



# Disadvantage and responses to legal problems in remote Australia

## A working paper

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**Abstract:** *New analyses from the Legal Australia-Wide (LAW) Survey confirm that high levels of disadvantage are associated with a lower likelihood of taking action and seeking professional advice in response to legal problems, independently of the effects of remoteness. Similarly, unawareness of free legal services was associated with lower levels of taking action and consulting legal professionals. Notably, the results also showed that living in more remote areas reduced the likelihood of taking action and seeking professional advice for certain groups of people, over and above disadvantage. In particular, Indigenous respondents were less likely to take action and use legal professionals if they lived in more remote areas. In addition, the lower level of using legal advisers observed for respondents who were unaware of free legal services became even more pronounced if they lived in more remote areas. These present findings raise questions about the coverage of legal services in more remote areas, particularly legal services that are culturally appropriate for Indigenous people.*

This paper presents **preliminary findings from new analyses** of the Legal Australia-Wide (LAW) Survey undertaken by the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales. The LAW Survey provides a comprehensive assessment of a broad range of legal needs on a representative sample of the population. With 20,716 respondents across Australia, including over 2000 in each state/territory, the LAW Survey covered 129 different types of civil, criminal and family law problems. It examined the nature of legal problems, the pathways to their resolution and the demographic groups that struggle with the weight of their legal problems. The first major findings for the whole of Australia were published as *Legal Australia-Wide Survey: Legal need in Australia* (2012) and authored by Christine Coumarelos, Deborah Macourt, Julie People, Hugh M. McDonald, Zhigang Wei, Reiny Iriana and Stephanie Ramsey. Reports on each state/territory were published in the same year. To download the reports visit [www.lawfoundation.net.au/publications](http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/publications)

## Introduction

Remote areas in Australia tend to be among the most disadvantaged (ABS 2008; Reid & Malcolmson 2008). Lack of nearby in-person services, low levels of vehicle ownership and public transport access, and the cost of transport act as barriers to obtaining immediate legal assistance (Cohl & Thomson 2008; Coverdale 2011; Forell, Cain & Gray 2010; Rosier & McDonald 2011). These barriers can be compounded by multiple aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage. Even without geographical barriers, some disadvantaged groups have been found to be less likely to seek advice in response to their legal problems (Currie 2007; Pleasence, Buck, Balmer, O'Grady, Genn & Smith 2004; Pleasence 2006).<sup>i</sup>

Initial findings from the Legal Australia-Wide (LAW) Survey provided strong evidence that various disadvantaged groups are less likely to take any action to resolve their legal problems and to seek advice from professionals when they did take action (Coumarelos, Macourt, People, McDonald, Wei, Iriana & Ramsey 2012). The Coumarelos et al. (2012) findings provided less evidence of a relationship between remoteness and

the strategies used in response to legal problems. Based on regression analyses, remoteness was not significantly related to whether any action was taken or whether advice was sought from any type of professional. However, it is notable that when the use of legal professionals was specifically examined, there was significantly lower use of legal advisers in the two jurisdictions that have the most sizeable population proportions living in remote areas – the Northern Territory and Western Australia.<sup>ii</sup>

