

Consumer Action's Worker Advice Service



Consumer Action's Worker Advice Service (**WAS**) is a free legal advice service for community workers who are helping clients with consumer, credit, debt and insurance problems.

Our 2021 evaluation of the service resulted in these key findings:



1. The service is high quality

Workers feel listened to and respected by our lawyers. The advice lawyers provide to workers is relevant, understandable and practical. After using the service, workers feel more confident about assisting clients.

2. The service builds knowledge, skills and confidence in workers

After using the service, workers know more. They better understand the law and the legal arguments they can raise, and better understand their clients' rights and options.

3. The service contributes to good client outcomes

The service helps workers achieve good results for their clients, including debt waivers, refunds and having unjust contracts set aside. Workers almost always follow the advice they receive.

4. Workers also make use of our online resources and know about our campaigns

About one in two workers who contact the service also use our online resources, including template letters. Using the resources gives workers more confidence, improves their efficiency and helps them achieve good results for clients. Most workers are also aware of our campaigns.

5. Our engagement and training work contributes to demand for the service

Some workers are prompted to contact the service after attending an engagement or training event involving Consumer Action.

6. Demand for the service is high and growing and this can affect wait times

When demand is high, workers can experience delays getting through to the service. Workers tell us they would call more often if we answered the phone more quickly and agreed to 'take on' or represent more of their clients.

7. There is high demand for small business advice that we can't provide

Workers report that there is significant unmet legal need among low-income small business owners. Some say they would use the service more if we could assist with small business matters.



Recommendations

1.

As demand increases, better resourcing of the Worker Advice Service is needed to ensure quality and accessibility of the service is maintained.

2.

Consumer Action should work with key stakeholders (including peaks) to help workers better understand the scope of the service and that our lawyers can assist workers in a range of different ways.

3.

Consumer Action should continue to work with stakeholders to understand the nature and extent of unmet legal need among low-income small business owners in Victoria and explore actions we can take to help address that need.