

# LSS 2011 Public Opinion Poll

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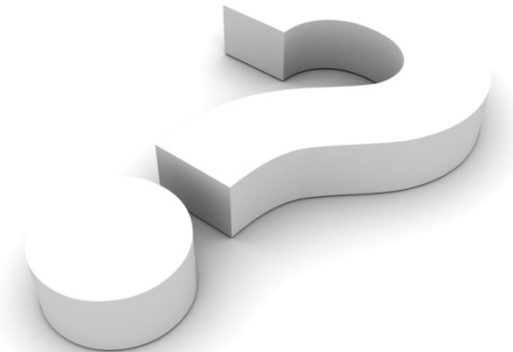
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# Objectives & Methodology



# Objectives & Methodology

Each year, Legal Services Society (LSS) of BC participates in a province-wide poll to measure awareness, knowledge and attitudes toward legal aid in BC.

The study has been in place since 2005, with the questionnaire changing slightly each year to reflect current goals and priorities. Hence, for some questions, trends date back as far as 2005 and on others, only as far back as 2009.

For the 2011 study, the Legal Services Society added questions to Synovate's telephone omnibus study (see the Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire).

The study consists of 600 telephone interviews with a representative sample of BC residents.

All interviewing was conducted from Synovate's fully supervised, in-house CATI facility located in Vancouver, BC. Interviewing for this study took place from March 7<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

To ensure the final sample was an accurate representation of the BC population, it was mathematically weighted by age and gender within region to match 2010 population estimates.

For the LSS survey, respondents were screened out if a respondent or anyone in their household was closely related to a Legal Services Society employee or a lawyer who provides legal aid services.

As a result, 562 out of the 600 respondents qualified for the LSS survey. The margins of error at the 95% level of confidence for a sample size of 562 is +/-4%.

When comparing 2011 to 2010 or to 2009 findings (n=562 versus n=574 or n=753), a maximum difference of +/-6 percentage points is required to be considered significant at the 95% level of confidence.

When comparing 2011 to 2010 findings among regional sub-groups (such Metro Vancouver/Southwest, Island and Interior), the following maximum differences are required in order for the difference to be considered significant at the 95% level of confidence:

Metro Vancouver/Southwest	+/- 8 percentage points
Island	+/-14 percentage points
Interior	+/-12 percentage points

# Highlights



# Highlights

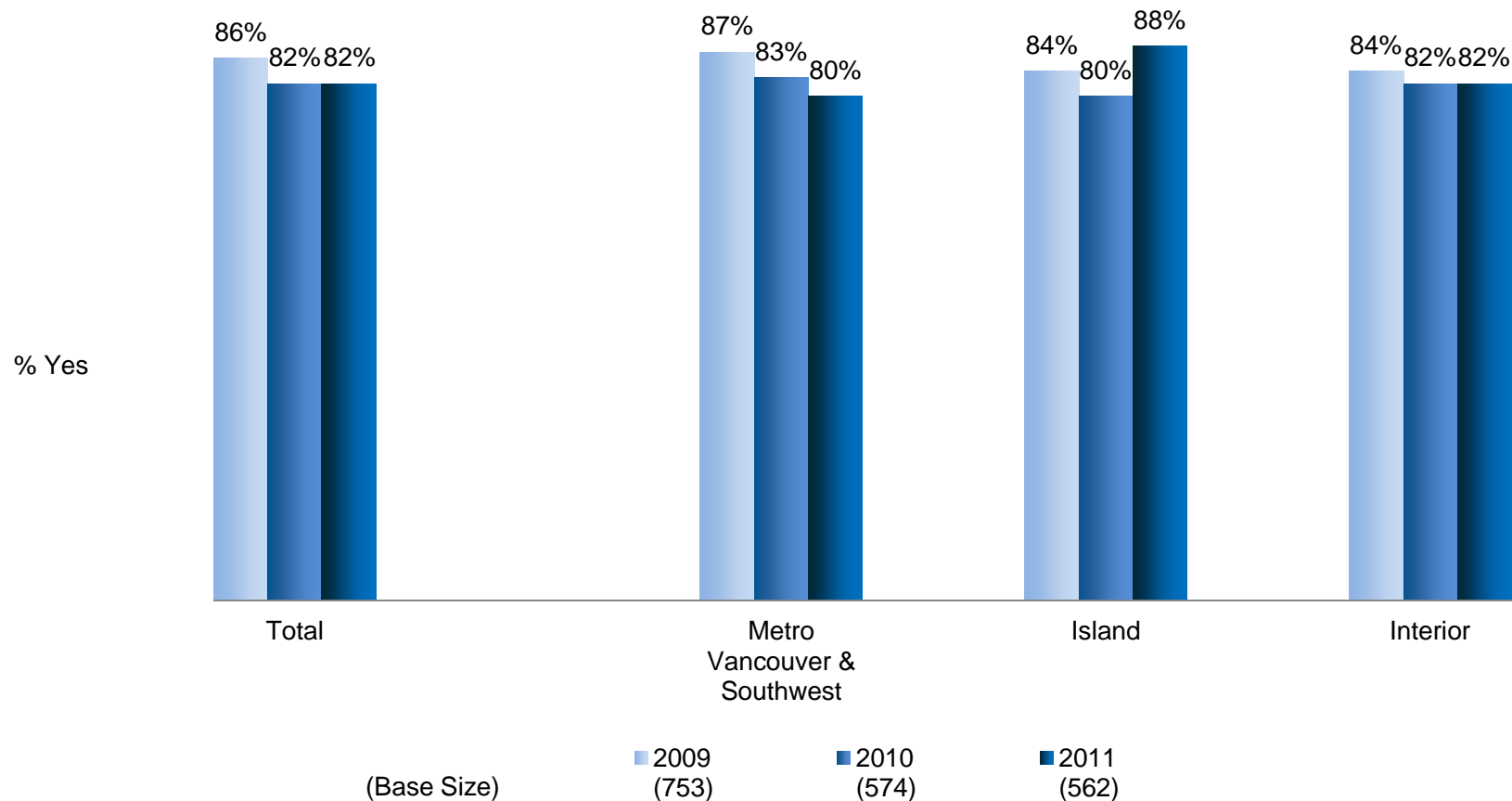
- **The general public's awareness levels and attitudes towards legal aid in BC are fairly consistent with one year ago.** Media stories, followed by word of mouth, continue to be the main ways BC residents hear about legal aid. However, almost half admit that in the past few months they have not heard anything.
- The large majority (82%) continue to be aware of legal aid and are aware that legal aid is available for criminal law matters (68%) and family law matters (61%). While fewer residents are aware that legal aid is also available for immigration/refugee law matters, awareness has grown since 2010 (from 43% to 52% currently).
- **Support for legal aid remains high with 89% of residents saying they support having legal aid services in the province for those with low incomes.** Those strongly in support of legal aid continues to stand at 52%.
- Further, BC residents feel everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means spending more money to reach people in remote and rural communities (92% agree overall, with 54% strongly agreeing).
- **BC residents continue to widely believe that it is important to fairness in the BC justice system to offer legal aid in the areas of family court, other civil legal proceedings, criminal court and immigration/refugee hearings.** Of the four areas of law, family court continues to be seen as the most important, while the importance of offering legal aid in civil, criminal and immigration proceedings has softened since 2010.
- **When it comes to the funding of legal aid services in BC, opinions continue to be divided and increasingly uncertain.** Currently, 37% admit they do not know if legal aid is adequately funded, up from 28% one year ago. Among those who claim to know, 38% think funding is adequate or more than adequate, with the remainder feeling that it is not.
- **Despite mixed and uncertain views towards the adequacy of legal aid funding, residents tend to agree (73%), as they have historically, that government should give legal funding the same priority as other social services.** Further, when asked for suggestions to improve legal aid services in BC, improved funding (mentioned by 18%) continues to be the top suggestion, followed by increasing public awareness (15%).
- **One of Legal Services Society's key goals is to help clients address the issues that are related to their legal issues (such as housing problems, debt, health problems, etc.) and 75% of the general public agree with this approach.** Among the remainder, 16% are neutral and only 5% disagree.

