

## 2023 CLC Engagement Survey Summary Report

January 2024

### Acknowledgement of country

This report was written on the land of the 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.

© 2024 Victoria Legal Aid. Reproduction without express written permission is prohibited. Written requests should be directed to Victoria Legal Aid, Strategic Communications, GPO Box 4380, Melbourne VIC 3001.

**Disclaimer.** The material in this publication is intended as a general guide only and has been prepared for Victoria Legal Aid staff and community legal centre staff and volunteers for study purposes only. The information contained should not be relied upon as legal advice and should be checked carefully before being relied upon in any context. Victoria Legal Aid expressly disclaims any liability howsoever caused to any person in respect of any legal advice given or any action taken in reliance on the contents of the publication.

---

## Part 1

### Background

In line with our Strategy 22 commitment, Victoria Legal Aid (**VLA**) has conducted two periodic engagement surveys with community legal centres (**CLCs**). The initial baseline survey was completed in 2021 and the second in August 2023. The aim of these surveys is to understand centre experiences of working with VLA, the varied challenges that they may experience and how they can better be supported.

The 2023 survey questions remain largely unchanged, allowing for comparison against the 2021 baseline.

In 2023 VLA scored satisfactorily against three out of five engagement measures including Sector Coordination and Support, Mutual Respect and Communication but scored less well in Transparency and Collaboration. 91% of participants indicated that they are either satisfied or very satisfied overall with VLA.

VLA has incorporated CLC feedback from the survey in developing the strategic and operational actions below.

### VLA actions

#### Strategic Actions

- VLA will continue to build on the Partnership Principles to strengthen its relationship and ongoing collaboration with the Federation of CLCs and the broader CLC sector.
- VLA will develop a strategic communications plan to:
  - communicate to the sector more clearly on its role and approach in funding decisions, and
  - to clarify when funding decisions are made by Commonwealth or State governments and when they are made by VLA.

#### Operational Actions

- VLA will continue to circulate a 'Key Contacts List' with the sector annually, to build relationships and so that CLCs can know the appropriate contact person(s) for different teams, projects and initiatives at VLA.
- VLA will continue to share and collaborate on Community Legal Information (CLI) through its CLI Strategy.
- VLA will continue to share organisational strategy documents and other resources with the sector (e.g. Client First Strategy, Client Survey results, Disability Action Plan and Diversity and Inclusion tools, as well as other resources as appropriate)
- VLA will increase the promotion of relevant CLC initiatives to VLA staff to enhance collaboration. This will be a key task of the dedicated CLC Engagement and Projects Coordinator position within the CLC Funding and Development team.
- VLA program areas including the CLCFD program will continue to highlight projects and opportunities, introduce key staff and provide information about the work they do and how they connect with the sector through the quarterly CLC e-newsletter

- VLA will pursue the development and implementation of our own Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles and Indigenous Data Governance Framework (in consultation with Djirra, VALS and FCLC) and where appropriate, share our learnings with the sector
- VLA will create more opportunities for sector collaboration via the current Data and Digital Information Strategy program such as by improving pathways for sharing of VLA data for collaborative service planning and through the re-establishment of the Better Referrals Network and other useful collaboration mechanisms

## Part 2

### Survey report summary

#### Respondent profile

This survey was sent to all CLCs which VLA has a funding relationship with – totalling 38 CLCs, Djirra, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and FCLC. One recipient per organisation was invited to participate, usually the CEO (or equivalent). Of those invited, 23 completed the survey (58%).

While the response rate was lower in 2023 it is largely representative of the CLC sector that VLA funds and comparable to the previous survey, however in 2023 there was a higher proportion of responses from Greater and Metropolitan Melbourne, while in 2021 there was a higher proportion of responses from Centres who deliver services across Victoria.

VLA acknowledges that a more robust survey response would likely be received if the communications were managed by an independent party, rather than VLA, who acts as both service partner and funding administrator for the sector.

Where appropriate, percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

Among the responses:

#### Centre Type

- 48% indicated they were from Generalist Legal Centres
- 52% indicated they were from Specialist Legal Centres

Overall, this characteristic aligned with the 2021 survey response.

