Victoria Legal Aid (VLA)
Client Experience Research 2025
Summary Report

June 2025



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1. Project overview

Project overview



Background

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) is an independent statutory authority established under the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic). VLA provides legal information, advice and representation to members of the Victorian community who are most disadvantaged and in need of support. Services provided by VLA and private practitioners are intended to be accessible, tailored to clients' needs and capabilities, and help people to address legal problems.

VLA has sought feedback from clients through surveys since 2011, to assess the extent to which it meets clients' needs. In 2022, VLA adopted an outcomes approach with the development of VLA's Outcomes Framework 2022-30 and the Outcomes and Evidence Agenda 2022-26.

The client outcome areas are:

- Access to VLA services
- Experience of VLA services
- Impact on client legal capability
- · Resolution of clients' legal problems, and
- Impact on client wellbeing.

VLA commissioned ORIMA Research to conduct the Client Experience Survey in 2023, 2024 and 2025. This report presents a summary of the findings from the 2025 wave of the research.

Research approach

Project establishment

Project inception and planning



Establishment of survey tools and processes

- Questionnaire refinement & finalisation
- · Sample preparation & validation
- Survey programming



- Online survey invitations & reminders distributed via email and SMS
- Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)



Data analysis & reporting

- Data cleaning & analysis
- Survey data weighted by service offering, service type and law type
- Preparation of a summary report and data tables





Sampling approach and response rates



Sampling approach

The survey was sent to all n=23,153 VLA clients who received services between 1 June – 30 November 2024. Survey invitations were sent via email or SMS to all records (with the exception of n=1,000 that were retained for computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI)). CATI was then used to top-up under-filled strata to ensure the sample was representative by service offering, service type and law type (see table below). Certain groups were oversampled to allow for more robust analysis and reporting. Survey data was then weighted by known population proportions.

The sample did not include clients aged under 18, or any client who had received a family law service where the risk level of seeking their feedback was deemed to be too high.

Response rates

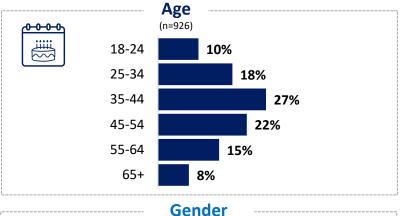
Response rates achieved via each survey distribution method are outlined below.

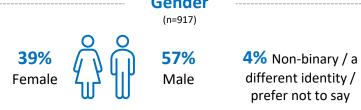
- Total: 3.9% (926/ 23,153)
- Email distribution (via research supplier): 2.8% (389/ 14,043)
- Email distribution (via VLA): 2.9% (29/1,000)
- SMS distribution (via research supplier): 2.9% (208/ 7,110)
- CATI (via research supplier): 18.5% (300/ 1,625*)

		Survey responses		Population		
	Target number of responses (# minimum)	Actual number of survey responses (#)	Proportion within survey responses (% unweighted)	Population (count of clients who had received VLA services between 1 June to 30 November, 2024) (#)	Proportion within population (%)	
Service offering						
In-house practitioner	300	802	87%	20,529	89%	
Private practitioner	100	125	13%	2,632	11%	
Service type						
Duty lawyer	300	504	54%	12,318	53%	
Legal advice	200	295	32%	8,072	35%	
Casework	80	143	15%	3,027	13%	
Key Law type						
Criminal law	200	480	52%	13,365	58%	
Family law	200	238	26%	6,005	26%	
Civil law	200	208	22%	3,817	16%	
Total number of unique client records	800	926	100%	23,153		

Demographic profile of survey respondents



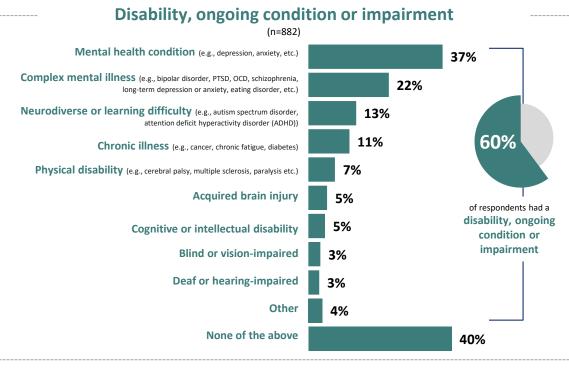


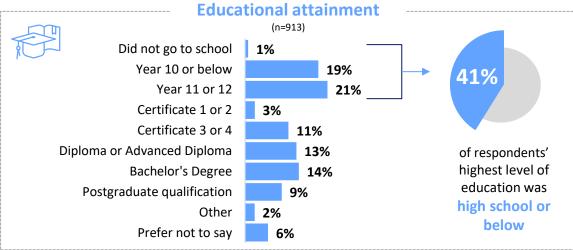






55% Metro	22% Regional	1% Interstate	22% Unknown





Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Profile presented is the weighted data. Base: All respondents (base sizes noted above)



2. Summary of key results

Summary of key results



Access



78% agreed it was easy to contact VLA when they first needed help

Stress and wellbeing



65% agreed they were less stressed after talking to the lawyer*^



66% of those with a fully resolved problem**^

wellbeing

37% of those with an improved unresolved problem***^(个)

