Client Satisfaction Survey 2019

Summary report

September 2019

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# Background

## Objectives

The objectives of the customer service survey are to:

* measure clients’ perceptions and experience of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) services
* help VLA make decisions about the services provided in the future
* report findings to government and stakeholders
* and meet reporting requirements under the National Partnership Agreement.

## Approach

The survey of VLA clients was conducted online and via telephone and included in-depth qualitative follow up of selected clients.

## Methodology

### Multi-method survey

A multi-method survey was conducted with 997 participants, 503 via telephone and 494 online.

The survey provided equal representation of clients from each of the VLA service types and program areas: Legal Advice, Casework, Duty Lawyer and Legal Help; Criminal, Civil and Family Law.

The survey is weighted to VLA’s client population and fieldwork was conducted between February and March 2019.

### Qualitative follow-up

Follow-up qualitative interviews with 20 clients, randomly selected to represent:

* service types and client types
* levels of satisfaction
* culturally and linguistically diverse clients, clients with disabilities and Indigenous clients.

The qualitative interviews were an extension of survey responses – clients telling their story.

## This report

This report is divided into sections covering overall satisfaction, impact on emotions and ease of access to VLA services as well as referral after service.

Process and outcome measures are presented for: legal advice, casework, duty lawyer and Legal Help services including client comments and feedback.

Qualitative findings are presented at the end of each section with conclusions presented at the end of this document.

# Overall client satisfaction

## Overall satisfaction results for 2019

Overall, seven in ten clients were satisfied with VLA’s services. Satisfaction with VLA has stabilised in 2019. Satisfaction was higher for casework services, and clients with criminal matters.

A total of 70 per cent of participants indicated they were either satisfied (32 per cent) or very satisfied (38 per cent) with VLA services. Other results were: neutral (11 per cent), dissatisfied (7 per cent), very dissatisfied (9 per cent) and don't know (2 per cent).

### Over time

* 2011 – 86%
* 2012 – 87%
* 2013 – 73%
* 2015 – 76%
* 2017 – 70%
* 2019 – 70%

### Service and client type

#### Client type

* Civil – 66%
* Criminal – 72%
* Family – 70%

#### Service type

* Casework – 75%
* Duty Lawyer – 71%
* Legal Advice – 71%
* Legal Help – 70%

# Overall satisfaction by service area

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Service area** | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2015** | **2017** | **2019** |
| Legal Advice | 85% | 84% | 70% | 72% | 66% | 71% |
| Casework | 88% | 91% | 75% | 85% | 78% | 75% |
| Duty Lawyer | 89% | 85% | 72% | 75% | 72% | 71% |
| Legal Help | N/A | 87% | 79% | 78% | 62% | 70% |

# Key standardised measures

Findings for VLA for the six key standardised measures set by the Attorney-General’s Department are:

* 84% of clients thought it was easy to contact VLA
* 82% of clients felt that their lawyer or advisor listened to them
* 77% of clients felt that their lawyer or advisor helped them understand their situation
* 86% of clients felt empowered to seek legal help in the future
* 45% of clients with personal/cultural needs felt that VLA met those needs
* 85% of clients would recommend VLA’s services to others.

# Impact on emotions

Clients were asked about their emotional state before and after VLA’s services. Differences in mean emotional ratings are broken down following.

VLA’s services had a very positive impact on clients’ wellbeing. Receiving help from VLA boosted clients’ positive emotions and reduce their negative emotions.

Before they received help, clients had high ratings of stress (mean: 7.3), depression (mean: 6.1) and anger (5.1). After receiving help, these negative emotions improved with stress falling to 4.8 (-2.5), depression to 4.3 (-1.8) and anger declining to 3.7 (-1.4).

Before receiving help from their lawyer, clients had low ratings of positive emotions – including feeling informed (4.2), feeling confident (3.9) and feeling calm (3.9). After receiving help from their lawyer these positive emotions also improved, with informed increasing to 6.5 (+2.3), confidence to 5.7 (+1.9) and calm also gaining ground to 5.5 (+1.7).