#### Catchment

- 35% provided services to all of Victoria
- 17% provided services Regional and/or Rural areas
- 43% provided services to Greater and/or Metro Melbourne only
- 4% provided services to Melbourne and Regional and/or Rural areas

In the 2023 survey, a higher proportion of responses were from Greater and Metropolitan Melbourne.

#### CEO/Centre Manager Tenure

- 13% had been in their role less than 12 months

- 22% for between 1 and 2 years
- 22% for between 2 and 5 years
- 43% for over 5 years

In both 2021 and 2023 surveys, over 60% of respondents had been employed for a period of over two years. In 2021, 26% of respondents had less than 12 months tenure, compared to 13% in 2023.

**Key insights**

Overall, VLA scored satisfactorily against three out of five engagement measures including Sector Coordination and Support (65% positive endorsement), Mutual Respect (76%) and Communication (65%) but scored less well in Transparency (35%) and Collaboration (57%).<sup>1</sup>

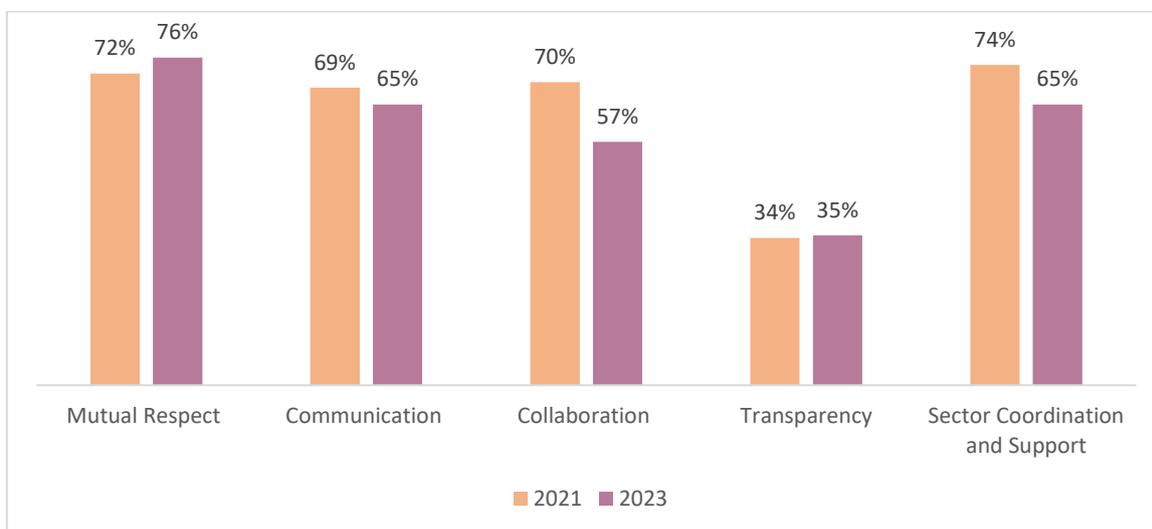


Figure 1 – Graph showing overall favourable responses for the engagement factors as an average score

For **Mutual Respect**, the favourable responses in 2023 compared to 2021 are shown below.

In 2023 most responses indicated that VLA understands the needs of their centre, with a marked increase compared to the 2021 results. In line with the 2021 feedback, 83% of survey participants felt that “My Centre and VLA share common goals”.

<sup>1</sup> Average factor scores (in Figure 1 above) were calculated based on the favourable responses received across the eighteen sub-factors. These average engagement scores may not adequately reflect the lowest and best performing sub-factors. Favourable responses were ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’. Unfavourable responses were ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ and neutral responses were ‘neither agree nor disagree’.

