

Legal Services Society:
2016 Public Opinion Poll

April 20, 2016

Contact:

Mary Bacica | 604 566 8913
mb@sentisresearch.com

Alana Kendrick | 604 566 8914
ak@sentisresearch.com



03

**Objectives &
Methodology**



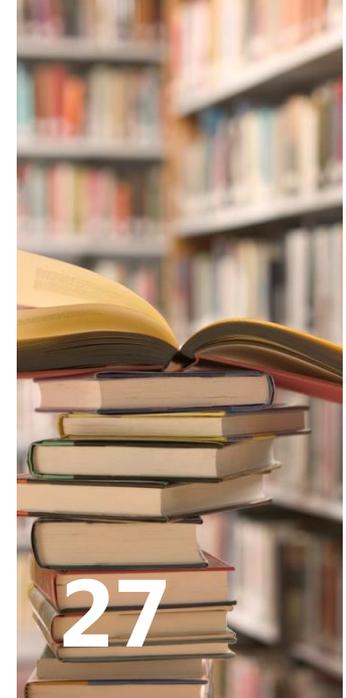
05

Highlights



08

**Summary of
Findings**



27

Appendix

contents



Objectives & Methodology

Objectives

- Since 2005, Legal Services Society (LSS) has enlisted research partners to conduct a province-wide survey with BC residents with the purpose of understanding the awareness, knowledge and attitudes around legal aid in BC.
- Changes to question wording have been made over the years to accommodate LSS's changing goals and priorities, and these modifications have been noted throughout the report. Wherever possible, results are trended back to 2005.

Methodology

- Due to the increasing difficulty in reaching a demographically representative sample via telephone surveying, the switch was made to begin administering the survey online in 2014.
- This year, 620 online interviews were conducted from February 22 to 29, 2016 with BC residents aged 18 and older*. The sample was generated from a general access panel maintained by Vision Critical, an online research panel provider based in Vancouver. The final data was weighted by age and gender within region in order to accurately reflect the actual BC population.
- *Note: The survey is conducted among the general BC population and not LSS clients. However, although they are not the target audience, some LSS clients could have been invited to participate in the survey.

Margins of Error (MOE)

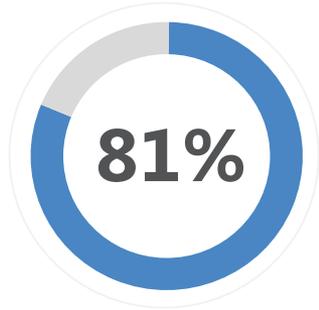
- At the 95% level of confidence, a sample size of 620 has a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$.
- Given the change in methodology to online surveying in 2014, percentage-to-percentage comparisons can only be made among 2005 to 2013 waves (waves conducted by telephone) and among 2014 onward (waves conducted online). Caution should be used when making comparisons between 2016 and waves prior to 2014 given the difference in methodologies, although these prior waves can still be used as a broad indicator of past public opinion.
- When comparing 2016 results to 2015, a shift of $\pm 6\%$ is required for the difference to be deemed statistically significant at the 95% level of confidence.
- When comparing 2015 results to 2016 findings on a regional level, the following differences are required for significance:

Region	2015-to-2016 Required Shift (at 95% Level)
Lower Mainland / Fraser Valley	$\pm 7\%$
Vancouver Island	$\pm 14\%$
Interior / North	$\pm 12\%$



Highlights

Awareness of Legal Aid



Are aware of Legal Aid in General

Awareness of Legal Aid for Specific Case Types (% aware)

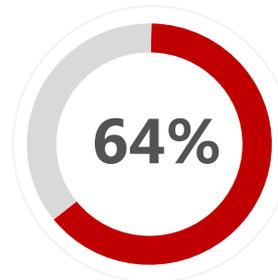
Criminal Law	70%
Family Law	64%
Immigration/Refugee Law	53%

- While British Columbians are widely aware of legal aid services in general (81%) they are less apt to know about the types of cases legal aid handles.
- However, at 81%, general awareness of legal aid is at a two-year low (it stood at 87% in 2014).
- Awareness of the case types handled by legal aid mirrors that of past years (i.e., BC residents are most apt to associate legal aid with criminal law, followed by family law, and least likely to know it also handles immigration/refugee matters).

Top Sources of Information on Legal Aid

% hearing info about Legal Aid from...

1	Stories in the Media	26%
2	Word-of-Mouth	14%
3	Community Service Agencies	10%



Have not heard anything about Legal Aid recently

- The lower levels of awareness can be attributed to the fact that British Columbians don't come across much information on legal aid. Two-thirds do not recall hearing anything about legal aid in the past few months (up from 58% in 2014 and 2015).
- For those who do recall hearing about legal aid recently, the main information sources continue to be stories in the media, word-of-mouth and community service agencies.

Public Support for Legal Aid

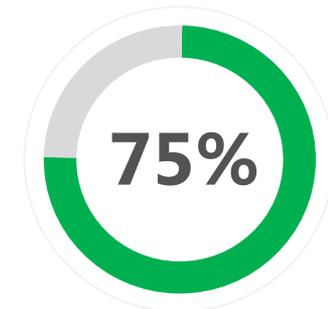
Support for Legal Aid in General



Support Legal Aid Services

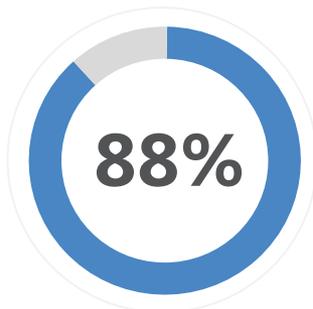
- Public support for legal aid remains very high across the province, with 92% of British Columbians saying they support legal aid services in general. This is on par with past years.
- Three-quarters of BC residents continue to agree that LSS should also support clients by helping them with problems that are related to their legal issues (for example, housing problems, debt or health problems). Just 6% of British Columbians disagree, while 18% are unsure or undecided.

Support for LSS Mandate



Agree that LSS should support clients by addressing related legal issues

Importance of Legal Aid in Ensuring Fairness in the Justice System



Feel Legal Aid is Important to Ensuring Fairness in the Justice System Overall (average of the importance for the 4 legal areas)

Importance By Legal Area

(% very/somewhat important)

Family Court	93%
Criminal Court	90%
Other Civil Legal Proceedings	90%
Immigration/Refugee Hearings	78%

- The majority of BC residents (88%) continue to feel that offering legal aid to people with low incomes is important to ensuring fairness in the justice system.
- Looking at the different types of cases handled by legal aid, fewer British Columbians see offering legal aid services for immigration/refugee hearings as important to ensuring fairness in the justice system than for cases in family court, criminal court and other civil legal proceedings (consistent with past trends).

