Client Experience Survey 2022

Summary report

August 2022

# Acknowledgement of country

This report was written on the land of the Wadawurrung, Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past and present. We also acknowledge the strength and resilience of all First Nations people who today are still arrested and imprisoned at rates far higher than other Australians.

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Accessibility: This report has been reviewed, edited, and formatted to ensure it is as accessible as possible to a diverse range of audiences.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Context

The purpose of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is to:

* make a difference for clients and the community through the provision of effective help to address legal problems,
* support the coordination of a strong and dynamic legal assistance sector, and
* collaborate with partners to create fairer laws and systems.

To help focus this work, in 2022 VLA released its Outcomes Framework, which will guide our services, programs, and strategies over the next eight years, from 2022–2030.

To strengthen our understanding of the difference we are making, we are continuing to invest in our client engagement and leadership through tools and processes such as our client experience surveys. These surveys are a central way in which we continue to build the evidence base of our achievements against our new Outcomes Framework and provide an important forum for client perspectives. This is the central focus of VLA Outcome 1 – Clients’ have increased access to justice. The Client Experience Survey also supports VLA’s broader client-first focus through prioritising clients’ lived experience in the improvement of VLA services.

Blue tile with a small infographic of someone at a computer wearing a headset. There is a speech bubble with a question mark in it.

Text underneath reads:

01 Clients have increased access to justice
1.1 Clients are assisted to address or prevent legal problems
1.2 Clients equitably access timely legal and related services, including early intervention and preventative services, that meet their needs and capabilities
1.3 First Nations clients experience culturally safe legal services and increased access to justice
1.4 Clients experience culturally safe, accessible, inclusive, and respectful services
1.5 Clients have a strong voice in services and systems affecting them

The period leading up to this survey was characterised by regular changes in service restrictions as Victoria managed the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation did not present ideal conditions for conducting a client survey, and in order to meet government reporting requirements and timelines, and to best manage the evolving COVID situation and its impacts, VLA decided to conduct the survey internally. This also provided an opportunity to pilot new outcomes measures as part of the ongoing development of a strengthened organisational client feedback program.

## 1.2. The survey

The survey questionnaire was designed by VLA’s Research, Evaluation and Library team (REAL). It was based on previous VLA client surveys, as well as client surveys used by community legal centres (CLCs) and legal aid commissions across Australia and considered peer-reviewed research into client survey questionnaire design. The REAL team also led the process to engage clients, monitored and managed the survey process in collaboration with other staff at VLA, and undertook the analysis and report writing.

The purpose of the survey was to:

* understand client perception and experience of VLA services
* collect high quality, statistically valid data to meet government reporting obligations (ie National Legal Assistance Partnership indicators (NLAP) and Budget Paper Number 3 (BP3) indicators)
* help inform VLA-wide strategy and planning through generating actionable insights where possible
* pilot the measurement of key client outcome metrics linked to the new Outcomes Framework
* test a new approach to surveying clients
* identify key learnings to apply in the ongoing maturation of our overall client feedback approach

The overall sample of those invited to participate was generated from a database of VLA clients that had received a service between 1 July and 31 December 2021. Key details of this process include:

* The survey included duty lawyer, legal advice/minor work clients and casework clients but did not include Legal Help clients
* Clients were excluded if they were current clients of VLA (ie still receiving a VLA service) and/or aged 14 and under
* There were 27,046 clients that matched these criteria and a sample of **10,113** clients were selected through randomised proportional sampling by area of law (criminal, civil, family) and service type (casework, duty lawyer, legal information)
* Clients were invited to participate in the survey through emails and SMS and follow up reminders were also sent to ensure a strong response was achieved
* **812 clients** responded to the survey invitation in January and February 2022 (an 8% response rate) with **752 (93%) clients** fully completing it and **60 (7%) clients** partially completing it
* The majority of clients (94%) in the survey sample received a service from an in-house VLA lawyer.

## 1.3. Limitations and challenges

Given the challenging operational environment during 2021/22, there are some limitations regarding the survey and the results. These include:

* **Survey tool** – Any stand-alone survey tool has limitations in terms of exploring and providing in-depth perspectives of client lived experience. Expectations as to what this survey can achieve must be understood in terms of this survey’s context, purpose, and scope.
* **Implementation** – Being the first time the survey has been undertaken internally, and with a shorter timeframe for implementation due to the challenging contexts, a range of new processes and resourcing had to be developed and adapted.
* **Access** – Online tools were used with only three phone interviews undertaken (upon request, this was not a formal option). This may have excluded those who prefer such methods and/or have issues or challenges with accessing and completing digital survey tools. The survey was only available in English, relied on the contact details of clients still being current, and did not allow opportunities for clients to clarify any questions or issues with the survey.
* **Client contact details** – Contact details for all clients were not always up to date or available (particularly email addresses), and this was especially the case for private practitioner clients. As only clients with valid email/mobile could be invited to participate in the survey, and as email was the most effective invite method, private practitioner clients made up only 13% of the initial sample. The response rate of these clients was only 6%. This is within expectations given the proportional random sampling method used.
* **Contexts** – Given the impacts of COVID-19 on the way services were accessed or delivered, some caution should be used in assessing satisfaction levels from the survey. More than half of the respondents said that the pandemic impacted on their VLA service. While the results are reliable and valid, the drivers of client satisfaction may be strongly influenced by the many impacts of the pandemic over the last two years.
* **Statistical reliability** – A randomised proportional sample was chosen for this study. Where the full sample responded to a question, the margin of error is 3.5% at a confidence level of 95%. A largely representative sample of clients were invited to complete the survey, though response rates between different cohorts varied. This is unlikely to have a statistically significant impact on population level parameters.

## 1.4. Content

This Report contains a summary of the key findings and themes from the survey. There is a separate Research Report document which outlines in-depth information about the survey design, methodology and questions as well as the detailed analysis, data products and raw data that have informed this document.

This first section covers relevant information on the context and background for the survey. Section two provides a snapshot of the overall client satisfaction data. Section three focuses on the major themes to emerge from the analysis of client feedback. The concluding section outlines key learnings and recommendations focusing on improving clients’ experiences engaging with VLA and improving VLA’s understanding of this lived experience. The overarching objective of this report is also to provide a focus on key feedback, insights and actions that connect into ongoing processes of change and improvement at VLA to make a practical contribution to the client-centric approach at the heart of VLA’s strategic vision.

# 2. Client satisfaction – snapshot

## 2.1. Overall satisfaction

Overall, 67.4% of clients were satisfied and very satisfied with the help received from VLA.

