



The Pilot Victorian Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (V-LULU) Survey — Research Brief

Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER

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Overview

The pilot V-LULU survey explores how the Victorian public interact with law, experience legal issues and use legal services.¹ It is a legal needs survey, but not a typical one. It reimagines how we capture people's efforts to address everyday legal issues, broadens the scope of issues considered, and builds on advanced approaches to measuring legal capability. It reveals significant opportunities to better tailor services to needs, improve accessibility, and resolve more problems justly – with legal regulation playing a pivotal role in this shared challenge.

The expanded picture

Legal problems are ubiquitous, interlink with broader life challenges, and create lasting impacts across all demographics. These issues often centre on basic social welfare needs around housing, employment, and relationships, creating complex and persistent webs of disadvantage. Against this backdrop, discrimination is endemic – stemming from more than two in five legal problems – adding layers of complexity to already difficult situations.

A tale of two systems

But not all issues are problematic, and the V-LULU survey captures the full spectrum from routine transactions to complex disputes, revealing two distinct worlds:

Non-contentious issues,² are shorter, better defined, and handled confidently using familiar services (predominantly private solicitors), with outcomes typically matching expectations. Contentious issues are less often recognised as 'legal', interact with a fragmented system, and result in less satisfaction with services and less success.

The comparison is stark: for the non-contentious, legal services function like a car service – predictable and typically satisfactory – while contentious issues resemble car crashes – complex, traumatic, with uncertain outcomes.

The silent revolution

Technological transformation has fundamentally changed how legal problems are addressed and dramatically expanded legal services' reach.

Digital by default

The Internet has become the gateway to legal help – 59% of respondents research services online for contentious issues with only 11% obtaining help solely offline. But a generational divide persists, with older Victorians less likely to use online services and less adept at combining online and offline resources.

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The longer arm of the law

Legal services, broadly defined, now provide help for half of all contentious issues – far exceeding previous estimates. In part this stems from the V-LULU's efforts to capture all levels and forms of interaction with services. However, it also reflects a technology-enabled services expansion at the periphery of traditional practice, particularly among issues requiring no in-person communication.

Meeting the unmet

Despite expanded service provision, unmet legal need remains routine. 39% seeking independent help failed to obtain the level sought, and even among those who received their sought level of help, 28% still didn't get everything they needed.

Communication Defines Experience

Legal services are credence goods, with members of the public poorly placed to evaluate many aspects of service delivery, even after issues conclude. This makes communication critical in creating transparency and building trust. Yet fewer than 30% of contentious issue users recalled receiving basic information about cost, duration, or outcomes. And quality of communication matters even more, with 96% satisfied with services where there was clear information, just 25% where communication was poor, and 52% with no communication.

Capability determines justice

We knew that legal capability related to your ability to extract value from advice³ – the V-LULU tells us much more about the mechanism. Legal capability shapes what help people seek, what they received, and crucially the gap between the two. Those with lower capability face greater mismatches and greater challenges effectively navigating services, demonstrating why tailoring services to individual capability is essential.

Transforming justice

The opportunity exists to better meet diverse needs and close the gap between the justice system and actual justice. This means leveraging technological innovations and expanded service reach, responding to dispute (and life) complexity, and designing for varying levels of legal capability. It involves promoting awareness of the nature and availability of services, addressing information asymmetry, bridging communication gaps, and encouraging legal capability-sensitive justice where provision is tailored to people's knowledge, skills, and attributes.

Technology offers unprecedented potential to customise services but must enhance equality and accessibility rather than further embed advantage. Regulation has a critical role, in encouraging service provision that can better meet needs, removing barriers to innovation (real or perceived) while maintaining essential protections.

Critically, data shows both why everyday legal problems matter and how they might be addressed more effectively. To make progress we also need more high-quality data – to both quantify impact at the micro, and monitor progress at the macro level. New and existing initiatives require rigorous testing, measured outcomes, broad dissemination, and continuous refinement. This is the bridge from isolated excellence to systemic transformation.

Too much need remains unmet, but the opportunity to move towards a system that truly delivers justice for all Victorians has never been greater.

- 1 For the full report, see Pleasence, P. and Balmer, N.J. (2025). *Report of the Pilot Victorian Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (V-LULU) Survey*. Melbourne: Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner. For a detailed overview of key insights, themes and lessons, see Pleasence, P., Balmer, N.J., & Nokes, K. (2025). *New Vision for a New Future: The Pilot Victorian Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (V-LULU) Survey*. Melbourne: Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner.
- 2 Most commonly associated with family issues concerning wills, probate and power of attorney, or housing issues concerning conveyancing, mortgages and planning.
- 3 Balmer, N.J., Pleasence, P., McDonald, H.M. & Sandefur, R.L. (2024). *The Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) Volume 3: A New Perspective on Legal Need and Legal Capability*. Victoria Law Foundation.