# Summary of Findings



# Awareness of Legal Aid in BC

*LS1. I would like to ask you a few questions about legal aid. First of all, are you aware that there are legal aid services in BC for people with low incomes?*

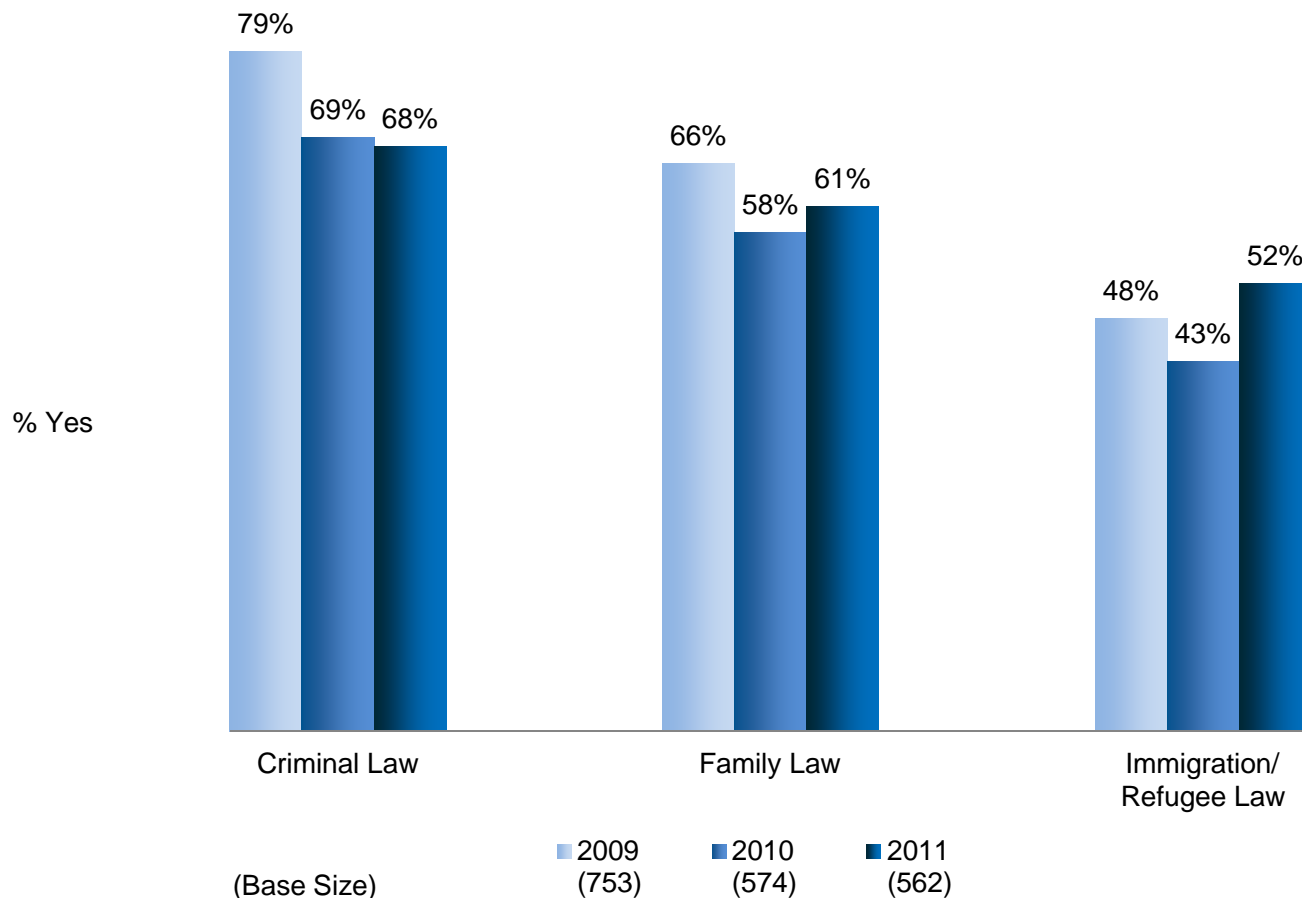


Note: Required differences when comparing 2011 to 2010 results are higher for regional samples (see Methodology, slide 4).

- Identical to one year ago, the large majority of BC residents claim to be aware that there are legal aid services in the province for low income people.
- Awareness of legal aid at the regional level is also unchanged from 2010.
- Awareness is significantly higher among BC residents over 34 years of age compared to those 34 and younger.

