Law informed:
The value of telephone legal information services to clients

Catriona Mirrlees-Black
Law and Justice Foundation of NSW
December 2020

LAW AND JUSTICE FOUNDATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The Law and Justice Foundation of NSW was engaged by Victoria Legal Aid to prepare this report.

The Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that seeks to advance the fairness and equity of the justice system, and to improve access to justice, especially for socially and economically disadvantaged people.

Authors: Catriona Mirrlees-Black

Title: Law informed: The value of telephone legal information services to clients

ISBN: 978-0-6484225-6-3

Other Authors/
Contributors: Maria Karras and Sarah Randell

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

Publisher

Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales
Level 13, 222 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A109 Sydney South NSW 1235
Ph: +61 2 8227 3200
Email: publications@lawfoundation.net.au
Web: www.lawfoundation.net.au

© Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales, December 2020.

This publication is copyright. It may be reproduced in part or in whole for educational purposes as long as proper credit is given to the Foundation.

Any opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation's Board of Governors.

LAW INFORMED: THE VALUE OF TELEPHONE LEGAL INFORMATION SERVICES TO CLIENTS

Catriona Mirrlees-Black
with Maria Karras and Sarah Randell

Acknowledgements

The Foundation would like to thank Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) for funding this research under our Research Alliance, which was set up to facilitate work of mutual interest. Particular thanks go to Cameron Hume, Rosy Jolic and Bridget McAloon for their oversight and guidance. The research design, surveys and final report were all informed by the valuable input of VLA's project steering group, comprising Rowan McCrae, Jon Cina, Himmat Singh, Rob Catania, Carman Parsons, Monica Ferrari, Annie Mereos, Jasmine Fiegehen and Michelle Bottomley.

A special thank you to the management and all the team at Legal Help who were required to collect and record additional information during their already busy work schedule. It was very clear from the research that what they do is much appreciated by their clients.

We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Claire Ascoli who managed and conducted the three-month survey fieldwork, and the specially recruited fieldwork team who undertook the one-week surveys: Campbell Burns, Daisy D'Souza, Gabrielle Lambert-Bridges, Laura Campbell, Leroy Angove and Shally Zhou.

This final version of the report has been enhanced by the insightful suggestions of the peer reviewer, Suzie Forell of Health Justice Australia.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the participation of over a hundred of Victoria Legal Aid's clients. The Foundation is very grateful for their time and thoughtful contributions.

Contents

Executive Summary 5

Sections

1 Legal information services at Victoria Legal Aid 11

2 A methodology for assessing value 17

3 Reach: who calls about what? 23

4 Access: how do clients access the service? 39

5 Appropriate: what is provided to clients? 49

6 Experience: What do clients experience? 61

7 Actions: what do clients do next? 71

8 Resolution: what do clients achieve? 79

9 Conclusion 97

Appendices

Appendix 1 Appendix Tables 103

Appendix 2 Methodology 108

Appendix 3 Measuring legal capability 117

Appendix 4 Legal Help automated message & out of scope matters 120

Appendix 5 Legal Help ATLAS data 122

Appendix 6 Client recruitment form 127

Appendix 7 One-week client survey questionnaire 136

Appendix 8 Three-month client survey questionnaire 152

References 161

Executive Summary

The aim of VLA's information services is to *provide Victorians with reliable, targeted and timely legal information that meets their diverse needs, interests and capabilities.*

Legal Help at Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is a telephone and webchat information and referral service available to everyone in the Victorian community. It also provides a gateway to more intensive services for those clients that meet certain criteria. Calls are handled by both legal information officers and lawyers, with the latter available to provide tailored legal advice to clients who qualify for this service. The focus of this evaluation was the telephone information and referral services provided by Legal Help. Other aspects of Legal Help, such as its webchat, legal advice services and triage functions, were not directly assessed in this research.

The research assessed the value of Legal Help's information/referral services to clients in the broader context of the Victorian legal assistance sector's information and service provision. Part of Legal Help's role is to provide clients with information about, or referral to, other providers or to more intensive support within VLA. As some clients utilise this, as intended, to access more intensive legal assistance, this is not and could not be, an evaluation of the impact of *only* receiving information/referral.

The service was evaluated on its reach to the community, accessibility to clients, appropriateness of services provided, client experience, actions prompted and client outcomes using three main data sources: information collected by Legal Help staff about 1,061 clients, a survey of 111 of these clients within about a week of the call and a further survey of 85 of these clients three months later.

Section 3: Reach

- A service with effective reach will demonstrate levels of demand in line with expectations; a range of problems substantial enough to require legal assistance; and a client profile that matches the intended target population.
- Legal Help receives **a large number of calls on a wide range of problems** from across the Victorian community.
- Although family problems are the most common legal problem enquired about, **civil problems are the most common information/referral legal problem type** as clients with family law problems are more likely to qualify for Legal Help's advice services.
- About **a fifth of information/referral enquiries are about problems that are out of scope** for Legal Help's advice services, but for which a referral can be provided. These are generally civil law matters of a more corporate nature or for matters which there is alternative provision.
- While the service provided is relatively low intensity, **clients' problems are not trivial:** a half of all problems were described by surveyed clients as having a severe impact, emotionally and/or financially.
- The diversity of Legal Help's information clients indicates that the service has a **good reach** into all sectors of the community. For instance, the service is well utilised by people

for whom English is not a first language, confirming the importance of providing interpreter services.

- Clients of both information/referral and advice services have a **more disadvantaged profile** than the Victorian community, which may reflect variations in problem prevalence across socio-demographic groups and that no-cost is the main attraction of the service.
- **Educational attainment, though, is relatively high** which might suggest a degree of capability helps users access this service.
- The **impact of problems on clients increased with the number of vulnerabilities they had,** probably reflecting the impact of belonging to multiple priority groups for service on legal capability.

Section 4: Access

- For an information/referral service to be accessible, clients must have a good awareness of its availability so that they can access it early in their help-seeking or easily when they require assistance. Access is also likely to be enhanced if the service is perceived as widely available and trustworthy.
- Two-thirds of surveyed clients had not called Legal Help previously. This high proportion of 'new' clients suggests that **Legal Help has a good level of community awareness**.
- This **awareness is facilitated through several channels** with the internet, recommendations from friends/relatives and referrals all important in generating traffic to the service.
- Legal Help is usually **a first point of external assistance for legal help,** after friends/relatives and perhaps some internet searching. Where this is not the case, clients are usually seeking free/cheaper help having initially approached a private lawyer.
- Four in ten clients had looked at the VLA website before their call, and these clients were more likely to say they were looking for personalised support. **The website may be diverting clients whose information needs have been met**, though alternatively these clients could better articulate the more personalised support they were looking for.
- The **no-cost feature of the service is particularly attractive,** with financial reasons being the most commonly mentioned reason for accessing the service.
- The brand recognition of Legal Aid ensures **Legal Help is seen as a trusted provider** of legal information.
- A substantial proportion of **legal problems had been going on for a while**, with external events or client preparedness prompting contact. This was particularly so for clients with multiple vulnerabilities.

Section 5: Appropriate

- To deliver a service that is appropriate, clients needs must be understood and met at the point of service delivery with accurate and relevant information and referrals. As information services are unlikely to be sufficient for low capability clients, these clients should be identified and triaged to more intensive help.
- **Many callers to Legal Help are looking for personalised 'advice'** about a specific problem or clear direction in what they should do next, rather than information or referral, particularly if they have already accessed information from the VLA website and found this too generic.

- **Clients with multiple vulnerabilities were the most likely to say they were looking for active assistance** such as legal representation.
- Legal Help staff tend to be validly **optimistic about the support** they have provided to clients and they are reasonably good at assessing the client's interpretation of the experience.
- **Client's issues were usually said to be easy to understand** and clients generally felt their needs had been understood by the person they spoke to.
- **Almost all clients were given a referral** to an external organisation or to another part of VLA.
- About half were also sent an information email. Use of **information emails was greater for clients with no or just one vulnerability** than those with multiple vulnerabilities.
- **Referrals to community legal centres were the most common type of referral**, except for out of scope matters for which referral to external lawyers/Law Institute of Victoria was the most common. **Referral to non-legal support is very rare.**

Section 6: Experience

- Immediate positive outcomes are experienced by clients when they perceive they were heard and helped and feel empowered to act on the information and referrals that have been effectively communicated to them.
- **Most clients recall being given a referral** to another organisation or person. Assessing the accuracy of that recall was hard as **clients don't distinguish well between legal assistance providers**. However, there is some evidence that referrals to community legal centres are better recalled than those to private lawyers/Law Institute of Victoria.
- **Clients value the immediate experience of the call highly**, with most saying that the Legal Help staff treated them with respect and sympathetically and understood what they wanted.
- **Clients with multiple vulnerabilities found it harder to understand what they were told** or had other questions they would have liked to ask but didn't. They were less likely to feel heard, more likely to feel frustrated and less likely to feel helped than other clients.
- For most, though, the call generally resulted in the **client feeling empowered** with a better understanding of their options and confidence about what to do next.
- Where clients have **an expectation of information tailored to their own circumstances this can lead to disappointment and frustration**. Two-thirds of clients seeking active assistance or representation said they should have been given more help.

Section 7: Actions

- Medium-term outcomes, in the days and weeks following the call, see clients empowered to resolve their dispute, using the information and referrals they were provided with to take action or to make the informed decision to take the matter no further.
- The call with Legal Help generally seems to **encourage clients into further action**. One week after their call, over three-quarters had already done something proactive or were waiting to be contacted for an appointment.
- Of the remaining quarter, most hadn't got around to taking action but were planning to do so. However, **clients with multiple vulnerabilities appeared to be less empowered to action.**

- The **information provided rarely made clients think there was little point to pursuing their matter further**. At the one-week point, just two of the 111 clients surveyed had decided that taking no further action was the best course action for them.
- The **open rate of information emails is reasonably high**: eight in ten clients recorded as having been sent an information email remembered getting one, and about three-quarters of these said they had opened it. Clients with family law problems were most likely to read the email in its entirety.
- The **evaluation of information emails was very positive**, with the majority of those that took at least a quick look at the contents saying they found it easy to understand and relevant to their problem. Links to other resources and referrals were appreciated. The content was less valued when it wasn't directly applicable to the client's specific question.
- For those clients who continued to seek help in the subsequent three-months, **private lawyers became the most common source of assistance**, perhaps because other options had been exhausted.

Section 8: Resolution

- Longer-term outcomes are about problem resolution, with ideally, problems reaching a timely and satisfactory conclusion.
- The duration of a legal problem will be determined by many factors, not all within the control of the client, whatever the value of the assistance they are provided with. However, the aim of providing assistance is in part to facilitate timely problem resolution. No doubt partly reflecting the relative seriousness of problems brought to the service, **many problems remained unresolved at the three-month follow up**, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn about the impact of the service on problem resolution.
- Even where problems were resolved, **many clients were not happy with the outcome**, sometimes because of how the problem had ended and sometimes the experience they had gone through to get there.
- Samples are too small to generalise from, but surveyed clients were more often **satisfied** when they had been referred to a helpful organisation, or when time or external factors (such as lack of negative actions by the other party) resolved or diminished the problem. Surveyed clients were **dissatisfied** when they couldn't access the help they needed, despite following up referrals and attempting to self-help.
- Although for most clients, the provision of information/referral achieved an immediate boost in confidence, **assessments of the value of the information/referral declined over time** as clients encountered barriers to problem resolution, including disappointment in what can/is provided by the services they were referred to.

Section 9: Conclusion

- The legal problems Legal Help deals with are having a substantial impact on quality of life of Victorians. This is a **relatively low intensity service assisting in the handling of serious legal problems**.
- Legal Help efficiently **enables the Victorian community's access** to a wide range of legal assistance services and other organisations supporting dispute resolution.
- The **trusted and recognised brand of Legal Aid** faciliates this coordination role. Clients only expressed frustration with onward referral if referral details were incorrect, though

they aren't always clear on the distinction between VLA and other legal assistance providers.

- The perception of Legal Aid as lacking the financial motivations of private lawyers may suggest that some clients who do not qualify for free legal advice but whose problems are too complex for self-help **may be willing to pay for further assistance.** However, this was not directly assessed in this research.
- The service provided is **distinct from that currently available from the VLA website** in that staff can triage to identify the legal problem and the client's needs. This ensures clients are provided with tailored information verbally or in pre-packaged emails and/or appropriate referrals to other organisations or parts of VLA.
- **Clients' experience of the service is almost universally positive**, and although the perceived value falls over time when problems remain unresolved or end badly, clients' evaluations of the service overall remain high.
- However, the **information/referrals service doesn't seem to be as successful for clients with multiple vulnerabilities**: they are less likely to say they were helped; less likely to recall being provided with referrals; less likely to act promptly on the information provided; and less likely to have achieved satisfactory problem resolution at three months. As this group tended to also have problems with longer duration, they could most efficiently be identified by asking how long ago their problem started and, if appropriate, triaged to more intensive services or followed up with a checking-in text/email a week or two later.
- There may be merit **to including chronic problems as a priority group for service**. Problems with longer duration had poorer outcomes with many remaining unresolved three months after the initial call to Legal Help.
- As Legal Help provides a recognised and trusted first point of contact there may be benefits to **widening the range of referrals to more often include non-legal human services** and related information.
- However, there is some **risk of a referral merry-go-round due to the almost universal provision of a referral** to another organisation. It is important to ensure there is no tendency to use referrals to shift responsibility for conveying disappointing news about the availability of free assistance on to other organisations or parts of VLA.
- The high rate of 'ongoing' problems also raises the question of whether the empowerment of clients through the positive experience of the call and provision of referrals, may result in over-optimism about the value of continuing to pursue resolution. It may be appropriate to **provide some clients with information on realistic expectations** about problem pathways, costs and potential outcomes.
- There may be scope to **increase the use of no-reply information emails**, perhaps to encompass additional topics, as they have a reasonably high open rate and are found useful by clients. As emails were equally well received whether the client had looked at the website or not, the presentation of similar information via online guided pathways may be a useful option.
- Although it is hard to identify a direct link between the service provided and the outcome of legal problems, **potential benefits to clients include an immediate boost to wellbeing and increased confidence** regarding options for managing their problem. There were, though, anecdotal examples of a **direct link between the information provided and a successful outcome**.

- Monitoring the quality of clients' experiences is important in designing a client responsive service and this research was able to **confirm the feasibility of contacting a representative sample of clients after an extended period**, even for this relatively low intensity legal assistance service. It also demonstrated the importance of doing so, in understanding the pathways clients follow and the challenges they continue to face in resolving their legal problems. Client satisfaction surveys conducted soon after the service provide a good indication of the immediate experience but are limited as a method of understanding the medium- and longer-term value of the service for clients.
- Although the achieved sample sizes limit the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn, the research was able to identify multiple ways in which **the service provides value to the community** and complements the more intensive service provision of VLA and other Victorian legal assistance providers.

As the achieved sample size of the surveys was relatively small, few findings in this report reached statistical significance. Those that did may only have done so through chance. For this reason, no statistical findings are provided and the reader is instead asked to interpret the findings as suggestive only and to treat those that are counter intuitive with particular caution.

Quotes from clients are taken verbatim from responses to the surveys. No information about the clients is given to protect confidentiality. Sometimes these have been amended to the first person where they were originally recorded by an interviewer in the third person. Where this is the case square brackets are placed around the pronoun. These are also used around any other text that has been added to the quote for ease of interpretation.

1 Legal information services at Victoria Legal Aid

Legal information was defined in the Victorian government's Access to Justice Review as:

Information about the law, the justice system, common legal problems, legal assistance services, and mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Unlike legal advice or legal assistance, it is not tailored to a specific situation and does not allow for a recommendation regarding the most appropriate course of action for an individual. Legal information can be delivered by a non-lawyer.

A jurisdictional scan across Australia, New Zealand and Canada conducted as part of this program of research found that organisations providing legal information services tend to use more than one channel of communication, including hard copy, websites, apps, audio, webchat and telephone services.[1]

In Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) information services are delivered through several channels, including a telephone help line and webchat (Legal Help), a comprehensive website, workshops for problem noticers and other community legal education (CLE) materials.

Working with VLA to develop a program logic[2] for information services, the Foundation concluded that the purpose of legal information services/resources within VLA is to:

provide Victorians with reliable, targeted and timely legal information that meets their diverse needs, interests and capabilities.[3]

To further inform the direction of the research reported here, the Foundation undertook an international literature scan.[4] This found that despite its relatively widespread provision, there is not a great deal of evidence on the value of information services, and how that value may vary for different sectors of the community and types of legal problems. VLA therefore requested the Foundation undertake an evaluation of their information services, using Legal Help as an example, to inform the future direction and design of their service provision.

Legal Help

Legal Help is the main gateway to public legal assistance and VLA's most accessible and timely provider of information to the general public/community. It is also the main telephone entry point for legal triage to more intensive service providers, both within VLA and elsewhere

1 Randell, S. 2018.

2 A program logic is a schematic representation of how the inputs of a service are causally linked to its intended outcomes. It is therefore a useful articulation of the factors that should be assessed in any service evaluation. The Law and Justice Foundation worked with VLA to develop an Information Services/Resources program logic to encompass all VLA's information services and VLA hasseparately developed a program logic specifically for Legal Help . Both these resources were consulted to identify measurable inputs, outputs and outcomes against which the value of the information/referral service could be evaluated.

3 Karras & Wilson, 2018

4 Randell, S. 2018.

across the Victorian legal assistance sector. The service is available on a 1300 number and via webchat between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday. Legal Help is staffed with both officers and lawyers, with the former not having the qualifications to practice as a lawyer, and therefore not qualified to provide legal advice (only information and referral). Most staff are located in VLA's head office in Melbourne.

When clients call Legal Help they join a queue and hear an automated message (see Appendix 4). When their call is answered there is a preliminary assessment of their primary legal issue and any accessibility, mainly language, issues they may have. Non-legal matters and legal matters that are 'out of scope', in that VLA does not provide any legal advice for them, can only be dealt with by providing a referral to a more appropriate organisation.[5] For matters that are within scope, the response the client receives will depend on VLA's policy regarding clients qualifying for advice or more intensive services and how the relevant VLA program (e.g. Civil law; Child Support) receives referrals. In practice then, depending on the problem type and their personal characteristics, clients may receive:

- Referral to one or more external organisations. Contact information may be provided over the phone, by email or by text message. In some instances referral bookings are made for the client.
- Information about their problem type and the options available (not tailored to their circumstances). This may include sending a standardised information email, the pre-set content of which provides information on a specific problem type.[6]
- Where a client is assessed as eligible, legal advice from a Legal Help lawyer (transferred from an officer if necessary) that is tailored to their circumstances
- Referral to an appointment (or short advice session) with a lawyer elsewhere in VLA, including to duty lawyer schemes based at court locations (Legal Help may forward an e-referral to the relevant service)

Information services provided by Legal Help have been researched previously, most recently by Colmar Brunton in their qualitative evaluation of the Improved Client Access and Triage project in 2013. In-depth interviews with 35 Legal Help clients explored their experience and response to the service provided. This research concluded that many of those interviewed were experiencing highly emotional broader issues and that the service could empower, calm and provide direction. This research also investigated the pathways followed subsequently, and how these reflected the type of referral received.

The research reported here is a further development of that work, with a larger more representative sample of clients, whose experience can be linked to the details of their call and followed up over a longer time period. This provides an opportunity to quantify some of the factors identified in the Colmar Brunton research, and explore in greater depth the experience of specific groups of clients.

However, this research is not an evaluation of the Legal Help service itself, it only covers part of what that service provides and has not included an assessment of how the organisation delivers its service. Inevitably elements of the evaluation are specific to the Legal Help mode

5 See Appendix x for list of VLA's 'out of scope' matters.

6 At the time of the research these emails were referred to as Orbit emails.

of delivery, but the focus of this research was on the information/referral aspects and how these were received and valued by the clients.

The role of information services in legal assistance

The provision of legal information to the general community is a recognised role for VLA, with the Victorian government's 2018 review of access to justice recommending that VLA be the "primary entry point for information about legal issues for the Victorian community". The review recognised the value of providing legal information to Victorians who are not eligible for (more intensive) public legal assistance services but who are not in a position to engage a private lawyer. The review considered that access to justice could be improved by "empowering people to help themselves through relevant, accessible legal information".

Legal information can be differentiated into 'just in case' and 'just in time', with the former relating to potential problems and the latter to current problems.[7] 'Just in case' services provide generic informative material to educate, empower and equip the community to avoid, identify and respond appropriately to legal problems. Once legal problems have arisen, the type of assistance requires changes. For some types of clients with some types of problems advice from a lawyer may be appropriate and available. For clients who do not qualify for free legal assistance services, 'just in time' legal information can be provided that is specific to their legal problem but not to their individual circumstances. This might include, for instance, direction and guidance on appropriate next steps or access to tools, such as proforma letters, for those most capable to self-help.

Within VLA, Legal Help is the main provider of 'just in time' information services to the Victorian community, but its lawyers can also provide advice to some clients.[8] An important element of its service delivery model are the methods used by legal information officers and lawyers to diagnose clients' legal issues, and in particular, to triage those that meet the criteria for legal advice to get assistance from a Legal Help lawyer or elsewhere in Legal Aid. The triage and legal advice aspects of the Legal Help service model were not assessed in this research, which focused on clients receiving information/referral services only. In the Legal Help context, information services include: providing a procedural version of legal information specific to the client's legal problem; or, a generic form of assistance that is not personal to the client's circumstances but helps set a direction for clients; or, referral to another organisation better able to meet the client's needs.

Client capability

The scan of the readily available literature on legal information services conducted by us in 2018 identified the importance of taking account of clients' personal capability to use the law to resolve their legal problems in designing and delivering effective information services.[9]

However, client capability was identified in the literature as a challenge for service providers, particularly as barriers to accessing services comes in many forms, including language, literacy, disability, geographical distance, skill level and confidence. These are not necessarily static and will interact with the complexity of the problem being experienced. Inevitably a

[7] Forell & McDonald, 2015.

[8] Advice is the least resource intensive of the services that can only be delivered by qualified lawyers and would not, for instance, involve active assistance such as drafting of documents.

[9] Randell, S. 2018.

danger of a one size fits all approach to providing legal information is that it is too complex for low capability clients but insufficiently detailed for clients who would like, and have the capability, to self-help. The value of information services is enhanced when there are a range of available modes to avoid excluding any particular client group. The more bespoke nature of a telephone information service, such as Legal Help, is well placed to respond to the diversity of need by helping the client identify what information is relevant to their issue. Where practicable this capability responsiveness should also flow through to the complete service including the content of supporting material, such as information emails, referral contact details, and how these are conveyed to callers. Nevertheless, as identified by the Victorian Access to Justice Review, information (without advice) is most obviously of value to the most capable clients who can apply it to their own circumstances.

There is no one agreed way to identify where individual clients are on the continuum of legal capability. Characteristics that tend to correlate with disadvantage, such as having limited access to financial resources, or poor health; or other vulnerabilities, including being at risk of family violence and homelessness, tend to be used as proxies for capability and thus used to identify clients as priority groups for service (see Box 1). VLA's policy recognises the interaction between priority group status and individual capability to manage and resolve problems. Relevant capability factors are financial circumstances, cultural or community practices, English language proficiency, previous justice system experience, number of legal problems, wellbeing and accessibility of services.

Box 1: VLA priority clients

VLA has a transparent Priority Client and Capability Policy[10] that recognises that some clients should be triaged for higher intensity services and to inform the design of appropriate services. This was reviewed during 2018, with the 2019 version prioritising the following groups:

Children and young people
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
People with a disability, including mental health issues
People with limited or restricted access to financial resources
People who have experienced family violence
People who are detained by the state, such as in custody
People who are experiencing homelessness
People with low levels of education and literacy
People who have recently arrived in Australia, such as refugees
Older people with limited family support
Single parents
People experiencing drug or alcohol dependence
People with a chronic illness or significant physical disability

[10] Victoria Legal Aid 2019, *Client priority and capability policy 2019*, Victoria Legal Aid, Melbourne.

Various options for measuring client capability were considered for this research, as outlined in Appendix 3. Multiple vulnerability was found to be the most useful indicator of capability for the purposes of this research. This measure, derived from survey responses, included a number of the groups identified in VLA's Priority Client Framework, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with limited financial resources, people in poor health, people with low levels of education and/or English language skills. But it is a broader measure than the one used by VLA as it also includes people with limited social networks, those lacking in technology skills and those with low levels of self-efficacy. While this indicator overlaps with the priority group status of clients, it is not intended to identify an equivalent client group. Therefore, findings on the experience of clients described as having multiple vulnerabilities in this report should not be taken as evidence on whether Legal Help is meeting the needs of clients that they have identified for priority service through their existing procedures.

2 A methodology for assessing value

What intervention is this research evaluating?

This research is an evaluation of the provision of information and referral legal assistance services to the Victorian community, as delivered by Legal Help's telephone services. Clients participating in this research had, therefore, received information and/or a referral during a call with a Legal Help officer or lawyer. Some had also subsequently been sent information or details of referral contacts by email/text message.

In part, the aim of an information/referral service such as this one is to *direct* clients to other sources of assistance, including potentially quite intensive services. Indeed, many clients did go on to have contact with other legal assistance providers, within VLA or elsewhere. This research is not, therefore, an evaluation of the impact on clients of *only* receiving information/referral services.

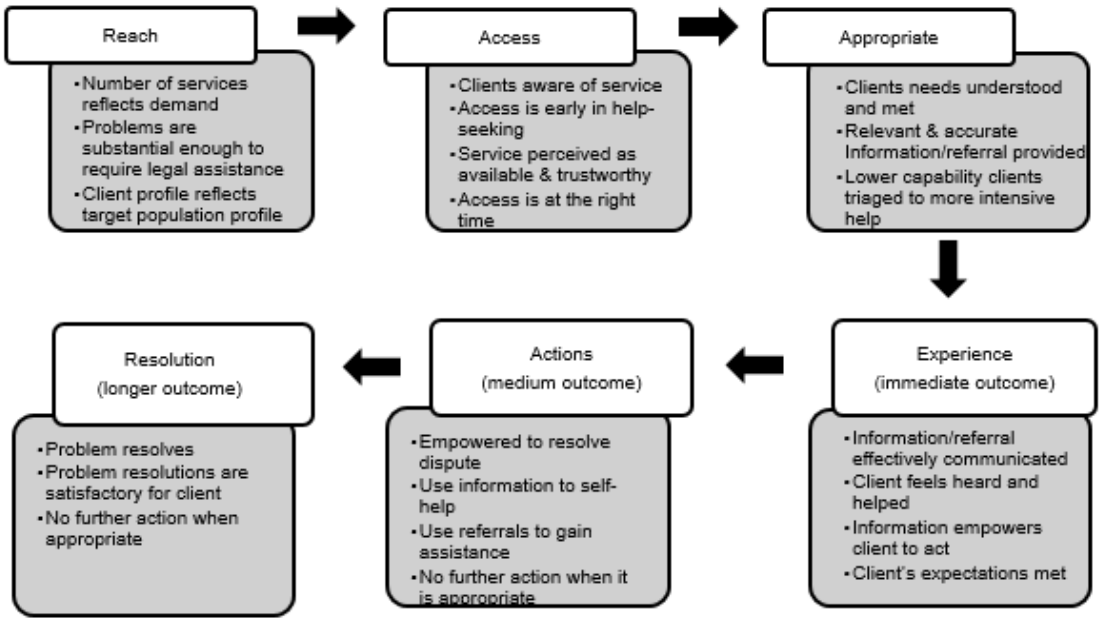
How to assess the value of information/referral services?

For Legal Help information/referral services six separate domains against which the value of the service could be assessed were identified from a review of the program logics developed for both VLA's information services/resources and Legal Help. These were: reach, access, appropriate, experience, actions and resolution. Reach describes the success of the service in reaching the range of clients and problems it is intended to target. Access relates to the accessibility of the service to clients at the time they need the service. Appropriate is concerned with how clients' needs are understood and responded to by the service. The three latter domains identify the outcomes that clients could experience/achieve during the call, immediately after the call, and subsequently. These outcomes are client-focused rather than problem-focused, as the evaluation design did not allow for a robust assessment of the impact of the service on problem outcome.[11]

Figure 2.1 provides a summary of the indicators potentially falling within each domain. This research aimed to assess the extent to which Legal Help information/referral services deliver against these indicators.

[11] See Appendix 2 for discussion of the challenge of measuring problem outcomes.

Figure 2.1 Indicators of the value of Legal Help's information and referral service assessed in this evaluation



The methodology

In developing the methodology our expectation was that many clients would additionally access other, and sometimes more intensive services in the form of legal advice or assistance from Legal Aid, another organisation or a private lawyer. Assessing the extent to which satisfactory problem resolution could be attributed to the information service provided by Legal Help was therefore not considered realistic. However, the immediate and medium-term outcomes experienced by the client, could more directly be attributed to the service, and thus could be assessed.

In addition, the research design allows us to quantitatively describe the clients and their problems, their experience of the service, and the actions they had taken prior to and following the service. To assess actions taken after the call and capture problem outcomes, research participants were followed up on two occasions, within about a week of their call and again three months after they had originally contacted Legal Help.

Between April and June 2019, Legal Help staff collected details of the calls they received and recruited clients who called the service to participate in this research. Those clients who were not provided with over-the-phone legal advice from a Legal Help lawyer were eligible for inclusion in the research. The Foundation conducted telephone interviews with 111 clients about one-week after their call to Legal Help to assess their experience of the call and the actions they had subsequently taken. Longer term outcomes were measured in a second interview with 85 of these clients about three-months after the original call to Legal Help.

Details of the methodology, including an analysis of response rates, are provided in Appendix 2 and are also summarised below.

How clients were recruited

Research participants were recruited by Legal Help staff at the end of their information/ referral call. Not all Legal Help staff participated in recruitment. Initially about eight staff were involved but the number was increased during the course of the research to achieve sufficient sample. Those that did participate were required to record information about *all* their calls into an electronic recruitment form. They were also strongly encouraged to ask all clients, who had agreed to the standard request of the call being recorded, whether they would be willing to participate in the research, and to have their details passed to the Foundation. However, asking this question wasn't always appropriate for some clients, and where callers were not asked to participate the reasons for this were captured in the recruitment form.[12] If callers agreed, then first name and contact details were additionally recorded in the recruitment form.

In addition to recording the client and problem details, the Legal Help staff were asked to record what information/referral they had provided to the client, if any, and to assess, on a five-point scale:

- How easy the client's issue was to understand
- How well the client understood them
- How well they met the client's needs

The recruitment form was piloted for a couple of days, with the research team lead attending for the briefing and listening in on calls on the first day. Amendments were made to the form at this point and again a few weeks later. A copy of the final version of the recruitment form is provided at Appendix 6. In total 1,061 client recruitment forms were completed, representing 6.8% of the 15,634 calls recorded by Legal Help during the research period.

The 1-week survey interview

To be eligible for the research, clients had to be making the call on behalf of themselves; not received legal advice from a lawyer during the course of the call; or been transferred to a Legal Help lawyer for legal advice. Interviews took place on average 5 days after the call to Legal Help, with a range of 1 to 13 days.

Clients were either contacted directly by phone or sent a text message. Clients who completed an interview were eligible to receive an e-voucher to the value of $30. All 1-week interviews took place by telephone, with specially trained interviewers conducting the calls from the Foundation's premises and completing the questionnaire contemporaneously onscreen. A copy of the 1-week survey questionnaire is provided at Appendix 7.

The 3-month survey interview

All clients who participated in the one-week survey were contacted again three months later, either by text message, email or by telephone. On average there were 93 days between the call to Legal Help and the three-month survey date. The range was 77 to 151 days. The second survey took place an average of 89 days after the first-week survey, with a range of 69 to 148 days.

[12] See Appendix 2 for the reasons recorded for not asking clients to participate in the research.

For 80% of the respondents, the three-month survey was self-completed online. For the remainder, interviews were conducted by telephone by Foundation staff. An additional $30 incentive payment by gift card was offered to complete the three-month survey.[13]

The three-month survey questionnaire was designed to be self-completed and was therefore shorter and had less complex routing and answer options. A copy is provided at Appendix 8.

Research data

The research team was provided with administrative data for services delivered by Legal Help from VLA's ATLAS information management system, for the period during which clients were recruited: 9 April to 19 June 2019. Further information about this data is provided in Appendix 5.

As there is no client identifier for information/referral services on ATLAS, ATLAS data was not matched to data collected for the purposes of this research.

The research therefore captured new data about clients at three points in time:

1. At the time of the information service, on recruitment forms completed by the Legal Help staff member.
2. About a week after the service, by telephone interview conducted by Foundation staff.
3. About three-months after the service for clients that had participated in the first survey, by a mix of online and telephone interviews.

The data collected in the recruitment form and the surveys was both quantitative and qualitative. Some of the latter responses were subsequently coded into categories for the purpose of reporting here.

How reliable are the research findings?

In order to draw any conclusions regarding Legal Help's information/referral services, it is important that clients participating in the research were representative of all Legal Help clients that were eligible to participate. A comparison of the socio-demographic characteristics of survey participants and Legal Help information/referral clients indicates a broadly similar profile (discussed further in Section 3 of this report). There are of course other potential differences between the research participants and Legal Help information/referral clients. First, there may be a bias to more successful calls, in that these clients were more likely to be asked to participate in the research. Not all clients could be contacted for the research, and not all those contacted agreed to participate. This may be because their lives are too chaotic and their problems too great or on the other hand that the problem was resolved, and they felt they had nothing to contribute. But the similarity of the problem type and socio-demographic profiles of all eligible clients and those that completed the surveys is nevertheless encouraging.

[13] Incentive payments were brought in to increase the response rate from 17 May. A small number of respondents to the first survey completed it prior to the payments and so were offered $50 to complete the second survey.

As the achieved sample size of the surveys was relatively small, few findings in this report reached statistical significance. The few that did may only have done so through chance. For this reason, no statistical findings are provided and the reader is instead asked to interpret the findings as suggestive only and to treat those that are counterintuitive with particular caution. Percentages are reported for ease of comparison but note should be taken of the absolute number of clients they represent.

Quotes from clients are taken verbatim from responses to the surveys. No information about the clients is given to protect confidentiality. Sometimes these have been amended to the first person where they were originally recorded by an interviewer in the third person. Where this is the case, square brackets are placed around the pronoun. These are also used around any other text that has been added to the quote for ease of interpretation.

Report structure

The following Sections of this report cover each of the domains of value of information/referral services in turn, presenting the available evidence on the success of Legal Help's information/referral services in the delivery of each domain, and how this varies according to the characteristics of clients and their problems. A concluding section identifies some potential areas for enhancement of the service.

3 Reach: who calls about what?

INDICATORS OF REACH
Number of services reflects expected demand
Problems are substantial enough to require legal assistance
Clients are representative of the target population

An essential outcome of an effective service is that it reaches the full range of clients that are experiencing the types of legal problems its services are designed for. In the case of Legal Help information/referral services, target clients are the general Victorian community, experiencing substantial enough legal problems to require assistance. Information on the profile of clients and their problems is routinely captured on VLA's data systems but the research collected further information through the client recruitment form and directly from the clients that were surveyed, to give a more complete picture of the types of people and types of problems that Legal Help is providing services for.

Number of services

The Foundation's Legal Australia-Wide (LAW) Survey estimates that about half of the Victorian community experience at least one legal problem every year, and about a quarter experience a substantial problem that has a moderate to severe impact on their everyday life.[14] At the time of the LAW Survey it was estimated 1,107,000 Victorians aged 15 and over had experienced a substantial legal problem in the preceding 12 months, and it is likely this figure will have risen with population growth over the last ten years. In Victoria some form of advice was sought for half of all problems, rising to 61.1% of substantial problems. When advice was sought, legal advisers were consulted for a third of problems; and in 5.6% of problems for which advice was sought, this legal adviser was identified as Legal Aid. With Legal Help's information/referral services available to all Victorians, expected demand is high and this is reflected in its delivery of over 140,000 services during 2018–19.[15]

Legal Help provides information to clients whose problems are 'in scope' for assistance but do not qualify for legal advice, while referral to external organisations is provided to clients with 'out of scope' legal problems. Examples of out of scope matters are provided in Appendix 4. Advice can only be delivered by a lawyer and is only available to clients with in-scope legal problems that meet the qualifying criteria, which is based on their priority client status.

Legal Help deploys a call management administrative system (ATLAS) that requires Legal Help staff to enter some information about clients directly into the system during the course of the call. The information requirements vary by the type of service being provided (see Table A5.1, Appendix 5). ATLAS provides VLA with a rich data source on the characteristics of

[14] Coumarelos, C, Macourt, D, People, J, McDonald, HM, Wei, Z, Iriana, R & Ramsey, S 2012, Legal Australia-wide survey: Legal need in Victoria, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney.

[15] Victoria Legal Aid, 2019a.

clients accessing and receiving their services.[16] During the research period, between 9 April and 19 June 2019, Legal Help recorded 12,820 information/referral client sessions and 2,814 advice client sessions. Information and/or referral client calls, the focus of the research reported here, therefore made up 82.0% of all Legal Help sessions.

Problem type

Legal Help ATLAS

Calls to Legal Help cover a very diverse range of problem types. In the research period there were enquiries about 345 different types of legal matter. The most commonly enquired about are listed in Table A5.3, Appendix 5.

Within ATLAS these legal matters can be grouped into three main areas of law for reporting purposes: civil law, criminal law and family law. Table 5.2 compares the legal problem profile for referrals, information services, information and referral services combined, and advice services. During the research period, civil matters were the most common information/referral type while family matters were the most common type of advice matter.

