

Nature:

Legal Services Council Form user testing research Report

February 2026

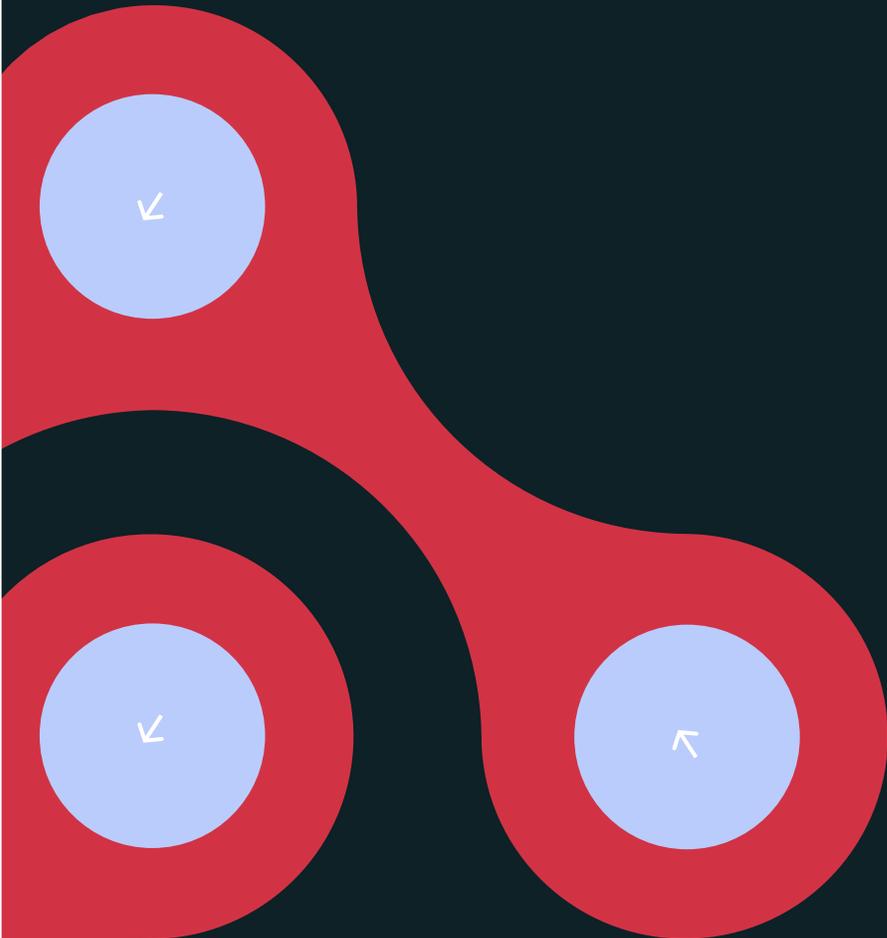


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- 04 Implications and recommendations for LSC

01

Overview of research
approach & key findings



New cost disclosure forms and information sheets were developed by the Legal Services Council to increase their utility to lawyers and clarity for consumers of legal services.

Research was required to evaluate these new documents, through the eyes of consumers & lawyers.

This research comprised of two phases that ran concurrently: an **online consumer survey** and qualitative **depth interviews with Solicitors & Barristers**



Consumer survey

Overarching research objectives

To evaluate and diagnose:

- How easily comprehensible the cost disclosure forms are to consumers
- The key takeaways after reading the documents
- Elements of the forms that are unclear and may require further clarification

Research approach

- 10-min online survey among n=1,022 Australians aged 18-75, in NSW (n=342), VIC (n=341) or WA (n=339), who have previously engaged or are looking to engage a Solicitor or Barrister in future
- Fieldwork was conducted between 10th Dec 2025 – 7th Jan 2026



Depth interviews with Solicitors & Barristers

Overarching research objectives

- Understand the type of work they do and needs when it comes to cost disclosure
- Explore feedback on ease, clarity and cohesion of the forms and information sheet, and identify areas for improvement
- Gauge likelihood of LSC form uptake, including driver and barriers
- Identify potential opportunities to increase usage

Research approach

30 x 45-min interviews with legal practitioners across NSW, VIC and WA:

- 12 x Barristers
- 18 x Solicitors
- Fieldwork took place between 3 December 2025 – 30 January 2026

Key takeouts

01

85% of consumers agreed that the cost disclosure form clearly and transparently explained the scope of services and provided information they need to make an informed decision.

02

Practitioners interviewed for the research described the cost disclosure form as clear, convenient, and easy to navigate, while suggesting opportunities for enhancements.

03

Consumers and practitioners viewed the information sheets as practical, user-friendly resources that support comprehension of the cost disclosure forms.

04

Younger consumers and those from low-income households were more likely to experience difficulties in understanding the cost disclosure form.

05

Opportunities to improve the cost disclosure forms were identified by both consumers and practitioners, including greater flexibility for different matter types, clearer explanations of cost and billing, less reliance on legal jargon by practitioners, and better alignment with existing practitioner workflows.

02

Consumer Comprehension

Consumers saw three types of stimulus in the online survey

01 Cost disclosure form

SOLICITOR STANDARD COSTS DISCLOSURE FORM

Legal Profession Uniform Law s 174(5)

When filled out by your lawyer, this form gives you information about your legal services and costs.

YOUR MATTER

Why you have come to us:

To assist with your family law matter, specifically in the drafting of the agreement reached between you and the other party in relation to your family law property matter.