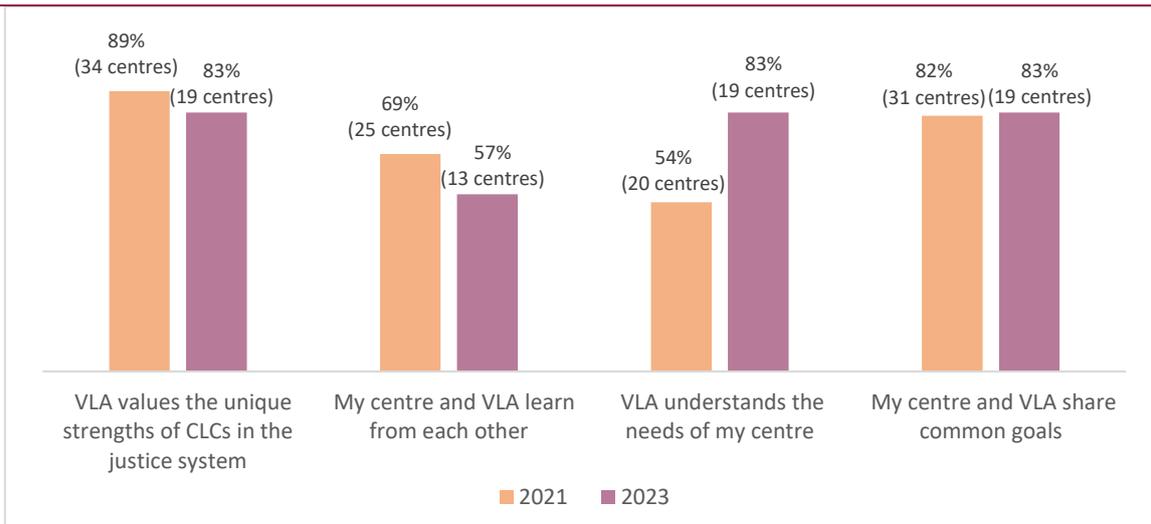


Figure 2 - Graph showing proportion of favourable responses for mutual respect questions in 2023 compared to 2021 responses.

For **Communication**, the favourable responses in 2023 compared to 2021 are shown below.

As in 2021, most respondents in 2023 agreed the VLA communicated clearly with their centre. There was a drop in favourable responses (from 82% in 2021 to 74% in 2023) to the question about VLA keeping centres informed. Just over three quarters of respondents in 2023 indicated that they felt VLA listened to and responded to feedback. Responses to the statement “VLA consults with my centre effectively about guideline changes” shows a drop in favourable responses from 68% in 2021 down to 22% in the 2023 survey. However, the shift away from the favourable response has been largely to the neutral option (from 18% in the 2021 survey to 70% in the 2023 survey), which may indicate it did not apply in many instances.

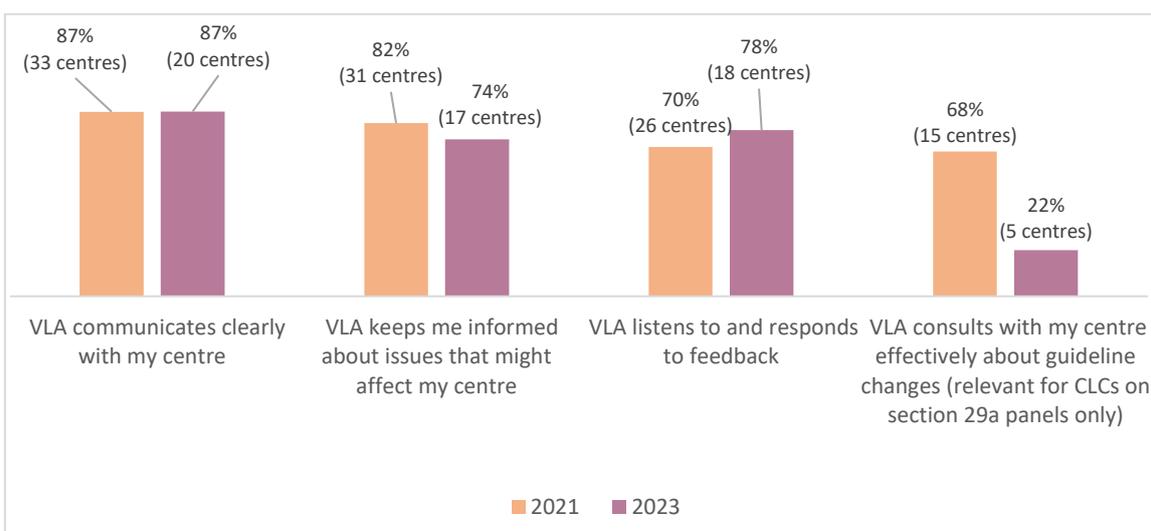


Figure 3 - Graph showing proportion of favourable responses for communication questions in 2023 compared to 2021 responses

For **Collaboration**, the favourable responses in 2023 compared to 2021 are shown below.