## Positive impact on emotions

Client quote: ‘I was numb. As the incident had just happened. I was in shock. I felt shell shocked. But I calmed down after I spoke to VLA. I had direction. I knew what had to be done.’

Client quote: ‘When I first called them, I was beside myself. I was completely distraught. After talking with them I felt relieved I’d be able to get some help.’

## Negative impact on emotions

Client quote: ‘They made me have twice as much stress, because I felt like there was no lifeline. To be told there was nothing they could do. They should have organised someone else to help me, but they give no alternatives.’

Client quote: ‘It was distressing a time. Talking to the duty lawyer did not make me less distressed. She was just interested in getting through it quick and not in getting the right outcome for me.’

# Access to legal aid

## First contact

Most VLA clients become aware of the service via a court or family and friends. Few experience difficulties first accessing the service. Those that do experience difficulties report issues getting through on the phone and access issues relating to eligibility.

### Source of awareness

* Court – 22%
* Friends or family – 16%
* Word of mouth – 13%
* Google/internet search/social media – 11%
* Duty Lawyer at court – 8%

### Any difficulties

* No – 84%
* Yes – 16%

### Why

* Could not get through – 27%
* Long wait times – 20%
* Eligibility issues – 18%
* Difficulties explaining situation – 12%
* Unresponsive – 8%
* Staff rude – 5%

## Assessment

Few VLA clients had difficulty completing assessment**.** Time taken and understanding what help VLA could give were the biggest issues, though only for a small number of clients.

* 83% agree or strongly agree that **they could fully explain their situation**, other responses included: neutral 6%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 1%
* 81% agree or strongly agree that they were **satisfied with the type of questions** asked, other responses included: neutral 8%, disagree 6%, strongly disagree 4%, don't know 1%
* 79% agree or strongly agree that they were **satisfied with the number of questions** they were asked, other responses included: neutral 8%, disagree 6%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 2%
* 78% agree or strongly agree that they **understood what help VLA could give**, other responses included: neutral 9%, disagree 6%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 2%
* 78% agree or strongly agree that they **satisfied with the time taken** by initial triage, other responses included: neutral 8%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 8%, don't know 1%.

# Performance measures for each service

## Legal advice

Legal Advice clients considered that the staff at Legal Advice are polite, respectful and provide clear explanations. Some clients would like more information on an ongoing basis throughout the process.

* 93% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **was polite and respectful**, other responses included: neutral 4%, disagree 2%, strongly disagree 1%, don't know 1%
* 88% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **listened to their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 7%, disagree 3%, strongly disagree 2%, don't know 1%
* 81% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **clearly explained to them what they needed to do next**, **if anything,** other responses included: neutral 10%, disagree 6%, strongly disagree 2%, don't know 1%
* 80% agreed or strongly agreed that **the advice received was helpful**, other responses included: neutral 9%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 0%
* 79% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **helped them to understand how to deal with their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 9%, disagree 7%, strongly disagree 4%, don't know 1%
* 78% agreed or strongly agreed that they **felt confident in their lawyer’s advice**, other responses included: neutral 10%, disagree 8%, strongly disagree 4%, don't know 1%
* 78% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **didn’t rush them**, other responses included: neutral 11%, disagree 7%, strongly disagree 3%, don't know 1%
* 74% agreed or strongly agreed that they were **kept informed throughout the process**, other responses included: neutral 13%, disagree 8%, strongly disagree 2%, don't know 2%
* 74% agreed or strongly agreed that the **service met their expectations**, other responses included: neutral 11%, disagree 10%, strongly disagree 4%, don't know 0%.

### Suggestions

The most common suggestions for improvement to the legal advice service were increases to funding and therefore resources. Helpfulness of advice was also recommended as an area for improvement:

* 17% suggested more funding and resources
* 13% suggested being more helpful
* 11% said no improvements were needed and they already did a good job
* 10% suggested more staff and less waiting
* 9% suggested better assessment processes.

Client quote: ‘They could be more helpful and have a service similar of that to west justice or recommend something like that instead of saying well sorry we can't help you best of luck. That's not really fair.’