The work we will do for you (scope of work):

1. Obtain and assess necessary disclosure materials and provide advice in relation to the agreement.
2. Draft Consent Orders and the necessary court forms to document the agreement reached between you and the other party.
3. Once agreed, arrange for the signing of the Consent Orders and necessary court forms.
4. Attend to filing the Consent Orders and necessary court forms

In preparing the estimate below, we have assumed that:

1. The agreement has been reached, and only minor negotiations remain about how it will be carried out, not about the agreement itself.
2. You and the other party will provide the disclosure requested in a timely fashion and that the assets and liabilities will be in accordance with your instructions in conference.
3. Your understanding of the financial circumstances of you and the other party is accurate.

We will not:

1. Enter into negotiations to change the agreement reached between you and other party.
2. Engage in lengthy correspondence with the other party about disclosure.
3. Commence court proceedings.
4. Where an agreement is not one which would be considered just and equitable, and we have advised you of the same, reply to requisitions from the Court in relation to the agreement.

CLIENT DETAILS

Your name: Jill Smith Your best contact: 0413 345 678

Other person/entity responsible for payment of your bill: not applicable.

WHO YOU SHOULD CONTACT ABOUT YOUR MATTER

Law practice: ABC Law Practice

Lawyer: Bob Jones Best contact: 0413 456 789

Date this form was given to you: 04/10/2025



BILLING

Your bill will be: Lump sum

You will be billed: Monthly

ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

This part sets out your estimated total costs. It includes our fees and any other costs that you will need to pay (also known as disbursements). In the next section, we explain how we will charge you for our work and for any other costs you will need to pay.

The estimated total costs are set out below:

Estimate of our fees (excluding GST)	\$6,000.00
Estimate of our costs (disbursements)	
Barrister's estimated costs (excluding GST)	Not required
Estimated other costs (excluding GST)	\$2,500.00
GST on estimated fees and other costs	\$850
The estimated total costs (our fees plus other costs plus GST)	\$9,350

Please note that this is a costs estimate only and not a quote.

Some reasons why your costs estimate might change include:

- if you change what you want us to do
- if the law changes
- if what we need to do to complete your matter becomes more complex (for example, as more information becomes available)
- if the actions of other people involved are unreasonable or obstructive (such as witnesses, another party or their lawyers)

- if the number and length of our phone calls or other communication between us are more than we expected
- how quickly and efficiently you respond when we ask you for information.

If we believe the estimate will change significantly, we will give you an updated estimate and the reasons why it has increased.

HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR COSTS

FEES

Our fees will be based on the time it takes us to do the work we have agreed to do in your matter.

We charge our time based on units of 6 minutes. Where the time we spend on a task includes part of a unit, you will be charged for that whole unit.

For example, if a task takes up to 6 minutes you will be charged 1 unit.
Or if a task takes between 7 - 12 minutes you will be charged 2 units.

The hourly rate(s) and cost(s) per unit (ex. GST):

Paralegal - \$250.00/hour (\$25.00/unit)
Solicitor - \$400.00/hour (\$40.00/unit)
Senior Solicitor - \$500.00/hour (\$50.00/unit)
Director - \$600.00/hour (60.00/unit)

Our rates are reviewed regularly and may change during your matter. We will give you notice in writing 30 days before any change to our hourly rates.

OTHER COSTS

You will be charged for any other costs that you will need to pay (also known as disbursements).

These may include filing fees, printing costs, costs for postage, archiving fees and third party costs such as ABC TECH

You will also be charged for internal office expenses.

An information sheet about this form is available at: <https://legalservicescouncil.org.au/for-consumers.html>
You can ask us to give you a copy.

YOU SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT:

- you have had enough time to read and understand the form
- you understand the work we will do for you, including what we will not do
- you understand the estimate and how it has been calculated, and
- you have asked us about anything you do not understand.

YOUR RIGHTS

You have the right to:

- ask us to explain any information in this form
- negotiate costs with us, for example, by talking about possible alternative amounts or the scope of the work that you will be charged for
- a costs agreement with us, which needs to be in writing or supported by written evidence (for example by letters or emails)
- negotiate how you will be billed, for example, how often you will be billed and how detailed your bill will be
- ask us for a written progress report, at no extra cost, that explains the cost of our work for you so far
- receive a bill
- within 30 days of the due date for payment, ask for a lump sum bill to be itemised (broken down)
- be informed about any significant changes to any of the information in this form, including our costs estimate
- seek the assistance of the regulator in your state or territory if you are in a dispute with us about your legal costs and can't resolve it directly with us.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Litigation: If the work involves court action, you could also be liable to pay some or all of the other party's costs if your case is unsuccessful. Even if you are successful, it is unlikely you will be able to recover all our costs from the other party, but you will still have to pay our costs. If you are unable to recover any costs from the other party, you will still have to pay our costs. If we negotiate a settlement of your matter, we will give you details of your costs, of costs which you may recover from another party, and costs which you may be liable to pay to another party.

Interest: If you do not pay your bill by the due date, interest may be charged at the rate of 2% above the cash rate target specified by the Reserve Bank of Australia as at the date of the bill. We may also stop acting for you and retain your documents until the bill is paid. The cash rate target is available at: <https://www.rba.gov.au/statistics/cash-rate/>. The appropriate cash rate target is the rate in effect on the date the bill is issued.

DISPUTING LEGAL COSTS

If you have any concerns about our bill (for example, the amount you have been charged), we encourage you to discuss this with the lawyer you have been working with or you can ask to speak with another lawyer at our practice. If you can't resolve your concerns directly with us, you can ask the regulator for their help, depending on the amount of your bill or the amount you disagree with. Time limits will apply (for example, there is a 60 day time limit to make a complaint about legal costs and a 12 month time limit to make an application for costs assessment).