Most centres felt that VLA had a strong working relationship with them, however there was a decline in the positive response to this question in 2023. Responses to the statement “VLA and my centre work together to plan for and deliver services” shows a significant drop in favourable responses (from 61% in 2021 to 39% in 2023) and an increase in unfavourable responses (from 18% in 2021 to 30% in 2023). Less than half of the participants gave a positive response to the statement that VLA and the Centre work together on systemic issues and advocacy, fewer than in the 2021 survey. More than half of survey responses indicated that the relationship between their Centre and VLA serves to better assist clients, however there was also a decrease in the positive response to this statement compared to the 2021 survey.

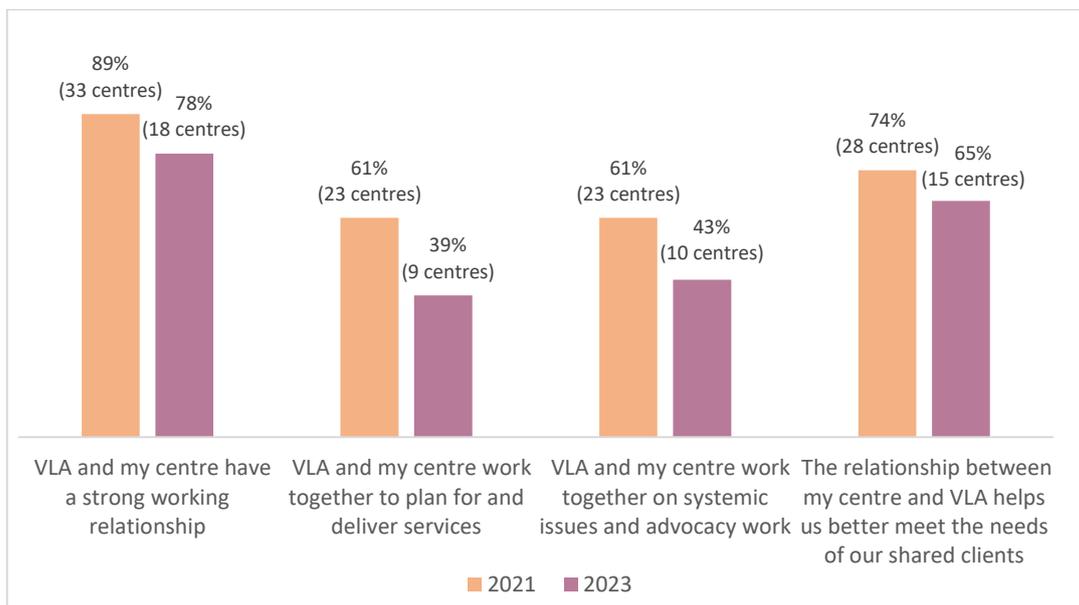


Figure 4 - Graph showing proportion of favourable responses for collaboration questions in 2023 compared to 2021 responses

For **Transparency**, the favourable responses in 2023 compared to 2021 are shown below. This factor relates to transparency around funding. Over one-third of responses indicated they understood how VLA made funding decisions, an increase on the positive response in 2021.