Experience*



83% agreed that the lawyer treated them with respect



83% agreed that the lawyer listened to their legal problem (1)



73% agreed that the lawyer took their circumstances into account[^]

Legal capability*



79% agreed they know where to get help for future legal problems



76% agreed they feel more confident to get legal help in the future



76% agreed that the lawyer helped them understand how to deal with their legal problem

Resolution



legal problem

52% had their 16% had their legal problem fully resolved*(1) partially resolved* **26%** had an unresolved legal problem*(**↓**)

Satisfaction



68% were satisfied with the help they got from VLA (1)



79% agreed they would recommend VLA to others (个)



79% agreed that VLA's help had a positive impact on their legal outcome^**(

✓



78% agreed that VLA helped fix their legal problem ***

Summary of key indicators 2022-25



Question/ indicator	2022	2023	2024	2025
ACCESS: It was easy to contact VLA when you first needed help. (NLAP)	77%	81%	80%	78%
EXPERIENCE : The legal aid lawyer understood my legal problem.	77%	73%	77%	77%
EXPERIENCE: The lawyer treated me with respect.	81%	80%	85%	83%
EXPERIENCE: The lawyer listened to my legal problem. (NLAP)	83%	76%	77%	83%
RESOLUTION: The help I got from VLA had a positive impact on the outcome of my legal problem.	85%	76%	84%	79%
RESOLUTION: Legal Aid helped me fix my legal problem.	84%	75%	80%	78%
RESOLUTION: Proportion of clients who had their legal problem resolved.	42%	50%	48%	52%
LEGAL CAPABILTY: You know where to get help if you have another legal problem in the future.	78%	80%	77%	79%
LEGAL CAPABILTY: You feel more confident to get legal help in the future if you need it. (NLAP)	75%	76%	75%	76%
LEGAL CAPABILTY: The lawyer helped you understand how to deal with your legal problem. (NLAP)	77%	70%	74%	76%
WELLBEING: I was less stressed after talking to the lawyer.	65%	59%	63%	65%
SATISFACTION: Overall client satisfaction. (DPS)	67%	62%	65%	68%
SATISFACTION: I would recommend VLA to other people. (NLAP)	78%	76%	76%	79%

Key takeouts





VLA continues to perform well at an overall level

At an overall level, Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) continues to perform well, as the majority of clients were satisfied with the services they received (68%). Since 2015, client satisfaction had been following a trajectory of decline, however this has now reversed, as client satisfaction has increased consistently in the past two annual surveys. In the 2025 survey, most clients felt it was easy to contact VLA when they first needed help, that lawyers used a person-centred approach, and that the service strengthened their legal capability. Almost four in five would recommend VLA to others (79%), reflecting strong service advocacy, another outcome indicator of positive client experience.



Almost half of clients had personal or cultural needs

The proportion of VLA clients with personal or cultural needs was high, with almost half reporting they had a specific need. The most common support needs were a disability, mental health issue or other health concern (26%), and experience of violence (17%). Only around two in five of those clients felt that VLA fully met those specific needs. Catering for the needs of VLA's heterogenous client-base continues to be of importance.



VLA helped strengthen client's legal capability

The experience of interacting with VLA left most respondents feeling more capable of dealing with legal problems in the future. For example, almost four in five respondents agreed they would know where to get help with future legal problems (79%), and three quarters felt the lawyer gave them the confidence to take the next steps to address their legal problem (74%).



Clients with unresolved legal problems and unfavourable outcomes had lower satisfaction

The resolution status and outcome of clients' legal problems continues to have a significant influence on service satisfaction, with clients who had unresolved problems and clients who had unfavourable outcomes reporting poorer service satisfaction and poorer wellbeing.



Legal advice clients and those who had sought support for a family law matter continue to have lower satisfaction

Clients who had received Legal Advice services had lower overall satisfaction than those who had received Duty Lawyer or Casework services. This may in part be due to the lower service intensity and the lower rate of case resolution among Legal Advice clients. Similarly, those seeking support for family law matters also had a lower rate of case resolution, which would have contributed to the lower service satisfaction rating. Additional support for these client cohorts may be needed.



3. Access

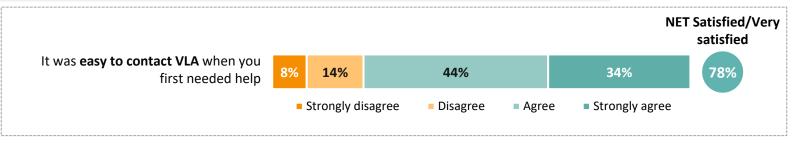
This section of the report focuses on clients' initial contact with VLA and any difficulties they had when contacting VLA when they first needed help.

