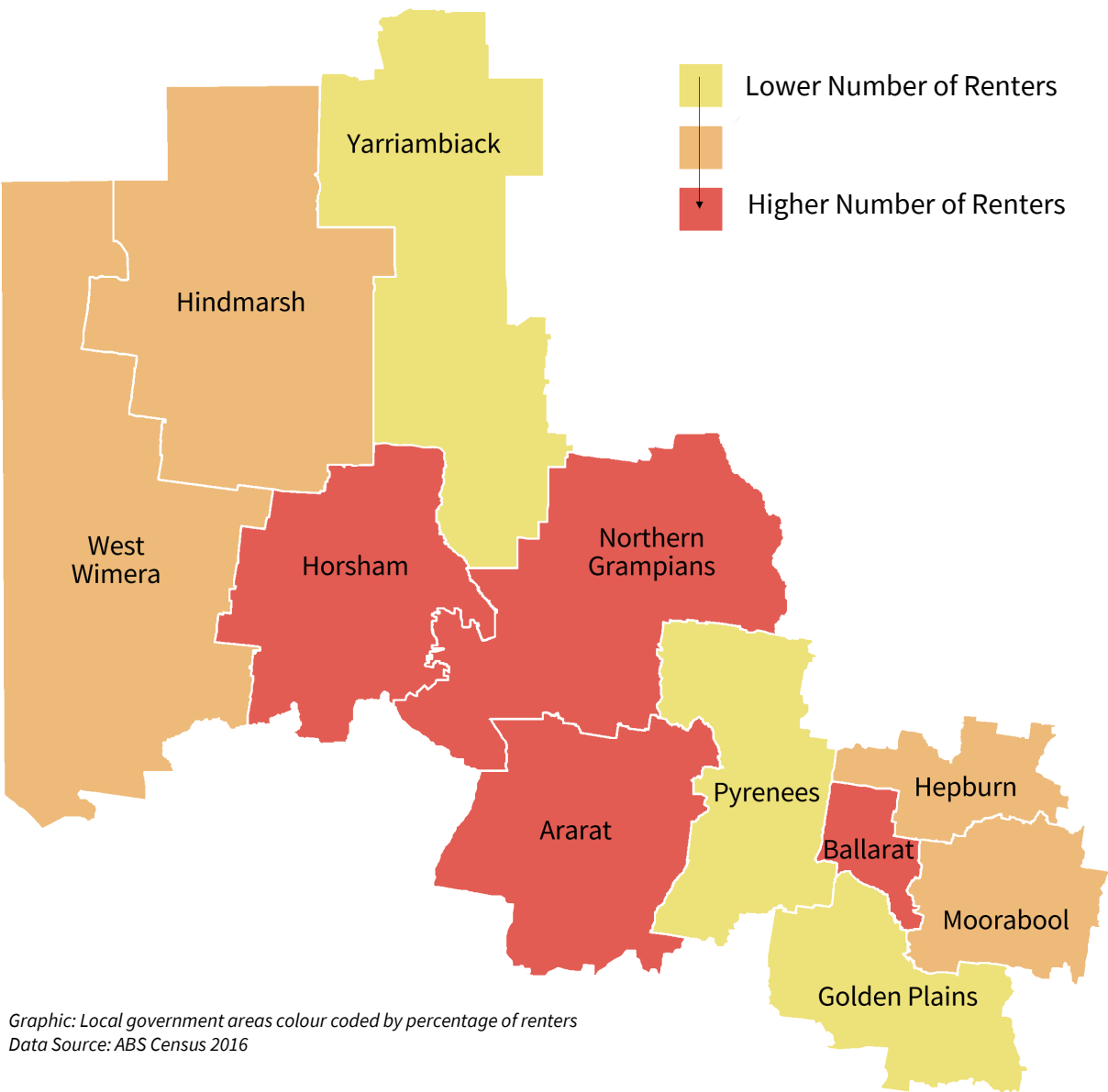
Next steps...

- Develop and maintain a database of job and income data using unemployment, DSS and Census data to identify population trends and potential legal need.
- Consider broadening client support criteria to include sole proprietors and those with small numbers of employees
- Maintain existing networks to understand the broader financial impact of the pandemic on non-legal specific areas, such as food security, that may lead to legal issues in the future

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

Housing

Whilst rent related financial stress can occur in all areas of the community, single parent families with children under 15 years and sole person households are overrepresented. Financial stress makes residents more susceptible to legal problems such as credit and debt, consumer and tenancy related problems. Social renters and private renters are more likely to experience legal need in areas including tenancy and homelessness, family law, family violence, credit and debt and employment.



Graphic: Local government areas colour coded by percentage of renters
Data Source: ABS Census 2016

Locations with the Highest Numbers of Social Housing stock	Ballarat	Horsham	Moorabool	Northern
	2,501	435	342	212

Source: DHHS 2020 - Housing assistance additional service delivery data 2019–20



Social Housing

Areas with high proportions of social housing tend to display higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, with SEIFA levels falling well below the LGA and Victorian state average.

Ballarat, Ararat and Horsham have the highest percentages of renters living in social housing, closely followed by the smaller LGA of Northern Grampians (encompassing St Arnaud and Stawell).

Residents in social or public housing often have an increased legal need and multiple layers of disadvantage.

In June 2021, the State Government announced the fast tracking of a \$50.3M investment in new social housing in Delacombe. This consists of removal and rebuilding of existing housing and the addition of new one-, two- and three-bedroom homes. Road changes and improved open spaces will be incorporated to provide greater access and safety in the area. Construction is expected to commence in 2022 following community consultation.

The Victoria Government's Big Build Fund, provides the following guaranteed spend in four local government areas within the BGCLS catchment. Golden Plains will see an introduction of social housing that has previously not been within the area.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA	GUARANTEED MINIMUM INVESTMENT
Ballarat	\$80,000,000
Horsham	\$15,000,000
Golden Plains	\$15,000,000
Moorabool	\$20,000,000
Total Minimum Investment	\$130,000,000

Ballarat, as the largest city in the catchment, has the highest number of social housing dwellings. Many of these dwellings are in concentrated pockets, including the Ballarat suburbs of Wendouree, Delacombe, Sebastopol, Redan and Ballarat East.

Suburb	Number of residents	Percentage of suburb residents
Wendouree	465	10.2%
Sebastopol / Redan	451	7.6%
Ballarat East / Eureka	170	7.2%
Delacombe*	162	6.6%
Golden Point / Mt Pleasant / Canadian	139	4.2%
Soldiers Hill / Black Hill / Brown Hill / Nerrina	123	3.1%

* This is expected to alter significantly in the next five years as the State Government invest \$50.3 into Delacombe social housing



COVID Initiatives

Rent

Temporary changes were made to tenancy laws in 2020, ending March 28, 2021. These changes included:

- An ability to apply for a rent reduction
- An ability to request an early end to a fixed term tenancy where significant financial hardship existed
- Inability of a landlord to issue a notice to vacate
- Inability to place a tenant on residential tenancy blacklists due to failure to pay rent if the reason was COVID related

These changes provided security for tenants who may have lost employment or were otherwise suffering from significant financial hardship as a result of protracted restrictions. It also provided security against homelessness.

The Federal and State governments have provided financial assistance in the form of grants and support payments to people affected by the ongoing lockdowns. The Victorian Government offered rent relief grants to eligible Victorians, designed as a one off grant to help keep renters safely in their homes. As of May 24, 2021, the Victorian Government had approved over 33,000 applications state wide. However, despite ongoing lockdown in 2021, rental protections have not been reinstated. In twelve months to March 2021, rental prices in Ballarat increased by a median of \$20 per week, yet rental stock dropped by 214 dwellings. In an increasingly tight, and expensive, rental market, this may have a significant impact on renters and their legal needs regarding tenancy matters including rent arrears and bonds.

Mortgages

Housing purchase and rental prices have progressively increased over the past decade, with a sharp rise since mid-2020. A decrease in rental stock in some areas has led to an increase in cost as supply fails to meet demand.

As a mechanism of assisting people to stay in their houses during turbulent financial times at the beginning of the pandemic, governments and financial institutions encouraged borrowers to access temporary loan deferrals should they experience problems paying their mortgage. This had the benefit of providing housing security for mortgage holders and renters, whose landlords were able to reduce their repayments to maintain their investment properties. This deferral was originally slated for completion in September, but was extended an additional four months to meet the need of the community.

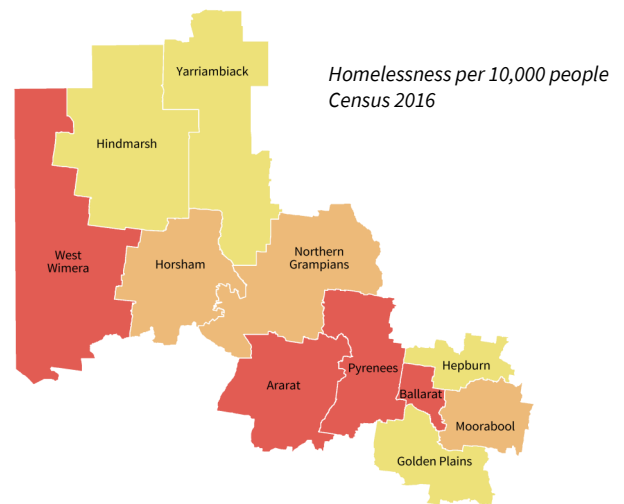
Victorian homeowners were the largest adopters of the mortgage deferrals, due to the significant restrictions in the second half of 2020. Nationwide data from APRA shows a high uptake in the early stages of the pandemic, with a steady decrease in the following months.

Homelessness

People experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, are at greater risk of having multiple legal needs.

Based on data from the 2016 Census, the rate of homelessness per 10,000 people averaged 24.5 across the Grampians. It was much higher in the following local government areas:

- Ararat—45.4
- Ballarat—41.3
- Pyrenees—36.8
- West Wimmera—34.7



Met Legal Need

There is currently no significant data collection from clients regarding their housing status. One indicator that is utilised, however is the Homelessness Risk Indicator. CLASS data shows of clients at risk of homelessness:

- 87 clients at risk of homelessness
- 33 were Ballarat residents
- 32 clients residence was Unknown
- 46 were women
- 2 clients were First Nations people
- 34 had a disability or mental illness

Legal services provided
regarding housing

85

+17.6%

Increase in
clients at risk of
homelessness

Clients at risk of
homelessness aged
25—49

79.7%

36.5%

Clients at risk of
homelessness have
medium to high income

Client Service and Homelessness Indicator July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021
CLASS Data

Next steps...