Table 3.1 Main area of law recorded in ATLAS, by type of service provided by Legal Help

	Referral only	Information	Information & referral	Advice	All
	n=4,900	n=7,920	n=12,820	n=2,814	**n=28,454**
	%	%	%	%	**%**
Civil	50.3	36.1	41.5	18.2	**37.3**
Criminal	23.5	26.8	25.5	21.4	**24.8**
Family	26.3	37.1	33.0	60.4	**37.9**
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	**100.0**

Source: Victoria Legal Aid ATLAS data, Legal Help calls 9 April to 19 June 2019.
Analysis uses field Primary Matter Law Type.

Table 3.2 shows the distribution of calls within each broad area of law. This indicates that a higher proportion of calls about family law problems (28.7%) get triaged to advice services than criminal (15.6%) or civil law (8.8%) matters.

Table 3.2 Type of service provided by Legal Help, by main area of law as recorded in ATLAS

		Referral only	Information	Information & referral	Advice	All
	n	%	%	%	%	%
Civil	5,833	42.2	49.0	91.2	8.8	100.0
Criminal	3,872	29.7	54.7	84.4	15.6	100.0
Family	5,929	21.7	49.6	71.3	28.7	100.0
All calls	15,634	31.3	50.7	82.0	18.0	100.0

[16] Income levels are not currently captured but are often asked of clients to determine their eligibility for more intensive services. There may be value, therefore, in capturing a broad categorisation of personal or household income.

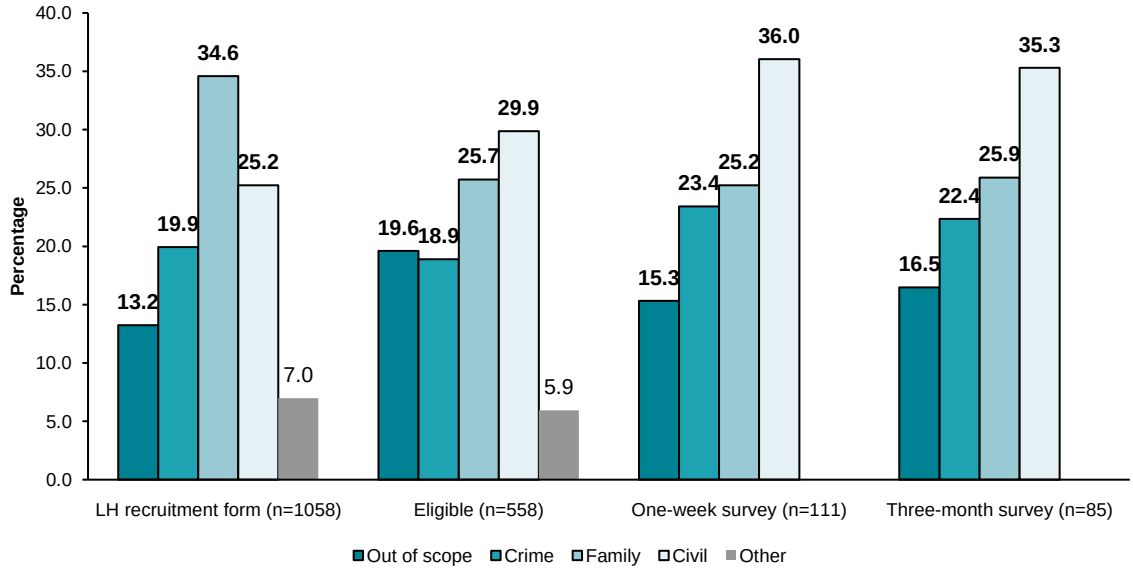
Source: Victoria Legal Aid ATLAS data, Legal Help calls 9 April to 19 June 2019.
Analysis uses field Primary Matter Law Type.

Client recruitment form

On the client recruitment form used for this research, in addition to the three main areas of law, calls could be recorded either as an 'out of scope' legal problem or as not relating to a legal problem. The latter included calls to a named lawyer or those relating to a problem that did not have a legal aspect. In Figure 3.1 the latter are counted as 'other' calls which also include calls with a mix of the three main areas of law for clients other than those who participated in the first survey. This is because survey clients provided sufficient details of their problem during the 1-week survey to allow for allocation to one of the main three areas of law.[17]

Just over a third of calls captured on the Legal Help recruitment form during the research period were related to family problems and a quarter were civil matters. As noted above, clients with family law problems were more likely to qualify for advice than those with civil or criminal problems. This means they made up only a quarter of clients eligible to participate in the research, given this was restricted to clients receiving information/referral only.[18] Out of scope problems made up a larger proportion of the eligible (information/referral) clients than all clients captured by the recruitment form because they cannot be triaged to legal advice. However, civil problems were the most common problem type amongst clients eligible for the research, making up 29.9% of clients receiving information/referrals captured on the recruitment form.

Figure 3.1 Problem type of clients, captured on Legal Help recruitment form, eligible for survey, and participating in surveys



[17] In Figure 3.1 'other' calls also include those reported as spanning more than one legal program type. For surveyed clients with more than one problem type, the client's description of the matter was used to allocate it through coding to one program type. Calls not seeking information for a legal problem were not eligible for inclusion in the research. Hence there is no 'other' category for surveyed clients.

[18] This is supported by the ATLAS problem profile for Advice matters: Family 60.4%, Criminal 21.4%, Civil 18.2%.

Amongst surveyed clients, traffic offences were the most common crime type, while property, financial and parenting disputes made up the bulk of family matters (Table A1.3.1 Appendix 1). Civil matters were spread across a larger number of matter types, with debts, fines and uninsured motor vehicle accidents some of the more common. The most common out of scope legal matters were related to employment and wills/estates.

How substantial are problems?

Although there is no one definition of substantial legal problems, the concept recognises that many legal problems are relatively straightforward in nature and won't require anything other than basic knowledge of the law to resolve, such as many goods and services problems. However, problem seriousness cannot be measured by problem type alone as the impact of problems is in practice an interaction of the problem type with an individual's capability to manage and resolve the issue. The Foundation's LAW survey therefore defined substantial problems as those having a moderate or severe impact on everyday life and estimated about half of all problems experienced in Victoria could be classified as substantial on this criteria.[19]

Impact of problems on client's wellbeing

More than half of surveyed clients (55.6%) said that the problem they called VLA about was having a severe impact on their everyday life, and nearly nine in ten (87.1%) said it was having at least a moderate or severe impact, and this was consistent across problem types (Table 3.3).[20] This exceeds the LAW Survey proportion, indicating that the types of problems enquired about are relatively likely to be substantial ones. This is in line with the LAW Survey finding that people are far more likely to seek advice for substantial than minor problems.[21]

This is not a temporary feature either, as three-quarters of problems described as having a severe impact immediately after the call, were still described as such three months later. Indeed, at the three-month point the percentage described as severe was still a half (50.6%) of problems, with some previously less impactful problems having increased their severity rating.

[19] Coumarelos et al 2012.

[20] The survey also asked clients whether they had any positive experiences as a result of their problem and 17.1% agreed that they had, with the assistance provided sometimes being the cause of that: "All the people [I] have dealt with [have] been very kind and understanding". The 'educational' aspects of the experience were reported positively too: "Learnt a great deal…has been nerve wracking [but] interesting". And for others it was working out what matters in life: "I care more about my family now. They are everything. My family have disintegrated as a result of this so this has taught me a lesson".

[21] According to the LAW Survey, advice was sought from someone in 61.1% of the substantial problems experienced by Victorians, compared to 40.5% of the minor problems (Coumarelos et al 2012).

Table 3.3 Impact of problems on everyday life

	Out of scope	Criminal	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=25	n=40	n=108
	%	%	%	%	
No impact	5.9	3.8	0.0	2.5	2.8
Slight	11.8	19.2	4.0	7.5	10.2
Moderate	5.9	30.8	44.0	35.0	31.5
Severe	76.5	46.2	52.0	55.0	55.6
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1-week client survey

In terms of types of impact, stress was most commonly reported, followed by depression and anxiety, irrespective of problem type (Figure 3.2):

> "When you don't have control it's stressful"

Although having to take time off work was a negative experience in itself, it was also seen as a consequence of other negative experiences:

> "I am so stressed about this, I didn't go to work last week because I was so stressed"

> "Impacting concentration and that has impacted work"

Among other negative responses reported were the impacts of lack of knowledge:

> "Fear due to lack of information"

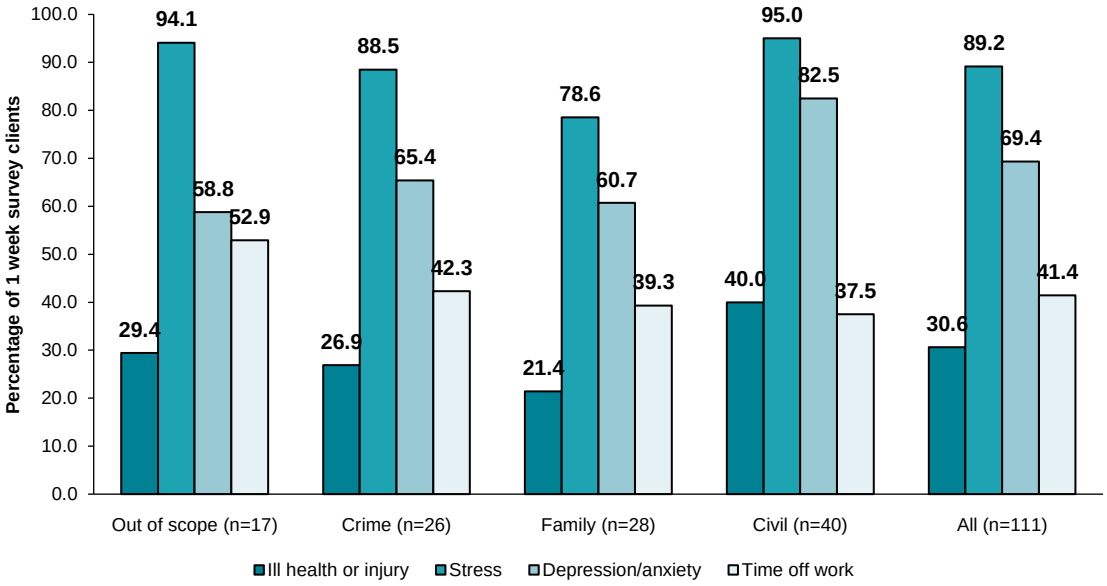
> "Lots of negative experiences, the issue pretty much levels you when you're in a legal situation you have no understanding of it, just a big blow"

Some were experiencing major disadvantages as a direct result of their legal issue:

> "I have lost my job, I am homeless, I had a great life prior to this one night and this has taken a toll on my entire family"

> "Flashbacks, nightmares….at certain times I was homeless, that was devastating for me"

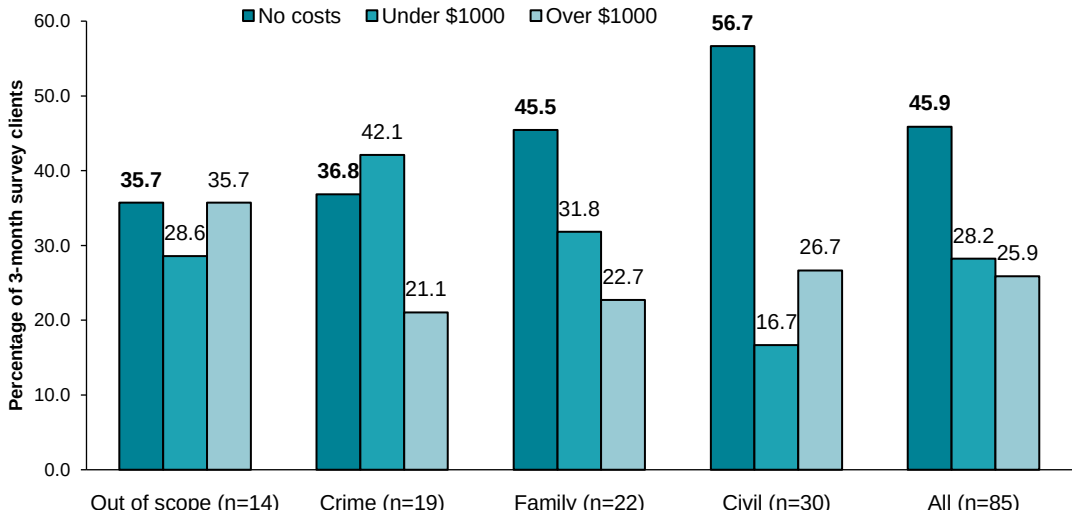
Figure 3.2 Type of negative impact clients experiencing at 1 week, by problem type



Financial impacts of problems

At the one-week survey just under half of clients (44.1%) said they had lost or spent money as a result of the problem itself or their attempts to resolve it. Larger sums were due to lost income, private lawyer costs, and transport costs (particularly for those that had lost their vehicle or licence). At the three-month survey this had risen to over half (54.1%) reporting financial losses with again lost income being frequently mentioned (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Financial loss and costs[22] due to problems at 3 months, by type of problem



[22] The question asked respondents in what ways they had lost or spent money due to the problem or through attempts to solve it.

Lost income could be a direct consequence of the legal problem leading to loss of employment, but could also be due to requiring time off to deal with the problem:

> "Couldn't work because wasn't reliable. Needed time off for court, lawyer [appointments] etc."
>
> "I had to pay my lawyer his fees and take time off work in order to meet with him in order to complete the application"
>
> "Travel costs to get to the city for the court hearing, travel to meetings, telephone costs to contact people"
>
> "Time is money. I've spent way too much time worrying trying to resolve this with no progress. I could have been doing better things with my life, but I'm stuck"

At the one-week survey, a fifth of all clients (20.7%) said they had lost or spent more than $1,000. At the three-month point, this had risen to a quarter of all clients (25.9%), with out of scope clients most likely to report this level of financial impact.

Most of the surveyed clients accessing Legal Help's information/referral service were not calling about trivial issues, but rather problems that were having a significant impact on their finances and wellbeing.

Are clients representative of target population?

Comparison of Legal Help client profile to community profile

VLA records socio-demographic information about clients contacting Legal Help in its administrative client management system, ATLAS. The extent of the information recorded varies according to the service provided, with less information for clients with out of scope or referral only problems, than for clients provided with information or legal advice services.[23]

VLA's telephone information service is available to anyone in the state of Victoria. It might be expected, therefore, that the socio-demographic profile of clients would match that of the Victorian population. However, the profile of clients is younger than the Victorian adult population and callers are more likely to live in disadvantaged areas than the general population (Table 3.4). The main reasons for this are:

- Legal problems are not experienced equally across society
- Some people are more likely to seek assistance than others
- Some potential clients may prefer and have the knowledge to self-help or directly utilise alternative providers – be they private or other not-for-profit services.

As noted above, according to the Foundation's LAW Survey about half of Victorians experience at least one legal problem every year, and a quarter experience a substantial legal problem.[24] While no one is immune from this, and the profile of people experiencing a legal problem varies by type of legal problem, the LAW Survey identified that certain socio-

[23] See Appendix 5 for what information ATLAS collects by type of service provided.

[24] Coumarelos et al 2012.

demographic groups were at greater risk of experiencing substantial problems than others, including being middle-aged, having one or more disabilities, being a single parent, living in disadvantaged housing, requiring government benefits and/or being unemployed.[25]The LAW Survey also found variations in propensity to seek assistance, and to seek assistance from not-for-profit providers, which will in part reflect the different barriers people face in accessing legal help.[26] All of these factors will be reflected in the profile of clients.

Differences between the profiles of clients receiving referral, information and advice will also be a consequence of their differing qualifying criteria, including the legal problem type and client priority status. For instance, as noted above (Table 3.1), family law problems make up a larger proportion of legal advice services than referral or information services.

[25] Coumarelos, C, Macourt, D, People, J, McDonald, HM, Wei, Z, Iriana, R & Ramsey, S 2012, Legal Australia-wide Survey: Legal need in Victoria, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney.

[26] McDonald, HM & Wei, Z 2015, How people solve legal problems: level of disadvantage and legal capability, Justice issues paper 23, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney.

Table 3.4 Socio-demographic profile of Legal Help clients recorded in ATLAS April-June 2019

	Legal Help			Census
	Referral only	Information	Advice	Victoria Aged 18+
	%	%	%	%
Gender				
Female	52.1	52.9	59.3	51.5
Male	46.6	46.2	40.6	48.5
Age groups				
<18	n/r	0.6	0.1	n/a
18-20	n/r	2.9	2.7	4.9
21-30	n/r	25.4	27.1	18.4
31-40	n/r	32.4	32.3	17.9
41-50	n/r	20.7	21.4	17.1
51-65	n/r	13.3	12.7	22.1
65+	n/r	4.7	3.7	19.6
SEIFA				
20% Most disadvantaged areas	15.1	14.8	16.5	13.1
2.00	18.7	19.4	17.4	15.4
3.00	21.0	21.7	23.5	19.2
4.00	21.4	22.0	21.6	22.9
20% Least disadvantaged areas	23.7	22.2	21.1	29.4

Source: Victoria Legal Aid ATLAS data and 2016 ABS Census data
Notes:
Percentages for are of law and gender on basis on all clients
Percentages for age and SEIFA on basis of data recorded
N/R = not recorded
N/A = not applicable

Characteristics of research clients

As no client identifier is recorded on ATLAS for information/referral clients it was not feasible to link the information collected on ATLAS to the clients participating in this research. It was therefore necessary to separately record the characteristics of clients, including their priority group status, on a specially designed client recruitment form.

Comparing the profile of all callers to Legal Help during the research period to the profile of callers whose details were captured on the client recruitment form provides some indication of how representative these calls were of all those received (Table 3.5). However, as all client characteristics featured in greater proportions on the recruitment form than on ATLAS it may

be that probing for and/or recording of this information was undertaken more diligently for the purposes of the research client recruitment than would otherwise be the case.

Table 3.5 Characteristics of all information/referral Legal Help clients recorded on ATLAS and the characteristics recorded on the research recruitment form during the same period

	ATLAS	Recruitment form
	n=12,820	n=558
	%	%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0.6	1.1
At risk of family violence	8.0	10.9
Homeless	1.6	2.0
Low literacy	3.4	5.2
Mental illness/cognitive disability	6.0	14.3
Overseas born	11.7	31.7
Physical disability	3.2	5.4
Receiving a benefit	15.3	29.4
Speaks a language other than English at home	5.6	21.0

Source: Legal Help ATLAS data for all information/referral clients during the research period April to June 2019 and Legal Help client recruitment form, excluding advice clients and those calling on behalf of someone else

Not all clients whose details were collected by the recruitment form were eligible to participate in the research, as clients given legal advice by Legal Help lawyers were excluded. And not all clients that were eligible participated in the research by completing the first survey. Table 3.6 compares the profile of all clients whose details were captured on the client recruitment form, to those receiving only an information/referral and those that went on to participate in the one-week survey. A comparison of the latter two groups provides reassurance that the clients taking part in this research were broadly representative of those eligible to participate.

As clients falling into a priority group are more likely to be triaged to legal advice services, it is to be expected that the information/referral profile is slightly less disadvantaged than the full recruitment form sample (for instance the proportion on government benefits). It is also evident that being at risk of family violence increases the likelihood of being triaged to Legal Help advice services.

Table 3.6 Client characteristics recorded on client recruitment form, by eligibility for research and participation in 1-week survey

	All information/ referral and advice clients	Eligible for survey: information/ referral clients	1-week survey clients
	n=1061	n=558	n=111
	%	%	%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1.1	1.1	3.6
At risk of family violence	16.9	10.9	9.9
Homeless	2.6	2.0	2.7
Low literacy	4.1	5.2	2.7

Mental illness/cognitive disability	15.6	14.3	12.6
Overseas born	30.6	31.7	28.8
Physical disability	6.0	5.4	6.3
Receiving a benefit	33.1	29.4	33.3
Speaks a language other than English at home	19.8	21.0	22.5

Source: Legal Help client recruitment form. Legal Help staff completed these forms during or immediately after the call.

Notes: Clients were not necessarily asked about all characteristics. Clients can have more than one characteristic so percentages do not add to 100.0% Eligible clients were not provide with advice over the phone and were recorded as calling on behalf of self.

However, the characteristics collected by Legal Help on the research client recruitment form did not always match the information that the same clients reported in the survey. For instance, although the client recruitment form recorded 22.5% of the survey clients as speaking a language other than English at home, this rose to 39.6% in the survey – which compares to 27.0% of Victorians according to the 2016 Census.[27] Aboriginal status was also slightly undercounted, with 5.7% of survey clients self-identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander compared to the 3.6% recorded on the recruitment form – though both proportions exceed the 0.7% of Victorians who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the 2016 Census (Table 3.7).[28] This finding of an under-recording on the client recruitment form (which already had higher proportions than ATLAS – see Table 3.5) could indicate that the ATLAS data significantly under-represents the extent to which people with these characteristics are clients of Legal Help.

Clients' educational attainment was not collected on the recruitment form (other than low literacy) but was asked about in the survey. Comparing the educational profile of survey clients to the 2016 Census suggests a more educated profile. This may partly reflect the younger age profile of clients but could also be an indication that a higher degree of capability facilitates access to legal assistance services. Reported income though is low, with over half of surveyed clients stating a household income of less than $50,000 compared to a quarter of Victorians recording this level of income in the 2016 Census.[29] Although the survey findings suggest that *on average* clients are relatively well educated but on low incomes, clients with higher educational attainment tended to also have higher incomes, and vice versa. Of the 16% of clients for whom this was not the case, in that they declared an income of less than $50,000 and had attained at least a first degree, over half were women in the 21-40 age group.

[27] Survey respondents reported speaking 25 different languages, with Arabic and Punjabi the most frequently mentioned.

[28] This potential under-identification is also found in Legal Help's administrative ATLAS data. During the research recruitment period, 0.6% of information/referral and 2.0% of advice clients were recorded as identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and, 5.6% of information/referral and 12.1% of advice clients were recorded as speaking a language other than English at home.

[29] It should be noted, however, that this may in part be a reporting artefact, with reporting of personal rather than household income and/or a recognition that legal assistance services are targeted at those with lower incomes.

Table 3.7 Surveyed client characteristics, compared to Victorian community

	One-week survey profile	Victorian population aged 18-75
	%	%
Cultural diversity		
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	5.7	0.7
Speaks non-English language at home	39.6	27.0
Household income less than $50,000/year	56.7	24.6
Highest educational attainment		
Postgraduate Degree [e.g. PhD, Masters]	12.4	6.8
Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate	4.8	3.1
Bachelor's degree [incl. Honours]	24.8	20.8
Advanced Diploma and Diploma	10.5	11.4
Certificate Level 3 or 4	14.3	17.6
Certificate Level 1 or 2	1.9	0.1
School	31.4	40.0

Source: One-week survey (n=111) and ABS 2016 Census Table Builder.

Notes: The survey sample was selected to exclude clients that were given an advice service at the time of their call (though some received a subsequent advice service). Survey estimates are subject to sampling error. Missing/refused responses are excluded from base of survey responses.

The census age range was restricted to match that of surveyed clients to assist comparability.

On the available evidence, Legal Help's information and referral service clients reflect the full diversity of the Victorian community. Reasons for any differences between the community profile and that of clients will reflect socio-demographic variations in the experience of legal problems, the legal capability to resolve problems and to seek assistance, and the availability of other options – including Legal Help's advice services and private lawyers for those in the community that can afford them.[30]

Vulnerabilities of surveyed clients

In addition to these relatively static socio-demographic characteristics, clients contacting legal assistance services may have specific features that increase their personal vulnerability and limit their capability to successfully resolve their legal problems. General barriers to managing problems can include lack of self-efficacy to problem solve, lack of access to financial resources, cultural barriers and poor physical or mental health. Barriers specific to accessing help may include the extent of their social network, English language skills and their ability to utilise technology. While these aren't directly assessed during the call to Legal Help, it was possible to assess these in the one-week survey of clients. Eight measures of vulnerability were identified for the purposes of this research. Among the clients surveyed, the vulnerability

[30] Given the qualifying criteria for advice services, the expectation would be that those triaged to advice would have a more disadvantaged profile, resulting in a less disadvantaged profile for those receiving information/referral services. On the other hand, the profile would be more disadvantaged if those with the greater financial resources choose to self-help or use private lawyers instead.

profile of clients did not differ greatly by legal problem type though clients with family problems were less likely to report health problems or low educational attainment (Table 3.8).

It is important to note that although there is likely to be overlap, this categorisation of clients will not match the priority group criteria that qualify clients for Legal Help legal advice. This is mainly because the criteria used here are more broadly defined than VLA's priority groups, and partly because the characteristics reported by clients in the survey do not necessarily match those they reported to Legal Help at the time of their call.

Table 3.8 Demographics and vulnerabilities of survey clients, by problem type

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=40	n=111
Average age[1]	46	40	38	38	40
Percent female	52.9	40.0	65.4	64.1	57.0
Vulnerabilities:					
Poor health[2]	47.1	34.6	17.9	45.0	36.0
Low social capital[3]	17.6	23.1	14.3	12.5	16.2
Low financial security[4]	35.3	42.3	21.4	35.0	33.3
Poor English language skill[5]	23.5	15.4	32.1	27.5	25.2
Poor technology skill[6]	11.8	11.5	14.3	7.5	10.8
Low educational attainment[7]	35.3	46.2	17.9	30.0	31.5
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	0.0	3.9	7.1	7.5	5.4
Low self-efficacy[8]	5.9	11.5	7.1	7.5	8.1

Source: 1-week client survey.

Notes:

[1] Mean age rounded to nearest year

[2] Health described as 'poor' or have a long-term health condition, disability or impairment restricting everyday activity

[3] Completely disagree that have many friends and relatives to help if needed

[4] Getting into difficulties on income

[5] Somewhat or completely agree that sometimes have problems understanding spoken or written English

[6] Never access the internet or completely disagree that it is easy to find useful information on the internet or completely disagree can tell whether information on the internet is reliable

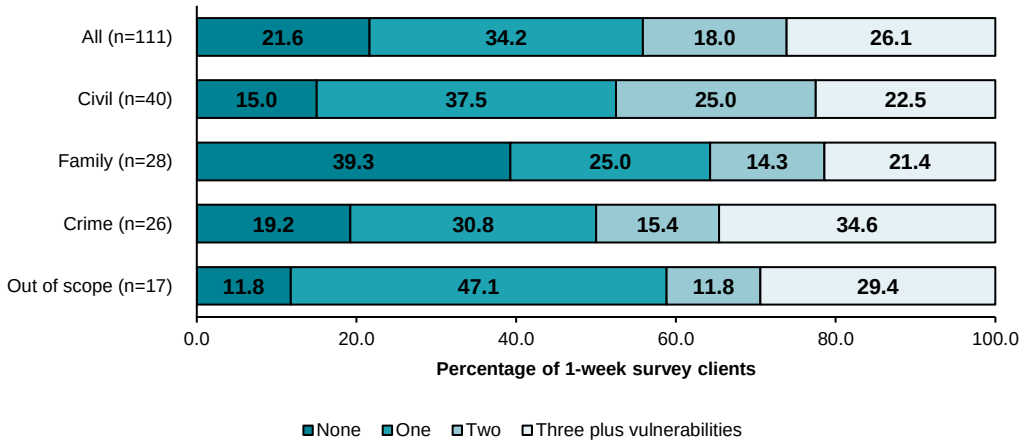
[7] No tertiary or post school qualifications other than Certificate 1 and 2 level

[8] For further details on this measure see Appendix 3.

Count of vulnerabilities

As it is known that the experience and response to legal problems is worsened by the extent of multiple disadvantage, the number of vulnerabilities of each client was computed. Overall, a fifth (21.6%) of surveyed clients had none of the measured vulnerabilities, with this percentage ranging from 11.8% of clients with out of scope problems to 39.3% of those with family problems (Figure 3.4). Multiple vulnerabilities, defined as having three or more vulnerabilities, were most common amongst those calling about a crime-related problem.

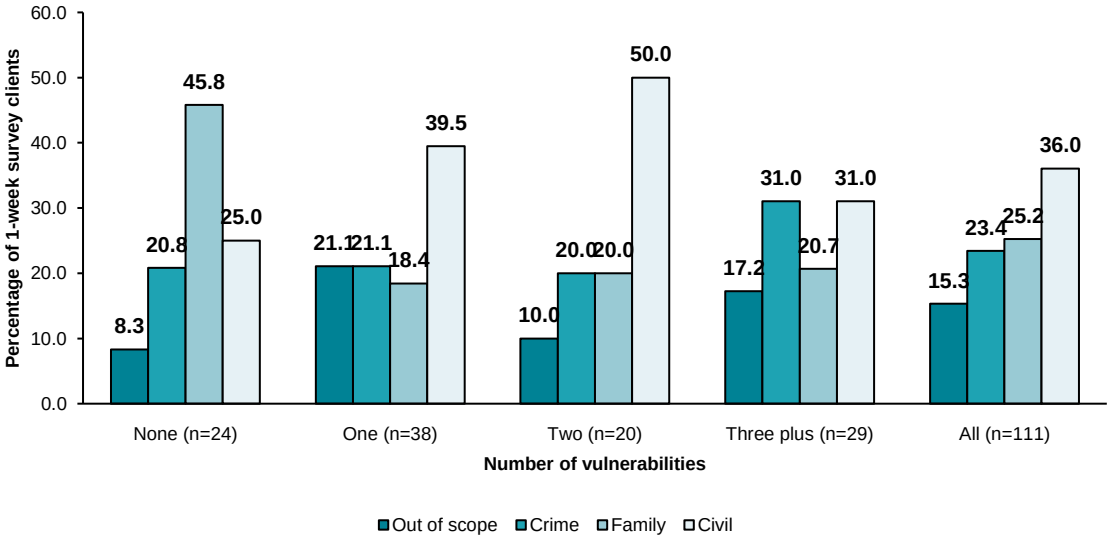
Figure 3.4 Number of vulnerabilities of 1-week survey clients, by problem type



Clients with multiple vulnerabilities did not have a particular problem profile, although those with three or more vulnerabilities were more often calling about a crime problem than those with fewer or no vulnerabilities (Figure 3.5).

Clients with no vulnerabilities were more likely to be enquiring about a family problem. Given the likely overlap between clients with multiple vulnerabilities and those meeting the criteria for Legal Help advice services, this profile may reflect the increased triaging of clients with family problems to receive Legal Help advice (as shown in Table 3.2).[31]

Figure 3.5 Problem type, by number of vulnerabilities

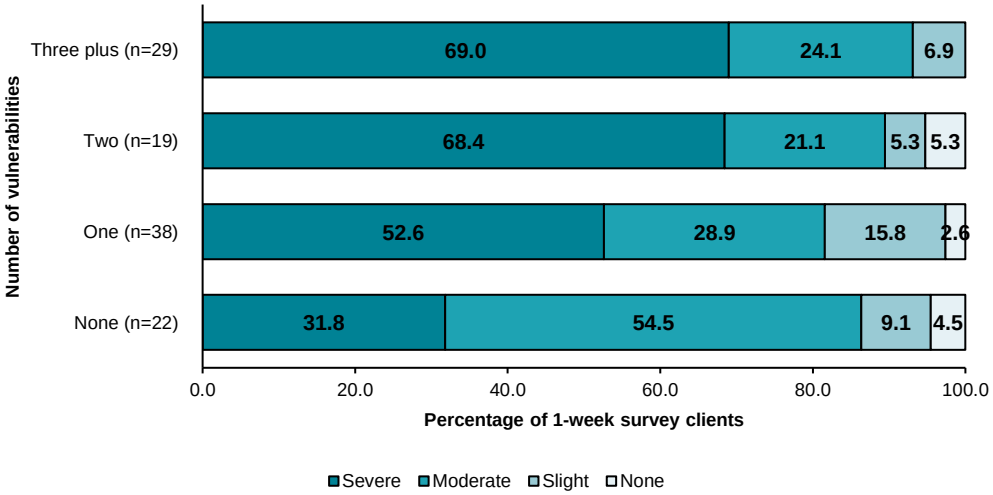


[31] Note, however, that although there is likely to be overlap, this categorisation of clients with multiple vulnerabilities used in the research is not intended to be an indicator of whether or not clients would qualify for advice under Legal Help's criteria.

Impact of problems by client vulnerability

Clients with some vulnerabilities appear to be at greater risk of experiencing severe impacts, particularly those experiencing poor health, and the socially and financially vulnerable (Table A1.3.2, Appendix 1). It is not surprising, then, that clients with multiple vulnerabilities were far more likely to report that their problem was having a severe impact on their everyday life in the 1-week survey (Figure 3.6).[32]

Figure 3.6 Impact of problems on everyday life for vulnerable clients, by multiple vulnerability



Summary

- A service with effective reach will demonstrate levels of demand in line with expectations; a range of problems substantial enough to require legal assistance; and a client profile that matches the intended target population.
- Legal Help receives a large number of calls on a wide range of problems from across the Victorian community.
- Although family problems are the most common legal problem enquired about, civil problems are the most common information/referral legal problem type as clients with family law problems are more likely to qualify for Legal Help's advice services.
- About a fifth of information/referral enquiries are about problems that are out of scope for Legal Help's advice services, but for which a referral can be provided. These are generally civil law matters of a more corporate nature or for matters which there is alternative provision.
- While the service provided is relatively low intensity, clients problems are not trivial: a half of all problems were described by surveyed clients as having a severe impact, emotionally and/or financially.

[32] This may also reflect the length of time that problems had been going on, as clients with multiple vulnerabilities were more likely to be calling about chronic problems see Section 4 (Figure 4.5) where this is discussed further.

- The diversity of Legal Help's information clients indicates that the service has a good reach into all sectors of the community. For instance, the service is well utilised by people for whom English is not a first language, confirming the importance of providing interpreter services.
- Clients of both information/referral and advice services have a more disadvantaged profile than the Victorian community, which may reflect variations in problem prevalence across socio-demographic groups and that no-cost is the main attraction of the service.
- Educational attainment, though, is relatively high which might suggest a degree of capability helps users access this service.
- The impact of problems on clients increased with the number of vulnerabilities they had, probably reflecting the impact of belonging to multiple priority groups for service on legal capability.

4 Access: how do clients access the service?

INDICATORS OF ACCESS

Clients are aware of service
Access is early in help seeking
Service is seen as available and as trustworthy
Service is accessed at the right time for client

To successfully access services, clients need to be aware that the service exists and is available to them and relevant to the problem they are experiencing. As a source of immediate legal information to all Victorians and a route of referral to other providers, or on to more intensive support from within VLA, Legal Help is most appropriately used early in the process of seeking legal assistance. One measure of the effectiveness of Legal Help's information service is, therefore, an assessment of the extent to which the service is accessed early in the help seeking pathway or at least promptly after clients recognise their need for assistance. For this, clients need to be aware of the service and perceive it to be available to them, trustworthy and providing relevant assistance.

Are clients aware of service?

Two thirds (65.5%) of the clients surveyed said this was their first call to Legal Help. Clients calling about a criminal matter were most likely to have had previous contact, with 57.7% saying it was their first call (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Survey clients' previous calls to Legal Help

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=39	n=110
	%	%	%	%	%
Never before	70.6	57.7	67.9	66.7	65.5
Once or twice	11.8	30.8	14.3	20.5	20.0
A few times	17.6	11.5	17.9	12.8	14.5
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1-week client survey

Clients had become aware of Legal Help through multiple channels. Internet searching was the most common method overall (30.6% of surveyed clients). For clients with family problems, referrals from other organisations were the most common source of awareness, while for clients with out of scope matters, recommendations from friends, relatives or colleagues were most often mentioned (Table 4.2). While for crime problems the inclusion of Legal Help contact details on court correspondence was another method of directing clients to

assistance, this was less often the case for family law matters and not mentioned at all by survey clients with civil matters. This raises the question of whether there is an opportunity to include this information on other court or tribunal related notices and forms. The local library, it seems, is no longer the source of knowledge and information it once was.

Table 4.2 How survey clients first heard of Legal Help

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n = 17	n = 26	n = 28	n = 40	n=111
	%	%	%	%	%
Another website (including googling)	29.4	34.6	14.3	40.0	30.6
Recommended by friend/relative/colleague	35.3	26.9	28.6	20.0	26.1
Referred by an organisation (VLA office, court, lawyer, consumer affairs etc.)	23.5	15.4	35.7	22.5	24.3
Just knew, from school or work / can't recall	17.6	11.5	14.3	15.0	14.4
Used Legal Help before	5.9	3.8	0.0	7.5	4.5
Saw on VLA website / told by chatbot / webchat	0.0	3.8	7.1	5.0	4.5
On letter or form received e.g. court summons	0.0	11.5	3.6	0.0	3.6
VLA or other legal information publication	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.9
Library	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

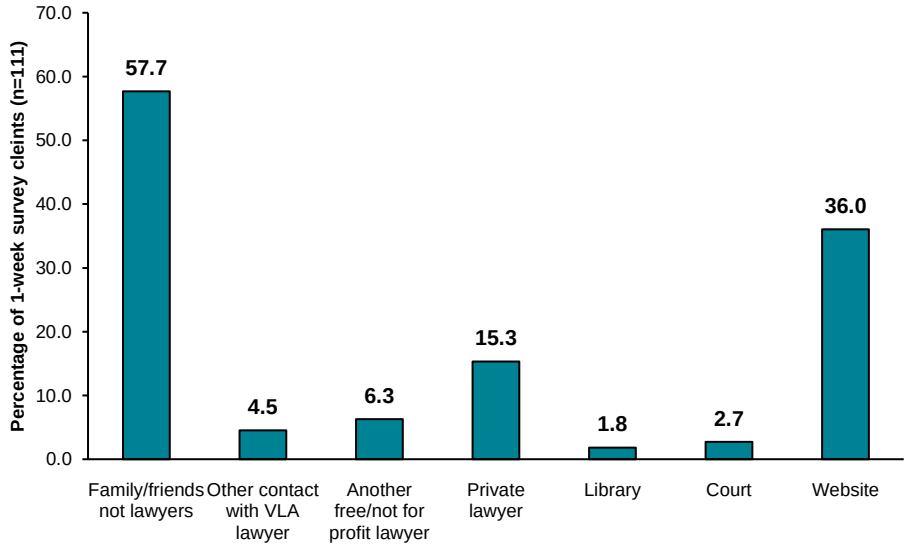
Source: 1-week client survey
Note: More than one option could be selected

Is access early in help seeking?