Client quote: ‘Give them more funding so they can help more people.’

Client quote: ‘Victims of family violence should be allowed the service regardless of their financial situation.’

### ‘Other’ comments

Most ‘other’ comments were positive and related to the lawyers’ helpfulness and professionalism and communicativeness.

Other positive comments:

* 22% said they were satisfied with lawyer/VLA and no further improvements were needed
* 20% said they were helpful
* 14% said they were friendly, polite, approachable
* 9% said they were communicative, explained options well

Other negative comments:

* 14% said they found staff unhelpful
* 7% felt rushed
* 5% thought the service was short-staffed or not available.

Client quote: ‘He was very helpful & emailed me the information that I needed.’

Client quote: ‘I found that [NAME] was very respectful, gave good advice and had a very nice manner about him.’

Client quote: ‘Very helpful and explained everything that was going on. Good communication.’

# Casework

Most casework clients described their lawyer as being polite and being good listeners. Some Casework clients did not feel as confident in their lawyer’s advice.

* 86% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **was polite and respectful**, other responses included: neutral 6%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 3%, don't know 0%
* 83% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **listened to their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 4%, disagree 8%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 0%
* 81% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **clearly explained what was going to happen next in their case**, other responses included: neutral 6%, disagree 8%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 0%
* 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they were **kept informed throughout the process**, other responses included: neutral 6%, disagree 10%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 0%
* 78% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **didn’t rush them**, other responses included: neutral 3%, disagree 13%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 1%
* 78% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **helped them to understand how to deal with their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 5%, disagree 11%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 0%
* 78% agreed or strongly agreed that the **advice received was helpful**, other responses included: neutral 7%, disagree 11%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 0%
* 77% agreed or strongly agreed that they were **confident in their lawyer’s advice**, other responses included: neutral 5%, disagree 11%, strongly disagree 7%, don't know 1%
* 73% agreed or strongly agreed that the **service met their expectations**, other responses included: neutral 7%, disagree 9%, strongly disagree 8%, don't know 2%.

## Suggestions

More funding to build capacity was again identified as the main area for improvement to the Casework service.

* 25% suggested more funding and resources
* 17% suggested more staff and less waiting
* 14% said no improvements needed, they are already doing a good job
* 11% suggested listening to clients and considering their point of view
* 10% suggested more lawyers.

Client quote: ‘Listen to the clients a bit more, get what the clients want, instead of going in without any evidence.’

Client quote: ‘More lawyers, so that they may spend more time with their clients, so that they can actually speak for them at court and appropriately handle their case.’

Client quote: ‘Definitely the ratio of cases to lawyers. The one I saw had such a large caseload that they couldn't spend much time with me.’

## ‘Other’ comments

Most ‘other’ comments about the casework service were positive, though non-specific. Some casework clients praised the lawyers’ helpfulness and professionalism.

Other positive comments:

* 26% said they were satisfied with their lawyer/VLA and no further improvements were needed
* 16% said their lawyer was helpful
* 12% said their lawyer was professional
* 9% said their lawyer was friendly, polite, approachable

Other negative comments:

* 16% said their lawyer could not help
* 11% said the service was short staffed or they did not see a lawyer
* 7% said that their lawyer was unresponsive or did not listen.

Client quote: ‘They were very helpful when I felt overwhelmed and reassured me in the best way possible.’

Client quote: ‘She was really good with getting things organised, she did a good job.’

Client quote: ‘He knew what he was talking about and I was very happy with him.’

# Duty lawyer

Duty lawyer clients perceived their lawyers to be polite and that the advice they received was helpful. Clients also praised the service for explaining what would happen next with their case. The amount of waiting time, however, was a particular issue for these clients.