If the bill, or the amount in dispute, is above a certain amount, the regulator may not be able to deal with the costs dispute. If this is the case, you will need to consider applying for costs assessment if you want to dispute your bill. The regulator can give you more information about the costs assessment process.

You can contact the regulator in your state or territory using the contact details below:

New South Wales New South Wales Legal Services Commissioner T 1800 242 958 E olsc@justice.nsw.gov.au www.olsc.nsw.gov.au	Victoria Victorian Legal Services Commissioner T 1300 796 344 E consumerenquiry@lsbc.vic.gov.au www.lsbc.vic.gov.au	Western Australia Legal Practice Board T (08) 6211 3600 E enquiries@lpbwa.com www.lpbwa.org.au
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This form has been issued by the Legal Services Council under s 174(5) of the Legal Profession Uniform Law and the Legal Profession Uniform General Rules 2015.

02 Cost amendment form

SOLICITOR STANDARD COSTS DISCLOSURE FORM – UPDATE TO ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

Legal Profession Uniform Law s 174(5)

On 04/10/2025 we gave you an estimate of the total costs for your matter of \$9,350

including GST and other costs that you need to pay (known as disbursements). A copy of the form which sets out our previous estimate is attached.

The estimate of the total costs for your matter now needs to be updated because:

A dispute has arisen in relation to the value of the property and we are required to enter into further negotiations in relation to the agreement reached

The updated estimate of your total costs is \$13,200

This includes the cost of our work so far plus the estimated cost of the future work we will do for you.

UPDATED ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

This part sets out the updated estimate of your total costs, including GST and other costs that you need to pay (known as disbursements). It covers the cost of our work so far plus the estimated cost of the future work we will do for you.

Updated estimate of our fees (excluding GST)	\$9,000
Updated estimate of other costs (disbursements)	
Barrister's estimated costs (excluding GST)	NA
Estimated other costs (excluding GST)	\$3,000
GST on updated estimated fees and other costs	\$1,200
The updated estimated total costs (our fees plus other costs plus GST)	\$13,200

Date this form was given to you: 07/11/2025

An information sheet about this form is available at: <https://legalservicescouncil.org.au/for-consumers.html>
You can ask us to give you a copy.

YOU SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT:

- you have had enough time to read and understand the form
- you understand why the estimate has changed, and
- you have asked us about anything you do not understand.

This form has been issued by the Legal Services Council under s 174(5) of the Legal Profession Uniform Law and the Legal Profession Uniform General Rules 2015.

Please complete the blank fields. Instructions will appear when you place your cursor over the centre of a blank field.

Please select your costing method below to continue completing the form.

- Time-based costs
- Scales of legal costs or determinations
- Fixed fee costing

Please click on the "FINAL" > hide guides" button below before printing or saving this document. Click on the bottom left corner of this page to see the guides again.

FINAL > hide guides

Consumers saw three types of stimulus in the online survey

03 Information sheet

DRAFT FOR INITIAL CONSULTATION ONLY

Information sheet for consumers

XX 2025



Standard costs disclosure form

The Legal Profession Uniform Law (Uniform Law) standard costs disclosure form is one way a lawyer can give you information about your costs including an estimate of the costs you can expect to pay. This information is to help you make an informed choice about whether to ask the lawyer to work for you.

This information sheet explains what you need to know about the form.

What information does the costs disclosure form give me?

The form outlines:

- why you have gone to see the lawyer
- the work the lawyer will do for you
- any assumptions the lawyer has made in preparing the estimate, and
- work that the lawyer will not do and is not included in the estimate.

The estimate includes three parts.

The first part is an estimate of the fees the lawyer will charge you for the work that they do.

The second part is an estimate of any other costs. These are known as disbursements and are different from the lawyer's costs. They are additional costs that you will need to pay.

Some examples are court filing fees, stamp duty, property search fees, fees for doctors' or experts' reports. They can also include the fees of another law practice engaged on your behalf. Any fees for a barrister will be set out separately on the form.

The third part is an estimate of the GST (goods and services tax) which must be paid.

How will my legal fees be calculated?

Lawyers usually charge:

- an hourly rate for the time they spend on your matter

(known as time-based costing), or

- in accordance with a scale of legal costs that sets out the fees they can charge, or
- a fixed fee for the work you agree they will do.

You should talk to your lawyer about how they charge and confirm with your lawyer what work you will be charged for, including the cost of your first meeting.

In Western Australia, the lawyer must tell you if a determination applies to the work that they will do for you. The lawyer does not have to use the determination to calculate their fees, but the fees may be higher where the determination is not used.

What is time-based costing?

In a time-based costing matter, a lawyer charges for their work based on the time it takes them to do the work. The form will set out the hourly rates and how time is calculated. It is common for lawyers to charge by units of time (often 6 minutes units), rather than by the minute. Where the lawyer is charging by units of time, the time will be rounded up to the nearest unit.

For example, if a lawyer charges \$420 per hour and charges in units of 6 minutes, each unit is charged at \$42. If a task takes 4 minutes, it will be rounded up to 6 minutes and you will be charged 1 unit or \$42. If a task takes 21 minutes it will be rounded up to 24 minutes and you will be charged 4 units or \$168.

An estimate for a time-based costing matter is not a fixed fee or a quote. It is the amount that your lawyer estimates the matter will cost, but the actual fees will depend on how long it takes the lawyer to do the work.

The estimated costs may be set out as a single figure or a range, for example:

- a single figure estimate of \$5,000, or
- a range of \$2,000-\$7,000.

