

Taverner Research, Level 2, 88 Foveaux  
St, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia  
t +61 2 9212 2900 f +61 2 9212 3920  
www.taverner.com.au



**TAVERNER**  
RESEARCH

Condensed Report:  
Legal Aid NSW  
Client Satisfaction Survey 2015  
June 2015

Taverner Contact: Dr Don Porritt

---

CONFIDENTIAL/DISCLAIMER NOTICE

The information contained herein is confidential and has been supplied under a confidentiality agreement. If you are not authorised to view or be in possession of this document you are hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution or duplication of this document is expressly prohibited. If you receive this document in error, please notify Taverner Research immediately on +61 2 9212 2900.



## Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CONDENSED REPORT .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Outcomes and Satisfaction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Other Results.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. Pathways to the service .....	11
2.2. Accessibility and barriers.....	11
2.3. Application for grant of legal aid.....	12
2.4. Legal Aid NSW waiting times .....	13
2.5. Representation and assistance .....	13
2.6. Information from Legal Aid NSW.....	14
2.7. Referrals from Legal Aid NSW .....	14
2.8. Internet use .....	15
<b>3. Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. Conclusions.....	16
3.2. Recommendations.....	16

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

As part of a series of client experience and satisfaction studies, 615 consenting clients who had received legal advice services from a solicitor at a Legal Aid NSW office, with or without additional minor legal assistance being provided, completed a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) averaging between 15 and 16 minutes.

Legal Aid NSW recruited a total of 1,220 clients to participate in the survey. An oversample was obtained to ensure Taverner Research could successfully contact and interview 600+ clients as part of the survey. The area of law, namely, Civil Law, Criminal Law, and Family Law was also identified for each advice allowing client satisfaction to be assessed for each area. 1,070 of the 1,220 clients who gave written consent to their contact details being provided to Taverner Research were called, with 615 clients successfully contacted and interviewed.

Recruitment began on 23rd February 2015 and 615 interviews were completed by 21st April 2015. This report is based on that sample. The sample included 24 clients who indicated they would need the assistance of an interpreter to complete the survey. Almost no clients indicated that they would need assistance due to a disability, and none required a face to face interview although 15% indicated in the interview that they had special needs due to a disability.

87% of the sample were satisfied (rating 6-10 on a zero to 10 scale) with the service provided by clerical staff with 6% dissatisfied (ratings of 0-4).

87% were satisfied with the service provided by the solicitor (rating 6-10 on a zero to 10 scale) with 6% dissatisfied (ratings of 0-4).

54% considered the service from their solicitor was better than expected while 15% considered the service was worse than expected.

Given the similarity of the results in 2015 to those obtained in 2013, the conclusions and recommendations are similar. Where possible, actions taken since the 2013 survey are taken into account in formulating recommendations. It was concluded from the detailed results that:

- Satisfaction with the service is high.
- Satisfaction with services provided the clerical staff appeared slightly lower than in the 2013 survey (87% compared to 95%), but both were high and the apparent fall was within the range that could occur by chance.
- Satisfaction with the services provided by the solicitors remained high, and was effectively unchanged from 2013.

- The main causes for dissatisfaction with the service from solicitors were:
  - Not being shown respect or sensitivity.
  - Feeling the solicitor did not listen effectively.
  - Not being given all the services sought.
  - Not having questions answered.

It must be kept in mind here that we have only the client's perspective on these cases. Given a fuller picture including the perspective of the solicitor involved, it might have been found that some clients had expectations that were unable to be met.

Clients with special needs were generally having those needs met.

Overall results in the 2015 survey were generally as good as or better than achieved in the 2011 and not significantly below those achieved in 2013 surveys.

In 2011 it was recommended that steps be taken to ensure clients with short time lines before a court or tribunal deadline received advice in time to be helpful, if at all possible. This was reinforced in 2013. The 13% of clients surveyed in 2015 who felt they had not received advice in time to meet critical deadlines accounted for 47% of those dissatisfied with service from the solicitor, and half the very small number (5/12) who were dissatisfied with the service from clerical staff. Keeping the number not seen in time as low as possible continues to be a priority issue.

