



## Media release

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# LAW Survey shows access to justice for disadvantaged people must remain a priority

Launched today, the LAW Survey (Legal Australia-Wide Survey) published by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW is the largest ever survey of legal need conducted anywhere in the world. It shows that legal problems are widespread, and that many disadvantaged people are particularly vulnerable to multiple and substantial legal problems, making access to justice a cornerstone issue for the entire community.

Based on 20,716 interviews on a representative sample of the Australian population, the LAW Survey shows 50% of Australians 15 years or over (an estimated 8,513,000 people) experienced at least one legal problem over a 12-month period, including 22% (an estimated 3,736,000 people) who experienced three or more legal problems.

Key findings from the survey indicate that people with a disability and single parents were twice as likely to experience legal problems. The unemployed and people living in disadvantaged housing also had heightened vulnerability. Indigenous people were more likely to experience multiple legal problems including government, health and rights related problems.

The most common legal problems reported were consumer (21% of respondents), crime (14%), housing (12%) and government (11%) problems.

Many respondents reported adverse consequences as a result of their legal problems—financial strain was associated with 29% of problems, stress-related illness with 20%, physical ill health with 19%, relationship breakdown with 10% and having to move home with 5%. Legal problems related to family issues had the most adverse consequences.

While legal problems were widespread, there is no 'rush to law'—respondents sought advice for 51% of legal problems, with a legal professional being used for only 16% of legal problems. Legal problems were only rarely finalised via formal legal proceedings in a court or tribunal (3%) or via formal dispute resolution or complaint-handling processes (3%).

The LAW Survey showed that some respondents who did nothing about their legal problems (sometimes ignoring serious legal problems) had unmet legal need and achieved poor outcomes.

The final chapter of the LAW Survey proposes a range of integrated strategies to achieve justice for all people and expresses the hope that the approach proposed will be a key input to legal assistance policy and planning.

A copy of the report can be downloaded from [www.lawfoundation.net.au](http://www.lawfoundation.net.au)

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