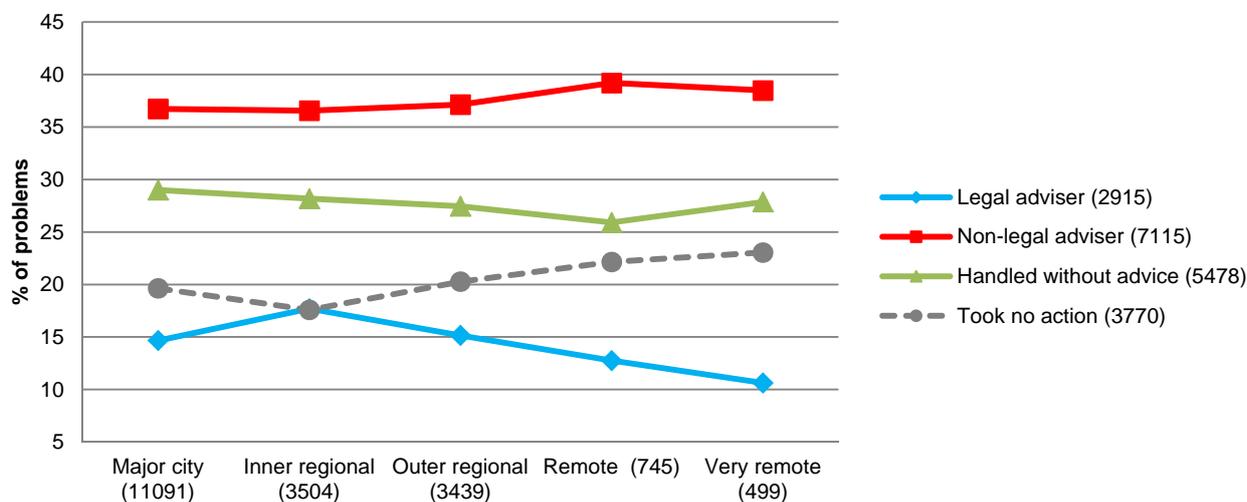
### New findings from the LAW Survey

This short paper uses the LAW Survey data to further explore the strategies people use in response to legal problems in different geographical areas. It builds on the work of Coumarelos et al. (2012) by using more detailed categorisations of remoteness and strategy. The present study examines the remoteness of residential area according to five categories: ‘major city’, ‘inner regional’, ‘outer regional’, ‘remote’ and ‘very remote’.<sup>iii</sup> The paper examines four types of strategy in response to legal problems: ‘legal adviser’ or seeking formal advice from a legal professional, ‘non-legal adviser’ or seeking formal advice from a non-legal professional,

‘handling without advice’ from a professional and ‘taking no action’.<sup>iv</sup>

First, the present paper describes the overall relationship between remoteness and strategy using the new categorisations. However, the strategies people use in response to their legal problems depend on their sociodemographic characteristics and the nature of the legal problems they experience (e.g. Coumarelos et al. 2012; Pleasence 2006). Furthermore, census data demonstrate that there are considerable differences in sociodemographic profiles by remoteness, such as, for example, a relatively higher concentration of disadvantage and a higher proportion of Indigenous people in more remote areas (ABS 2010; 2011). Thus, the paper then further examines the relationship between remoteness and strategy using regression analyses to take into account any differences between geographical areas in sociodemographic and legal problem profiles. In particular, these analyses examined whether the strategies people use in different geographical areas depend on whether they are Indigenous, are relatively disadvantaged and are unaware of free legal services.<sup>v</sup>

Figure 1: Strategy in response to legal problems by remoteness



Note: N= 19 278 problems (unweighted). Data were missing for 191 problems.  $\chi^2=45.77$ ,  $F_{12,122903}=3.27$ ,  $p=0.000$ .<sup>vi</sup>

### The overall relationship between strategy and remoteness

Figure 1 shows the overall relationship between remoteness and strategy, without taking into account the sociodemographic characteristics or legal problem profiles of respondents in different areas. The figure shows significant differences in the strategies used in response to legal problems according to remoteness. With increasing remoteness, relatively fewer legal problems resulted in the use of legal advisers, with the exception that use of legal advisers was lower in major city than inner regional areas.<sup>vii</sup> So, while 17.7 per cent of problems resulted in the use of legal advisers in inner regional areas, the figure was just 10.6 per cent in very remote areas. In addition, again with the exception of major city areas, the percentage of problems resulting in no action increased as remoteness increased, from 17.6 per cent in inner regional areas to 23 per cent in very remote areas.

### Breaking down the relationship between strategy and remoteness

Two regression analyses were conducted to examine the factors that may explain the overall relationship between remoteness and strategy (shown in Figure 1). In particular, the regressions examined whether the lower levels of taking action and using legal advisers in more remote areas reflect geographical differences in sociodemographic profiles and legal problem experience or are independent of any such differences. More specifically, the regressions examined whether remoteness influences the strategies used in response to legal problems independently of, or over and above, the effects of gender, age, Indigenous status, level of disadvantage<sup>viii</sup>, awareness of free legal services, problem type<sup>ix</sup> and problem impact<sup>x</sup>. Interactions between remoteness and each of the variables of Indigenous status, level of disadvantage and awareness of free legal services were also included as predictors to more fully examine whether the strategies used in different geographical areas depend on these variables. For example, the interaction between remoteness and Indigenous status examined whether the effect of remoteness on strategy is different for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The first model examined the independent predictors of taking some type of action to resolve legal problems (see Table A1). The second model was based only on the respondents who took some action, and examined the independent predictors of seeking formal advice. It compared handling problems without advice from a professional to use of a (i) legal adviser and (ii) non-legal adviser (see Table A2).<sup>xi</sup>

In keeping with past research, the nature of legal problems was found to influence the strategy used. Both problem type and problem impact predicted whether action was taken (see Table A1) and whether legal and non-legal advisers were used when action was taken (see Table A2).