It is recommended that:

- Legal Aid NSW sustain the resources currently devoted to maintaining the high level of staff commitment, concern for client needs and respectful treatment of clients revealed by the survey results, and to keeping waiting times for service as short as possible.
- Further improvement in outcomes might be achieved by continued specific attention to a range of specific issues identified that arise for client sub-groups. In particular, continued efforts to ensure so far as possible that appointments fit within the client's time frame and that other specific needs are identified and met will sustain and might improve the high level of satisfaction even further.
- To further improve performance on some aspects, consideration should be given to developing, testing and implementing formal protocols to assist staff in deciding how to provide the assistance needed by particular client sub-groups.

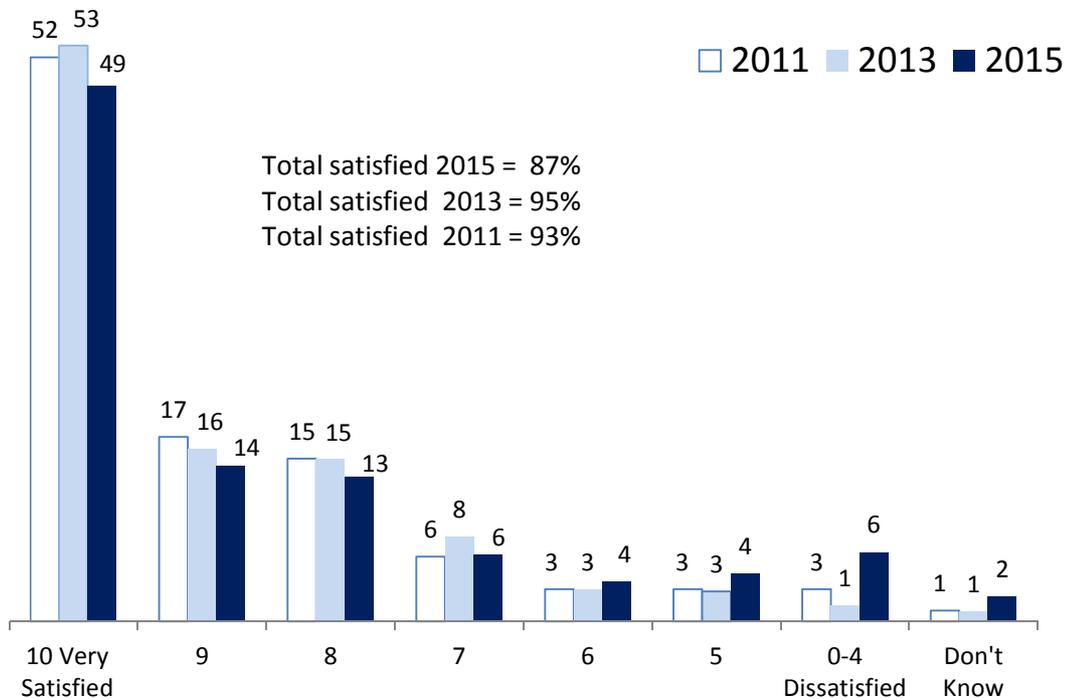
More detailed suggestions are made at the end of this report.

# CONDENSED REPORT

As part of a series of client satisfaction surveys, Legal Aid NSW commissioned Taverner Research to interview clients who had received a legal advice service (with or without minor assistance) about their experience of the service. This section of the report summarises the results, conclusions and implications.

## 1. Outcomes and Satisfaction

### Satisfaction with clerical staff service (Q14, %)



In 2015:

- 87%<sup>1</sup> were satisfied (rating 6-10 on a zero to 10 scale) with the service provided by clerical staff.
- 49% were very satisfied (rating 10).
- 6% were dissatisfied (0-4).
- 6% gave other replies including ratings of 5 (4%) or being unable to give a rating (2%).
- The mean rating was 9.0.