Public Positions on the Justice System & Legal Aid



84%

Strongly/
Moderately Agree

Everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if the provincial government has to spend more money on it

- Even if the provincial government has to spend more money on it, 84% of British Columbians agree that everyone should have the right to access the justice system.
- When it comes to government funding priorities, 72% agree that legal aid funding should be given the same priority as the funding for other social services like health care, education, welfare and child protection. Although this position receives relatively less support, agreement has inched up from 66% in 2014.



72%

Strongly/
Moderately Agree

Governments should give legal aid funding the same priority as funding for other social services

Legal Aid Funding Perceptions

Among the 60% offering an opinion:



71%

Funding is **inadequate**

24%

Funding is **adequate**

5%

Funding is **more than adequate**

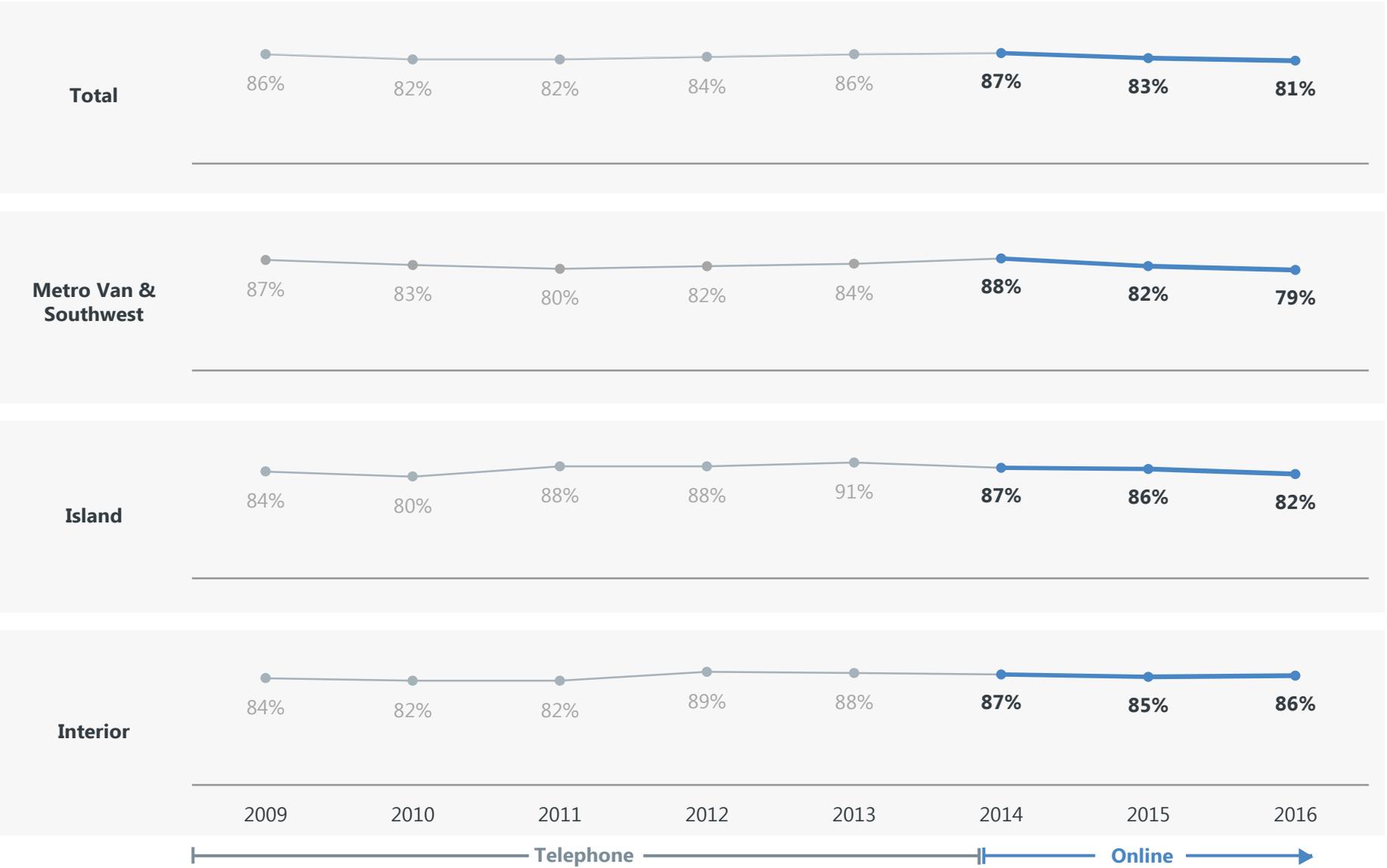
- When asked to assess the adequacy of legal aid funding, four-in-ten BC residents admit that they don't know enough to offer an opinion. Among those who do express their views, the majority (71%) feel that the current funding of legal aid services is *inadequate*. This sentiment has been growing over the past few years (67% thought funding was inadequate in 2014).



Summary of Findings

- Overall, eight-in-ten BC residents are aware that there are legal aid services available for people with low incomes across the province. At 81%, awareness is unchanged from 2015, although it is 6 points lower than its peak of 87% in 2014.
- Regionally, awareness has decreased on the Island (down 4 points to 82%) and in Metro Vancouver (down 3 points to 79%). After holding steady this year, awareness in the Interior stands at 86%, making it the region with the highest awareness of legal aid.
- Consistent with past trends, awareness of legal aid in BC increases with age - awareness stands at 90% among those 55 and older, 86% among those 35 to 54, and stands at only 64% among those under 35. Compared to last year, awareness is even lower among the youngest age group (falling 8 points from 72% in 2015).
- British Columbians with the lowest household incomes (less than \$25k/year) are also the least likely to be aware that legal aid is available across the province (76% versus 81% overall).
- When it comes to awareness of legal aid for different types of cases, BC residents remain the most aware that legal aid is available for criminal law matters (70% are aware). Two-thirds (64%) are aware of legal aid for family law matters, while just half (53%) of British Columbians know that legal aid is available for immigration/refugee matters. After spiking two years ago, awareness continues to hold steady with 2015 levels.
- As is the case with legal aid in general, BC residents between 18 and 34 are the least aware of the different types of cases handled by legal aid (unchanged from past years).