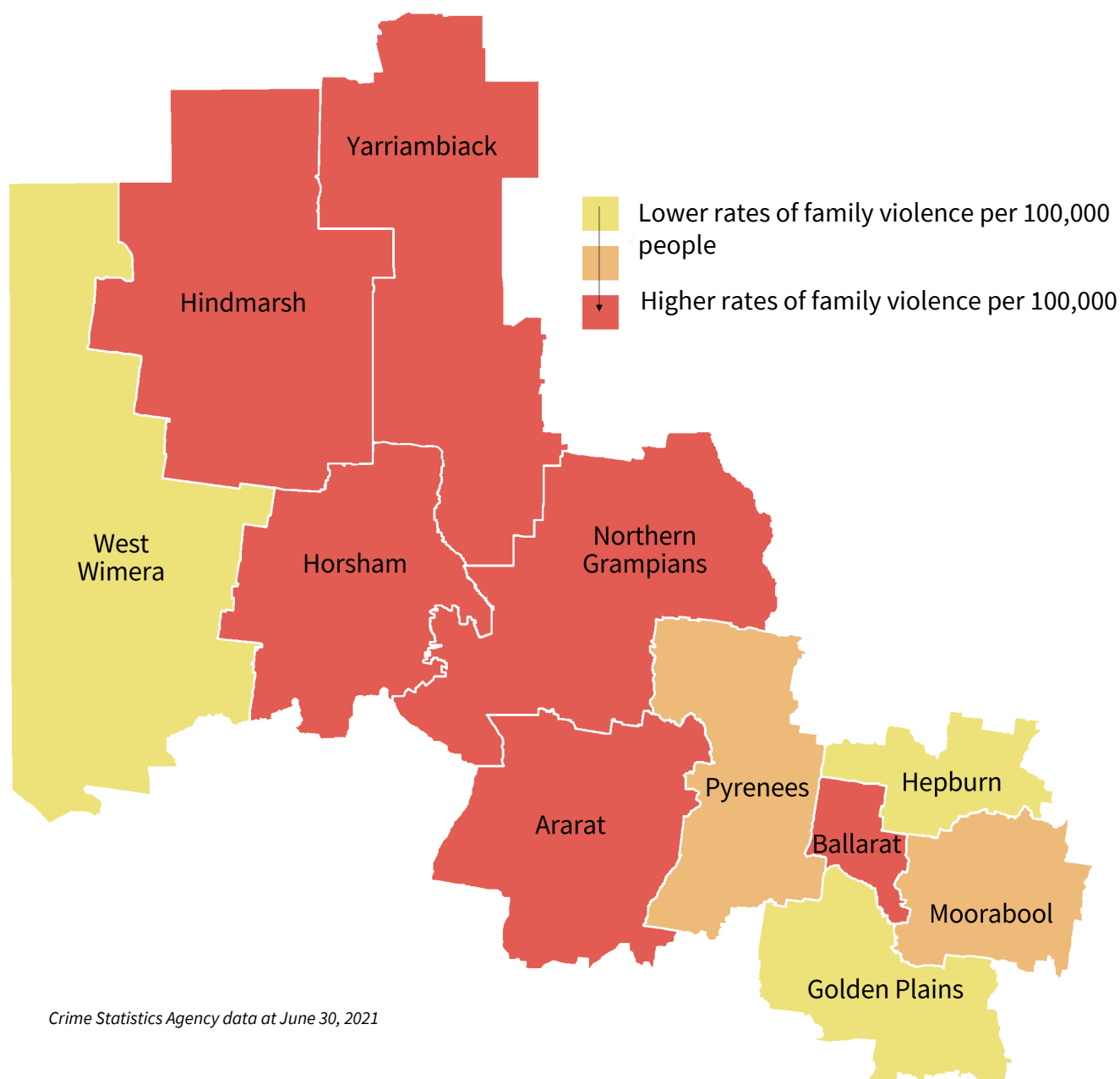
- BGCLS to pursue opportunities to assist community consultation for the Delacombe Housing changes occurring over the next phase of the redevelopment project.
- Investigate collaboration options with external organisations such as CAV, DHHS, Tenants Union to provide CLE regarding tenancy rights and responsibilities with a COVID focus (such as rent arrears or ending a tenancy). Family violence and renting CLE should be considered.
- Maintain an ongoing review of rental prices across the region as a means of identifying potential rental hotspots.

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

Families and Family Violence

Single parent families are vulnerable to legal need, particularly in areas of debt, housing, family violence and family law matters. At the 2016 Census, sole parent families with dependent children totaled 9,772.

Family violence is another significant factor in legal need. Women are significantly more likely to experience family violence and are increasingly vulnerable during pregnancy or if they have a disability.



74.9%

Total **incidences** are
against women
across the Grampians

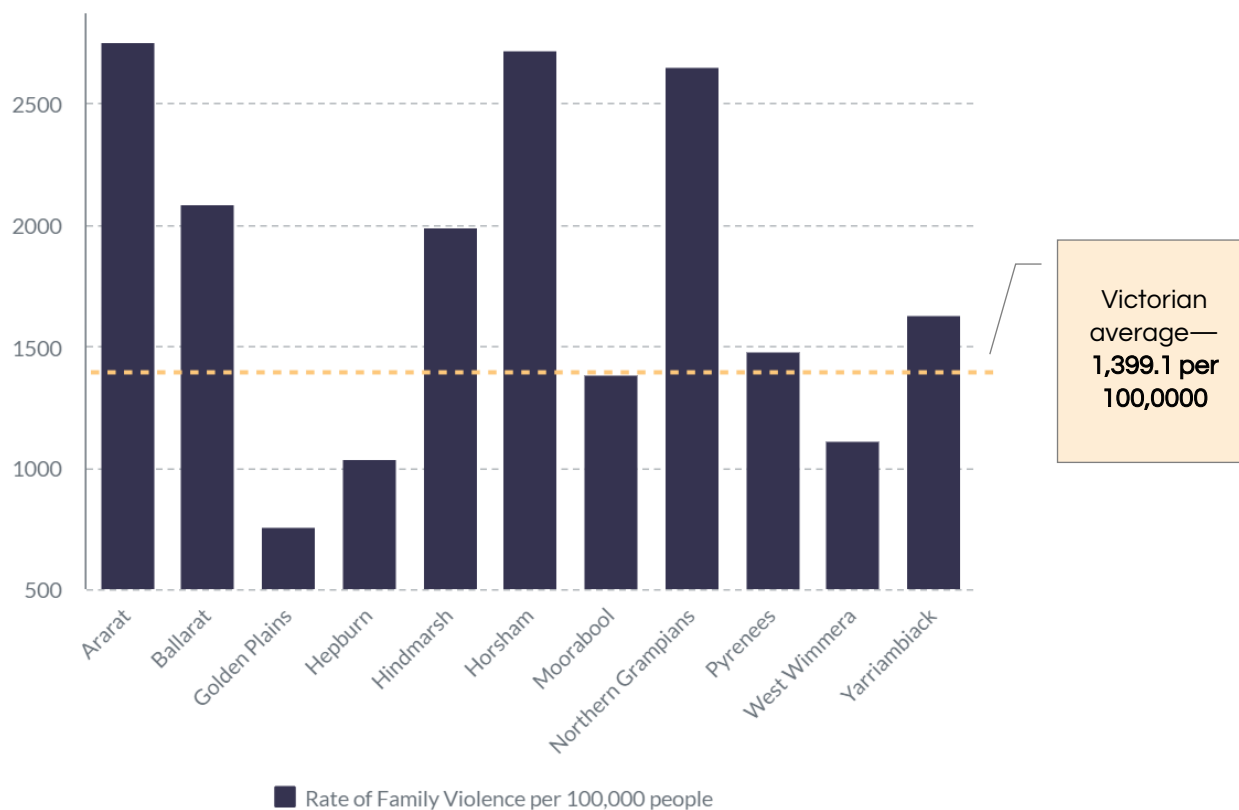


3,609

Women as **affected**
family members
reported to police

2,369

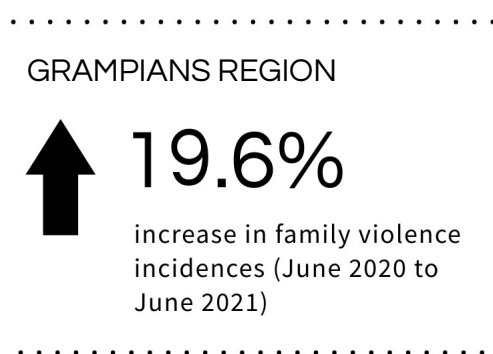
Total **incidences** in the
largest reported Local
Government Area of **Ballarat**



Seven of the eleven local government areas in the Grampians region have high levels of police reported family violence incidents, above the Victorian state average per 100,000 people. Ararat (2,757.4), Horsham (2,719.8) and Northern Grampians (2,652.1) report the highest levels.

By number of incidents, Ballarat had the highest number 2,369 reports, between July 2020 and June 30, 2021. Given the significant population of Ballarat, this is expected per 100,000 people, Ballarat ranks fourth. The region has a number of support programs, particularly for women, with the introduction of family violence and support hub, Orange Door, in Ballarat.

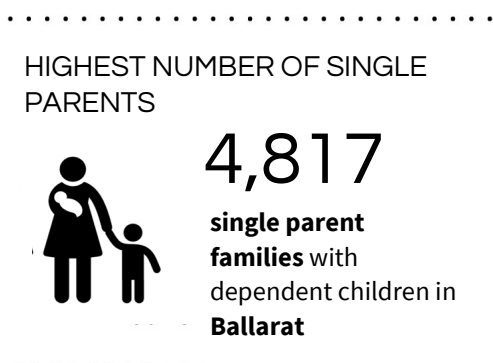
Family safety has become an increasing theme of the pandemic, with incidences in the Grampians region increasing by 19.6% to a total of 4,774 reported to the police. It is probable that there are cases of family violence unreported and therefore not reflected in these figures.



Single Parents

Single parent families are vulnerable to legal need, particularly in areas of debt, housing, family violence and family law matters.

At the 2016 Census, sole parent families with dependent children totaled 9,772. Of those sole parents, 79.8% were women.



Met Legal Need

Top three legal matters BGCLS July 2019—June 2021

1. Family or Domestic Violence
2. Child contacts / contact orders
3. Property in marriage

Key work of BGCLS includes Family Law assistance. Often clients have family law matters that are experienced in tandem with family violence. Along with duty lawyer services for family violence at Ballarat, Ararat and Stawell, BGCLS provides a duty lawyer service for family law hearings during Circuit Week in Ballarat.

Behind direct family violence work, 381 (8%) services to clients were for Child Contact / Child Contact Orders. A further 225 (4.5%) were related to Property in Marriage.

Integrated Maternal & Child Health Family Law Services

The Integrated Program with Maternal & Child Health Services in the region provides legal assistance in the areas of family violence and family law to parents and carers visiting Maternal & Child Health Services. Placing a Family Lawyer in a Maternal & Child Health setting provides opportunity for parents/carers to receive a discrete and confidential legal service without having to attend a Community Legal Service or similar.

Throughout the pandemic BGCLS continued to engage with Maternal & Child Health (MCH) services in the region and provided Professional Legal Education sessions to Maternal & Child Health Nurses and other Children & Families team members within the City of Ballarat.