There were no significant changes from the results obtained in 2011 or 2013.

<sup>1</sup> The total satisfied (87%) differs from the totals of the individual values due to rounding.

The twelve who were dissatisfied in 2015 gave as reasons that client service was poor, the staff were felt to be unhelpful, that service was not quick or efficient, that they were given information that was not good or was incorrect, or that staff did not answer questions asked.

Ratings of the five specific aspects of the service given by clerical staff revealed very high satisfaction (92% to 95% for those who felt able to give a rating). For two items, a substantial proportion felt that item did not apply to them or said they did not know how satisfied they were: 20% for how much staff helped them understand the type of services Legal Aid NSW could provide, and 56% for ratings of the sensitivity and awareness staff showed to the client's culture and background.

There were no significant differences in specific ratings of clerical staff performance between those attending for different law types.

In 2015:

- 87%<sup>2</sup> were satisfied with the service provided by the solicitor (rating 6-10 on a zero to 10 scale).
- 49% were very satisfied (rating 10).
- 6% were dissatisfied (rating 0-4.)
- 6% gave other replies including ratings of 5 (4%) or being unable to give a rating (2%).
- The mean rating was 8.5.

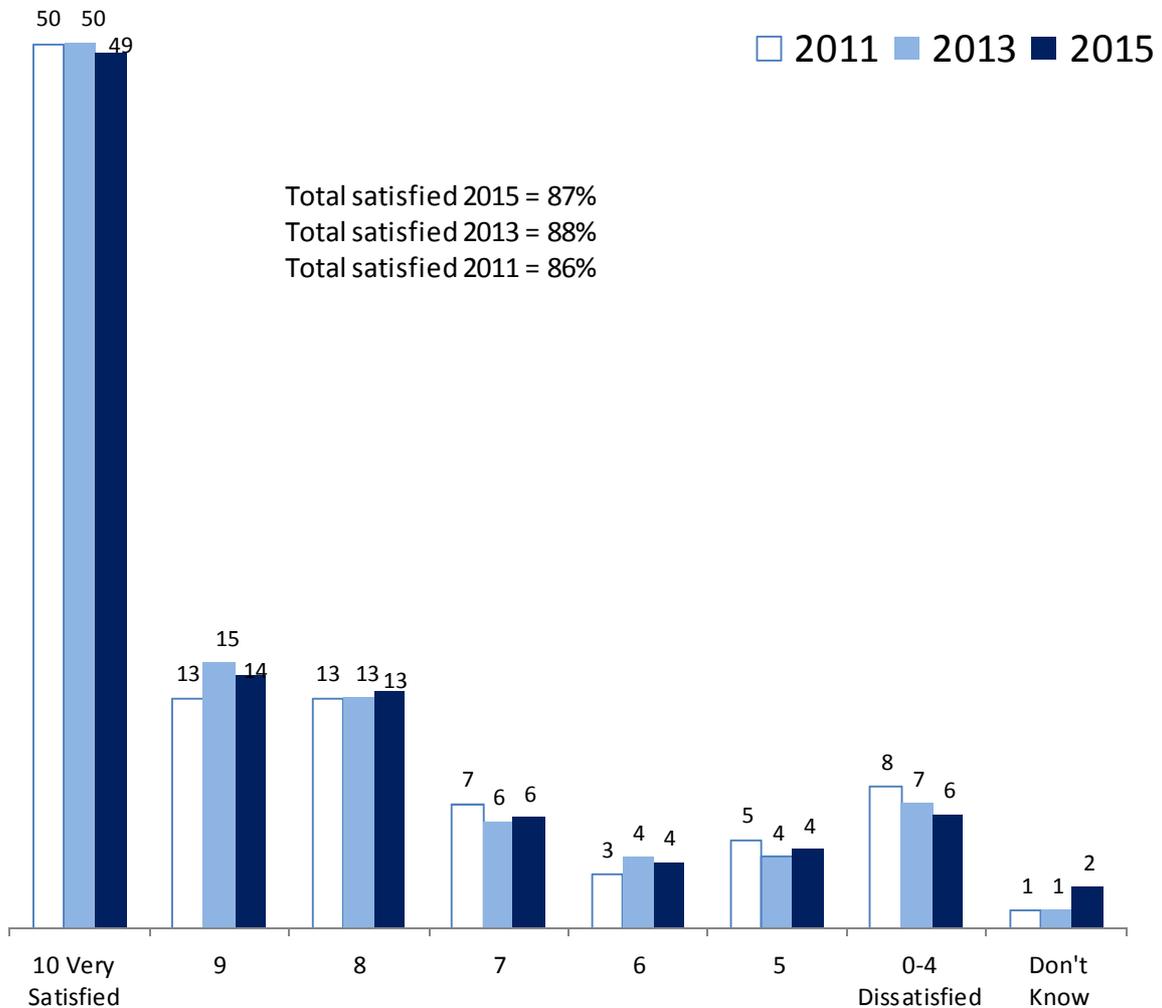
There were no significant changes overall from the results obtained in 2011 or 2013.