If a range is used, it should be realistic and based on your lawyer's experience of the likely costs. For example, a range

Standard costs disclosure form

of \$1,000-\$10,000 would not be realistic.

What is a scale of legal costs or determination?

A scale of legal costs sets out the fees that the lawyer will charge. These are sometimes referred to as determinations. Depending on the type of matter, the scale of legal costs may set out the hourly rate the lawyer can charge, or it may set out an amount that the lawyer can charge for each task they do for you.

What is a fixed fee?

In a fixed fee matter, a lawyer charges a set fee for the work they have agreed to do. The lawyer can only charge a higher fee for that work if you agree to that higher fee. The fixed fee does not usually include other costs (disbursements), which will be charged on top of the fixed fee. The fixed fee will only apply to work that is within the agreed scope.

How will I know the cost of a barrister or other law practice engaged on my behalf?

The form will include the costs of a barrister or other law practice engaged on your behalf. If the cost of a barrister is unknown at the beginning of your matter, the lawyer must provide the cost estimate of the barrister as soon as practicable.

How will I be billed for my legal costs?

The form sets out when you can expect to receive bills from your lawyer. For example, bills might be sent weekly, monthly or at the end of your matter.

The form also includes information about interest that can be charged if you don't pay a bill by the due date.

Can I request an itemised bill?

Your bill may come in the form of a lump sum bill or it may be itemised. A lump sum bill lists the work done with the total amount of legal costs but does not give a charge per item. An itemised bill generally lists each item of work and the cost for each item.

You can ask for a lump sum bill to be itemised. You must ask for this within 30 days of the due date to pay the bill and it must be provided within 21 days of your request.

You must not be charged for the preparation of an itemised bill. However, if you request an itemised bill after being given a lump sum bill, your itemised bill may be higher than your lump sum bill.

If the itemised bill is higher, the lawyer can only take the difference against you to pay the higher amount if:

- the lump sum bill included a written notice that an itemised bill could be higher, and
- there is a determination that you have to pay the higher cost by the regulator or a costs assessment.

How can I make an informed choice?

Before you accept the estimate, you should make sure you:

- have had enough time to read and understand the form
- understand what the lawyer will do for you, including what they will not do
- understand the estimate of your costs and how this is calculated, and
- ask your lawyer any questions you have about the form or for further information if you do not understand something in the form.

You should consider the costs as well as other factors such as the lawyer's experience and whether you can work with them. You may also need to consider other factors relevant to your matter, such as the risks involved.

Can my estimated costs change?

Yes, your estimated costs can change over time. This may be because new information comes to light, something changes which makes your matter more difficult or your matter reaches a point that was not included in the original estimate. If you have a fixed fee arrangement, the fixed fee for the agreed work can only be changed with your agreement.

Your lawyer must tell you if there is a significant change to your estimated costs and may use a standard costs disclosure update form to give you this information.

If the updated estimate is more than \$10,000 (excluding GST and disbursements), you must be given full disclosure of costs in writing which may look different to the form.

Will I need to pay the other party's costs?

If the work involves court action, you could also be liable to pay some or all of the other party's costs if your case is unsuccessful. Even if you are successful, it is unlikely you will be able to recover all of your lawyer's costs from the other party, but you will still have to pay your lawyer's costs.

Standard costs disclosure form

If you are unable to recover any costs from the other party, you will still have to pay your lawyer's costs.

If your lawyer negotiates a settlement of your matter, they will give you details of your costs, of costs which you may recover from another party, and costs which you may be liable to pay to another party.

How should I work with my lawyer?

You should ask your lawyer about how you can work with them. Some of the things you can do to reduce costs are:

- Write down a summary of your legal problem, including information that might help your lawyer, before you meet with your lawyer.
- Make copies of any documents that are relevant to your legal problem to give to your lawyer.
- Come prepared with documents and information when you meet with your lawyer.
- Provide any documents in an organised manner.
- Write down any questions you have for your lawyer and anything your lawyer tells you.
- Give your lawyer complete and correct information when they ask for it.
- Remember that if your lawyer is charging an hourly rate, there will be a charge for every telephone call or email.

The form gives you the details of the best contact at your lawyer's office. This is the person you should speak with first if you have any concerns.

What are my rights as a consumer?

You have certain rights in relation to costs, billing for legal services and complaints. You can:

- **Ask for the form to be explained:** You are entitled to have the information on the form explained to you.
- **Negotiate a costs agreement:** A costs agreement can be enforced like a contract.
- **Negotiate how you want to be billed:** This might be every month or when specific tasks have been completed or in some other way.
- **Request a written progress report on the costs of the matter to date:** You are entitled to progress reports within a reasonable time and at no extra charge.

- **Receive a written bill for work done:** You must receive a written bill for the work done. You can be given the bill in person, by post or by email.

- **Request an itemised bill:** You can ask for a lump sum bill to be itemised within 30 days of the bill being payable.

- **Ask for help from the regulator in your state or territory:** Talk to your lawyer first if you are not happy about your bill. You can also ask for help from the regulator in your state or territory. Time limits apply (for example, there is a 60-day time limit to make a complaint about legal costs and a 12-month time limit to make an application for costs assessment). You can contact the regulator using the contact details below.

