

FIRST NATIONS
ADVOCATES AGAINST
FAMILY VIOLENCE

Submission to the review of Practical Legal Training

**Prepared by First Nations Advocates Against
Family Violence**

Submitted 28 May 2026



Table of Contents

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV)	3
Who are we?	3
Who are our members?	3
What do we do?	3
Terminology	4
Executive Summary	5
Key Recommendations:.....	6
Submission to the review of practical legal training	8
Introduction	8
Law courses	10
Reform of Practical Legal Training (PLT) – Practical knowledge and skills	14
Reform of Practical Legal Training (PLT) – Delivery of PLT	15
Workplace experience	18
Post Admission Legal Training (PALT)	21
Delivery of Post Admission Legal Training (PALT)	23
Clinical legal education.....	23
Supervision of early career lawyers	25
National Reform Context and Closing the Gap Alignment	25
Closing	26
Appendix A: FNAAFV Member List.....	29



First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV)

Who are we?

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) is the National Peak Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) for the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) sector. The FVPLS sector provides specialised domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) supports through delivery of culturally safe, holistic services to First Nations, predominantly women and their children. FNAAFV provides expert advice in areas of national policy, planning and law reform, sector capacity building, supporting innovation and best practice, through our advocacy for safety and justice for First Nations peoples affected by family violence. We collaborate across all sectors with a specialised focus on reducing experiences of all forms of DFSV experienced by First Nations families and households. FNAAFV's work is informed by principles of self-determination, culturally safe service delivery and implementation of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), consistent with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

Who are our members?

FNAAFV is the FVPLS sector peak body. The FVPLS sector consist of 16 distinct service organisations, with 14 of those organisations being proud members of FNAAFV (see [Appendix A – Member list](#)). The FVPLS sector is present in all jurisdictions. FVPLSs provide culturally safe and specialist legal and non-legal family and domestic violence assistance to more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

What do we do?

FNAAFV provides a unified voice for its FVPLS members in areas of national policy, program and legislative reform, and representation as a member of the [Coalition of Peaks](#). Our work, informed by evidence aims to inform implementation and progression of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap; the [National Access to Justice Partnership](#); the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#) and associated [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025](#).



Terminology

FNAAFV respectfully uses the terms “First Nations,” “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander,” “Aboriginal,” and “Indigenous” throughout this submission. These terms are used intentionally and contextually, including to reflect:

- the preferences of communities and organisation,
- the language used in legislation, policy, and national frameworks, and
- direct references to existing reports, agreements, and source materials.

FNAAFV acknowledges that language is important and should be guided by context, cultural authority, and self-identification.



Executive Summary

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the review of Practical Legal Training (PLT) and broader reforms to the legal education and early-career legal practice in Australia.

FNAAFV is the national peak body for Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLSs), representing specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled family legal services that deliver culturally safe and responsive, holistic legal and non-legal supports to First Nations victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) across Australia.

The FVPLS sector works at the frontline of some of the most legally, culturally, and ethically complex environments within the Australian justice systems. FVPLSs provide integrated responses that exist beyond legal assistance alone, including safety planning, advocacy, crisis support, referrals, court support and culturally safe and responsive, trauma-informed, healing-informed engagement with victim-survivors, families, and communities. FNAAFVs work is informed by the lived experience of First Nations women, children, families, and communities, together with more than 25 years specialist FVPLS sector leadership and expertise across FDSV, child protection and other legal systems.

As the specialist frontline legal sector, FNAAFV strongly supports reform of the current PLT framework and agrees with the consultation paper's finding that aspects of the existing model are no longer fit-for-purpose. The FVPLS sector has long observed that law graduates often enter practice underprepared for:

- Trauma-informed and healing-informed legal practice,
- Culturally safe and responsive engagement,
- Multidisciplinary service environments,
- Ethical complexity, and
- The realities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled legal service sector.

FNAAFV submits that PLT reform should not be viewed solely as educational reform. It is also:

- Workforce reform,
- Access to justice reform,
- Cultural safety reform, and
- An important opportunity to advance the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) and National Access to Justice Partnerships (NAJP).



FNAAFV is particularly concerned that aspects of proposed reform may unintentionally deepen existing inequities for First Nations law students and graduates if accessibility, cultural safety, regional and remote participation, and workforce sustainability are not central considerations in reform design.

This submission identifies significant barriers impacting First Nations graduates, including:

- High PLT costs,
- Unpaid placement expectations,
- Relocation and travel burdens,
- Limited regional and remote pathways,
- Culturally unsafe supervision, and
- Structural workforce inequities across the legal assistance sector.

FNAAFV also highlights the increasing pressures facing the FVPLS and broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Legal Services (ATSICCLS) sector including:

- Workforce shortages,
- Recruitment and retention challenges,
- Practitioner burnout, and
- Growing unmet legal need, particularly in regional and remote communities.

To address these challenges, FNAAFV recommends reforms that strengthen accessibility, cultural safety, and workforce sustainability across the legal profession.