% Aware

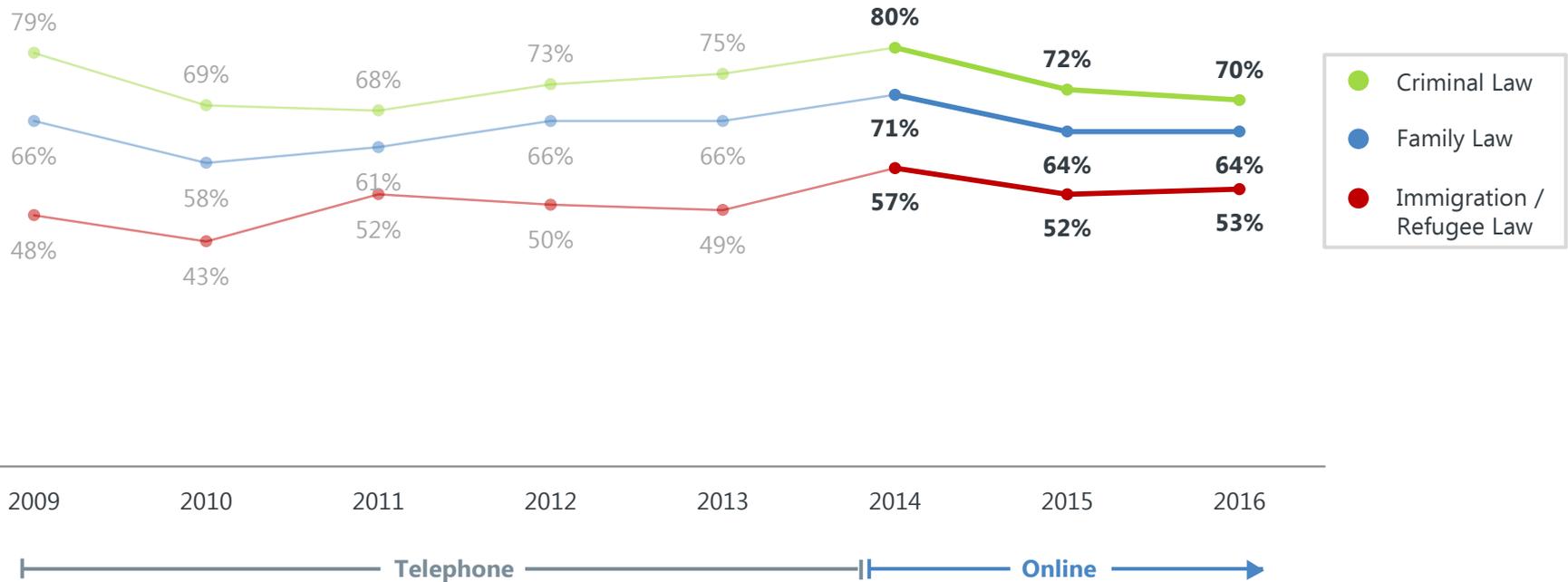


Total base size: 2009 (753), 2010 (574), 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

LS1. Now we 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?

Awareness of Legal Aid for Different Types of Cases

% Aware



Total base size: 2009 (753), 2010 (574), 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

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

- Among BC residents, support for legal aid in general continues to be very high – 92% support legal aid services, including 62% offering strong support. Regionally, the level of support for legal aid remains on par with 2015.
- Consistent with 2015, the lowest income households offer the strongest support for legal aid – 85% of households earning less than \$25k/year strongly support legal aid services versus 62% overall.
- Support for the LSS mandate of helping clients in addressing problems related to their legal issue remains strong, with three-quarters of BC residents agreeing that LSS should assist their clients in this way. Among the rest of British Columbians, only a small portion (6%) disagree with the mandate, while 18% remain uncertain or undecided.
- Support for the LSS mandate has experienced directional increases across all three regions – especially on the Island, where agreement inched up 10 points (albeit not a significant increase) to 81% this year.
- Again, households in the lowest income bracket are most likely to strongly agree that LSS should be helping clients address problems related to their legal issue. Among households making less than \$25k/year, 72% strongly agree compared to 44% overall.

