

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited

Media Release



Aboriginal Legal Services in Australia and Canada join forces to increase access to justice for Aboriginal communities

Toronto (September 22, 2015):

The Aboriginal Legal Service of Toronto (ALST) and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) have joined forces in their work to continue to increase access to justice for Aboriginal communities.

Two Legal Services are over 16,000 kilometres from one another, yet share many of the same challenges and issues. Discussions commenced earlier in 2015 on how the two organisations could support each other, learn from each other and knowledge share, including providing professional development opportunities for staff from each respective service.

Today the VALS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with ALST. Wayne Muir, the Chief Executive Officer of VALS was in Toronto to sign the MOU with ALST's Board President, Amanda Carling.

In both Australia and Canada, Aboriginal peoples are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups. In both countries, Aboriginal people are tremendously overrepresented in the criminal justice system. The agreement entered into today reflects a joint commitment to collaboration, information and resource sharing which will further the work of both services and improve outcomes for Aboriginal peoples in Ontario and Victoria.

ALST President Amanda Carling stated "We believe that entering into this MOU will strengthen both of our agencies' understanding, knowledge and ability to increase access to justice for our communities. Our goal is to ameliorate conditions for Aboriginal peoples in Ontario and Victoria, in Canada and Australia and, ultimately, around the world."

VALS CEO Wayne Muir stated "Both legal services have a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and practice resources that we can share with one another. Building off each other's strength in practice experience benefits our clients." Mr Muir further stated that a lot of planning and goodwill has gone into bringing the two organisations together and this was the first such MOU for Aboriginal Legal Services in Australia.