* 84% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer was **polite and respectful**, other responses included: neutral 9%, disagree 4%, strongly disagree 3%, don't know 0%
* 77% agreed or strongly agreed that the **advice received from the lawyer was helpful**, other responses included: neutral 9%, disagree 7%, strongly disagree 7%, don't know 0%
* 76% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **listened to their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 10%, disagree 7%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 1%
* 75% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **helped them understand how to deal with their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 11%, disagree 9%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 0%
* 74% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **clearly explained to them what they needed to do next**, other responses included: neutral 10%, disagree 8%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 2%
* 73% agreed or strongly agreed that they **were kept informed throughout process**, other responses included: neutral 13%, disagree 7%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 1%
* 71% agreed or strongly agreed that their lawyer **didn't rush them**, other responses included: neutral 10%, disagree 9%, strongly disagree 9%, don't know 1%
* 70% agreed or strongly agreed that the **service met their expectations**, other responses included: neutral 15%, disagree 10%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 0%
* 68% agreed or strongly agreed that they **felt confident in their lawyers' advice**, other responses included: neutral 15%, disagree 9%, strongly disagree 6%, don't know 1%
* 62% agreed or strongly agreed that they **didn't have to wait too long** to see the lawyer, other responses included: neutral 11%, disagree 17%, strongly disagree 9%, don't know 0%.

## Suggestions

Like other VLA services, duty lawyer clients perceive that the service needs more funding to build capacity.

* 23% suggested more funding and resources
* 14% suggested more lawyers
* 12% suggested listening to clients and considering their point of view
* 9% said no further improvements are needed and they already did a good job.

Client quote: ‘By making more lawyers available at court systems – there is not enough staff to client ratio.’

Client quote: ‘Without further government funding, there is little they can do.’

Client quote: ‘If they were better funded to have more duty lawyers in court.’

Client quote: ‘The service could be much improved by listening to and attending to the concerns of the individual. I was not given any support for a tribunal hearing despite me pleading for help. The outcome had awful consequences for me and my children.’

## Comments

Positive comments about the duty lawyer focused on helpfulness and general satisfaction. Some clients held an opposite point of view and did not perceive the duty lawyer to be helpful.

Other positive comments:

* 22% said their duty lawyer was helpful
* 13% said they were satisfied with their lawyer/VLA and no further improvements were needed
* 12% said their lawyer was comforting and reassuring
* 9% said their lawyer showed understanding of their situation.

Other negative comments:

* 14% said they were unhelpful
* 6% said they were short-staffed
* 4% said they were unresponsive or did not listen
* 4% said there were long waits.

Client quote: ‘They were very helpful and understanding with my situation and tried to fight for the best outcome for my personal gain.’

Client quote: ‘I never been court in my entire life. By talking to a duty lawyer, I was confident to face the court.’

Client quote: ‘The duty lawyer was helpful and assisted me through the day and made the day much less dark.’

# Legal Help

Legal Help advisors are viewed as polite and respectful. However, some clients felt that the advice that was provided was unhelpful.

* 88% said their adviser was **polite and respectful**, other responses included: neutral 9%, disagree 1%, strongly disagree 1%, don't know 1%
* 84% said their adviser **listened to their legal problem**, other responses included: neutral 8%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 2%, don't know 1%
* 78% said their adviser **didn't rush them**, other responses included: neutral 10%, disagree 9%, strongly disagree 3%, don't know 0%
* 78% said their **enquiry was answered in a reasonable time**, other responses included: neutral 11%, disagree 4%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 1%
* 72% said their adviser **clearly explained what you needed to do next**, other responses included: neutral 13%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 8%, don't know 2%
* 71% **felt confident in their adviser's ability**, other responses included: neutral 18%, disagree 5%, strongly disagree 5%, don't know 0%
* 66% said the **information received was helpful**, other responses included: neutral 13%, disagree 10%, strongly disagree 9%, don't know 3%
* 62% said the **service met their expectations**, other responses included: neutral 15%, disagree 11%, strongly disagree 11%, don't know 1%.

## Suggestions

Greater funding and resources was again the most commonly suggested improvements for Legal Help.

* 15% said no improvements are needed and they already do a good job
* 13% suggested more funding and resources
* 13% suggested being more helpful
* 13% suggested better assessment processes.

Client quote: ‘Legal Aid should not be refusing anyone the basic requirements of legal advice, especially tax payers who essentially fund their entire scheme.’