# Awareness of Legal Aid for Different Types of Cases

**LS2a-c.** *Did you know that legal aid services are available for people facing criminal law/family law/immigration/refugee law matters?*



Consistent with one year ago, the majority of BC residents know that legal aid services are available for criminal law and family law matters. Between the two, slightly more residents are aware of legal aid availability for criminal law matters than family law matters.

Fewer residents (52%) know that legal aid also deals with immigration/refugee law matters. However, awareness is significantly higher than last year, but in line with 2009.

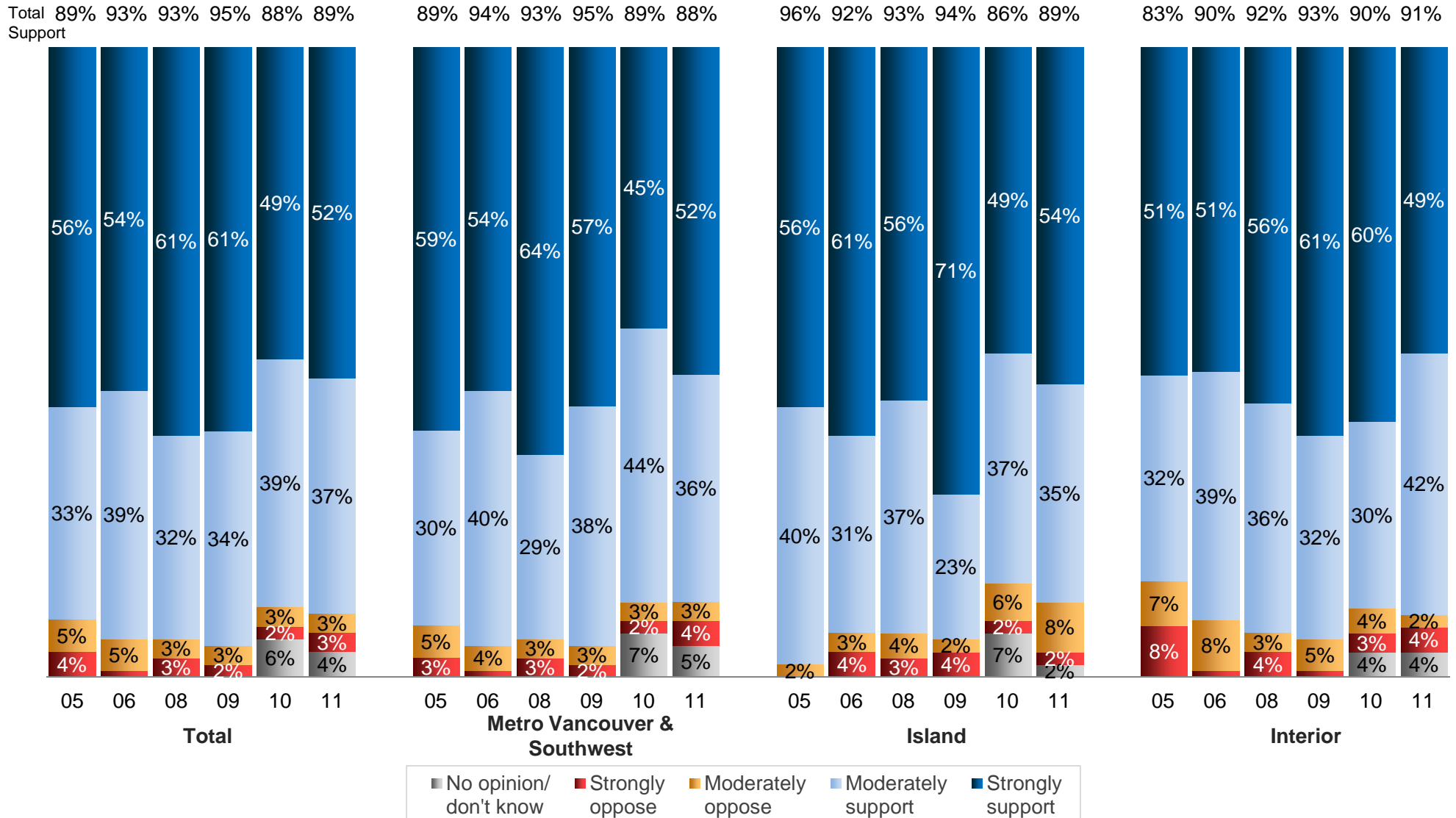
Awareness of all three service areas are highest among those in higher income earning households (\$65,000+/year). Women and residents 35+ tend to be the most aware of family law legal aid services.