Most respondents found accessing VLA's service straightforward

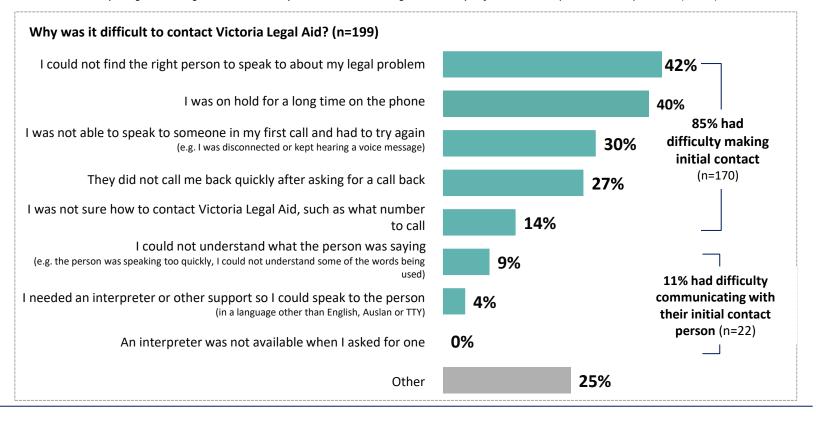


Almost 8 in 10 agreed it was easy to contact VLA when they first needed help (78%).

22% felt that it was not easy to contact VLA when they first needed help. Of these clients, 85% reported difficulty in making initial contact with VLA, and a much smaller proportion (11%) had difficulties communicating with the VLA staff member when they were able to make contact.



Q3. How much do you agree or disagree that it was easy to contact Victoria Legal Aid when you first needed help? Base: All respondents (n=920).





4. Experience

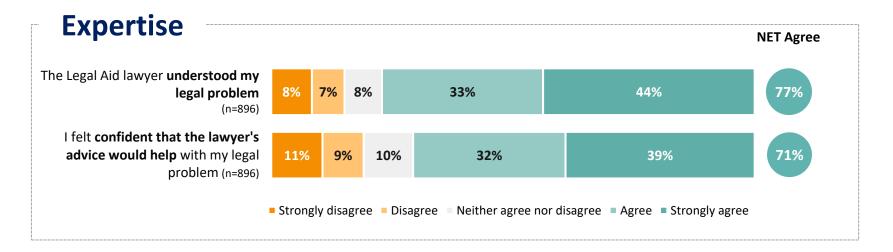
This section of the report focuses on the various factors influencing the quality of the experience clients have while interacting with VLA. These can be summarised as:

- perceived expertise of the legal advisors
- quality of communication between clients and legal advisors
- the extent to which services are person-centred and tailored to individual circumstances, and
- support needs and considerations of clients, and whether these were adequately met.

Respondents generally felt positive about the expertise of the lawyer



Around three quarters of respondents agreed that the lawyer understood their legal problem (77%) and seven in ten felt confident that the advice provided would help them (71%). 15% did not think that their lawyer understood their problem and around one in five had not been confident that the lawyer's advice would help them (19%), disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with these statements.



Some respondents praised the capability of their lawyer and felt this resulted in a better legal outcome.

"They have got results for you. Feeling confident moving forward in July."

"My lawyer was methodical, organised, well versed in the law and got me a good outcome."

"Because the person I spoke with understood the difficulty with my case and suggested how to challenge that to try and get a different outcome to make my case clearer."

Some respondents felt that their lawyer did not provide helpful advice or information, as it wasn't specific to their matter or they felt the lawyer had lower capability.

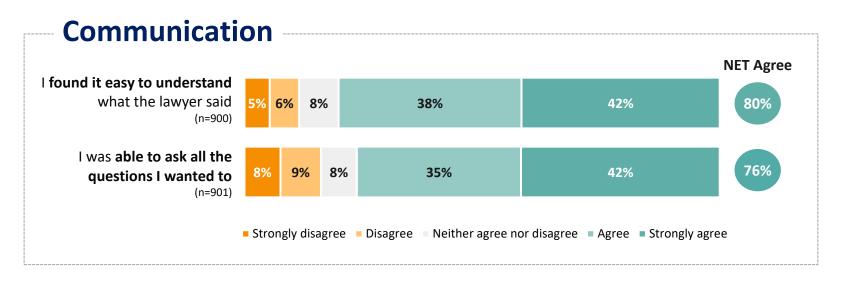
"The lawyers are not helpful and I had chance to speak to two lawyers and both were very unhelpful and seems very less knowledgeable."

"Advice was vague and generalised. I have since received a second opinion from a private lawyer that contained far more useful information for decision making and future planning."

Communication between lawyers and clients was viewed positively



Four in five agreed it was easy to understand the lawyer (80%) and 76% said they were able to ask all the questions they wanted.



Some respondents praised the ability of lawyers to explain complex information and processes related to their case:

"The communication / Being able to understand everything."

"It was explained really well, it solved part of the case / They explained more about how the process will be going, what I need to do, and how to improve my case, overall."

"The lawyer I spoke with provided the information I required, in a warm and intelligent way. Any questions I had, were answered promptly and professionally."