#### Figure 1: Client responses ‘Overall, how do you feel about the help you got from us?

Overall client satisfaction with VLA services

- 14.9% of clients marked that they were 'very dissatisfied' with the help they received from VLA
- 8.2% of clients marked that they were 'dissatisfied' with the help they received from VLA
- 9.4% of clients marked that they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the help they received from VLA
- 27.8% of clients marked that they were 'satisfied' with the help they received from VLA
- 39.6% of clients marked that they were 'very satisfied' with the help they received from VLA

## 2.2. Satisfaction trend

This result is slightly down on the previous survey results in 2019. The longer-term trend for overall satisfaction (from 2013) is slightly downwards. Overall dissatisfaction increased from 16% in 2019 to 23% in 2022 and the longer-term trend for dissatisfaction is slightly upwards.

#### Figure 2: Overall satisfaction and dissatisfaction rates 2013–22

#### Overall client satisfaction trend graph - In 2013, overall satisfaction was at 73% and overal dissatisfaction was at 18% - In 2015, overall satisfaction was at 76% and overal dissatisfaction was at 15% - In 2017, overall satisfaction was at 70% and overal dissatisfaction was at 19% - In 2019, overall satisfaction was at 70% and overal dissatisfaction was at 16% - In 2022, overall satisfaction was at 67% and overal dissatisfaction was at 23%

## 2.3. Satisfaction by program

The Criminal Law program has higher levels of satisfaction (75%) compared with Civil Law (61%) and Family Law (66%) programs. Overall satisfaction levels are trending downwards for Civil Law but slightly more stable for Family and Criminal Law services between 2015–22.

#### Figure 3: Overall satisfaction by program 2015–22

Overall satisfaction by program area graph

2015:
Criminal Law = 81% overall client satisfaction with services
Civil Law = 73% overall client satisfaction with services
Family Law = 72% overall client satisfaction with services

2017:
Criminal Law = 76% overall client satisfaction with services
Civil Law = 72% overall client satisfaction with services
Family Law = 64% overall client satisfaction with services

2019:
Criminal Law = 72% overall client satisfaction with services
Civil Law = 66% overall client satisfaction with services
Family Law = 70% overall client satisfaction with services

2022:
Criminal Law = 75% overall client satisfaction with services
Civil Law = 61% overall client satisfaction with services
Family Law = 66% overall client satisfaction with services

## 2.4. Satisfaction by service

Clients receiving casework services indicated higher levels of satisfaction (72%) when compared with duty lawyer support (69%) and legal advice (64%). Satisfaction levels are trending downwards for all services (although more so for case work).

#### Figure 4: Overall satisfaction by service type 2015–22

Overall satisfaction by service area graph

2015:
Case work = 85% overall client satisfaction with services
Duty lawyer = 75% overall client satisfaction with services
Legal advice = 72% overall client satisfaction with services

2017:
Case work = 78% overall client satisfaction with services
Duty lawyer = 72% overall client satisfaction with services
Legal advice = 66% overall client satisfaction with services

2019:
Case work = 75% overall client satisfaction with services
Duty lawyer = 71% overall client satisfaction with services
Legal advice = 71% overall client satisfaction with services

2022:
Case work = 72% overall client satisfaction with services
Duty lawyer = 69% overall client satisfaction with services
Legal advice = 64% overall client satisfaction with services

## 2.5. Overall satisfaction across different cohort groups

These include those with multiple vulnerabilities[[1]](#footnote-2), the impact of COVID-19, young people, those experiencing/or at risk of homelessness, gender, those with a disability, metro/regional location, First Nations clients, and culturally and linguistically diverse cohorts. Only the categories of satisfied and very satisfied are shown below for each of these cohorts.

Satisfaction by cohorts bar graphs

Higher satisfaction levels for vulnerable clients:
Of the clients who have 3 or more vulnerabilities (n=54):
- 73% overall satisfaction
- 25% satisfied
- 48% very satisfied
Of the clients who have no identified vulnerability (n=246):
- 57% overall satisfaction
- 26% satisfied
- 31% very satisfied

Higher level of satisfaction for clients aged 15-24:
Of the clients aged 15-24 years of age (n=45):
- 80% overall satisfaction
- 56% satisfied
- 24% very satisfied
Of the clients who are aged over 24 years (n=707):
- 67% overall satisfaction
- 39% satisfied
- 28% very satisfied

Slight difference in satisfaction levels for First Nations clients and others:
Of those clients who are First Nations respondents (n=21):
- 76% overall satisfaction
- 33% satisfied
- 43% very satisfied
Of those clients who are non-First Nations respondents (n=604):
- 70% overall satisfaction
- 42% satisfied
- 28% very satisfied

Satisfaction by cohorts bar graphs (continued)

Similar satisfaction levels for regional and metro clients:
Of the clients who lived in metro Melbourne (n=478):
- 68% overall satisfaction
- 39% satisfied
- 29% very satisfied
Of the clients who live in regional Victoria (n=225):
- 69% overall satisfaction
- 43% satisfied
- 26% very satisfied

Satisfaction strongly influenced by the impacts of COVID-19
Clients who had services impacted by COVID-10 (n=401):
- 52% overall satisfaction
- 25% satisfied
- 27% very satisfied
Clients who did not have services impacted by COVID-19 (n=351):
- 85% overall satisfaction
- 31% satisfied
- 54% very satisfied

A slightly higher proportion of female clients satisfied
Of those clients who identify as female (n=281):
- 72% overall satisfaction
- 43% satisfied
- 29% very satisfied
Of those clients who identify as male (n=346):
- 67% overall satisfaction
- 38% satisfied
- 29% very satisfied

Satisfaction by cohorts bar graphs (continued)

Slightly less clients with disability/health concern satisfied with VLA:
Of the clients with a disability/health concerns (n=400):
- 66% overall satisfaction
- 41% satisfied
- 25% very satisfied
Of the clients with no/unknown disability status or health concern (n=352):
- 69% overall satisfaction
- 38% satisfied
- 31% very satisfied

Those experiencing/at risk of homelessness are less satisfied:
Of those clients experiencing/at risk of homelessness (n=27):
- 59% overall satisfaction
- 11% satisfied
- 48% very satisfied
Of those clients not experiencing/at risk of homelessness (n=725):
- 67% overall satisfaction
- 28% satisfied
- 39% very satisfied

Similar satisfaction levels from those born in English and non-English speaking countries:
Of those clients born in English-speaking country (n=493):
- 66% overall satisfaction
- 26% satisfied
- 40% very satisfied
Of those clients born in non-English-speaking country (n=259):
- 70% overall satisfaction
- 31% satisfied
- 39% very satisfied

The sample sizes of some groups (eg First Nations, young people, highly vulnerable, etc) means these results should not be seen in isolation and should be seen in the context of the broader analysis in this report and some of the limitations discussed in the introduction.