For most of the clients surveyed, Legal Help was the first point of call for *legal* assistance (Figure 4.1). Many had spoken to friends or family (57.7%) or searched the internet for help (36.0%) but only 12.6% had previously contacted a free legal service for this specific problem.[33] A private lawyer had been consulted by 15.3% of clients, with those with family law problems most likely to have done this (25.0%).

[33] Included in this figure are clients having contact with any of the following: VLA lawyer, another free/not for profit lawyer or a court-based help service. The figure is less than the sum of these as some clients had contact with more than one.

Figure 4.1 Who contacted for help prior to calling Legal Help



There were some differences by type of legal problem, with clients calling about family problems the most likely to have previously consulted a private lawyer.

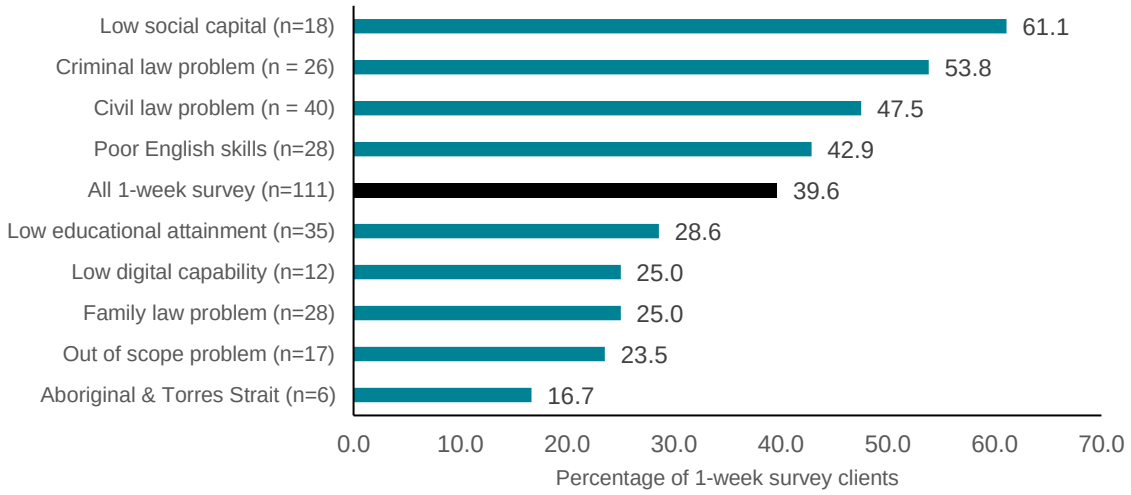
VLA website as a pathway

Although only a small proportion of surveyed clients specifically said the VLA website was how they first became aware of Legal Help, four in ten (39.6%) recalled looking at the website for information relating to their problem, prior to their call. Website use was more common amongst clients with criminal or civil problems than family or out of scope issues (Figure 4.2). Clients reporting low social capital were more likely to access the website (perhaps in lieu of contacts to consult) while, not surprisingly, those with reported low digital capability were less likely to have accessed the website. Poor English skills did not appear to be a barrier though, with access rates in line with the average.

Level of educational attainment was also a relevant factor, with higher levels of educational attainment increasing the likelihood that the website was used as a pathway. Half (51.2%) of those that had accessed the website were educated to at least first-degree level, compared to a third (36.5%) of those that had not accessed the website.

The most commonly cited reason for calling after looking at the website was the need for more personalised information or help (38.6%) or that the information required did not appear to be on the website (25.0%). The website was also a source of Legal Help's phone number, important for those who said it would be easier to speak to someone, sometimes to confirm or understand the information on the website (11.4%).

Figure 4.2 Percentage of surveyed clients who looked at VLA website prior to calling



> "The website was very helpful…because I wanted to get an overview of what legal aid is because all this is new to me. Calling allowed me to get specifics about my issue. "
>
> "Everyone's circumstances are different and the website doesn't give information for alternative situations."

Section 5 provides more information on what surveyed clients were looking for when they called Legal Help, but it is worth noting here that this appears to vary depending on whether they had looked at the VLA website prior to their call (Table 4.3). Surveyed clients who had looked at the website were less likely to say they were just looking for information, referral or to be informed of their rights. As elsewhere this is not a statistically robust finding but it may indicate that either the website is diverting some clients from Legal Help by the information it provides, or that having looked at the website clients are clearer that they need more personalised advice. Both explanations would be aligned with the purpose of the website.

Table 4.3 What clients said they wanted from Legal Help by whether they had looked for information on the VLA website prior to their call

	Via website	Not via website
	n=44	n = 63
	%	%
Information and referral	9.1	11.1
Informed of rights	4.5	17.5
Advice[1]	43.2	28.6
Told what they need to do or should do	27.3	22.2
Active assistance incl representation	15.9	20.6

Source: 1-week survey clients Coded from descriptive data. Excludes 2 clients who did not provide codable answers to this question and 2 who could not recall whether they had looked at website prior to their call
Notes: [1.]Clients articulated that they were looking for 'advice' which may not match the legal definition of advice.

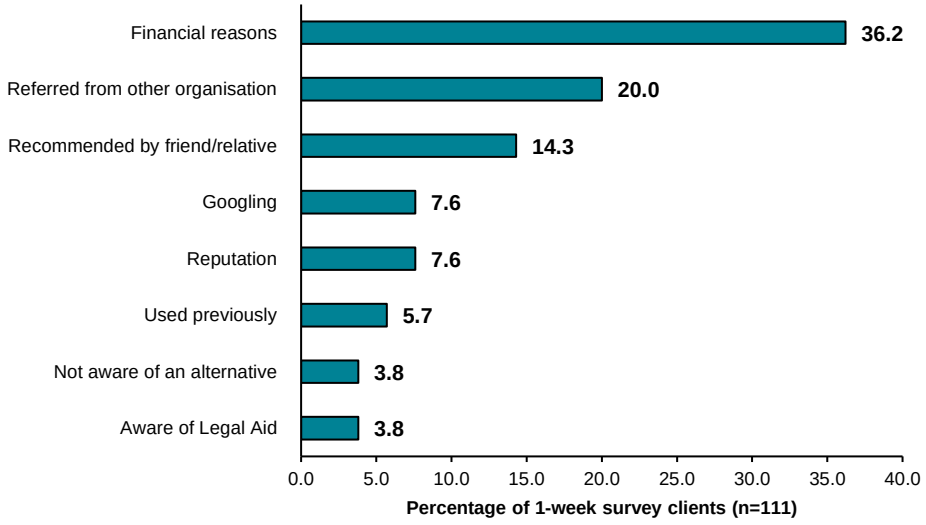
Is service seen as available and trustworthy?

Over eight in ten of the surveyed clients completely agreed that anyone could contact Legal Aid for information and that it provides a valuable service to the community.[34]

With a similar proportion disagreeing they could afford to pay for a private lawyer,[35] it was not surprising that financial reasons were the most often cited explanation for contacting Legal Aid (Figure 4.3):

> "Heard that VLA is there to help people who can't afford legal advice from [a] solicitor."
>
> "Because I can't afford a solicitor. I am on a pension."
>
> "They could give me free advice over phone I thought they would be first port of [call]. I didn't want to see a solicitor and pay anything until Legal Aid directed me where I should be going"
>
> "Because it was free, Victorian based, and someone referred [me]"
>
> "First thing [I] saw online that …was free"

Figure 4.3 Why survey clients contacted Legal Aid for help



The other main reasons for Legal Aid being the service contacted were referrals from other organisations (20.0%) and recommendations from friends/relatives (14.3%):

> "[I spoke] to VCAT that morning and they recommended calling Legal Aid"
>
> "Recommended by [my] support worker"
>
> "…talking to a friend who had been in a similar situation and she had called Legal Aid"

[34] 83.5% and 85.7% respectively.

[35] 81.1%

Reputation, and trust in Legal Aid, was referred to by 7.6% and for a further 7.6% that searched the internet, the credibility of the presentation was important:

> “After googling 'divorce advice' Legal Aid looked like the most reliable and best option to call"
>
> "Sometimes you can't believe what you find so I thought I'd call Legal Aid"
>
> “It’s very easy to know that they provide advice or assistance. It’s simple to call Legal Aid. I don't have a great education. I was scared to call a big law firm. I saw Legal Aid as the same as first aid. They would help me in my problem.”

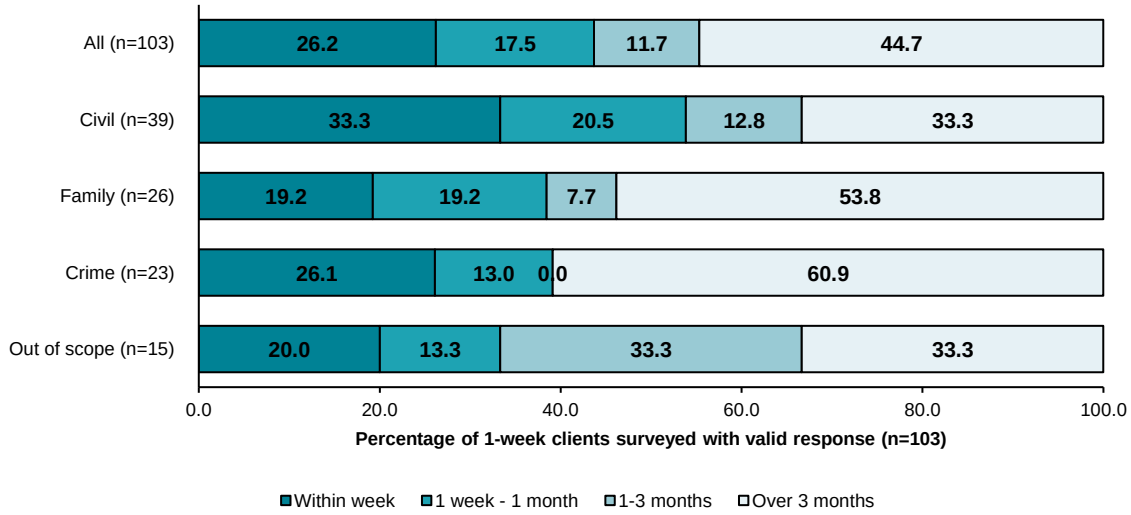
Other reasons for contacting Legal Aid were a general awareness of Legal Aid (3.8%), or it was the only option they were aware of (3.8%) or having used the service before (5.7%).

> “Just thought of them first up”
>
> “Only one that came to mind regarding legal stuff”
>
> “I remembered using them before”

Accessible at the time needed?

Clients were asked when the problem started and what had prompted them to call Legal Help on the day and time that they did. The ‘start’ of a problem isn’t necessarily clear: for instance, for some clients the beginning of a family separation was the start, while for others it was not until a child access issue had arisen. Reported here are client’s own perceptions of how long the problem had been going on. A quarter of clients (26.2%) said that the problem they were calling about had arisen very recently.[36] Overall, half (54.3%) of problems were described as having started within three months prior to the call. But a substantial proportion had commenced longer ago, particularly crime and family related matters (Figure 4.4).

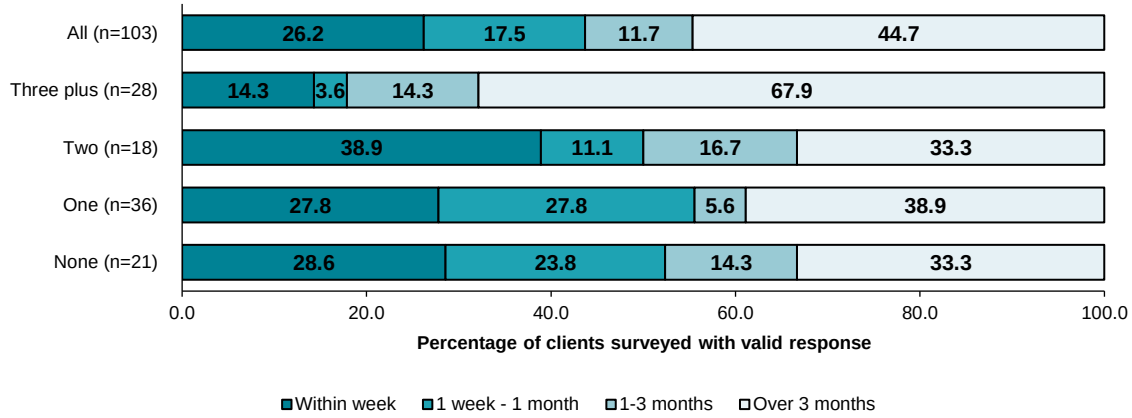
Figure 4.4 Elapsed time between problem start and call to Legal Help, by problem type



[36] Only clients providing a time period are included in the base of this percentage. Excluded are 8 cases where client wasn’t sufficiently clear, refused to answer, or it was not applicable to their issue.

There was also a relationship between problem duration and client vulnerability with two-thirds of surveyed clients with three or more vulnerabilities saying the problem they were calling about had started more than three months ago (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Elapsed time between problem start and call to Legal Help, by number of client vulnerabilities



Recent problems

Some problems had prompted an immediate response:

> "The day the issue with blackmail happened, needed to speak to someone immediately. One of the first phone calls [I] made."
>
> "It was the day [I] received the letter from the debt collectors"
>
> "The day after noticing money had left the joint account"
>
> "The reason is because when I left the magistrates court, the charges told me I needed to call someone to get representation and Legal Aid's number was already there. This is why I called"

Others took a little bit more time:

> "Tried to get through initially for overall advice about what to do post-accident and then after [I] got the letter from the other person that prompted [me] further"
>
> "Only a couple of days…called the union and Fair Work Australia …. Referred [me] to Job Watch [but] couldn't get through…so called Legal Aid."
>
> "The incident in the workplace had only taken place a week ago, … kept thinking about the events and it had really been bothering [me] and [I] needed to talk to someone"

Medium-term problems

Some of the clients that had taken a little longer to contact Legal Help mentioned struggling to find out who could assist them:

> "Was trying to do something about the problem and was ringing everyone [I] could."
>
> "Trying to work out where I stood with issue that I had. I didn't know where to go to get advice that I needed."

Or because they had an ongoing problem that they now required further assistance with:

> "The issue has been ongoing, already contact[ed] VLA before. Called on the day because … hadn't heard from them so wanted advice."

Unsuccessful contacts with other legal assistance providers had sometimes delayed things:

> "Event had occurred – called Intouch and they never got back to [me], tried to call them on that day and they never answered so … called Legal Aid"

> "… Waiting for the insurance company to solve the issue was uncertain and would take too long. [I] had seen a private lawyer who did not help and … was very excessive [sic]"

Others had been attempting to self-help but now needed assistance:

> "Received an email from employer – sent one back. They didn't return it so decided to take action."

> "Trying to sort out for a few weeks, police don't want to get involved….Trying to get stuff, sick of dealing with Victoria Police."

> "Fed up with the landlord not replying to [me], the gas bill is due …"

> "Needed help and wasn't handling it well by myself. Other party was more mature and had the upper hand, so wanted professional opinion so [I] wasn't going to be taken advantage of."

Longer term problems

For the 47 (42.3%) clients whose problem had commenced more than three months prior to their call, contact was sometimes prompted by a recent event, such as a court summons, escalation by the other party, or new information becoming available: [37]

> "[The] summons recommended [calling] Legal Help"

> "Ongoing for over a year. Had court [day after]"

> "Second lot of messages from boss … felt like boss was looking to fire [me] before [maternity] leave started"

In some cases, the timing of the call was triggered by the cumulative impact of the problem on the client's financial security (n=5) or emotional wellbeing (n=2).

> "Really having a hard time trying to pay for …. life"

For most of the remainder it was just that the time had been right for one reason or another:

> "No reason, I just had the time"

> "Had time off and best to get it done"

or the mental space to address the issue:

> "I couldn't get physically or mentally ready to call earlier"

[37] In practice more of the longer duration problems may also have recently escalated, but this wasn't clear from the survey response.

or had been reminded to take action:

> "I had been wanting to call…for a while and it was just a reminder from a friend… prompted me to do so";

or had recognised that they now needed assistance:

> "Thinking about what needed to do, realised legal advice was the best step forward";
>
> "Needed help and wasn't handling it well by myself…".

or that this was just their most recent action in an ongoing journey to resolve the problem:

> "Another attempt to solve the issue…"
>
> "Wanting to get the matter resolved because it has been going on for too long…",

A small number said they had tried calling previously:

> "I tried a few times prior to the day but didn't get through…I also missed a couple of calls from them";
>
> "Called on a few occasions and couldn't get through".

For all these clients, though for a wide range of reasons, it was 'just the right time' to seek assistance, and Legal Help's services were accessible to them at that time.

Summary

- For an information/referral service to be accessible, clients must have a good awareness of its availability so that they can access it early in their help-seeking or easily when they require assistance. Access is also likely to be enhanced if the service is perceived as widely available and trustworthy.
- Two-thirds of surveyed clients had not called Legal Help previously. This high proportion of 'new' clients suggests that Legal Help has a good level of community awareness.
- This awareness is facilitated through several channels with the internet, recommendations from friends/relatives and referrals all important in generating traffic to the service.
- Legal Help is usually a first point of external assistance for legal help, after friends/relatives and perhaps some internet searching. Where this is not the case, clients are usually seeking free/cheaper help having initially approached a private lawyer.
- Four in ten clients had looked at the VLA website before their call, and these clients were more likely to say they were looking for personalised support. The website may be diverting clients whose information needs have been met, though alternatively these clients could better articulate the more personalised support they were looking for.
- The no-cost feature of the service is particularly attractive, with financial reasons being the most commonly mentioned reason for accessing the service.
- The brand recognition of Legal Aid ensures Legal Help is seen as a trusted provider of legal information.
- A substantial proportion of legal problems had been going on for a while, with external events or client preparedness prompting contact. This was particularly so for clients with multiple vulnerabilities.

5 Appropriate: what is provided to clients?

INDICATORS OF SERVICE
Clients' needs are understood and met
Relevant and accurate information and / or referral details are provided
Lower capability clients are triaged to more intensive help

To effectively deliver a service that is appropriate for the range of clients accessing the service, clients' needs must be understood and met at the point of service delivery with accurate and relevant information and referrals. Clients surveyed at one-week after the call were asked what they had been looking for from Legal Aid when they called. Legal Help officers and lawyers recorded their own interpretation of what clients wanted. They also indicated how easy they had found it to understand the client's issue, whether they thought the client understood them, and how well they met the client's needs. Details of what was provided to the client, including whether the client was sent an information email and, if referrals were made, the type of organisations referred to, were also captured on the client recruitment form.

What do clients say they want?

Most callers are looking for assistance with a problem that they know or suspect to be legal. But the language they use to express the kind of assistance they are looking for varies. And while these differences may be subtle, they nevertheless provide some insight into clients' expectations of the type of support they were expecting.

Only one in ten (9.9%) specifically mentioned wanting information or a referral:

> "Wanted more information about finding out about criminal history"
>
> "Needed information about going to court"
>
> "Looking for a referral for family law help …"

A further one in ten described wanting clarity on their 'rights' (11.7%):

> "Wanted to know rights regarding threaten[ed] dismissal …for peace of mind."
>
> "Know my rights [if] it came to [my] partner wouldn't sign the forms for the sale"
>
> "Find out about …rights as a consumer

The most commonly used phrasing by surveyed clients indicated that they were looking for 'advice' for their specific issue, though the meaning of the word advice in this context could have a wider definition than that used by legal assistance providers (35.1%):

> "I just wanted advice on what options I had"
>
> "I don't have insurance and I need to get advice because I've never been involved in a car accident before…"

"General advice about everything to do with separation, mostly concerned about kids"

*Wanted advice before appealing to Centrelink"

"Advice about how to have the warrant executed and the matter going before the court"

Overlapping with the concept of asking for advice, but more clearly in line with the legal assistance provider definition of 'advice', nearly a quarter (23.4%) of survey clients stated that they wanted to know what they needed to do, or should do, next:

"Just wanted to know what to do"

"What can I do, do I need to take legal action"

"Basically, where I stood and what I needed to do"

"Should [I] go through [court] or not [and] just pay the fine"

Nearly a fifth (18.0%) described their requirement as one for active assistance such as interpreting the terms of contracts or conditions of orders, or a lawyer to represent them:

"Hoping to get someone to help [me] and liaise [with insurance company] on my behalf"

"I just wanted some legal representation. I can't represent myself and wanted to know my options."

"Seeking legal representation due to the summons [I] received"

"I was asking if I could book a lawyer to represent me. I wanted to see if I was eligible for a duty lawyer"

Problem type

Table 5.1 shows what clients said they wanted by problem type. Active assistance/ representation was most often mentioned by surveyed clients with family or crime problems, while clients with civil problems were more likely to say they were seeking direction on what to do next. While the high proportion of clients with crime-related problems categorised as seeking information/referral is perhaps surprising, most of these had impending court appearances and were seeking information about the court process, including information on availability of duty lawyers. These clients did not articulate their requests as ones for assistance but that doesn't mean they weren't ultimately seeking more active support.

Table 5.1 What survey clients say they wanted when they contacted Legal Help, by type of problem

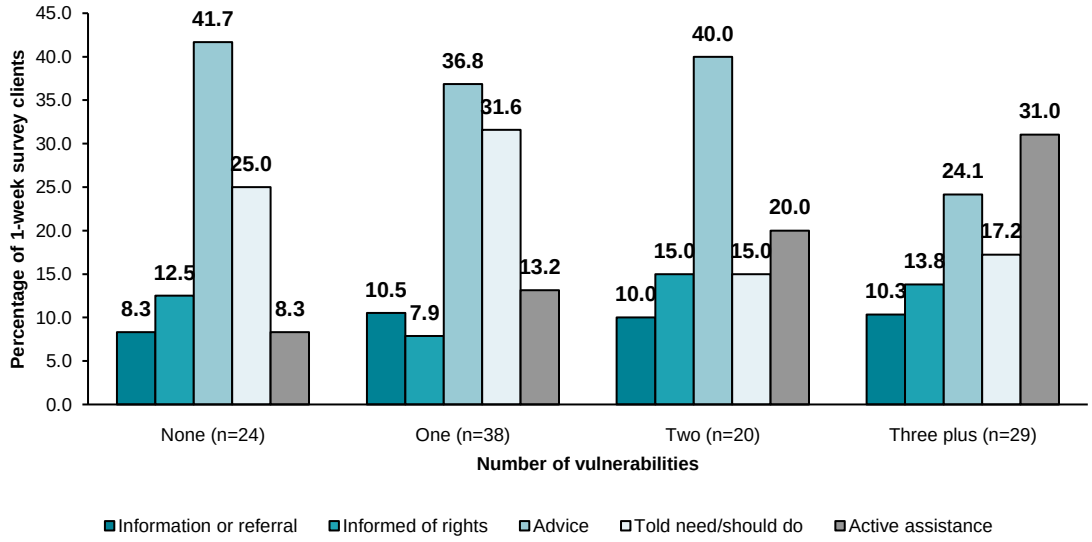
		Information or referral	Informed of rights	Advice	Told need/ should do	Active assistance/ representation
	n	%	%	%	%	%
Out of scope	17	5.9	11.8	47.1	17.6	11.8
Crime	26	30.8	0.0	23.1	19.2	26.9
Family	28	3.6	3.6	46.4	21.4	25.0
Civil	40	2.5	25.0	30.0	30.0	10.0
All	111	9.9	11.7	35.1	23.4	18.0

Source: One-week client survey. Verbatim responses coded into categories.
Note: As categories are based on client's descriptions, they will to reflect how a client expressed themselves as well as any underlying differences in expectations. Allocation to a particular category was sometimes a judgement call so not too much weight should be placed on precise percentages. Two clients are excluded for not providing a relevant response.

Client vulnerabilities

The percentage of clients who said they had contacted Legal Help looking for active assistance or representation increased with increasing number of vulnerabilities (Figure 5.1). In contrast, surveyed clients with two or less vulnerabilities were most commonly seeking advice.

Figure 5.1 What clients said they wanted from Legal Help, by number of vulnerabilities

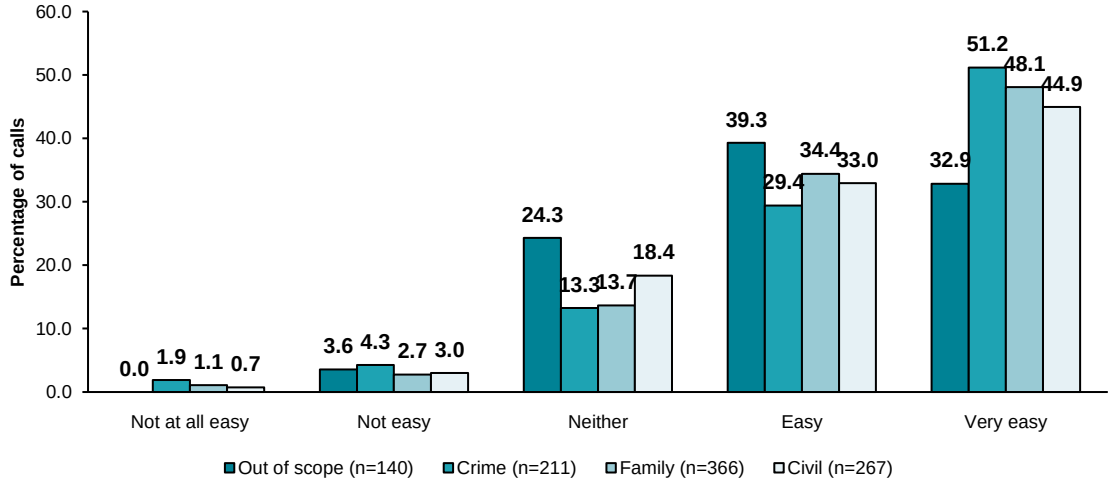


Understanding what clients want

From our observations, one advantage of the Legal Help service is that it allows for questioning of clients to determine the exact nature of their problem, which isn't always immediately apparent. By the end of the call Legal Help staff usually said they had found it easy or very easy to understand what the client wanted (Figure 5.2), and to some extent this

will reflect their own skill and experience in probing for and identifying legal problems. There was little variation according to legal problem type, though ratings were less definitive for out of scope calls.

Figure 5.2 Legal Help rating of how easy it was to understand the client's issue[38]



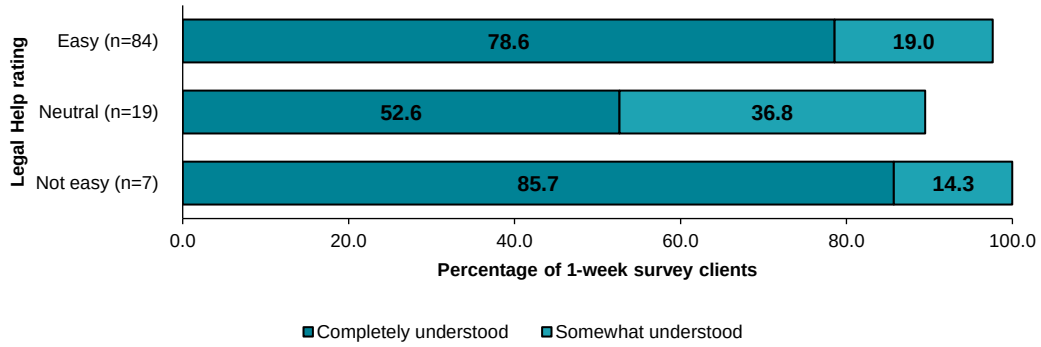
Reasons for 'not easy' ratings included callers for whom English was not their first language; poor quality telephone lines; the ability of client to express themselves or understand what they were being told; the need to review paperwork; and the complexity of the matter:

> "Unclear, arranged for Korean speaking lawyer to call back and assist"
>
> "Very bad telephone line, difficult to understand caller'
>
> "Caller did not understand why I was referring him back to his private lawyer"
>
> "[client] had a lot of difficulty reading out his charges and understanding the paperwork…"
>
> "the client struggled to locate his charge sheet and understand what information I needed"
>
> "Was difficult to identify client's legal issue, referred … to have lawyer look over…agreement…and clarify…obligations"

Only seven of the clients surveyed were recorded as not easy to understand. In all these cases the client, however, agreed either somewhat or completely that the person they spoke to had really understood what they wanted (Figure 5.3).

[38] Excluded are 23 cases with more than one problem type and 40 non-legal problem calls.

Figure 5.3 Percentage of survey clients agreeing the person they spoke to really understood what they wanted, by Legal Help rating of how easy the client was to understand



What are clients provided with?

Legal Help staff perform a range of roles: they listen, gather relevant details about the client and their problem, identify the legal aspects, determine the service options they have available, and respond accordingly. Service options include information over the phone, referral to another organisation or part of VLA, and sending one or more information emails on a specific topic. In practice they also provide a sympathetic and listening ear.

Referrals

Virtually all the surveyed clients had either been referred to at least one type of organisation and/or sent an email, though few had only been sent an email (Table 5.2).[39] Multiple referral types were most often given to clients with a family problem, with, for instance, 35.7% provided with a referral to a CLC and with information on private lawyers.

Table 5.2 What Legal Help staff provided to clients, by surveyed client problem type

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=40	n=111
	%	%	%	%	%
No referral	0.0	7.7	0.0	2.5	2.7
Information email only	0.0	7.7	3.6	2.5	3.6
1 referral type	76.5	73.1	42.9	77.5	67.6
2 referral type	23.5	7.7	42.9	15.0	21.6
3+ referral types	0.0	3.8	10.7	2.5	4.5
	100.0	100	100	100	100.0

Source: Client recruitment form and 1-week client survey. Referral counts are to specified organisations and exclude information emails, which may have been sent in addition.
Notes: The larger sample (n=558) of all eligible clients gave a very similar profile, providing reassurance that despite the small numbers reported here this is a good representation of referrals provided to non-Advice clients.

[39] This profile was the same as that for all eligible Legal Help clients – see Table A2.4, Appendix 2. There were some small differences in terms of what the referral was with surveyed clients more likely to be referred to a CLC and sent an information email – see Table A2.5, Appendix 2.

Overall, referral to one or more community legal centres was the most frequent type of referral, with half of surveyed clients provided with such a referral (Table 5.3).

A third of clients were referred to Law Institute of Victoria resources to facilitate access to private and pro bono lawyers or back to their own private lawyer. There were also referrals to other departments within VLA, including their court-based duty lawyers (particularly for those with crime problems) and panel lawyers who are private practitioners that provide services to Legal Aid clients through grants of aid. Referral to non-legal support was rare, but examples of these were referrals to organisations providing financial advice and support in relation to family violence.

Table 5.3 Type of referral provided by Legal Help to 1-week survey clients, by problem type

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=40	n=111
	%	%	%	%	%
Community legal centre [1]	47.1	50.0	60.7	55.0	54.1
External lawyer or Law Inst. Victoria [2]	70.6	15.4	60.7	15.0	35.1
Referral/appointment elsewhere in VLA[3]	0.0	0.0	14.3	30.0	13.5
VLA duty lawyer [4]	0.0	23.1	7.1	0.0	7.2
Panel lawyer [5]	0.0	3.8	7.1	0.0	2.7
Non-legal support	0.0	0.0	3.6	7.5	3.6
Court or other dispute resolution	0.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.9
Public advocate/commission [7]	0.0	0.0	3.6	2.5	1.8

Source: Client recruitment form, includes recoding of 'other' responses. Multiple responses allowed.
Notes:
1 Community legal centres are independent of Legal Aid. Some provide general services to their local community, or to parts of that community, others specialise in specific areas of law.
2 Law Institute of Victoria provides information on lawyers practising in Victoria by specialism and location.
3 This includes to specialist areas of VLA but excludes referral back to Legal Help.
4 Duty lawyers are based at courts and tribunals to assist people who are at court for a hearing and do not have their own lawyer.
5 Panel lawyers are private practitioners that have been selected to provide services to Legal Aid clients through grants of aid.
6 These include financial and family violence support services.
7 Also includes ombudsman.

Variations in types of referral by client vulnerability provide evidence that Legal Help staff are actively responding to the needs and capabilities of clients. Referrals to external lawyers was more common for those with no or just one vulnerability, whereas referrals to lawyers elsewhere in VLA was greatest for those with multiple vulnerabilities (Table 5.4). There was also greater referral to duty lawyers and panel lawyers for those with more than one vulnerability.

Table 5.4 Type of referral provided by Legal Help to 1-week survey clients, by number of vulnerabilities

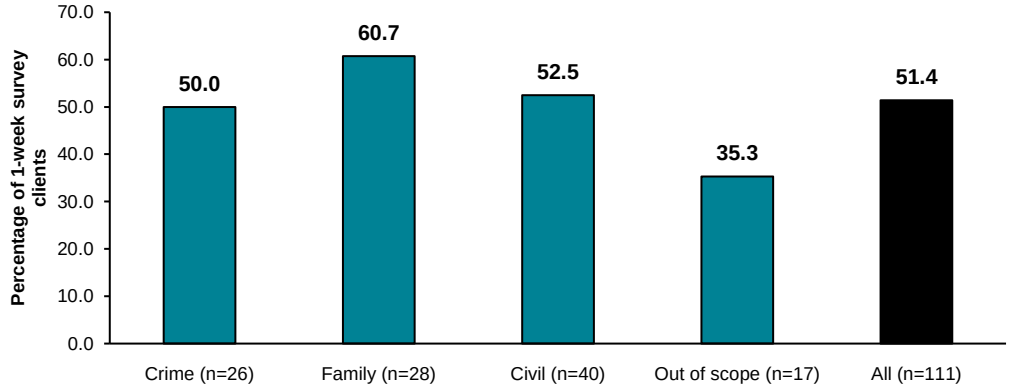
	Number of vulnerabilities			
	None	One	Two	Three plus
	n=23	n=37	n=19	n=27
	%	%	%	%
Referral to a community legal centre [1]	52.2	51.4	57.9	63.0
Referral to external lawyer or LIV [2]	56.5	40.5	26.3	22.2
Referral/appointment elsewhere in VLA[3]	8.7	2.7	5.3	18.5
Referral to VLA duty lawyer [4]	0.0	5.4	15.8	7.4
Referral to panel lawyer [5]	4.3	0.0	0.0	7.4
Referral to non-legal support	4.3	2.7	5.3	3.7
Referral to court or other dispute resolution	4.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Referral to a public advocate/commission	4.3	0.0	5.3	0.0

Source: Client recruitment form, includes recoding of 'other' responses, and 1-week survey for client vulnerabilities. Multiple responses allowed.
Notes:
1 Community legal centres are independent of Legal Aid. Some provide general services to their local community, or to parts of that community, others specialise in specific areas of law.
2 Law Institute of Victoria provides information on lawyers practising in Victoria by specialism and location.
3 This includes to specialist areas of VLA but excludes referral back to Legal Help.
4 Duty lawyers are based at courts and tribunals to assist people who are at court for a hearing and do not have their own lawyer.
5 Panel lawyers are private practitioners that have been selected to provide services to Legal Aid clients through grants of aid.
6 These include financial and family violence support services.
7 Also includes ombudsman.

Information emails

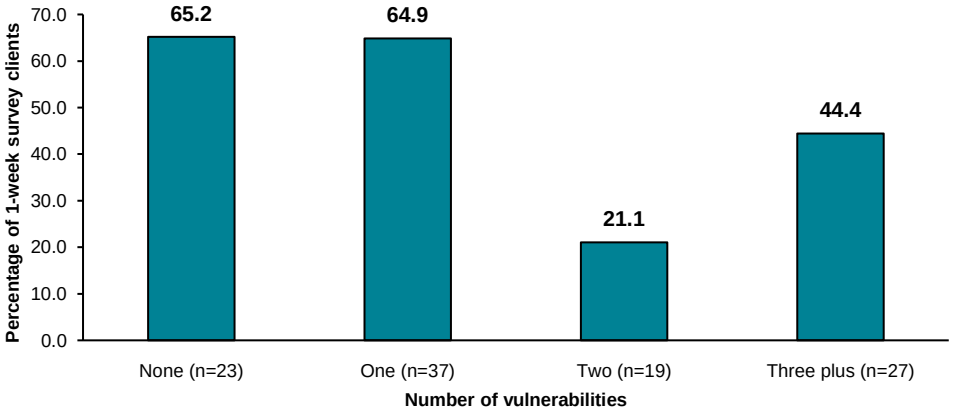
Information emails contain standardised information on a specific type of legal problem or procedure. They are not used for the purpose of a conversation and are therefore tagged as 'no-reply'. Information emails were used extensively and as the main way to provide information directly relevant to the client's issue, links to further resources, contact details for referrals and community legal education. They provide detailed material on a wide range of legal problems. They are not tailored to the particular circumstance of the individual but the triage role that Legal Help provides ensures clients are directed to appropriate self-help resources via the links in the information emails. Although there was variation in the use of information emails by problem type for *surveyed* clients (Figure 5.4) this did not generalise to the larger Legal Help information/referral client sample where the use of such emails was more consistent across legal problem type.