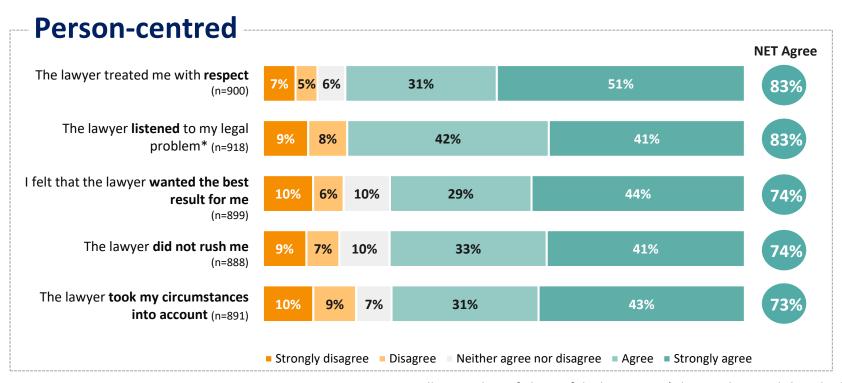
Fewer respondents held negative sentiment in relation to communications. Those with negative sentiment mentioned poor listening skills and unanswered questions.

"He just didn't listen to what I had to say, basically even the police that were there said it was a misunderstanding and the lawyer didn't care at the time "just plead guilty.""

"I am dissatisfied because I haven't had my questions answered, I was not advised on what I should do to make the outcome of my case better and things were left till last minute instead of being dealt with in a suitable time frame."

Respondents perceived the service to be person-centred





Many respondents felt they were respected, empathised with, and that their personal circumstances were taken into account.

"Great empathetic lawyers who treated me and my family with respect and had a strong duty for charge and justice."

"The lawyer was emphatic kind, considered and completely dedicated to resolving the matter."

A smaller number of clients felt they weren't listened to, and that the lawyer lacked understanding of their personal circumstances.

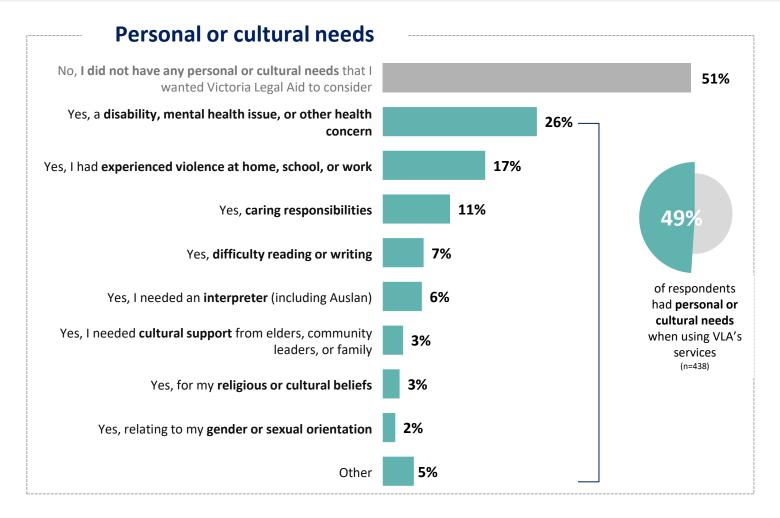
"I felt that the legal aid lawyers were there as a token gesture. I felt like a number and was rushed through so they could get to next client."

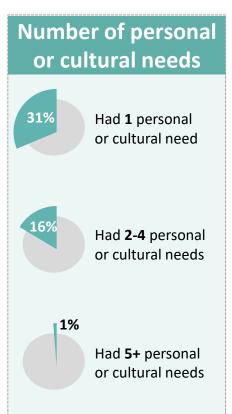
"Felt like just another number in the system. Didn't listen to issue or have any understanding of what it was like to be a victim in a dv situation. Seemed like just wanted the day to end."

"They didn't listen to me / They didn't care about me."

Almost half of respondents had personal or cultural needs that they wanted VLA to consider when accessing services



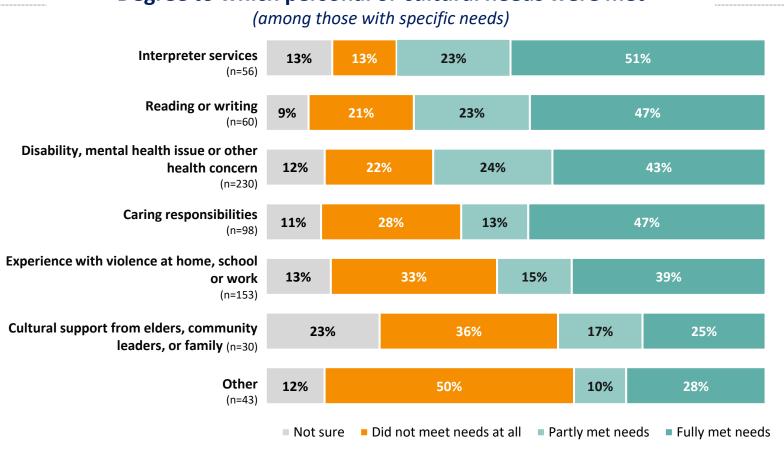




Of those who had personal or cultural needs when accessing VLA services, feedback on whether these needs were met was mixed



Degree to which personal or cultural needs were met



49% of those who had a personal or cultural need had at least 1 need that was fully met

^{*}Results relating gender or sexual orientation, and religious or cultural beliefs are not shown due to small response numbers (n=17-27)

Comments and suggestions for assisting clients with personal or cultural needs





When respondents were asked why their personal or cultural needs were not fully or only partially met, many explained that it was because they felt VLA did not understand or ask questions about their situation.

"Because they didn't ask if I needed any assistance due to these disabilities and experiences."