## 2.6. Overall satisfaction by resolution

Eighty-four percent (84%) of clients who reported that after help from VLA their legal problems were resolved or ended, were satisfied with their service compared to only 47% of those who reported their legal problems had not been resolved or ended. Even those who reported that their legal problems were only partially resolved showed high levels of satisfaction (78%).

#### Figure 5: Overall satisfaction by clients who indicated that after VLA legal support, their legal problem had been resolved or ended

Overall client satisfaction by resolution bar graph

Resolution status = Yes
- 27% satisfied
- 57% very satisfied
- 84% overall satisfaction

Resolution status = Partially
- 34% satisfied
- 44% very satisfied
- 78% overall satisfaction

Resolution status = Other
- 16% satisfied
- 32% very satisfied
- 48% overall satisfaction

Resolution status = No
- 29% satisfied
- 18% very satisfied
- 47% overall satisfaction

## 2.7. National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) indicators

Data for against the NLAP indicators show that while VLA still performs well against these measures, between 2019 and 2022 there has been a statistically significant decrease in net agreement that:

* VLA is easy to contact when the client first needed help
* that clients know where to get help in the future, and
* clients would recommend legal aid to others.

| **NLAP indicators** | **Percentage of clients that agree and strongly agree (2019)** | **Percentage of clients that agree and strongly agree (2022)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *It was easy to contact Victoria Legal Aid when you first needed help* | *84%* | *77%* |
| The service provider listened to your legal problem | 82% | 83% |
| The service provider helped you understand how to deal with your legal problem | 77% | 77% |
| *You know where to get help if you have another legal problem in the future* | *86%* | *78%* |
| You feel more confident to get legal help in the future if you need it | N/A | 75% |
| *You would recommend legal aid to other people* | *85%* | *78%* |

# 3. Client experience – findings

This section focuses on the themes and factors that inform client satisfaction based on client feedback of their experience with VLA services. It uses both the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey highlighting the main themes to emerge from the analysis. These are:

* Resolution of legal problem
* The central role of lawyers
* Communication between clients and VLA
* Clients feeling understood and supported
* The impacts of COVID-19

## 3.1. Resolution of legal problems

‘[The lawyer] was amazing and provided a very thorough service, she went above and beyond in helping me win the case that was raised against me, she represented me in an excellent manner and provided the court a very thorough view of the case … I couldn't have been happier with the service she provided, and I am extremely grateful to her for the time and effort she put into helping me throughout the entire ordeal.’  
– client quote

**A significant factor in client satisfaction was if the client reported their legal problem had been resolved or had ended after legal support from VLA**.[[2]](#footnote-3) Almost half of clients indicated that their problem had been resolved (42%) while one third (34%) said that the legal problem had not resolved or ended by the time of the survey. It is important to note that only clients who were no longer receiving support from VLA for their legal problem were included in the survey. For the 42% of clients that responded that their legal problem had been resolved or ended, 84% were satisfied overall, while for clients that reported their legal problem had not been resolved, 47% were satisfied. For those that said their issue was partially resolved, satisfaction was still strong at 78% (refer to [Figure 5](#_Figure_5:_Overall)).

As with previous years, clients of the Criminal Law program indicated higher levels of satisfaction (75%) when compared with Civil Law (61%) and Family Law (66%) programs. Also, as with previous years, clients receiving casework services reported higher levels of satisfaction (72%) when compared with duty lawyer support (69%) and legal advice (64%). See [Figure 2](#_Figure_2:_Overall) for details.

**Levels of client satisfaction across all areas were higher for those whose legal problem had been resolved** – especially in the areas of family and civil law and for those receiving legal advice and duty lawyer services. Case work levels of satisfaction were only slightly higher for those who reported that their legal problem was resolved. See [Figure 6](#_Figure_6:_Overall) for more details.

#### Figure 6: Overall client satisfaction with VLA support by program/service type and if indicating their legal problem was resolved

Those whose legal problems resolved are more satisfied, by program (bar graph)

Family law:
- 84% satisfaction for those whose legal problems were resolved
- 66% overall satisfaction

Civil law:
- 79% satisfaction for those whose legal problems were resolved
- 61% overall satisfaction

Criminal law:
- 87% satisfaction for those whose legal problems were resolved
- 75% overall satisfaction

Those whose legal problems resolved are more satisfied, by service type (bar graph)

Legal advice:
- 84% satisfaction for those whose legal problems were resolved
- 64% overall satisfaction

Duty lawyer:
- 85% satisfaction for those whose legal problems were resolved
- 69% overall satisfaction

Case work:
- 79% satisfaction for those whose legal problems were resolved
- 72% overall satisfaction

The association between legal problem resolution and satisfaction may therefore explain differences in satisfaction rates between program area and service types. Forty-eight percent (48%) of clients receiving casework support and 45% of those in the Criminal Law stream of support reported that their legal problem was resolved at the time of the survey. This was higher than other areas and services, which could explain slightly higher overall satisfaction rates in these groups. At the same time, casework clients did not report as much of a difference in satisfaction from those whose legal problem was or was not resolved possibly reflecting the greater intensity of support provided over time to these clients. **Regardless of the outcome of an actual legal problem, receiving an intensive service has a material impact on their satisfaction with VLA services** – something that is consistent with findings in previous surveys.

While some factors were associated with increased likelihood that legal problems resolve, the factors were also associated with increased likelihood of receiving an intensive service. For example, young people were more likely to indicate that their legal problem had resolved (54% compared to 41% of those aged above 24), but also more likely to have received an intensive (ie casework) service. It is possible that service intensity is more related to increased resolution rates than the demographic factors identified. Casework clients are also more likely to be surveyed at a time when their legal problem is resolved.

**The overwhelming majority (84%) of clients whose legal problem had been resolved agreed that the help from the lawyer had a positive impact on their problem.** This was consistent across all programs, with 90% of criminal law clients, 78% of civil law clients, and 81% of family law clients agreeing this was the case. Also, for clients that felt that the outcome of their legal problem was fair, 84% were satisfied with their service. For those that did not agree that the outcome of their legal problem was fair, 42% were satisfied with the support from VLA. More broadly, when clients reported that their legal problem had been resolved or had ended after support from VLA, they also indicated higher levels of satisfaction across several areas that contribute to overall client satisfaction (see [Figure 7](#_Figure_7:_Clients’)).