In addition, several sociodemographic characteristics predicted strategy, with level of disadvantage and awareness of free legal services being the strongest demographic predictors (not including the interaction effects discussed below). Respondents with at least three types of disadvantage were less likely to take action (see Table A1) and use legal and non-legal advisers when they took action (Table A2). Respondents who were unaware of free legal services were less likely to take action (see Table A1) and use legal advisers when they took action (Table A2).<sup>xii</sup> In addition, younger people were less likely to use legal and non-legal advisers when they took action (see Table A2). Although gender was also a significant predictor, the direction of the relationship was not consistent.<sup>xiii</sup> Although the interactions involving Indigenous status were significant (as discussed below), Indigenous status per se was not a significant predictor in either model. Thus, overall, Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents had similar odds of taking action and of using legal and non-legal professionals when they took action.

Notably, the regression results showed that, although the *overall* relationship between remoteness and strategy (shown in Figure 1) was no longer significant when sociodemographic and problem characteristics were taken into account, two of the *interactions* involving remoteness were significantly related to strategy (see Tables A1 and A2). The two significant interactions were the strongest of the demographic predictors. The non-significant *overall* relationship between remoteness and strategy indicates that *people who have similar demographic characteristics and legal problems* in different geographical areas are likely to have similar levels of taking action and seeking advice. However, as already noted, remote communities tend to be more disadvantaged, and disadvantage predicted strategy in the regressions, so disadvantage is in part responsible for the lower absolute rates of taking action and using lawyers in more remote areas (see Figure 1). The two significant interactions involving remoteness indicate that certain groups are especially

unlikely to take action and seek advice if they live in more remote areas.

Firstly, the interaction between remoteness and Indigenous status was significant in both models, indicating that Indigenous respondents were less likely to take action (see Table A1) and consult legal advisers when they did take action if they lived in more remote areas (see Table A2). The interaction between Indigenous status and use of legal advisers is depicted in Figure 2. It can be seen that in less remote areas, the percentage of legal problems resulting in the use of legal advisers was higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous respondents. However, this trend reversed with increasing remoteness so that, in very remote areas, the percentage was higher for non-Indigenous respondents (11.4%) than Indigenous respondents (5.6%).

Secondly, the interaction between remoteness and awareness of free legal services was significant in both models. In the model for taking action, this interaction indicated that the lower levels of taking action associated with lack of awareness of free legal services (noted above) were more prominent for people living in major city areas rather than remote areas (see Table A1). However, in the model for seeking advice, the interaction between remoteness and awareness showed that the lower levels of using legal advisers for people who are unaware of free legal services became even more pronounced if they lived in very remote areas (see Table A2). It is worth noting that this second interaction is consistent with the possibility that the measure of awareness of legal services may to some extent be acting as proxy for the availability of legal services, and, as a

result, people in more remote areas may be less aware of legal services and less likely to consult a lawyer because of the paucity of legal services in their local community. However, there may be other possible explanations.<sup>xiv</sup>

The interaction between remoteness and disadvantage was not significant in either model. Thus, although, as already discussed, respondents with at least three types of disadvantage generally had lower levels of taking action and seeking advice, their geographical location did not further affect these levels.