Key Recommendations:

Strategic Reform Recommendations

1. Embedding cultural safety, trauma-informed and healing-informed practice, and family violence capability as core legal competencies within legal education and PLT reform.
2. Align PLT reform with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) and National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP), including all four CTG Priority Reforms.
3. Recognise FVPLSs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled legal services (ATSICCLS) as leaders in culturally safe legal education, clinical legal education, and workforce development.
4. Ensure PLT reform strengthens, rather than deepens, equity, accessibility and participation for First Nations law students and graduates.



Workforce, Accessibility, and Implementation Recommendations

5. Improving financial and structural support for First Nations law graduates undertaking PLT, including scholarship pathways, paid placements, and stipend. These mechanisms should prioritise FVPLSs and ATSIICLS who are not currently funded to provide this support.
6. Strengthening culturally safe regional and remote workforce pathways through flexible delivery models, regional PLT intensives, and community-based learning approaches.
7. Fund culturally safe supervision, mentoring and post-admission workforce support models for early-career lawyers.
8. Address risks associated with unpaid placement expectations and workforce inequities within the legal assistance sector.
9. Incorporate Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI), and culturally safe technology governance into legal education reform.
10. Improve national data collection, monitoring and accountability regarding:
 - a. First Nations participation and completion rates,
 - b. Workforce retention,
 - c. Regional and remote workforce pathways, and
 - d. Culturally safe supervision outcomes.

FNAAFV further recommends that PLT reform be aligned with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly:

- Priority Reform One – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making,
- Priority Reform Two – Building the Community-Controlled Sector,
- Priority Reform Three – Transforming Government Organisations, and
- Priority Reform Four – Shared Access to Data and Information

FNAAFV considers that culturally informed and equity-focused PLT reform present an important opportunity to strengthen:

- Workforce sustainability,
- Culturally safe and responsive legal systems,
- Regional and remote legal workforce pathways,
- Equitable access to justice, and
- Long-term outcomes for First Nations peoples and communities.



Submission to the review of practical legal training

Introduction

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the review of the Practical Legal Training (PLT) and broader reforms to legal education and early-career legal practice in Australia.

FNAAFV is concerned that the Review of Practical Legal Training Consultation Paper (April 2026) does not adequately consider or address the experiences, barriers and needs of First Nations law students, graduates, and legal practitioners, including those seeking to work within the FVPLS and broader ATSICCLS sector.

FNAAFV is also concerned by the limited consideration given to the accessibility needs and experiences of law students and graduates living with disability, particularly where disability, remoteness, financial hardship, and systemic inequity intersect to create compounding barriers to legal education, PLT completion, and entry into the legal profession.

The absence of meaningful analysis regarding First Nations participation, culturally safe legal education pathways, disability accessibility, caring-responsibilities; and the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services and broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Legal Service (ATSICCLS) sectors workforce needs represent a significant gap within current reform process and consultation framework.

FNAAFV is the national peak body for Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLSs), representing specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled organisations delivering culturally safe legal and non-legal support to First Nations victim-survivors of family violence across Australia.

The FVPLS sector operated at the intersection of:

- Family violence
- Child protection
- Criminal law
- Family law
- Tenancy and housing
- Victims support.

- Youth laws, and
- Broader social and community support systems and services.

Our sector works daily within some of the most complex legal and social environments in Australia, including regional and remote communities where access to justice is already under significant strain and where culturally safe legal assistance is critical.

As a frontline specialist legal sector peak organisation, FNAAFV strongly supports reform of the current PLT framework and agrees with the consultations paper's finding that the existing model is no longer fit-for-purpose.

The sector has long observed that graduates often enter practice underprepared for:

- Trauma-informed, healing-informed, and family violence legal practice
- Culturally safe and responsive engagement
- Multidisciplinary service environments
- Working with vulnerable clients
- Ethical complexity, and
- The realities of FVPLSs and other ATSI/CCLS.

FNAAFV supports reforms that strengthen practical legal capability, ethical practice, and public confidence in the legal profession. However, FNAAFV strongly emphasises that reform must:

- Improve, not reduce, equitable access into the profession.
- Address structural barriers faced by First Nations law students and graduates.
- Strengthen regional and remote pathways.
- Avoid creating additional unpaid or inaccessible training burdens, and
- Recognise the expertise of FVPLS and ATSI/CCLS sectors in developing culturally capable lawyers.

PLT reform should not be viewed solely as educational reform. It is also:

- Workforce reform
- Access to justice reform
- Cultural safety reform, and
- An opportunity to advance the National Closing the Gap (CTG) commitments.

Overarching Principles

1. Cultural safety is a core legal capability, not an optional or supplementary skill.
2. PLT reform must improve equity, not deepen inequity, and not deepen existing structural inequities.

- 
3. FVPLSs and ATSI CCLS expertise must be recognised as leaders in trauma-informed, healing-informed, culturally safe and responsive legal education and workforce development.
 4. Workforce sustainability and practitioner wellbeing are essential to successful reform.
 5. Regional and remote accessibility must remain central to all implementation and delivery models.