# Support/Oppose Legal Aid Services



synovate  
Research reinvented

**LS3. As you may already know, legal aid services provide low income people with legal information, advice, and/or representation in court. This can include providing them with a self-help kit, giving them a few hours of legal advice, or paying a lawyer to represent them in court for serious family, criminal, or immigration/refugee problems. Knowing this, to what extent do you support or oppose legal aid services?**



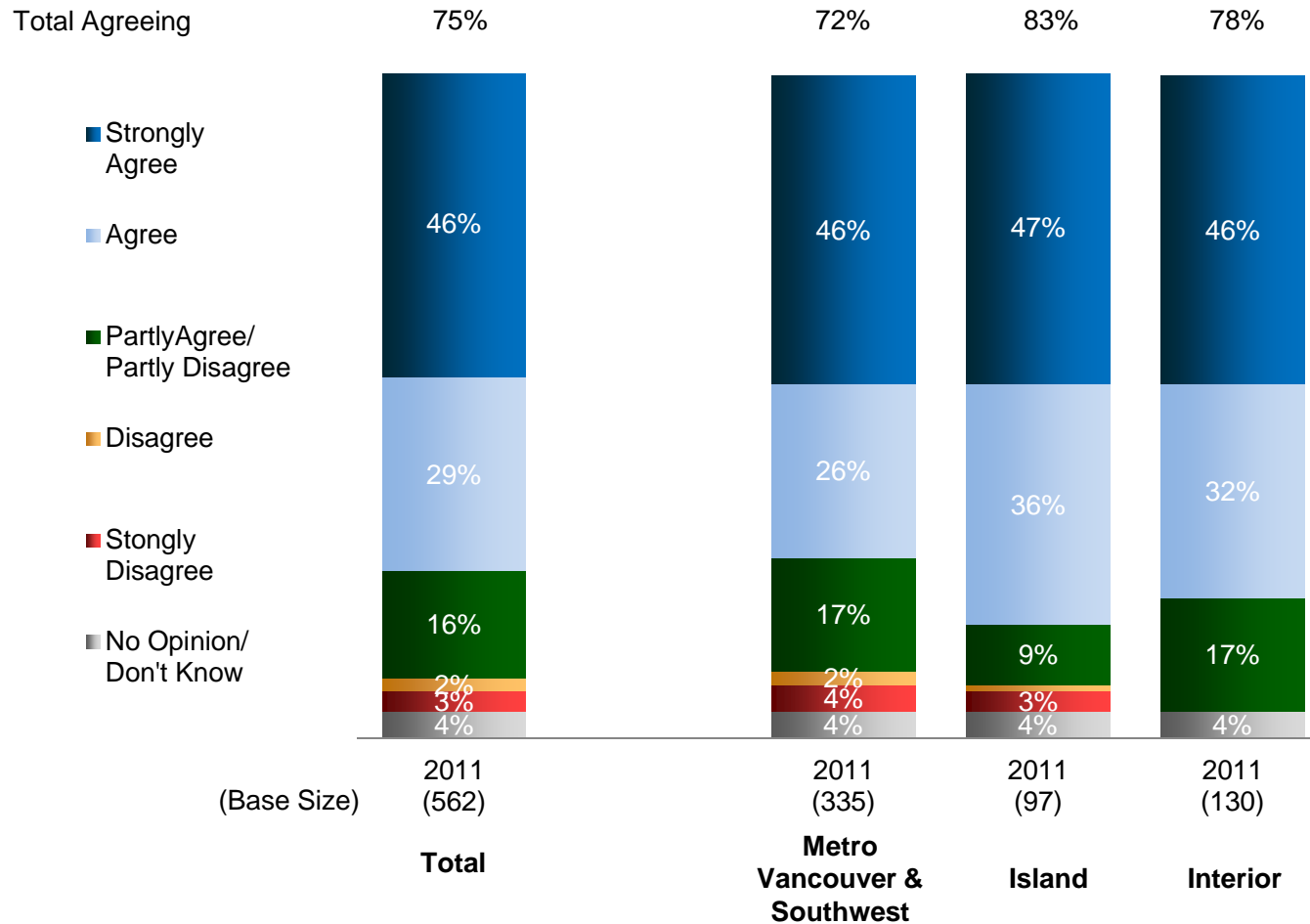
Base: 2005=763, 2006 =745, 2008=730, 2009=753, 2010=574, 2011=562 Note: Required differences when comparing 2011 to 2010 results are higher for regional samples (see Methodology, slide 4).

# Support/Oppose Legal Aid Services

- BC residents continue to support legal aid services, with 89% giving their support in total, including 52% saying they are strongly in support.
- Support levels are unchanged from one year ago.
- While very few residents outright oppose legal aid services (only 6% are opposed), opposition is highest among those living in lower to mid-level income earning households (\$25,000 to \$45,000/year) (doubling to 12% among this group).