Support / Oppose Legal Aid Services

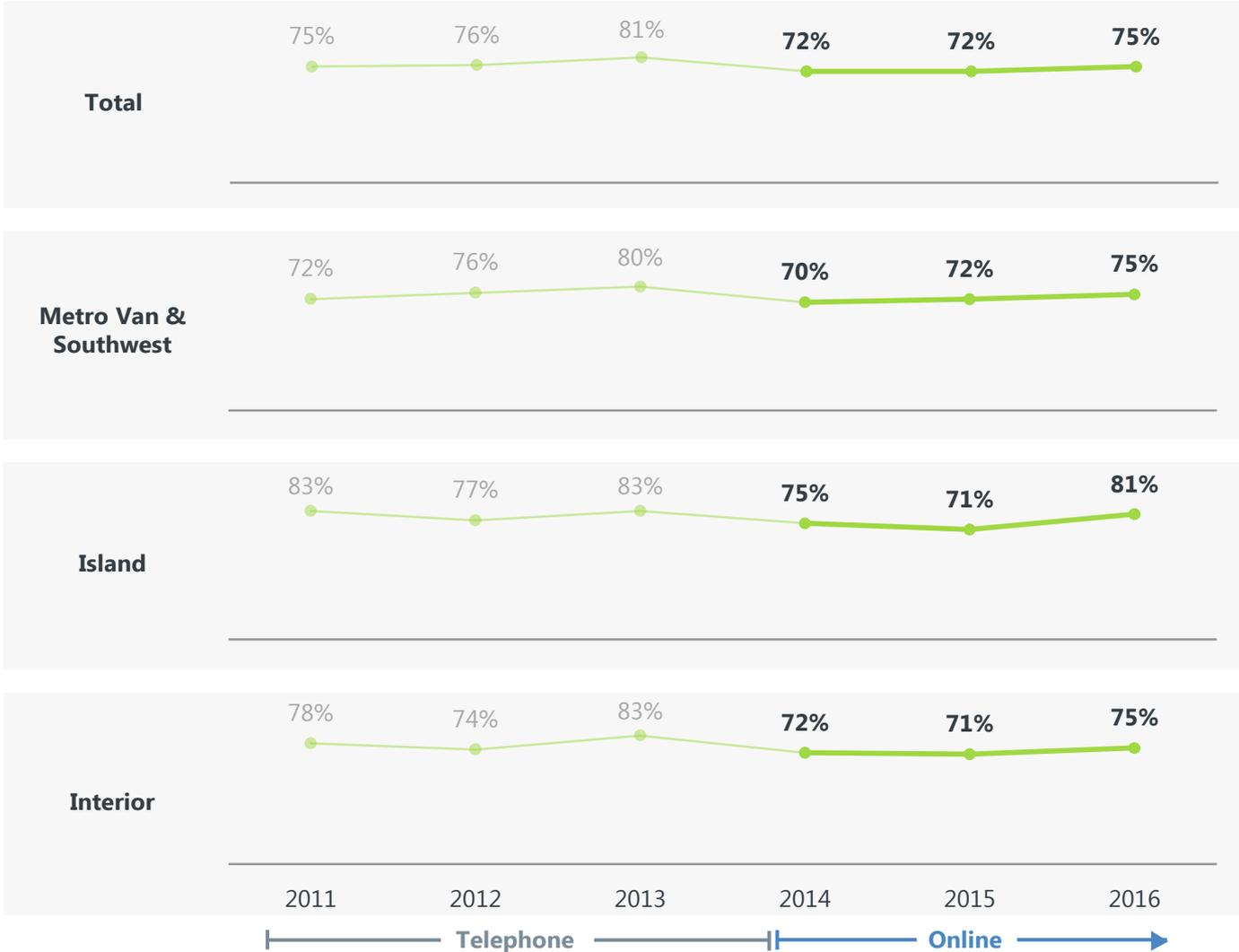


Total base size: 2005 (763), 2006 (745), 2008 (730), 2009 (753), 2010 (574), 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

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 self-help materials, 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?

Should LSS Support Clients by Addressing Legal Related Issues?

% Agreeing



2016	
	(620)
Strongly agree	44%
Agree	31%
Partly agree / disagree	16%
Disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	2%
No opinion / don't know	2%
Strongly agree	43%
Agree	32%
Partly agree / disagree	16%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
No opinion / don't know	3%
Strongly agree	50%
Agree	31%
Partly agree / disagree	13%
Disagree	2%
Strongly disagree	2%
No opinion / don't know	1%
Strongly agree	45%
Agree	30%
Partly agree / disagree	18%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
No opinion / don't know	1%

Total base size: 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

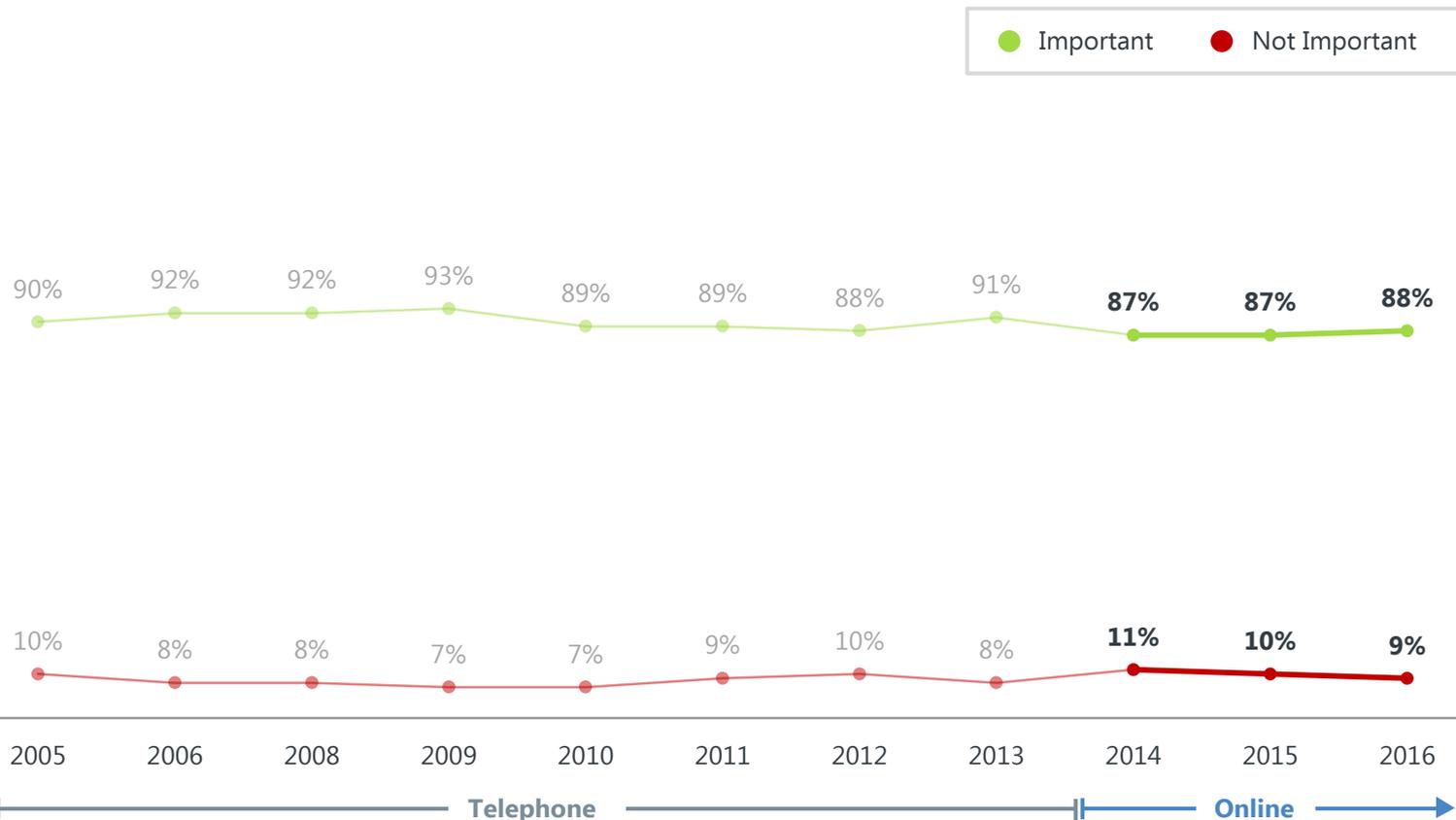
Note: 22% of tariff lawyers agree that LSS helps them to help their clients address problems that are related to their legal issues (2010 Tariff Lawyer Survey)

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)

LS3a. Do you strongly agree, agree, partly agree/partly disagree, disagree or strongly disagree that... Legal Aid should support their clients in addressing problems that are related to their legal issues (such as housing problems, debt, health problems, etc.)?

- The large majority of BC residents continue to believe that legal aid is important to ensuring fairness in the justice system. With 88% saying it is important (including 61% very important), perceptions are in line with past years and consistent across the three regions.
- Across income levels, households making less than \$45k/year are the most likely to say legal aid is very important to ensuring fairness in the justice system (69% say so).
- By legal area, offering legal aid services for family court matters continues to be perceived as the most important to ensuring fairness in the justice system. After a dip in 2015, importance ratings have rebounded for other civil legal proceedings so it now stands in line with criminal court (both at 90%). However, of the two, legal aid for criminal court is seen as more *strongly* important to ensuring fairness in the justice system (65% rating very important versus 58% very important for civil legal proceedings).
- Unchanged from past trends, fewer BC residents perceive legal aid for immigration/refugee hearings as important to ensuring fairness in the justice system compared to the other areas of legal aid (78% versus broadly nine-in-ten for the other legal aid areas).