Law courses

Cultural Safety as Core Legal Capability

FNAAFV notes that the consultation paper does not expressly identify First Nations cultural capability, competency, or cultural safety as mandatory components of legal education reform.

Cultural safety should be recognised as a core component of professional legal capability and ethical legal practice. FNAAFV recommends that *A Framework for First Nations Cultural Capability in the Legal Profession* developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service¹ be embedded in the design and delivery of Law courses, including:

- A focus on increasing knowledge and understanding about history of settler colonialism and ongoing impacts of the legal system of First Nations communities.
- Increased capability to reflect on attitudes and positionality, including settler norms, ideas, and practices.
- A baseline understanding of Indigenous Cultural Capability (ICC) being recognised as legal best practice.

Access to culturally safe legal services for victim-survivors of family violence is foundational to the work of the FVPLS sector and has been advocated for by First Nations organisations for decades. The importance of culturally safe legal services for First Nations peoples, particularly women, has been recognised through:

- *R v Kina* [1993] QCA 480²,
- The coronial findings into the passing Veronica Nelson, a proud Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman³, and
- Numerous inquiries and reports examining systemic inequalities within the legal and justice systems over decades⁴.

¹ Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victoria Legal Aid and Law Institute of Victoria, *A Framework for First Nations Cultural Capability in the Legal Profession* (June 2025).

² *R v Kina* [1993] QCA 480, 40.

³ *Inquest into the Passing of Veronica Nelson* (Coroners Court of Victoria, 30 January 2023) 306–307.

⁴ See: Phyllis Daylight and Mary Johnstone, *Women's Business* (Report of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force, 1986) 17; Australian Law Reform Commission, *Equality Before the Law: Justice for Women* (ALRC Report No 69, July 1994)



The significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training as an element of education for legal practitioners was reflected in the findings into the passing of Veronica Nelson where the coroner noted:

*It is incumbent upon the legal profession to ensure that lawyers who work with clients in Veronica's position are alert to the range of challenges faced by an Aboriginal woman with a drug dependency in the criminal justice system and equipped to manage the barriers that might impede her capacity to provide instructions. In my view, legal practitioners would be aided by relevant training when they commence legal practice and refresher training at regular intervals throughout their careers.*⁵

For First Nations peoples, culturally unsafe legal practice can directly contribute to:

- Disengagement from legal systems,
- Failure to seek legal assistance,
- Miscommunication,
- Re-traumatisation,
- Escalation of legal matters,
- Poor legal outcomes, and
- Distrust of institutions.

Culturally capability is therefore not merely a diversity issue. It is a consumer protection, ethical practice, and access to justice issue.

The legal profession's consumer protection obligations cannot be fully realised without ensuring graduates are equipped to safety and effectively engage with First Nations peoples and communities.

FNAAFV recommends the Committees consider how FVPLSs have already led this work in various jurisdictions in the legal assistance sector and implement mandatory cultural safety training as a core legal capability that is designed and delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Legal Services.

Reforming law courses is also important in ensuring cultural safety for First Nations legal practitioners. The Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP Review) found that roughly 38% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who work in non-ACCO community legal services have experienced harassment and/or discrimination⁶.

12; Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice, Parliament of New South Wales, *The Family Response to the Murders in Bowraville* (No 55, November 2014) 32; Law Council of Australia, *The Justice Project, Final Report, Introduction and Overview* (August 2018) 24–25; Yoorook Justice Commission, *Yoorook for Justice Report* (Report into Victoria's Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems, 2023) 353.

⁵ *Inquest into the Passing of Veronica Nelson* (n 3) 106.

⁶ Warren Mundy, *Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25* (Final Report, March 2024) 153–175.



Trauma-Informed, Healing-Informed and Family Violence Capability

FNAAFV strongly recommends trauma-informed, healing-informed and family violence legal practice be recognised as a core foundational competency for entry-level lawyers. Large parts of the Australian legal system involve direct engagement with people impacted by:

- Family violence
- Sexual violence
- Child protection systems
- Criminal legal systems
- Youth legal systems
- Racism
- Discrimination
- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Intergenerational trauma, and
- Mental health distress

Trauma-informed, healing-informed and family violence capability is therefore not specialist knowledge restricted to certain practice areas. It is increasingly a core legal practice capability that can impact every client-based area of legal practice⁷.

Graduates should understand:

- Trauma impacts on communication and memory
- How legal systems can retraumatise clients.
- Safe interviewing practices
- Client regulation and distress, and
- Referral pathways within multidisciplinary settings

FNAAFV strongly recommends the revised competency framework include:

- Family violence competency
- Coercive control awareness
- Trauma-informed interviewing, and
- Understanding intersectional disadvantage

⁷ Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (Queensland), *Hear Her Voice* (Report One - Addressing coercive control and domestic and family violence in Queensland, May 2023) 20.