#### Figure 7: Clients’ responses to statements for those who indicated resolution and those who indicated otherwise

Bar graph 1: The percentage of clients (whose legal problem was resolved) who agree and strongly agree with the following statements:

I am satisfied with the outcome of my legal problem = 85%
The lawyer's help had a positive impact on the outcome of my legal problem = 84%
Legal Aid helped me fix my legal problem = 84%
The outcome of my legal problem was fair = 80%
Legal Aid should have given me more help with my problem = 33%

Bar graph 2: The percentage of clients (whose legal problem was 'not/partially resolved', or 'other') who agree and strongly agree with the following statements:

I am satisfied with how my case is going = 40%
The lawyer's help will have a positive impact on the outcome of my legal problem = 54%
The help from Legal Aid helped me to get to the next step(s) in my legal problem = 52%
Legal Aid should have given me more help with my problem = 57%

Additionally, clients who reported that their legal problem was resolved also reported improved levels of overall wellbeing after their support from VLA. These included those who said their wellbeing was improved, their housing situation was better, they felt safer, and their financial situation was better (see [Figure 8](#_Figure_8:_Clients’)).

#### Figure 8: Clients’ responses to statements for those who indicated resolution and those who indicated otherwise

Bar graph 1: The percentage of clients (whose legal problem was resolved) who agree and strongly agree with the following statements:

The help I got made my financial situation better = 55%
The help I got made me safer = 66%
The help I got made my housing situation better = 38%
The help I got improved my overall wellbeing = 74%

Bar graph 2: The percentage of clients (whose legal problem was 'not/partially resolved', or 'other') who agree and strongly agree with the following statements:

The help I've got so far made my financial situation better = 32%
The help I've got so far made me safer = 37%
The help I've got so far made my housing situation better = 24%
The help I've got so far improved my overall wellbeing = 39%


It should come as no surprise that clients who feel their legal issues have been resolved with the help of VLA would be more satisfied in the service offered by VLA. This is the first time we have asked questions regarding the resolution of the legal problem, which has provided a wealth of interesting data but further work on: better understanding what clients mean when they feel their legal problem has been resolved; trends that can help pinpoint barriers to resolution; and what changes in service delivery (if any) could support the resolution of clients’ issues would be helpful next steps.

## 3.2. The central role of lawyers

**Overall, clients were positive in the ways in which lawyers supported them.** The majority of clients (94%) in the survey sample received a service from an in-house VLA lawyer and there were only slight differences in satisfaction levels between them and private practitioners. As is further explored in this section, client feedback was clear on the pivotal role that their interaction with their lawyer had on their satisfaction levels. And as the following quotes indicate, there was a range of feedback on the positives and negatives of these experiences and the challenges in providing a consistent service to all clients:

‘I did not have a clue about what to do. You guys made my journey through the legal system less stressful with the information about what to expect, step-by-step guidelines and helped me decided what was best for me in the given circumstances. The lawyer I spoke to was very patient, showed empathy and was very professional in her approach towards the issue.’  
– client quote

‘I wish that all legal aid lawyers were as good as the one that represented me, I have been to my son's hearings he was also represented by legal aid lawyers, somehow, he got the raw end of the deal where the lawyer didn't pay attention, didn't care for my son's wellbeing, he did no research or anything and I believe he was rude as well which was appalling ... I was the lucky one who ended up with a lawyer who cared enough about their job which showed up in the effort they put towards my case.’   
– client quote

‘First lawyer I had was very helpful and understood me and where I was coming from, the second lawyer that got assigned my case is very unhelpful, does not communicate with me, it’s been six months and I’ve heard nothing from her about my case this month.’  
– client quote

**Seventy percent (70%) of clients surveyed felt that their lawyer wanted the best outcome for them.** And the proportion of clients who agreed that the help from the lawyer had a positive impact on the outcome of their legal problem was high across all areas. When asked about the last time they obtained support from VLA, clients were asked about what the lawyers did, with overall positive results (see [Figure 9](#_Figure_9:_Client)).

#### Figure 9: Client responses to the question, ‘The last time you got help, the Legal Aid lawyer …

Clients response to the question 'The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer ...' bar graph

The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer understood my legal problem:
- 31% agree
- 46% strongly agree
- 77% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer took my circumstances into account:
- 27% agree
- 43% strongly agree
- 70% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer treated me with respect:
- 28% agree
- 53% strongly agree
- 81% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer helped me understand my legal problem:
- 31% agree
- 44% strongly agree
- 75% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer did not rush me:
- 32% agree
- 38% strongly agree
- 70% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help, the Legal Aid lawyer helped me feel safe:
- 29% agree
- 39% strongly agree
- 68% overall satisfaction.

Data from the survey also reinforced the importance of the elements of lawyer’s support for clients and highlighted positive feedback for all of the points listed (see [Figure 10](#_Figure_10:_Clients’)).

#### Figure 10: Clients’ responses to ‘The last time you got help from Victoria Legal Aid…’

Clients response to the question 'The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid ...' bar graph

The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid, I found it easy to explain my problem to the lawyer:
- 35% agree
- 37% strongly agree
- 72% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid, the lawyer wanted the best outcome for me:
- 26% agree
- 44% strongly agree
- 70% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid, I felt confident in the lawyer's advice (what they said to do ...):
- 31% agree
- 38% strongly agree
- 69% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid, I was less stressed after talking to the lawyer:
- 29% agree
- 35% strongly agree
- 64% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid, I wasn't able to ask all the questions I wanted to:
- 20% agree
- 15% strongly agree
- 35% overall satisfaction

The last time I got help from Victoria Legal Aid, I found it hard to understand what the lawyer said:
- 9% agree
- 6% strongly agree
- 15% overall satisfaction

The survey results showed that when a client’s legal issue had not been resolved, the support provided by a client’s lawyer was an important element of how they assessed their overall experience. The following service delivery factors were statistically correlated most strongly with higher satisfaction for these clients.

* Legal Aid helped me get to the next steps in my legal problem
* The lawyer wanted the best outcome for me
* The lawyer helped me understand my legal problem
* The lawyer took my circumstances into account
* The lawyer helped me understand how to deal with my legal problem

The next two themes go into further detail on two specific areas of the support provided by lawyers and VLA more broadly – communication and understanding.