Fairness in the Justice System – Overall



2016	
	(620)
Very	61%
Somewhat	27%
Not very	6%
Not at all	3%
No opinion / don't know	3%

Total base size: 2005 (763), 2006 (745), 2008 (730), 2009 (753), 2010 (574), 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

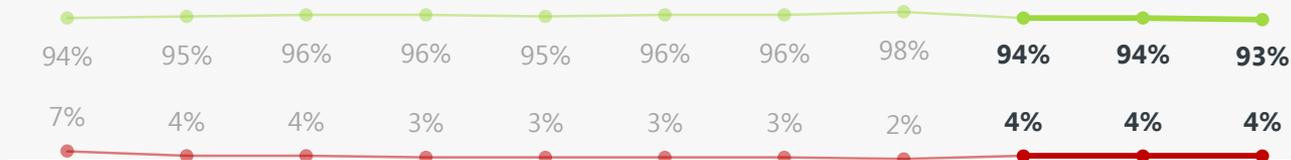
Results are based on an average of importance ratings for providing legal aid in the following four areas combined: family court, criminal court, immigration/refugee hearings and other civil legal proceedings.

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...?

Fairness in the Justice System – By Legal Area

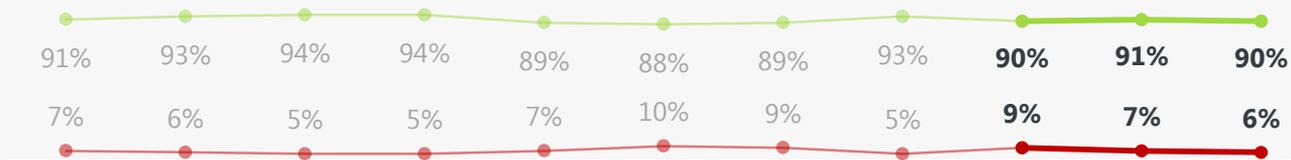
● Important ● Not Important

Family Court



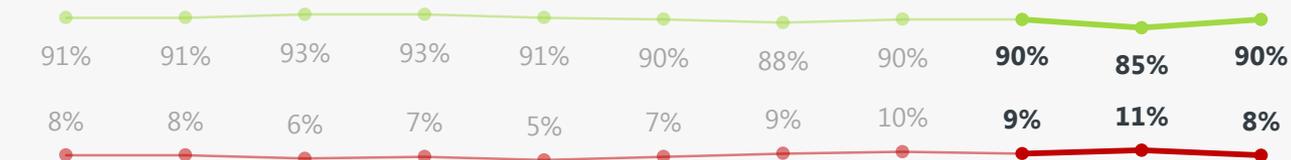
2016	
	(620)
Very	70%
Somewhat	23%
Not very	3%
Not at all	1%
No opinion / don't know	2%

Criminal Court



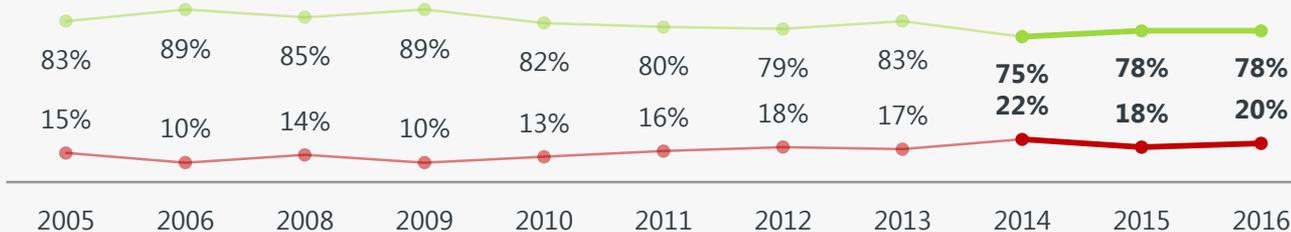
Very	65%
Somewhat	25%
Not very	4%
Not at all	2%
No opinion / don't know	3%