# LSS Priorities

**LS3.a. Would you strongly agree/agree/partly agree or partly disagree/disagree/strongly disagree with the following statement: Legal Aid should help their clients address problems that are related to their legal issues (such as housing problems, debt, health problems, etc.)**



Note: 22% of tariff lawyers agree that LSS helps them to help their clients address problems that are related to their legal issues (2010 Tariff Lawyer Survey)

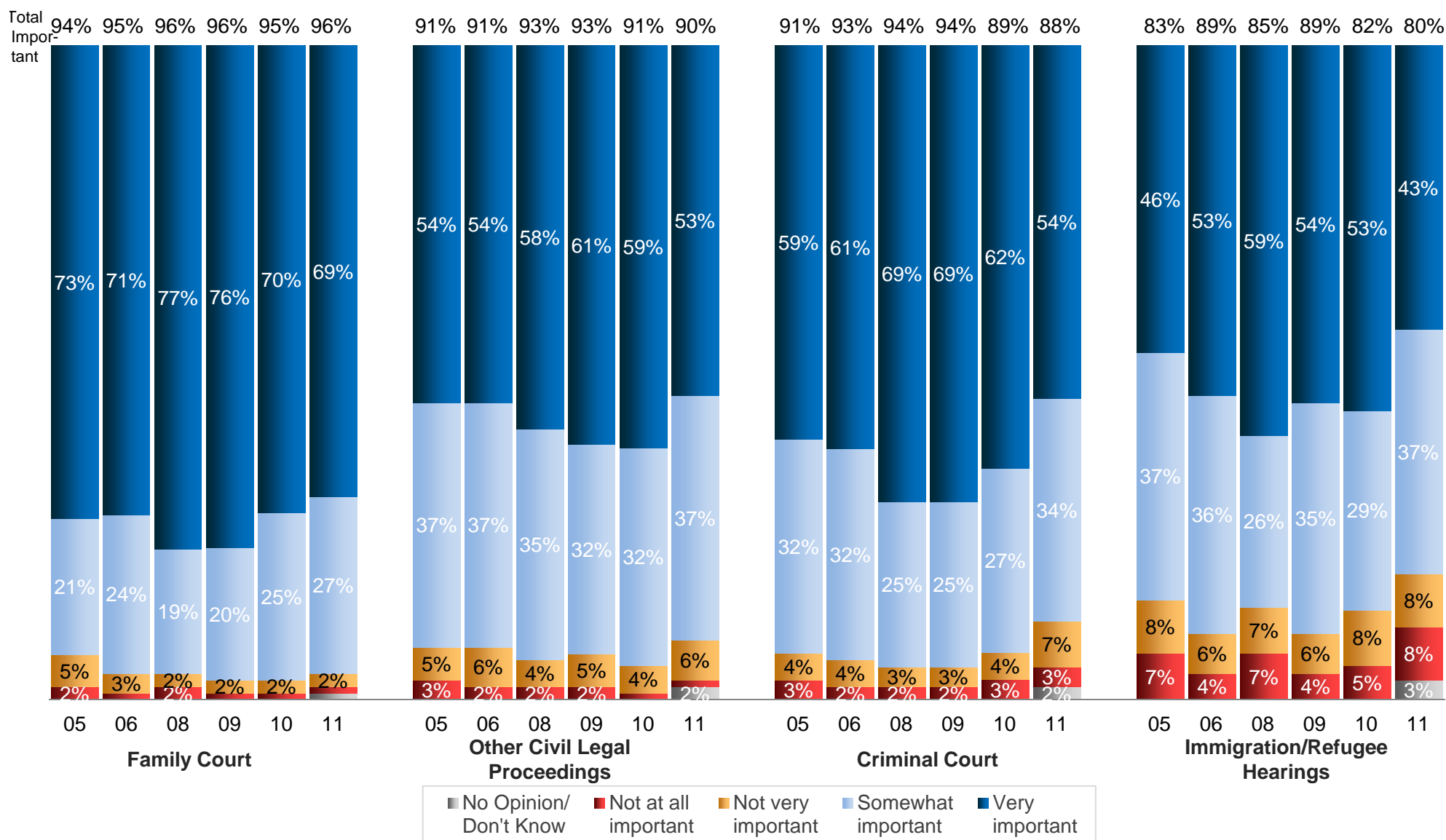
Note: 48% of LSS clients agree that they are satisfied with the level of support LSS gave them so they could address problems related to their legal issues (2011 Client Services Survey)

# LSS Priorities

- BC residents agree that the LSS should help their clients address problems that are related to their legal issues (such as housing problems, debt, health problems). Specifically, 75% agree, 16% are neutral, leaving only 5% who disagree.
- As a point of comparison, in the 2010 Tariff Lawyer Satisfaction Survey, only 22% of tariff lawyers agreed that they are satisfied with the level of support LSS gives them to help their legal aid clients address related legal issues.
- Further, in this year's Client Satisfaction Survey, 48% of clients, in total, agreed they are satisfied with the level of support LSS gave them so they could address the problems related to their legal issues.
- Hence, while the public generally agrees with the approach set by LSS, legal aid clients, and especially tariff lawyers, report room for improvement in reaching this goal.

# Fairness in the Justice System

**LS4.** In your opinion, how important is it to fairness in the justice system for BC to provide low income people with legal aid in...?



Base: 2005=763, 2006=745, 2008=730, 2009=753, 2010=574, 2011=562

Note: Don't Know responses not shown, but range from 2% to 4% in 2010.