In New South Wales:
New South Wales Legal Services Commissioner
T: 1900 242 958 (toll free)
E: olsc@justice.nsw.gov.au
W: www.olsc.nsw.gov.au

In Victoria:
Victorian Legal Services Commissioner
T: 1300 796 344 (toll free)
E: consumerenquiry@lslbc.vic.gov.au
W: www.lslbc.vic.gov.au

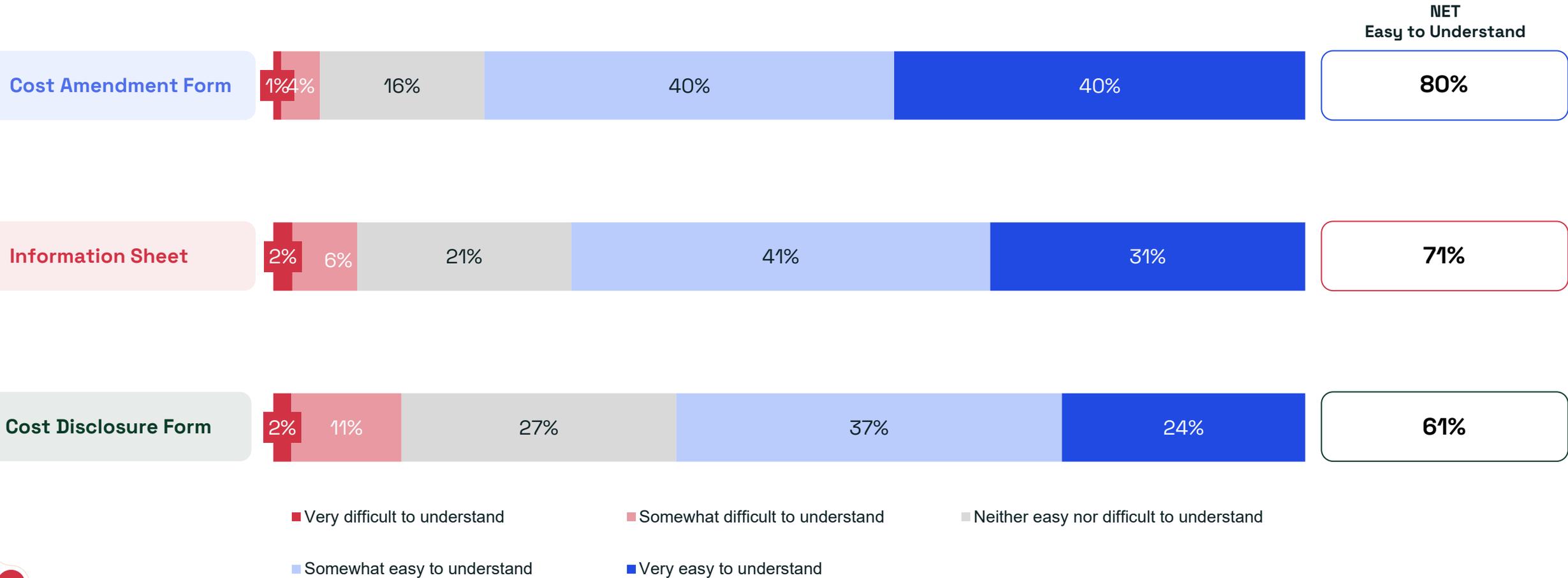
In Western Australia:
Legal Practice Board
T: (08) 6211 3600
E: enquiries@lplb.wa.gov.au
W: www.lplb.wa.gov.au

Consumers were shown different combinations and content versions of each form

Varying the content of the forms allows us to measure differences in how easily the forms are comprehended. Consumers were either shown forms relating to Family law, Wills & Estate, Driving or Guardianship matters.