Other Civil Legal Proceedings



Very	58%
Somewhat	32%
Not very	7%
Not at all	1%
No opinion / don't know	2%

Immigration/ Refugee Hearings



Very	50%
Somewhat	28%
Not very	11%
Not at all	9%
No opinion / don't know	3%

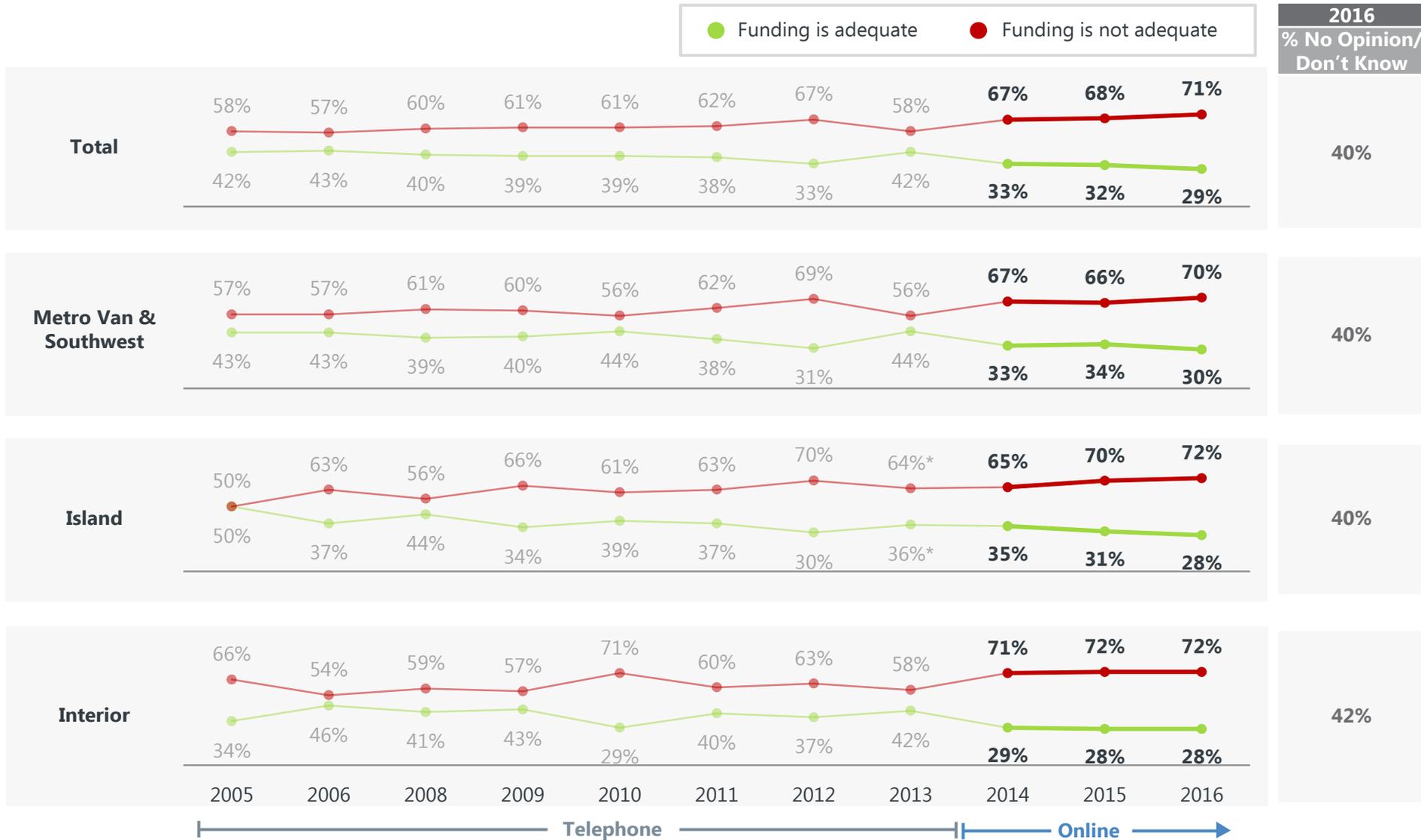
— Telephone — Online —>

Total base size: 2005 (763), 2006 (745), 2008 (730), 2009 (753), 2010 (574), 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

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...?

- Six-in-ten BC residents are able to offer an opinion on the adequacy of legal aid funding. Among this group, the majority (71%) believes that the funding for legal aid services is inadequate, one-quarter feels that it is adequate, and just 5% say the funding is more than adequate.
- The proportion of British Columbians saying that legal aid is inadequately funded appears to be growing. In 2014, 67% felt that funding for legal aid was inadequate, this moved to 68% in 2015 and currently stands at 71%. From a regional perspective, opinions continue to be highly similar with 70% to 72% among those with an opinion believing that legal funding is inadequate.
- Although the majority of BC residents feel that legal aid funding is inadequate, that opinion is not as widely held among higher income households as it is among lower income households (67% of households with incomes of \$65k/year or higher think funding is inadequate, versus 86% among those with household incomes of less than \$25k/year).
- When it comes to even having an opinion about legal aid funding, young British Columbians (between 18 and 24) are the least likely to be able to offer an opinion and this lack of awareness or knowledge seems to be growing. This year, 56% of this age group could not give an assessment compared to 44% in 2015 and 45% in 2016.

Legal Aid Funding Perceptions (among those with an opinion)



Base: Among those giving an opinion - 2014 (399), 2015 (372), 2016 (371)

Note: Base sizes for 2005 to 2013 are not available

*Caution small base size

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

- British Columbians continue to agree that everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if it means the provincial government has to spend more money on it. On par with past years, 84% of BC residents agree, including 46% who strongly agree.
- Comparatively, British Columbians give relatively less support when it comes to governments giving legal aid the same priority as they give to funding for other social services like health care, education, welfare and child protection. However, support appears to be growing – it stands at 72% this year (up from 68% in 2015). Further, with 29% saying they strongly agree this year, the strength of the agreement is holding steady after increasing 6 points to 30% in 2015.
- Again, younger BC residents (under 35 years of age) are the most likely to be unsure or lack an opinion, relative to their older counterparts – especially when it comes to whether or not legal aid funding should be given the same priority as funding for other social services.
- Compared to 2015, more British Columbians agree that everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if it requires more government spending *and* that legal aid funding should be given the same priority as other social services – 70% support both positions (up from 65% last year). Conversely, one-in-ten BC residents disagree with both points-of-view (unchanged from past years).
- Another group of British Columbians agree that everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if the government has to spend more money, but they disagree that legal aid should be given the same funding priority as other social services. This year, 11% feel this way, falling from 15% in 2015. The remaining 2% of BC residents continue to hold the opposite point-of-view.

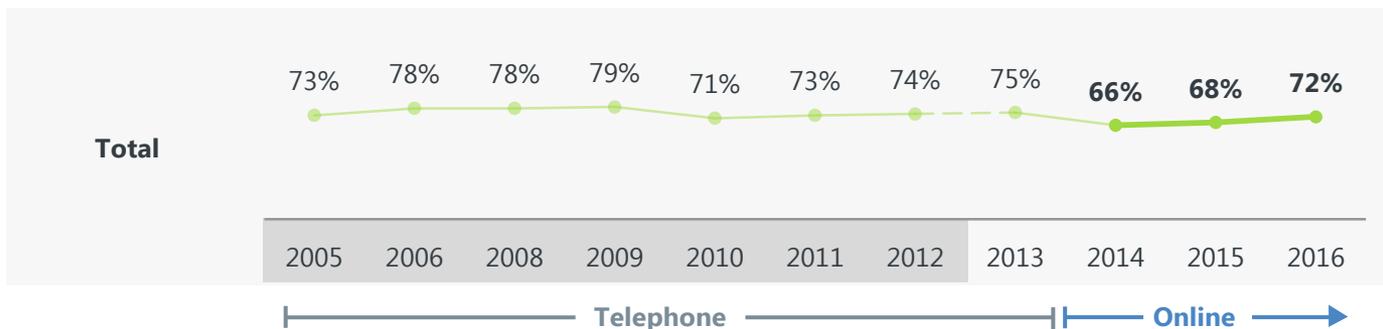
% Agreeing

*Everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means the provincial government, which provides most of the funding for legal aid, has to spend more money on it.**



2016	
	(620)
Strongly agree	46%
Moderately agree	38%
Moderately disagree	9%
Strongly disagree	2%
No opinion / don't know	5%

*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.**



Strongly agree	29%
Moderately agree	43%
Moderately disagree	18%
Strongly disagree	5%
No opinion / don't know	5%

Total base size: 2005 (763), 2006 (745), 2008 (730), 2009 (753), 2010 (574), 2011 (562), 2012 (602), 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

*New wording/question order was implemented in 2013, trends should be viewed with caution.

LS6. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? Everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means the provincial government, which provides most of the funding for legal aid, has to spend more money on it.

2011-2012 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.