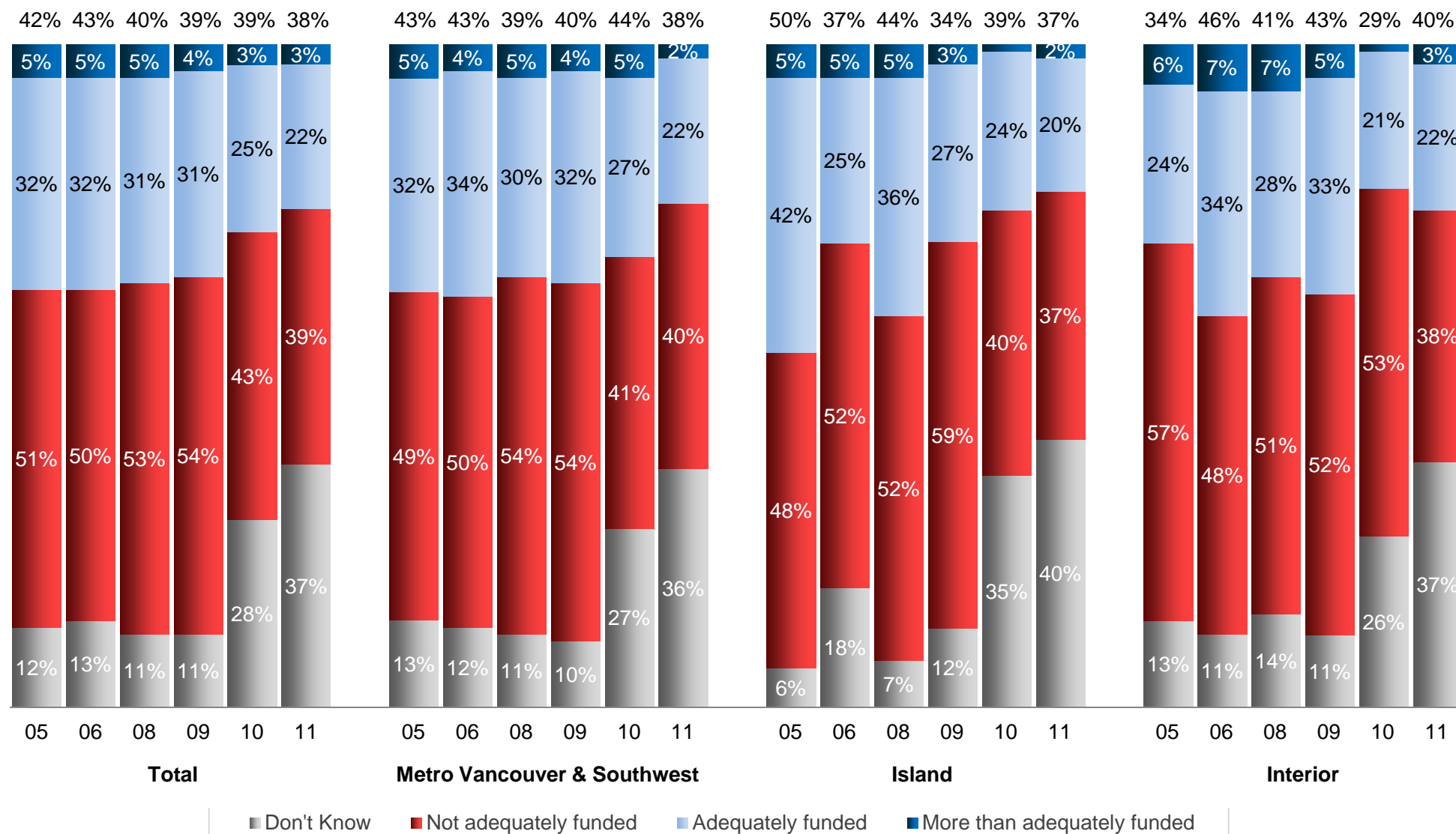
# Fairness in the Justice System

- Consistent with findings from one year ago, the large majority of BC residents continue to think it is important to fairness in the justice system that low income people in BC are provided with legal aid in various courts, proceedings and hearings.
- Residents living outside Metro Vancouver/Fraser Valley tend to feel most strongly that providing legal aid in family court is important to fairness in the justice system.
- Of the four types of areas asked about, residents say it is most important to fairness in the justice system to provide legal aid in family court (96%), followed by other civil legal proceedings (90%), criminal court (88%) and in immigration/refugee hearings (80%).
- Overall importance attributed to these areas has not changed in the past year. However, with the exception of legal aid in family court, perceptions have softened in the past 12 months. That is, BC residents are less likely to say civil proceedings, criminal court and immigration hearings are “very” important to maintaining fairness in the justice system and more likely to say they are “somewhat” important.

# State of Legal Aid Services in BC

**LS5. Based on anything you may have read, heard, or seen, would you say that legal aid services in British Columbia are...**

% believing funding is at least adequate, among those with an opinion



Base: 2005=763, 2006=745, 2008=730, 2009=753, 2010=574, 2011=562

Note: Required differences when comparing 2011 and 2010 results are higher for regional samples (see Methodology, slide 4).