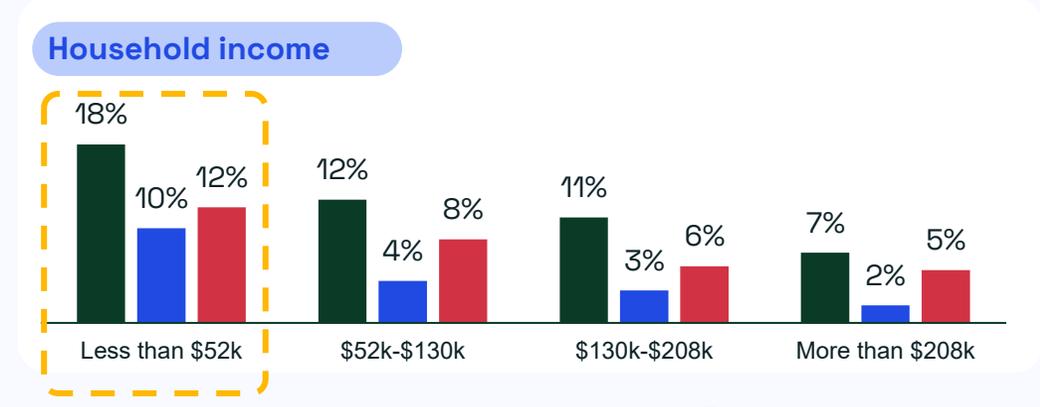
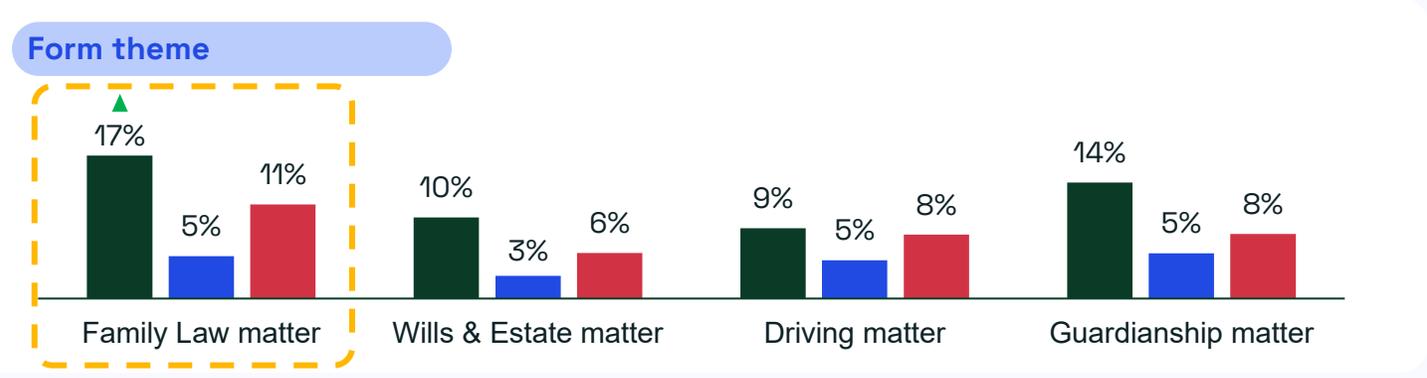
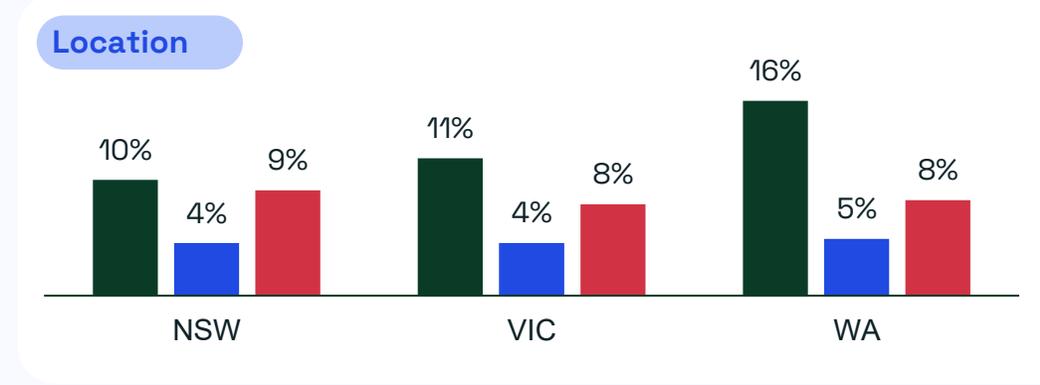
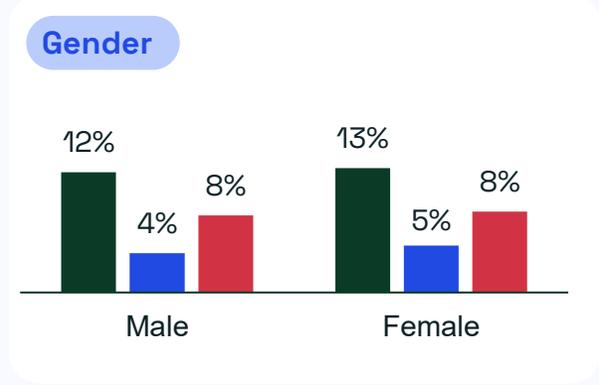
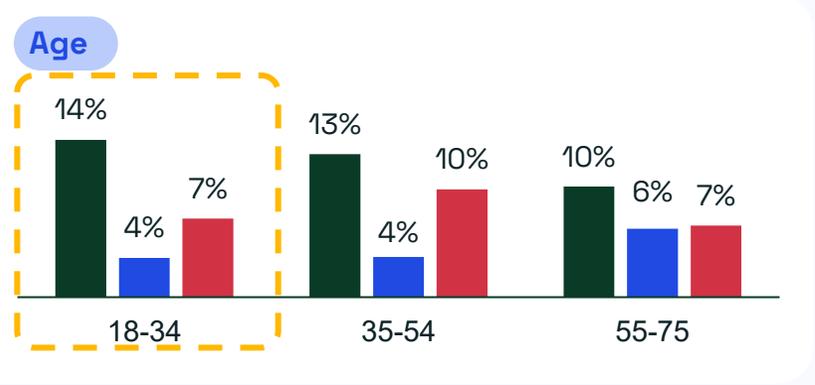
Cell 1	Cell 2	Cell 3	Cell 4
Shown Solicitor cost disclosure form + cost amendment form on Family Law Matter	Shown Solicitor cost disclosure form + cost amendment form on Wills & Estate Matter	Shown Barrister cost disclosure form + cost amendment form on Driving Matter	Shown Barrister cost disclosure form + cost amendment form on Guardianship Matter
n=254 consumers	n=254 consumers	n=258 consumers	n=256 consumers
<p>Everyone saw the same information sheet n=1,022</p> <p>Cells matched on demographics (age, gender, location)</p>			

A majority of consumers found the Cost Disclosure Form, Cost Amendment Form, and Information Sheet easy to understand



SOURCE: B2/C2. Overall, how easy or difficult was this form to understand? Please answer using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very difficult to understand and 5 is very easy to understand. D1. Overall, how easy or difficult was this information sheet to understand? Base: Total sample (n=1,022)

Comprehension of the cost disclosure form is lowest among younger consumers with a lower HH income. The Family Law matter is the least understood version of the form



▲ ▼ Sig. difference at 95% confidence

SOURCE: B2. Overall, how easy or difficult was this form to understand? A2. How old are you? A1. Firstly, are you... A3. Please type in your postcode below and select the suburb you live in. E2. Which of these best describes your household annual income before tax? Base: Total sample (n=1,022); Age (18-34 n=250, 35-54 n=436, 55-75 n=336); Gender (Male n=498, Female n=522); (State (NSW n=342, VIC n=341, WA n=339); Theme (Family n=254, Wills n=254, Driving n=258, Guardianship n=256); HH income (<52k n=189, 52k-130k n=427, 130k-208k n=245, 208k+ n=125)