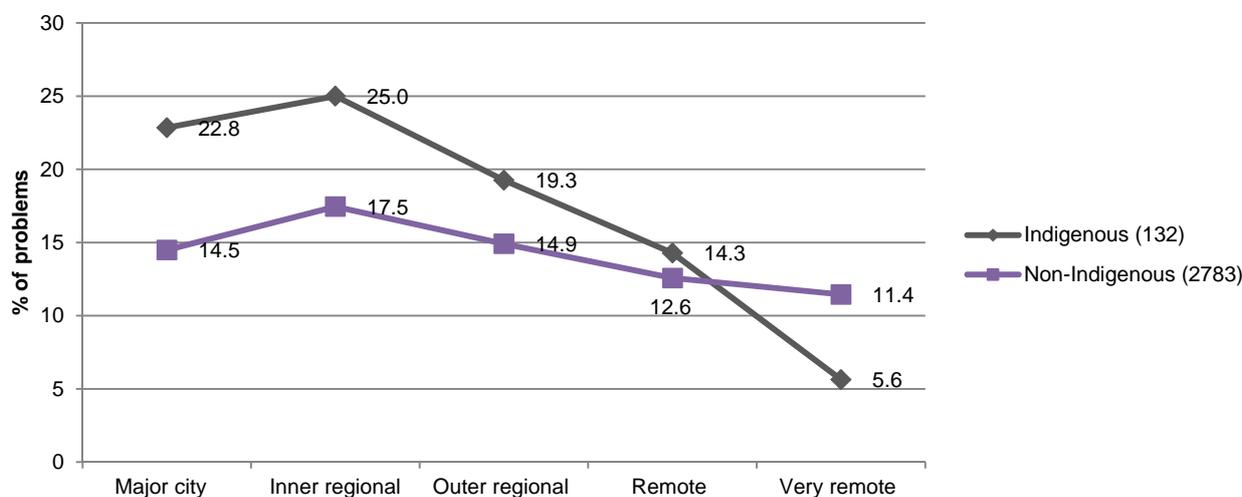
### Conclusion

The results highlight that people faced with legal problems are less likely to *take any type of action* and also less likely to *use lawyers when they take action* if:

- they have high levels of disadvantage
- they are unaware of free legal services, with especially low levels of using a lawyer if they also live in remote areas<sup>xv</sup>
- they are Indigenous people living in more remote areas.

The new findings raise questions about the coverage of legal services in more remote areas, particularly, legal services that are culturally appropriate for Indigenous people. Given that respondents who were unaware of free legal services in very remote areas were less likely to seek advice from lawyers, outreach advice in such areas may be a viable method of service delivery (Buck & Curran 2009; Forell & Gray 2009).

Figure 2. Use of legal advisers by remoteness and Indigenous status



Note: N= 2915 problems (unweighted).

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## Appendix: Statistical tables

Table A1. Parameter estimates and odds ratios for model on taking any action

Variable		B	S.E	Wald	OR	Lower	Upper
<b>Gender (cf. male)</b>	Female	<b>0.310</b>	<b>0.049</b>	<b>6.33</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>1.50</b>
<b>Age (cf. 65+)</b>	15–17	-0.010	0.144	-0.07	0.99	0.75	1.31
	18–24	0.097	0.111	0.87	1.10	0.89	1.37
	25–34	0.163	0.104	1.57	1.18	0.96	1.44
	35–44	0.158	0.105	1.50	1.17	0.95	1.44
	45–54	0.117	0.105	1.11	1.12	0.92	1.38
	55–64	0.011	0.110	0.10	1.01	0.81	1.25
<b>Indigenous status (cf. Non-Indigenous)</b>	Indigenous	0.113	0.249	0.45	1.12	0.69	1.82
<b>Number of indicators of disadvantage (cf. 0-2 indicators)</b>	3+ indicators	<b>-0.500</b>	<b>0.101</b>	<b>-4.95</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.74</b>
<b>Awareness (c.f. Aware)</b>	Not aware	<b>-0.381</b>	<b>0.064</b>	<b>-5.95</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.77</b>
<b>Remoteness (cf. Major city)</b>	Inner regional	0.085	0.095	0.89	1.09	0.90	1.31
	Outer regional	-0.045	0.094	-0.48	0.96	0.80	1.15
	Remote	-0.247	0.172	-1.44	0.78	0.56	1.09
	Very remote	-0.169	0.222	-0.76	0.84	0.55	1.30
<b>Problem type (cf. Accidents)</b>	Consumer	<b>0.256</b>	<b>0.094</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>1.07</b>	<b>1.55</b>