The revised competency framework should specifically include the following principles of trauma-informed practice:

- Safety – ensuring that clients feel emotionally and physically safe both in the environment and in their relationship with legal practitioners.
- Trust – being clear and transparent with clients about what decisions are made and why.
- Collaboration – minimising power imbalances by finding ways to work with clients, allowing them to participate in their case.
- Choice – informing clients about the options available to them and giving them genuine control over the decisions affecting them.
- Empowerment – building on clients’ strengths and amplifying their voice.

FNAAFV also strongly recommends that Aboriginal and Torres Islander ways of doing, knowing, and being are recognised as foundational to trauma and healing-informed legal practice:

- Building genuine relationships and foster connection as a foundation for healing
- Understanding trauma and its impacts on individuals, families, and communities
- Recognising the dynamics of power and privilege and embed cultural safety in all practice.
- Creating environments where staff, clients and community members feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe.
- Walking alongside clients, empowering them in their own journey of healing and recovery.
- Integrating and coordinating practice to holistically meet the needs of individuals, families, and communities⁸

AI, Technology, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty

FNAAFV supports inclusion of ethical AI capability within legal education reform.

However, training should move beyond technical competence and include:

- Bias and discrimination risks,
- Cultural harms,
- Confidentiality,
- Misuse of client information,
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles and considerations,
- Ethical management of sensitive community information, and
- Risks associated with AI-generated legal content impacting vulnerable communities.

⁸ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), ‘Trauma-Informed Care: Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities’ (August 2021) 43(3) *InPsych* <<https://psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/inpsych/2021/august-special-issue-3/trauma-informed-care>>.



Early career lawyers must understand that technology does not replace ethical judgement, cultural safety, or professional responsibility.

AI systems are not neutral. Without appropriate safeguards, oversight and critical understanding, emerging technologies risk reinforcing systemic bias and reproducing existing inequalities experienced by First Nations peoples within legal and justice systems. We recognise the impact these systems have had on marginalised communities in other jurisdictions as well as in Australia⁹. The risks that such systems pose and how they can disproportionately impact First Nations people should be embedded into PLT, particularly as they begin to be introduced into judicial decision-making processes in Australia¹⁰.

Reform of Practical Legal Training (PLT) – Practical knowledge and skills

FNAAFV supports strengthening practical legal capabilities within PLT. However, reform must recognise that contemporary legal practice increasingly occurs within:

- multidisciplinary service environments
- FVPLS trauma- informed, healing-informed and family violence practice settings
- ATSI/CCLS sector
, and
- First Nations culturally diverse communities

Graduates should therefore be equipped to:

- work collaboratively with non-legal professionals.
- understand referral systems.
- engage in integrated service responses, and
- navigate complex service systems.

⁹ Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, *An Investigation into the Use of the NSW Police Force Suspect Targeting Management Plan on Children and Young People* (Operation Tepito, Final Report, October 2023) 9; Elizabeth Englezos, 'Policing by Algorithm: NSW Police's Suspect Target Management Plan' (2023) 48(1) *Alternative Law Journal* 17.

¹⁰ Chief Justice Thomas Bathurst, 'Modern and Future Judging' (Sir Maurice Byers Lecture, NSW Bar Association, 3 November 2021) 45 <https://supremecourt.nsw.gov.au/documents/Publications/Speeches/2021-Speeches/Bathurst_20211103.pdf>.

FNAAFV is concerned that the communication and client relationship skill areas do not focus enough on building the competency of lawyers to communicate and build relationships in culturally safe, trauma-informed ways. The following communication and client relationship competencies need to be recognised to strengthen practical legal capabilities within PLT:

- Active listening (taking the time to listen without judgement) as a key communication skill for legal practitioners when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients¹¹.
- Accessible communication that avoids legal jargon and focuses on explaining processes clearly¹².
- Establishing trust through relationship-building as best practice when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients¹³. To recognise this, the importance of relationship-building needs to be explicitly included as in the client relationship key skill area.
- Reflective practice where lawyers need to have the skills to recognise that they must adapt their communication approach when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.
- Lawyers should have the skills to recognise when language interpreters and/or cultural supports need to be available when working with clients who speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their first language¹⁴.

FNAAFV also notes that many First Nations graduates face structural barriers in completing PLT and transitioning into practice.

Reform proposals should therefore explicitly include:

- targeted financial support,
- culturally safe supervision,
- supported placement pathways,
- regional and remote access solutions,
- mentoring, and
- partnerships with Aboriginal Community-Controlled legal services

Reform of Practical Legal Training (PLT) – Delivery of PLT

¹¹ Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victoria Legal Aid and Law Institute of Victoria (n 1).

¹² Australian Pro Bono Centre, *Working with First Nations Clients: Best Practice Approaches to Providing Pro Bono Legal Services* (August 2025) 25.

¹³ Heather Douglas and Robin Fitzgerald, 'The Domestic Violence Protection Order System as Entry to the Criminal Justice System for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People' (2018) 7(3) *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 41.

¹⁴ Bellach Peter, 'Working with Aboriginal Clients: What Makes a Good Lawyer?' (2014) 8(11) *Indigenous law bulletin* 22, 23.