Cost Disclosure Form

The majority of consumers agree that the cost disclosure form clearly communicates the information needed to make an informed decision

Cost Disclosure Form

% that somewhat or strongly agree with each statement



What consumers are taking away from the cost disclosure form

The **cost of engaging a lawyer and the scope of work expected**

This form **explains the nature of the legal matter**, the barrister's role and limits of work, **key assumptions affecting costs**, and the client and barrister details to ensure **clear disclosure of legal services and fees**

Upfront information about an agreement between law firm and client outlining fees and **expectations prior to engaging in the work**

Detailing what is and isn't included, ensuring consent is understood, explaining fee structure and associated terms/conditions

It informs me of **my rights and responsibilities** and what will be **delivered** with disclosure of the costs

It was a breakdown of **costs for engaging** with a solicitor as well as the scope of costs and **reasons why** these fees may vary. It states the conditions of engagement and your rights to negotiate with said solicitor

A form that sets out the **legal costs** and likely additional charges **for work provided**

‘How we calculate fees and costs’ and ‘disputing legal costs’ are the two sections that consumers find the most difficult to understand

Cost Disclosure Form

Sections of the cost disclosure form	% that found each section somewhat or very difficult to understand
Page 1: Your matter	7%
Page 1: Who you should contact about your matter	6%
Page 2: Billing	7%
Page 2: Estimate of your costs	6%
Page 2: How we calculate your costs – Fees & other costs	9%
Page 3: Your rights	6%
Page 3: Additional information	7%
Page 3: Disputing legal costs	10%

HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR COSTS

FEES

Our fees will be based on the time it takes us to do the work we have agreed to do in your matter.

We charge our time based on units of 6 minutes. Where the time we spend on a task includes part of a unit, you will be charged for that whole unit.

For example, if a task takes up to 6 minutes you will be charged 1 unit.

Or if a task takes between 7 - 12 minutes you will be charged 2 units.

The hourly rate(s) and cost(s) per unit (ex.GST):

Paralegal - \$250.00/hour (\$25.00/unit)
Solicitor - \$400.00/hour (\$40.00/unit)
Senior Solicitor - \$500.00/hour (\$50.00/unit)
Director - \$600.00/hour (60.00/unit)

Our rates are reviewed regularly and may change during your matter. We will give you notice in writing 30 days before any change to our hourly rates.

OTHER COSTS

You will be charged for any other costs that you will need to pay (also known as disbursements).

These may include filing fees, printing costs, costs for postage, archiving fees and third party costs such as ABC TECH

You will also be charged for internal office expenses.

DISPUTING LEGAL COSTS

If you have any concerns about our bill (for example, the amount you have been charged), we encourage you to discuss this with the lawyer you have been working with or you can ask to speak with another lawyer at our practice. If you can't resolve your concerns directly with us, you can ask the regulator for their help, depending on the amount of your bill or the amount you disagree with. Time limits will apply (for example, there is a 60 day time limit to make a complaint about legal costs and a 12 month time limit to make an application for costs assessment).

If the bill, or the amount in dispute, is above a certain amount, the regulator may not be able to deal with the costs dispute. If this is the case, you will need to consider applying for costs assessment if you want to dispute your bill. The regulator can give you more information about the costs assessment process.

You can contact the regulator in your state or territory using the contact details below:

New South Wales
New South Wales Legal
Services Commissioner
T 1800 242 958
E olsc@justice.nsw.gov.au
www.olsc.nsw.gov.au

Victoria
Victorian Legal
Services Commissioner
T 1300 796 344
E consumerenquiry@lsbc.vic.gov.au
www.lsbc.vic.gov.au

Western Australia
Legal Practice Board
T (08) 6211 3600
E enquiries@lpbwa.com
www.lpbwa.org.au

While **only 12%** of consumers feel that the cost disclosure form is difficult to understand, **legal jargon added to the form by practitioners** and the **costs and billing** section remain key pain points

SOURCE: B4. Thinking about everything you've just read. Please tell us more about what you found difficult to understand. What specifically was unclear or hard to follow in this form? Please provide as much detail as possible. Base: If anything in the cost disclosure form was difficult to understand (n=220)

Legalese and jargon

There were a lot of **big words** that I didn't fully know the meaning of, a glossary or something would be helpful

I found some of the **jargon** a bit confusing

Some of the **legal terminology** was difficult

Some Legal Terminology are confusing and also there is financial uncertainty for quote

Unfortunately the need for legal jargon makes the document hard to read and understand. It does say that the form can be explained, but again, the legal jargon would scare a lot of people . I'd be worried about extra costs for any explanation

It is still legalese in style, **needs to be simplified into everyday English**

The overall form is ok to understand just some of the **legal jargon can be complicated without having prior knowledge of the meaning of certain words used in the form**

I don't understand law jargon

Sometimes a bit too much legal professional words rather than plain English

Lots of **legal jargon** I did not understand

Costs & billing

The matter was very clear. And why I was engaging legal council was clear. But **costs and information pertaining to that was slightly less clear**

The estimates of the **amount I should pay in the different billings**

Difficulty with negotiations etc **Lack of clarity with estimates and final billing**

With the billing it was a **bit difficult to understand when extra time and therefore extra costs would be needed** - e.g. length of phone calls. Also when the different level legal people would be required at the different cost levels

I think the **interest costs and having to pay other peoples legal costs were unclear**

What exactly might fall outside of the scope of work and result in additional legal costs