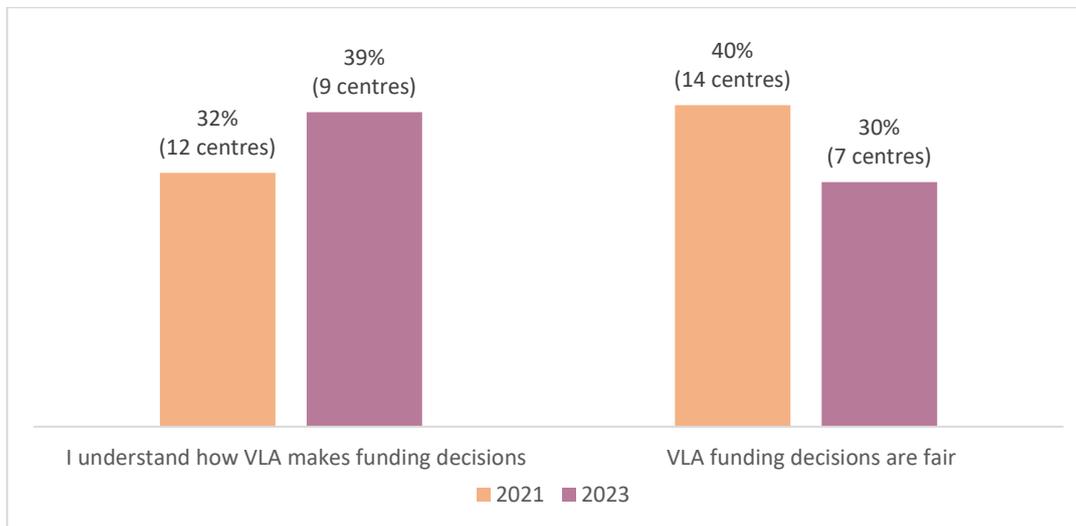


Figure 5 - Graph showing proportion of favourable responses for transparency questions in 2023 compared to 2021 responses

For **Sector Coordination and Support**, the favourable responses in 2023 compared to 2021 are shown below.

Fewer centres were comfortable to reach out to VLA if they needed assistance compared to the 2021 response, and almost all had been offered professional development opportunities by VLA. In 2023 less than one third of participants agreed that VLA advocated effectively for funding on their behalf, while unfavourable responses to this question increased to one quarter of total responses in 2023 (26%). Almost half of the responses agreed that VLA contributed effectively to sector coordination efforts across the legal sector in 2023, a significant drop in favourable responses (from 69% in 2021 to 48% in 2023).



Figure 6 - Graph showing proportion of favourable responses for sector coordination and response questions in 2023 compared to 2021 responses

**Some CLCs would like to engage with various programs and business units within VLA more.**

Two out of every five survey responses expressed an interest in engaging more with the CLC Funding and Development team, one in four participants would like to engage more with the Service Design and Innovation team, and one in six participants would like to engage more with Community Legal Education Team, with Legal Help and with Outcomes and Evidence.