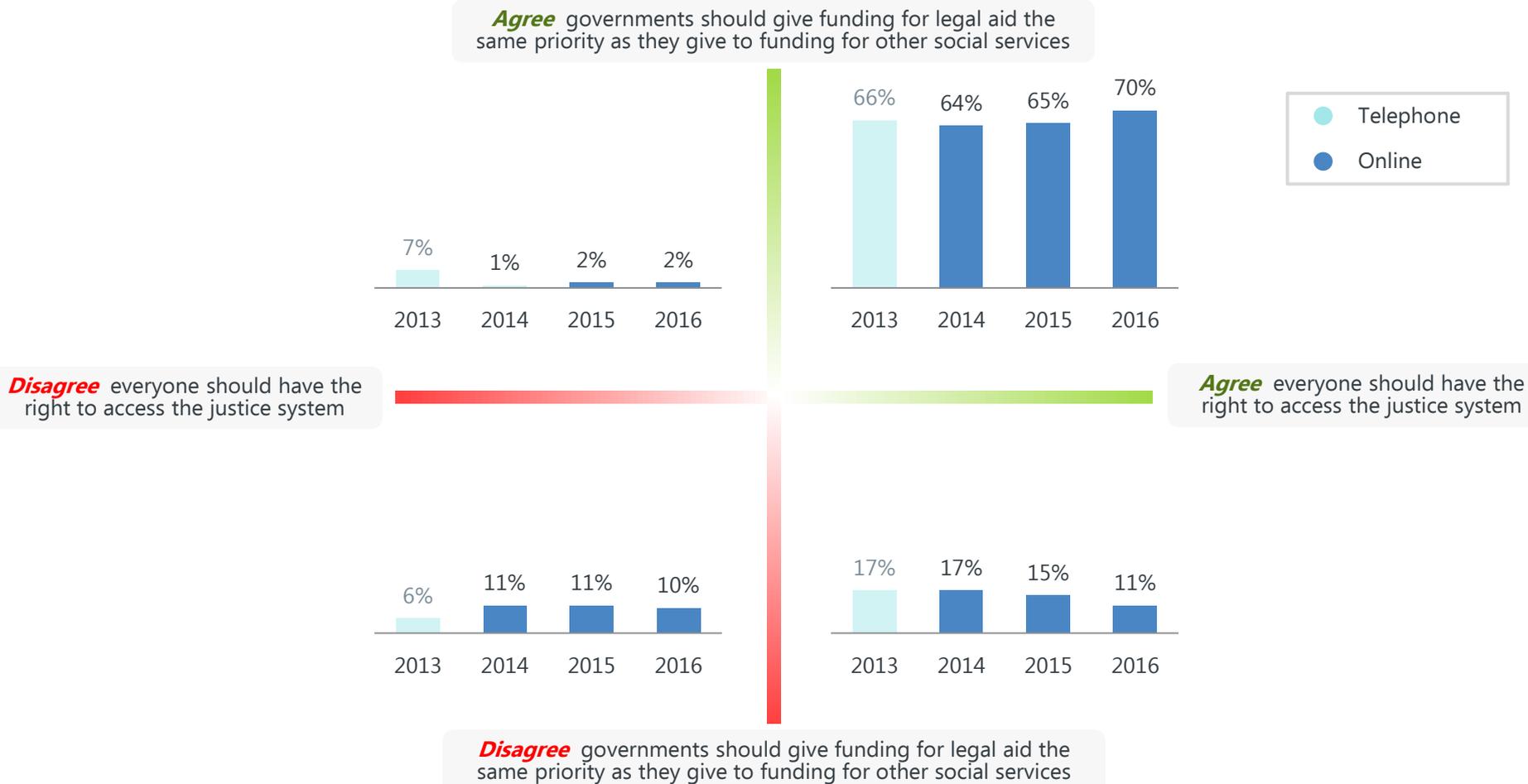
WORDING PRIOR TO 2011: Everyone should have the right to access the justice system.

LS7. Most of the funding for legal aid comes from the provincial government. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? 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.

WORDING PRIOR TO 2013: Governments should give funding for legal aid the same priority as other social services.

Public Positions on the Justice System & Legal Aid (cont'd)

The chart below combines BC resident opinions on everyone having the right to access the justice system, even if the provincial government has to spend more money on it *and* their opinions on governments giving legal aid funding the same priority as they give other social services. The majority agree with the two positions (top, right-hand quadrant), whereas one-in-ten disagree with both (bottom, left-hand quadrant).



Total base size: 2013 (600), 2014 (612), 2015 (600), 2016 (620)

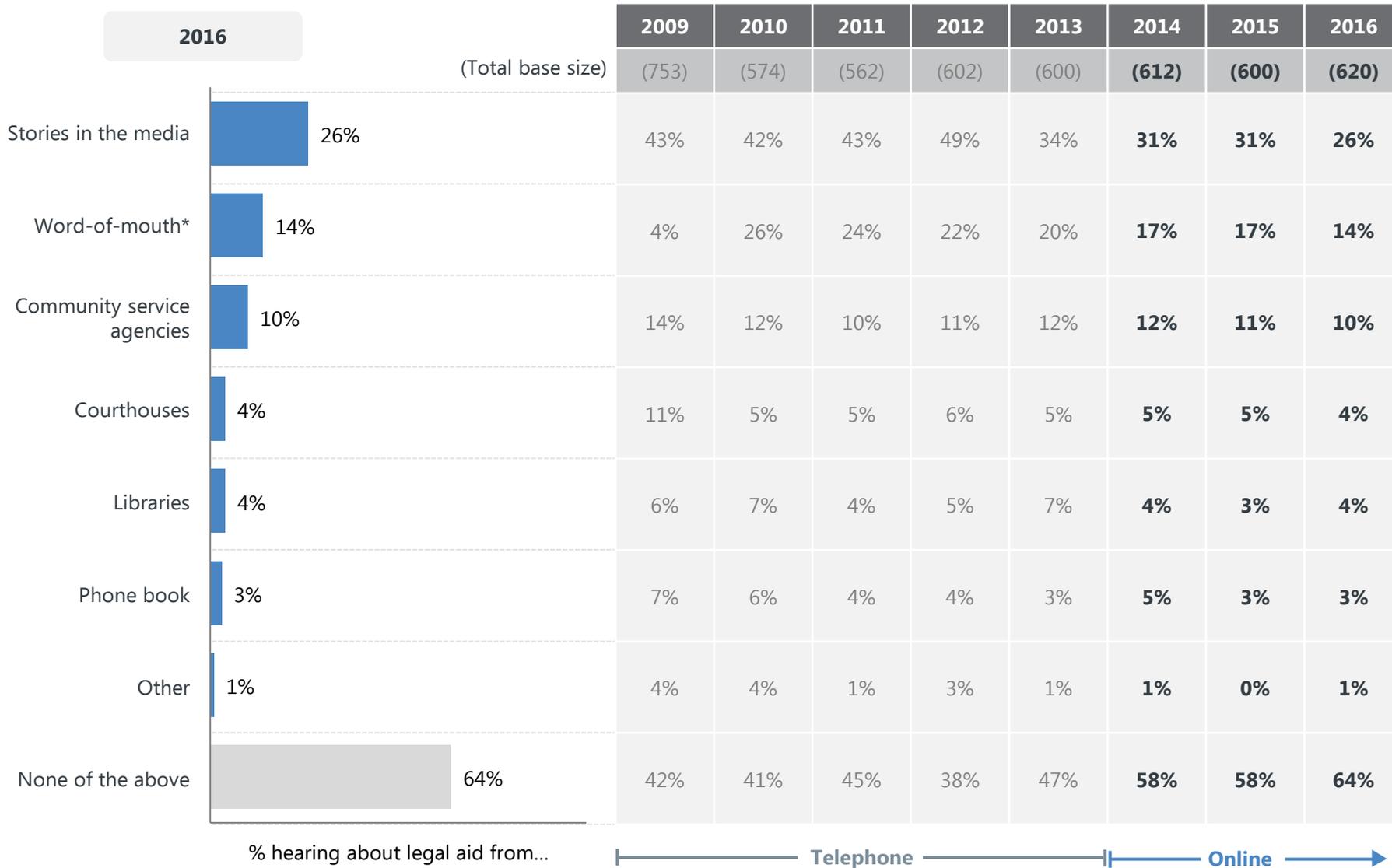
Note: "No opinion/don't know" responses were 3% in 2013, 7% in 2014, 6% in 2015 and 5% in 2016.