The reforms to PLT will have an inherent impact on the workforce of the broader legal assistance sector. We note that the workforce challenges faced by the legal assistance sector, and particularly the FVPLS sector, were articulated extensively in NLAP Review and that developing a more sustainable workforce is one of the priority reforms identified under the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP).

Whilst reform to PLT alone cannot address all the existing structural workforce challenges within the legal assistance sector, PLT is essential for our sector as our member organisations are not funded to develop ongoing training for their own workforce. This means that PLT is crucial for graduate lawyers entering the workforce and that the work required to prepare graduates to enter the workforce does not fall solely on a sector which is under resourced and overworked.

In person delivery

FNAAFV is concerned that a transition to in-person delivery models may disproportionately disadvantage regional and remote students if not carefully designed. FNAAFV's analysis of existing PLT providers suggests that most existing in-person models are delivered in metropolitan areas. FNAAFV does not support the notion suggested in the review that students from regional and remote areas, as well as those with disabilities or caring responsibilities should be considered as 'exceptional cases' and we would not support a model in which these students would be required to undertake a formal process to seek an exemption to undertake PLT training remotely.

Many First Nations law graduates:

- Live outside metropolitan centres
- Return to community after university.
- Work within under-resourced legal services.

Mandatory metropolitan attendance requirement risk:

- Increasing financial hardship
- Reducing completion rates
- Forcing relocation away from community and cultural supports and
- Excluding future practitioners from remote workforce pathways.

FNAAFV recommends that any in-person requirements:

- Allow regional and remote delivery hubs.
- Permit high-quality synchronous online learning.
- Include intensive block models.
- Support hybrid learning, and
- Avoid 'one-size-fits-all' metropolitan models.



Costs of PLT

The consultation paper also acknowledges that PLT costs currently range from approximately \$6,000 to over \$16,000.

For many First Nations graduates, barriers include:

- Tuition fees
- Relocation costs
- Accommodation
- Unpaid placement requirements
- Travel expenses
- Loss of income during study, and
- Balancing family, community, and cultural obligations

Furthermore, the costs required to complete PLT has a direct impact on workforce supply for the FVPLS sector. It is not uncommon for private law firms to fund employees' PLT costs¹⁵ and in some jurisdictions Legal Aid Commissions have recruitment pathways in place to fund PLT costs for law graduates. Our Commonwealth funded FVPLS member organisations do not receive funding to do the same for their employees. This is an additional factor which incentivises law graduates to seek employment with private law firms or with Legal Aid Commissions. This has a real impact on the legal workforce supply for the FVPLS sector and ultimately makes it more difficult for our members to be able to recruit and retain legal practitioners in an environment where funding disparities already create uneven workforce attraction and retention conditions, particularly in regional and remote areas.

FNAAFV recommends:

- Commonwealth and state-funded PLT scholarship schemes
- Travel and accommodation assistance, and
- Expanded fee support mechanisms

FNAAFV supports reducing duplication and modernising PLT. However, any reduction in formal PLT duration must be accompanied by:

- Stronger supervision frameworks
- Accessible post-admission learning
- Culturally safe mentoring, and
- Funded practical learning opportunities.

¹⁵ Legal Profession Admission Board of New South Wales, *Discussion Paper on PLT Reform* (30 September 2025) 160.



Workplace experience

FNAAFV acknowledges that many FVPLSs and other ATSICCLSs are already operating under significant workforce, funding, and service demand pressures. Any expansion of workplace placements, supervision responsibilities or clinical legal education partnerships must therefore be appropriately funded, supported and designed in partnership with the sector to avoid unintentionally increasing workforce strain.

FNAAFV strongly supports workplace experience as a critical component of clinical legal education and professional capability development.

However, FNAAFV is concerned that increased reliance on workplace experience and clinical legal education may unintentionally increase unpaid labour expectations for students and graduates.

This disproportionately impacts:

- First Nations students
- Regional and remote students
- Mature-age students
- Carers, and
- Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Another concern is increasing the existing resourcing and income inequalities faced by FVPLSs and ATSICCLSs. The NLAP review found that employees from FVPLSs reportedly earn 20% to 30% less than staff working at Legal Aid Commissions (LACs). Further, the average salary offered to graduate solicitors at Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service is 17- 32% below the average offered by a mid-tier and top-tier law firm in Melbourne¹⁶.

PLT reform should not shift costs from providers to students through unpaid labour expectations.

Consideration should be given to:

Paid placement models

- Structured graduate trainee or cadetship models that allow students and graduates to undertake PLT workplace experience as paid employees within legal assistance services, including FVPLSs.

This could include:

- Part-time or full-time graduate trainee positions
- Paid clerkship-style pathways linked to PLT completion, or
- Wage subsidised trainee roles supported through Commonwealth or State funding arrangements,

¹⁶ Mundy (n 6) 153–175.

- Paid placement models would reduce financial barriers while strengthening workforce pipelines into community-controlled legal sectors.