BGCLS has adapted through COVID-19 and is slowly returning to on-site and in person visits as easing of restrictions allows.

Number of legal education webinars held for MCH professionals

4

Number of services provided for clients

48

Number of available MCH visits

26

Client Outcomes

Tara, who BGCLS had previously represented in a family violence intervention order case, contacted us as the other party had applied for another order.

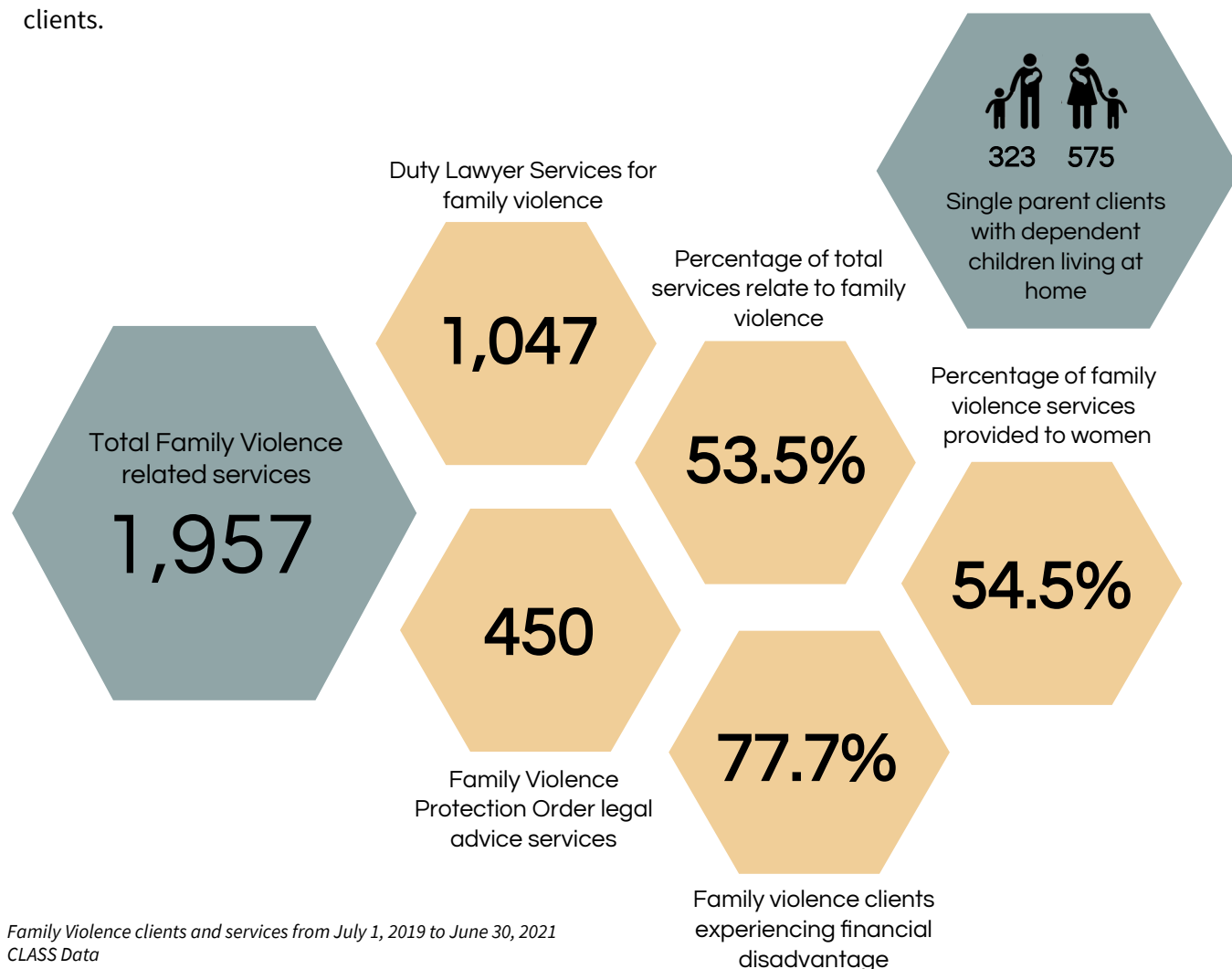
Tara lives in a small town where the other party also lives. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions duty lawyer services were only available remotely. Tara was quite distraught at the thought of having to represent herself, but we reassured her that we would do the negotiating by phone beforehand and she would not have to speak much in front of the Magistrate.

On the Court date, we contacted the Registrar at Court who helped us negotiate with the other party. Tara was contacted with the results of the negotiation and Tara elected to contest the matter. That information was relayed to the Registrar, who made notes on the file for the Magistrate and Tara did not have to advocate for herself in Court, much to her relief. Her next Court date was the first day BGCLS returned to providing the duty service in person and BGCLS were able to represent her on that day.

BGCLS provides legal advice, casework and duty lawyer services for people experiencing family violence. The service conducts a conflict check for each client and represents affected family members and perpetrators, dependent on client need.

Duty lawyer services to Ararat, Stawell and Ballarat ensure both parties are represented in a matter. Currently Victoria Legal Aid is the only low cost, or free, legal service available to residents in Horsham or surrounds for family violence court matters.

In terms of family composition, single parent clients with dependent children make up 31.8% of total clients.



Next steps...

- Maintain existing levels of service through appointments and court services
- Continue working directly with Maternal Child Health (MCH) services in the Ballarat region, especially as face to face services resume
- Pursue opportunities to develop MCH services in Moorabool and Horsham (both areas with high number of family violence incidences against women)
- Consider relationship building with disability support services who work with women who may be affected by family violence

Client Outcomes

TABITHA'S STORY

Tabitha was introduced to BGCLS via a referral from another CLC. The Court Application had been filed against her and she was needing urgent legal assistance for a Federal Court Parenting Matter. Tabitha was not only a mother to young children, she was also a victim of family violence. The extent of the family violence was difficult for Tabitha to discuss as she was from a cultural background that made family violence hard to identify for those who belonged within that cultural setting.

BGCLS had the added difficulty of Tabitha being based in Melbourne and the service being based in Ballarat. Due to COVID services were provided remotely.

Within a very short space of time, BGCLS had drafted all the relevant documents for Tabitha and filed and served them on the other side. Tabitha was ready to proceed to Court by the Court hearing date. BGCLS were able to represent Tabitha via Microsoft Teams as well as telephone communications both with the Court and with Tabitha.

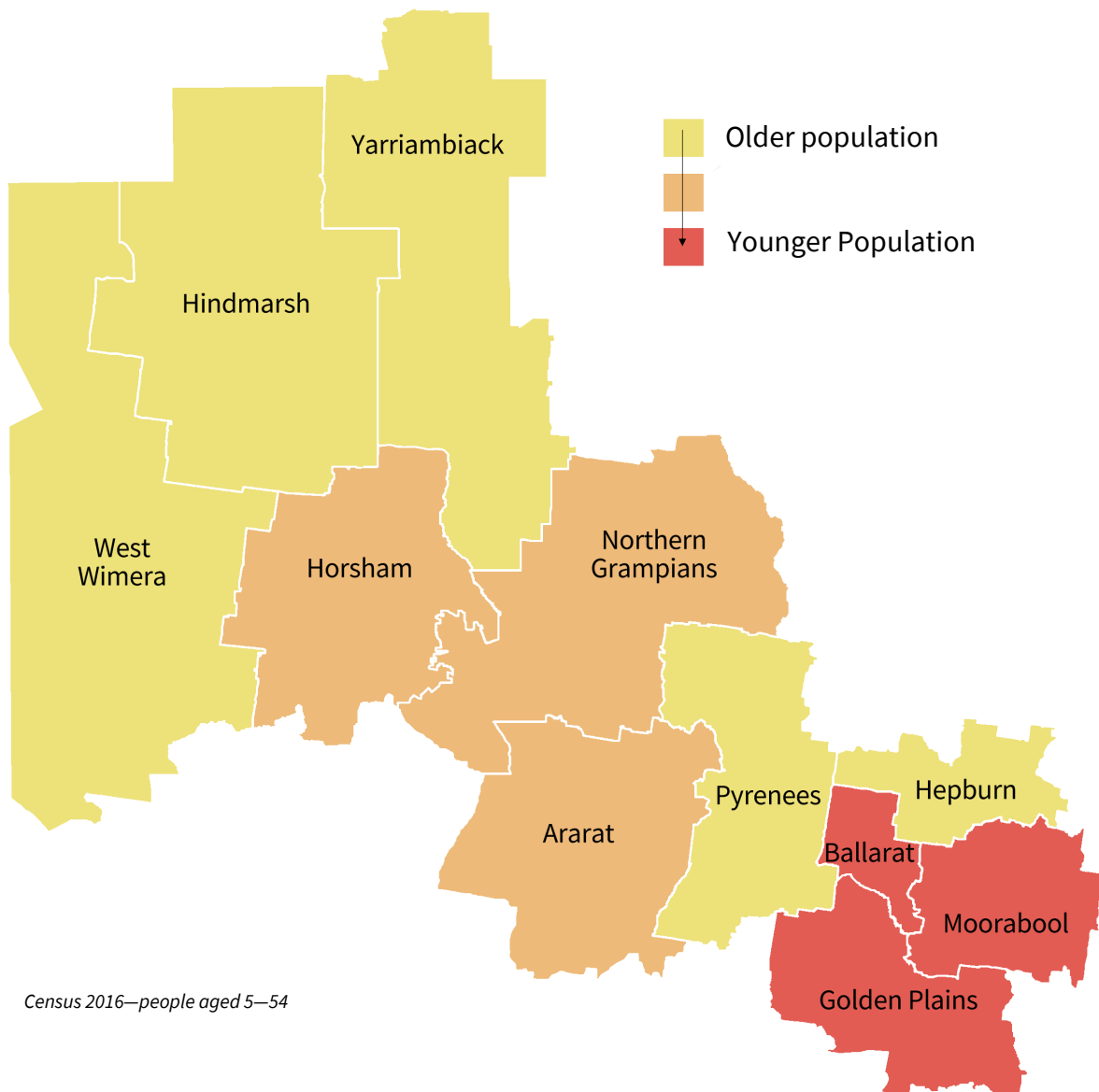
In order to save Tabitha from being 'dragged through the Courts' we were able to identify and negotiate Final Orders for her within a day. This was achieved while guiding Tabitha through the Family Law system and providing advice at each point. For most clients, Court is a dramatic and emotionally demanding proposition. However, by navigating Tabitha, BGCLS were able to save her from the prospect of being stuck in Court for years and being consistently exposed to emotional and distressing upheaval.

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

Age

Age is a factor in potential legal needs. People aged 15-54 years are at highest risk of legal problems, however, the needs in each age bracket differ. The more populous LGAs have, a higher percentage of younger people. This is often due to an increase in employment and education opportunities. Areas west of Ballarat have a higher median age. In the context of the pandemic, younger people including students are more likely to be in casualized workforces such as hospitality and retail.