## 3.3. Communication between clients and VLA

‘You gave me information on the best actions for me to take (as well as not to take) in order to prepare for court. You checked in on how I was going and went over my preparations as well as gave me further advice. You represented me in court and achieved the desired outcome. You pushed for an even better outcome which was considered by the judge (no reporting to Department of Justice and Community Safety). You prevented me from going to jail and I am going really well with all of the programs and requirements. Thank you very much.’   
– client quote

Keeping clients informed through-out the process, helping them understand what will happen next, and any steps they might need to take to support their legal journey were things that VLA clients valued. When this was not done well, or done inconsistently, client feedback indicated that this negatively affected their experiences and satisfaction.

**Being informed and kept up to date was a major priority for clients.** Several clients reported that having regular follow-up contact with their lawyer, or at least being kept in the loop about when to expect further contact from their lawyer helped reduce their anxiety and stress when dealing with their legal issue. About two-thirds of clients (64%) said that they felt less stressed after the last time they received help from VLA and 69% felt confident in their lawyer’s advice. Often clients felt uncertain about what to expect and contact from legal aid helped them feel guided in the process.

‘If a phone call was not followed up, it was followed up with an email, stating when they would be able to return my call or contact me next. Knowing this eleviated [sic] any added stress or anxiety, knowing when I would talk with my representative to discuss any pending issues.’  
– client quote

Conversely, clients noted when they felt they were not kept informed about the process and the negative impact this had on them:

‘It was stressful not getting to speak with my representative until soon before the hearing.’  
– client quote

‘Keep customer informed. Sometimes there is too long silence. I understand that lawyers have a lot to do but as a client point of view, sometimes feels like we living in darkness and can’t heard long time anything from lawyers.’  
– client quote

**Clients reported that they need to feel the lawyer has taken time to help them understand their legal problem and can answer any questions that the client might have.** Only 35% of clients surveyed said they were not able to ask all the questions they wanted and only 15% said they found it hard to understand what their lawyer said.

‘Absolutely impressed with the way our lawyer spoke … nonjudgmental, clear language that was understood by us and requested any information that was needed to help with outcome. Always available to answer any questions that was put to her. Very calm and professional, which aided our anxiety.’  
– client quote

‘The lady went through all the questions thoroughly and wrote everything down, was very informative and lovely, she made me feel comfortable to talk about everything that I had to tell her about.’  
– client quote

Some clients, both those that were satisfied and dissatisfied with VLA, also noted the long wait times for calls when they tried to access support, and the difficulties contacting VLA.

**Clients who said that help from VLA enabled them to be better prepared, more aware of their options, and clearer on next steps were more satisfied with the legal help from VLA.** Several clients noted that they felt supported when the lawyer helped them to understand what they could do to support their legal issue progressing and what they could expect. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of respondents indicated that they felt confident in the lawyer’s advice about what to do about their legal problem (see [Figure 9](#_Figure_9:_Client)). This included understanding different options available to them:

‘The lawyer I spoke to addressed the situation from a number of different angles. She gave advice on possible approaches and outcomes and the limited situations which may attract leniency if I went to court.’  
– client quote

‘The lawyer … listened to me and understood my stance in the case. She gave me appropriate advice that made me feel like I had options and gave me a good understanding of the court process …’  
– client quote

Conversely, many clients noted that they would have liked to have been told a bit more about what to expect and what they needed to do in terms of next steps. When asked what VLA could have done better, clients were clear in their suggestions:

‘Explain in more depth what a person needs to do, to take the next step in receiving the help they need to move forward.’  
– client quote

‘It wasn’t clear what was supposed to happen after I got the letter. I was just annoyed … and I wasn’t sure if I wanted to keep engaging with a service that was not helping. It wasn’t clear what would happen with this letter, how it was going to be sent, by email or by post or what might happen if I sent the letter, would it cause further issues?’  
– client quote

‘After the court case I didn't hear from [my lawyer] which must be the process, but I was left with questions about what happened in court and wasn't able to ask. I feel like a quick follow up call to make sure your client understands the outcome in court or to give them advice going forward.’  
– client quote

**Clients also felt like expectations could be set more clearly.** Clients reported that they had been told to expect a certain intensity of service only to be told later that they did not meet necessary eligibility requirements or were not clear on why they might not qualify for assistance.

‘[One lawyer] was very spot on with her knowledge like clarifying all my queries and my doubts, the issue with her was that we took it to the stage where I thought we could progress it, but I was not eligible, but I did not understand why we had so many appointments if I was not eligible …’  
– client quote

‘[VLA confirmed] that you can help the matter after hearing it but in phone conversation after that on the phone said you can’t help.’  
– client quote

‘When a request for legal representation from a low-income person cannot be met, it would be helpful if a more thorough explanation can be made than “there isn't enough money for that”.’  
– client quote

Similarly, clients felt promised a follow up call, or for a lawyer to represent them, but they never received the service they expected.

‘Other than picking up the phone, nothing went well. I was unemployed and had called to get advice on a family law matter. The person who picked up the phone told me that someone would call me to help me with my problem. I never heard back. I would have expected someone to call back but that did not happen and considering the wait times I did not bother calling back. Keep your commitments. If you say you are going to call, please call back.’  
– client quote

**Overall, we can see that for clients, understanding the entire process is fundamental to setting and managing their expectations, and ultimately their overall satisfaction.** Especially for those that have not dealt with a similar legal issue previously and may not understand how legal services might normally progress, taking the time to explain this to clients in a way they can understand can have a positive impact on their experience. A lack of clarity in terms of what clients can expect from their legal aid support can add to client stress and reduce satisfaction.

