



The Pilot Ex-Victoria Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (X-LULU) Survey

Research Brief

Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER

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Overview

The pilot X-LULU survey captures the real-world experiences of legal service users across Australia, outside Victoria.¹ Conducted alongside the Victorian V-LULU survey, X-LULU investigated the experience of 2,063 recent legal service users, providing a broad picture of consumer experiences, cost communication, service choice, satisfaction, and complaint behaviour.

It reveals both existing strengths, and potential to extend these, as well as opportunities to address known weaknesses, including around matching to needs, communication and transparency.

The reach of legal services... and barriers to access

Around one-quarter of adult Australians outside Victoria used legal services in the 2 years prior to the survey. The most common issues concerned wills, probate or powers of attorney (31%), housing or property (29%), and divorce or end of a de facto relationship (10%). Overall, over two-thirds of legal service use related to non-contentious issues.² Private solicitors were most commonly used (62% of issues), followed by conveyancers (27%), legal aid (12%), and notaries (11%).

However, around one in 10 Australians tried, but were unable to access, one or more legal services. Common barriers included services being unable to help, difficulties making contact, time and distance limitations, and, particularly for help from solicitors, cost.

Choosing and engaging with legal services

Quality, accessibility, and value for money drove service choice, with online search playing an increasingly important role.

People's choice of legal service was often informed by internet and social media searches (47%), though this was less common for those using private solicitors (35%), where 48% of users were also returning clients. Skills and experience were the most frequently mentioned factor guiding choice (51%), followed by method of communication (49%) and location (48%). Among those expressing a preference for method of communication, face-to-face communication was the most common preference (44% of cases). In practice, face-to-face communication was the main form of communication in 36% of occasions and used at some point for 59%. The telephone was used in 66% of cases and email in 61% of cases.

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Satisfaction, dissatisfaction and their determinants

Service satisfaction was high, but contingent upon the match between expectations and delivery, the quality of interpersonal and procedural communication, and perceived competence.

Fifty-seven per cent of service users rated their overall experience as very satisfactory and 34% fairly satisfactory. Where respondents received everything they needed, asked for and were told they would get, satisfaction rose to 98%, but fell to 25% where they got none of these. Further linking to mismatches between service expectations and delivery,³ the most common reason for dissatisfaction was that services had not done enough (38% of cases of dissatisfaction) or provided poor value for money (32%). Perceived mistakes and unprofessional conduct were also mentioned (33% and 18%, respectively), as were reasons relating directly to quality of communication, such as failure to keep clients informed of progress (31%) and bills that were higher than expected (26%). Just 28% of dissatisfied users raised their concerns directly and only 16% made formal complaints.

The cost of legal services

The pilot X-LULU survey reveals a more nuanced landscape than popular discourse regarding the cost of legal services might suggest, and one where access to justice was more than a binary public-versus-private choice.

A significant minority incurred no direct cost, and for those who did pay, the median outlay was \$1,500, suggesting relatively affordable basic transactional legal services.⁴ However, the distribution of costs was highly skewed, with a long upper tail extending beyond \$40,000. Funding sources reflected cost diversity, and personal savings, current income, and family assistance all featured prominently, while contingency arrangements also accounted for a small but significant number of issues.

While cost disclosure requirements are intended to promote transparency, there was room for improvement, with the provision of information about likely cost recalled by just 56% of legal service users overall. Moreover, 16% of those who paid for services reported higher costs than expected.

Improving access to justice

Legal service provision continues to evolve, shaped by regulatory reform, digital transformation, and shifting public needs. Alongside this evolution, X-LULU findings reinforce that matching services to needs, expectations and capabilities remains imperative, with clear and transparent communication central to facilitating this.⁵ They also highlight the importance of service diversity, with a healthy legal services market being one that fosters permeability and effective referral between sectors to best serve the full spectrum of consumers and issues.

The goal is to optimise legal service provision for all users, from routine non-contentious transactions to complex disputes. This means grounding reform in user experience, such as that captured by the pilot LULU surveys, as well as other high-quality data that places the public at the centre of regulation, policy and service design. This is the foundation of ‘bottom-up’⁶ justice and the route to a legal services market that is fair, accessible, and trusted by all who might need it.

1. For the full report, see Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, *Report of the Pilot Ex-Victoria Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (X-LULU) Survey* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2026). For key themes, see Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, *How People Use Legal Services: The Pilot Ex-Victoria Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (X-LULU) Survey* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2026). The pilot X-LULU was an opportunistic expansion of the pilot LULU project that leveraged the survey infrastructure to collect data outside Victoria (for more, see the project technical report by Roy Morgan at <https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/research-centre/what-we-do/publications/pilot-legal-understanding-and-lawyer-use-lulu-survey>).
2. The term ‘non-contentious’ does not directly correspond to specific non-litigious issues. Instead, in line with the survey’s broader bottom-up methodology, non-contentious issues are defined from the perspective of those experiencing them. Specifically, they are characterised as justiciable issues that do not involve any dispute, so are not framed as contentious or adversarial in nature.
3. A core theme in the pilot V-LULU. Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, *Report of the Pilot Victorian Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (V-LULU) Survey* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2025); Pascoe Pleasence, Nigel J. Balmer and Karen Nokes, *New Vision for a New Future: The Pilot Victorian Legal Understanding and Lawyer Use (V-LULU) Survey* (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2025).
4. As has been highlighted in other jurisdictions. See Rebecca L. Sandefur, “Money isn’t everything: Understanding moderate income households’ use of lawyers’ services,” in M. Trebilcock, A. Duggan, and L. Sossin, eds. *Middle Income Access to Justice*, (University of Toronto Press, 2012).
5. This was also a central theme in the V-LULU reports. See Pleasence and Balmer, *Report of the Pilot V-LULU Survey*; Pleasence, Balmer and Nokes, *New Vision for a New Future*.
6. Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, N.J. “Justice and the capability to function in society”, *Daedalus* 148, 1 (2019): 140-149.