"Did not consider my disability or pension to even take on my case."

"I don't have the knowledge to understand advanced English words as I have a learning disability (SLD) they were very aware of that but still didn't take any consideration to work on a easy pass."

"I had difficulty understanding the lawyer at times. I wasn't always sure that my experience of violence was being taken into account. My sexual orientation and gender identity are highly relevant to my case and whilst acknowledged I haven't felt entirely understood."

"It was never asked or taken into consideration."



Respondents whose personal or cultural needs were not fully met were asked how VLA could better meet their needs. Asking whether clients have these needs in the first instance was mentioned by some. Improved listening skills, the need for a trauma-informed approach, and better training for lawyers in working with people from diverse backgrounds was also mentioned.

"Asking would be a good start."

"Slow down. Listen carefully. Listen completely, talking isn't a competition. Allow processing time and allow us to talk when we have something to say instead of talking straight over the top."

"Carry my concerns into the court room."

"Need trauma-informed approach across VLA."

"They could be more patient, listen and treat me with some dignity, respect and empathise with my situation."

"If I have a social worker from Victoria Legal Aid who listens to and understands me, and works together with the lawyers supporting me, I believe the outcome will be more effective. Additionally, if the lawyer has specific training in working with people form diverse backgrounds, I believe Victoria Legal Aid will be able to support me better."

Q14. Please describe why Victoria Legal Aid did not meet or fully meet these personal or cultural needs.? Base: All respondents who had personal or cultural needs that were not fully met or only partially met (n=163). Q15. How can Victoria Legal Aid better meet your personal or cultural needs? Base: All respondents who had personal or cultural needs that were not fully met or only partially met (n=153).



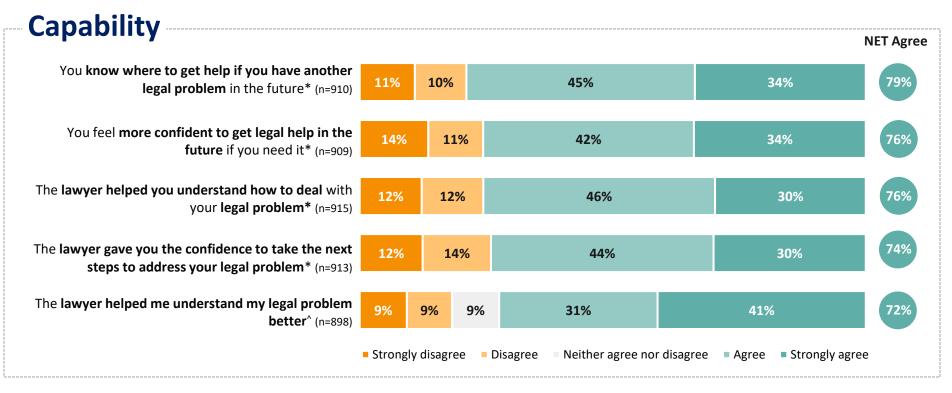
5. Legal capability

This section describes the impact of VLA's assistance on clients' ability to understand their most recent legal problem, how to deal with it, as well as their impact on building client capability in dealing with future legal problems.

The experience of interacting with VLA left most respondents feeling more capable of dealing with legal problems in the **future**



Almost four in five respondents agreed they would know where to get help with future legal problems (79%), and three quarters felt more confident in getting legal help should they need to do so in the future (76%).



^{*}These questions were asked on a 4-point agreement scale without a neutral mid-point (e.g., 'neither agree nor disagree'). ^Excludes 'not sure / I can't remember' responses.

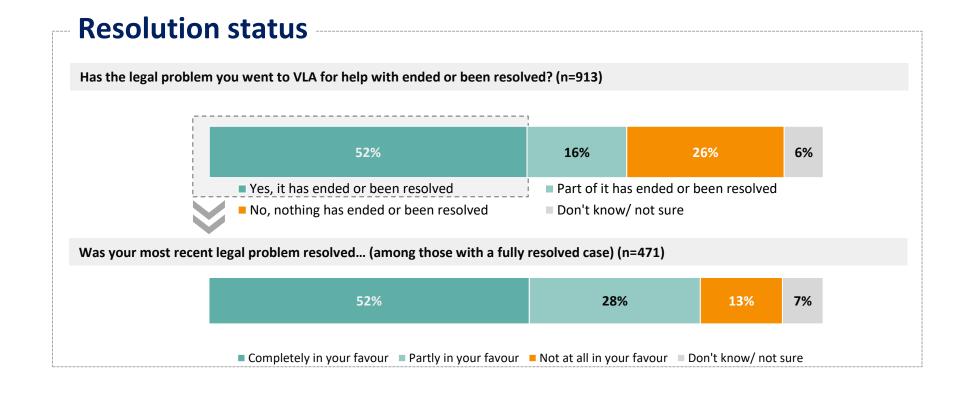


6. Resolution

This section focuses on client perceptions of VLA's impact on their legal problems. In the survey, there was a separate set of questions for those who had a fully resolved legal problem to those whose legal problem was yet to be resolved. The former focused on the perceived impact of VLA assistance on the outcome, and the latter focused on the perceived impact of VLA assistance on the progress of their case or anticipated outcome.