Client quote: ‘Make sure the advisers are fully informed to the best of their ability. So, if I call twice with the same problem I will receive the exact same information and legal advice.’

Client quote: ‘Consistency with advice is important and if it's beyond the scope of Legal Aid then must inform the client to seek a more comprehensive option.’

## ‘Other’ comments

‘Other’ comments about the Legal Help service were mostly positive and centred on   
general satisfaction, and the helpfulness and friendliness of advisors.

Other positive comments:

* 20% said they were satisfied with lawyer/advisor/VLA and no further improvements were needed
* 12% said they explained my options well
* 10% said they were helpful
* 10% said they were friendly

Other negative comments:

* 37% said they were unhelpful
* 7% said they did not follow up
* 5% said they were not approachable or were unfriendly
* 5% said they felt rushed.

Client quote: ‘It was made easy to understand what I needed to do next. Very helpful.’

Client quote: ‘Good service when you are stuck for information.’

Client quote: ‘The adviser was very helpful and understanding and took the time to really ask questions about my situation and listen without making judgement but pointed me in the right direction.’

# Qualitative findings

## Conduct of lawyer/advisor

Many clients were very impressed by the manner and professionalism of the lawyer or advisor.

Client quote: ‘She was really good. Willing to help. She helped me understand my legal problem. Good at communicating and helped me understand things. If it went to court she told me what would happen.’

Client quote: ‘They were very caring and assisted positively. Frequently calling or emailing and telling me and giving advice. It was very positive.’

Client quote: ‘She was able to explain everything in laymen’s terms. She really helped me. I believe if I had any other lawyer I would have gone to jail.’

However, others questioned the lawyers’ dedication and abilities.

Client quote: ‘I think she was good at communicating what she felt was important about my legal problem. But she didn’t listen to what I said. All they were interested in was let’s get out of here before lunch.’

Client quote: ‘He needs to brush up on his communication skills. He said ‘we don’t deal with this’ as soon as I mentioned traffic infringement. I had no advice from anyone. What am I supposed to do?’

Client quote: ‘she was terrible at communicating and she didn’t care about me. I made a complaint because there was no communication from her for about 3 and a half months. She didn’t send me anything.’

## Meeting expectations

The expectations of clients were met or exceeded for many clients. The services provided by VLA went above and beyond what they thought they might receive.

Client quote: ‘They have a better understanding of the court proceedings and what is going on than I do myself. They were able to advise me better on what I should be doing more so than if I did it myself. I think they did it very well.’

Client quote: ‘I expected they would be good people and that they would respect my situation. I got what I needed. I needed support in a hard time and help and that’s what they gave me.’

Not all clients felt that their expectations were met. Issues of eligibility appeared to be the main driver of unmet expectation.

Client quote: ‘They never even told me there was an on-duty lawyer. I knew nothing about the courts. There was no advice of any description given to me.’

Client quote: ‘It was what I expected. Because everyone said only poor people get Legal Aid – you don’t get good lawyers. Because they are not being paid normal fees – they don’t do the job as well. Or they don’t give legal aid clients priority over other full fee-paying clients.’

# Conclusions

## In conclusion

VLA continues to provide very high-quality services – most of the organisation's clients, some of whom have complex issues, were satisfied overall.

Staff members’ professionalism, politeness, listening skills and ability to provide clear explanations were praised

Clients’ overall satisfaction levels remain high in 2019. Rates have stabilised across all client types (Civil, Criminal and Family) and services (Legal Advice, Casework, Duty Lawyer and Legal Help).

Out of each of the key performance measures that were assessed, feeling that the service met their expectations was rated the lowest across all service types and client types. This is possibly due to be a mix of:

* ineligibility for services in relation to expectations
* lower than expected quantities or types of service
* perception of under-resourcing (non-attentive staff).

Service improvement efforts could emphasise expectation setting, explanation of eligibility criteria and enhanced referrals. Monitoring of external lawyers should also be prioritised – to ensure that the service they are providing to clients is of an expected standard. Building legal awareness among clients should continue to be a focus of VLA’s service offerings.