

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



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LEGAL SERVICES PANEL TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

Women barristers will have greater opportunities through a new Victorian Government Legal Services Panel.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes today announced legal firms can apply to be appointed to the new legal services panel for an initial fixed term of three years, starting on 1 July. The Department of Justice and Community Safety will appoint the panel through an open tender.

The panel allows government departments and agencies to purchase legal advice and representation from private law firms at competitive rates.

Areas of law to be covered by the panel include administrative, employment, property, contracts, general commercial, and planning and environmental law.

Firms on the new panel will be required to provide an increased portion of barrister briefs and counsel fees to female barristers, with a new target of at least 50 per cent of briefs to women barristers, and will be required to report to government on diversity policy and practices as well as gender pay gaps.

The Andrews Labor Government is also committed to recognising and encouraging the provision of pro bono services for vulnerable Victorians.

Community legal centres will benefit from these pro bono services arrangements, strengthening and supporting social outcomes for Victorians. This will include requiring large firms to contribute legal staff to community legal centres.

Current legal services panel firms have delivered more than \$260 million in pro bono legal services since March 2016.

Victorian law firms, including large, small, medium and regional firms, interested in providing legal services to the Government are invited to submit a tender via tenders.vic.gov.au, with tenders closing at 2.00pm on 16 February 2023.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"The appointment of a new Legal Services Panel will produce high-quality, cost-competitive and consistent legal services. It will ensure that more briefs go to women barristers, boosting equal opportunity."

"The panel's new pro bono obligations will deliver services to Victorians experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, helping those who need it most."