In 2020, older people were considered more susceptible to the serious illness and possible death of COVID-19 and were stood down in some areas of life, such as volunteering. This could lead to legal matters such as health and safety in the workplace or discrimination.



HIGHER INCIDENCES OF LEGAL PROBLEMS BY AGE



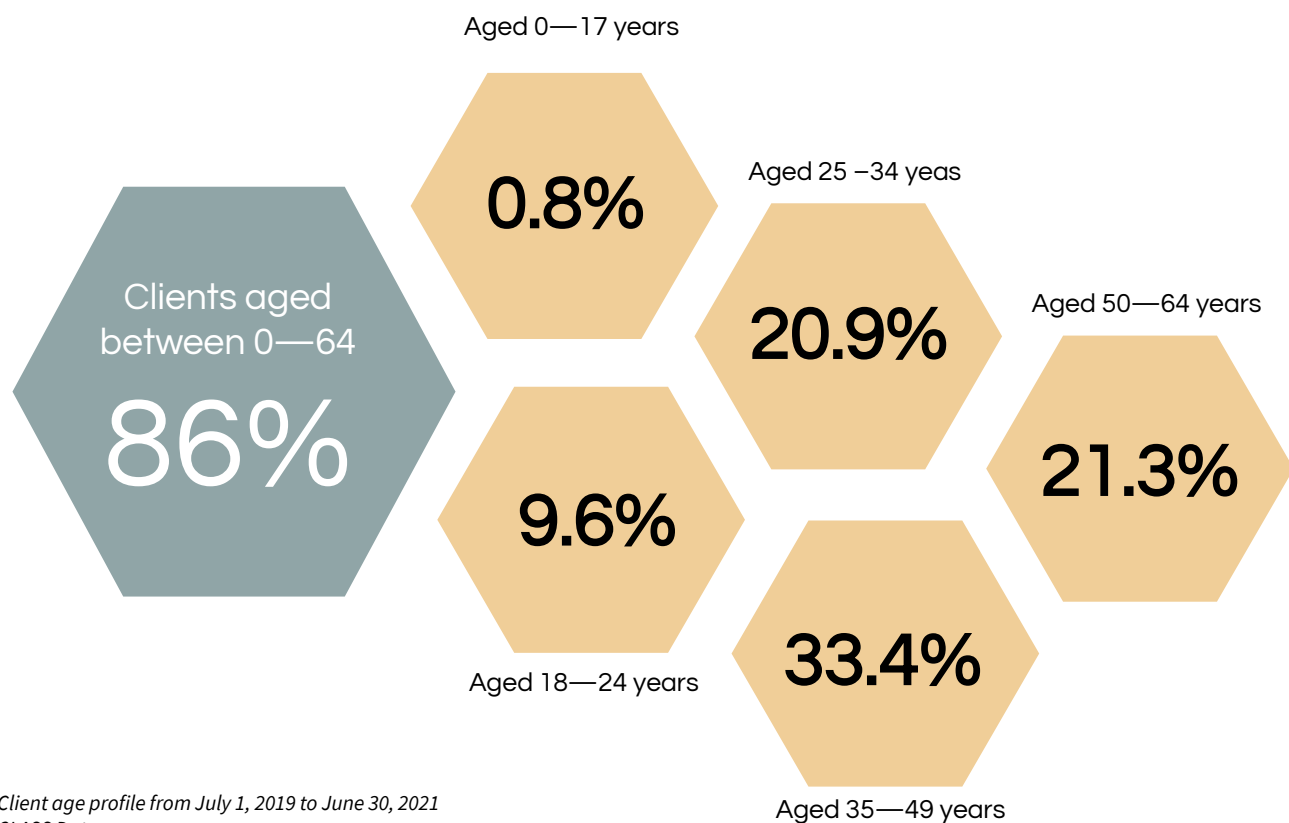
- 15-24: housing, unfair police treatment, crime, traffic offences, accident/injury
- 25-34: credit and debt, traffic offences, accident/injury
- 35-44: family law, consumer problems, credit/debt
- 45-54: employment problems

Top three Local Government Areas by percentage of population within legal need age bracket

15-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballarat (13.6%) Golden Plains (12.5%) Moorabool (11.8%) 	35-44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moorabool (13.4%) Golden Plains (13.3%) Ballarat (12.1%)
25-34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballarat (14%) Horsham (12.2%) Moorabool (11.6%) 	45-54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Golden Plains (15.1%) Hepburn (14.7%) Pyrenees (14.2%)

Met Legal Need

One third of BGCLS clients are aged between 35 and 49 years. This age profile is in keeping with the high levels of family violence and family law services that the service undertakes. Young people are underrepresented in service provision. This may be due to limited accessibility to the service, or engagement with other, youth specific legal services. People aged 25 –34 make up 10% of the Grampians population, yet 20.9% of the BGCLS client profile.



Next steps...

- Identify opportunities to increase service delivery to younger people, such as secondary or tertiary institutions (e.g. University services or Lawyers in Schools programs)

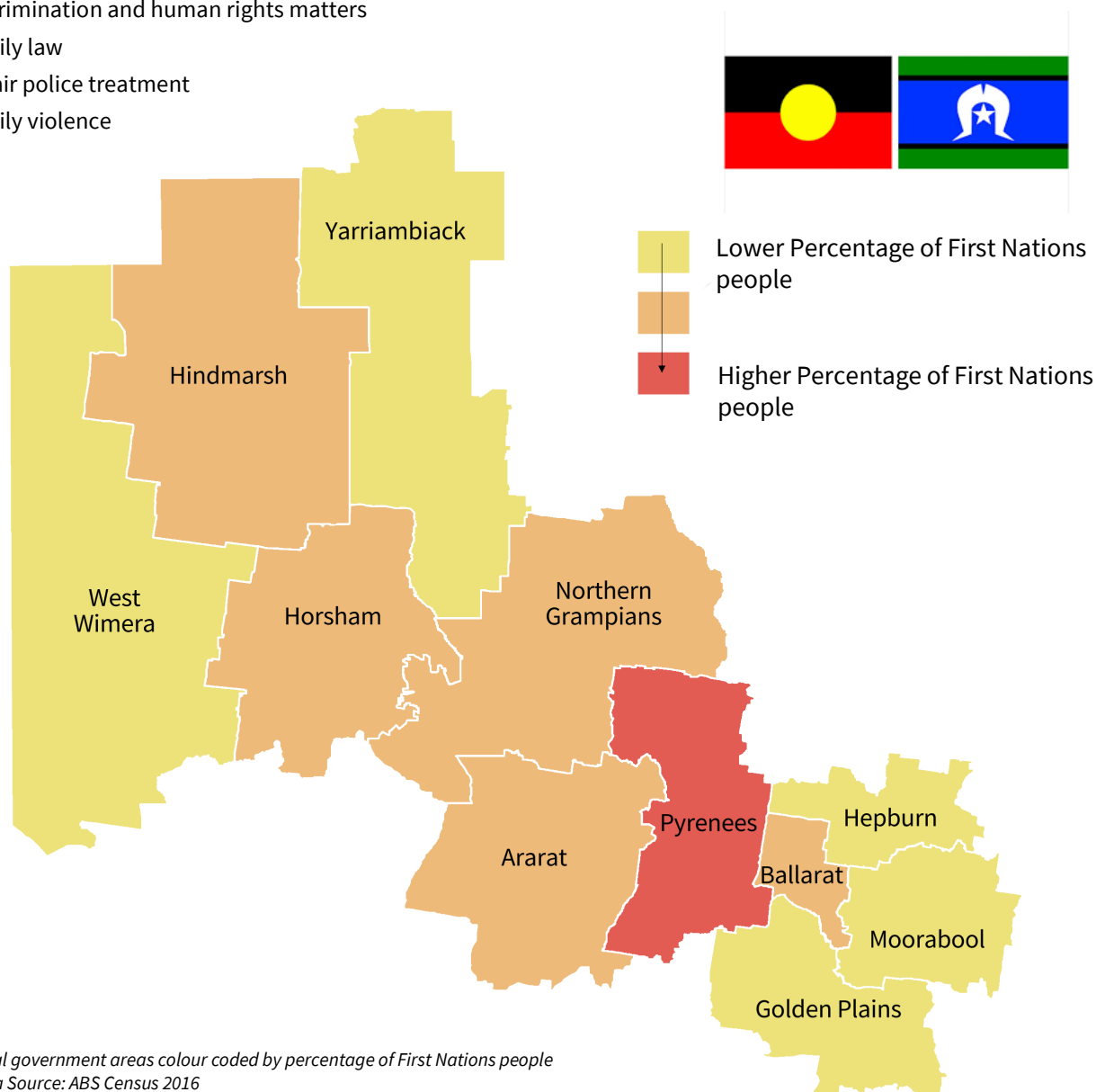
INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

First Nations People

In the 2016 census, First Nations people made up 0.8% of the total Victorian population, and 1.6% of the population in regional areas. All areas in the Grampians have a First Nations ATSI population higher than the state average. However, when compared to the regional Victorian average, the Pyrenees shire is the only area higher, with 1.9% of the population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Legal needs research indicates the people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander can experience higher levels of legal need in areas including:

- Credit and debt
- Employment
- Discrimination and human rights matters
- Family law
- Unfair police treatment
- Family violence