## 3.4. Clients feeling understood and supported

‘They were very understanding with my mental illnesses and understanding the caring responsibilities that I have. They were very patient and helpful with me and my situation and how distressed I was during the entire process from the start of the situation months prior and understanding that it had, and was continuing to take, a huge toll on my health and how I was declining so much because of the ordeal.’  
– client quote

‘A staff member … did get in touch and spent a good few hours hearing my story, she said my case was serious. She said I will attend court when you have hearings and stand with you … I am forever grateful for that experience with Legal Aid, you are a worthy, outstanding organisation, you were there for me in person in the court building when I needed you most, the outcome was achieved on this occasion. In 2021, I first reached out to Legal Aid by telephone expressing my concerns about a situation, and the gentlemen on the phone was so helpful, after listening to me, he assisted me and guided me on the journey I needed to follow, and I did.’  
– client quote

**Clients appreciated when their lawyers took the time to understand their unique needs and circumstances** and ensured these were considered in their service delivery but also in the ways in which their legal problem was progressed. Identifying the specific circumstances of an individual client that may influence the nature and approach of VLA support is a central element in providing a targeted, inclusive, and effective service. When this was not done well, clients noted this negatively affected their experiences. Forty-four percent of clients (n=355) reported that they had personal or cultural needs. Seventy-four percent (74%) of these respondents (n=175) agreed that these needs were met by VLA. Eighty-six percent (86%) of these 175 said they were satisfied with the service they got from VLA. Of those whose needs were not met, only 16% were satisfied with the support from VLA. This implies that understanding, responding to, and meeting clients’ personal and cultural needs is a key driver of client satisfaction.

#### Table 1: Client-identified personal and cultural needs

| **Client-identified personal and cultural needs (n=355)** | **Number of clients** | **Proportion of clients** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| I have a disability, mental health issue, or other health concern | 178 | 24% |
| Experienced violence at home, school, or work | 128 | 18% |
| Caring responsibilities | 81 | 11% |
| Need an interpreter | 51 | 7% |
| Difficulty reading and writing | 41 | 6% |
| Religious or cultural beliefs | 43 | 6% |
| Need cultural support from Elders, community leaders, or family | 21 | 3% |
| Gender or sexual orientation | 22 | 3% |

Clients appreciated when their circumstances were considered in how the lawyer approached dealing with their legal issues and this also reduced stress for clients:

‘[VLA] took into consideration my son’s mental health problems and allowed me to talk [on] his behalf, that took a lot of stress off myself and my son.’  
– client quote

‘I have a baby at home, my legal aid did not require me present at court and went on my behalf. I was able to fully care for my son. They kept in contact and updated me via phone calls which was great.’  
– client quote

‘She clearly understood my mental health issues and circumstances, said in her professional opinion this intervention order should’ve never been issued, and got it withdrawn before the second court hearing!’  
– client quote

‘If more people have cultural knowledge, they can better guide how to present the case to the magistrate and how to convince them to consider their perspective.’  
– client quote

**Clients told us that when their needs were not taken into account this made their experience poorer.** For clients who indicated VLA did not meet their personal or cultural needs only 16% were satisfied with their VLA service:

‘[VLA should] make people feel like people and that they matter rather than just another number and we are a bother calling and asking questions. I hadn't come to terms with the domestic violence being what it was, all I knew was I was scared. I needed compassion and understanding, and I didn't get it.’  
– client quote

‘The lawyer didn’t understand how anxiety impacts the client’s memory, decision making abilities and general comprehension etc. It may not be obvious either to those like a lawyer meeting the client for the first time. Had high anxiety being in isolation.’  
– client quote

Some clients also report that they were not asked about any needs that they might have that required consideration or that these were not considered, or worse, clients felt they were treated negatively because of these needs:

‘I asked Legal Aid to communicate by email because I have a sever[e] hearing disability and a speech impairment. They mostly communicated by email, but they also communicated by phone, and this confused me. I felt Legal Aid used the phone to push me in a direction that I wasn't comfortable with.’  
– client quote

‘Lawyer immediately wanted to end the session after finding out I was transgender, despite having earlier told me we had ample time to discuss things. Told me she couldn’t help with my issue anyhow and I needed to apply for representation closer to the time of court date.’  
– client quote

**Clients took notice of the amount of time lawyers gave them and felt more positive about their experience when their lawyers took time in speaking to them**, especially when they spoke without jargon and provided the client time to ask any questions they might have had. Some clients, however, felt rushed and that the lawyer did not have enough time for them or that they were not given sufficient opportunity to voice concerns or ask questions, as these suggestions highlight:

‘Listen to the client. I often struggled to get a word in when speaking to a duty lawyer, and when I attempted to was talked over and down to.’  
– client quote

‘Devote more than a couple of minutes in a phone conversation, moments before a court appearance is required. If a matter demands more time, than give it the appropriate time, and do so sufficiently in advance of the hearing.’  
– client quote

Clients also felt that insufficient time with their lawyer had negatively impact on their legal outcomes.

‘As a Stolen Generation Aboriginal and respected person in the Aboriginal community, the time limit for communication was at the day of the court case. Less than 1/2 hr. Was disappointed that half of conversation and facts that we would like to have been presented to Magistrate was not mentioned by him. We left feeling very let down and it was just a job to him.’

– client quote

**There is a disproportionate amount of people who indicated they have a disability.** This may be an influential factor in understanding, communicating, and supporting client needs and clients feeling as though they have been understood and supported. When asked specifically in the survey if a client had a disability, mental health, or health concern, 178 clients (24% of the total) answered in the affirmative. The VLA Atlas database indicates that of the survey cohort, 34% have registered as having a disability. Later in the survey, when asked whether any items from a list of conditions applied to them,[[3]](#footnote-4) 426 clients (52%) indicated that they experienced or suffered from one or more of these. That is, many more people (52% of survey respondents) indicated they live with a condition defined as a disability than either VLA records note (34%), and clients themselves note in response to a direct question on disability (24%).

If the larger number (52%) is a truer reflection of the proportion of clients with a disability, then this has ramifications not only for how VLA engages and supports such clients (and builds understanding with them) but it may also impact on how assessments of disability on a client-by-client basis are undertaken. There are a range of perspectives on what constitutes a disability and still much social and personal stigma around such definitions.

Further research is needed to better understand these results as they may point to:

* differing views on what constitutes a disability
* whether some clients identified as having a disability but did not have any specific need when engaging with VLA at that moment
* whether clients had sufficient time and confidence to go into greater depth with VLA at the time of engagement about their disability and/or needs.

**Additionally, while there was a diverse range of responses across most of the cohorts surveyed, there was little in the way of clear or major trends.** The data was analysed across different cohorts, including, for example, First Nations clients, young people, those with disabilities, and others. The only notable difference that showed some level of consistency was for young people (aged 15–24), who were more satisfied, and more likely to strongly agree with the positive nature of their interaction with VLA and the support provided. The factors that inform this and the intensity/type of service young people receive will be useful areas to further reflect on in continuing to service a highly vulnerable cohort. However, the sample size was small (45 young people out of 812 respondents) and therefore makes it difficult to make broader judgements on satisfaction levels and influencing factors. This result – in terms of no clearly significant major trends for specific cohorts – also highlights the need for more in-depth and focused consultation with specific cohorts to provide a clearer view of their lived experience in their engagement with VLA.