The more common reasons for dissatisfaction among the 39 who were dissatisfied in 2015 were feeling the solicitor did not treat the client with respect (46%), or did not listen (41%). Less common reasons were that the solicitor did not give enough assistance to understand their legal problem (28%), did not answer questions asked (23%), gave incorrect advice or inaccurate information (21%), was rushed or the office appeared understaffed (18%), and that the solicitor did not help with special needs (10%). Two dissatisfied clients (5%) reported the solicitor did not act as promised and one dissatisfied client (3%) mentioned that they were refused service because of a conflict of interest.

---

<sup>2</sup> The total satisfied (87%) differs from the totals of the individual values due to rounding.

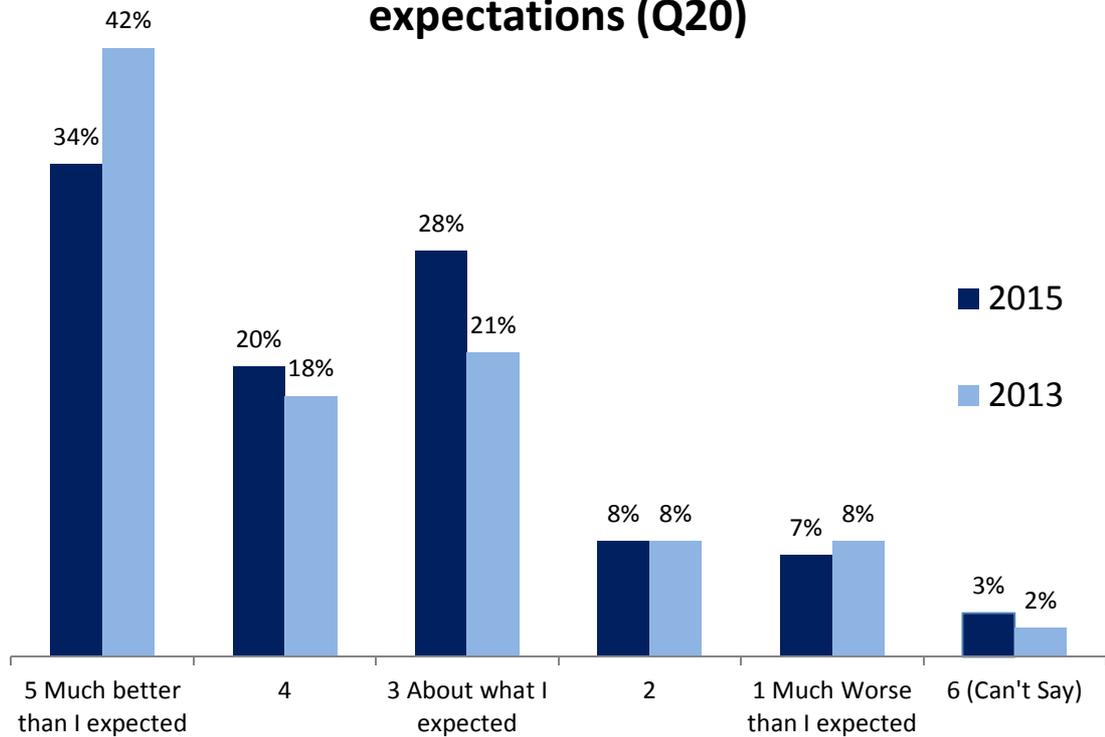
## Satisfaction with solicitor's service (Q18, %)