# State of Legal Aid Services in BC

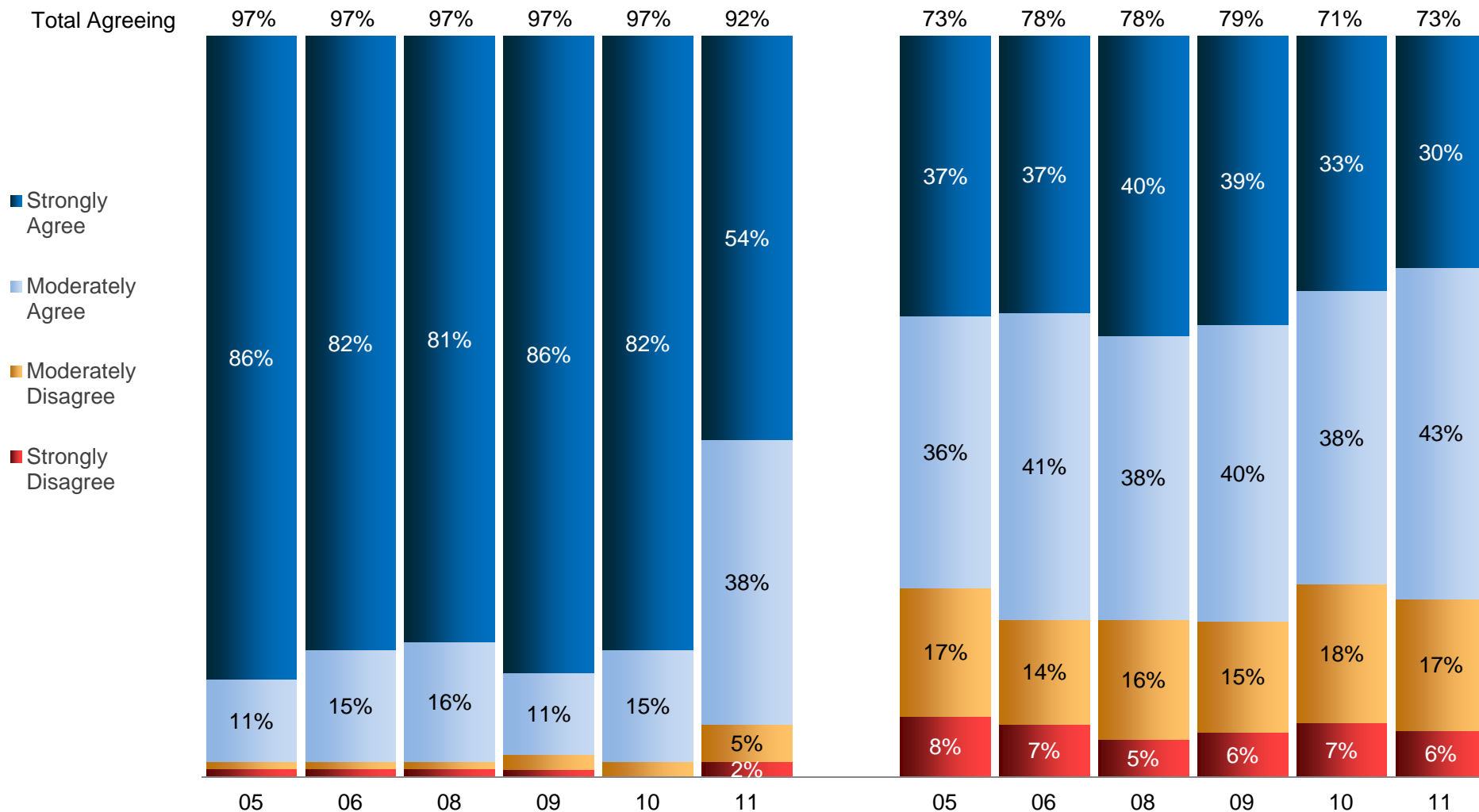
- Unchanged from one year ago, BC residents are somewhat divided in their opinions about whether or not legal aid services in BC are adequately funded.
- Currently, one-quarter thinks funding is adequate/more than adequate, 39% thinks legal aid is inadequately funded, leaving 37% who don't know or lack an opinion.
- Among residents who could actually offer an opinion, the proportion feeling that legal aid is adequately (or more than adequately) funded stands at 38%, consistent with past trends.
- Older residents (55+) are the most apt to feel it is inadequately funded.
- Perceptions about legal aid funding do not appear to be driven by any one information source, as the sources of information about legal aid accessed in the past few months is consistent across those holding the various views about funding.
- The proportion of residents who say they don't know if legal aid services in BC are adequately funded increased significantly in 2010, when there was a change in research suppliers used to conduct the study.
- We surmised at that time, that a different approach to the data collection/interviewing process likely accounted for this difference.
- The current, growing proportion of residents who are unable to say whether or not legal aid services in BC are adequately funded, may be related to the absence of recent media coverage (as the question is prefaced by "Based on anything you may have read, heard or seen...").

# Public Positions on the Justice System & Legal Aid

Would you agree or disagree with the following statements:

**LS6. 2011 WORDING:** Everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means spending more money to reach people in remote and rural communities  
**WORDING PRIOR TO 2011:** Everyone should have the right to access the justice system

**LS7. Most of the funding for legal aid comes from the provincial government. Governments should give funding for legal aid the same priority as they give to funding for other social services such as health care, education, welfare, and child protection.**