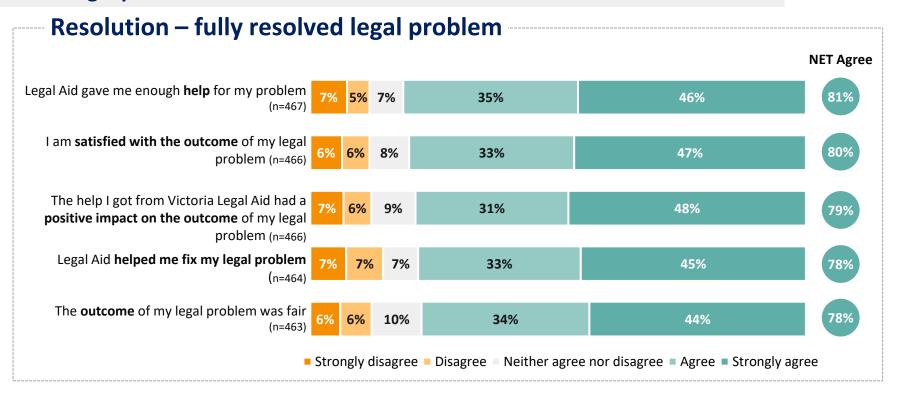






VLA's involvement was perceived to have had a positive impact on the outcomes of respondents' legal problems where the legal problem had been resolved. Four in five agreed that legal aid gave them enough help for their legal problem, and fixed their legal problem





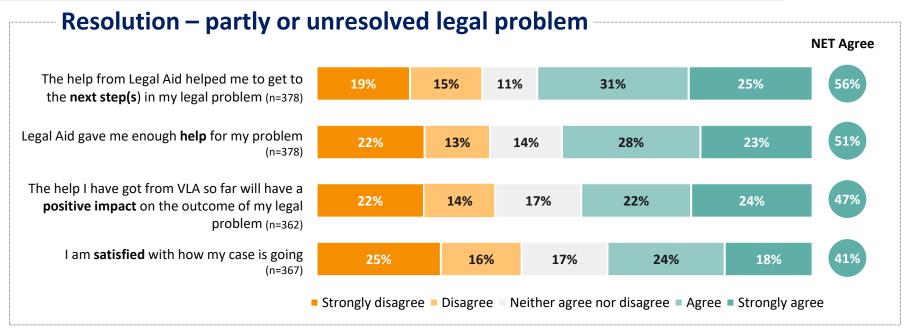
Respondents who perceived VLA to have had a positive impact on their legal problem spoke highly of VLA's support and the skills of the lawyers:

[&]quot;My lawyer was methodical, organised, well versed in the law and got me a good outcome."

[&]quot;I was able to get all the correct advice to fight my case with a great outcome, was thoroughly happy with the results."

Views were less positive among those with a partly or unresolved legal matter





Respondents who were not satisfied with their overall experience and whose legal problem had not been resolved described disappointment with the quality of the service or felt that they weren't helped.

"Was given incorrect advice totally irresponsible."

"They were very quick and rushed me/Couldn't help and told me to find someone else in private practice but gave no referrals."

"They didn't help with my situation."

"The legal help I received before ended in a fiasco. The last time I called for legal aid, I was told that Legal Aid would pick me up with an interpreter, but I never received the call."

However, some clients expressed satisfaction with VLA despite their case not being resolved. In many cases this was because they felt their lawyer had helped them, had been empathetic, and had reduced their stress levels.

"Because I'm shown care in their tone and understanding."

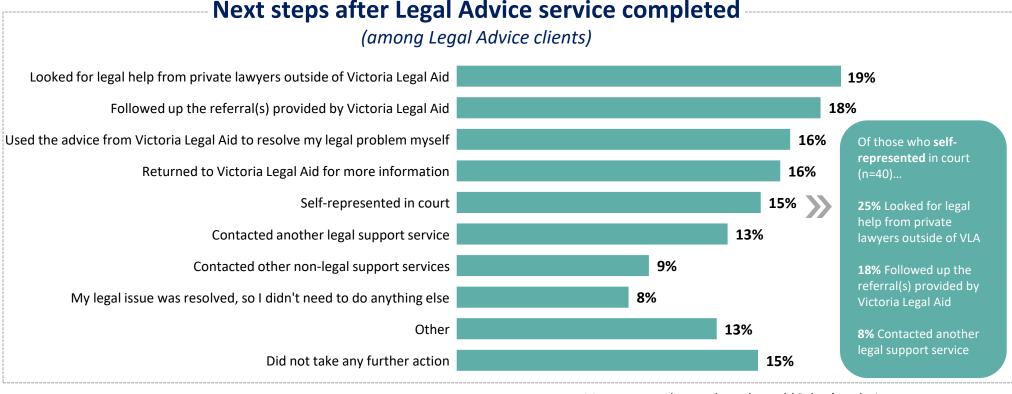
"I was at the lowest in my life with no direction or idea on how to until I spoke to [name] from Victorian legal aid, she actually listened and understood where we could fight for my right to be a parent. She is an angel thank you."

"They helped a lot with stress."

"Just helpful and related easily to my issue."