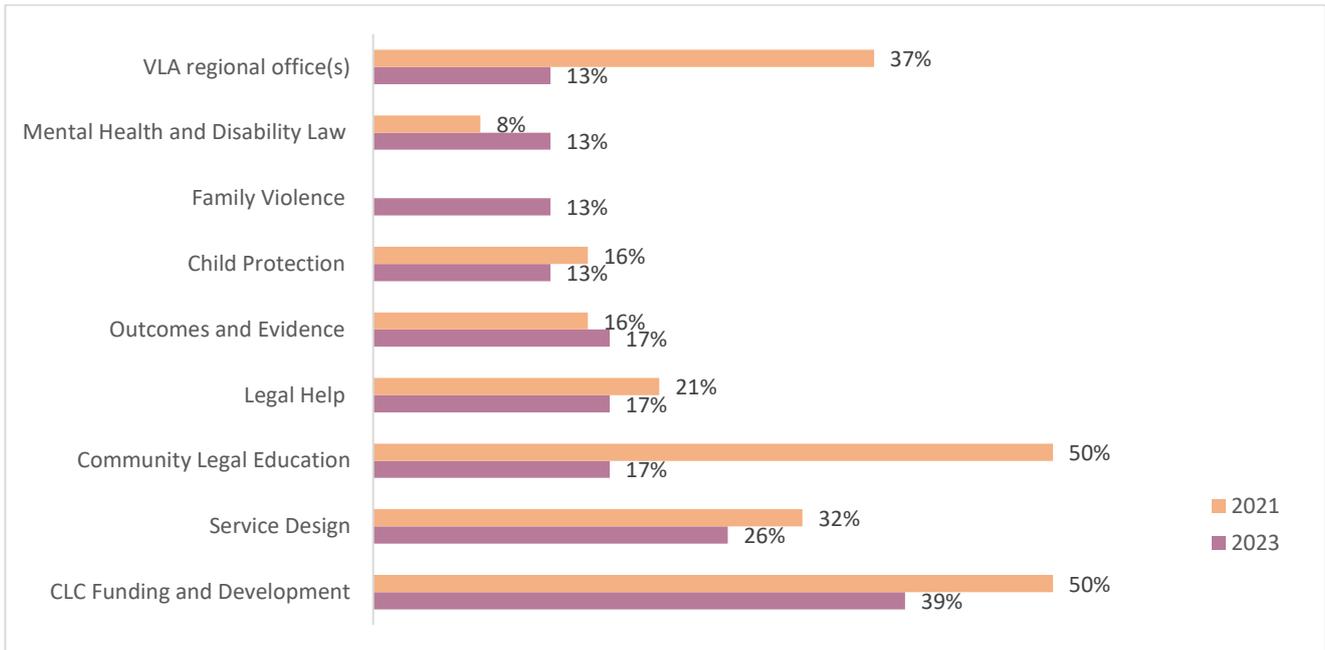


Figure 7 – Graph showing percentage of CLCs who responded positively to VLA teams they would like to work with more 2023 results

**CLCs provided feedback on things VLA are doing well**

Here are some quotes from CLCs about what works well in their engagement with VLA<sup>2</sup>:

- We work very well with VLA in terms of attending training opportunities and use resources like LHO.
- At an individual level, the management staff and lawyers at VLA are very good to deal with, and have a strong alignment of values with the CLC sector.
- DL relationship is strong and clear.
- I think we generally have a good relationship with VLA, it is respectful and not demanding. We aim to work together with the relevant areas in line with our funding streams.
- VLA are great to work with, very professional, knowledgeable and supportive.
- VLA staff have been accessible, understanding and flexible.

<sup>2</sup> Quotes and comments have been edited for minor spelling and grammar issues for readability.

- We value our close, longstanding partnership with VLA, including the CLC Funding and Development Program team and service delivery and advocacy-focussed teams.
- The CLCFD team is very responsive when you reach out for information or help.
- We really appreciate the efforts of the funding and development team to communicate with our centre across a range of areas.
- The VLA team members I work with are fantastic and we've resolved issues together very well. We've also collaborated on active projects.

### **CLCs provided feedback on things VLA can do better**

Here are some suggestions from CLCs on how VLA can improve engagement:

- Some centres indicated that they would like more training opportunities in particular areas and opportunities to collaborate on developing shared resources
- VLA could do more to assist CLC understanding of VLA teams and their work, to support overall engagement with CLCs
- Many centres indicated that they were not sure how funding decisions are made, and they did not understand what, if any, work VLA did in regards to advocating for funding for CLCs
- Some centres would like to meet more regularly with VLA representatives and they find their relationship and engagement with VLA varies depending on the area of VLA, and is sometimes dependant on particular staff members
- Many centres would like to see more collaborative planning between the sector and VLA and to work with VLA on systemic reform work
- VLA can continue to improve its reporting process for CLCs and reduce burden where possible, including with consideration for CLC's data collection approaches and tools

**Overall satisfaction with VLA**

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with VLA on a 10-point scale, where 1 is not at all satisfied and 10 is extremely satisfied. The average score for satisfaction with VLA was 7.5 overall, compared to 7.1 in 2021. As shown in Figure 8 below, in 2023 82% of responses provided a satisfaction rating of 7 or above, while in 2021 77% of respondents did the same.

