

Media Release

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LSA releases first national survey of legal needs

More than 7000 New Zealanders have provided information for a nationwide survey on legal needs and access to legal services, released by the Legal Services Agency today.

The Agency's Chief Executive, Tim Bannatyne says, "The survey is the largest of its kind in the world, and provides us with a comprehensive base of evidence. The next steps for the Agency involve assessing the gaps to help improve people's access to services."

The survey findings show where people seek help with their legal problems, where they encounter problems getting services, and what happens if services are not available for them. The findings cover information about the law, as well as face to face legal advice, assistance and representation.

Of the people who responded to the survey, nearly one in three experienced a legal problem over the year. "Amongst these," Mr Bannatyne said, "are small and big problems, from buying faulty goods, to drawn out disputes involving the care of children when a relationship ends. In a society like ours that prides itself on the rule of law, many people inevitably encounter legal situations that affect their life in different ways."

The research says that about 70% of people with a legal problem wanted information, and half of these also wanted a basic level of support to help them deal with their problem. Around 65% of those who had experienced a legal problem said that in the end either their legal needs were met or they did not need to resolve the issue because it stopped being important.

The research methodology is based on the leading work in the field internationally and is designed to focus the respondent on the types of problems they experience that have a legal solution.

The report, of particular interest to organisations and people who have an interest in access to justice, is available from <http://www.lsa.govt.nz/general/research.htm>

The Legal Services Agency administers the legal aid scheme for people who cannot afford their own lawyer, and provides duty lawyers in Courts and when people are detained by the Police. The Agency also contracts with community law centres and delivers legal information and education.

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