LS6. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? Everyone should have the right to access the justice system even if that means the provincial government, which provides most of the funding for legal aid, has to spend more money on it.

LS7. Most of the funding for legal aid comes from the provincial government. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement? 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.

- When it comes to getting information about legal aid, almost two-thirds of British Columbians admit to not hearing anything about legal aid in the past few months. Although this number has consistently been high in the past, it has jumped up another 6 points this year.
- Households with an annual income of \$100k or higher are the most likely to have not heard anything about legal aid in the past few months (77% say they haven't).
- For BC residents who have heard something about legal aid recently, the top channels have not changed. Stories in the media continue to be the top source of information (26%), followed by word-of-mouth (14%) and community service agencies (10%).
- There are a few notable differences when it comes to where various demographic groups get their information on legal aid.
 - British Columbians over 55 are the most likely to get their information from stories in the media (34% versus 26% overall)
 - Those less educated (high school or less) are the most apt to hear about legal aid through courthouses (10% versus 4% overall)
 - Community service agencies are most likely to be an information source for households with an income of less than \$25k/year (19% versus 10% overall)
- When asked how legal aid in BC could be improved, residents continue to most frequently comment about improving or increasing funding (mentioned by 11%), with no other comment being made by more than 5%. Residents in the lower income households (less than \$25k/year) mention that they'd like more information on how to obtain legal aid (11% of this group mentioning this versus 4% overall).

Sources of Legal Aid Information



Total base size: 2016 (620)

*This response was added to the response list in 2010.

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

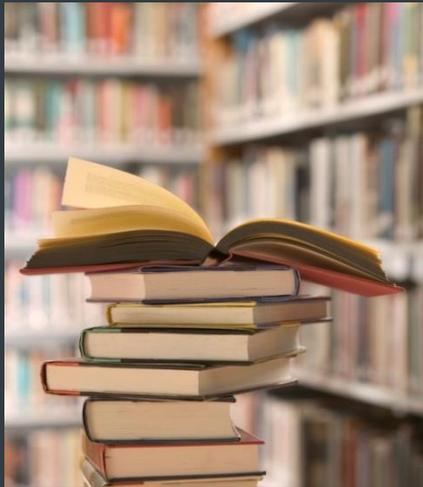
Suggested Improvements for Legal Aid Services

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
(Total base size)	(753)	(574)	(562)	(602)	(600)	(612)	(600)	(620)
Improve / increase funding	22%	18%	18%	21%	19%	15%	14%	11%
Improved access / availability	18%	9%	6%	7%	6%	11%	5%	5%
More advertising / promotion / public awareness	14%	14%	15%	11%	13%	9%	4%	5%
Provide more information on how to obtain legal aid	2%	4%	2%	–	3%	2%	0%	4%
Expand qualifications for legal aid / raise max. income level	–	2%	2%	3%	2%	4%	5%	3%
More lawyers doing pro bono work / who will work for lower fees	–	2%	1%	4%	2%	2%	4%	3%
More lawyers available	8%	5%	3%	5%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Better funding management	–	–	–	–	3%	2%	0%	3%
Better guidelines as to who should qualify for legal aid	5%	3%	3%	5%	5%	5%	3%	2%
Make system more efficient (legal / judicial / courts)	3%	2%	5%	3%	5%	5%	3%	2%
Better government / a government that supports legal aid	–	–	1%	1%	3%	1%	3%	2%
Have legal seminars / more education about legal issues	–	–	–	–	–	–	1%	2%
More qualified legal representation	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
More help / support for family matters	–	–	–	–	2%	2%	1%	1%
Discontinue coverage for immigration cases	–	–	–	–	–	1%	1%	1%
Reduce the costs of the legal system / reduce legal fees	–	–	–	–	–	–	1%	1%
Other	10%	3%	2%	2%	5%	8%	4%	3%
None / no improvement necessary	2%	24%	24%	36%	4%	7%	0%	0%
Don't know / not stated	32%	26%	26%	15%	43%	37%	58%	62%



Note: 2016 main mentions only.

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



Appendix

	2016	
	Base	620
Gender 	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Age 	18 – 34	28%
	35 – 54	34%
	55+	38%
Region 	Metro Vancouver	47%
	Fraser Valley	14%
	Vancouver Island / Coast	17%
	Thompson / Kootenays / Okanagan	18%
	North (North Coast / Nechako / Northeast)	3%
Educational Background 	High school or less	14%
	Vocational / technical / college	28%
	Some university	19%
	Graduated university	38%
	Prefer not to answer	1%
Household Income 	Less than \$25,000	9%
	\$25,000 to less than \$45,000	18%
	\$45,000 to less than \$65,000	17%
	\$65,000 to less than \$100,000	21%
	\$100,000 or more	17%
	Prefer not to answer	17%
Household Composition 	Single with no children	25%
	Couple with no children	36%
	Family with children (includes single parent household)	28%
	Other	9%
	Prefer not to answer	2%