	Credit/debt	-0.233	0.122	-1.91	0.79	0.62	1.01
	Crime	<b>-0.459</b>	<b>0.095</b>	<b>-4.83</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.76</b>
	Employment	<b>0.306</b>	<b>0.129</b>	<b>2.37</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>1.75</b>
	Family	<b>0.454</b>	<b>0.155</b>	<b>2.93</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>2.13</b>
	Government	<b>0.410</b>	<b>0.111</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>1.51</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>1.87</b>
	Health	<b>-0.514</b>	<b>0.163</b>	<b>-3.15</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>0.82</b>
	Housing	<b>0.601</b>	<b>0.106</b>	<b>5.67</b>	<b>1.82</b>	<b>1.48</b>	<b>2.25</b>
	Money	<b>1.044</b>	<b>0.152</b>	<b>6.87</b>	<b>2.84</b>	<b>2.11</b>	<b>3.83</b>
	Personal injury	-0.122	0.121	-1.01	0.89	0.70	1.12
	Rights	<b>-0.282</b>	<b>0.121</b>	<b>-2.33</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.96</b>
<b>Problem impact<sup>a</sup></b>		<b>0.438</b>	<b>0.018</b>	<b>24.33</b>	<b>1.55</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>1.61</b>
<b>Indigenous status x remoteness</b>	Indigenous x inner regional	-0.481	0.405	-1.19	0.62	0.28	1.37
	Indigenous x outer regional	-0.428	0.346	-1.24	0.65	0.33	1.28
	Indigenous x remote	<b>-1.135</b>	<b>0.447</b>	<b>-2.54</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>0.77</b>
	Indigenous x very remote	<b>-1.385</b>	<b>0.471</b>	<b>-2.94</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.63</b>
<b>Number of indicators of disadvantage x remoteness</b>	3+ indicators x inner regional	0.191	0.186	1.03	1.21	0.84	1.74
	3+ indicators x outer regional	0.027	0.187	0.14	1.03	0.71	1.48
	3+ indicators x remote	0.086	0.370	0.23	1.09	0.53	2.25
	3+ indicators x very remote	-0.399	0.442	-0.90	0.67	0.28	1.60
<b>Awareness x remoteness</b>	Not aware x inner regional	0.131	0.136	0.96	1.14	0.87	1.49
	Not aware x outer regional	0.089	0.128	0.70	1.09	0.85	1.40
	Not aware x remote	<b>0.607</b>	<b>0.270</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>3.11</b>
	Not aware x very remote	0.539	0.313	1.72	1.71	0.93	3.17
<b>Constant</b>		<b>1.729</b>	<b>0.135</b>	<b>12.81</b>	<b>5.64</b>	<b>4.32</b>	<b>7.34</b>