Stipend programs

- Targeted financial assistance programs to support students undertaking compulsory workplace experience, particularly First Nations students and those in regional and remote communities.
- Stipend support could assist with:
 - Living expenses,
 - Travel,
 - Accommodation,
 - Relocation costs,
 - Internet and technology access, and
 - Participation in regional and remote placements.
- This would help reduce inequitable barriers created by unpaid placement expectations and geographic isolation.

Placement subsidies for host organisations

- Dedicated government funding to support organisations hosting PLT students and graduates. This could include funding for:
 - Supervision time,
 - Placement coordination,
 - Training resources,
 - Mentoring,
 - Cultural supervision, and
 - Administrative costs associated with placements.

Travel and accommodation assistance

- Targeted support for students required to travel or relocate to undertake workplace experience or PLT intensives. This could include:
 - Regional and remote travel subsidies,
 - Accommodation assistance,
 - Transport support, and
 - Remote connectivity assistance.
- Such support would help ensure regional and remote students are not disproportionately disadvantaged by placement or training requirements.



Government-supported workforce pathways

- Long-term workforce initiatives connecting legal education, PLT, admission employment pathways within the legal assistance and Aboriginal community-controlled legal sectors. This could include:
 - First Nations graduate pathways programs,
 - Targeted regional and remote workforce schemes,
 - Funded mentoring and supervision programs, and
 - Structured pathways into FVPLSs and other Aboriginal community-controlled legal service sectors.
- These approaches would support workforce sustainability, improve regional and remote legal workforce pipelines, and strengthen culturally safe legal services nationally.

FNAAFV strongly supports:

Placement partnerships with FVPLSs

- Government-supported partnerships enabling FVPLSs and other Aboriginal community-controlled legal service sectors to become recognised PLT and clinical legal education placement providers. This could include:
 - Funded placement coordinator positions
 - Wage subsidies or stipends for students
 - Supervision funding,
 - Culturally safe mentoring programs, and
 - Structured graduate pathways into FVPLSs

Regional PLT intensives

- Short-form block-delivered PLT programs delivered within regional centres or Aboriginal community-controlled legal services organisations, allowing students to undertake practical training without prolonged relocation to metropolitan areas. For example:
 - 1 -2 week in-person intensive training delivered in regional hubs such as Broome, Kalgoorlie, Dubbo
 - Combined with ongoing online learning and local workplace placements.
 - Supported by travel and accommodation.
- This model would improve accessibility for regional and remote students while strengthening local workforce pathways.



Community-based learning models

- Partnerships between universities, PLT providers, and Aboriginal community-controlled legal service sectors that allow students to learn directly within community-based legal and multi-disciplinary service environments. This could include:
 - Supervised placement rotations within FVPLSs
 - Exposure to holistic legal and non-legal practice
 - Multidisciplinary case management, and
 - Culturally safe and responsive service delivery.
- These models recognise that contemporary legal practice increasingly occurs outside traditional private-firm environments.

Remote supervision technology

- Use of secure digital supervision and mentoring models to support students and graduates undertaking placements or supervised legal practice in regional and remote communities. This could include:
 - Regular video supervision sessions,
 - Virtual file reviews,
 - Remote advocacy observation,
 - Online reflective practice sessions,
 - Peer mentoring networks, and
 - Culturally safe supervision supports across jurisdictions.
- This would help address geographic isolation while maintaining supervision quality and workforce connectivity.

Post Admission Legal Training (PALT)

FNAAFV supports structured, culturally informed, and practice-based post – admission learning and professional development for early career lawyers.

The FVPLS sector, alongside the broader Aboriginal community-controlled legal service sectors, operates within environments of significant workforce pressure and complexity.

These sectors already face:

- Significant workforce shortages
- Recruitment challenges
- Burnout
- Workforce attrition, and

- 
- Retention pressures in regional and remote communities

For many early career practitioners entering FVPLSs and ATSICCLSs, the work involves exposure to highly complex legal matters and confronting realities including family violence, child protection, youth justice, racism, intergenerational trauma, and community grief and loss. Lawyers are often required to navigate these issues while working within under-resources systems and geographically isolated environments with limited formal supervision and professional support opportunities.

PLT reform should therefore be viewed not only as an education reform issue, but as part of a broader national workforce sustainability and justice access strategy. Stronger post-admission support pathways are critical to building and retaining culturally capable, trauma-informed, and sustainable legal workforce.

Poorly supported early-career lawyers are at increased risk of:

- Burnout,
- Secondary and vicarious trauma,
- Moral distress,
- Professional isolation,
- Unsafe or unsupported practice, and
- Early exit from FVPLSs and other ATSICCLSs.

These impacts are particularly significant within FVPLSs and other ATSICCLSs, where workforce instability directly affects continuity of care, trust, cultural safety, and access to justice for communities.

FNAAFV therefore supports post-admission legal training models that embed:

- Reflective practice and professional supervision,
- Trauma-informed practice and healing-informed practice approaches,
- Culturally safety and capability development,
- Ethical decision-making and professional accountability,
- Practitioner wellbeing and psychosocial safety,
- Supported mentoring and peer learning opportunities, and
- Place-based and culturally responsive learning models relevant to regional and remote practice contexts.