## 3.5. The impacts of COVID-19

‘I was not aware until this legal problem how necessary it is to be literate and tech/computer confident to be able to interact with the legal/court system. My case was conducted via the web (due to COVID I suppose). Even though I am educated and have smartphone/notebook it was still all stressful. It made me think about how difficult the legal process would be for someone who was not confident in English literacy or in computer skills or had no access to technology.’  
– client quote

Service delivery options which were introduced during the pandemic helped increase accessibility for some clients but made things more difficult for others. **Just under half of clients (45%) indicated that COVID-19 negatively impacted on their service experience** with the main issues dominated by access and clarity of communication, including trouble contacting VLA, barriers to explaining their problems and understanding the lawyer, troubles with the service using a phone, video call, mobile or internet and challenges sharing paperwork and information (see [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary)).

#### Table 2: Summary of how clients felt their service was impacted by COVID-19

| **Statement** | **Proportion of clients** |
| --- | --- |
| The service took longer to get | 19% |
| It was harder for me to explain my problem | 15% |
| I could not ask all the questions I wanted to | 14% |
| I had trouble getting the service using a phone, video call, mobile, internet | 13% |
| I had trouble contacting Victoria Legal Aid | 13% |
| I could not share my paperwork easily | 13% |
| It was harder for me to understand the lawyer | 9% |

This feedback indicates that while the pandemic impacted on many clients’ service experience in varying ways, this did not result in a raft of new issues presenting as challenges. Rather, the pandemic seems to have exacerbated existing challenges for clients, specifically around access, communication, and understanding the process and progress of their legal issue.

The impacts of the pandemic influenced overall satisfaction rates. Eighty-five percent (85%) of those who said that COVID-19 had not been an issue with their support from VLA were satisfied with the service they received while only 52% of those who did say COVID-19 had an impact on their VLA experience expressed satisfaction (see [Figure 11](#_Figure_11:_Client)).

#### Figure 11: Client satisfaction for those impacted and not impacted by COVID-19

The impact of the pandemic on client satisfaction

Of those clients where COVID-19 had no impact on their services:
- 8% very dissatisfied
- 5% dissatisfied
- 3% neither
- 31% satisfied
- 54% very satisfied 
- (85% overall satisfaction)

Of those clients where COVID-19 had an impact on their services:
- 21% very dissatisfied
- 11% dissatisfied
- 15% neither
- 25% satisfied
- 27% very satisfied 
- (52% overall satisfaction)

**While some clients found remote service delivery easier, particularly remote court, others found remote services less easy.** Clients noted that lack of confidence with IT, poor internet access or health or disability issues added to their stress and potentially negatively affected their legal outcomes.

‘Unfortunately, I missed the check in to the WebEx Lobby and missed my hearing by a few minutes. I was subsequently marked absent. I really was disappointed that my limited computer skills hampered my Mention.’  
– client quote

‘I was very stressed to go online at court when my home computer camera [was] not working, very stressed and ended up sick with pneumonia.’  
– client quote

‘Court was a little harder as it was online being legally blind [I] had to get help.’  
– client quote

# 4. Lessons and recommendations

The findings of the 2022 Client Experience Survey reiterate the importance of issues that have arisen in past surveys such as:

* keeping clients better informed at key stages of their legal matter
* improving how we listen to, and communicate with, our clients
* improving our explanation around our eligibility criteria
* better understanding and responding to clients’ personal and cultural needs.

In some ways, this is a positive message, as there is little doubt as to what clients’ value and what they are telling VLA about their experiences. **Despite the impact of COVID-19, many clients expressed satisfaction with VLA and said that the support provided made a meaningful and positive impact on them and their legal problem.** At the same time, the challenges raised by clients are strikingly similar to past surveys. While there are many positive messages to come out of the survey there are ongoing challenges, such as those listed in this section, that are connected to funding levels or allocating more time to these aspects, systemic limitations, broader organisational structures and supports, and staff practice.

Additionally, there are also limitations in terms of what feedback a survey can provide and what pathways exist for utilising that feedback across the organisation. Further, it is possible that there exists a ‘satisfaction ceiling’ above which client experiences may not improve without additional resourcing, new modes of engagement (eg technologically driven communications), and potentially, other changes in the clients’ experiences of the broader criminal justice system.

The learnings have helped highlight the importance of initiatives that are already taking place more broadly at VLA, many of which have been developed partially in response to previous client surveys, including, for example, under the Client-first Strategy, the Gender Equality Action Plan, the Disability Action Plan, the Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Plan along with the emerging Data Strategy and changes underway with Digital Legal Aid. There are many other ways which VLA can (and does) gather client information and centre client voices and while this survey is a valuable tool, further improvements are needed.

Proposed recommendations are listed and discussed below.

## 4.1. Develop a clearer, more holistic research and evaluation approach to support VLA’s client-first strategy and the Outcomes Framework

Client surveys are giving us clear and consistent feedback on areas that are working well and others that can be improved. But they also have their limitations, and a broader, more holistic approach is needed to gather client feedback and centre clients’ voice and lived experience in the design and delivery of our services. Different research and survey approaches are useful for different purposes, and all should be part of an outcomes and learning agenda designed to support our client-first strategy and the Outcomes Framework. In delivering client centred services, eliciting feedback from clients will continue to be an important feature of service provision at VLA. A variety of approaches to client feedback must be employed to gather effective, useful data and insights to inform reporting, outcomes measurement, strategy, and improvements for clients.

We propose at least four types of client feedback to be rolled out on an ongoing basis, noting that resourcing and cultural change needs to be managed for this to be effective, and the approach will take time to develop and embed. This would include:

* **an organisation-wide client experience survey** (annual) to feed into State and Commonwealth reporting requirements as well as collect standard, statistically valid data on a regular basis for the Outcomes Framework
* **short, real-time feedback options** for all clients at the end of their interaction with VLA to obtain quick and more timely feedback; this can build on developing IT functionality in areas including through the new Legal Help software and new VLA website
* **targeted surveys/consultation with local programs** to capture program-focused feedback and document the lived experience of clients in specific contexts, including feeding into program and project evaluations and testing new service delivery models, and
* **in-depth qualitative research** (ie one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions) with priority cohorts to better understand the nuances and learnings from clients.
* **collaborative longitudinal studies** to understand the broader client journey, the longer-term outcomes for clients and the impacts of Victoria Legal Aid support

This proposed multi-pronged approach would elicit a more nuanced and targeted range of client feedback, enabling a more rounded and in-depth content to better understand, and respond to, the lived experience of clients. This would form the backbone of an organisational Client Feedback Framework that could be integrated into existing and new systems of client management and engagement.