3,742

Total First Nations
residents across the
Grampians

1740

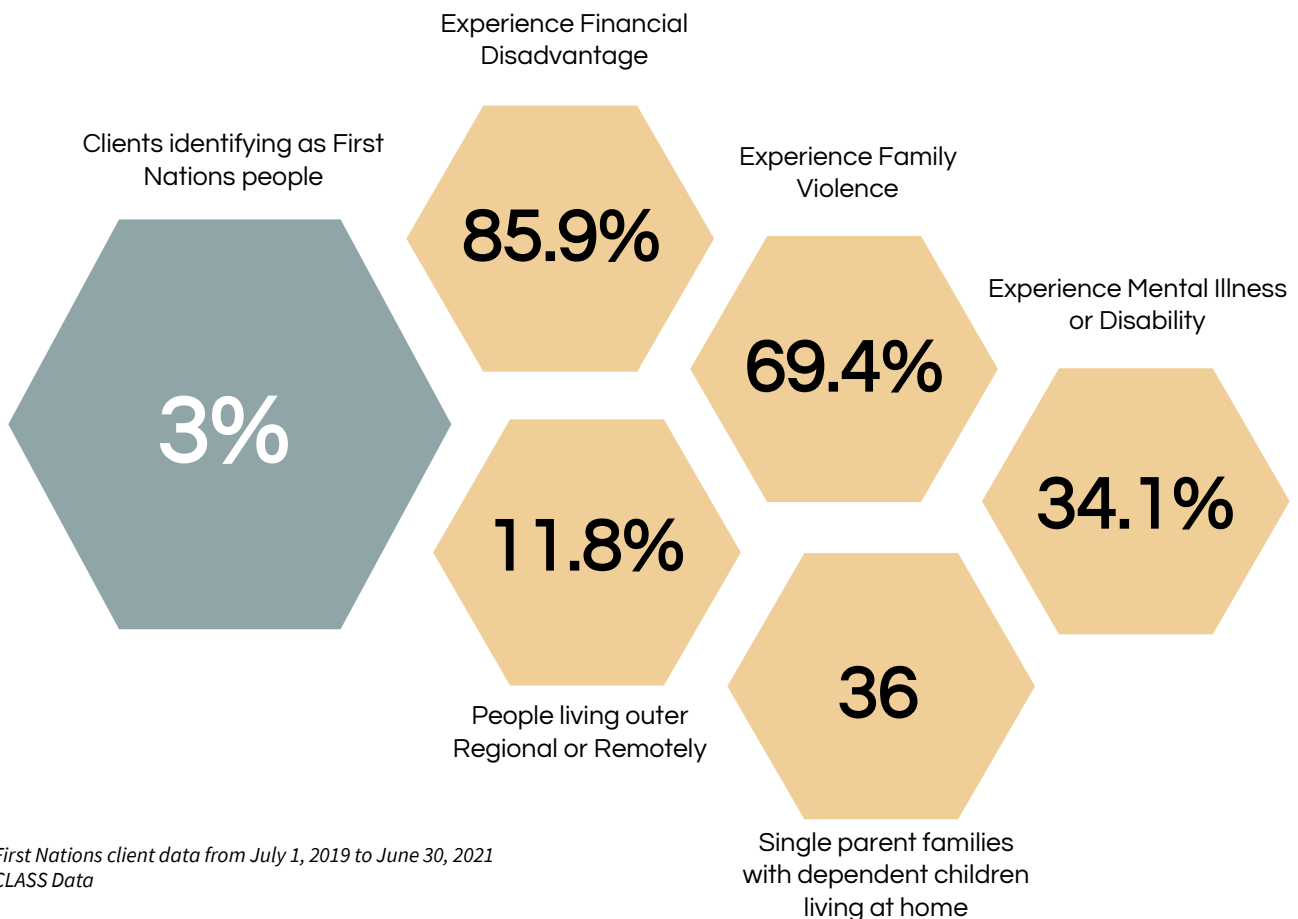
Total First Nations
residents in Ballarat

1.3%

Percentage of First
Nations population
in Grampians

Met Legal Need

BGCLS assisted 85 clients who identified as First Nations people. This made up 3% of the clients assisted, well over double the Grampians region population percentage. This indicates that BGCLS provides a welcoming and culturally safe service for clients to seek legal assistance. No clients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander accessed the service from Yarriambiack, and only one in each of West Wimmera, Hindmarsh and Moorabool, although this reflects the small percentage of First Nations people living in the majority of these areas.



Next steps...

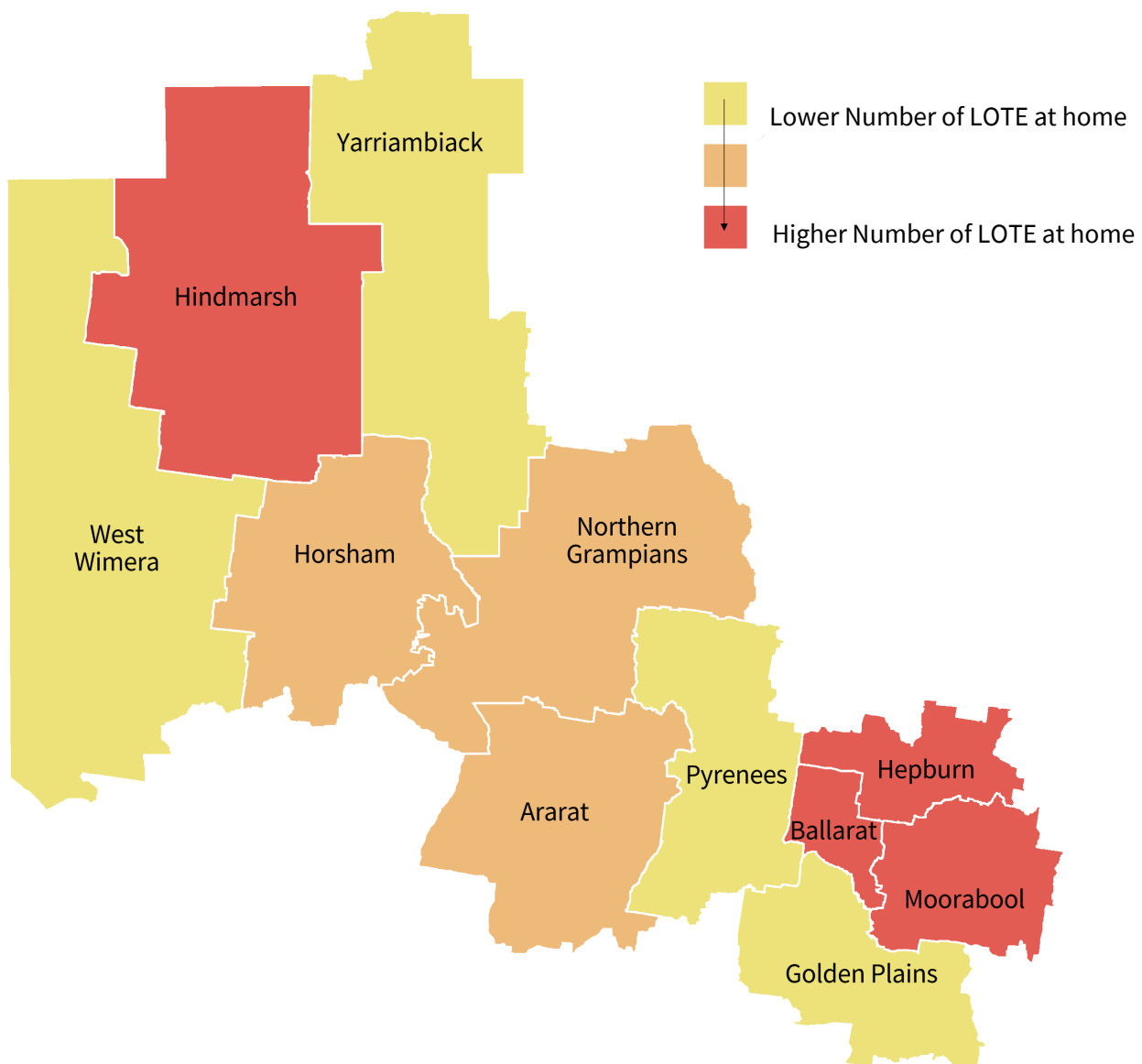
- Further develop and maintain ongoing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and co-op organisations, particularly in the Wimmera
- Work with VALS to identify work being undertaken by them for First Nations community members.
- Identify areas for shared resourcing and development of culturally appropriate community legal education programs.

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

Cultural Diversity

People who speak a language other than English at home, or who were born in another country (excepting Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the USA) are at greater risk of legal need. Legal issues of concern include employment problems, immigration matters and incidences of discrimination.

Census 2016 data indicates that 4.3% of the Grampians population speak a language other than English (LOTE) at home. Changes to internal migration, international student numbers and border closures may have had an impact on the number during the pandemic, with a potential increase, particularly in highly populated areas.



HIGH LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH POPULATION & COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

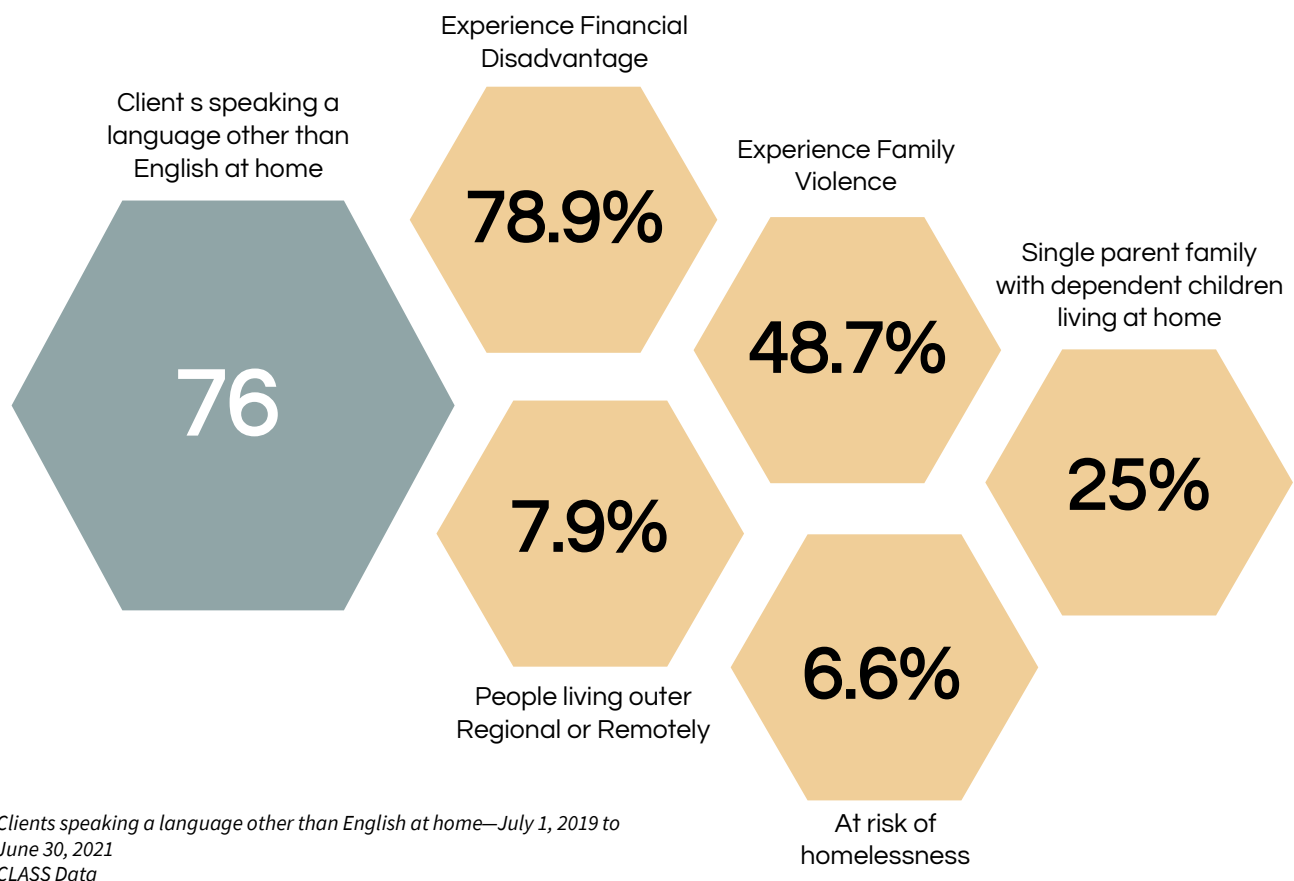


Ballarat: Mandarin, Punjabi, Malayalam, Hindi, Italian
Hindmarsh: Karen, Malayalam, Filipino, Dutch, German
Hepburn: Italian, German, Greek, Mandarin, Serbian
Horsham: Italian, Malayalam, Mandarin, Karen, Filipino

Met Legal Need

BGCLS supported 76, or 2.7% of clients between July 2019 and June 2021, who spoke a language other than English as their primary language at home. Interpreter services were provided to 22 clients to help support their provision of legal services.

The percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse clients attending BGCLS is lower than the Grampians population percentage of 4.3%. This may be due to a number of factors including accessing community support rather than formal support or an inability to access the service due to location (for example, a high Karen population lives in Nhill) where no physical service provision exists.



Next steps...

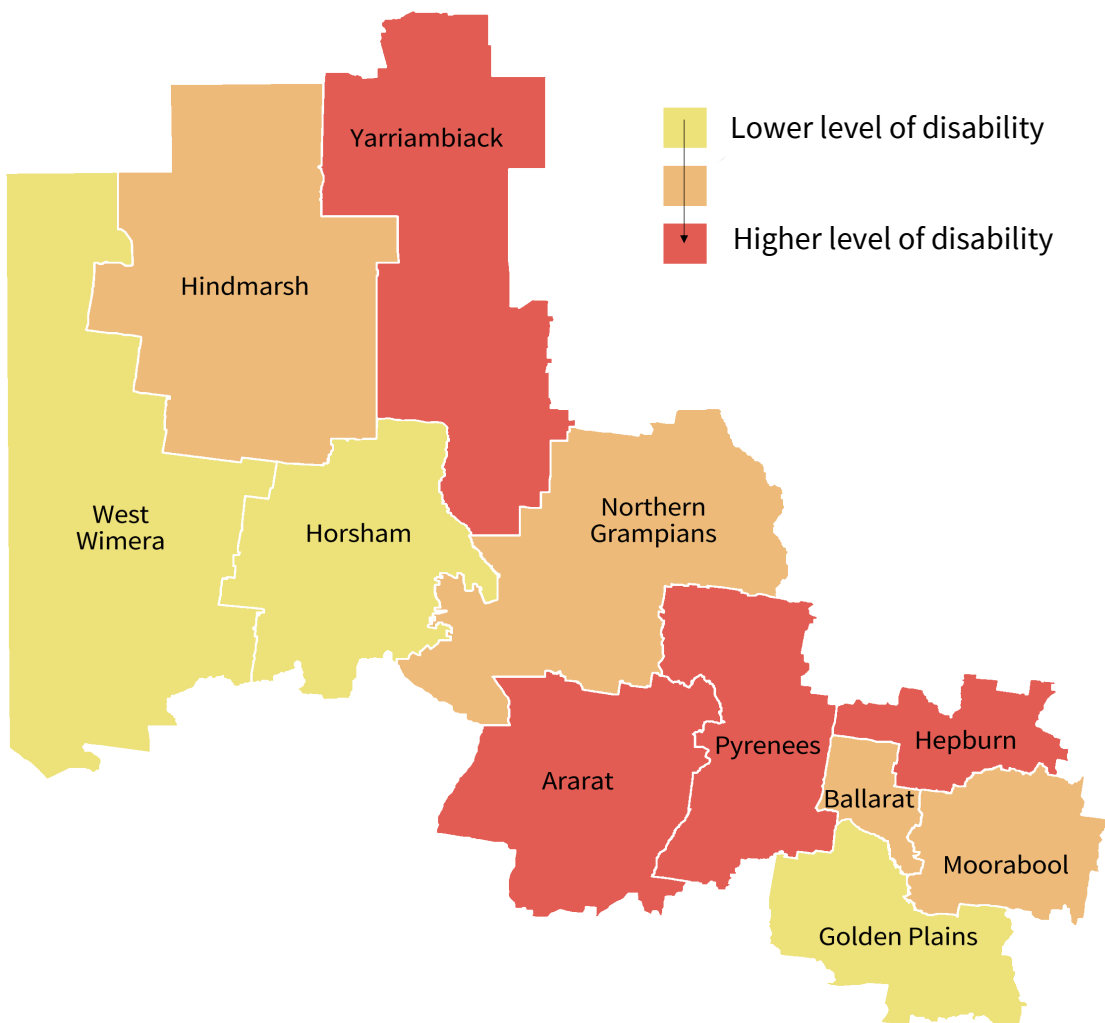
- Ongoing relationship development with BRMC and equivalent centres across the region
- Provision of basic legal contact information (e.g. BGCLS contact details and areas where assistance can be provided) in common community languages could be developed in partnership with multicultural service providers across the region.
- Identify small statistical areas with a higher population of non-English areas for targeted marketing and provision

INDICATORS OF LEGAL NEED

Health and Disability

Community members experiencing a disability or mental health conditions are more likely to experience legal need in a wide variety of areas including:

- Credit/debt
- Employment
- Discrimination or human rights problems
- Crime
- Accident/injury
- Consumer problems
- Neighbour problems
- Tenancy
- Family Violence

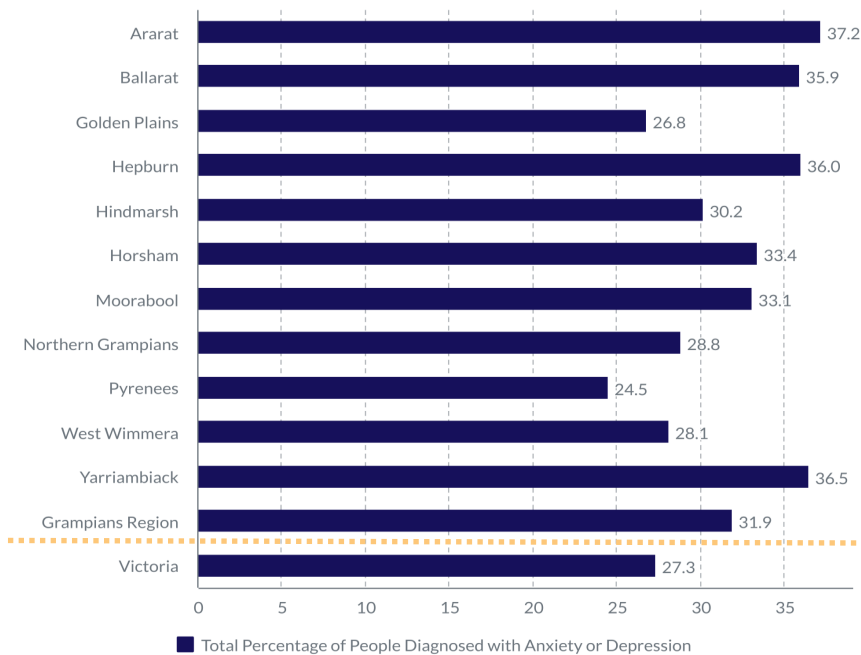


Source: Census Data 2016—Persons with a disability.

COVID-19 and Health

Aside from the immediate threat of catching COVID-19, the continued lockdowns and uncertainty the pandemic has created have brought significantly higher levels of psychological distress, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. High, ongoing level of psychological distress and poor mental health are expected to continue in the foreseeable future.

Mental Wellbeing



Victorian Population Health Survey 2017

Residents in the Grampians Region were diagnosed with anxiety or depression at a higher percentage than the state average.

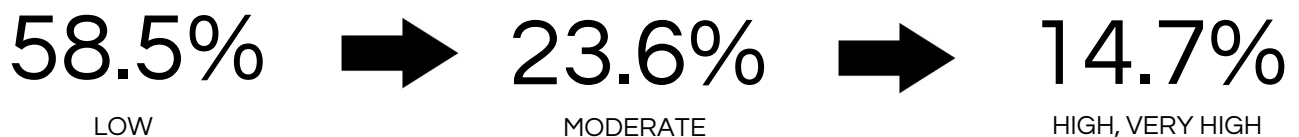
Women are more likely to receive a diagnosis—38.9% of women across the Grampians. The highest proportion of women with an anxiety or depression diagnosis fall in the following LGAs:

- Ararat (49.1%)
- Hepburn (42.2%)
- Moorabool (41.7%)

Men is the following LGAs had higher rates of diagnosis:

- Yarriambiack (32.0%)
- Ballarat (30.8%)
- Horsham (30.6%)

REPORTED RATES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS ACROSS THE GRAMPIANS



Victorian Population Health Survey 2017

National Disability Insurance Scheme Participation

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports people under 65 years who have a permanent and significant disability. It is designed to help people with a disability to access services and supports to have greater involvement in the community, gain employment, have improved wellbeing outcomes and greater independence.

The higher number of NDIS recipients were in the following LGAs:

- Ballarat—2,862
- Moorabool—760
- Horsham—547

Number of NDIS Participants across the Grampians

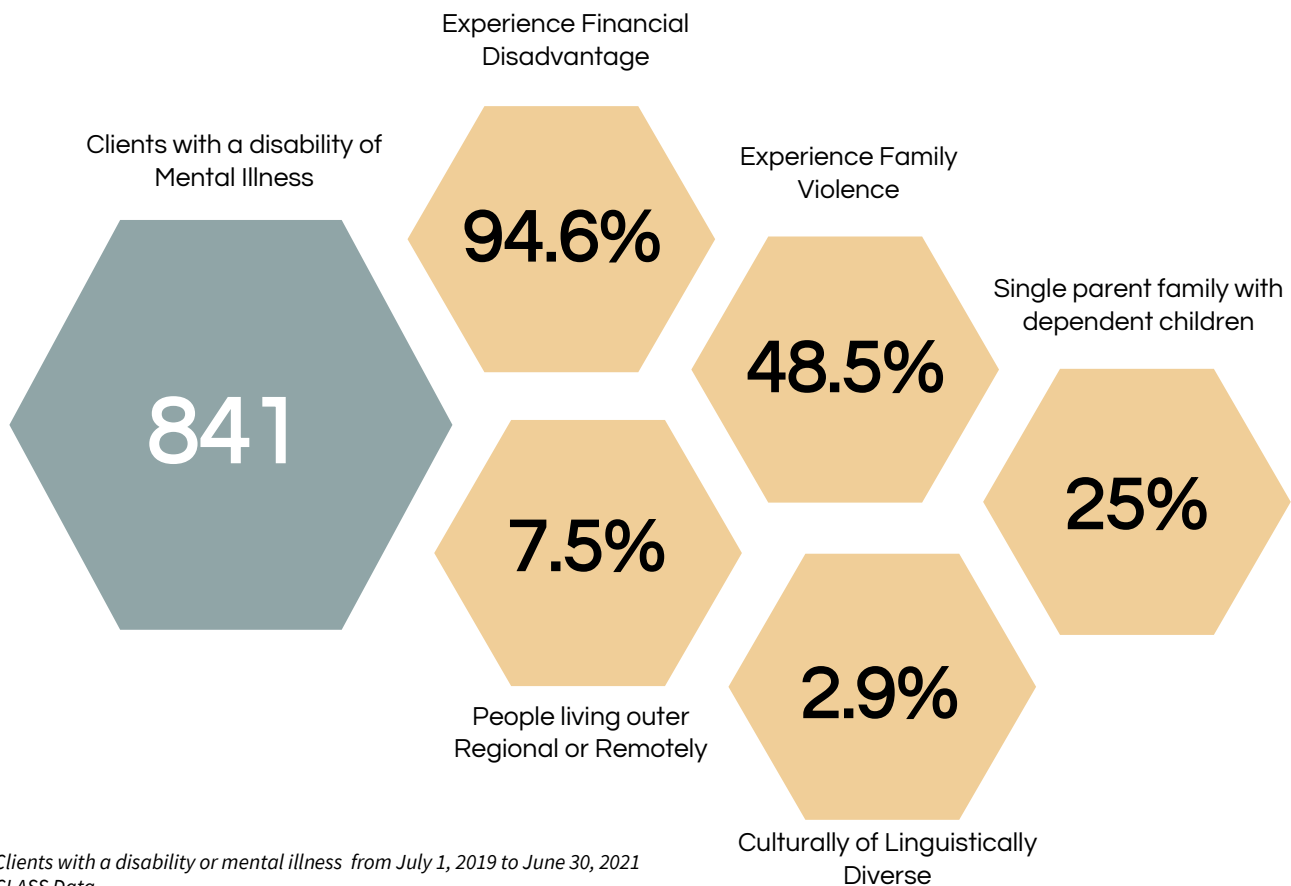
6,060

data.gov.au—September 2021

Met Legal Need

BGCLS supported 841 clients with a disability or mental illness between July 2019 and June 2021. This equates to 29.8% of clients attending the service (over the Grampians average for disability of 22.8%). Data collection does not currently assess level of client psychological distress. Approximately 52% of clients with disability or mental illness were men. The age of clients was more evenly distributed across age groups.

Given the effects of the pandemic of overall population mental health, it is possible that a higher percentage of clients will meet the mental illness threshold in coming months.



Next steps...

- Develop ongoing relationships with disability support services who work with women who may be affected by family violence
- Review mental health data and research in coming months as Victoria exits lockdowns and COVID specific data become more readily available

Client Outcomes

Tyson has been experiencing ongoing mental health problems for a long period of time. However, he stopped taking his medication as he was no longer able to afford his prescriptions. Furthermore, Tyson instructed that his prescribed medications were not required as he was mentally of sound mind.

Tyson instructed BGCLS that he breached Covid restrictions by crossing the regional borders to enter Melbourne, past curfew, in order to attend a medical appointment. The medical appointment was 2-3 days from when Tyson crossed the border and he crossed in the early hours of the morning.

Tyson had other criminal matters and Court hearings were spread out for all his various matters. Tyson instructed BGCLS to enter guilty pleas on all the charges and have it heard in one Court hearing.

BGCLS had ongoing correspondence with Tyson to obtain supporting documents to submit to the Court. This included preparing and representing Tyson for a plea in mitigation, at the Magistrates' Court of Victoria. The matter is expected to resolve by means of a consolidated plea in later half of 2021, requesting Tyson be placed on a Community Corrections Order.

Obtaining clear instructions from Tyson was difficult at times due to his mental health problems. Communicating with Tyson in general was also difficult, as he did not always appear available to converse and was not stationary at his primary place of residence. Additionally, Tyson has incurred additional criminal charges for driving offences, after being advised not to drive as his license is suspended.

"I don't mind going to jail, I'll get three free meals a day."

Tyson was overwhelmed by the many different legal problems he was facing. BGCLS Covid team were able to assist him in putting together a plan of action. This included referring him to our client advocate who could assist with client's non legal needs and ensuring that he was safe, sheltered and able to pay for his medicines.

By consolidating his matters with the Court and preparing a plea in mitigation, Tyson is able to have confidence that he will not be going to jail and that he will receive a fair outcome.



Additional Considerations

Crime Statistics

Incidences of crime can provide a strong potential for inadequately met legal need for both the perpetrator and the victim. Victims of crime are more likely to experience legal need as a result of their experiences.

Incidence of criminal activity during the COVID pandemic varied by local government area, and also by the type of criminal activity committed. The initiation of State of Emergency and State of Disaster orders in Victoria in 2020 meant that not adhering to the advice and direction of the Chief Health Officer led to a higher number of criminal activities regarding Public Health and Safety Offences. These offences are also met with significant fines, which, left unpaid, could lead to additional legal problems.

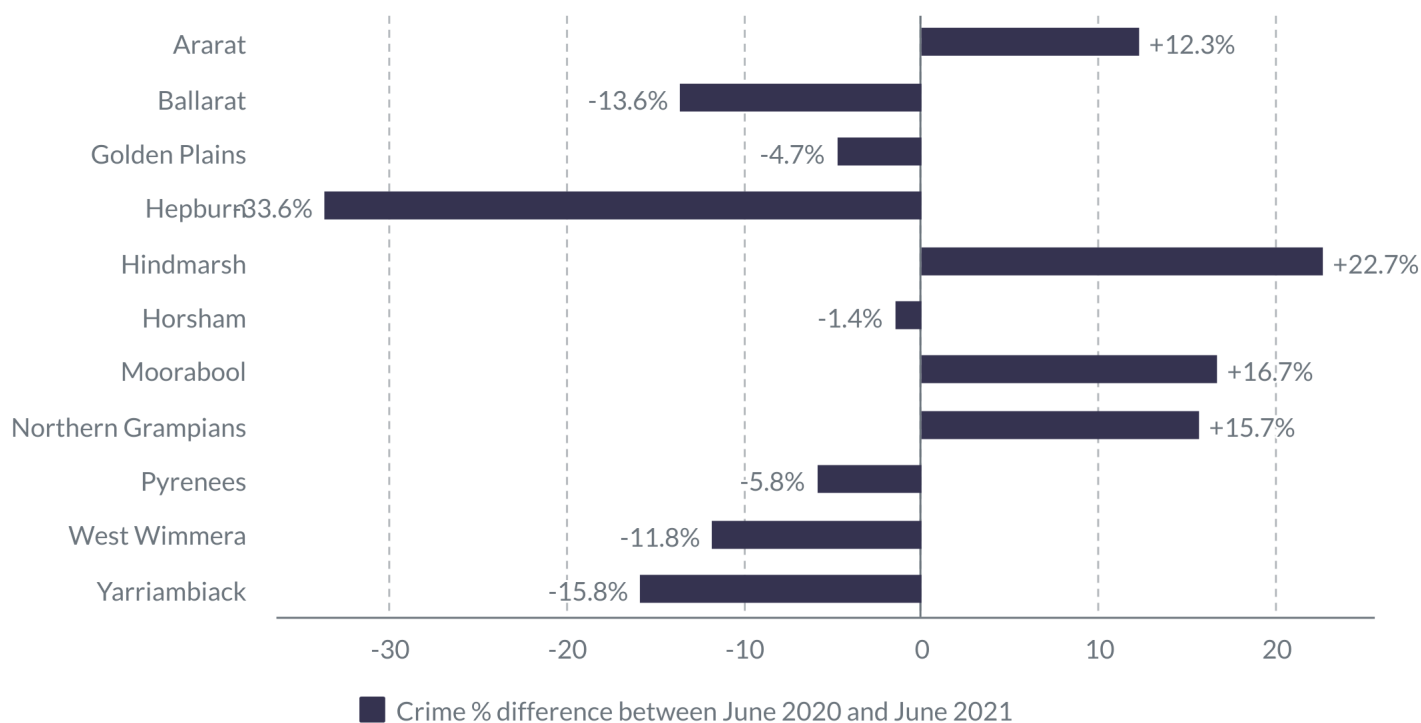


- Criminal damage
- Other theft



- Family Violence
- Breaches to Family Violence Orders
- Public health and safety offences

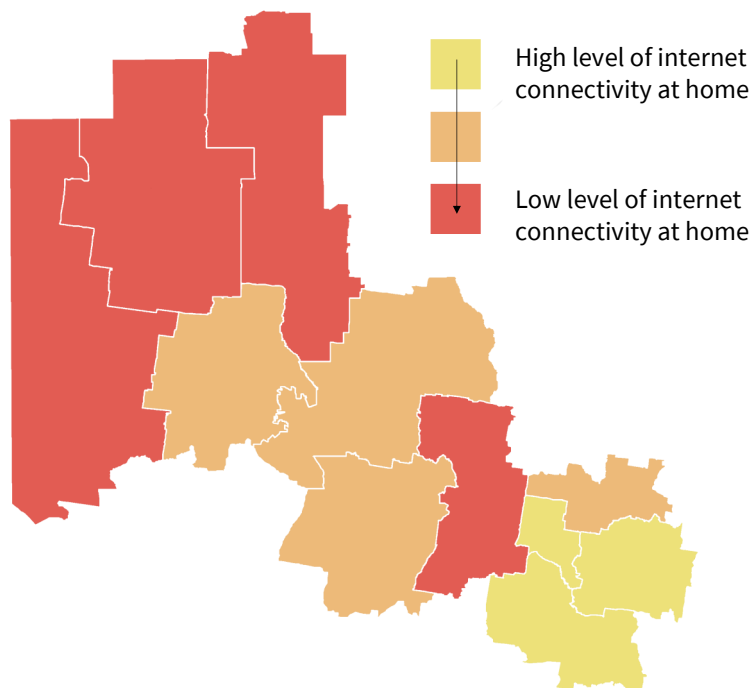
*Increases and Decreases in Criminal Offences
Crime Statistics Agency - Grampians LGAs June 2021*



Crime Statistics Agency - Grampians LGAs June 2021

Internet Accessibility

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the need to connect via telephone and internet services has increased. Access to medical care, welfare services, government and legal services (including Court) was primarily virtual. The reduced access to internet connection may impact a person's ability to access and obtain appropriate assistance. Services that people may otherwise utilise, such as free library services, also became inaccessible during extended periods of community lockdown.



Gambling

Whilst not identified as a specific indicator of legal need, gambling is well recognised as an indicator of potential disadvantage, with increased likelihood of credit / debt concerns, family violence and criminal activity combined with an increasing likelihood of multiple layers of disadvantage. There is a significant positive association between gaming expenditure and crime, particularly generating income to fund problem gambling habits (Wheeler, Round, & Wilson, 2010)¹

The Grampians region has five LGAs with Electronic Gaming Machines. Throughout 2020 and 2021, electronic gaming machine venues have been periodically closed, in line with government restrictions. This had lead to a reduction in spending. There has, however, in recent years been an increasingly high uptake in online wagering, with over \$1.4 billion gambled online annually (Department of Social Security, 2015). With lockdowns and ongoing financial pressures, it is expected that online gambling will have increased.