FNAAFV further encourages consideration of funded and coordinated supervision, mentoring and wellbeing supports for lawyers entering FVPLSs and other ATSICCLSs, recognising that workforce sustainability cannot rely solely on individual resilience. Sustainable legal workforces require systemic investment, culturally safe workplaces and professional development structures that support practitioners to remain healthy, effective, and connected to community over the long term.



Delivery of Post Admission Legal Training (PALT)

FNAAFV supports flexible, accessible, and culturally responsive delivery models for PALT, particularly for practitioners in regional and remote communities.

Access to ongoing learning should not be determined by geography, organisational size, or financial capacity. However, practitioners working with FVPLSs and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled legal services in remote contexts frequently face significant barriers to accessing professional development opportunities, including travel costs, workforce backfilling pressures, limited local training availability and unreliable digital infrastructure.

For many services, releasing staff to attend metropolitan-based training can create substantial operational impacts, particularly in already under-resources environments where legal practitioners are managing high workloads and complex client needs. Excessive travel requirements can also contribute to practitioner fatigue, disruption to community-based delivery and additional workforce strain.

PALT delivery models should therefore:

- Remain accessible and affordable,
- Support hybrid and online participation options,
- Avoid excessive travel burdens and centralised delivery models.
- Recognise differing levels of digital connectivity and infrastructure access.
- Support flexible participation and frontline service delivery demands, and
- Enable culturally safe and place- based learning opportunities.

Clinical legal education

FNAAFV strongly supports the expanded inclusion and recognition of clinical legal education within PLT and broader legal education reform.

Clinical legal education provides critical opportunities for students and early-career practitioners to develop practical legal capability within real-world service environments. Importantly. It also supports the development of professional judgement, ethical decision-making, cultural capability, and client-centered practice skills that cannot be fully replicated through classroom-based learning alone.

FVPLSs and other ATSICCLSs offer uniquely valuable learning environments for:

- Practical legal learning and advocacy skills,
- Ethical development and reflective professional development,
- Exposure to systemic injustices and structural inequality,

- Client-centered practice and community-centred practice,
- Trauma-informed and culturally safe services delivery, and
- multidisciplinary and holistic responses to complex legal and social issues.

These practice settings expose students and graduates to the realities of frontline legal assistance work, including the intersection of family violence, child protection, housing insecurity, racism, policing, mental health, and community wellbeing. They also provide critical insight into the importance of trust, cultural safety and relationship-based practice when working with First Nations communities.

FNAAFV supports clinical legal education models that:

- Include structured placements within FVPLSs and other ATSICCLS providers,
- Recognise these placements as legitimate, high-value legal and specialist legal training environments,
- Provide dedicated funding and resourcing support for host organisations, and
- Promote equitable access to placements for First Nations law students and graduates.

FVPLSs and other ATSICCLS possess significant expertise in:

- Culturally safe and responsive legal practice
- Trauma-informed and healing-informed service delivery
- Multidisciplinary and holistic service responses,
- Community engagement and relationship-based practice, and
- coordinated legal and non-legal assistance models.

These organisations should not simply be viewed as placement hosts. They are leaders in culturally informed legal practice and should be recognised as key contributors to the future design, delivery, and reform of legal education nationally.

FNAAFV therefore recommends the formal partnerships with FVPLSs and other ATSICCLS in:

- Curriculum and competency design,
- Clinical legal education reform processes,
- Supervision and mentoring standards,
- Placement framework development, and
- ongoing legal education policy and workforce planning discussions.

Greater investment in clinical education partnerships with FVPLSs and ATSICCLS would strengthen the future legal workforce, improve cultural capability across the progression and support more accessible, community responsive and trauma-informed legal systems.



Supervision of early career lawyers

The consultation paper appropriately identifies national concerns regarding supervision, including risks associated with remote work arrangements and inconsistent supervision quality.

However, FNAAFV considers the reforms should go further in addressing:

- Culturally unsafe supervision,
- Institutional racism,
- Isolation of First Nations graduates,
- Tokenism, and
- A lack of culturally informed mentoring.

FNAAFV recommends supervision frameworks explicitly include:

- Cultural safety obligations
- Anti-racism capability
- Trauma-informed supervision
- Reflective practice
- Culturally safe complaint pathways, and
- Mentoring for First Nations graduates

National Reform Context and Closing the Gap Alignment

FNAAFV recommends the Committee explicitly consider the broader national policy and reform context, including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) and National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP).

Improving pathways into the legal profession for First Nations law students and graduates is directly connected to national commitments relating to:

- Structural reform
- Culturally safe institutions
- Equitable access to justice
- Workforce participation, and
- Self-determination

PLT reform presents an important opportunity to operationalise all four (4) Priority Reforms under CTG.