## 4.2. Strengthen VLA’s client-centric culture and pathways to action

Regardless of how client feedback is collected and analysed, we need processes and approaches to ensure it is reflected upon and acted on. Utilisation of research and evaluation findings are primarily driven by clear channels for meaningful actions, staff reflections and feeding into service change. Such utilisation requires ongoing cultural change, and a strengthened positioning of client feedback, including client surveys, and the results across the organisation. This will require time, effort, and resourcing. As learning from the Client Feedback Pilot (2021) show, a broader cultural change piece is needed to champion the usefulness of staff asking clients for feedback more regularly across our programs. As VLA is maturing in its approach to gathering and actioning client feedback, further work would ensure that data collection methods are well-designed; that they allow VLA to meet its strategic and operational requirements; and that the cultural change required for VLA staff to feel comfortable soliciting and using client feedback is managed sensitively and effectively.

This approach also needs to address how differing processes across the organisation speak to each other and work collaboratively to ensure client feedback is managed There is also an opportunity to reinforce the importance of reflective practice for staff to focus on the results of research and surveys; to document and harness good practice and experiences; and to trouble-shoot challenges and issues amongst staff. This would continue to build a stronger focus on outcomes and a learning culture centred on realising positive impacts for clients in efficient, effective, and respectful ways.

A good first step in this process would be the sharing of and reflection on these survey results which will also connect with the forthcoming first Outcomes and Lessons Report (due September 2022). This report will provide an analysis of VLA reports and evaluations (including this survey) from the past three years, documenting the evidence base and key common learnings against the VLA Outcomes Framework. Similar findings to these survey results have been identified in previous evaluations, and the Outcomes and Lessons Report will draw together all the evidence and learnings from client experience and feedback over the last three years. It will also help validate the learnings and recommendations that we need to take forward across multiple areas of the organisation.

## 4.3. Improve communication, expectation management, and understanding of clients’ needs and circumstances

The results from the survey under these themes are ongoing topics that arise with every client satisfaction and experience survey. Clients identified a clear desire for being kept better updated and informed during their interactions with VLA and that VLA more clearly understands their contexts and experiences. These are also central factors in enabling VLA to provide a more effective service in targeting the right information and appropriate support to clients. It points to the importance of clients feeling connected and empowered in a process where that may not be the norm or where disempowerment is experienced. The future functionality proposed by the recently launched Legal Aid Services Online (LASO) platform and its ability to connect clients with key dates and information could play a significant role in the communication aspect. Implementation of the new Community Legal Information strategy could also provide an opportunity to improve client journeys with VLA through the provision of information that helps manage expectations and assists clients to better understand VLA services and processes. While system changes act as prompts, more deliberate action is needed with the role and expectation of our staff practice.

A specific focus needs to be on better understanding the extent to which disabilities impact on both client experience and service delivery. These insights could provide useful input into the implementation of the VLA Disability Action Plan. With 52% of clients indicating they had a disability (higher than VLA records and higher than a response to a simple question on disabilities), there is an imperative to improve on how this topic is defined with clients and how information on disability is gathered and used to deliver and improve services. This will help VLA better understand the extent to which this may be a barrier for clients in their capacity to engage and understand their legal issue and for VLA to be able to appropriately target and support clients.

This also points to the introduction of remote and digital access options that emerged during the pandemic and the extent to which these can improve client experience through providing a broader range of options for clients to access services in the way that best suits them. This could include phone, video, and face-to-face options. While remote access options for client support can be a positive for many, further consultation and research is suggested to ensure that clients’ lived experience guides any changes or expansion of such services. What remains critical is ensuring these new options increase client access by providing more accessible and tailored choices that can meet a client’s varying range of personal and cultural needs. A move to digital and online platforms must continue to exist alongside more ‘analogue’ platforms where possible.

Additionally, all service delivery options, online or otherwise, must be carefully developed and implemented with an eye to increasing the ability to understand and support a client’s full range of personal and cultural needs, whatever they may be, at the point of service delivery. This is resource dependent in some ways but is also dependent on how we design our services, and what factors we are prioritising to fully understand a client’s circumstances, how they impact on their legal journey, and how best we can meet those needs to help them on that journey.

## 4.4. Further investigate and strengthen the understanding of the resolution of clients’ legal issues, and VLA’s role

Whether clients indicated that their legal issue had been resolved was a major factor in their satisfaction with VLA. But it also raised questions as to exactly what clients meant when they said this and how their experience of VLA was influenced by a positive resolution. Clients also reported that they felt the justice system overall needs to be improved, including VLA funding and eligibility criteria so further understanding the role of VLA in the resolution of clients’ legal problems is vital. This was the first time this question had been asked in a client experience survey and it provides an opportunity to further explore client expectations, understanding and views of VLA support in the resolution of their legal issue. Given the importance of resolution to client satisfaction, VLA needs to further research what service delivery factors can positively impact legal problem resolution, and how approaches could be tailored for different service delivery types. This should also consider better understanding the utility of one-off advice and legal information services, when and how they can best support clients to reach a resolution, and critically analysing whether VLA needs to reconsider the service ‘mix’ and the resourcing provided to lower intensity services.

1. The vulnerabilities counted for this analysis are Disability status; Indigenous Status; Born in non-English-speaking country; Education level below Year 12; Young Age (15-24yrs); At Risk of Homelessness; Annual income below $50K; Clients who need an interpreter. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Clients were asked about the reasons behind the resolution or ending of their legal problem, or what further steps were being taken if it remained unresolved, but there were no clear or consistent themes to pull out. Resolution from a client’s perspective is likely to be linked to a range of factors, including other concurrent legal and related issues, the limitations in achieving resolution for various matters and the limitations of what can be achieved with the various available legal support options (ie legal advice vs. casework). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The list included the following list taken from the ATLAS system: Acquired Brain Injury; Physical disability; Blind or vision-impaired; Chronic illness (eg cancer, chronic fatigue, diabetes); Cognitive disability (including intellectual disability); Deafblind; Deaf or hearing-impaired; Developmental delay (in children); Learning difficulty (eg dyslexia); Mental health issues (psychosocial); Neurodiverse (eg autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder); Neurological (eg Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, Multiple Sclerosis); Speech or sensory issues; Other. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)