Ratings of most of the specific aspects of the service provided by the solicitor showed quite similar distributions to overall satisfaction. The only aspect that had a mean rating below 8.6 was the solicitor's ability to help clients who had special needs due to disability (average rating 8.2, but this had increased from 7.8 in 2013). Even for this aspect, among the 9% who gave a rating on this item (with 91% saying it was not applicable to them or that they could not give a rating) only 4% were actually dissatisfied.

When asked to assess how well the service from the solicitor met their expectations, 54% considered the service better than expected (down from 60% in 2013) and 15% considered the service was worse than expected (very close to the 16% in 2013).

## How well solicitor's service met client expectations (Q20)



The more common reasons for saying the service was worse than expected included the solicitor not listening to or understanding or appearing unhelpful or uninterested (6% of the total sample, 30% of those who felt the service was worse than expected); that the answer given appeared sound but was not what had been hoped for or was disappointing (3% of the total sample, 15% of those who felt the service was worse than expected); feeling rushed (3% of the total sample, 14% of those who felt the service was worse than expected); wanting more help or other types of help (3% of the total sample, 12% of those who felt the service was worse than expected); and being told they were not eligible for the assistance they sought (3% of the total sample, 12% of those who felt the service was worse than expected). Other replies were given by no more than 7% of those who felt the service was worse than expected.

For the 54% who were pleasantly surprised (i.e. felt the service was better than expected), the most common reasons given were that the solicitor explained options or told the client what to do (18% of the total sample, and 22% of those who found the service better than expected); was easy to understand (12% of the total sample, 17% of those who were pleasantly surprised); gave practical assistance or a helpful referral (11% and 16%); listened and/or understood and/or was interested (9% and 22%); treated the client well (including treated with respect, that the solicitor cared about them, or did not judge them – 8%

and 11%); provided what was wanted (13% and 9%); or that the client had not expected much and the service was better than expected in unstated ways (6% and 10%). Other reasons were given by under 10% of those who found the service better than expected.

Three reasons were commonly given by those who found the service the same as they had expected - that they got what they had wanted (27%), had options explained or told what they could do (20%) and that the advice confirmed their own plans or ideas (10%).

Most (68%) reported that the interview improved their understanding of their legal problem and situation and 60% felt more confident in dealing with the problem. Half (50%) reported it reduced their level of stress or anxiety (although 13% did say it made this worse). Other areas were reported to be improved by 21-35%. Only the level of stress or anxiety and the client's confidence in dealing with the problem were reported as being made worse by more than 10% (both 13%).

Most (96%) would recommend the service to another person.

The overwhelming reason for not recommending the service among the 4% that would not do so was that they were dissatisfied with the service (52%), finding it overall to be poor, insufficient or ineffective; others reported that the service could not help the client (28%) or recommended it be used only as a last resort without further explanation (14%). This confirmed other indications that for some, the outcome was more important than the process in determining their attitude to the service.

## 2. Other Results

### 2.1. Pathways to the service

Legal Aid NSW was usually found directly by the client:

- 79% went to Legal Aid NSW without being referred including:
  - 68% who went directly to Legal Aid NSW without consulting any other source of help.
  - Another 11% consulted another source of help but were not referred to Legal Aid NSW by that source.
- 13% were referred without any explanation of the services offered.
- 8% were referred with some explanation of the services offered.