Figure 5.4 Percentage of 1-week survey clients recorded on client recruitment form as being sent an information email, by problem type



What was evident, though, was that information emails were more often sent to clients with no or just one vulnerability, than those with two or more (Figure 5.5)

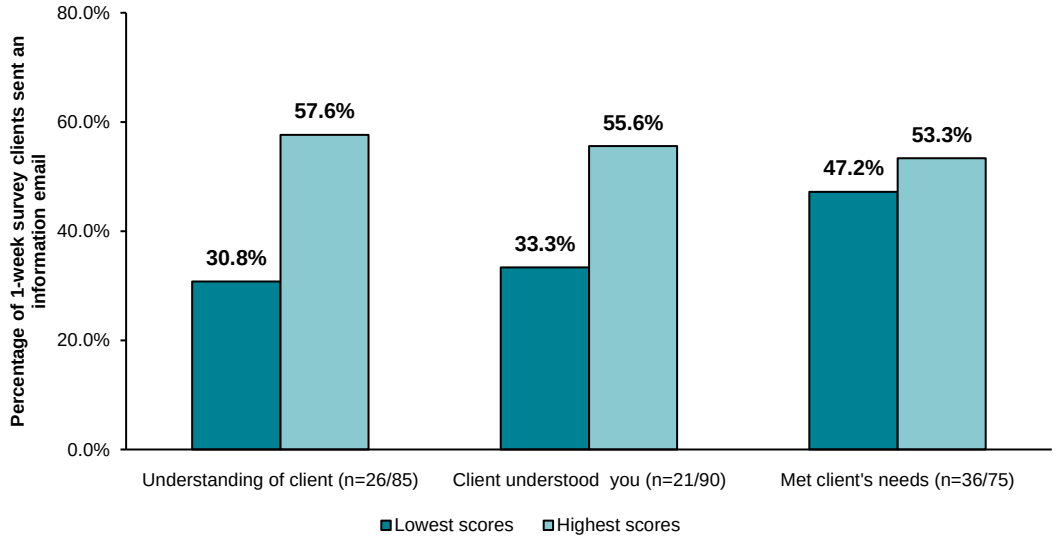
Figure 5.5 Percentage of 1-week survey clients recorded on client recruitment form as being sent an information email, by number of vulnerabilities



Legal Help staff who said they had understood the client's issue well and/or that the client had understood them, were more likely to have sent the client an information email. However, email use did not differ much whether they said they had met that client's needs or not (Figure 5.6).[40]

[40] This finding was also found for the full Legal Help client recruitment form sample.

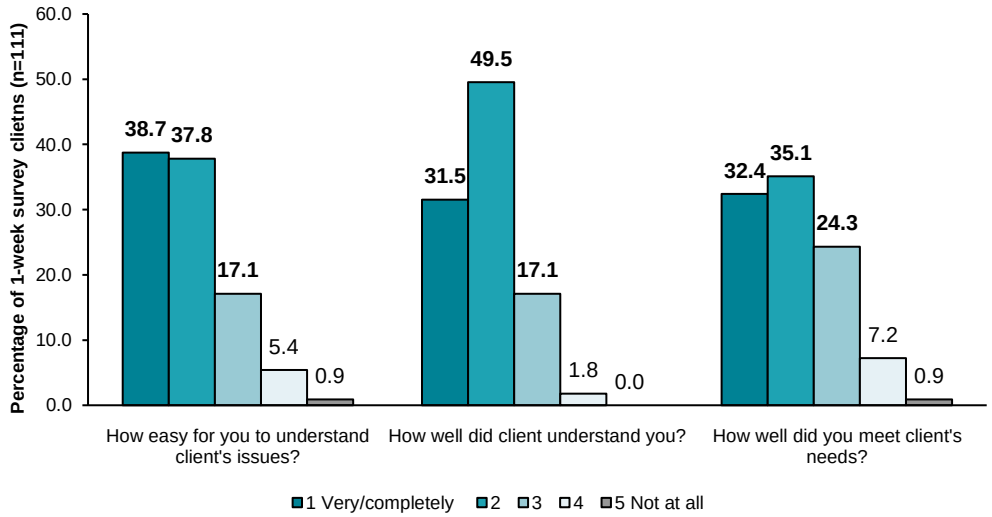
Figure 5.6 Percentage of clients sent an information email by Legal Help staff ratings of the call[41]



Legal Help staff assessment of calls

In general, then, Legal Help staff are generally positive about how calls went, at least for those clients who were asked to participate in the research.[42] The majority of surveyed clients' issues were rated as fairly or very easy to understand. Legal Help staff usually thought the client had understood them. A lower proportion thought they had met the client's needs but, nevertheless, two-thirds of the surveyed client calls received this rating (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7 Legal Help staff ratings of surveyed clients' calls on client recruitment form



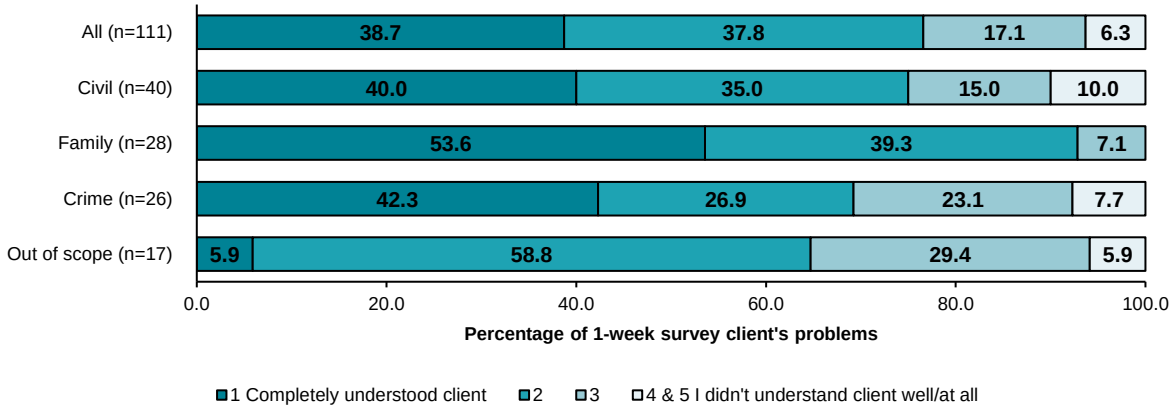
[41] For each item, lowest scores are ratings of 1,2 and 3. Highest scores are ratings of 4 and 5 by the Legal Help officer/lawyer.

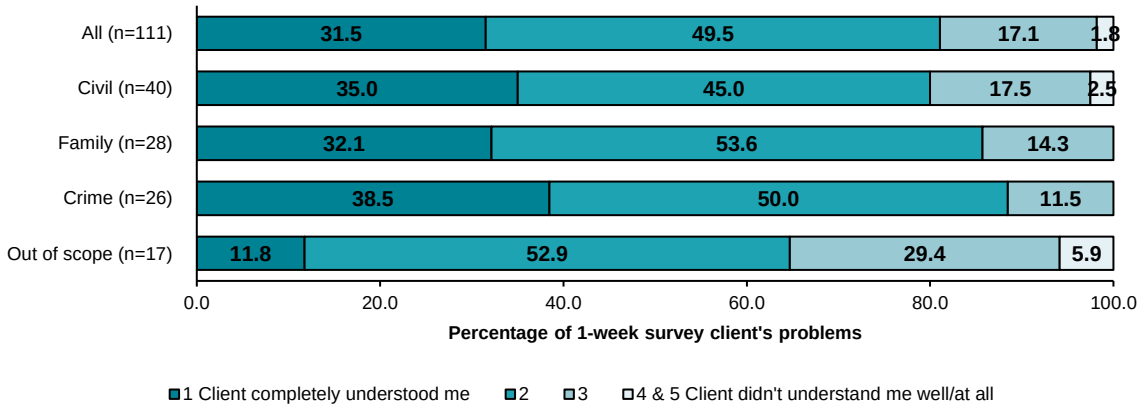
[42] See Table A2.2, Appendix 2 for reasons clients were not asked to participate in the research and Table A2.3 for Legal Help staff ratings for all eligible clients, compared to those participating in the one-week survey.

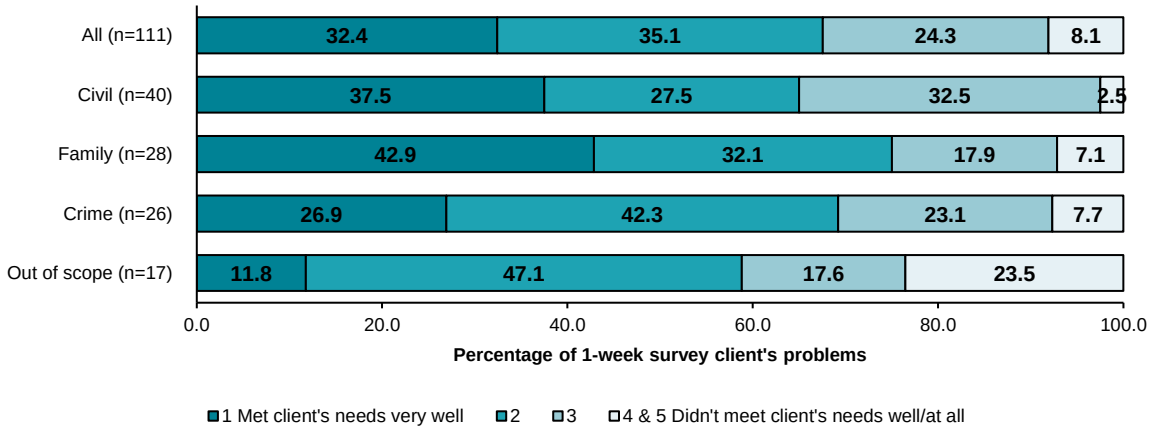
Problem type

Clients with family law problems seemed to have the easier to understand issues, while out of scope problems seem to present a greater challenge (Figure 5.8). On the other hand, Legal Help staff were less sure about how well clients with family law problems had understood them, though again the communication barrier seemed to be greatest for out of scope clients. Not surprisingly communication ratings were related to how well the staff thought they had met the needs of the client, with family problems scoring highest and out of scope problems the lowest.

Figure 5.8 Legal Help staff ratings, by surveyed client problem type



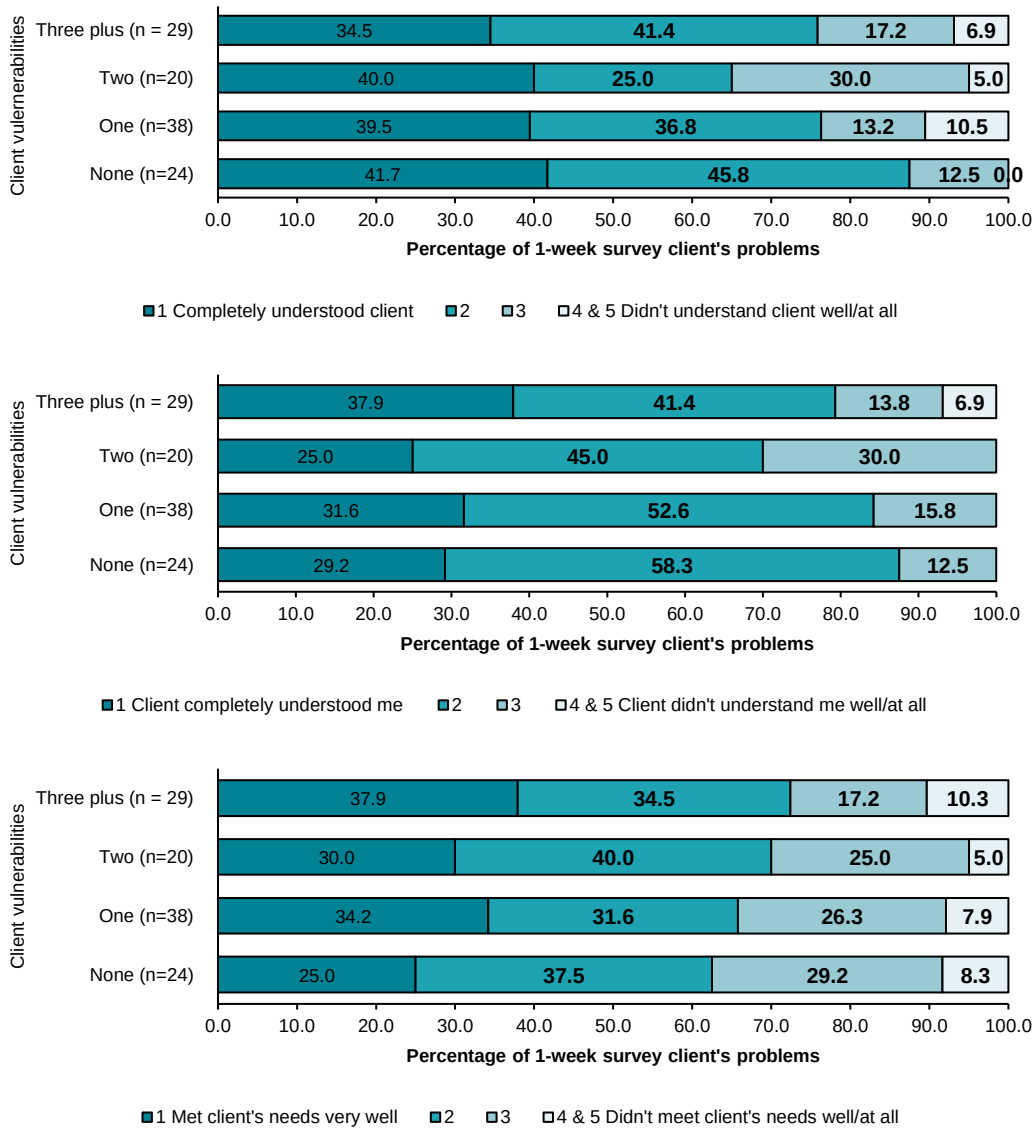




Client vulnerabilities

On average, Legal Help staff said they had found it harder to understand clients with vulnerabilities than those with no vulnerabilities, though these differences were small (Figure 5.9). But surprisingly, they were more likely to think clients with multiple vulnerabilities had completely understood them, and that they had met these clients' needs very well.

Figure 5.9 Legal Help staff ratings, by surveyed client vulnerabilities



Although the number of clients is too small to draw robust conclusions, this finding could be due to clients with lower capability being less likely to question what they were told by the Legal Help staff. Some possible support for this conjecture is provided by the impact of client educational attainment, as this is likely related to a client's ability to express their problem and question the information they are given. Clients with higher educational attainment were said by Legal Help staff to be easier to understand, but staff were less likely to say they had completely met these clients' needs or that the client had completely understood them (Table 5.5). However, there are other potential explanations for this finding too, so further investigation is warranted.

Table 5.5 Legal Help staff ratings of client calls, by client's educational attainment

		Very easily understood client	Met clients needs very well	Client completely understood me
Client's educational attainment:	n	%	%	%
Degree or above	44	40.9	27.3	25.0
Diploma or Cert 3/4	20	45.0	30.0	35.0
Year 11/12 or Cert 1/2	20	50.0	55.0	55.0
Year 10 or below	10	20.0	30.0	40.0
Current student	11	27.3	27.3	9.1

Source: Client recruitment form and 1-week client survey

Summary

- To deliver a service that is appropriate, clients' needs must be understood and met at the point of service delivery with accurate and relevant information and referrals. As information services are unlikely to be sufficient for low capability clients, these clients should be identified and triaged to more intensive help.
- Many callers to Legal Help are looking for personalised 'advice' about a specific problem or clear direction in what they should do next, rather than information or referral, particularly if they have already accessed information from the VLA website and found this too generic.
- Clients with multiple vulnerabilities were the most likely to say they were looking for active assistance such as legal representation.
- Legal Help staff tend to be validly optimistic about the support they have provided to clients and they are reasonably good at assessing the client's interpretation of the experience.
- Clients' issues were usually said to be easy to understand and clients generally felt their needs had been understood by the person they spoke to.
- Almost all clients were given a referral to an external organisation or to another part of VLA.
- About half were also sent an information email. Use of information emails was greater for clients with no or just one vulnerability than those with multiple vulnerabilities.
- Referrals to community legal centres were the most common type of referral, except for out of scope matters for which referral to external lawyers/Law Institute of Victoria was the most common. Referral to non-legal support is very rare.

6 Experience: What do clients experience?

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES
Information / referral is effectively communicated
Client feels heard and helped
Client empowered to act
Information provided is relevant and useful
Client has the information to take appropriate next steps

However appropriate the information or referral provided, it is of little value if the client can't recall receiving it, doesn't understand it or doesn't consider it relevant to their problem or circumstances. This Section draws on findings from the one-week survey to assess the extent of these barriers.

Are referrals effectively communicated?

For a referral service to be effective, the information conveyed to clients has to be absorbed by them, whether or not they then choose to act on it. Just over eight in ten (81.1%) of the clients surveyed recalled being told or recommended to contact another person or organisation. Not all clients were given a referral of course, so restricting this analysis to those recorded as having been given a referral or sent an email increases the recall rate to 82.4%.[43] Rates of recall were generally unrelated to client characteristics but were lower for clients with lower educational attainment, or who spoke a language other than English. This will partly explain why recall rates are lowest for those with two or more vulnerabilities (Table 6.1).

[43] Not all emails include referrals but it isn't feasible to adjust the analysis to exclude those that do not. Some clients recalled an email or referral although none was recorded as provided. However, they may have been reporting appointment emails that were not captured by the client recruitment form.

Table 6.1 Percentage of clients recalling a referral

		Client recalls a referral
Problem type:	n	%
Crime	22	86.4
Family	27	85.2
Civil	37	75.7
Out of scope	17	94.1
Vulnerabilities:		
None	23	95.7
One	37	83.8
Two	20	75.0
Three plus	28	75.0
All where referral given	108	82.4

Source: Legal Help recruitment form and one-week client survey

Note: Question asked "were you told/recommended to contact another organisation/person?"

Base excludes clients who were not recorded as being sent an email or provided with one or more referrals on the client recruitment form

Are some types of referral remembered better than others?

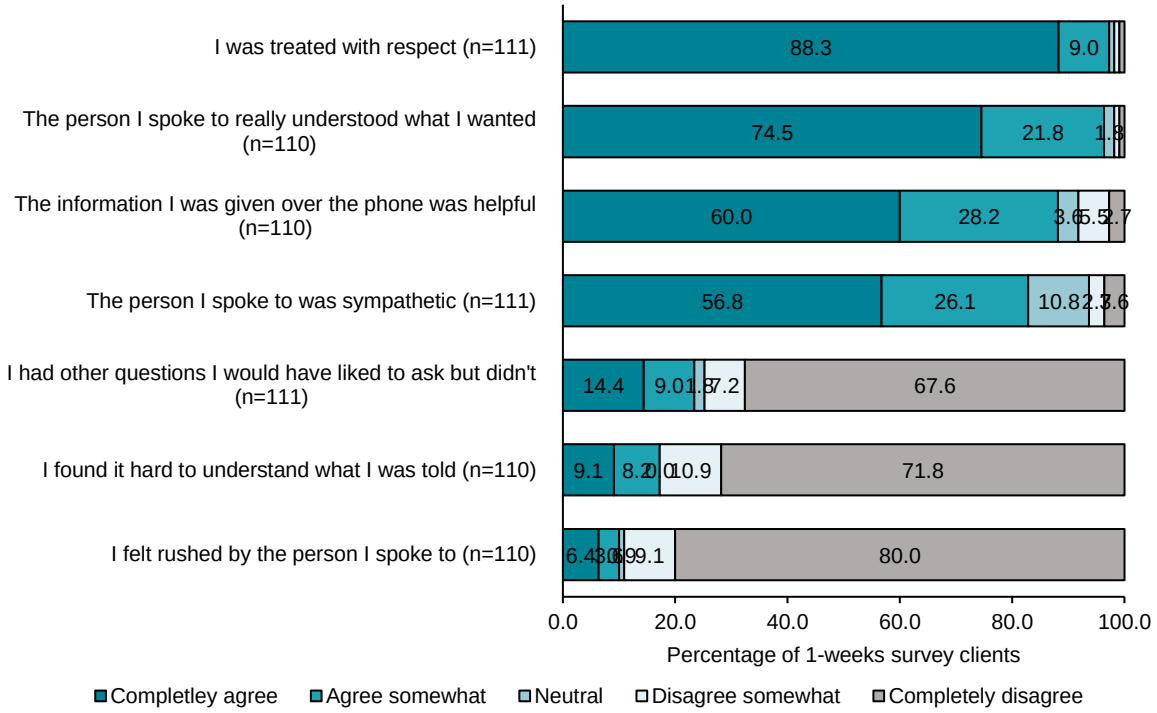
Matching up the referrals provided to those recalled by clients isn't straightforward as clients won't necessarily distinguish between referral types, such as community legal centres, duty lawyers, panel lawyers, other VLA lawyers, private lawyers and Law Institute of Victoria referrals. The match was best for community legal centres, with 58.3% of clients who were recorded as having been given a CLC referral, recalling this. The equivalent figure for private lawyers or Law Institute of Victoria was 36.8%. Only 30.4% referrals to VLA lawyers were remembered, but this may be an artefact of the question asking about 'other' organisations.

Eight in ten (80.7%) of clients that were recorded as having been sent an email remembered receiving one. The actions they then took are discussed further in Section 7 of this report.

Do clients feel heard and helped?

Nearly nine in ten (88.3%) clients completely agreed that the officer or lawyer they spoke to treated them with respect, and nearly six in ten (56.8%) completely agreed they were treated sympathetically. Only a small minority of clients found it hard to understand what they were told, felt rushed or had other questions they would have liked to ask but didn't (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Clients' rating of experience of the service they received



Problem type

There was little variation in surveyed clients' experience of their call by problem type, with positive assessments across the board, though clients with out of scope problems were slightly more likely to say they had found it hard to understand what they were told (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Percentage of clients somewhat or completely agreeing with experience, by problem type

% somewhat and completely agree	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=40	n=111
	%	%	%	%	%
I was treated with respect	94.1	96.2	100.0	97.5	97.3
The person I spoke to really understood what I wanted	100.0	96.2	92.9	95.0	95.5
The person I spoke to was sympathetic	82.4	76.9	96.4	82.5	82.9
The information I was given over the phone was helpful	76.5	88.5	96.4	85.0	87.4
I found it hard to understand what I was told	23.5	11.5	17.9	17.5	17.1
I felt rushed by the person I spoke to	11.8	15.4	14.3	2.5	9.9
I had other questions I would have liked to ask but didn't	23.5	23.1	21.4	25.0	23.4

Source: 1-week client survey

Client vulnerabilities

In terms of positive service experience, client vulnerability did not seem to have any impact, other than the information provided being perceived as less helpful for those with three or more vulnerabilities. However, surveyed clients with multiple vulnerabilities were more likely to say they had found it hard to understand what they were told, and to say they had other questions they would like to have asked but didn't (Table 6.3). Analysis by type of vulnerability indicates that this is primarily driven by clients with low social capital, poor English language skills and lower levels of educational attainment (Table A1.6.1 and A1.6.2, Appendix 1).

Table 6.3 Percentage of clients somewhat or completely agreeing to experience, by number of vulnerabilities

	None	One	Two	Three plus
	n = 24	n = 38	n =20	n = 29
	%	%	%	%
I was treated with respect	100.0	97.4	100.0	93.1
The person I spoke to really understood what I wanted	95.8	100.0	85.0	96.6
The person I spoke to was sympathetic	83.3	81.6	85.0	82.8
The information I was given over the phone was helpful	100.0	89.5	95.0	69.0
I found it hard to understand what I was told	4.2	7.9	25.0	34.5
I felt rushed by the person I spoke to	12.5	5.3	10.0	13.8
I had other questions I would have liked to ask but didn't	4.2	15.8	30.0	44.8

Source: 1-week client survey

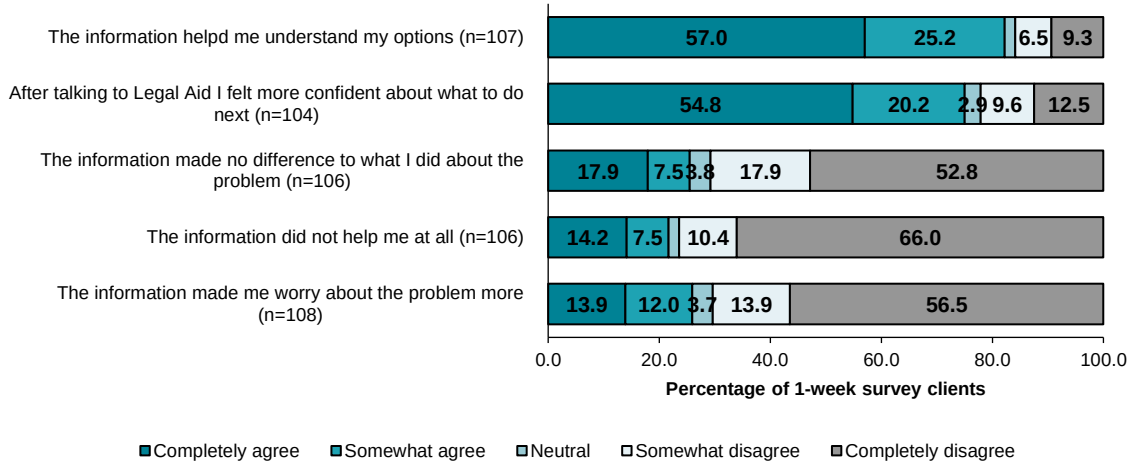
Notes: Despite the small sample size, there was some indication that the poorer ratings for clients with multiple vulnerabilities for (a) *I found it hard to understand what I was told* (b) *the information I was given over the phone was helpful* and, (c) *I had other questions I would like to ask but didn't* are statistically significant and persist when controlling for broad area of law type in a logistic regression model.

Most clients also completely agreed that the person they spoke to really understood what they wanted, and reassuringly for Legal Help staff, this was the case even where the staff member had said it wasn't easy to understand what the client wanted (see Section 5, Figure 5.3).

Does information empower the client to act?

Immediate outcomes that clients experience from the service were assessed in regard to: the impact on their immediate wellbeing, empowerment, and clarity of next steps. Over half of clients completely agreed that, as a result of the call, they felt more confident about what to do next and that the information helped them understand their options (Figure 6.2). Over half (52.8%) completely disagreed that the information made no difference to what they did about their problem. For some, the information they were given made them worry about the problem more, but a half (56.5%) completely disagreed that it had such an impact.

Figure 6.2 Clients' rating of the value of the service they received



Only a minority of clients gave negative assessments. Clients with out of scope problems were most likely to say that the information was of no help to them (35.3%), while those enquiring about criminal matters were most likely to agree somewhat or completely that the information they got made them worry about the problem more (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Percentage of clients completely or somewhat agreeing with value of service, by problem type

% completely or somewhat agree	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=40	n=111
	%	%	%	%	%
The information helped me understand my options	70.6	76.9	78.6	85.0	79.3
After talking to Legal Aid I felt more confident about what to do next	70.6	69.2	67.9	72.5	70.3
The information made no difference to what I did about the problem	23.5	26.9	21.4	25.0	24.3
The information did not help me at all	35.3	19.2	21.4	15.0	20.7
The information made me worry about the problem more	17.6	34.6	21.4	25.0	25.2

Source: 1-week client survey

Clients with two or less vulnerabilities generally had similar ratings of service value. Those with three or more vulnerabilities were less likely to say the information had helped them understand their options or made them feel more confident about what to do next. They were also more likely to give negative assessments, with more than a third saying they completely or somewhat agreed the information made no difference to what they did about their problem; did not help them at all; and made them worry more (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5 Percentage of clients completely or somewhat agreeing with value of service, by number of vulnerabilities

% completely and somewhat agree	None	One	Two	Three plus	All
	n=24	n=38	n=20	n=29	n=111
	%	%	%	%	%
The information helped me understand my options	79.2	84.2	90.0	65.5	79.3
After talking to Legal Aid I felt more confident about what to do next	75.0	78.9	75.0	51.7	70.3
The information made no difference to what I did about the problem	12.5	18.4	25.0	41.4	24.3
The information did not help me at all	8.3	21.1	10.0	37.9	20.7
The information made me worry about the problem more	16.7	15.8	30.0	41.4	25.2

Source: 1-week client survey

Notes: Despite the small sample size, there was some indication that the poorer ratings for clients with multiple vulnerabilities for all the items are statistically significant and persist when controlling for broad area of law type in a logistic regression model.

The main elements of clients' experience

Grouping together similar responses to the service assessment questions indicates there are three distinct types of experience of the service: Helped, Frustrated and Heard.[44]

Clients scoring highly on Helped feel more confident about what to do next and tend to agree that the information had helped them understand their options. They disagreed that the information did not help them, made no difference to what they did, or made them worry more.

Clients scoring highly on Frustrated were more likely to disagree that the person they spoke to understood what they wanted or that the information they got was helpful. They found it hard to understand what they were told and had other questions they would like to have asked but didn't. Not surprisingly, then, they thought Legal Aid should have given them more help with their problem.

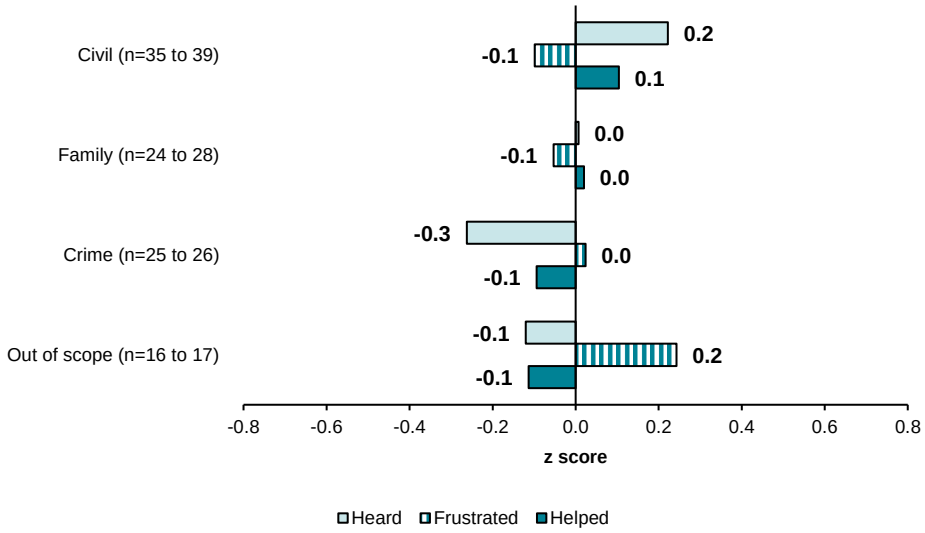
Clients scoring highly on Heard were focused on the positive experience of the conversation. They did not feel rushed and found the person they spoke to treated them with respect and was sympathetic.

Figure 6.3 plots standardised scores on these three experience measures by client's problem type. In this chart a zero score is the average score, a negative score is below average and a positive score is above average. The differences by problem type are fairly minor with clients of out of scope problems being slightly more frustrated; and, those with crime problems less

[44] A principal components analysis was run on all the service assessment questions. This type of analysis identifies which questions are assessing similar underlying constructs, in that answers to them tend to be correlated. The analysis results in a set of uncorrelated principal components.

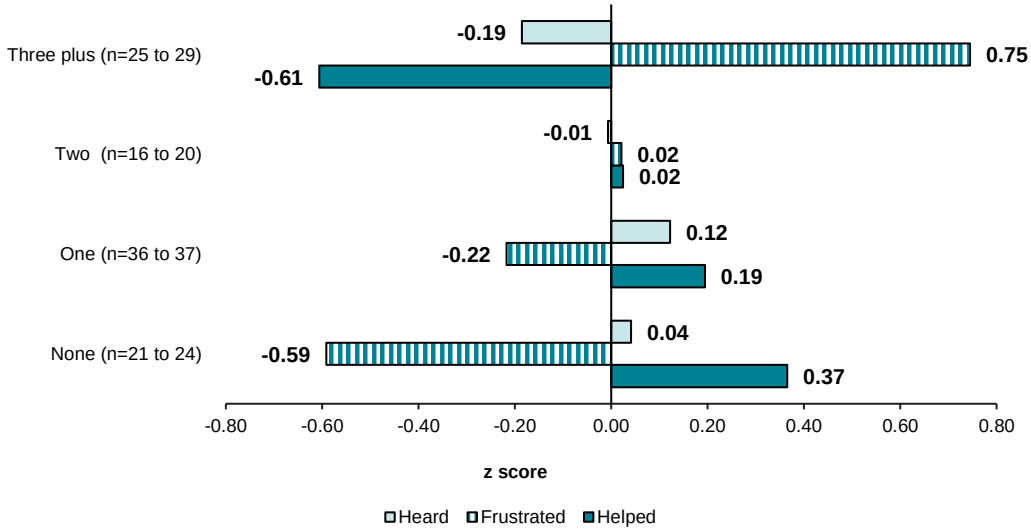
likely to feel heard, particularly in contrast to those with civil problems.

Figure 6.3 Variation in clients' experience of call, by problem type (normalised scores, average = 0)



There were, though, more apparent differences on these measures by client vulnerability (Figure 6.4). Clients with the three or more vulnerabilities had a high average Frustrated score and a low average Helped score. Clients with no vulnerabilities, on the other hand, had a high average Helped score and a low average Frustrated score.

Figure 6.4 Variation in clients' experience of call, by number of vulnerabilities (normalised scores, average = 0)

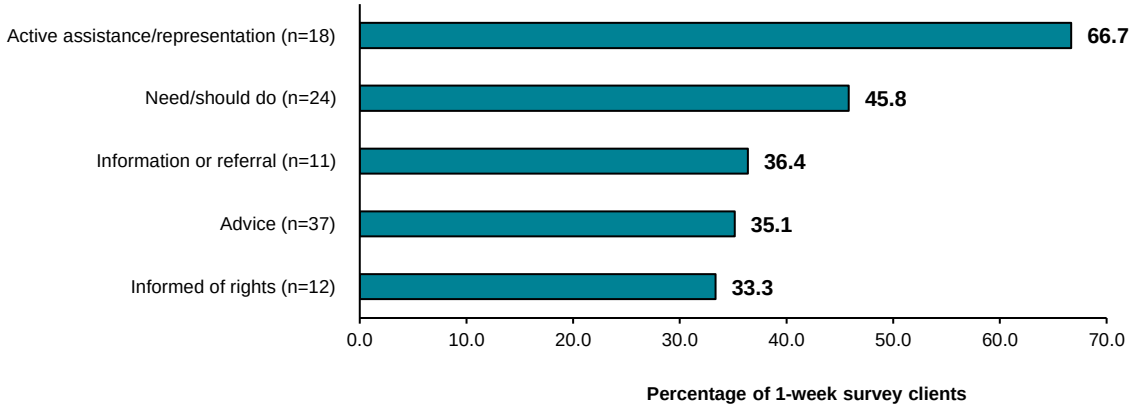


Did clients get what they wanted?

Overall, surveyed clients were fairly evenly split on whether they had got what they wanted from the service they received, with four in ten agreeing completely or somewhat that Legal Aid should have given them more help with their problem. Not surprisingly, it was those clients who were seeking active assistance or representation that were most likely to say they

should have been given more help, followed by those who had wanted direction on what they personally needed or should do next (Figure 6.5).

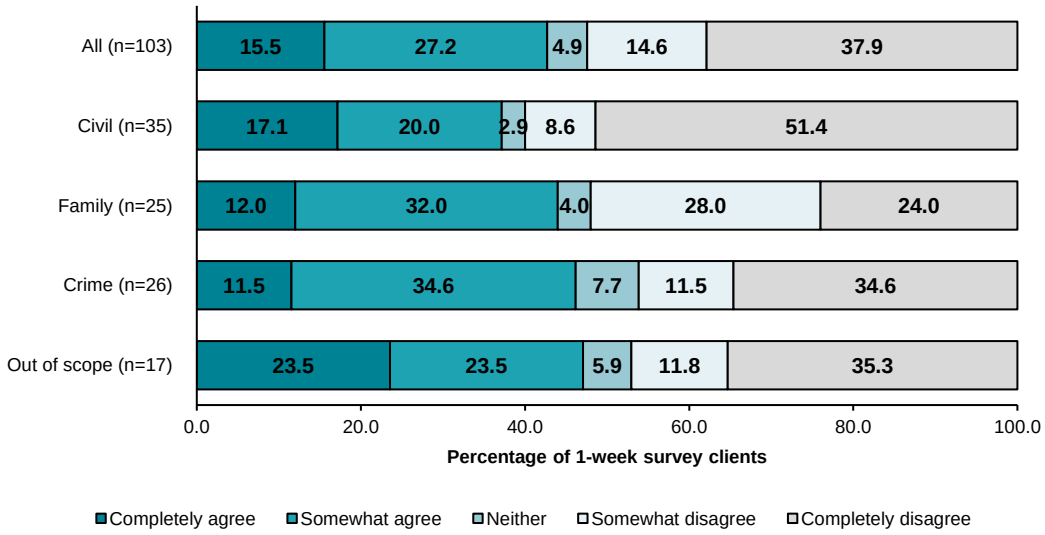
Figure 6.5 Percentage of survey clients somewhat/completely agreeing they should have been given more help, by type of assistance they had wanted at the time of their call



Problem type

There were some small differences between problem types: clients with civil problems were most likely to completely disagree that they should have got more help (Figure 6.6).

