



Media release

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Landmark survey shows widespread legal need in New South Wales

To be launched today by NSW Attorney General, The Hon. Greg Smith SC, a landmark survey by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW shows that legal problems are widespread. With 4,113 respondents in NSW, the **Legal Australia-Wide Survey** estimates that half the NSW population aged 15 years or over—2.8 million people—experience at least one legal problem in any year, including 1.3 million experiencing three or more legal problems.

The most common legal problems were consumer (21% of respondents), crime (14%), housing (13%) and government (11%) problems.

Legal problems often had considerable adverse impacts on people's lives, including financial strain (29%), stress-related illness (21%), physical ill health (20%), relationship breakdown (10%) and having to move home (6%). These findings underscore the importance of early intervention to address legal needs before they escalate into bigger problems.

Despite the volume and impact of legal problems, there was no 'rush to law'. Respondents sought advice for only half of all legal problems and took no action whatsoever to try to resolve 19% of problems.

A legal professional was consulted for only 16% of legal problems. Matters were rarely finalised in formal legal proceedings. Reasons for doing nothing were often related to stress (30%), cost (28%) or not knowing what to do (21%). The survey found that those who do nothing about their legal problems tend to achieve poorer outcomes.

Consistent with the national findings, the NSW findings showed that some of the most disadvantaged groups in the community often fare worst. People with a disability and single parents in NSW were twice as likely to experience legal problems. The unemployed, people living in disadvantaged housing and people in remote or regional areas also had increased vulnerability. Furthermore, those with low education levels or a non-English main language were more likely to ignore their legal problems.

Thus, the survey demonstrates that access to justice for disadvantaged people must remain a priority. The research concludes that no single strategy will successfully achieve justice for all people. Rather, it proposes a range of integrated strategies to achieve justice throughout the community and expresses the hope that the approach proposed will be a key input to legal assistance policy and planning.

To download the report visit www.lawfoundation.net.au

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