After their service with VLA was completed, Legal Advice clients most commonly looked for legal help from private lawyers outside of VLA (19%) or followed up the referral(s) provide by VLA (18%)







Many respondents who selected 'Other' as their next step mentioned that their case was still ongoing.

"Need more follow up as matters with [organisation] not resolved."

"Still ongoing."

"Has not been resolved."



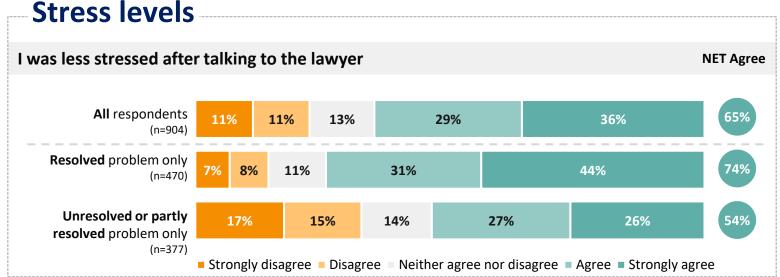
7. Wellbeing

This section discusses VLA's impact on the wellbeing of clients, including stress levels, overall wellbeing and mental health.

Almost three in four respondents whose legal problem was resolved generally indicated that VLA's services had a positive impact on their stress levels



In contrast, just over half of respondents whose problems were partially or entirely unresolved agreed that VLA's services had a positive impact on stress levels (54%).



Some of those with unresolved problems indicated that their involvement with VLA may have been detrimental to their wellbeing, and caused them emotional distress.

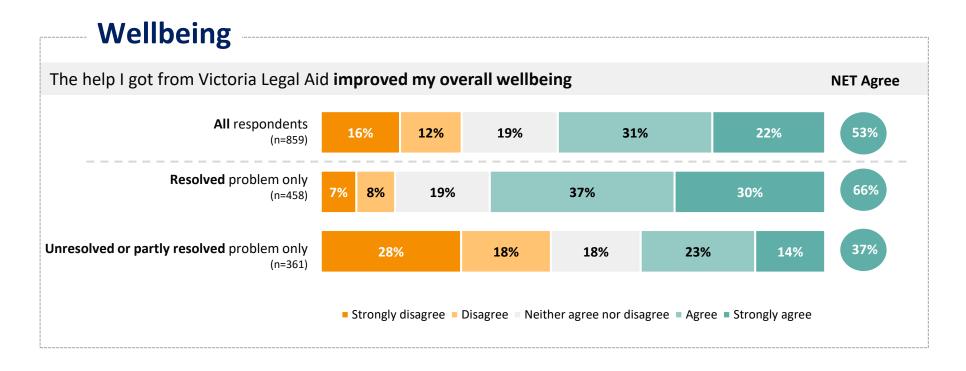
"They have destroyed our life, collected a paycheck and left my child and myself to fend for ourselves."

"The lady I spoke to did not listen and I felt very judged and dictated to. I was emotional by the end of the call and very confused."

Similarly, respondents whose legal problem was resolved generally indicated that VLA's services had a positive impact on their wellbeing



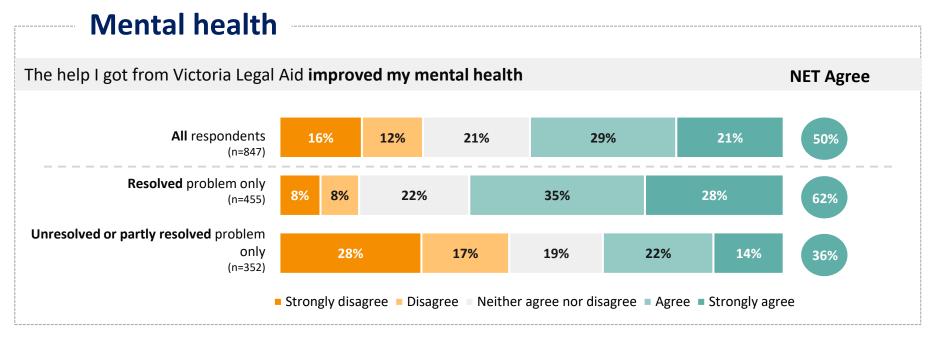
In contrast, a minority of respondents whose problems were partially or entirely unresolved agreed VLA's services had a positive impact on their wellbeing.



Similarly, respondents whose legal problem was resolved generally indicated that VLA's services had a positive impact on their mental health



In contrast, a minority of respondents whose problems were partially or entirely unresolved agreed VLA's services had a positive impact on their mental health.



Respondents who felt that they had good mental health outcomes, praised VLA's assistance:

"The lawyer I spoke to was excellent / Made me feel great / I said to the lawyer after leaving court, you've made me feel like a stronger woman."

"Because they were just so lovely they were not rude or was arrogant to me, I went through some stuff and wasn't judged, they took time to understand me, they were lovely for my mental health."