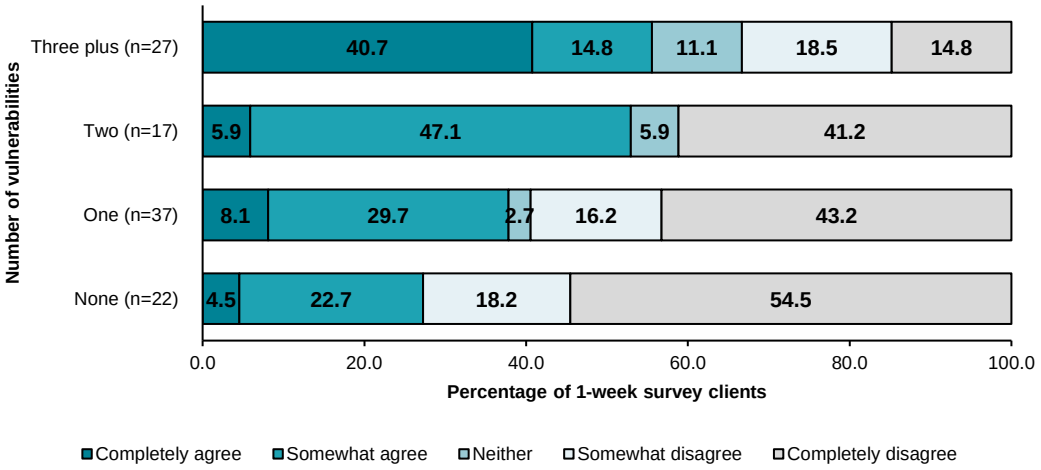
Figure 6.6 Clients disagreeing/agreeing that Legal Aid should have given them more help with their problem, by problem type



Client vulnerabilities

The percentage of clients agreeing they should have been given more help increased with increasing number of vulnerabilities. Four in ten (40.7%) of the clients surveyed who had three or more vulnerabilities completely agreed they should have been helped more by Legal Aid and a further 14.8% somewhat agreed (Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7 Clients disagreeing/agreeing that Legal Aid should have given them more help with their problem, by number of vulnerabilities



Summary

- Immediate positive outcomes are experienced by clients when they perceive they were heard and helped and feel empowered to act on the information and referrals that have been effectively communicated to them.
- Most clients recall being given a referral to another organisation or person. Assessing the accuracy of that recall was hard as clients don't distinguish well between legal assistance providers. However, there is some evidence that referrals to community legal centres are better recalled than those to private lawyers/Law Institute of Victoria.
- Clients value the immediate experience of the call highly, with most saying that the Legal Help staff treated them with respect and sympathetically and understood what they wanted.
- Clients with multiple vulnerabilities found it harder to understand what they were told or had other questions they would have liked to ask but didn't. They were less likely to feel heard, more likely to feel frustrated and less likely to feel helped than other clients.
- For most, though, the call generally resulted in the client feeling empowered with a better understanding of their options and confidence about what to do next.
- Where clients have an expectation of information tailored to their own circumstances this can lead to disappointment and frustration. Two-thirds of clients seeking active assistance or representation said they should have been given more help.

7 Actions: what do clients do next?

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES
Client takes appropriate action
Use of information to self-help
Use of referrals to gain assistance
Client empowered to resolve dispute
Client takes no further action when it is appropriate

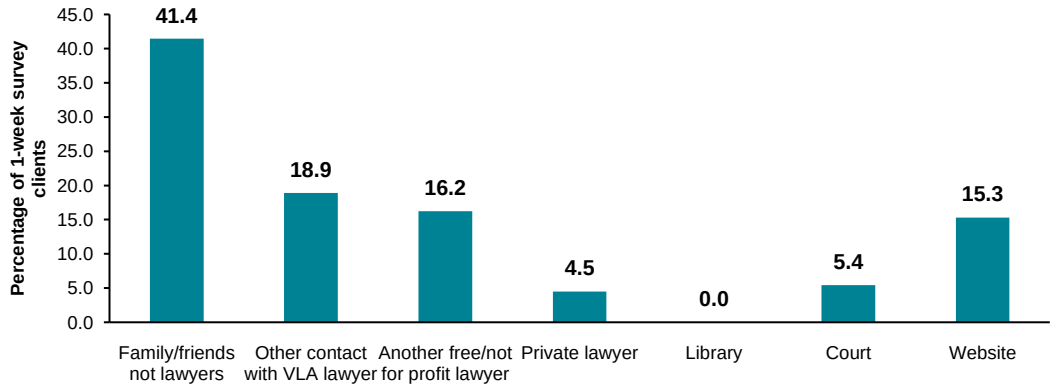
Following the immediate impact of the service on the client at the time of the call, the next potential outcomes are the use that clients make of the information/referral provided. Clients were surveyed twice, the first time within about a week of their initial call to Legal Help, and the second time three-months later to explore what actions they had taken subsequently. At both points there were questions about organisations contacted and what had been happening about the problem.

Do clients take appropriate action?

Action within a week

At the 1-week interview most clients had done something proactive about the problem as a result of their conversation with Legal Help.[45] Clients were specifically asked whether they had used a range of organisations to get help either before (reported in Section 4) or after their call to Legal Aid. Responses to the latter are shown in Figure 7.1. As with actions taken prior to their call, family and friends were still the main source of support (41.4% and consulted them) but 41.1% said they had consulted a resource other than family/friends following their call, with other VLA lawyers and other not-for-profit legal assistance providers the most common of these.

Figure 7.1 Who/what consulted between call to Legal Help and one-week survey interview[46]



[45] 88.3% of survey interviews were conducted within 7 days of the call to Legal Help. All were conducted within 13 days.

[46] Clients could name more than one source of support.

Contacting legal assistance

Clients surveyed were also asked to describe in their own words what had happened since their call, and the responses to this question would suggest the findings in Figure 7.1 are an undercount of activity. For instance, consultations with students/volunteers at a CLC were not strictly speaking consultations with lawyers; setting up an appointment wasn't recorded as having used the source for help, and also not captured were unsuccessful contacts where organisations referred to couldn't assist. Using this qualitative description of actions taken, rather than the answers to the closed question, therefore gives a more complete picture of contacts, indicating that 43.1% of clients had already consulted one or more of the organisations they had been referred to (Table 7.1):

> "Calling lawyers from the list given by VLA, talking to friends about similar experiences"
>
> "Contacted the community legal centre… they recommended a list of private practices…then received [useful] advice from a lawyer"
>
> "Visited the [CLC] drop in centre last night. Very helpful. Put mind at ease about the procedures of the police"
>
> "Got onto someone at Job Watch and got some legal advice from them"
>
> "Met up with panel lawyer and …organising representation"
>
> "Called Youth Line…didn't get call back till this morning. Will call other places today."
>
> "I have since contacted two of the services. I have an appointment tomorrow…and second appointment …however I don't think they will be able to help me as they told me over the phone that I was not in their catchment area"

However, occasionally this contact had indicated the organisation was unable to assist or was difficult to make contact with:

> "Called the [recommended CLC] and was told they don't deal in wills and estates"
>
> "Having trouble contacting [CLC]..unsure whether to continue pursuing this matter"

Waiting for legal organisation to make contact

Not all clients described proactive actions, as 11.0% said they were waiting for a legal assistance organisation to make contact with them, sometimes following a soft-referral:

> "Waiting on referral from other agencies"
>
> "Contacted [VLA office] and left details and waiting for call back"
>
> "Waiting on the call from Legal Aid"

Self-help actions

At one-week, 22.9% of clients surveyed had taken some action of their own, not directly related to the referral they had been provided with:

> "I did not use any of the lawyers from Legal Aid [suggested source] … instead I got in contact with an external lawyer"
>
> "Next week I have an appointment with a private lawyer…I found this lawyer off the internet"

Done nothing but might

Overall, within a few days of their call, over three-quarters of surveyed clients had already done something proactive or were waiting to be contacted for an appointment. Of the remaining quarter, most hadn't got around to taking action but were planning to do so:

> "After calling Legal Aid I had a look at the email that was sent to me… I am in the process of calling the community centre that was recommended to me in the email… I am trying to see if I can give them a call today or tomorrow…"
>
> "[I] will go to [suburb] Town Hall tonight on Legal Help's advice"
>
> "Going to nominate the person [that was] driving, as advised by Legal Aid"

For some, time was not of the essence:

> "Nothing yet, just doing research the hearing is on Monday"

Done nothing and won't

Deciding to take no action may be the right course of action where the information provided supports that decision. However, very few of the surveyed clients had decided not to take any further action at the time of the one-week interview, just 2.8% had done so:

> "Haven't pursued, financially not to benefit, and may not get better result"
>
> "Nothing. I have just accepted that I will lose my license … as there is nothing I can do."

Table 7.1 Actions taken in initial days of call to Legal Help, by problem type

		Made contact with legal organisation[1]	Waiting for legal organisation to make contact [2]	Self-help actions only [3]	Done nothing but might [4]	Done nothing and won't
	n	%	%	%	%	%
Out of scope	17	41.2	0.0	41.2	17.6	0.0
Crime	26	30.8	3.8	26.9	34.6	3.8
Family	26	53.8	11.5	11.5	19.2	3.8
Civil	40	45.0	20.0	20.0	12.5	2.5
All	109	43.1	11.0	22.9	20.2	2.8

Source: One-week client survey
Notes:
1 Contact with a lawyer, a service providing legal assistance, or some other dispute resolution organisation. Includes having had a meeting, setting up an appointment, and determining can't assist
2 Soft referrals or other situations where client not expecting to have to be proactive regarding contact
3 Includes looking at websites, contacting other side, attending court, looking for private lawyer (not referred)
4 Includes waiting for court date; waiting for other side to act; planning to make contact with legal organisation; and undecided about next steps

Client vulnerability did not impact on whether or not they had actively contacted one or more of the referrals provided by Legal Help (Table 7.2). Not surprisingly those with more vulnerabilities, and thus more likely to have been identified as being in a priority group, were

more likely to be waiting to be contacted or to attend an appointment that had been set up for them. They were also less likely to have taken any self-help actions.

Overall, 20.2% hadn't done anything yet but said they might, some because they were waiting to see what happened or for their court date but mainly just because they hadn't done it yet. Clients with two or more vulnerabilities were more likely to give this response, which suggests they were less empowered to act than those with no or just one vulnerability.

Table 7.2 Actions taken in initial days following call to Legal Help, by number of client vulnerabilities

		Made contact with legal organisation	Waiting for legal organisation to make contact	Self-help actions only	Done nothing but might	Done nothing and won't
	n	%	%	%	%	%
No vulnerabilities	22	40.9	4.5	31.8	18.2	4.5
One	38	50.0	5.3	28.9	13.2	2.6
Two	20	30.0	20.0	15.0	30.0	5.0
Three to six	29	44.8	17.2	13.8	24.1	0.0
All	109	43.1	11.0	22.9	20.2	2.8

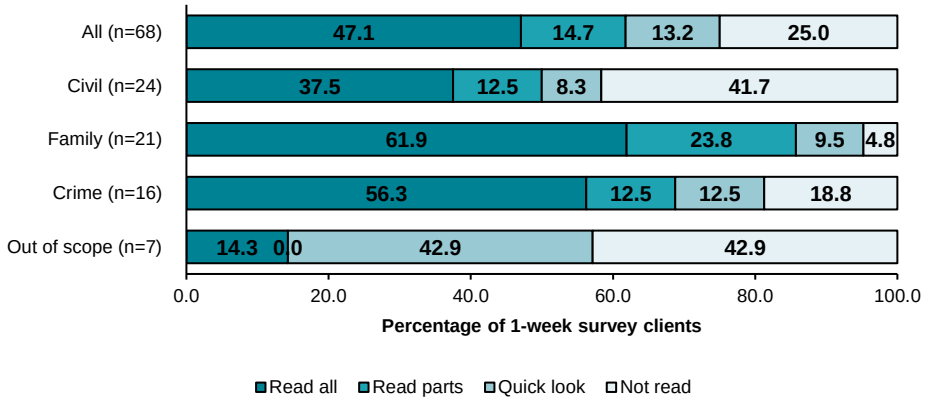
Source: One-week client survey.
Note: 2 cases missing responses on this question

Clients' use of information emails

Overall, 61.3% of surveyed clients recalled receiving an email from Legal Help: at least two-thirds of these appear to have been information emails (in that these clients were recorded as having been sent such an email), the remainder are likely to have been copies of soft referral emails, details of appointments or other (non information) emails that weren't captured in the recruitment form.

Of the 51.4% recorded on the client recruitment form as having been sent an information email 80.7% remembered they had been sent an email. Three-quarters said they had opened the email. Although opening an email is no guarantee of having read it, just under half of surveyed clients who had opened the email said they had read it all. Clients with out of scope and civil problems were least likely to have looked at it, while those with family problems were most likely to have read it in its entirety (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 Response to email by surveyed clients that recall receiving email



For those that did at least take a quick look at the email, the vast majority (88.2%) said it was easy or very easy to understand and relevant or very relevant to their problem (84.3%). Over half (52.9%) had clicked on one or more links in the email they received (though not all emails contained links, and some links were sent separately by text message).

> "Everything was very well explained…email that stated all the legal jargon, how to plead etc…..the document was helpful"
>
> "[Have] visited all the links and found the email to be extremely helpful"

Of the few that didn't find it easy to understand the email, one had forwarded it to a friend for help and another had nevertheless used it to access telephone numbers for other service providers:

> "The email was very long; it could have been summarised much better. I almost wanted to stop reading"[47]

As said, generally the content was relevant to the client. In one case it wasn't specific enough to the client's circumstances:

> "… it related to urban fencing disputes and did not have any information on rural properties"

Even if relevant, some clients commented that it wasn't that helpful to them:

> "Didn't add to anything I already knew"
>
> "It's not new information to me"
>
> "Read but not able to use – not applicable"

Or didn't give the information they had requested:

> "I already knew all the information they gave me in the email. That wasn't the help I was asking for [which was evidentiary requirements in divorce proceedings]"

[47] Taken from case study in Section 8: **Example of problem not resolved but no further action**

Nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of clients that had at least given the email a quick look said they had used at least some of the information contained in the email:

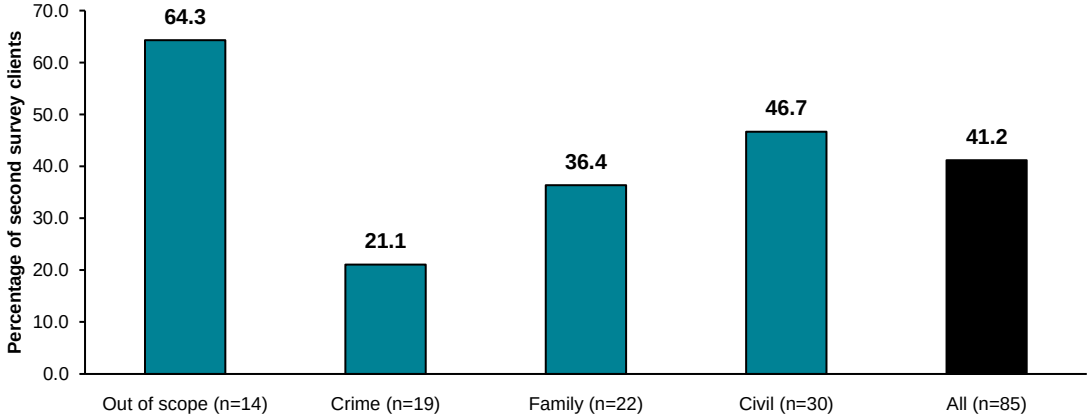
> "Used the info to find a lawyer"

Actions taken in subsequent three months

In the three-month survey, clients were asked about actions they had taken in the intervening period. Due to changes in the questionnaire necessitated by the partial change of methodology from telephone to self-completion interviews, it isn't possible to directly compare actions taken in the initial period with those taken in the subsequent three months.[48]

Clients were asked whether or not they had contacted anyone to assist them with their matter and those that responded affirmatively were asked about contact with named organisations.[49] Overall 41.2% of the three-month survey clients said they had sought some further kind of assistance other than from VLA, with out of scope clients most likely to say this (Figure 7.3).[50]

Figure 7.3 Percentage of three-month survey clients that had contacted anyone other than VLA to assist with their problem since the one-week survey, by problem type



Of the 50 (58.8%) three-month survey clients that had not contacted anyone for assistance, 29 (58.0%) said this was because they no longer required help, often because the problem was now resolved:

> "I didn't need to. I had all the information from Legal Aid"
>
> "It's dealt with"
>
> "Not needed"

[48] The three-month survey did not ask about consulting family/friends and reviewing of websites, so it is not feasible to comment on the extent of self-help activity during the three-month period.

[49] This may have undercounted help seeking and contacts relative to the 1-week survey which instead asked about each type of contact with no prior filter.

[50] A total of 6 clients had contacted Legal Help again during the three months, and 4 of these had also contacted someone else.

> "Problem got solved after contacting Legal Aid"
>
> "Because I negotiated on my own"

Five clients cited financial reasons:

> "Don't have the money"
>
> "Financially exhausted"

Two clients mentioned stress as a barrier to further action:

> "Whenever I start to think about it I get very anxious and stressed and feel very overwhelmed"
>
> "When I am dealing with this matter I am so pressured and suffering …having known that I cannot get legal support I have to move on… my financial condition, mental and physical conditions don't allow me to seek alternative support."

Six clients (7.1%) said they had contacted Legal Help again and three clients (3.5%) said they had contact with another part of VLA; 8 (9.4%) said they had contact with another not-for-profit lawyer; 19 (22.4%) reported subsequent contact with a private lawyer or Law Institute of Victoria. Other sources of support included other not-for-profit, or government organisations, such as Salvation Army, family violence services, police, ombudsman and health professionals.

Summary

- Medium-term outcomes, in the days and weeks following the call, see clients empowered to resolve their dispute, using the information and referrals they were provided with to take action or to make the informed decision to take the matter no further.
- The call with Legal Help generally seems to encourage clients into further action. One week after their call, over three-quarters had already done something proactive or were waiting to be contacted for an appointment.
- Of the remaining quarter, most hadn't got around to taking action but were planning to do so. However, clients with multiple vulnerabilities appeared to be less empowered to action.
- The information provided rarely made clients think there was little point to pursuing their matter further. At the one-week point, just two of the 111 clients surveyed had decided that taking no further action was the best course of action for them.
- The open rate of information emails is reasonably high: eight in ten clients recorded as having been sent an information email remembered getting one, and about three-quarters of these said they had opened it. Clients with family law problems were most likely to read the email in its entirety.
- The evaluation of information emails was very positive, with the majority of those that took at least a quick look at the contents saying they found it easy to understand and relevant to their problem. Links to other resources and referrals were appreciated. The content was less valued when it wasn't directly applicable to the client's specific question.
- For those clients who continued to seek help in the subsequent three-months, private lawyers became the most common source of assistance, perhaps because other options had been exhausted.

8 Resolution: what do clients achieve?

LONGER TERM OUTCOMES

Problem resolves
Problem resolutions are satisfactory for client
Problem ongoing but managed
No further action when appropriate

Longer term outcomes are about problem resolution, with problems ideally reaching a timely and satisfactory conclusion. Surveyed clients were asked about the status of their problem in both the one-week and three-month surveys.[51] For problems described as resolved or ended, clients were asked how they had ended and how satisfied they were with the resolution. If the problem was described as ongoing, but the client was no longer actively seeking resolution, they were asked why this was.

Problem finalisation status at 3 months

The duration of a legal problem will be determined by many factors, not all within the control of the client, whatever the value of the assistance they receive. Indeed, some may resolve with no intervention at all if, for instance, the other side in the dispute drops the matter. However, the aim of providing legal assistance is, in part, to assist in timely problem resolution and the provision of information/referral may be an important link in the chain to enable that problem resolution.

As there was no comparator group (clients not receiving information/referral) it isn't feasible to assess what the rate of problem resolution would have been in the absence of the information/referral service, and it is likely other external factors will also be important.[52] But tracking problems over time provides an insight into how problem resolution varies for different types of clients and different types of legal problems, and the extent to which clients credit the assistance they receive as helping to achieve that outcome.

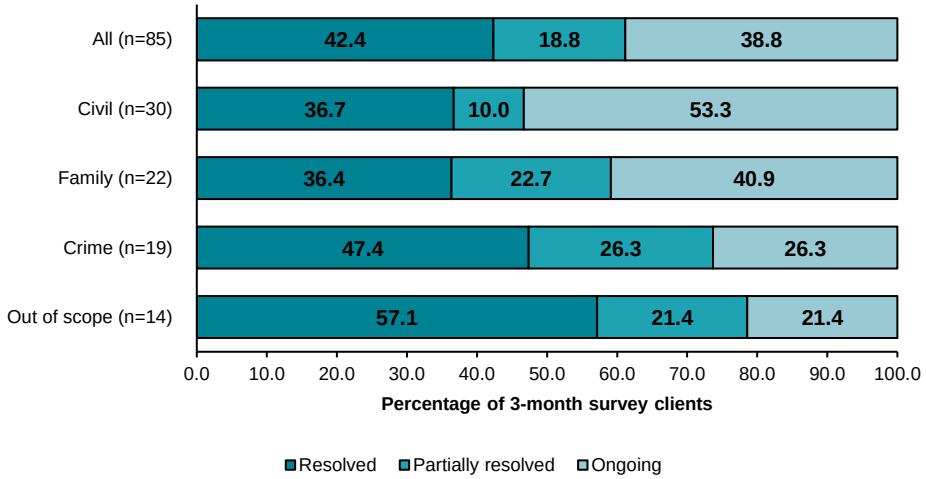
At the time of the three-month survey, 42.4% (n=36) of problems were described by the clients themselves as resolved. A further 18.8% (n=16) were partially resolved. Four in ten (n=33, 38.8%) of the three-month survey clients said they still had the problem. For surveyed

[51] At the time of the one-week survey, 10 of the 111 (9.0%) said their problem was no longer ongoing. Eight of these clients participated in the three-month survey at which point five confirmed the problem was no longer ongoing. Of the twenty-three clients whose problem was ongoing but did not participate in the three-month survey, all but two were still actively pursuing the issue at one-week. It should be noted that despite having a similar problem profile, those that did not participate in the three-month survey may well have differing rates of problem resolution. The problem profiles were essentially the same for the drop-outs as the three-month sample. The number of vulnerabilities was also similar, though the drop-outs had a slightly more vulnerable profile with 30.8% having three or more, compared to 24.7% of the three-month sample. It would be understandable, though, if those whose problem had resolved were less interested in participating in the three-month survey.

[52] See Appendix 2, Section: *Limitations of the research design* for a more detailed discussion.

clients, rates of resolution were highest for out of scope and crime matters and lowest for family and civil matters (Table A1.8.4 & A1.8.5 Appendix 1 and Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1 Status of problems at 3 months, by problem type

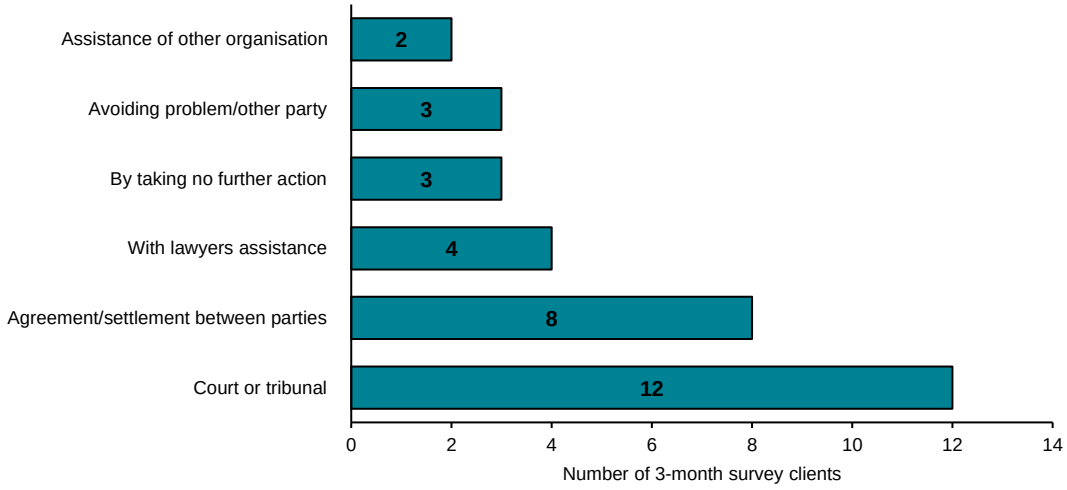


How problems finalise

Resolved problems

The thirty-six (42.4%) surveyed clients who said their problem was resolved were asked how this had happened. Figure 8.2 summarises the findings.[53]

Figure 8.2 How three-month survey clients' problems were resolved



The responses indicated a perhaps surprisingly high level of justice system involvement with this mentioned for a third of the matters (n=12): [54]

> "Judge dismissed it"

[53] Three matters are excluded from this analysis because they did not include valid information on problem resolution. In addition, a further call had been about a hypothetical event which had not yet occurred.

[54] This is taken from how the resolution was described. 1 was a fine that didn't necessarily involve court/tribunal.

> "The matter ended after I attended my hearing in order to get a divorce"
>
> "I was fined"
>
> "Magistrate granted me permission to nominate someone who is responsible"
>
> "Resolved by VCAT. I was not liable for the damage done to the property as I was not living there"
>
> "Went to court and spoke to Legal Aid"
>
> "Spoke to Legal Aid on the day and complied with the court request"

Eight had resolved by the client engaging with the other side, without, it would appear, direct legal or other assistance in doing so:

> ""I contacted a number of community legal aid services and then a private practice, before getting in contact directly with the insurance company"
>
> "I personally negotiated with the other party. I took a reduced offer for him to cover all legal costs if settlement"
>
> "I contacted Centrelink for a review. A review took place and the debt was reduced"

Lawyers had clearly assisted with the resolution of four matters:

> "Came to a settlement by offering $$$ by our lawyer to the other party"
>
> "Handled by a private lawyer"
>
> "Spoke to a lawyer and discussed about my options and later I was not keen on pursuing"

Others had also decided to take no further action or time had resolved matters:

> "I decided to not take further action"
>
> "Need[ed] time to solve. Fortunately she gets better. We passed [sic] hard times for solving this matter but the result was good"
>
> "Did not appeal it"

Some had to take more active avoidance actions:

> "[client] resigned from her job [due to bullying]"
>
> "I ended up blocking her [the other side in the dispute]"
>
> "I quit my job"

Two referenced other organisations as having assisted them:

> "I reported to Financial Ombudsman. They check all policy for me and go through with [insurance company] instead of me. [The insurance company] paid us part of cost …"
>
> "I went to the bank…the bank has a section which specialises in wills. They were quite helpful albeit still a bit of a minefield"

Not resolved but no further action

In addition to problems described as resolved were those problems that clients said they still had, but for which they were no longer trying to do something about. There were 12 of these in the three-month survey: five of which were family matters (Table A1.8.1, Appendix 1).

There was no discernible pattern to the reasons for not continuing to take action. They included financial barriers and being too busy as well as the other side not having taken action:

> "I haven't been contacted [by] the police since then"
>
> "Waiting to see"
>
> "…busy after starting …new job"
>
> "PO lost my paperwork and by now I did not have time [to] lodge another"

There was also mention of avoiding conflict:

> "I don't know how much it would involve and I feel intimidated by the neighbour as she is a solicitor"

or because further action just seemed pointless:

> "There is no resolution to the issue I raised [impact of criminal record on employment]"

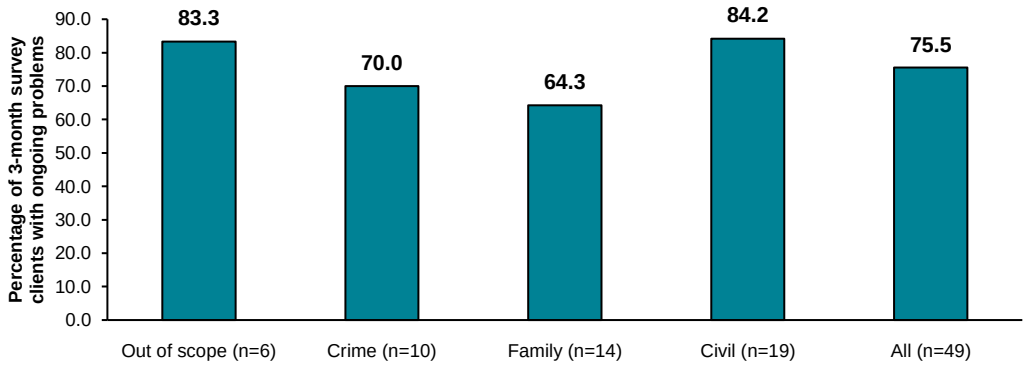
In practice there may be little difference between resolved problems, that is ones where the client says they no longer have the problem, and problems which are not seen as resolved or ended but for which the client is no longer taking any action. However, understanding this difference in perspective of clients will be an important consideration when legal assistance providers wish to monitor problem outcomes.

Example of problem not resolved but no further action
Client had separated from his wife a couple of weeks previously and was calling to find out what he had to do to get access to his children. He also enquired about the financial and property implications of separation. He had found VLA by googling and wanted general information about separation but also specific advice for his own circumstances. He had looked at the VLA website but "everyone's circumstances are different and the website doesn't give information for alternative situations". The Legal Help officer found him fairly easy to understand and was neutral on whether they had met his needs, because he wasn't eligible for further assistance due to his income level. They sent him an information email and referred him to a CLC, an external lawyer/LIV and non-legal support. He reported that they "gave me lots of helpful information". He thought he had been told to contact a Victoria Legal Aid lawyer (not CLC or external lawyer). He recalled receiving an email which he had given a quick look, rating it moderate on difficulty finding it "very long… [so I] almost wanted to stop reading" but very relevant. He reported a very positive experience of the call, feeling much more confident about his options after the call. He was strongly of the view he preferred phone to written information. At the time of the first survey he reported no negative impacts and considered the problem had only had a moderate impact on him. At this point he had contacted a private lawyer. His wife had also agreed to him seeing the children and to discuss divorce. He reported moderate self-efficacy, tertiary education, good health and financial status. At the time of the second call he said he still had the 'problem', had experienced some anxiety, but that as "things are gradually settling" so he was no longer taking any action. Overall he rated the Legal Help information as very useful, given all the links to various services he had been provided with, but now felt he should have been given more help and that the information had made him worry more about his situation.

Ongoing problems

Of those 49 respondents whose problem was only partially resolved or ongoing, three-quarters (n=37, 75.5%) said they were still trying to do something about it, ranging from 64.3% for family matters to 84.2% for civil matters (Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3 Percentage of clients with ongoing problems still trying to do something about it, by problem type



Of these 37, 14 said nothing further had happened about the problem since the one-week interview, but 23 reported some activity, including engaging with a lawyer:

> "I ended up speaking to a lawyer, and he agreed to take my case on pro-bono. Through this, we've contacted the person responsible, and are making headway."
>
> "I spoke to a lawyer through In-touch service. And now we are trying to arrange for mediation."
>
> "Found a lawyer, just a long process"

Not that this had always gone well:

> "I had to end negotiations with the other party as my lawyer was not providing sufficient support. It has left me with a significant debt, but I am seeking other representation."

For those problems now within the justice system, court procedures were taking their time, with clients mentioning adjournments and interim hearings, and the necessity of preparing documents and affidavits for the court:

> "I have handed in my parenting order application to the Family Court and am waiting on the date set out for its decision, I was told it would be a 3 to 4 month wait until that is final"
>
> "Court ordered mediation for the dispute: there was a directions hearing that ordered mediation"

Some cases had been partially resolved but the intervening period had thrown up new issues:

> "Received apology letter from hospital who made error but the letter itself highlights further issues with my record at that hospital and their processes of keeping patient information safe"
>
> "I received a part payment of what I was owed, and then my regular payment was deducted to compensate over payment'"
>
> "Setting up the payment plan, got more fines, paid one fine back"

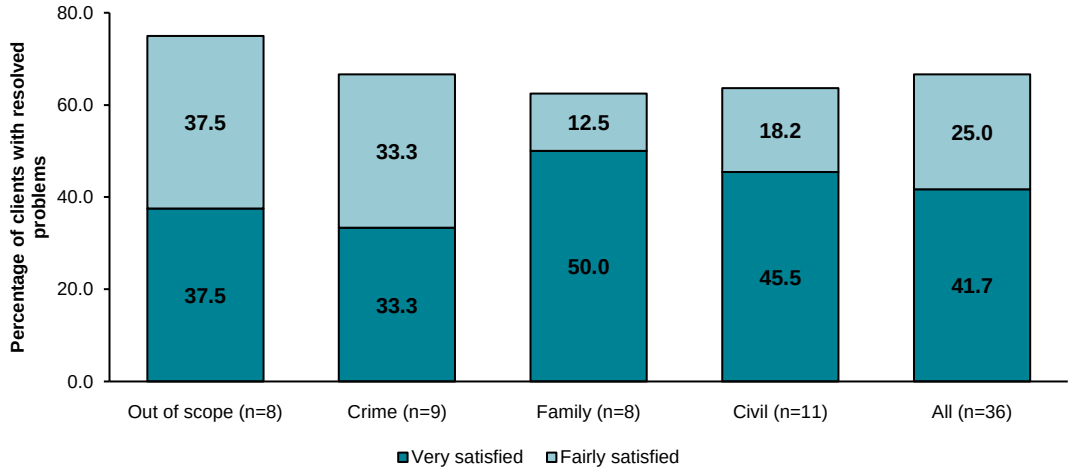
Example of not resolved and ongoing
Client had a no-fault car accident with an uninsured driver, resulting in what he assessed as a severe impact on his life with financial loss, injury and stress. His own insurance would not cover the cost of his repairs. He had attempted to contact the other party without success. He rang Legal Help for advice on what to do next as he had been without the use of the car for a month. He had previously consulted a private lawyer whom he said was not helpful and expensive. His wife had come across Legal Help after googling. He was very positive about the call to Legal Help, felt he had been listened to and found the information very helpful. The Legal Help officer found him very easy to understand and considered they had met his needs very well. They referred him to a couple of CLCs, Law Institute of Victoria and sent him an information email. The client recalled being referred to a community legal centre and receiving an email, which he hadn't read. He also reported he had an appointment to see Legal Aid, though this is unlikely. Although he had tertiary level education he reported a low self-efficacy score and having Centrelink problems. Three months later he had made no progress. He was suffering depression and anxiety and now had a much lower rating of the usefulness of the information provided and felt that Legal Aid should have given him more assistance. He would "somewhat" recommend Legal Aid to friends if they had a problem.

Satisfaction with resolution

The 42.4% (n=36) of clients whose problem had resolved were asked how satisfied they were with how it had ended.[55] Two-thirds of these clients were fairly or very happy with the outcome which translates to about a quarter (28.2%) of all surveyed clients' problems resolving satisfactorily. Satisfaction with resolution was greatest for the 8 out of scope matters, at three-quarters of resolved problems. Resolved family problems had a lower rate of satisfaction overall, but the greatest proportion of clients who were very satisfied with the outcome (50.0%, n= 4, were very satisfied) (Figure 8.4).

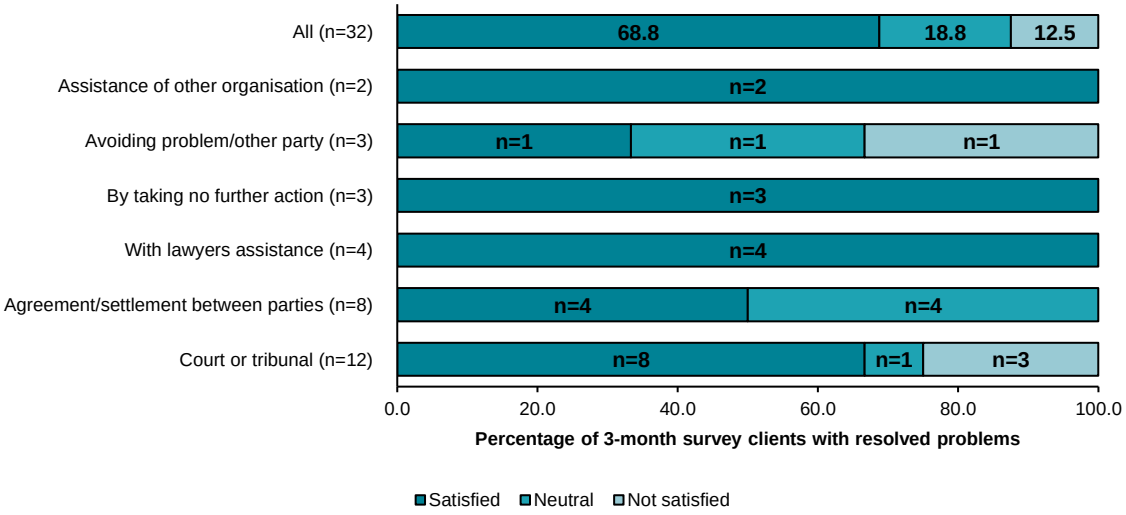
[55] Clients were asked how satisfied they were with how the problem resolved/ended on a five point scale from 1 'not at all satisfied' to 5 'very satisfied'. A response of 4 or 5 was categorised as satisfied.

Figure 8.4 Satisfaction with how problems resolved by problem type



Clients' descriptions of how the problem was resolved were coded and are shown in Figure 8.5 alongside clients' satisfaction with the resolution. Clearly we are now looking at a very small number of problems, but it is interesting to note that among those clients surveyed, dissatisfaction with the outcome was only expressed where the problem had been resolved by avoidance or at a court/tribunal (Figure 8.5).