A wide variety of sources were consulted before approaching the Legal Aid NSW service by the 32% who said they had consulted other sources before contacting Legal Aid NSW. The more common sources consulted about the legal issue before approaching Legal Aid NSW were (as a percentage of the total sample, n=615):

Law Society	11%
Government department	8%
LawAccess NSW	6%
Community Legal Centre	3%
Court or tribunal	2%
Other community organisations	2%
Internet	2%
Dispute resolution/mediation service	2%

More details of these sources are provided in the full report. Overall, the 32% who had consulted elsewhere before contacting Legal Aid NSW was slightly less than the 38% who had done so in 2013, and both these were significantly less than the 51% who had done so in 2011. It appears that the proportion of clients going directly to Legal Aid NSW without seeking help elsewhere first is increasing.

Some (14% in 2015, 19% in 2013) had consulted more than one source.

### 2.2. Accessibility and barriers

Legal Aid NSW is committed to ensuring that the same quality of service is provided to all clients irrespective of their ability. The interview thus asked all respondents about perceived barriers to access, disability and whether this affected the service received, and other possible indicators of disadvantage (ethnic background, preferred language, and concerns about personal safety).

Only 8% reported they had problems gaining access to the service, and some of these were talking about difficulties in obtaining the service they had sought, rather than barriers to making contact and attending. The time spent waiting for an appointment and operating hours that

clients fund unsuitable were the most common specific difficulties but each was mentioned by under 3% of the total sample.

While 16% reported they had been frightened as a result of threatened or actual violence in a relationship, only 9% reported they were worried about their safety at home when they attended their Legal Aid NSW advice session; in total 19% were either worried about their safety at home or about threatened or actual violence in a relationship, or both.

8% reported they were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. This group showed no notable or significant differences in satisfaction with the service from clerical staff, the service from the solicitor (if anything being more satisfied with these than others) or with the cultural sensitivity shown them by the solicitor.

27% reported they spoke a language other than English at home. While these respondents were less likely to be very satisfied with the service from clerical staff and the solicitor and with the solicitor's cultural sensitivity, they were no more likely to be dissatisfied with any of these.

4% of those interviewed (15% of those who spoke a language other than English at home) were interviewed by a bi-lingual interviewer fluent in their preferred language.

15% reported they had special needs due to a disability. Most of these 93 clients reported either a physical (52% of the 93) or psychiatric (32%) disability; few reported any other disability as shown below:

Type of disability reported	n=93
Physical disability	52%
Psychiatric disorder	32%
Intellectual disability	24%
Hearing	4%
Visual	2%
Other	1%

One in four of the 93 (26%, a total of 24 respondents) reported they had experienced some difficulty with Legal Aid NSW services as a result of their disability.

### 2.3. Application for grant of legal aid

66% had not applied for a grant of legal aid or had not yet made up their mind whether to do so; 17% had already applied, and 17% intended to do so.

26% of the 107 who had already applied for a grant of legal aid reported they did get the help they needed in filling the application.

68% reported that they did not need help.

1% reported they did not receive help that they needed.

32% of the 28 who said they had received help said this came from an unspecified source within Legal Aid NSW; 21% said it came from the solicitor and 7% from reception staff; 21% reported that they obtained help from a friend (21%) or other sources (18%).

Of the 404 who had not applied for a grant of legal aid and did not intend to do so, 52% said they only sought advice or did not need a grant, 14% said this was because they had been advised by the Legal Aid NSW solicitor that an application would not be successful, 7% were not aware that they might be eligible, 6% said that the Legal Aid NSW service did not have the expertise or for other reasons could not assist with their issue, and other reasons were each given by fewer than 5%. Less than 2% said it was because they found the Legal Aid NSW service poor or left too confused to pursue the matter. Under 1% did not have time to obtain aid before their hearing and under 1% were refused service because of a conflict of interest.