<sup>a</sup> This variable was a continuous variable measuring the severity of the problem by combining its overall impact on everyday life and the number of adverse consequences it caused.

**Note:** N=19 205 problems (unweighted). Data were missing for 264 problems. Significant findings (at the 95% level) are presented in bold. For categorical variables (i.e. all variables in this analysis other than problem impact), a significant (i.e. bolded) odds ratio (OR)>1.0 indicates that the category in question had significantly higher odds of taking action than the comparison category. A significant OR<1.0 indicates that the category in question had significantly lower odds than the comparison category. The size of the OR indicates the strength of the relationship. E.g. OR=2.0 means that the odds for the category in question were twice those for the comparison category. For the continuous variable (i.e. problem impact), ORs represent changes in odds per unit of measurement.

Table A2. Parameter estimates and odds ratios for model on seeking formal advice

Variable		Non-legal advisers					Legal advisers				
		B	S.E	OR	Lower	Upper	B	S.E	OR	Lower	Upper
Gender (cf. male)	Female	<b>0.136</b>	<b>0.040</b>	<b>1.15</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>-0.157</b>	<b>0.055</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.95</b>
Age in years <sup>a</sup>		<b>0.062</b>	<b>0.007</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>0.051</b>	<b>0.010</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>1.07</b>
Indigenous status (cf. Non-Indigenous)	Indigenous	-0.307	0.185	0.74	0.51	1.06	0.174	0.221	1.19	0.77	1.83
Number of indicators of disadvantage (cf. 0-2 indicators)	3+ indicators	<b>-0.267</b>	<b>0.087</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>-0.303</b>	<b>0.107</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.91</b>
Awareness (c.f. Aware)	Not aware	-0.085	0.054	0.92	0.83	1.02	<b>-0.660</b>	<b>0.074</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>0.60</b>
Remoteness (cf. Major city)	Inner regional	-0.032	0.074	0.97	0.84	1.12	0.102	0.097	1.11	0.92	1.34
	Outer regional	0.084	0.074	1.09	0.94	1.26	0.062	0.094	1.06	0.88	1.28
	Remote	0.157	0.146	1.17	0.88	1.56	0.104	0.199	1.11	0.75	1.64
	Very remote	0.258	0.186	1.29	0.90	1.86	0.145	0.243	1.16	0.72	1.86
Problem type (cf. Accidents)	Consumer	<b>-2.730</b>	<b>0.097</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>-1.928</b>	<b>0.167</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.20</b>
	Credit/debt	<b>-2.185</b>	<b>0.123</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>-0.616</b>	<b>0.190</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.78</b>
	Crime	<b>0.229</b>	<b>0.105</b>	<b>1.26</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>1.54</b>	<b>0.655</b>	<b>0.175</b>	<b>1.93</b>	<b>1.37</b>	<b>2.71</b>
	Employment	<b>-0.933</b>	<b>0.117</b>	<b>0.39</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>-0.418</b>	<b>0.189</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>0.95</b>
	Family	<b>-1.545</b>	<b>0.143</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.955</b>	<b>0.191</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>1.79</b>	<b>3.78</b>
	Government	<b>-1.770</b>	<b>0.105</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>-0.641</b>	<b>0.173</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.74</b>
	Health	<b>-0.692</b>	<b>0.159</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>-0.741</b>	<b>0.242</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.77</b>
	Housing	<b>-1.467</b>	<b>0.104</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>0.28</b>	-0.117	0.171	0.89	0.64	1.24
	Money	<b>-1.544</b>	<b>0.129</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.913</b>	<b>0.185</b>	<b>2.49</b>	<b>1.73</b>	<b>3.58</b>
	Personal injury	<b>0.467</b>	<b>0.151</b>	<b>1.59</b>	<b>1.19</b>	<b>2.14</b>	<b>1.033</b>	<b>0.208</b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>1.87</b>	<b>4.22</b>
	Rights	<b>-0.825</b>	<b>0.116</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.55</b>	-0.221	0.195	0.80	0.55	1.17
Problem impact <sup>b</sup>		<b>0.240</b>	<b>0.014</b>	<b>1.27</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>0.577</b>	<b>0.018</b>	<b>1.78</b>	<b>1.72</b>	<b>1.85</b>
Indigenous status x remoteness	Indigenous x inner regional	0.185	0.345	1.20	0.61	2.37	0.082	0.392	1.08	0.50	2.34
	Indigenous x outer regional	0.301	0.280	1.35	0.78	2.34	0.101	0.338	1.11	0.57	2.14
	Indigenous x remote	-0.375	0.437	0.69	0.29	1.62	<b>-1.148</b>	<b>0.553</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.94</b>
	Indigenous x very remote	-0.617	0.469	0.54	0.21	1.35	-0.837	0.797	0.43	0.09	2.06
Number of indicators of disadvantage x remoteness	3+ indicators x inner regional	-0.144	0.155	0.87	0.64	1.17	0.027	0.181	1.03	0.72	1.46
	3+ indicators x outer regional	0.150	0.170	1.16	0.83	1.62	0.306	0.209	1.36	0.90	2.05
	3+ indicators x remote	0.429	0.367	1.54	0.75	3.15	0.762	0.454	2.14	0.88	5.22
	3+ indicators x very remote	-0.432	0.428	0.65	0.28	1.50	-1.123	0.690	0.33	0.08	1.26
Awareness x remoteness	Not aware x inner regional	0.137	0.112	1.15	0.92	1.43	0.095	0.154	1.10	0.81	1.49
	Not aware x outer regional	-0.070	0.110	0.93	0.75	1.16	-0.042	0.155	0.96	0.71	1.30
	Not aware x remote	-0.066	0.214	0.94	0.62	1.42	-0.228	0.342	0.80	0.41	1.56
	Not aware x very remote	-0.028	0.264	0.97	0.58	1.63	<b>-1.619</b>	<b>0.607</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.65</b>
Constant		0.136	0.156	1.15	0.84	1.56	<b>-1.539</b>	<b>0.281</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.37</b>

**a** Age was treated as a continuous variable in this model.

**b** This variable was a continuous variable measuring the severity of the problem by combining its overall impact on everyday life and the number of adverse consequences it caused.

Note: N=19 205 problems (unweighted). Data were missing for 264 problems. Significant findings (at the 95% level) are presented in bold. For categorical variables (i.e. all variables in this analysis other than age and problem impact), a significant (i.e. bolded) odds ratio (OR)>1.0 indicates that the category in question had significantly higher odds of taking action than the comparison category. A significant OR<1.0 indicates that the category in question had significantly lower odds than the comparison category. The size of the OR indicates the strength of the relationship. E.g. OR=2.0 means that the odds for the category in question were twice those for the comparison category. For the continuous variables (i.e. age and problem impact), ORs represent changes in odds per unit of measurement.