Figure 8.5 Satisfaction with problem resolution, by how problem resolved



Dissatisfied or neutral

Not surprisingly, clients who did not achieve the outcome they had hoped for were more likely to be neutral or dissatisfied:

> "It didn't end in a nice [manner] but at least it ended"
>
> "I would like to have had the whole debt cleared but …..I am content with it being reduced"
>
> "Had to resign and received no assistance from anyone"

> "Unfair [court outcome]"

Even where a 'successful' outcome was achieved the stress of the experience undermined the outcome for some:

> "Legal part was alright, but feel like the legal trauma, hoops and troubles to contest a $75 fine was too much, time frame was unrealistic"
>
> "…caused a lot of stress"
>
> "Don't have debt anymore but the amount of hoops [I] had to jump through were awful"

And the lack of legal assistance was seen to contribute to this:

> "I struggled to get any proper legal advice or representation and so had to do it myself"
>
> "There was nothing. No more contact from Legal Aid or anything they said they would do"

Example of client dissatisfied with resolved outcome

The client required assistance with a financial matter following a "traumatic" relationship breakdown. This had been ongoing for a number of years but recently escalated. He wanted information on the division of assets, and someone to inform him of a realistic settlement and how to achieve it. He went straight to the Legal Aid website and saw the Legal Help number and rang to clarify the information. The Legal Help officer found it easy to understand the issue and considered they met the client's needs very well. They sent an information email, referred him to a CLC and provided links to legal information publications. The client recalled being referred to a CLC and elsewhere in VLA. At the time of the first interview he was reasonably positive about Legal Help, saying he found the information provided over the phone to be reasonably helpful. However, there had been confusion over his eligibility for services and he reported he had been given some incorrect information which had affected the referrals. He recalled the email which he found very easy to read and very relevant. He had already made contact with two CLCs and, he said, a lawyer from VLA. At both the first and second survey he reported the problem was having a severe impact, including stress, depression and anxiety. At the second survey he gave negative ratings of his experience of Legal Help. He didn't necessarily distinguish VLA from other legal assistance but had spoken to five different people failing to get any legal help. He felt strongly that he should have gotten more help, and that the information he had been provided with was not useful at all. "I struggled to get any proper legal advice or representation and so had to do it myself… [in the end]…I had to accept less than I was due".

Satisfied clients

Reasons for satisfaction generally related to clients achieving the outcome they had wished for, or at least in part:

> "My car got fixed and I don't have to pay for any of it"
>
> "Because the case was awarded in my favour"

> "Because I feel it was fair"
>
> "Because that was the outcome I needed and it went smoothly and no headache"
>
> "[I have] now received the benefit payment and no longer [have] the stress of the process"

Or just because it was ended:

> "I no longer have to deal with this issue"

Example of problem resolved satisfactorily but low rating of help received
The client had what she thought was a straightforward question regarding the process for informing her ex-partner she was taking their son abroad: whether a text message counted as written notice. She had previous contact with Legal Aid regarding her divorce. However, Legal Help informed her that this would depend on the terms of the court order, which they couldn't assist with over the phone and that she should either return to the private lawyer that assisted her with the orders or use a CLC. She reported she was treated with respect and sympathetically but was less sure her issue was understood or that she was given the time to ask everything she wanted to. She felt she was not provided with any useful information. After the call she went back to the court order and found contact details for Family Relationship, who told her she would get a free 20-minute consultation with a lawyer within the next 48 hours (not recorded whether this occurred). At the time of the first survey she reported stress and depression and concern she might experience financial loss due to non-refundable tickets. She was even less positive about the value of the call to Legal Help at the time of the second survey, less likely to say the information had helped her understand her options and more strongly agreeing that Legal Aid should have helped her more. The problem had been resolved by her ex-partner granting her permission.

Although not directly asked, some positive outcomes were sometimes directly credited to the legal assistance they received, including from Legal Aid:

> "[private] lawyers are very helpful"
>
> "Lawyer from Legal Aid was very knowledgeable and was very patient with me….I decided to take no further action"
>
> "With the advice given by…Legal Aid lawyer I had the knowledge how to proceed with the IVO matter"
>
> "I [got] Ombudsman department from [Legal Aid]. Otherwise I would be still struggling with problems"

Example of client satisfied with outcome and help given
Client called about a problem with an insurance claim following an accident. He hadn't called before but was recommended by a friend/relative. He wanted advice on how to deal with the company, and ideally someone to liaise on his behalf as he felt they were not treating him properly. The Legal Help officer did not find it easy to understand the client's issue and wasn't sure the client understood them. They were neutral on whether they met their needs. The Legal Help officer only recorded a referral to a CLC. The client said they had been referred to the Financial Ombudsman, possibly by the CLC which they did contact. The client considered the Legal Help officer had treated them with respect, completely understood the issue, and did not rush them. The client said they had no trouble understanding what they were told. At this point they agreed somewhat that the information they had been provided with was useful. At the time of the one-week survey the client reported the problem was having a severe impact, including the cost of the damaged vehicle, stress and taking time off work. The client had tertiary level education and good health and financial status, but relatively poor English language ability. At the time of the second survey the problem had been resolved, with the client receiving part of the claim from the insurance company with the assistance of the Financial Ombudsman. He was very satisfied with the outcome, crediting the referral to the ombudsman to VLA. He now rated the information provided as extremely useful as it "guide me right way to solve issues [sic]".

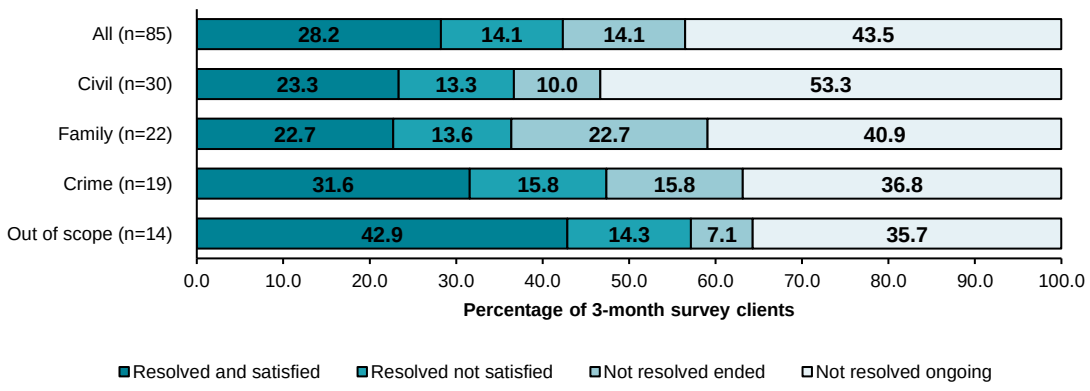
Outcome status

To compare outcomes achieved, problems were first grouped into whether they had resolved or not. Resolved problems were then split to separately identify those where the client was satisfied with the outcome. Unresolved problems were split according to whether the client was still trying to do something about it or not.

Problem type

Family and civil problems were more likely to be not resolved than crime and out of scope problems. Civil problems were most likely to be ongoing. Clients with out of scope problems were most likely to say the problem had resolved satisfactorily. Clients with civil and family law problems the least likely to say this (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6 Outcome and status of problems at three months, by type of problem



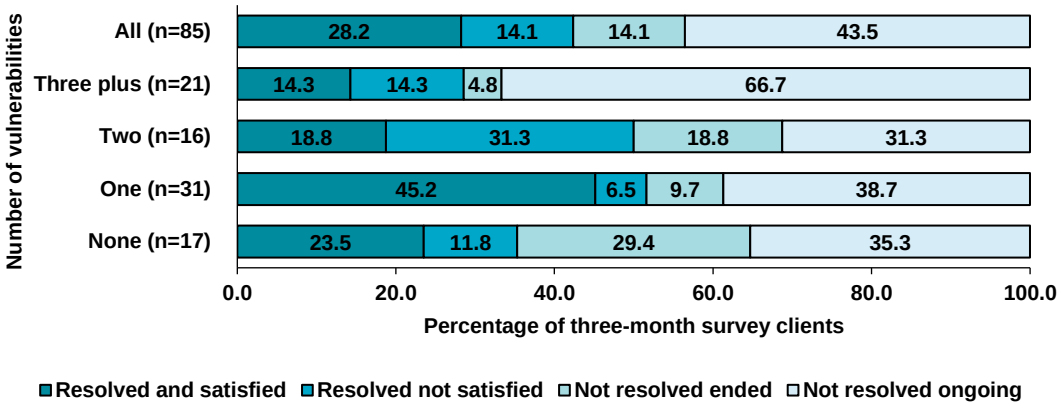
Client vulnerabilities

The 21 clients with multiple (three plus) vulnerabilities were the least likely to have reached problem resolution: n=11 (52.4%) had not resolved their problem at all and a further 19.0% had only partially resolved it (Appendix 1, Table A1.8.3 & A1.8.4).

Amongst those clients with ongoing problems, the 14 with multiple vulnerabilities were also the most likely to say they were still trying to do something about it: all but one was. Overall, two-thirds of clients with multiple vulnerabilities were still taking action at the time of the three-month survey, compared to a third of those with fewer or no vulnerabilities (Figure 8.7, Appendix 1, Table A1.8.4).

Due to the small samples these findings cannot be reliably generalised from, but the finding of low problem resolution is in line with evidence from the LAW Survey that the most disadvantaged have the lowest rates of problem resolution.[56] The same research also found that the most disadvantaged were also the most likely to give up the pursuit of a resolution. While this group claimed they were still actively engaged in attempting to resolve their matter, it may be that the level of activity isn't sufficient or appropriate enough to achieve that goal.

Figure 8.7 Problem outcome status at 3-months, by number of client vulnerabilities



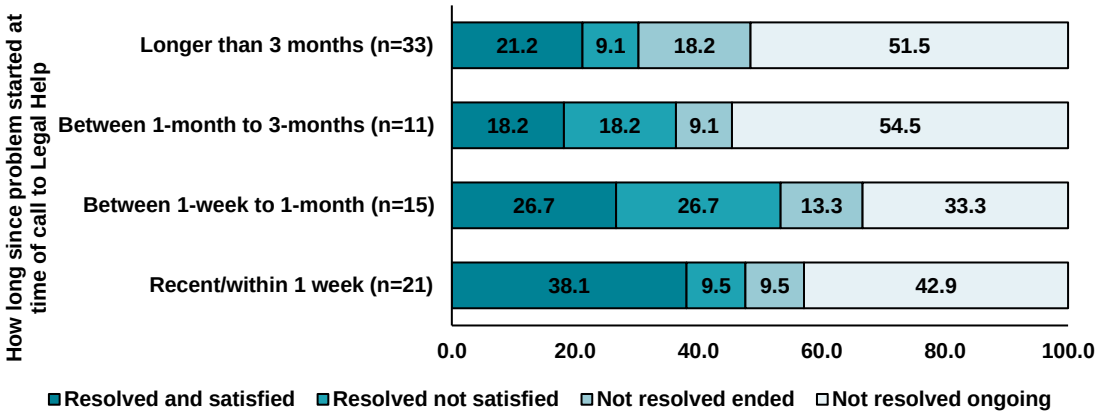
Problem length

Problem outcome at 3-months was also related to how long the problem had been going on at the time of the call to Legal Help, with problems that had started more than a month before the call having lower chance of satisfactory resolution (Figure 8.8). Over a half of these problems were not resolved and were still ongoing three months later. There is some, but not complete, overlap with client vulnerability with about a third of clients whose problems had a duration of one month or more also having multiple vulnerabilities.[57]

[56] McDonald & Wei, 2018.

[57] Of the clients participating in the 3-month survey 17 out of 80 (38.6%) had three or more vulnerabilities and reported the problem had started more than a month prior to their call to Lega Help.

Figure 8.8 Problem outcome at 3-months by how long problem had been going on at the time of the call to Legal Help



Outcome by help given

In this small sample of clients there was no evidence of a relationship between the outcome status of their problem at three-months and the type of referral they had been given and/or whether an email was sent (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 Status and outcome of problem at 3-months, by email/type of referral given

	Email	CLC	VLA	Private/LIV
	n=38	n=41	n=20	n=28
	%	%	%	%
Not resolved ongoing	39.5	43.9	50.0	42.9
Not resolved ended	21.1	12.2	10.0	10.7
Resolved not satisfied	10.5	12.2	20.0	10.7
Resolved and satisfied	28.9	31.7	20.0	35.7

Source: Recruitment form and three-month client survey

Note: Clients could have more than one type of referral and/or an email

Outcome by action taken

In this small sample there were also no discernible patterns in the outcomes achieved by the actions taken immediately after the call to Legal Help (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 Status and outcome of problem at 3 months, by action taken by client at 1 week

	Made contact with legal assistance or dispute resolution org	Other action incl self-help website attending court contacting other side	Waiting to be contacted mainly by Legal Aid	Done nothing and don't plan to	Done nothing but might
	n=36	n=21	n=10	n=2	n=15
	%	%	%	%	%
Not resolved ongoing	52.8	33.3	n=4	0.0	46.7
Not resolved ended	5.6	19.0	n=1	n=1	20.0
Resolved not satisfied	11.1	14.3	n=3	0.0	13.3
Resolved and satisfied	30.6	33.3	n=2	n=1	20.0
	100.0	100.0	n=10	n=2	100.0

Source: One-week and three-month client surveys. Counts rather than percentages are provided where the base is 10 or less.

The lack of relationship between accessing legal assistance and outcomes is not that surprising because of the other factors at play here.

Perceived value of help at 3 months

In the three-month survey, clients were asked to again evaluate their experience of Legal Help. Overall, ratings of the service remained positive with two-thirds (67.1%) saying the information had helped them understand their options and 63.5% saying it had made them feel more confident about what to do next. Clients with family problems now tended to rate their experience less positively than those with other types of problems (Table A1.8.5, Appendix 1).[58]

Perceived value of help by outcome

Figure 8.9 compares average agreement for each evaluation item, by the outcome status of the problem at three months. Clients whose problem had resolved satisfactorily were more likely than average to say that after talking to Legal Aid they had felt confident about what to do next and that the information they had been given had helped them understand their options. Lowest ratings in this regard were also from clients whose problem had resolved, but not satisfactorily.

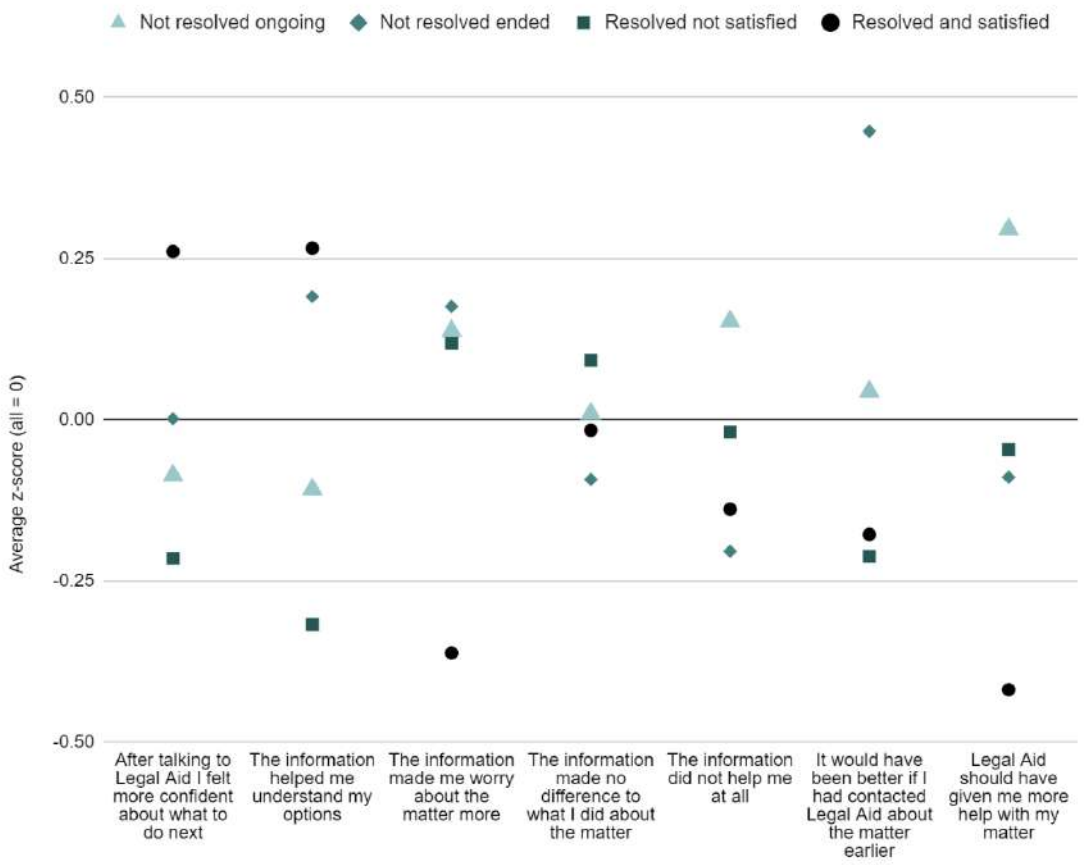
Clients whose problem had resolved satisfactorily were least likely to say the information they were provided with had made them worry about the matter more. All clients, whatever their outcome, tended to disagree that the information they had received made no difference to

[58] Respondents were reminded that they had called Victoria Legal Aid Help line, and the problem they had called about. We can be reasonably confident, particularly for interviews conducted by telephone, that respondents understood that they were being asked to evaluate Legal Help, rather than any other organisations they had contact with in the intervening period. However, it is likely that any intervening experiences will have an impact on a client's rating of VLA at the 3-month point.

what they did, so there was no variation in responses by outcome type. Clients with problems that were still ongoing at three months were the most likely to say that the information did not help them at all and that Legal Aid should have given them more help with their matter.

Clients whose problem had not resolved but for which they were no longer doing anything, were the most likely to agree that it would have been better if they had contacted Legal Aid about their matter earlier.

Figure 8.9 Client perceptions of help provided at 3 months, by problem outcome (normalised scores with 0 = average for all clients[59])

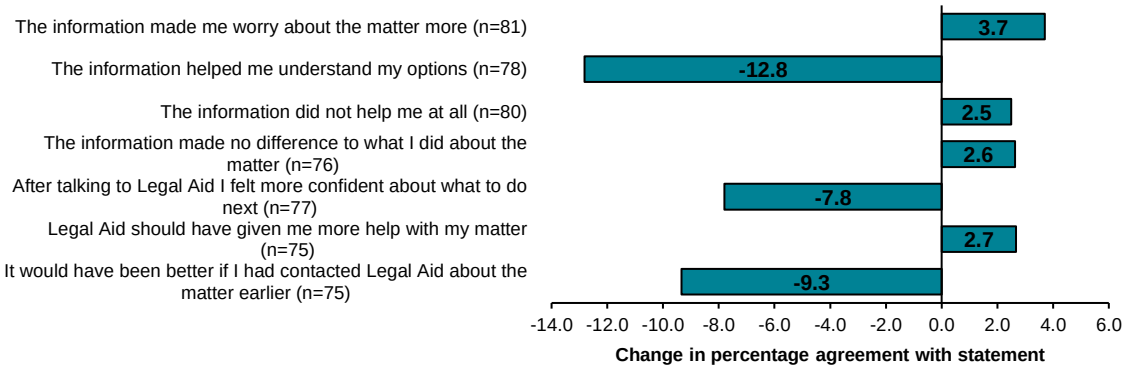


Change in perceptions of Legal Help

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the low level of problem resolution, overall ratings of the information service provided by Legal Help had declined at the three-month point. Figure 8.10 shows the change in the percentage of clients agreeing with the seven rating statements in both surveys. The decline was most marked for client's ratings of the value of the information in helping them understand their options, with 12.8% fewer clients agreeing this in the 3-month survey. However, there was also a decline in the percentage of clients agreeing it would have been better if they had contacted Legal Aid about the matter earlier and that talking to Legal Aid made them more confident about what to do next.

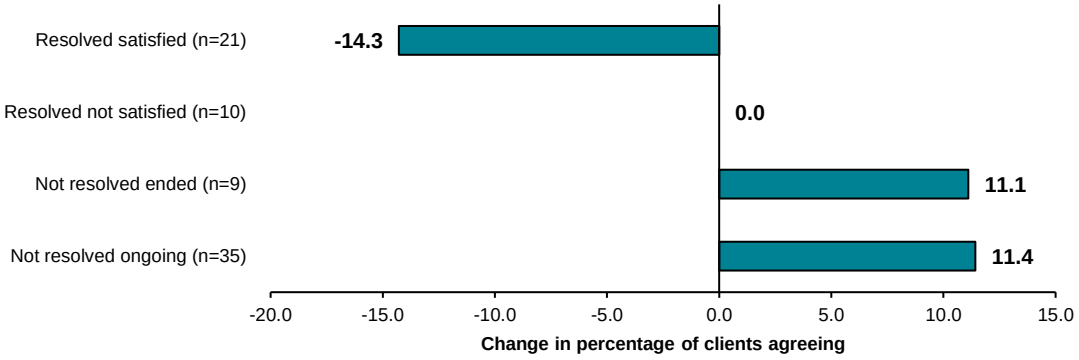
[59] Z-scores measure the distance from the average, standardizing the distribution around an average of 0.

Figure 8.10 Percentage point change in agreement with ratings of service between 1-week and 3-month survey[60]



Perhaps not surprisingly clients whose problem was not resolved were most likely to increase their agreement that Legal Aid should have given them more assistance (Figure 8.11). On the other hand, 14.3% fewer of the 21 clients whose problem had resolved satisfactorily agreed with this statement than at the 1-week point.

Figure 8.11 Percentage change in agreement between 1-week and 3-month survey that Legal Help should have given more help, by outcome type[61]



Despite this overall drop in ratings, three-quarters (77.6%) of clients said they were somewhat or very likely to contact Legal Aid again if they had another problem. However, clients with two or more vulnerabilities were less likely to say this as were clients with family problems. One of the latter commented:

> "Long wait times and they will definitely point me to the lawyers so why not I go straight to lawyers for advice."

[60] For each question, only clients providing a valid response (excluding 'don't know') in both the 1-week and 3-month survey are included in the analysis. The same people are therefore responding at each point in time.

[61] Sample sizes are maximums, with up to 7 missing responses overall for some questions (see sample sizes in Figure 8.9).

Impact of problem at 3 months

As discussed in Section 3, surveyed clients' legal problems were often having a significant impact on their wellbeing, and many clients reported these impacts again at the 3-month survey, with half of those who participated in each survey saying the impact had been severe. Although for some the overall impact had increased and for others declined, overall 38.6% of clients who participated in both surveys reported severe impacts in both the 1-week and 3-month survey (Table 8.3).

Table 8.3 Impact of problem at three-months, by impact at one-week

		Extent of 3-month impact:			
		None/slight (n=13)	Moderate (n=28)	Severe (n=42)	Combined 1-week impact
		%	%	%	%
Extent of 1-week impact:	None/slight (n=11)	10.8	1.2	1.2	13.3
	Moderate (n=30)	3.6	21.7	10.8	36.1
	Severe (n=42)	1.2	10.8	38.6	50.6
Combined 3-month impact		15.7	33.7	50.6	100.0

Source: 1-week and 3-month client surveys.

While for some the immediate stress had moderated, others had now lost or had to leave their jobs, spent time in prison or faced actual or potential homelessness. Ongoing battles with Centrelink or other government departments were particularly likely to prompt comment:

> "Already had depression, which Centrelink know, and their treatment made it worse…"
>
> "Child protection are child destroyers not protectors"
>
> "Severe stress which is very deliberately placed on people shoved onto Newstart for the crime of having the temerity of fleeing domestic violence…"

But to end on a positive note, when asked whether they had experienced any stress, anxiety, ill health etc., one client responded:

> "I felt all those things while trying to do it myself whereas once I went to a lawyer I felt relieved it was over and taken care off."

Summary

- Longer term outcomes are about problem resolution, with ideally, problems reaching a timely and satisfactory conclusion.
- The duration of a legal problem will be determined by many factors, not all within the control of the client, whatever the value of the assistance they are provided with. However, the aim of providing assistance is in part to facilitate timely problem resolution. No doubt partly reflecting the relative seriousness of problems brought to the service, many

problems remained unresolved at the three-month follow up, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn about the impact of the service on problem resolution.

- Even where problems were resolved, many clients were not happy with the outcome, sometimes because of how the problem had ended and sometimes the experience they had gone through to get there.
- Samples are too small to generalise from, but surveyed clients were more often satisfied when they had been referred to a helpful organisation, or when time or external factors (such as lack of negative actions by the other party) resolved or diminished the problem. Surveyed clients were dissatisfied when they couldn't access the help they needed, despite following up referrals and attempting to self-help.
- Although for most clients, the provision of information/referral achieved an immediate boost in confidence, assessments of the value of the information/referral declined over time as clients encountered barriers to problem resolution, including disappointment in what can/is provided by the services they were referred to.

9 Conclusion

The experience of legal problems is common, with about a half of Victorians estimated to experience a legal problem every year, and a half of these problems having a substantial impact on quality of life. In the context of high demand and limited resources, not-for-profit legal assistance providers focus their services on the most disadvantaged and those least able to help themselves.

But private legal assistance can be expensive, with a recognised gap between those qualifying for free legal assistance and those that can comfortably afford it. Even those that could pay for a private lawyer may perceive an unacceptable risk of escalating costs. For these members of the community not qualifying for VLA's legal advice or more intensive services, information and referral services can help frame the issue, providing explanation of legal terms and procedural options to support informed decision making. For those clients that require further assistance, referral services to bona fide organisations known to provide relevant support gives a more efficient direction to next steps than individuals might manage without that guidance.

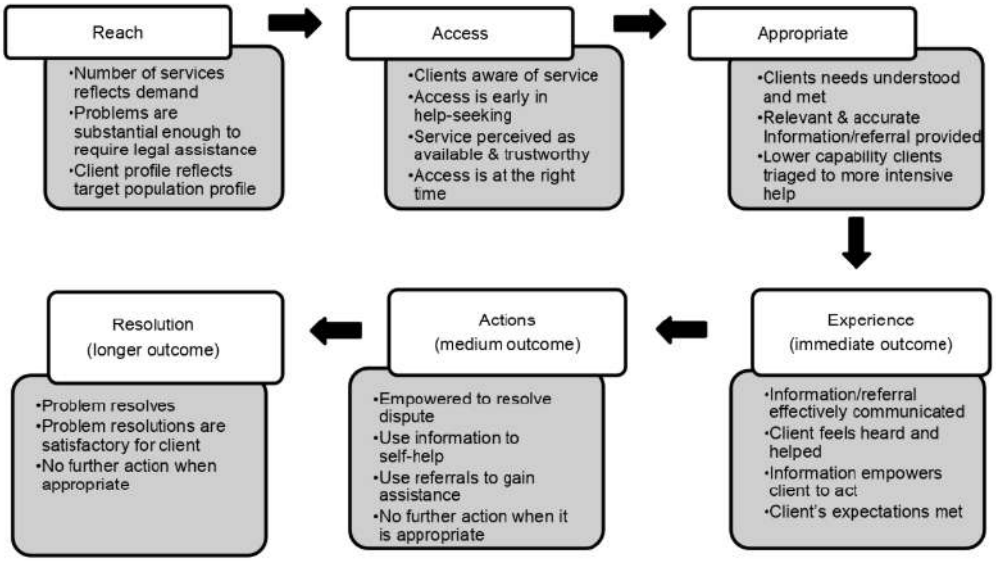
This research provided an opportunity to explore the value of legal information/referral services. These are relatively low resource to provide so can be made more widely available than more intensive services. In Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), information/referral services are provided by Legal Help's telephone and web chat and do not have the financial and other eligibility criteria of more intensive legal assistance services.

The value of this information/referral service was assessed against a range of criteria, shown in Figure 9.1. These included its success in reaching clients most in need of its services; its accessibility to clients; and the appropriateness of the service provided. Immediate, medium- and longer-term outcomes were assessed by interviewing clients within a week of their call to Legal Help and again about three-months later. Having received the service, the impact on clients may be immediately experienced, may generate useful actions and may assist in problem resolution.

This research was able to confirm the feasibility of contacting a representative sample of clients again after an extended period of time, even for this relatively low intensity legal assistance service. It also demonstrated the importance of doing so, in understanding the pathways clients follow and the challenges they continue to face in resolving their legal problems. Monitoring the quality of clients' experiences is important in designing a client responsive service. Client satisfaction surveys conducted soon after the service provide a good indication of the immediate experience but are limited as a method of understanding the medium- and longer-term value of the service for clients.

Although the achieved sample sizes limit the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn, the research was able to identify multiple ways in which the service provides value to the community and complements the more intensive service provision of VLA and other Victorian legal assistance providers.

Figure 9.1 Indicators of the value of Legal Help's information and referral service



Reach

However effective a service, its value is limited if it isn't reaching those clients that are most in need of its assistance. There is clearly considerable demand for Legal Help's services, with many thousands of calls to the service each month. And the research shows that these are not for trivial matters as most of the clients participating in the research said the problems they were calling about were having a substantial impact on their quality of life and a half of problems were described as having a severe impact, emotionally and/or financially.

The findings of the research also indicate that the service has good reach into all parts of the community. Despite the more disadvantaged being more likely to qualify for immediate advice, the profile of information/referral clients was still more disadvantaged than the general Victorian community. People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and for whom English was not their first language were well represented, highlighting the value of providing culturally appropriate training and the support of interpreters. However, the high representation of these groups amongst callers was not as apparent in the administrative ATLAS data, which – if this indicates a degree of under-reporting – may limit the service's ability to respond effectively to the legal needs of these two groups.

There is some evidence that a telephone service caters to clients with differing levels of legal capability than the website, as clients who called Legal Help not having looked at the website tended to have lower educational attainment. However, the website is potentially diverting clients away from the telephone service and/or helping those that visit the website prior to calling, to articulate their requirement. The telephone service, unlike the website, allows for the diagnosis of problems, a sympathetic hearing, and a tailored response in person over the phone, in carefully selected information emails and appropriate referrals to other organisations or elsewhere in VLA.

As different channels cater to different clients, it is strongly recommended that where feasible, information on the characteristics identified as relating to the needs of clients (such as those in VLA's Client and Capability Policy) are routinely and consistently captured across service

types This is a necessary prerequisite to making optimal decisions for clients, and being able to effectively identify those that would benefit from escalation to more intensive assistance.

Access

Potential clients need to be aware of the availability of the service to ensure they can access it early in their help seeking and ideally early in the timeline of the problem and before they have accessed inappropriate assistance.

How clients articulated what they were looking for when they contacted Legal Help is relevant to how services advertise their availability. Very few clients said they were looking for 'information' or a 'referral' and people probably had in mind a wider definition than that of most legal assistance providers when they said they were looking for 'advice'.

The extent of service awareness in the community was evident from the large proportion of new clients – and this was not a lack of returning callers, as most surveyed clients said they would call again if they needed to. It was clear from the research that the Legal Aid brand is not only widely recognised but well respected. And although the no-cost feature of the service is its main attraction, reputation and trust are also mentioned, in contrast with the perception of private lawyers as financially motivated. The lack of perceived financial motive and thus risk of cost escalation would support VLA exploring whether some of those clients not qualifying for free assistance, would be willing to pay for legal advice.

When clients are calling late in the timeline of a problem, it is sometimes because a recent event related to the problem has prompted or required them to initiate contact. While for many, the timing of the contact was appropriate, in others it was the cumulative impact of the problem on their financial or other wellbeing that had triggered their help seeking. Some of the most vulnerable clients were contacting Legal Help late in the problem timeline and these chronic problems appear to be particularly resistant to resolution. Recognising that achieving earlier contact amongst this client group may not be realistic, if there is the capacity to extend eligibility for legal advice, it is recommended that problem duration is made an additional qualifying criteria. Collecting information on problem duration for a pilot period prior to implementing any change to the criteria would allow an assessment of whether the qualifying duration should vary by problem type and/or by client priority group status.

Appropriate

A necessary requirement for an effective service is that what is provided is appropriate to the client's needs. And a prerequisite for that, is that those needs are identified and understood. The advantage of delivering information services by telephone or other interactive mode is that it allows for the diagnosis of problems. From observation this was a particular skill of Legal Help staff, and they themselves generally reported it was easy to understand clients. Even for the small number where it was not, the clients themselves believed that they had been understood.

Clients expectations of the service when they call vary, with many saying they wanted general advice for their specific issue or clarity on their rights. For this group, the information provided over the phone and in follow-up emails, together with accurate and appropriate referrals meets that need. A substantial proportion, though, are looking for more specific and personalised direction or active assistance and representation, and this proportion was greatest for clients with multiple vulnerabilities. There was evidence that this requirement was

actively responded to, with this latter group more likely to be referred to lawyers elsewhere in VLA and less likely to be referred to an external lawyer or to be sent an information email.

A challenge for providers of all legal assistance services is the 'referral merry-go-round' or 'referral roundabout', where clients struggle to find a service that can assist them due to the nature of their problem or because they do not qualify for a particular provider's service. The consequence can be a frustrating pathway of contacting multiple providers, and research shows that those most in need of assistance are least likely to persevere in finding that assistance.[62] The client recruitment form did not ask to which CLC the client was referred, so it isn't possible to directly comment on the appropriateness of the referral. Monitoring this, particularly for clients with out of scope matters and multiple referrals, may assist in limiting the risk of clients entering the referral merry-go-round. Specific details of the organisations referred to could also be captured to allow for an independent assessment of whether these were appropriate for each client's problem and circumstances. There would also be merit in any future research explicitly asking clients to evaluate each of the referrals that they pursued, and in particular to report on whether the organisations they were referred to were able provide any additional assistance.

There may be scope to increase the use of information emails, perhaps to encompass additional topics, as they have a reasonably high open rate and are found useful by clients. As emails were equally well received whether the client had looked at the website or not, the presentation of similar information via online guided pathways may be a useful option.

One further observation is that as Legal Help provides a recognised and trusted first point of contact, with its coordinating role and oversight of services available, there may be benefits to widening the range of referrals to more often include non-legal human services and related information. This would be particularly beneficial for family breakup (non-violence) and employment (non-discrimination) matters, both of which can have serious welfare impacts for clients but generally do not qualify for Legal Aid's assistance.

Experience (immediate outcome)

Clients' immediate experience of the service is almost universally positive, and although the perceived value decreases over time when problems remain unresolved or end badly, in general, clients' evaluations of the service overall remain high.

However, clients with multiple vulnerabilities do not have quite such a positive experience as clients without vulnerabilities. Surveyed clients with multiple vulnerabilities were more likely to say they had found it hard to understand what they were told, and to say they had other questions they would like to have asked but didn't. They were also less likely to agree the information they were given was helpful. These findings confirm previous research that information services are less appropriate for clients with lower capability, so identifying and triaging these types of clients to more support is an important role of any information/referral service.

Even though the extent of help that can be provided is fairly restricted, a number of potential benefits to clients are nonetheless discernible. In the context of often highly stressful circumstances, the opportunity to discuss a legal problem can provide an immediate boost to

[62] McDonald & Wei 2018

wellbeing. Legal Help staff understanding and framing of the problem enquired about provides clear direction to appropriate next steps, leading to increased confidence amongst clients regarding their options for managing their problem. And the referral to organisations that can directly assist and links to self-help materials are an efficient method of providing access to reliable and appropriate resources. Legal Help efficiently enables the Victorian community's access to a wide range of legal assistance services and other organisations supporting dispute resolution.

The trusted and recognised brand of Legal Aid facilitates the information and referral coordination role it provides. Clients generally did not express frustration at the initial onward referral by Legal Help, as long as that referral information was correct. However, clients did get frustrated if they failed to get assistance from those that they had been referred on to. Not all understood they were being referred out of Legal Aid, but this confirms the value of a central point of contact and coordination.

Actions (medium outcome)

The call with Legal Help generally seems to encourage clients into further action, with over three-quarters either having done something proactive or waiting to be contacted for an appointment a week after their call. Nevertheless, there may be some clients for whom a follow up the initial call with a checking-in text/email a couple of weeks after the call would be beneficial. Follow up calls are used in private service sector (such as computer helplines) to make sure customers do not neglect to deal with problems that are having a negative impact on their customer experience. To assess whether the additional resource required is justified and to identify the clients for whom such a call would be most beneficial, it is recommended that such an approach be appropriately evaluated, ideally through a randomised control trial, with random allocation for follow-up. The challenge of designing such an evaluation is discussed further in Appendix 2.

The almost universal provision of a referral to another organisation increases the risk of clients ending up on a referral merry-go-round – particularly for those clients that have been referred to Legal Help by another organisation. It is important, therefore, to ensure there is no tendency to use referrals to shift responsibility for communicating the disappointing news that free assistance is unavailable on to other organisations or other parts of VLA.

While clients may not be immediately ready for 'just in case' community legal education at the time of their call, follow-up emails within the next couple of weeks may also be a way to target such information to appropriate client groups.

Resolution (longer outcome)

The duration of a legal problem will be determined by many factors, not all within the control of the client, whatever the value of the assistance they are provided with. However, the aim of providing assistance is in part to assist in timely problem resolution and many problems remained unresolved at the three-month follow-up. This low level of resolution limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the impact of the service on problem resolution. However, while the links between the information provided and problem outcomes were hard to discern, there were anecdotal examples of referrals that resulted in problem resolution.

As already noted, the information/referral service doesn't seem to be as successful for clients with multiple vulnerabilities: they are less likely to say they were helped; less likely to recall being provided with referrals; less likely to act promptly on the information provided; and less

likely to have achieved satisfactory problem resolution at three months. Our method of identifying vulnerable clients was far broader than VLA's current priority groups and it is probably not realistic to assess so many criteria in the service provision environment. As this group also tended to have chronic legal problems with a longer duration and given the potential for increased emotional and financial impact of longer term problems, as suggested above, VLA may wish to consider asking clients about the duration of their problem, potentially to offer more intensive services to those with chronic issues.