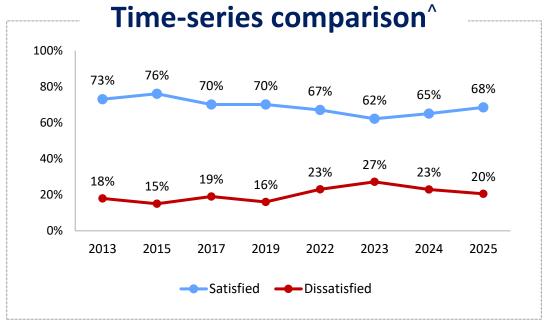


8. Overall client satisfaction

Between 2015 and 2023, client satisfaction followed a trajectory of decline. In 2024 this trend reversed, and satisfaction has continued to increase into 2025







Respondents were asked the reason for their level of satisfaction. The main reason among those satisfied was that their request for services was fulfilled or they were satisfied due to the outcome of their legal problem:

"I was happy with out the outcome / He did a good job."

Another common reason for satisfaction was the character or conduct of the lawyer, including mentions of empathy, patience, professionalism, understanding, care/support, work ethic and use of a trauma-informed approach.

"Because the lawyer I had was very respectful and understood my problem and supported me in my rough patch at that time."

"They fought hard for the result and were very competent lawyers that treated me well."

"I really appreciate that the lawyers I have interacted with are highly sensitive in their approach to working with victims of trauma, which has made a significant difference in how supported and secure we feel."

[&]quot;They understood me and got the case sorted."

Overall satisfaction comparisons by cohorts



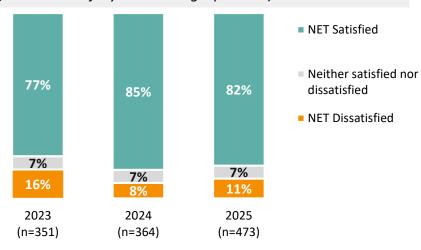


Overall satisfaction comparisons by cohorts, and over time



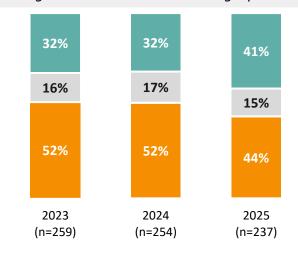
Overall satisfaction time-series comparison

(among those with a fully resolved legal problem)



Overall satisfaction time-series comparison

(among those with an unresolved legal problem)



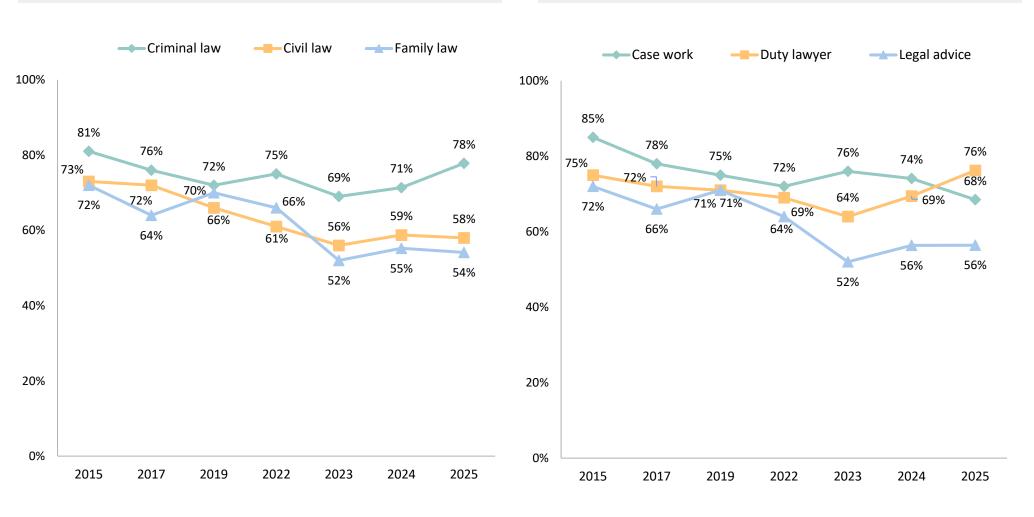
- NET Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- NET Dissatisfied

Overall satisfaction trend by cohorts



Overall satisfaction by program area and time-series comparison

Overall satisfaction by service area and time-series comparison



Base: All respondents by program area (2023 to 2025 results are weighted). 2023 (weighted): Criminal Law (n=269), Civil Law (n=189), Family Law (n=326). 2024 (weighted): Criminal Law (n=385), Civil Law (n=199), Family Law (n=221). 2025 (weighted): Criminal Law (n=480), Civil Law (n=208), Family Law (n=238).

Base: All respondents by service area. 2023 (weighted): Case work (n=127), Duty Lawyer (n=334), Legal advice (n=329). 2024 (weighted): Case work (n=113), Duty Lawyer (n=384), Legal advice (n=308). 2025 (weighted): Case work (n=143), Duty Lawyer (n=504), Legal advice (n=295).





Communications and marketing research



Client and stakeholder research



Employee research





Policy development and program management



Program evaluations and reviews



Data analytics



Data portals and ballots



PGPA Compliance services



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research



Public health research



Disability services research



Education research



Consulting and advisory services



User-centred design



#5890 VLA Client Experience Survey 2025

We would also like to acknowledge and thank all the participants who were involved in the research for their valuable contribution and input.

This project was conducted in accordance with the international quality standard ISO 20252, the international information security standard ISO 27001, as well as the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).