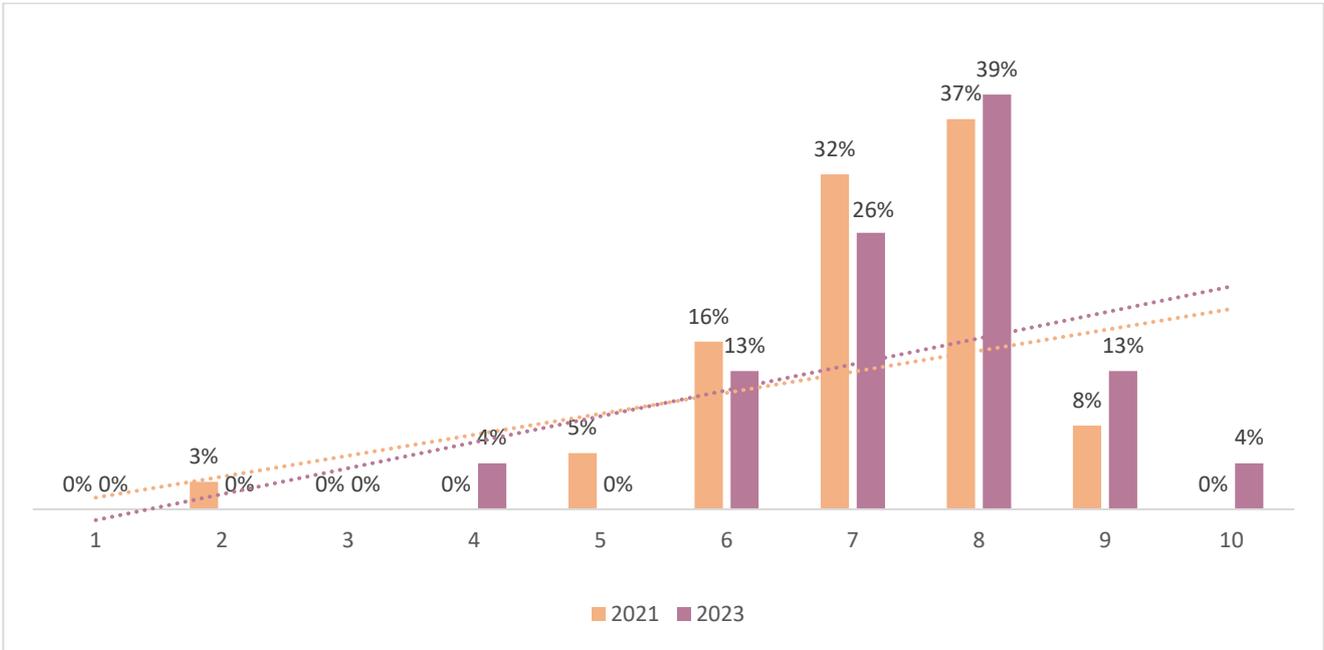


Figure 8 - Graph showing proportion of respondents who rated VLA 1-10 for overall satisfaction in a 10-point Likert scale

In 2023 survey participants were also asked to rate their overall satisfaction with VLA via a five ordinal response method. 91% of respondents (21 CLCs out of 23) are either satisfied or very satisfied.

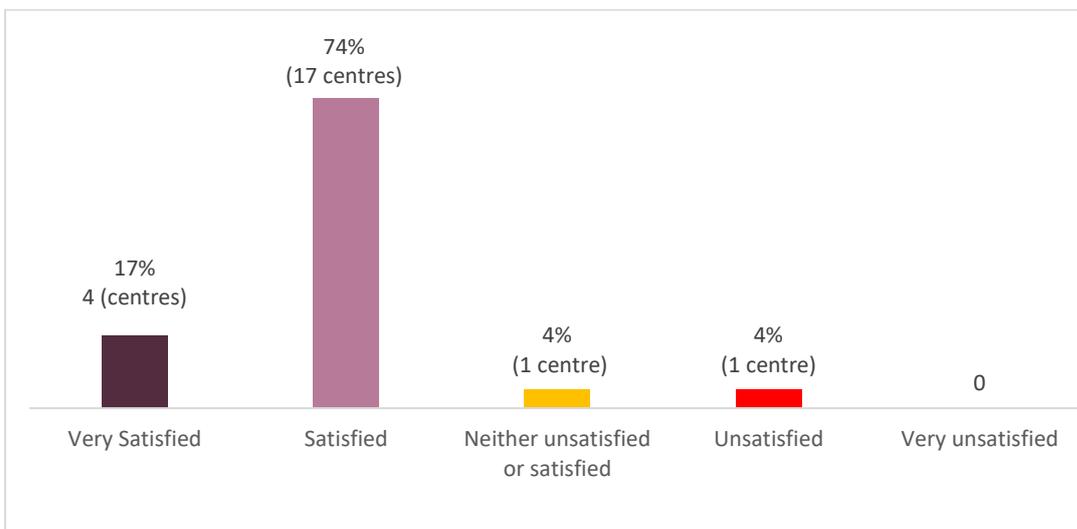


Figure 9 - Graph showing proportion of respondents who rated VLA for overall satisfaction with five ordinal response