The extent of unresolved problems which were still 'ongoing' for the client, also raises the question of whether this perseverance was appropriate. It may be that the necessary restriction of what can be provided to clients by an information/referral service doesn't readily allow the service to assist clients explore whether or not continued action is appropriate or cost-effective. Indeed, the empowerment of clients through the positive experience of the call and the focus on providing referrals, may result in over-optimism about the value of continuing to pursue resolution. VLA may wish to consider whether there is scope to add wording to information emails to prompt informed decision making in this regard by providing clients with information on realistic expectations about problem pathways, costs and potential outcomes and to manage their expectations on the likelihood of gaining free legal assistance from elsewhere.

This research has demonstrated the value of VLA's information/referral services to the Victorian community particularly for those with the capability to manage relatively straight-forward problems. Confirming previous research, that to be effective legal assistance must respond to both the complexity of the issue and the legal capability of the client, this role could be further enhanced by identifying vulnerable clients with chronic problems either for follow-up and/or to ensure they can access more intensive services,

Appendix 1 Appendix Tables

Section 3 Reach

Table A1.3.1 Matter types within problem types as recorded by Legal Help staff for surveyed clients

Out of Scope	n
Association queries (incorporated and unincorporated)	1
Building contracts and dispute	1
Civil litigation and power of attorney	1
Co-tenant dispute	1
Complaint about private lawyer	1
Complaint re - education institute - related to costs	1
Consumer Law	1
Employment law	6
Fencing dispute	2
MV accident - client insured	1
Personal injury	2
Privacy and freedom of information	1
Real property disputes and conveyancing	1
Taxation matters	2
Wills and estates	4
Workplace bullying	1
Crime	**n**
Assault police and resist arrest	1
Boating offence	1
Breach of order offences and variations	2
Costs application	1
Criminal records	2
Deal with proceeds of crime	1
Diversion	1
Domestic animal act offences	1
Drink driving offences	2
Drug driving dffences	2
Having warrant executed in Vic	1
Summary crime -pre- interview advice for adults	2
Theft and related offences	1
Threat to kill	1
Threats to injure	1
Traffic offences	10
Unlawful assault	2
Other indictable crime	1
Family	**n**
Airport watch and risk of removal from jurisdiction	1
Child protection - carers, third parties and relatives	1
Child Protection Complaint	1
Child Support	2
De facto relationship spousal maintenance	1
Divorce	4
Family violence – responding to an order etc.	2
Family violence – applying for an order etc.	2
Parenting dispute – living arrangements, spend time with, parental responsibility	10
Pre and post separation enquiries	1
Property and financial matters	14
Spousal maintenance	1

Travel and passport enquiries	2
Civil	
Centrelink	1
Centrelink automated debts	2
Centrelink enquiry	1
Centrelink underpayment	1
Consumer law	1
Criminal Record/Equality Team Ref	1
Debt and enforcement of debt	5
Disability Support Pension	1
Discrimination	2
Discrimination in employment	1
Employment	2
Employment – discrimination	1
Fencing disputes	2
Fines/infringements	5
General civil procedure	1
Migration	1
Motor vehicle accidents - (person not insured)	5
Personal safety intervention orders	1
Powers of attorney	2
Residential tenancy enquires	3
Will	1
Workplace discrimination	2
Source: Legal Help recruitment form	

Table A1.3.2 Impact of problems on everyday life for vulnerable clients, by vulnerability type

Impact on everyday life:	All clients	Poor health	Low social capital	Financial stress	Poor language skills
	n=108	n=40	n=18	n=37	n=28
None	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Slight	10.2	7.5	0.0	2.7	11.1
Moderate	31.5	15.0	22.2	27.0	33.3
Severe	55.6	77.5	77.8	70.3	55.6
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Source: 1-week survey clients					

Section 6 Experience

Table A1.6.1 Vulnerable clients' perceptions of the service they received

Percentage completely agreeing:	All clients	Poor health	Low social capital	Financial stress	Poor language skills
	n=111	n=40	n=18	n=37	n=28
I was treated with respect	88.3	82.5	83.3	86.5	85.7
The person I spoke to really understood what I wanted	73.9	72.5	55.6	70.3	71.4
The person I spoke to was sympathetic	56.8	62.5	66.7	56.8	57.1
Percentage completely agreeing:					
I found it hard to understand what I was told	9.0	15.0	22.2	10.8	10.7
I felt rushed by the person I spoke to	6.3	5.0	16.7	2.7	10.7
I had other questions that I would like to have asked	14.4	25.0	44.4	21.6	35.7

Source: 1-week survey clients
Notes: Vulnerabilities are self-assessed on the 1-week survey survey.

Table A.1.6.2 Clients' perceptions of the service they received by educational attainment of client

Percentage completely agreeing:	Degree or above	Diploma or Cert 3/4	Year 12/11 or Cert 1/2	Year 10 or below	Current student
	n=44	n=20	n=20	n=10	n=11
I was treated with respect	100.0	100.0	95.0	90.0	100.0
The person I spoke to really understood what I wanted	97.7	95.0	90.0	100.0	100.0
The person I spoke to was sympathetic	84.1	80.0	80.0	80.0	90.9
Percentage completely agreeing:					
The information I was given over the phone was helpful	100.0	95.0	55.0	70.0	90.9
I found it hard to understand what I was told	15.9	0.0	30.0	40.0	0.0
I felt rushed by the person I spoke to	11.4	5.0	5.0	30.0	0.0
I had other questions I would have liked to ask but didn't	20.5	15.0	40.0	30.0	9.1

Source: 1-week client survey

Section 8 Resolution

Table A1.8.1 Outcome of three-month survey client problems, by type of problem: count of clients

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n = 14	n = 19	n=22	n=30	n=85
Resolved (n=36)	8	9	8	11	36
Partially resolved (n=16)	3	5	5	3	16
Ongoing (n=33)	3	5	9	16	33
Of the partially resolved/ongoing:					
Still taking action (n=37)	5	7	9	16	37
Not taking action (n=12)	1	3	5	3	12

Source: Three-month client survey

Table A1.8.2 Outcome of three-month survey client problems, by type of problem: percentage of clients

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n = 14	n = 19	n=22	n=30	n=85
Resolved (n=36)	57.1	47.4	36.4	36.7	42.4
Partially resolved (n=16)	21.4	26.3	22.7	10.0	18.8
Ongoing (n=33)	21.4	26.3	40.9	53.3	38.8
Of the partially resolved/ongoing:					
Still taking action (n=37)	35.7	36.8	40.9	53.3	43.5
Not taking action (n=12)	7.1	15.8	22.7	10.0	14.1

Source: Three-month client survey

Table A1.8.3 Outcome of three-month survey client problems, by number of vulnerabilities: count of clients

	None	One	Two	Three plus	All
	n =17	n =31	n =16	n =21	n =85
Resolved (n=36)	6	16	8	6	36
Partially resolved (n=16)	5	5	2	4	16
Ongoing (n=33)	6	10	6	11	33
Of the partially resolved/ongoing:					
Still taking action (n=37)	6	12	5	14	37
Not taking action (n=12)	5	3	3	1	12

Source: Three-month client survey

Table A1.8.4 Outcome of three-month survey client problems, by number of vulnerabilities: percentage of clients

	None	One	Two	Three plus	All
	n =17	n =31	n =16	n =21	n =85
Resolved (n=36)	35.3	51.6	50.0	28.6	42.4
Partially resolved (n=16)	29.4	16.1	12.5	19.0	18.8
Ongoing (n=33)	35.3	32.3	37.5	52.4	38.8
Of the partially resolved/ongoing:					
Still taking action (n=37)	35.3	38.7	31.3	66.7	43.5
Not taking action (n=12)	29.4	9.7	18.8	4.8	14.1

Source: Three-month client survey

Table A1.8.5 Clients' perceptions at 3 months by type of problem

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	N=14	n=19	n =22	n=30	N = 85
	%	%	%	%	%
It would have been better if I had contacted Legal Aid about the matter earlier	57.1	36.8	18.2	50.0	40.0
Legal Aid should have given me more help with my matter	35.7	31.6	54.5	46.7	43.5
After talking to Legal Aid I felt more confident about what to do next	78.6	78.9	31.8	70.0	63.5
The information made no difference to what I did about the matter	14.3	10.5	40.9	20.0	22.4
The information did not help me at all	28.6	5.3	31.8	16.7	20.0
The information helped me understand my options	71.4	73.7	54.5	70.0	67.1
The information made me worry about the matter more	35.7	26.3	31.8	26.7	29.4

Source: 3-month client survey

Appendix 2 Methodology

Overview

The methodology was designed to collect information about a representative set of clients of telephone information and referral services:

1. at the time of the call,
2. within a week of the call, and
3. about three months later.

Additional data was collected from the VLA Legal Help officer or lawyer that took the client's call and recruited clients to the research. Administrative data relating to all calls received by Legal Help during the research period was provided by VLA.

Client recruitment

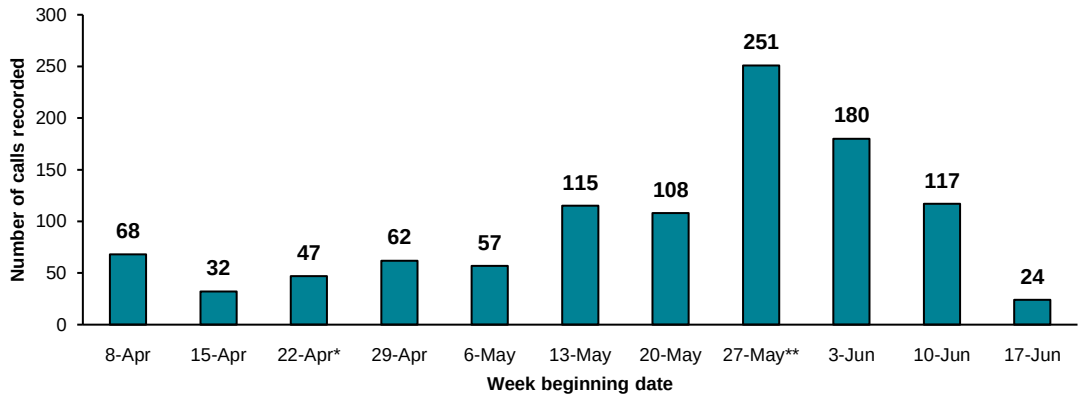
Legal Help selected the staff to participate in the research. The full client recruitment period ran from 26 March 2019 to 19 June 2019. Within this time, a pilot of the research recruitment process was conducted (26–29 March), followed by the main stage of collection (9 April–19 June). The main stage of recruitment ran in two phases, with extra Legal Help staff trained to increase the volume of clients recorded from 28 May 2019. There were two recruitment forms used during the main stage of recruitment. Changes made were minimal and were intended to allow for greater ease of recording for the participating Legal Help staff.

Unless clients had asked for their call not to be recorded, or there was some other reason why Legal Help staff considered it inappropriate, clients were asked at the end of their call with Legal Help whether they agreed to be contacted to take part in a survey about VLA information services. Participating Legal Help staff were asked to record details on an electronic form about all the calls they received, whether or not the client was asked to or agreed to participate in the survey. If a client agreed to participate, their contact details were also recorded. If they did not, no identifying information was recorded.

Every client for whom a recruitment form was completed was assigned a unique code (LJFClientID). This was subsequently used to link recruitment data to first and second survey data for each individual.

A total of 1,061 clients were recorded by participating Legal Help staff using the recruitment form during the main collection period. This represents 6.8% of the 15,634 calls recorded by Legal Help administrative systems during the research period. Figure 1 below shows the number of calls by week that were recorded using the recruitment form.

Figure A2.1 Number of calls recorded by week on Legal Help recruitment form



Note: *Two additional Legal Help staff were trained on this date; **nine additional Legal Help staff were trained on this date.

If client is willing to be contacted

Legal Help staff did not ask the client if they were willing to participate in a third (35.4%) of calls. The staff were instructed to not ask about contact if the client had not agreed to the call being recorded or if the client was excessively upset, angry, incoherent or they thought the client may not have capacity to participate in research. Of those that were asked, 69.5% agreed, which equates to 44.9% of all the calls for which details were recorded on the client recruitment form (Table A2.1).

Table A2.1: Number of calls by whether the client was willing to be contacted

Is client willing to be contacted	Number of calls	Percentage of calls
Yes	476	44.9%
Maybe	9	0.8%
No	200	18.9%
Did not ask client	376	35.4%
Total	1,061	100.0%

Clients who were not asked to participate

Table A2.2 provides a summary of the reasons why clients were not asked if they were willing to participate. The most common reason was that the nature of the call was too difficult (42.8%). In just under a quarter of calls the conversation was conducted in another language.

Table A2.2: Reasons for why clients were not asked if they were willing to participate

Reason	Number of calls	Percentage of calls
Nature of call too difficult	161	42.8%
Call conducted in another language	89	23.7%
Not appropriate to ask	43	11.4%
Third party caller	28	7.4%
Did not agree to being call recorded	16	4.3%
Forgot to ask	7	1.9%
Calling from overseas	6	1.6%
Call cut out	6	1.6%
Caller wanted to finish call	3	0.8%
Other	17	4.5%
Total	376	100.0%

Source: Legal Help client recruitment form. All clients.

Selection of research participants

Potential respondents were selected according to information recorded on the client recruitment form:

- "Yes" or "Maybe" response to: "Is Client willing to be contacted for research purposes by an independent research organisation?"
- "No" response to: "Was this call made on behalf of someone else (third party)?"
- "Information and referral" or "Referral only" response to: "What did you provide the caller?"
- "No" response to: "Did you refer the client to a lawyer within Legal Help?"

One-week survey

The first questionnaire is provided at Appendix 7.

Interviews were conducted between 12 April 2019 and 21 June 2019 by telephone from the Law and Justice Foundation offices by Foundation research staff and casual research assistants recruited specifically for the purpose. A half-day training and training manual were provided to all interviewers

The questionnaire was programmed into SurveyMonkey and completed electronically contemporaneously by interviewers. The calls were managed to ensure repeat attempts to make contact were made at different times of the day and/or the weekend. A record was made of every attempted call and its outcome.

To increase an initially low response rate, an incentive payment of a $30 gift card, was introduced on 17 May.[63]

[63] Those clients that had missed out on this were given an increased payment for participation in the 3-month survey.

Data was downloaded directly from SurveyMonkey to SPSS at the conclusion of the interviews.

111 clients completed at least part of the interview.

Three-month survey

The second questionnaire is provided at Appendix 8. The questionnaire was programmed into Survey Monkey.

All clients that participated in the first survey were contacted three months later by text message, email or telephone. Email addresses were collected at the conclusion of the 1-week survey, at which point respondents were asked if they would prefer a telephone interview. Phone interviews were offered as an alternative to the online survey to all respondents.

A second incentive payment of $30 gift card was offered to all three-month survey respondents. The 17 clients whose interview preceded the introduction of the incentive payment for the one-week survey were offered a $50 gift card.

Phone interviews were conducted by LJF research staff or one casual researcher who had also conducted first survey interviews. Interviews and online surveys were completed between 2 July 2019 and 21 October 2019.

Completed interviews were downloaded from SurveyMonkey into Excel. Some coding of open-ended questions was undertaken in Excel. The data was then read into SPSS and linked with client recruitment and first survey data.

85 of the 111 first survey clients undertook a second survey, either by email (80%) or phone (20%).

Survey response rates

The overall response rate, calculated as the proportion of clients included in both surveys as a percentage of those eligible to be included, was 15%. This increased to 20% for the one-week survey. The participation rate in the one-week survey as a percentage of those clients who were willing to have their details provided to the Foundation, was 44% (Table A2.3). Non-response includes non-contact and refusals. With the availability of call screening, non-response was an issue. The Foundation's telephone number was replaced with the name of the Foundation to assist with this. The response rate to the second survey as a percentage of those participating in the first survey, was 76.6%.

Table A2.3 Response rates, for clients meeting the criteria for inclusion in the research

Number of clients	Number
1 Not asked if willing to participate	204
2 Asked but said no	104
3 Said yes but did not participate	139
4 Participated in one-week survey	111
5 Participated in both surveys	85
6 Total eligible clients (1,2,3,4)	558
Response rates	**Percentage**
One-week survey response rate (4 / 6)	20%

Three-month survey response rate (5 / 6)	15%
One-week survey response rate based on recruited clients (4 / 3+4)	44%

Notes:
Clients eligible for inclusion were those calling on behalf of themselves and provided information/referral only and not transferred to a lawyer within Legal Help.

Data preparation and analysis

Where appropriate, surveyed clients' responses to descriptive questions were coded into categories for ease of analysis.

All analysis was undertaken in SPSS and/or Excel.

Are research participants representative of clients?

For various reasons, not everyone who is eligible to participate in research does so. Some of these reasons may introduce bias into the sample such that conclusions cannot be generalised to the full population of interest, in this case VLA clients receiving information and/or referral by telephone. The exclusion of a third of clients at the point of their potential recruitment is concerning in this regard. Reviewing the reasons for this (Table A.2.3) suggests there may be some bias in the sample to exclude clients whose experience of the call was below average and those for whom English is a second language.

To some extent it is also possible to assess the likelihood that the sample is biased by comparing the characteristics of the sample to that of the population from which it is drawn. This is only feasible for those characteristics for which information is collected for both the population and the sample. For this research this included: legal problem type, gender, age and geographic area of residence. The latter was coded into Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA).

Client characteristics that for the most part aligned with VLA's priority groups were collected on the Legal Help recruitment form for the purpose of the research. Table 3.6 in Section 3 of this report compares the profile of callers to Legal Help during the client recruitment period, those eligible for the research (essentially excluding those given advice over the phone) and those participating in the 1-week survey. This indicates that the surveyed clients had a very similar profile to all information/referral clients whose details were collected on the client recruitment form during the research period.

In terms of what they were calling about (Figure A2.1)[64] and the service they received (Table A2.4), those clients that participated in the research had a similar profile to all clients eligible to participate, whether they did or not. The main difference between all Legal Help clients and those eligible for the research is that the former includes those that met the criteria for and were given advice during the course of their call.

[64] Not shown in the figure are Legal Help clients with multiple problem types. These were recategorized for the survey sample based on the main problem type as described by the client in the survey.

Figure A2.1 What problems clients were calling about

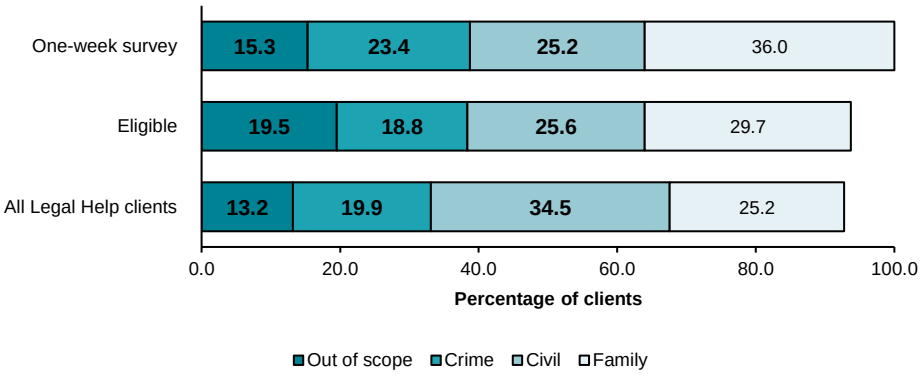


Table A2.4 Information/referral provided to Legal Help clients, those eligible for the research, and surveyed clients

	All Legal Help clients	Eligible	One-week survey
	n=1061	n=558	n=111
No referral	20.7	4.1	2.7
Email only	6.0	3.8	3.6
1 referral type	53.1	65.4	67.6
2 referral type	17.4	22.4	21.6
3+ referral types	2.7	4.1	4.5

Source: Client recruitment form
Note: Referral count does not include email. No survey client received more than three types of referral.
Eligible clients are those calling on behalf of themselves who were not given advice over the phone.

Table A2.5 shows that there are some differences in what the referral organisations were, with survey clients more likely to be referred to a community legal centre. Referrals to another part of VLA are lower for all Legal Help clients, perhaps because this group includes clients that received legal advice at the time of the call.

Table A2.5 Referral type recorded on client recruitment form

	Client form	Client form (eligible)	1-week survey
	n=1058	n= 556	n=111
	%	%	%
Referral to a community legal centre [1]	34.5	44.6	54.1
Information email [2]	34.3	38.5	51.4
Referral to external lawyer or LIV [3]	27.9	37.9	35.1
Referral/appointment elsewhere in VLA	9.5	13.7	13.5
Referral to VLA duty lawyer [4]	4.5	5.0	7.2
Referral to panel lawyer [5]	1.5	2.3	2.7
Referral to non-legal support	8.5	9.5	3.6
Referral to court or other dispute resolution	0.7	0.7	0.9
Referral to a public advocate/commission	0.9	1.3	1.8

Source: Client recruitment form and 1-week survey
Notes:
1 Community legal centres are independent of Legal Aid. Some provide general services to their local community, or to parts of that community, others specialise in specific areas of law.
2 These are emails containing standardised information on a specific type of legal problem or procedure. They are not used for the purpose of a conversation, and are therefore tagged 'no-reply'.
3 Law Institute of Victoria provides information on lawyers practising in Victoria by specialism and location.
4 Duty lawyers are based at courts and tribunals to assist people who are at court for a hearing and do not have their own lawyer.
5 Panel lawyers are private practitioners that have been selected to provide services to Legal Aid clients through grants of aid.

Table A2.6 shows that there some slight differences between all clients eligible for the research whose details were captured on the client recruitment form, and those that ended up participating in the first survey. A lower proportion of the Legal Help staff agreed that the client understood the full eligible sample than those who participated in the survey. This is not surprising given the reasons for not asking clients if they were willing to participate in the research, and it is reassuring that it is not too dissimilar. Also reassuring is that ratings of understanding of clients' issues and the meeting of needs were similar for the full eligible sample and the 1-week survey clients.

Table A2.6 Legal Help staff rating of calls of (a) all clients eligible for the research (b) clients participating in the 1-week survey

Percentage of staff agreeing that:	Eligible	1-week survey
	n=558	n=111
	%	%
They understood client's issues	76.9	76.6
Client understood them	72.9	81.1
They met the client's needs	64.9	67.6
Source: Client recruitment form. The two highest ratings (out of 5) are counted as agreement.		

Limitations of the research design

Although the evaluation reported here describes the outcomes for *clients*, and how these vary for different types of clients and the problems they bring, it is limited in that it isn't possible to say with any certainty what impact receiving the service had on the *problem* outcomes clients achieved. That is, we don't know whether the legal problems for which clients seek assistance resolve more often, more quickly and/or more satisfactorily than those for which they do not. This is because, for instance, some problems would resolve even if the client had not contacted Legal Help, or because some clients would have taken an appropriate course of action even if they hadn't received the service. It is also a risk that participating in the research itself affects the actions that clients take. Designing an evaluation to provide information on impact is challenging as it requires comparing the outcomes for an equivalent group of clients who received the service to one that did not, while keeping other factors – such as the research intervention – as similar as possible.

Although not necessarily straightforward, designing such an evaluation is not impossible but ideally requires legal assistance providers to be comfortable about clients being assigned to services randomly, rather than on the basis of their assessed need. This is because a valid comparison group should be matched on all the criteria that might affect the outcome, such as problem type, socio-demographic characteristics, capability and help seeking behaviour. Randomly allocating alternative callers to receive information and not receive it would create a valid comparison group. While from an ethical perspective, this might be justified on the basis that there is currently very limited evidence about what works best for clients, it is usually not a viable option in practice. Contact needs to be made with clients to gain their consent to participate in the research and to collect their contact details. Eliciting this information and then withholding legal assistance services from these callers would compromise trust in the service, and, even it if was possible, it is likely the comparator group would seek help from elsewhere. Another option is to provide a service 'plus' to a random sub-set of callers, such as information emails, and withholding these from the remainder. A third option is to randomly allocate clients to different intensities of service, such as randomly assigning clients to receive information or the more resource intensive advice. For policy and logistical reasons none of these options were feasible within the context of this project and indeed it is unlikely that sufficient sample would have been achieved for a robust experimental design within the available resources of this project.[65]

An alternative approach, often used in such circumstances, is a quasi-experimental design which assumes that there is sufficient natural randomisation in who receives the 'treatment' (service) that a comparison can be attempted. This approach requires sufficient sample size to control for the full range of client characteristics likely to affect outcomes, and although this was the original intention in the research reported here, in the event the achieved sample size was insufficient to support such an analysis.

Even with an appropriate evaluation design, it may be hard to detect a measurable impact of information services due to the relatively low intensity of this service and the wide availability

[65] Policy and logistical arrangements also ruled out random allocation to service intensity such as whether or not clients were sent a no reply information email, or whether they received advice, but this could remain a viable option for experimentally assessing impacts and is discussed further in the conclusion to this report.

of alternative sources of information and assistance that clients seeking information are, indeed, encouraged to access.

There is also the challenge of how to measure outcomes in an evaluation of legal assistance services. As legal disputes involve at least two parties, identifying a good outcome for the problem (as opposed to the client) is not straightforward. Clients may be clear on what a good problem outcome looks like to them, but this may be unrealistic or likely to involve considerable time, money and stress to achieve. The original research proposal suggested an independent assessment of problem outcomes by legally qualified staff to assess how appropriate this was. In the event, too few problems resolved to make this exercise worthwhile. In the research reported here we have therefore focused on outcomes for the client rather than the problem.

Appendix 3 Measuring legal capability

In the legal information provision context assessing legal capability supports the triaging of those most at need to more intensive services, and — tailoring the service so that it is most appropriate for an individual's level of legal capability. From an evaluation or monitoring perspective, legal capability will be an important confounding factor on the outcomes that clients achieve.

Box 1: VLA priority clients

VLA has a transparent Priority Client Framework that recognises that some clients should be triaged for higher intensity services and to inform the design of appropriate services.[66] This was reviewed during 2018, with the 2019 version prioritising the following groups:

Children and young people
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
People with a disability, including mental health issues
People with limited or restricted access to financial resources
People who have experienced family violence
People who are detained by the state, such as in custody
People who are experiencing homelessness
People with low levels of education and literacy
People who have recently arrived in Australia, such as refugees
Older people with limited family support
Single parents
People experiencing drug or alcohol dependence
People with a chronic illness or significant physical disability

VLA's policy recognises the interaction between priority group status and individual capability to manage and resolve problems. Relevant capability factors are financial circumstances, cultural or community practices, English language proficiency, previous justice system experience, number of legal problems, wellbeing and accessibility of services.

Psychological indicators of capability, such as emotional wellbeing, problem solving ability and preparedness to act are not formally recorded, though may become apparent during the client interaction. Some factors will also act to increase individual legal capability, such as strong and capable social networks, competence in the intelligent use of technology and, of course, access to financial resources. To provide further information on the personal capability of clients and to potentially comment on the validity of the approach of identifying priority clients for service, the research reported here additionally measured capability through a recognised measure of self-efficacy (see below) and additional vulnerabilities such as

[66] Victoria Legal Aid 2019, *Client priority and capability policy 2019*, Victoria Legal Aid, Melbourne.

access to social support (see Section 3). However, the lessons from this are limited as VLA's information/referral services are aimed at the broader community and Legal Help triages more vulnerable clients to more intensive services.

Self-efficacy measure

Psychometric scales have been developed to measure self-perceived capability at managing the problems of life when they arise. Perhaps the best known of these is the Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem 1995), from which Pleasence and Balmer proposed a Legal self-efficacy and Legal Anxiety scales.[67] The following index items were tested in the pilot version of the one-week survey questionnaire. Those that were included in the final version of the survey are indicated in bold:

- **I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough**
- If someone opposes me I can find the means and ways to get what I want[68]
- **It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals**
- **I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities**
- **When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions**
- **I am good at finding information to help resolve problems**
- I am afraid to speak to people directly to press my rights[69]
- Worry that I don't express myself clearly can stop me from taking action
- I avoid pressing my rights because I am not confident I will be successful [41]
- **I do not always get the best outcome for myself because I try to avoid conflict** [This item was not included in the measure as it did not appear to be measuring the same latent factor]

Responses were coded from 0 'not at all true' to 3 'exactly true', and the scores for the five items in the measure were added together to give a total score of between 0 and 15 for each client. Low efficacy was defined as scoring less than half on the measure, i.e. a score of 7 or below. No equivalent population profile was available for this restricted set of index items but the measure was not particularly discriminatory for the clients surveyed, with over nine in ten scoring 8 or more out of 15. Its value as a measure of legal capability was therefore limited. It was however used as one component of the multiple vulnerabilities measure developed for this research.

Multiple vulnerabilities

Eight indicators of vulnerability were employed in the research reported here. These are detailed in Table A3.1. The number of these experienced by each surveyed client was computed and grouped to separately distinguish between clients with no vulnerabilities, one, two and three to eight vulnerabilities.

---

[67] Legal confidence and attitudes to law - Pleasence and Balmer 2017

[68] This was dropped because respondents had problems understanding "opposes".

[69] This was dropped because respondents had problems understanding the concept of pressing rights.

Table A.3.1 Indicators of vulnerability used in this research

	Out of scope	Crime	Family	Civil	All
	n=17	n=26	n=28	n=40	n=111
Vulnerabilities:					
Poor health[1]	47.1	34.6	17.9	45.0	36.0
Low social capital[2]	17.6	23.1	14.3	12.5	16.2
Low financial security[3]	35.3	42.3	21.4	35.0	33.3
Poor English language skill[4]	23.5	15.4	32.1	27.5	25.2
Poor technology skill[5]	11.8	11.5	14.3	7.5	10.8
Low educational attainment[6]	35.3	46.2	17.9	30.0	31.5
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	0.0	3.9	7.1	7.5	5.4
Low self-efficacy[7]	5.9	11.5	7.1	7.5	8.1

Source: 1-week client survey

Notes:

1 Health described as 'poor' or have a long-term health condition, disability or impairment restricting everyday activity

2 Completely disagree that have many friends and relatives to help if needed

3 Getting into difficulties on income

4 Somewhat or completely agree that sometimes have problems understanding spoken or written English

5 Never access the internet or completely disagree that it is easy to find useful information on the internet or completely disagree can tell whether information on the internet is reliable

6 No tertiary or post school qualifications other than Certificate 1 and 2 level

7 See section on self-efficacy above.

Appendix 4 Legal Help automated message & out of scope matters

Automated message

On calling the Legal Help number, clients hear an automated message, along the lines of[70]:

Welcome to Victoria Legal Aid legal helpline. Please note that your call is now been recorded for quality and training purposes. If you do not wish to participate then please let us know.

Our team can provide Legal Help on a variety of legal topics or give a referral in areas of law we don't cover.

When there is a queue, the message will state….

As we are experiencing very high call volumes today our average weight time is …. minutes. If matter is urgent please stay on the line and we will assist you as soon as possible, if not please call back the following business day, alternatively we may be able to assist you with our live chat option.

Please visit our website at legalaid.vic.gov.au

Please note that live chat is an information and referral service only. It cannot provide legal advice'.

A new voice then says:

'To speak to Legal Help about a new legal issue - press 1.

If you have a Centrelink debt inquiry - press 2.

If you are calling regarding a police interview - press 3.

If you are a working representing a client from an agency - press 4.

To be transferred to other areas of Victoria Legal Aid - press 5.

Or to hear these options again - press 6.

Please note this a call may be recorded for quality and training purposes. If you do not wish to have this call recorded, please let us know'.

Callers are then placed on a queue and hear music and regular apologies:

We apologise for keeping you waiting

We know your time is valuable and thank-you for waiting. One of our members will be with you shortly, alternatively you may want to provide our live-chat option. Website @

[70] Text provided by VLA based on accessing the service at 11:45am on 21 October 2019

legalaid.vic.gov.au Please note it cannot provide legal advice. General information regarding the law and not provide you with specific information in regards to your circumstances.

Problem types that are out of scope for Legal Aid advice:

Work injuries
Wills and deceased estates
Town planning, development and environment disputes
Taxation matters (not criminal offences)
Superannuation claims and appeals
Real property disputes and conveyancing
Product liability
Privacy
Personal injury matters that may include medical negligence, public or occupier's liability
Pay disputes
Owner's corporation (body corporate) queries
Migration matters that relate to business, skilled, student and tourist visas
Landlord issues
Intellectual property
Insurance
Horse agistment
Freedom of information
Financial planning
Employment law – except where connected with discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation or vilification
Defamation
Consumer disputes
Business and commercial matters
Bullying – including general workplace complaints where there is no discrimination element
Building, buying and selling houses and land
Bankruptcy
Association queries (incorporated and unincorporated)

Appendix 5 Legal Help ATLAS data

VLA provided unit record data for Legal Help calls recorded in their ATLAS system between the 9 April 2019 and 19 June 2019. There were 12,820 Information and Referral clients and 2,814 Advice clients during this period. To facilitate comparison to the research sample, only clients calling on behalf of themselves are included in any analysis of this data presented in this report. There were 11,716 such information and referral clients.