## Endnotes

- i The term 'legal problem' is used throughout this paper for easy reference to a problem that is 'justiciable' in that it raises legal issues with the potential for legal resolution, regardless of whether the respondent recognised this or took any action involving the justice system (cf. Genn 1999).
- ii According to the 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2007a), 43.5 per cent of the Northern Territory population and 6.6 per cent of the Western Australian population lived in remote or very remote areas, compared to 0.0–3.7 per cent in the other Australian states/territories. It is also noteworthy that the Northern Territory has a much higher proportion of Indigenous people in the population compared to the rest of Australia, many of whom live in remote or very remote areas (ABS 2007b).
- iii These five categories were based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia or ARIA (ABS 2001). Coumarelos et al. (2012) used three categories: 'major city', 'regional' (which combined the ARIA inner and outer regional categories) and 'remote' (which combined the ARIA remote and very remote categories).
- iv The strategy used in response to legal problems often involved more than one type of action. Strategy was thus categorised according to the highest level of action used: (1) 'legal adviser', (2) 'non-legal adviser', (3) 'handled without advice' and (4) 'took no action'. The first two categories mean that a professional was consulted in a formal capacity, regardless of whether other actions were used. 'Legal adviser' denotes that the professional(s) included a lawyer or legal service, while 'non-legal adviser' denotes that the professional(s) were only non-legal. 'Handled without advice' means that a professional was not consulted, but some other action was used (i.e. used website or self-help guide, consulted relatives or friends informally, communicated with the other side, court or tribunal hearings had occurred or were likely, formal dispute resolution had occurred or was likely). 'Took no action' means that neither a professional nor other action was used. The classification of strategy by Coumarelos et al. (2012) was virtually identical with the major exception that 'legal adviser' and 'non-legal adviser' were combined into the single category of 'sought advice'. There were some other minor differences due, for example, to slightly different treatment of missing values and categorisation of the small percentage of cases involving only a court or tribunal hearing as 'took no action' in the present analyses rather than 'handled without advice'.
- v As noted by Coumarelos et al. (2012), the LAW Survey is likely to have underestimated the level of Indigenous disadvantage, because it could not include the particularly disadvantaged Indigenous people without landline telephone access, such as many in remote communities. Nationally, 29 per cent of Indigenous households in non-remote areas and 61 per cent in remote areas did not use a home landline telephone during a one-month period (ABS & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010).
- vi An adjusted version of the standard chi-square test was used, which applied a second-order Rao-Scott correction to accommodate clustering of the data, but not weighting. Due to insufficient weighted numbers in very remote areas, unweighted data were used.
- vii There are likely to be various contributing factors to the counter-trend observed for major cities, including, perhaps, more decentralisation of legal services in major cities when compared to inner regional areas and a greater availability of lawyers in inner regional areas.
- viii The following indicators of disadvantage were used to construct a measure of multiple disadvantage: disability, low levels of education, unemployment, single parenthood, disadvantaged housing, low income and non-English main language. The regression models compared respondents with at least three of these types of disadvantage to other respondents. Given the high occurrence between Indigenous status and other indicators of disadvantage such as low levels of education and low income, Indigenous status was excluded from the measure of multiple disadvantage and was examined separately.
- ix The present analyses used the same 12 legal problem groups used by Coumarelos et al. 2012 (see pp. 297–301 for further details).
- x Problem impact was based on a combination of the legal problem's overall impact on everyday life and the number of adverse consequences caused by the legal problem.
- xi The model on taking action was a binary logistic regression while the model on seeking advice was a multinomial logistic regression. Both models were multilevel (with two levels) adjusting for problems being nested within people and were conducted using MLwiN (Rasbash, Steele, Brown & Goldstein 2009). Most predictor variables were categorical variables where a reference category was compared to each other category. However, problem impact was a continuous variable in both models, and, due to smaller numbers in the second model, age was included as a continuous variable rather than as a categorical variable.
- xii It is possible that, to some extent, the lack of awareness of free legal services reflects a paucity of such services in some geographic areas, and hence, may partly explain the lower levels of taking action and using legal advisers in those areas.
- xiii Males were less likely to take action and use non-legal advisers while females were less likely to use legal advisers.
- xiv An earlier paper found that modes of communicating with advisers varied by remoteness (Iriana, Pleasence & Coumarelos 2013).
- xv As noted above, the low levels of taking any type of action were more pronounced for those in major city areas rather than those in remote areas.