#### 2.4. Legal Aid NSW waiting times

Time spent waiting for an appointment varied widely but most (87%) were seen within two weeks 61% in the same week:

Same day	22%
Same week	38%
1-2 weeks	26%
2-3 weeks	8%
A month or more	3%
Could not say	2%

87% of clients said "Yes" but 13% said "No" when asked: "Did you get advice in the time frame that you needed it, such as before a court deadline?"

Those who said they did not obtain service in time were significantly less satisfied with service from the solicitor (mean 6.7, 19% very satisfied, 19% dissatisfied) than those who did obtain service in time (mean 8.8, 55% very satisfied, 5% dissatisfied); this could have accounted for up to 36% of those dissatisfied with the service from the solicitor and five of the twelve clients who were dissatisfied with clerical staff performance.

#### 2.5. Representation and assistance

9% of the sample reported they had represented themselves in court or at a tribunal; most of these clients had apparently already had at least a first hearing by the time they were contacted to complete the survey.

Excluding those who had not yet been to court (19%) or did not expect they would go to a hearing (7%), 12% had represented themselves.

48% of those who either had represented themselves or were expecting to have a hearing (n=170) reported they had received assistance in representing themselves.

2% reported they had needed assistance that they did not receive, while 27% reported they did not need any assistance.

The types of assistance reported were:

General advice/information only	28%
Given something to use in court	6%
Letter written for client to send	4%
Letter sent on behalf of client	2%
Made phone call on client's behalf	3%
Represented in court	1%
Some other action	5%

Of those given assistance, 74% considered it helpful, with 22% believing it was too soon to say and 5% saying it was unhelpful.

More detail about how the assistance failed to help is given in the main report.

## 2.6. Information from Legal Aid NSW

26% received or picked up a Legal Aid NSW publication.

14% were referred to the Legal Aid NSW website for information.

67% received neither a Legal Aid NSW publication nor information from the Legal Aid NSW website.

## 2.7. Referrals from Legal Aid NSW

36% reported they were referred to other services by Legal Aid NSW.

The more common services reported by the 222 clients who were referred were:

Law Society or lawyers in private practice	29%
Government departments	16%
Community organisations	15%
Dispute resolution/mediation	11%
Court/tribunal	10%
Another Legal Aid NSW office	7%
Pro bono solicitor	6%
Community Legal Centre	5%
Police	2%
LawAccess NSW	2%
Police	2%

Of those referred to other services by Legal Aid NSW, 10% reported that someone at Legal Aid NSW made contact with the service to explain their situation or ask for assistance on their behalf.

Another 41% of the 222 referred clients reported they had themselves already made contact with a service they were referred to; 29% reported that they intended to do so; 14% said they did not intend to make contact and 6% were unsure whether they would do so.

## 2.8. Internet use

74% reported they had access to the internet at home, with another 10% having access away from home (84% having some internet access).

22% of those with internet access had used the Legal Aid NSW website to obtain information before making contact with Legal Aid NSW.

While most of the 135 who had used the site were satisfied with the ease of use (67%) and the usefulness of the information (73%), these levels could be higher. Around one out of ten were dissatisfied with the information found (10%) and slightly more with the ease of finding information (14%).

## 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 3.1. Conclusions

- Satisfaction with the service remains high for both clerical staff and solicitors.
- The main causes for dissatisfaction appear to be the limitations on the services that can be provided by Legal Aid NSW to clients.
- Clients with special needs are generally having those needs met, but there is room for improvement in this area.
- Unrealistic expectations about the level of assistance that can be provided before legal aid is granted or about what can be provided if aid is not granted seem to contribute to the levels of dissatisfaction reported.
- The specific sub-groups that account for most of those who were dissatisfied appear to be those who:
  - received a service after a hearing date or other critical deadline.
  - were dissatisfied with the actual response of the solicitor to the issue they sought advice about due to communication or relationship breakdowns, unmet expectations, perceived inaccuracy in facts the solicitor relied on or mistakes about the information provided.
  - wanted help in representing themselves that was not provided.