Table A5.1 Data items collected in ATLAS for Legal Help client services

	Referral only	Information /referral	Advice
Referred from	Yes	Yes	Yes
Legal problem type	Yes	Yes	Yes
Person enquiring (self, family, carer etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Age group	No	Yes	No
Country of birth	No	Yes	Yes
Gender	Yes	Yes	Yes
Disability indicator	No	Yes	Yes
Disability type	No	No	Yes
Benefits indicator	No	Yes	Yes
Benefit type	No	No	Yes
Literacy status	No	Yes	Yes
Indigenous status	No	Yes	Yes
At risk of family violence	No	Yes	Yes
Interpreter required	No	Yes	Yes
Employment status	No	Yes	Yes
Non-English language at home indicator	No	Yes	Yes
Non-English language type	No	No	Yes
Homelessness status	No	Yes	Yes
Local government area	Yes	Yes	Yes
Client in custody indicator	Yes	Yes	Yes
Client home suburb	Yes	Yes	Yes
Client home postcode	Yes	Yes	Yes
Client home state	Yes	Yes	Yes
Session funding category	Yes	Yes	Yes
Client living arrangement	No	No	Yes
Client date of birth	No	No	Yes

Source: Victoria Legal Aid ATLAS administrative data system
Notes: Data items marked 'no' may be included in the data if case changes categorisation

Table A5.2 Primary matter type of Legal Help information/referral calls between 9 April and 19 June

Primary matter type	Frequency	Percentage
Total	12820	100.0
Property settlement	539	4.2
Landlord and tenant - resident	531	4.1
Specific issue	528	4.1
Infringements	526	4.1
Other miscellaneous criminal offences	479	3.7
Spend time with	455	3.5
Family violence (app)	452	3.5
Family violence (resp)	404	3.2
Live with	293	2.3
Dissolution	278	2.2
Other contract matters	256	2.0
Motor vehicle property damage	235	1.8
Centrelink (other)	225	1.8
Personal safety intervention order (app)	225	1.8
Other consumer disputes (state)	222	1.7
Assault other	215	1.7
Parenting plans	200	1.6
Other traffic offences	195	1.5
Other migration matters	193	1.5
Exceed speed limit	178	1.4
Debt for goods and services	173	1.3
Wages/terms of employment	173	1.3
General enquiry	155	1.2
Other matters following death	144	1.1
The law in general	140	1.1
Drive whilst license suspended	133	1.0
Theft (state)	114	0.9
Personal safety intervention order (resp)	110	0.9
Power of attorney	110	0.9
Other child support matter	102	0.8
Breach of Family Violence Protection Act	94	0.7
Other consumer dispute (Commonwealth)	86	0.7
Other property matters	86	0.7
Driving under the influence of drugs	81	0.6
Exceeding .05%	77	0.6
Other personal injury	76	0.6
Centrelink - debt project	73	0.6
Driving under the influence of alcohol	73	0.6

Termination (incl dismissal/resignation)	70	0.5
Will drafting	68	0.5
Building dispute	66	0.5
Criminal record	63	0.5
Misc. common law	62	0.5
Other driving offences	62	0.5
Threaten to kill	62	0.5
Possess drugs	61	0.5
Recklessly cause injury	59	0.5
Burglary	56	0.4
Careless driving	56	0.4
Probate application	56	0.4
Employment activity	54	0.4
Judgment debt (incl. Instalment orders)	54	0.4
Property (family-other than settlement)	54	0.4
Theft from a shop	54	0.4
Dividing fences dispute	52	0.4
Travel application	51	0.4
Disability/impairment	50	0.4
Guardianship order	50	0.4
Nuisance	49	0.4
Property settlement – de facto	48	0.4
Relocation application	47	0.4
Family violence (cross)	45	0.4
Civil law - advice only	44	0.3
Insurance	44	0.3
Any other miscellaneous court applications (adjournment)	41	0.3
Mental Health Act order other	41	0.3
Criminal damage	39	0.3
Money loan	39	0.3
Uninsured motor vehicle	39	0.3
Victims of crime assistance	39	0.3
Assault police (state)	37	0.3
Unlicenced driving	37	0.3
Community treatment order	36	0.3
Parentage testing	36	0.3
Traffick drugs	36	0.3
Drive whilst disqualified	35	0.3
Inpatient treatment order	35	0.3
Intentionally cause injury	35	0.3
Plh only appeal	35	0.3

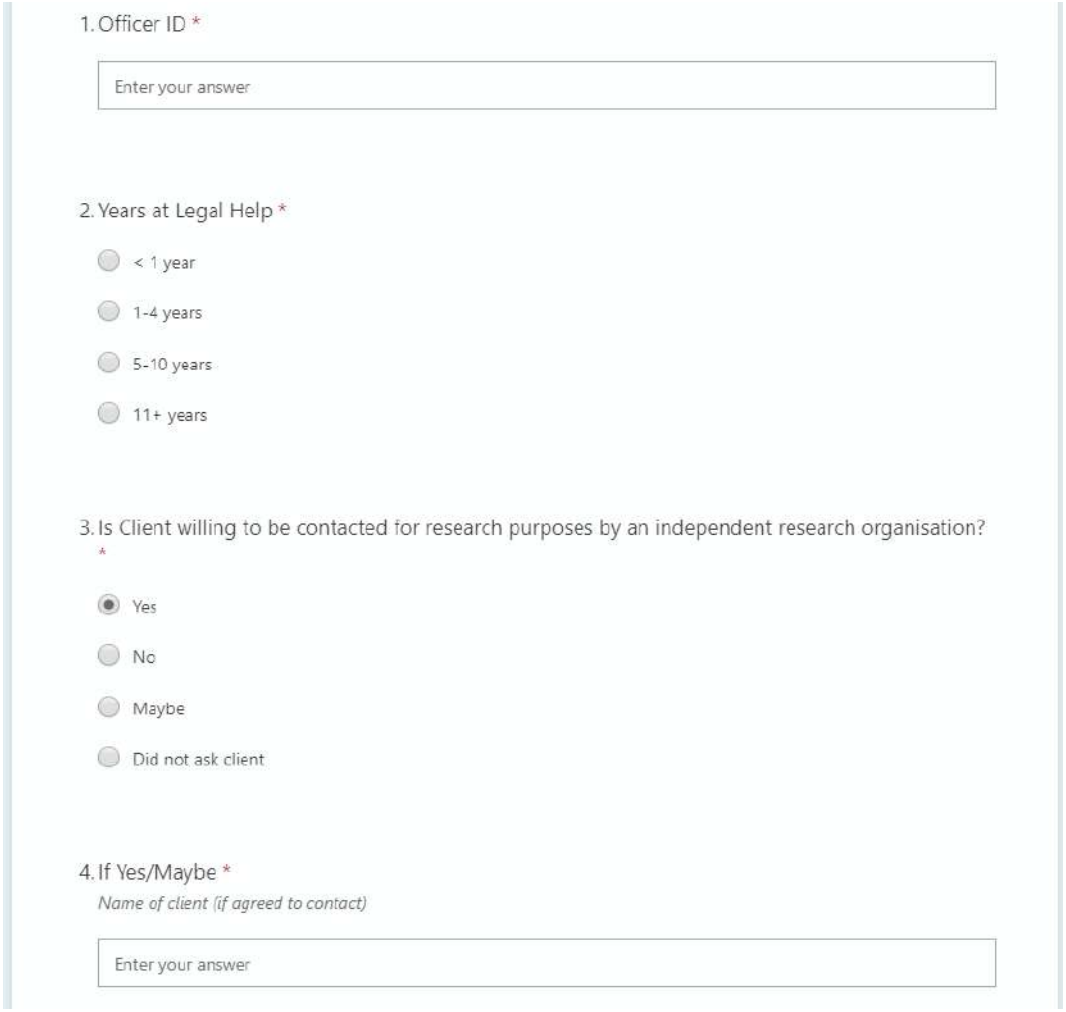
Recovery	34	0.3
Commercial disputes/partnerships	33	0.3
Rape	33	0.3
Defamation	32	0.2
Investigation/pre court	31	0.2
Possession of a weapon	31	0.2
Aggravated burglary	30	0.2
Bankruptcy	30	0.2
Other property damage	30	0.2
Contravention of Community Corrections Order	29	0.2
Other real estate matters	29	0.2
Partner visa	29	0.2
Breach bail	28	0.2
Complaint against police	28	0.2
Plh only bail	28	0.2
Visa cancellation (character)	28	0.2
Workers compensation	27	0.2
Third party advice	26	0.2
Bullying	25	0.2
Cultivate drugs	25	0.2
Doctors (negligence)	25	0.2
Personal safety intervention order (cross)	25	0.2
Real property eg mortgages	25	0.2
Procedural fairness	24	0.2
Redundancy issues	24	0.2
Other sexual offences (state)	23	0.2
Stalking	23	0.2
Theft of a motor car	23	0.2
Administration order	22	0.2
Body corporate matters	22	0.2
Lawyers (negligence)	22	0.2
Other professional negligence	22	0.2
Race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin	22	0.2
Other property damage offences	21	0.2
Unregistered motor vehicle	21	0.2
Armed robbery	20	0.2
Commercial tenancy	20	0.2
Sexual harassment	20	0.2
Testators family maintenance	20	0.2
Deception	19	0.1
Application for protection	18	0.1

Banking	18	0.1
Indecent assault	18	0.1
Miscellaneous licence offences	18	0.1
Other area	18	0.1
Breach s123a Family Violence Protection Act	17	0.1
Protection application – by notice	17	0.1
Child support agreement	16	0.1
Other matters	16	0.1
Adoption	15	0.1
Breach personal safety intervention order	15	0.1
Caveats	15	0.1
Conveyancing	15	0.1
Airport watch list	14	0.1
Arson	14	0.1
Miscellaneous civil - commonwealth entitlements	14	0.1
Other - guardianship & admin	14	0.1
Robbery	14	0.1
Miscellaneous civil – social inclusion	13	0.1
Other deception offences	13	0.1
Administrative Appeals Tribunal – SSCS division -tier 1	12	0.1
Assault with a weapon	12	0.1
Breach of community-based order	12	0.1
Fraud (state)	12	0.1
Maintenance application spouse	12	0.1
Trade practices	12	0.1
Child support declaration s106	11	0.1
Handling stolen goods	11	0.1
Intentionally cause serious injury	11	0.1
Murder	11	0.1
Partner visa - family violence exception	11	0.1
Enforcement	10	0.1
Family preservation order	10	0.1
Investigation phase	10	0.1
Protection application - by emergency care	10	0.1
Recklessly cause serious injury	10	0.1

Source: Legal Help ATLAS data

Notes: Only includes problem matter types with 10 or more enquiries during the period. This represents 95% of legal enquiries.

Appendix 6 Client recruitment form



1. Officer ID *

Enter your answer

2. Years at Legal Help *

- < 1 year
- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11+ years

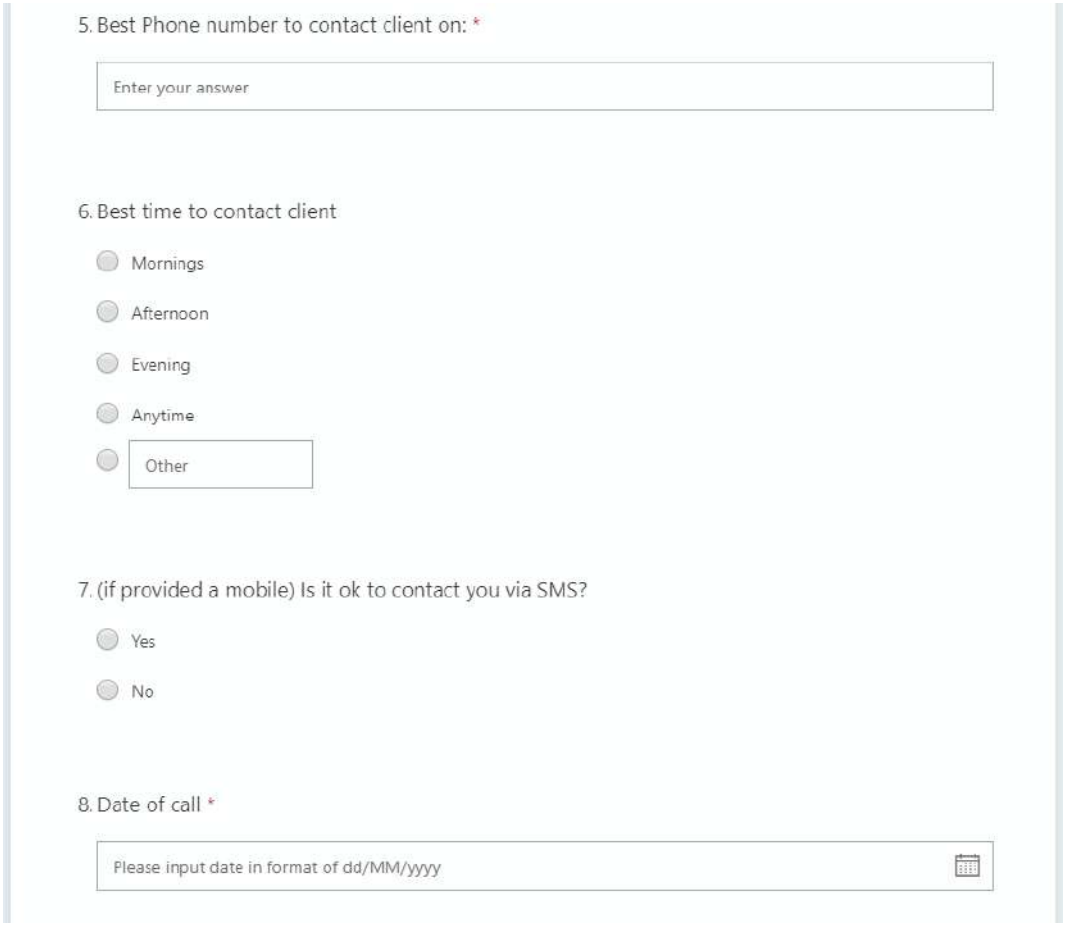
3. Is Client willing to be contacted for research purposes by an independent research organisation? *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Did not ask client

4. If Yes/Maybe *

Name of client (if agreed to contact)

Enter your answer



5. Best Phone number to contact client on: *

Enter your answer

6. Best time to contact client

- Mornings
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Anytime
- Other

7. (if provided a mobile) Is it ok to contact you via SMS?

- Yes
- No

8. Date of call *

Please input date in format of dd/MM/yyyy

9. Length of call *

- ○ < 1 mins
- ○ 1-5 mins
- ○ 6-15 mins
- ○ 16-30 mins
- ○ 31-60 mins
- ○ 61+

10. Was this call made on behalf of someone else (third party)? *

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No
- ○ Unsure

11. Was the call about a legal problem? *

- ◉ Yes (go to next questions)
- ○ No - a non-legal issue
- ○ No - student/educational request
- ○ No - wanting to contact VLA lawyer or another staff member
- ○ No - Other

12. Was the client's legal problem an Out of Scope (Referral Only) Matter? *

eg. business disputes /contractual matters etc.

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

13. Select the relevant REFERRAL ONLY (out of scope) MATTERS

- [ ] Association queries (incorporated and unincorporated)
- [ ] Business and commercial matters
- [ ] Building contracts and dispute
- [ ] Copyright, patents, trademarks
- [ ] Defamation
- [ ] Employment law
- [ ] Financial planning/asset management/trusts
- [ ] Horse agistment
- [ ] Migration (business, skilled, student, tourist)
- [ ] Intellectual property
- [ ] Life insurance/income protection queries
- [ ] Owner's corporation (body corporate queries)
- [ ] Personal injury – medical negligence, TAC, public liability, occupier's liability, workplace
- [ ] Privacy and freedom of information
- [ ] Product liability
- [ ] Real property disputes and conveyancing
- [ ] Residential tenancy – where caller is a landlord
- [ ] Superannuation claims and appeals
- [ ] Taxation matters
- [ ] Town planning development and environment disputes
- [ ] Wills and estates
- [ ] Interstate or overseas legal matters
- [ ] Other

14. Was the client's legal problem a Criminal Matter *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

15. Select the relevant CRIMINAL MATTERS

- [ ] Summary crime -pre- interview advice for adults
- [ ] Licence eligibility orders
- [ ] Drink driving offences
- [ ] Drug driving offences
- [ ] Impoundment and immobilisation of vehicles
- [ ] Demerit points
- [ ] Diversion
- [ ] Criminal records
- [ ] Police powers and complaints
- [ ] Traffic offences
- [ ] General criminal procedure
- [ ] Domestic animal act offences
- [ ] Statement of no complaint and spousal compatibility
- [ ] Minor drug offences
- [ ] Offensive behaviour – public drunkenness, urinating in public
- [ ] Breach of order offences and variations
- [ ] Theft and related offences
- [ ] Unlawful assault
- [ ] Indictable crime (specify type of offence in other)
- [ ] Other

16. Was the client's legal problem a Family Matter *

- (•) Yes
- ( ) No

17. Select the relevant FAMILY MATTERS

- [ ] Marriage and de-facto relationships
- [ ] Parentage testing
- [ ] Divorce
- [ ] Parenting dispute – living arrangements, spend time with, parental responsibility
- [ ] Pre and post separation enquires
- [ ] Pregnancy related enquires
- [ ] Property and financial matters
- [ ] Airport watch and risk of removal from jurisdiction
- [ ] Change of child's name
- [ ] Contraventions
- [ ] Recovery order
- [ ] Relocation
- [ ] Travel and passport enquires
- [ ] General procedure – jurisdiction, proper venue, service
- [ ] Family violence -applying for an order, interstate registration, applications including Apply, Vary and extend
- [ ] Family violence – responding to an order, safety notices, Applications including apply, vary and extend
- [ ] Child protection – carers, third parties and relatives
- [ ] Child Support
- [ ] Other

18. Was the client's legal problem a Civil Matter *

- (•) Yes
- ( ) No

19. Select the relevant CIVIL MATTERS

- [ ] Motor vehicle accidents – (persons not insured)
- [ ] Animal complaints
- [ ] Personal safety intervention orders
- [ ] Debt and enforcement of debt
- [ ] Trees
- [ ] Noise
- [ ] General civil procedure
- [ ] Uncollected goods
- [ ] Residential tenancy enquires
- [ ] Fines/infringements
- [ ] Centrelink automated debts
- [ ] Mental health general enquires
- [ ] Medical treatment orders
- [ ] Powers of attorney
- [ ] Guardianship and administration enquires
- [ ] Commission complaints and other organisations
- [ ] Fencing disputes
- [ ] Other

20. What did the caller want? *

Keep short - a couple of sentences max eg. wanted to speak to a lawyer about..wanted to know their options about etc....

Enter your answer

21. What did you provide to the caller? *

Select one only

- ( ) Information and referral
- ( ) Advice
- ( ) Information and advice

22. Did you refer the client to a lawyer within Legal Help? *

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

22. Was this client a referral from another legal help staff member? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

23. What else did you provide for the client? *

Select as many as apply...

- ☐ Made an appointment for the client within VLA
- ☐ ORBIT (no reply) email
- ☐ Referral to CLC
- ☐ External referral to lawyer/LIV
- ☐ Referral to non-legal support
- ☐ Links to CLE publications, resources
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other

24. How easy was it to understand the client's issue? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all easy	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

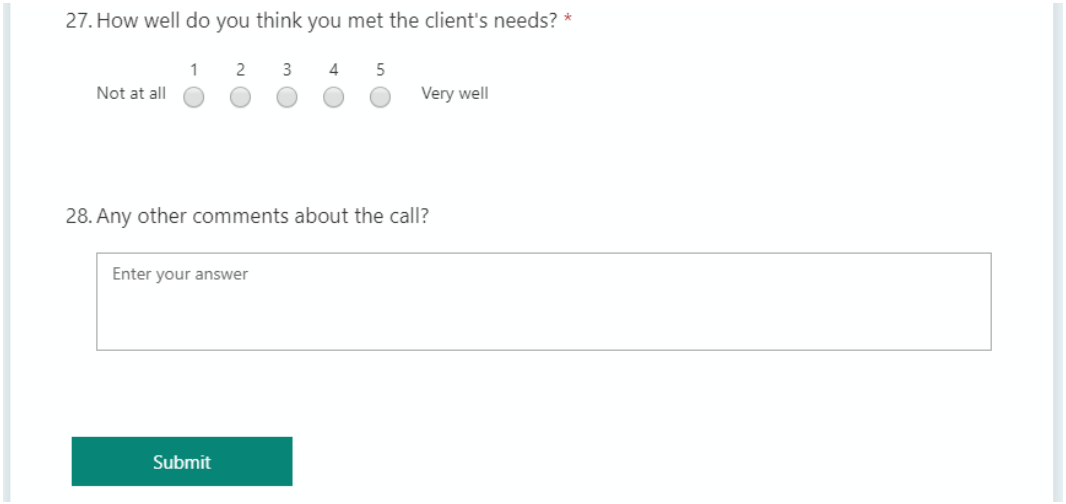
25. How well do you think the client understood what you said?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Did not understand at all	○	○	○	○	○	Understood completely

26. Does the client have any of these characteristics? *

select as many as apply

- ☐ Overseas born
- ☐ Speaks a language other than English at home
- ☐ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- ☐ Homeless
- ☐ Receiving a benefit
- ☐ Physical disability
- ☐ Mental illness/cognitive disability
- ☐ Low literacy
- ☐ At risk of family violence
- ☐ None of these


27. How well do you think you met the client's needs? *
1 2 3 4 5
Not at all
Very well
28. Any other comments about the call?
Enter your answer
Submit

Appendix 7 One-week client survey questionnaire

* 1. Interviewer ID

* 2. Date and time interview started

Date & Time

MM/DD/YYYY hh mm -

* 3. Client ID

Hi, I'm [SAY FIRST NAME] from the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW.

[IF NECESSARY]: Is that [CLIENT FIRST NAME] I'm speaking with?

Your name has been provided to us by the Legal Help line at Victoria Legal Aid as you called them on [DATE] and agreed to be contacted to take part in a survey. This survey is voluntary and will take about 30 minutes to complete. You will receive a $30 e-voucher on completion of the survey. All the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and you will remain anonymous. Are you available now to take this survey?

[IF NECESSARY]: Would it be more convenient if I made an appointment to speak to you in the next day or so? [IF YES, RECORD APPOINTMENT DETAILS IN CALL LOG AND APPOINTMENT SHEET]

[IF RESPONDENT HAS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH AND/OR THE FOUNDATION]: The Law & Justice Foundation is a research organisation. We are working with Victoria Legal Aid to find out what works best for their information services, and we are talking to clients like yourself as part of this process.

[IF RESPONDENT CONCERNED ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY]: This research is carried out in compliance with the Privacy Act, and the information you provide will be used only for research purposes.

4. Do you remember what that call was about? If so, can you tell me a bit about the matter?

- ◯ Yes - probe for details and enter below
- ◯ No - provide the problem matter type recorded to prompt interviewee for details
- ◯ Still no - collect demographic details only

Details about matter

5. [record for all, ask if not clear from previous answer] So can I just check, were you calling for yourself or on behalf of someone else?

- ◯ Myself
- ◯ Someone else - Own child
- ◯ Someone else - Other child – a relation
- ◯ Someone else - Other child – not related
- ◯ Someone else - Parent
- ◯ Someone else - Other relative
- ◯ Someone else - Work colleague
- ◯ Someone else - Friend
- ◯ [Refused]
- ◯ Someone else - Other [write in]

6. And can I check how many people you spoke to when you rang Legal Aid about this problem? [unprompted list]

- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4 or more
- ◯ Don't know / Can't remember
- ◯ [Refused]

7. Did you speak to a lawyer during your telephone call?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Don't know / Can't remember
- ◯ [Refused]

8. How long did you wait before you spoke to someone when you rang?
[unprompted list]

- ◯ Less than 5 minutes
- ◯ More than 5 minutes but less than 10 minutes
- ◯ More than 10 minutes but less than 15 minutes
- ◯ More than 15 minutes but less than 30 minutes
- ◯ More than 30 minutes
- ◯ Can't remember
- ◯ [Refused]

[if any comments about call wait besides time]

9. So can I just check how long has this problem has been going on?
[we want to be as specific as possible]

10. When you contacted Legal Aid on this occasion, what did you want from them? [What did you ask for?]

11. What information were you given during the call [over the phone not by email]?

12. Were you told/recommended to contact another organisation/person?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ [Refused]

13. If so which ones? [unprompted list unless necessary]

- ☐ Court
- ☐ Community legal centre/CLC
- ☐ Victoria Legal Aid lawyer
- ☐ External lawyer / Law Institute of Victoria
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Other legal (write in)
- ☐ Non-legal (write in)
- ☐ Can't remember
- ☐ [Refused]
- ☐ [for interviewer - check box if this list was prompted]

Other legal or non-legal (write in)

14. Thinking about the telephone call you had with Legal Help, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
[ask statement then 'Is that completely or somewhat']

	Completely disagree	Disagree somewhat	Neither agree or disagree	Agree somewhat	Completely agree	Don't know / can't remember	[Refused]
I was treated with respect	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The person I spoke to really understood what I wanted	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I found it hard to understand what I was told	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The person I spoke to was sympathetic	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I felt rushed by the person I spoke to	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The information I was given over the phone was helpful	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I had other questions that I would like to have asked but didn't (probe for example)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

15. [only ask if agree that they had other questions they wanted to ask but didn't]
What did you want to ask at the time of the call but didn't?

16. Were you sent an email by Legal Aid or Legal Help during or immediately after the call?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Can't remember
- ◯ [Refused]

17. [if yes] Have you read any of the email?

- ◯ No
- ◯ Gave it a quick look
- ◯ Read parts of it
- ◯ Read it all
- ◯ Can't remember
- ◯ [Refused]

18. [other than no] On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Very difficult' and 5 is 'Very easy', how easy was it to understand the content of the email

Very difficult				Very easy	
1	2	3	4	5	[Refused]
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

19. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not relevant at all' and 5 is 'Very relevant', how relevant was the information in the email to your matter?

Not relevant at all				Very relevant	
1	2	3	4	5	[Refused]
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

20. Thinking about the information in the email, have you clicked on any of the links in the email?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ [Refused]

Comments (if any)

21. Again, thinking about the information in the email [if asked: not what you were told over the phone] Have you used any of the information in the email?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ [Refused]

Comments (if any)

22. What prompted you to call on the day and the time that you did? [why did you call VLA on [DAY]]

23. Why was it Legal Aid that you contacted for help? [Prompt: Why this organisation?]

24. [do not prompt] How did you first hear about Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help telephone service?

- [ ] Saw on VLA website
- [ ] Saw on another website (incl. Google)
- [ ] Referred by someone (record who)
- [ ] Recommended by a friend/relative etc.
- [ ] It was on a letter or form I received
- [ ] From the library
- [ ] VLA publication (e.g. pamphlet)
- [ ] Can't remember
- [ ] [Refused]
- [ ] Other (please specify)

25. Had you called Legal Help at Victoria Legal Aid before, or was this your first call?

- ◯ Never before
- ◯ Maybe once or twice
- ◯ A few times
- ◯ Frequently
- ◯ Can't remember / don't know
- ◯ [Refused]

26. Before you called Legal Help for this problem, did you look for information about this problem on the Victoria legal aid website?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Can't remember
- ◯ [Refused]

27. [if yes] Why did you call Legal help after visiting the website?

28. Either before or after your call to Legal Aid did you use any of the following to get help?

	Before you contacted Legal Aid on this occasion	After you contacted Legal Aid on this occasion	N/A
Family/friends – not lawyers	☐	☐	☐
Other contact with a lawyer from Victoria Legal Aid	☐	☐	☐
Another lawyer you did not have to pay for e.g. from community legal centre etc.	☐	☐	☐
Private lawyer that you paid	☐	☐	☐
At a library	☐	☐	☐
A court or help service based at a court	☐	☐	☐
Any type of website (specify)	☐	☐	☐

Specify website type if used

29. Can you tell me what has happened since you called Legal Aid? [What actions have you taken?]

30. Do you still have this problem? [would you say you still have this problem?]

- ◯ No it is resolved/ended
- ◯ Yes
- ◯ Partially
- ◯ [Refused]

31. [If problem resolved/ended] How was the problem resolved/ended?

32. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all satisfied' and 5 is 'Very satisifed', how satisfied are you with how it was resolved/ended?

Not at all satisfied				Very satisfied	
1	2	3	4	5	[Refused]
○	○	○	○	○	○

33. Why do you say this?

34. [If yes/partially] Are you still trying to do something about it?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

35. [If no] Why not?

I am now going to ask you some questions about the impact of this problem for you.

36. Did you experience any of the following as part of or as a result of the problem

- ☐ Ill health or injury
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Depression or anxiety
- ☐ Time off work
- ☐ Any other negative experiences
- ☐ Any positive experiences
- ☐ [Refused]

[If other negative OR any positive experiences - enter details below]

37. Have you lost/spent any money due to the problem or through your attempts to solve it?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ [Refused]

38. [If yes] In what ways have you lost/spent money?

39. Roughly how much money have you lost/spent? [Prompt, but if no idea ask "was this more or less than $100"]

40. Overall, what impact has this problem had on your everyday life? [read options]

None	Slight	Moderate	Severe	Don't know / can't say	[Refused]
○	○	○	○	○	○

Now thinking about the information you received..

41. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements
[ask statement then 'Is that completely or somewhat']

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Don't know	[Refused]
It would have been better if I had contacted Legal Aid about the problem earlier	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Legal Aid should have given me more help with my problem	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
After talking to Legal Aid I felt more confident about what to do next	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information made no difference to what I did about the problem	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information did not help me at all	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information helped me understand my options	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information made me worry about the problem more	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I am now going to read out some general statements...

42. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following
[ask statement then ask 'Is that completely or somewhat']

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Don't know	[Refused]
I would recommend Legal Aid to my friends if they had a problem	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Legal Aid provides a valuable service to the community	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Anyone can contact Legal Aid for information	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I could afford to pay for a private lawyer to help me	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I prefer to get help over the phone than use the internet or email	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
It would be useful for me to receive this information in a written form, e.g. pamphlet	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

I am now going to ask you some questions that will provide us with information about different peoples circumstances, and I can assure you this information is confidential.

43. Thinking about how you are managing on your income, would you say you are [prompt list]
[if asked - response should relate to personal income]

- ◯ Managing quite well and able to save or spend on leisure
- ◯ Just getting by, unable to save if wanted to
- ◯ Getting into difficulties
- ◯ [Refused]

44. In general would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?

- ◯ Excellent
- ◯ Very good
- ◯ Good
- ◯ Fair
- ◯ Poor
- ◯ [Refused]

45. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statement:
I have many friends and relatives that can help me if I want or need help
[ask statement then 'is that completely or somewhat' based on response]

Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	[Refused]
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

46. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following:
[ask statement then 'is that completely or somewhat' based on response]

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	[Refused]
I sometimes have problems understanding English when it is spoken to me	○	○	○	○	○	○
I sometimes have problems reading English	○	○	○	○	○	○

47. How often do you access the internet? Would you say..
[prompt list]

- ○ At least once a day
- ○ Nearly every day
- ○ Not every day
- ○ Never
- ○ [Refused]

48. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements
[ask statement then 'Is that completely or somewhat']

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Don't know	[Refused]
I am confident I can tell whether information on the internet is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is easy for me to find useful information on the internet	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I use online self-help forums/social media to get help or information (e.g. Whirlpool; Facebook; Instagram; etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The next question I am going to ask you relates to places you visit

49. In the last three months have you visited

- ☐ A doctor, nurse or other health facility?
- ☐ A library?
- ☐ A community centre?
- ☐ A government agency? [e.g. Centrelink]
- ☐ [Refused]

50. Thinking about problems like the one you experienced, to what extent do the following statements describe you on a scale where 1 is 'Not at all true' and 4 is 'Exactly true'

	Not at all true 1	Hardly true 2	Moderately true 3	Exactly true 4	Don't know	[Refused]
I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am good at finding information to help resolve problems	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not always get the best outcome for myself because I try to avoid conflict	○	○	○	○	○	○

Now I would like to ask you some questions about you and your background. The information you provide is totally confidential and will be used only for this research.

51. What is your age?

52. What is your gender?

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Other (please specify)

53. Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

- ◯ No
- ◯ Yes Aboriginal
- ◯ Yes Torres Strait Islander
- ◯ Yes both
- ◯ [Refused]

54. Do you speak a language other than English at home

- ◯ [Refused]
- ◯ No - English only
- ◯ Yes - specify

55. Do you have any long-term health condition, disability or impairment which restricts your everyday activity?
[if asked long term = 6 months or more]

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Don't know
- ◯ [Refused]

56. Are you currently attending any educational institution
[if yes and necessary ask 'is that full time or part time?'

- ◯ No
- ◯ Yes full time student
- ◯ Yes part time student
- ◯ [Refused]

57. What is your highest level of education?
[read out list from top - list is ordered in hierarchical order]

- ◯ Postgraduate Degree [e.g. PhD, Masters]
- ◯ Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate
- ◯ Bachelor Degree [incl. Honours]
- ◯ Advanced Diploma and Diploma
- ◯ Certificate Level 3 or 4
- ◯ Certificate Level 1 or 2
- ◯ School
- ◯ [Refused]

58. [if school or certificate] What is your highest level or year of school completed?
[unprompted list]

- ◯ Year 12 or equivalent
- ◯ Year 11 or equivalent
- ◯ Year 10 or equivalent
- ◯ Year 9 or equivalent
- ◯ Year 8 or below
- ◯ Did not go to school
- ◯ [Refused]

59. What is the postcode of the address you usually live in

60. For the purpose of our research we need to have a rough idea of your household income. Can I check is it above $50,000 a year or less than $50,000 a year? [if asked - gross income / before tax]

- ◯ Greater than $50,000
- ◯ Less than $50,000
- ◯ [Refused]

61. Finally can I ask you a few questions about any other current problems you might have

	Yes	No	Don't know / Not sure	[Refused]
Do you currently have any unpaid fines?	○	○	○	○
Is anyone chasing you for money?	○	○	○	○
Are you at risk of losing your home?	○	○	○	○
Do you have a Notice to Appear or are you due in Court?	○	○	○	○
Are you having any problems with Centrelink?	○	○	○	○

[if necessary] comments about problem(s) if mentioned

62. [if yes to any of the above] Would you like me to remind you of the Legal Aid telephone number so that you can contact them about this/these problems?
[Legal Help number 1300 792 387]

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ No problems mentioned
- ○ [Refused]

We have now reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your time and assistance. We will send you the $30 e-voucher within 5 business days.

We may also contact you again in three months for a follow up survey. Can I please take down your email address for this purpose and to send you your e-voucher?

63. Client email address

If you have any questions about this survey I can give you an email address to contact. Would you like me to provide you with this email address? [IF YES: datadigest@lawfoundation.net.au]

Thank you again for your time today, it is greatly appreciated.

[IF RESPONDENT CONCERNED ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY]: This research is carried out in compliance with the Privacy Act, and the information you provided will be used only for research purposes.

[IF RESPONDENT HAS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH AND/OR THE FOUNDATION]: The Law & Justice Foundation is a research organisation. We are working with Victoria Legal Aid to find out what works best for their information services, and we are talking to clients like yourself as part of this process.

[IF RESPONDENT WANTS TO VERIFY THE WORK]: You can contact the Manager of Research at Victoria Legal Aid on research@vla.vic.gov.au or 03 9269 0665

* 64. Date & time interview finished

Date & time

DD/MM/YYYY hh mm -

65. Interviewer notes

Appendix 8 Three-month client survey questionnaire

You participated in a telephone survey with usthree months ago and agreed to be contacted again.

We are working with Victoria Legal Aid to improve their Legal Help Line.

This survey is voluntary and will take about**10-15 minutes to complete**.

YOU WILL RECEIVE A [$XX] E-VOUCHER FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

All the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and you will remain anonymous.

We interviewed you about the [insert problem type here] matter that you rang Legal Aid about in [month]

Do you still have this problem?

- ◯ No it is resolved/ended
- ◯ Yes
- ◯ Partially

Are you still trying to do something about it?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Why not?

What actions did you or anyone else take towards resolving the matter?

How was the matter resolved/ended?

On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all satisfied' and 5 is 'Very satisfied', how satisfied are you with how it was resolved/ended?

Not at all satisfied				Very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Why do you say this?

Since we last interviewed you [in month] has anything further happened with the matter?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Can you tell us what has happened with the matter in the last three months? We are interested in hearing anything that has happened in relation to the matter since we spoke to you.

In relation to this matter was a court or tribunal (VCAT) involved?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure

Did you participate in any mediation or other formal meeting about your matter?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure

We are now going to ask you some questions about the impact of this matter for you.

Did you experience any of the following as part of or as a result of the matter?

- [ ] Ill health or injury
- [ ] Stress
- [ ] Depression
- [ ] Anxiety
- [ ] Time off work
- [ ] Any other negative OR any positive experiences?

Have you lost/spent any money due to the matter or through your attempts to solve it?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

In what ways have you lost/spent money?

Examples could include financial loss, fines, replacing goods, taking time off work, costs for lawyers or court costs.

Roughly how much money have you lost/spent?

- ◯ None
- ◯ Under $100
- ◯ $100 - $500
- ◯ $501 - $1,000
- ◯ More than $1,000

Overall, what impact has this problem had on your everyday life?

None	Slight	Moderate	Severe	Don't know
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Why do you say this?

Thinking back to the information that the Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help line provided to you when you called them in [MONTH] about this matter, how useful would you now rate this information?

Not at all useful	Not so useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	Don't know
○	○	○	○	○	○

Why do you say this?

To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Don't know
It would have been better if I had contacted Legal Aid about the matter earlier	○	○	○	○	○	○
Legal Aid should have given me more help with my matter	○	○	○	○	○	○
After talking to Legal Aid I felt more confident about what to do next	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information made no difference to what I did about the matter	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information did not help me at all	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information helped me understand my options	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information made me worry about the matter more	○	○	○	○	○	○

Do you have any other comments about your answers above?

In the last three months have you contacted Victoria Legal Aid through the Legal Help line again?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Was that for the same matter or a different one?

- ◯ Same matter
- ◯ Different matter
- ◯ Same matter *and* a different matter

How many times have you contacted them?

How likely are you to contact the Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help line again if you had another problem?

Very unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Why do you say this?

In the last three months, have you contacted anyone else to assist you with this matter?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Why not?

Please indicate who else you have contacted to assist you with this matter from the list below

- [ ] Court
- [ ] Community legal centre/CLC
- [ ] Victoria Legal Aid lawyer
- [ ] Private lawyer / Law Institute of Victoria
- [ ] Library
- [ ] Can't remember
- [ ] Other (please specify)

Why did you contact this person or organisation?

In the last three months, have you contacted anyone else to assist you with*another* legal matter?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Please indicate who else you have contacted to assist you with*another* legal matter from the list below

- [ ] Court
- [ ] Community legal centre/CLC
- [ ] Victoria Legal Aid lawyer
- [ ] Private lawyer / Law Institute of Victoria
- [ ] Library
- [ ] Can't remember
- [ ] Other (please specify)

Why did you contact this person or organisation?

To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Don't know
I would recommend Legal Aid to my friends if they had a problem	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Legal Aid provides a valuable service to the community	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Anyone can contact Legal Aid for information	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I could afford to pay for a private lawyer to help me	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I prefer to get help over the phone than use the internet or email	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
It would be useful for me to receive this information in a written form, e.g. pamphlet	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

If you have any general comments about your experience with the Legal Help line at Victoria Legal Aid when you rang them about your matter three months ago, please feel free to provide this feedback:

We would like to ask you some questions about you and your background. The information you provide is totally confidential and will be used only for this research.

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Other (please specify)

What is the postcode of the address you usually live in

Finally are there any other current matters you might have?

	Yes	No	Don't know / Not sure
Do you currently have any unpaid fines?	◯	◯	◯
Is anyone chasing you for money?	◯	◯	◯
Are you at risk of losing your home?	◯	◯	◯
Do you have a Notice to Appear or are you due in Court?	◯	◯	◯
Are you having any problems with Centrelink?	◯	◯	◯

If you would like to speak to Victoria Legal Aid about any other current matters you may have the Legal Help line number is 1300 792 387.

We have now reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your time and assistance.

We will send you a [$XX] e-voucher for your participation in this follow-up survey within 5 business days. Be sure to check your junk email folder if the voucher does not appear in your inbox.

Please enter in your email below to ensure we have your correct email address to send the voucher

If you have any final comments about your experience with the Legal Help line please feel free to provide this feedback.

If you have any questions about this survey please contact us by email at:
datadigest@lawfoundation.net.au

Thank you again for your time, it is greatly appreciated.

References

Brunton, C 2013, *Victoria legal aid ICAT evaluation*, Victoria Legal Aid, Melbourne.

Coumarelos, C, Macourt, D, People, J, McDonald, HM, Wei, Z, Iriana, R & Ramsey, S 2012, *Legal Australia-wide survey: Legal need in Victoria*, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney, <http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/templates/LAW_Vic/$file/LAW_Survey_Vic.pdf>.

Forell, S & McDonald, HM 2015, *Beyond great expectations: Modest, meaningful and measurable community legal education and information*, Justice issues paper 21, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney, <http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/articleIDs/D1D67F87F681ECBACA257F0F0021C08A/$file/JI_21_Beyond_great_expectations.pdf>.

Karras, M. & Williams, A. 2019 *Victoria Legal Aid: Information services/resources logic*. Law and Justice Foundation Report to Legal Aid September 2018.

McDonald, HM & Wei, Z 2018, *Resolving legal problems: The role of disadvantage*, Updating justice, no. 56, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney, <http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/templates/UpdatingJustice/$file/UJ_56_Resolution_disadvantage.pdf>.

Pleasence, P & Balmer, N 2017, *Legal confidence and attitudes to law: Developing standardised measures of legal capability*, PPSR, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

Randell, S 2018, *Victoria legal aid: Information services literature scan*, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney, <http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/articleIDs/A6CFAC06CE380F6B8525834000028F11/$file/VLA_info_serv_lit_scan.pdf>.

Victoria Legal Aid 2019, *Client priority and capability policy 2019*, Victoria Legal Aid, Melbourne. **https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-organisation/how-we-are-improving-our-services/client-priority-and-capability-policy**

Victoria Legal Aid 2019a, *Victoria legal aid annual report 2018-2019*, Melbourne, <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-organisation/annual-report>.

Victoria State Government 2016, *Access to justice review*, Melbourne.