Base: 2005=763, 2006=745, 2008=730, 2009=753, 2010=574, 2011=562

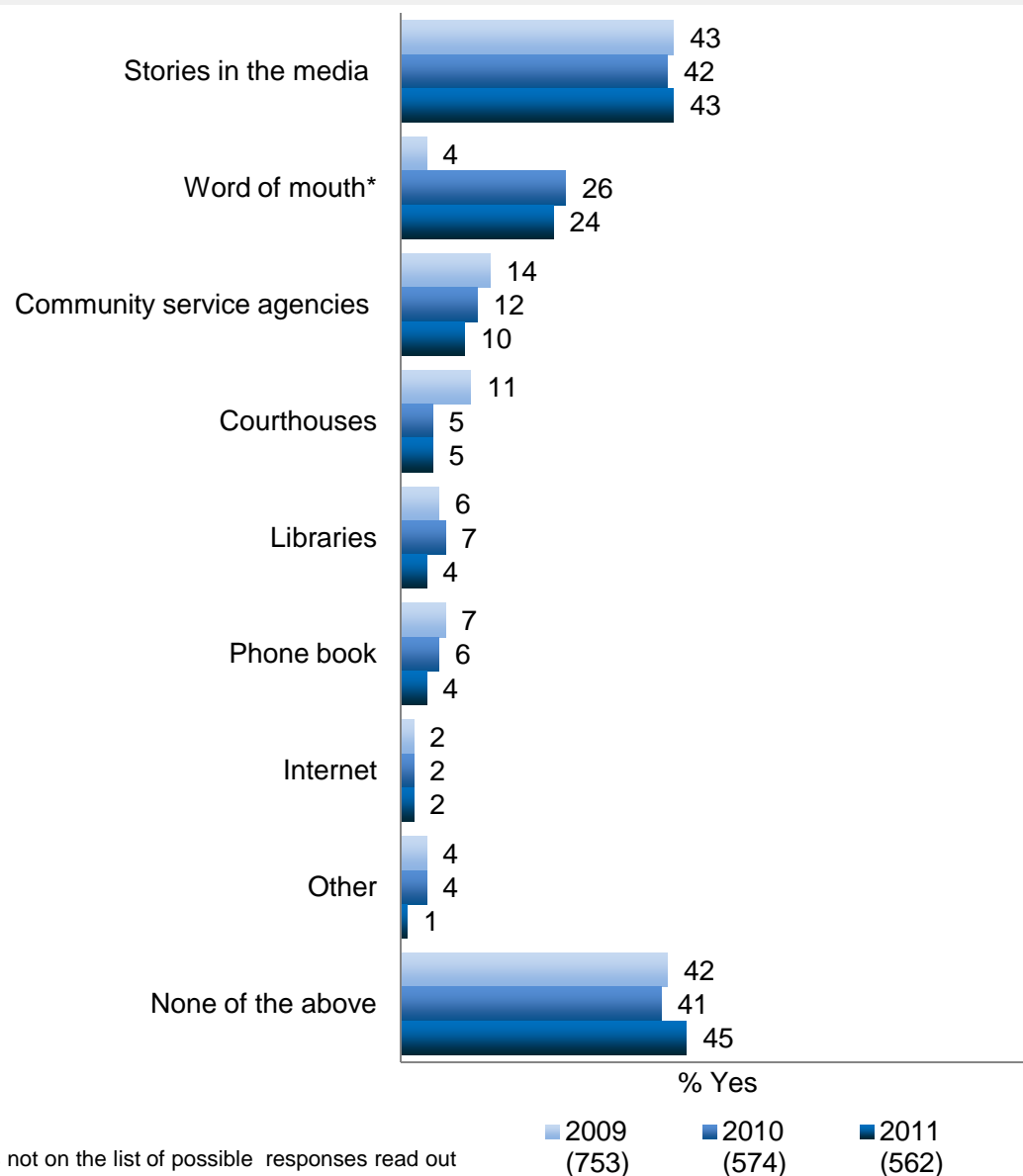
Note: Don't Know responses not shown, but are 1% for QLS6 and 3% for QLS7 in 2011.

# Public Positions on the Justice System & Legal Aid

- *Please note that the question wording for question LS6 changed this year. Instead of asking for agreement/disagreement on the statement “Everyone should have the right to access the justice system” the new wording is “Everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means spending more money to reach people in remote and rural communities”.*
- Currently, the large majority of BC residents agree (54% strongly and 38% moderately) that everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means spending more money to reach people in remote and rural communities.
- Residents who feel legal aid is inadequately funded especially tend to agree with this point-of-view.
- While not directly comparable to historical trends given that the question wording changed for 2011 (since in the past we asked “everyone should have the right to access the justice system”), overall agreement continues to be widespread.
- Opinions regarding the priority government should give legal aid remains unchanged from one year ago. Currently, 73% agree that legal aid should get the same funding as other social services such as healthcare, education, welfare and child protection.
- Older residents (55+), those living in the Interior, and those with lower household incomes agree most strongly that legal aid should be given the same funding as other social services.

# Sources of Legal Aid Information

**LS8. In the past few months, did you hear about (get your information about) legal aid from any of the following sources?**



\*This response was not on the list of possible responses read out to respondents in the 2009 survey. However, it was on list in the 2010 & 2011 surveys.

- Just over one-half of residents report hearing something about legal aid in the past few months.
- Unchanged from past trends, stories in the media tend to be the primary information source for legal aid news/information, followed by word of mouth and community service agencies.
- Men and those in the lowest household income category are more likely than their counterparts to report not hearing any news about legal aid in recent months.

# Suggested Improvements for Legal Aid Services

## LS9. How do you think legal aid services in British Columbia could be improved?

	2009	2010	2011
	(753) %	(574) %	(562) %
Improved funding	22	18	18
More advertising/promotion/public awareness	14	14	15
Improved access/availability	18	9	6
Make system more efficient (legal/judicial/courts)	3	2	5
Improved access/availability for lower income people	4	2	4
More lawyers available	8	5	3
Better guidelines as to who should qualify for legal aid	5	3	3
Provide more information on how to obtain legal aid	2	4	2
More qualified legal representation	2	3	2
Improved access/availability in remote areas	-	2	2
Expand qualifications for legal aid/raise max. income level	-	2	2
Provide more services/programs	2	2	1
More lawyers doing pro bono work/who will work for lower fees	-	2	1
Better government/a government that supports legal aid	-	-	1
Provide service in different languages/more services for immigrants	-	-	1
More time/hours of legal aid assistance	-	1	-
Other	10	3	2
None/no improvement necessary	2	24	24
Don't know/not stated	32	26	26

Improved funding and more advertising/public awareness are the top two suggestions for improving legal aid, which is in line with past trends.

Improving accessibility, in general and for those in remote areas, is another suggestion mentioned by 12% of residents.

# Copy of Questionnaire