### 3.2. Recommendations

1. Legal Aid NSW should sustain the resources currently devoted to maintaining the high level of staff commitment, concern for client needs and respectful treatment of clients revealed by the survey results.
2. Additional improvement in outcomes might be achieved by focussing further specific attention on:
  - a. Identifying critical deadlines and ensuring appointments are scheduled if possible before these dates.  
Rationale: Missing critical dates was a major contributor to client dissatisfaction
  - b. Assisting clients to understand any guidelines or policies that might limit the range of assistance that can be given to clients seeking legal aid, such as the allocation of time for advice sessions.  
Rationale: Disappointment that desired services could not be provided was a major contributor to dissatisfaction and might be reduced by even better communication to prospective clients of what Legal Aid NSW can and cannot provide. While changes have been made to a key publication on the website to make limitations clearer, it

appears that some clients continue to not be aware of possible limits to the services provided and find out about these only during the advice sessions, leading to disappointment and dissatisfaction.

- c. Ensuring adequate resources are allocated for sessions with heavy bookings for the number of solicitors available. Rationale: This might reduce the time spent waiting to see the solicitor at the office attended and reduce the time pressures that can result in clients feeling rushed that contributes to some instances of client dissatisfaction. Extension of the Head Office "backup solicitor" system for Civil Law cases might assist with this issue.
- d. Continuing to meet the special requirements of those with physical, intellectual and psychiatric disabilities where these can be identified, with particular attention to establishing what assistance these clients need to obtain equitable service from Legal Aid NSW. Rationale: A few instances of dissatisfaction were due to particular needs of clients with a disability not being identified and met.
- e. Having reception staff check with clients with physical disability if they are in discomfort and then being empowered to move clients in physical discomfort ahead in the queue and establish protocols to minimise adverse reactions from other clients who then have to wait longer. Rationale: This was a correctable source of dissatisfaction for some clients with a physical disability.
- f. Remind reception staff and solicitors to continue being alert to the need for assistance in filling out forms for clients with an intellectual disability, or for seeing such clients with a support person who can assist the client to understand the advice being given. Rationale: This was a correctable source of dissatisfaction for some clients with an intellectual disability.
- g. Checking with any client who mentions personal safety concerns that the response given was helpful, and establishing protocols for following through until the client reports that they have received appropriate help or do not require any further assistance. Rationale: Not all clients made staff aware of their concerns about physical safety, and some that did so reported the response received was not helpful. Further systematic effort to identify all clients with such concerns and ensure that the situation is followed through until a satisfactory outcome is achieved could correct a few instances of client dissatisfaction. By setting up protocols,

staff can be assisted to know what they can and should do to deal with these challenging situations.

- h. More actively probing (where appropriate) for client concerns about personal safety; establish clear protocols for dealing with such concerns, including follow up with clients of the outcomes and specification of further action to be taken if the client felt they had not been helped.
- i. Identifying cases where it appears that the client and the allocated solicitor are not communicating effectively and develop avenues to address these concerns to ensure enhanced client service; this might include protocols requiring solicitors to directly ask clients whether they believe their issue and concerns have been listened to, understood and responded to appropriately, or asking all clients to complete a short questionnaire at the end of an advice session that asks them to rate the session on these attributes; this would require resources to review the replies and take follow up action if the responses indicate there was a problem.
- j. Checking eligibility for and need for a grant of legal aid with any client where representation appears to be required.

Rationale: Although most clients who did not ask about eligibility appeared to have had good grounds for not doing so, it would be appropriate if eligibility were checked during the advice interview for those cases where representation might be needed, even if the client does not raise the issue.

**This page intentionally left blank.**

Taverner Research, Level 2, 88 Foveaux  
St, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia  
† +61 2 9212 2900 f +61 2 9212 3920  
[www.taverner.com.au](http://www.taverner.com.au)



**TAVERNER**  
RESEARCH