This includes:

- 
- Priority Reform One (1) – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making by ensuring Aboriginal Community-Controlled Legal Sectors, including FVPLSs and ATSILS, are genuine partners in the design, delivery and supervision of legal education, workplace training, and clinical legal education models.
 - Priority Reform Two (2) – Building the Community-Controlled Sector through investment in FVPLSs and ATSICCLSs as placement providers, clinical legal education partners, culturally safe environments, and long-term legal workforce development pathways.
 - Priority Reform Three (3)- Transform Government Organisations by strengthening culturally safe legal institutions, increasing First Nations representation across the legal profession and justice systems, and improving institutional capability to respond safely and effectively to First Nations peoples and communities.
 - Priority Reform Four (4) – Shared Access to Data and Information by improving collection, monitoring, and reporting of data relating to:
 - First Nations completion rates in PLT
 - Barriers to admission and workforce retention
 - Regional and remote workforce pathways
 - Supervision experiences, and
 - Culturally safe training outcomes

FNAAFV recommends that any future PLT reform implementation framework include transparent accountability mechanisms and reporting against CTG outcomes, particularly regarding:

- First Nations participation and completion rates
- Workforce retention
- Culturally safe supervision outcomes, and
- Regional and remote workforce pathways.

PLT reform also presents an opportunity to support the long-term policy priorities of the National Access to Justice Partnership, namely the fourth priority which is 'developing a National Legal Assistance Workforce Strategy'.

Without intentional design, reform risks reproducing inequities within the legal profession and broader legal system.

Closing

This review presents an important opportunity to reshape legal education in a way that better reflects the realities of contemporary legal practice, strengthens workforce sustainability, and improves equitable access to justice for First Nations peoples and communities.



FNAAFV strongly emphasises that PLT reform must not be approached solely as an education reform process. It is also:

- Workforce reform
- Cultural safety reform
- Access to justice reform, and
- Opportunity to advance the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and National Access to justice Partnerships.

Without intentionally and equity-focused reform, existing barriers within the legal profession risk being further entrenched, especially for First Nations law student, graduates, and practitioners, as well as those living and working in regional and remote communities.

The FVPLS sector and broader ATSI/CLS sector possess significant expertise in:

- Culturally safe and responsive legal practice
- Trauma-informed and healing-informed service delivery
- Multidisciplinary and holistic assistance
- Community-led workforce development, and
- Relationship-based practice grounded in trust, accountability, and self-determination.

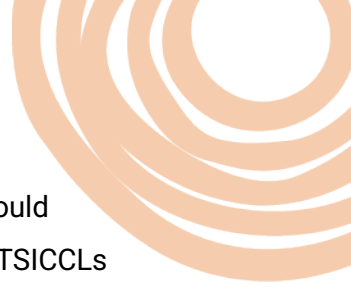
These sectors should not simply be viewed as placements hosts or stakeholders within reform discussion. They are leaders in culturally informed legal practice and essential partners in the future design, delivery and supervision of legal education and workforce development nationally.

FNAAFV urges the committee to ensure that future PLT reform:

- Embeds cultural safety as a core legal capability.
- Strengthens accessibility and equity.
- Supports regional and remote workforce pathways.
- Invests in culturally safe supervision and mentoring.
- Addressed financial and structural barriers faced by First Nations graduates, and
- Aligns with national commitments under Closing the Gap.

The evidence is clear. The workforce pressures are known. The barriers by First Nations graduates FVPLSs and ATSI/CLSs are long withstanding and well documented.

What is now required is coordination, evidence-informed and properly implementation.



FNAAFV welcomes ongoing engagement regarding this reform and process and would welcome opportunities for further consultation with the FVPLS sector and boarder ATSICCLs sectors as reforms progress.

Please consider receipt of this submission permission for it to be made publicly available.

Appendix A: FNAAFV Member List



NAAFLS
NORTH AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL FAMILY
LEGAL SERVICE



**Ngaanyatjarra
Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council**



Aboriginal
Family Violence
Legal Service



Binaal Billa
Family Violence Prevention Legal Service



**Aboriginal
Family** LEGAL
SERVICES





- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Western Australia (Perth Head Office, Broome, Carnarvon, Kununurra, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland)
- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Queensland (Toowoomba Head Office, Roma, Murgon and Gympie)
- Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Forbes)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation (Alice Springs Head Office, Tennant Creek)
- Djirra (statewide service with head office in Melbourne and 8 regional offices in Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Echuca, Shepparton, Morwell, Melton & Mildura)
- Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (Port Augusta Head Office, Ceduna, Pt Lincoln)
- Many Rivers Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Kempsey Head Office, Grafton)
- Marninwarnitkura Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Fitzroy Crossing)
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Domestic and Family Violence Service (Alice Springs, NPY Tri-state Region)
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (Cairns Head Office, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Bamaga, Thursday Island and Brisbane)
- Thiyama-li Family Violence Service Indigenous Corporation (Moree Head Office, Bourke, Walgett)
- Warra-Warra Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Broken Hill)
- North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (Darwin Head Office, Katherine)
- SiSTAS (Hobart Head Office, Tasmania)