1. Wheeler, S., Round, D. K., & Wilson, J. (2010). *The Relationship Between Crime and Gaming Expenditure in Victoria*. Centre for Regulation and Market Analysis.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Service Providers

Community service and welfare agencies throughout the Grampians region were sent a Community Agency Survey to determine their perception of legal needs within their client base. There were two sources of data collection for this project, an online survey (July 2021) followed by a small focus group (held September 2021).

The online survey had 31 responses from community organisations across the Grampians region. All LGAs were serviced by the participating organisations, however the majority (25) were located in Ballarat. Agencies included Councils, government departments and welfare agencies.

A number of significant themes emerged from the survey and subsequent focus group, providing an overview of some of the issue affecting clients seeking support.



Families

Family matters were identified as a key concern for clients. The focus group highlighted an increase in the number of young mothers accessing their services. Many reported feelings of isolation as being the main cause of reaching out.

According to the survey, Child protection, Family law – children, Family violence and Intervention orders were highlighted as the main areas that clients have experience legal matters, demonstrating the ‘family’ nature of the issues experienced.



Mental Health

A significant theme of mental health issue emerged from both data sets. Mental health was highlighted as one of the biggest changes in client presentation over the past 12 months. To a lesser extent, emotional wellbeing and addiction were also emphasised in this section.

The focus group identified client mental health as being ‘in decline’. These mental health issues are said to be caused by outstanding mental health issues that were fueled by feelings of isolation due to lockdowns. Service providers reported anecdotal evidence of clients increasingly unable, or unwilling to address social and legal problems, rather seeking significant case management, often outside the capacity of the agency.

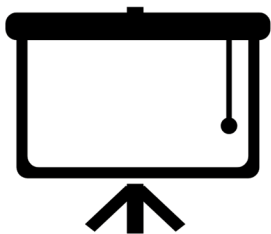
The issues surrounding mental health are supported by organisations such as Beyond Blue and Lifeline who have experienced a substantial increase in people seeking support for mental health problems including depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation.



Barriers to Legal Help

In the context of the pandemic, service providers identified the largest barrier to legal assistance as cost, closely followed by access issues such as a lack of internet or not being able to attend appointments. Other key issues included isolation, clients not knowing where to find assistance and safety concerns. Half of the survey respondents did not feel that their clients had a general understanding of how or where to seek assistance for legal problems, with over half indicating clients lacking a general understanding of the legal system.

Survey respondents and focus group members identified one of the biggest barriers to obtaining legal assistance as a lack of legal education. It was said that many individuals have not accessed help as many of them didn't know that the services were available.



Community and Professional Legal Education

The focus group identified a need for education concerning the services available to clients. Many clients are reported to either not have a firm understanding of their rights or not understand that many services were separate entities and needed to be accessed independently of each other.

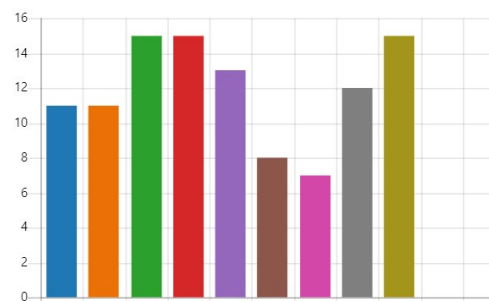
These barriers also applied to welfare professionals who expressed concern in knowing where to appropriately refer clients for support.

The method of legal education suggested, for both service providers and community members was a narrative, or story telling, model. This model was considered best for making legal information more accessible to people who could identify with the story.

12. What kind of legal services / information do you think you would most benefit from?

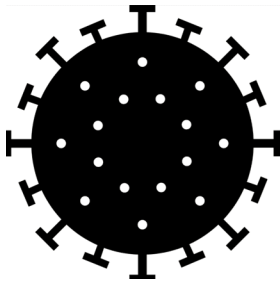
[More Details](#)

Community education sessions	11
Legal Fact sheets	11
Legal advice	15
Legal Representation – court a...	15
Legal Representations – letter...	13
Online services via Zoom or si...	8
Self-help resources	7
Services close to home	12
All of the above	15
None of the above	0
Other	0



Twenty respondents indicated that their clients would benefit from targeted community legal education. Only 8 respondents believe their clients have a general understanding of the legal system and only 5 believe their clients would know where to seek assistance for legal problems.

The following suggestions were provided for the type of community legal education clients would benefit from:

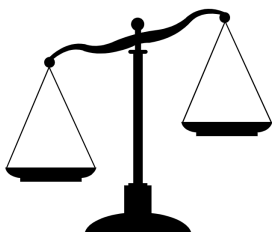


Impact of COVID-19

Only 2 of the 31 survey participants responded to the question ‘How, if at all, did COVID-19 contribute to your clients legal problems?’ These two responses highlighted rental affordability and inability to meet face to face being the main issues for clients.

A low response rate can also be seen in the question ‘Are your clients generally able to identify if they have legal needs?’ with only 3 respondents giving an indication. Additionally, 7 of the 31 respondents were unsure if the issues their clients were facing were occurring before the pandemic.

The focus group participants highlighted an increase in young mothers requiring additional assistance, an increase in mental health issues and difficulties in accessing services due to a lack of internet or travel. Service provision for organisations changed significantly, with face to face services no longer available and some services suspended.



Law Reform

Potential areas for law reform were identified by respondents to the survey, with family violence and order breaches featuring in multiple responses:



Community Members

In May, a community survey was launched online to gain an understanding of the needs of the local community. Despite multiple advertising methods, including postcards, posters, paid social media and sharing through various networks, the survey had limited success with only 18 responses. The responses came primarily from Ballarat and surrounds, although one response from each of Bacchus Marsh and Stawell were received.

Paid social media posts were created around the same time as Victoria's May 2021 lockdown. This resulted in a number of people using the survey as a means of sharing anti-government, anti-police rhetoric. Comments were disabled on the original post and advertising was cancelled.

No population generalisations can be made from the data received from the survey, however the following points are interesting to note:

- The majority of respondents had not heard of BGCLS
- Over half of the respondents believed some areas of law required review and change. These areas included sentencing, family violence, youth matters and compensation
- The most significant impact the pandemic had had was on people's feeling of isolation and being unable to visit family
- Legal services or information of benefit include community legal education, legal fact sheets and self-help resources
- The majority of respondents had not experienced a legal problem in the twelve months prior to the survey.



Recommendations

Community and Professional Legal Education

Community organisations have identified a need for both community and professional legal education. Consideration should be given to the further development of professional legal education opportunities, with a particular emphasis on family violence and family law. Resources, such as narrative, case study based information would assist professionals to better identify and support clients with legal need.

With the anticipated reopening of the region, there will be increased opportunity for collaborative community legal education.

Staff Mental Health Knowledge

Maintaining staff professional development and networks regarding mental health and related issues should be a priority. It is highly possible that the rate of legal need, combined with mental health concerns will increase and staff should have the appropriate tools and knowledge for supporting client wellbeing, and appropriate referral networks. Victorian Government initiatives following the Mental Health Royal Commission should assist in providing additional referral pathways over time.

Small Statistical Area Analysis

This report has provided a broad overview across the Grampians region. There are, however, significant pockets of disadvantage that exist in all local government areas. A focused, small statistical analysis of identified areas should be undertaken to help target marketing and resources. This will be especially important as data demonstrating the impact of the pandemic becomes more prevalent.

Broadened Service Provision & Marketing

Local government areas in the Wimmera region have lower levels of engagement with BGCLS. The difference in engagement between 2019/2020 when BGCLS was engaged in a Health Justice Partnership with Grampians Community Health, and 2020/2021 and demonstrates the importance of local referrals and in-person service delivery for regional communities. Opportunities for broadening in-person service delivery should be considered, and would potentially benefit more regional and rural communities.

Increased, targeted marketing of remote service delivery to the community and service providing organisations, to the areas of Horsham, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack would be beneficial.

SNAPSHOT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

Data Source Breakdown

Local Government Area Traditional Owners



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Estimated Residential
Population, 2020**



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**

**GOVERNMENT
SUPPORT
RECEIPIENTS**

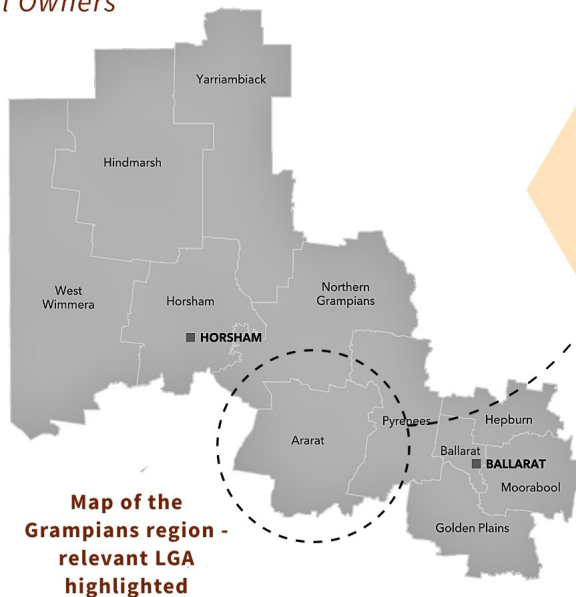
**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Regional Statistics by
LGA, 2019**



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Socio Economic
Indicators for Areas,
2016**



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**



**Map of the
Grampians region -
relevant LGA
highlighted**

**Basic Geographic
Data**

**AREA
Q KMS**

MAJOR TOWNS



**Local
Government
Logo**

DEMOGRAPHICS



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**

**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**

**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU
OF STATISTICS,
Census, 2016**



CRIME AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



**CRIME STATISTICS
AGENCY,
Family Incidents, 2021**



**CRIME STATISTICS
AGENCY,
Family Incidents, 2021**



**CRIME STATISTICS
AGENCY,
Criminal Incidents,
2021**

Useful Data Sources

The following list provides a list of government data used throughout this report and recommended for ongoing review and analysis. Data sets are regularly updated by governments and health and welfare agencies.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2016
www.abs.gov.au/census

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Statistics by LGA, 2019
www.abs.gov.au

Australian Government, Data Sets
www.data.gov.au

Community Legal Centres Australia, Legal Needs Planning Guide
<https://clcs.org.au/planning>

Crime Statistics Agency, Criminal Incidents 2021
www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au

Crime Statistics Agency, Family Incidents 2021
www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au

Department of Housing, Public Housing
www.housing.vic.gov.au/public-housing

Department of Social Security, Demographics by LGA, 2021
www.dss.gov.au

Primary Care Partnerships
Central Highlands— www.chpcp.org
Grampians Pyrenees—www.garmpianspyreneespcp.org.au
Wimmera—wimmerapcp.org.au

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Responsible Gambling,
www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au



**BALLARAT & GRAMPIANS
COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE**