I found the form very wordy, it also did not give me an example of under what circumstances I would need to pay extra, or how much more additional fees would cost

The vagueness about **what could incur additional charges**

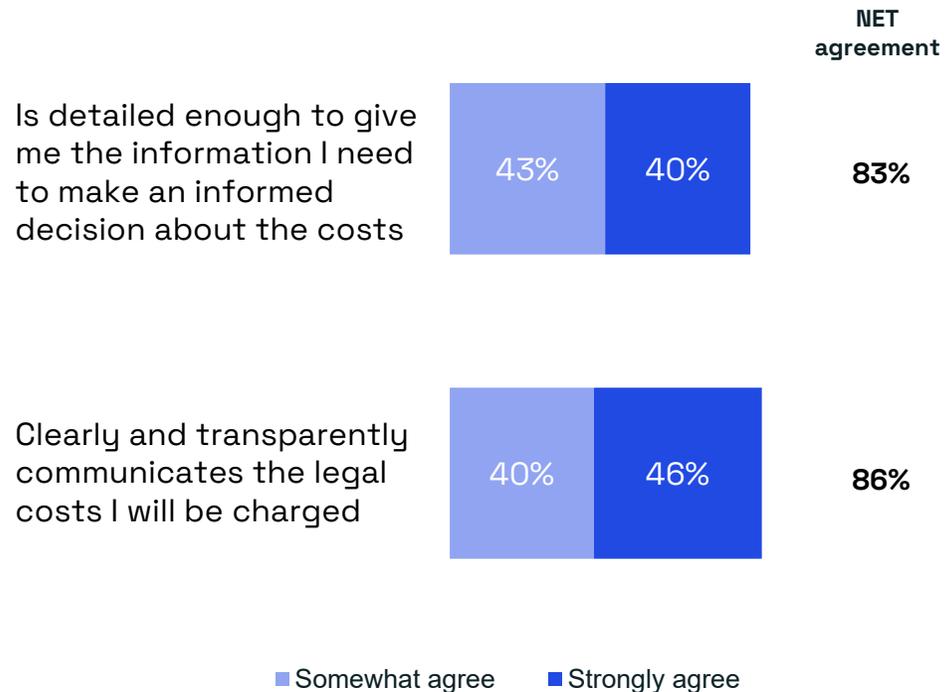
I found it a bit difficult to understand the **estimate cost aspect**

Cost Amendment Form

Over 80% of consumers agree that the cost amendment form effectively communicates the costs & is detailed enough to make an informed decision

Cost Amendment Form

% that somewhat or strongly agree with each statement



What consumers are taking away from the cost amendment form

This form **updates the client on changes** to the barrister's original cost estimate, **explaining why the costs increased** and providing a revised breakdown of total fees, GST, and the **new overall amount payable**

This is a lawyer providing their client with an **updated/increased cost estimate for the legal work** as a dispute has arisen and further work needs to be done

The **breakdown of the fees charged** for the services provided

It **explains changes to fees based on events that transpired** during the hearing

Showing a **change to the initial costing** due to required changes

The form is an updated legal costs disclosure form that is required because **the initial estimate increased significantly**. The new form itemises the increases and provided the new total and the date of the update



5% of consumers found the 'Your matter' section difficult to understand

Cost Amendment Form

Sections of the cost amendment form	% that found each section somewhat or very difficult to understand
Top 1/3: Your matter	5%
Middle 1/3: Updated estimate of your costs	4%
Bottom 1/3: Date this form was given to you & below	2%

SOLICITOR STANDARD COSTS DISCLOSURE FORM – UPDATE TO ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS



Legal Profession Uniform Law s 174(5)

On 04/10/2025 we gave you an estimate of the total costs for your matter of \$9,350 including GST and other costs that you need to pay (known as disbursements). A copy of the form which sets out our previous estimate is attached.

The estimate of the total costs for your matter now needs to be updated because:

A dispute has arisen in relation to the value of the property and we are required to enter into further negotiations in relation to the agreement reached

The updated estimate of your total costs is \$13,200

This includes the cost of our work so far plus the estimated cost of the future work we will do for you.

As this form doesn't currently relate to the individual's circumstance, we hypothesise that this section will be more clearly understood when it details their reason for engaging a lawyer.

While **only 5% of consumers find the cost amendment form difficult to understand...**

...the **'Your Matter'** section, **specific words and phrases added by practitioners who completed the form** and the reasoning for the additional costs incurred are **unclear or hard to follow** for some

SOURCE: C4. Please tell us more about what you found difficult to understand. What specifically was unclear or hard to follow in the form? Please provide as much detail as possible. Base: If anything in the cost amendment form was difficult to understand (n=81)

'Your matter'

The **matter description** was not as clear as the first document

Not enough information on what is the matter about, need to provide more summary and how are the items being billed

It's legal jargon so not sure what the matter actually meant

Specific words & phrases

I would need an explanation of the legal term **interocular** and what is required

Could not understand the legal terminologies- like **interlocutory**. Again, simple, plain English would be beneficial

I wouldn't say it's too difficult it's just a lot of vocab that maybe a regular person wouldn't be aware of

What does the word Interlocutory mean?

I didn't understand what **VCAT** is?

All the **legal language**

The **legal technical information** that was in it

Legal wording

Justification for additional costs

I found the **reason for the cost increase** was not fully explained and what my actions should be

The fact that there are **charges added** stipulated as **disbursements** yet there is **zero charge allocated for disbursements**

There is very little explanation as to what additional costs were for

What the "other costs" are - if I'm paying the bill I'd want this information itemised so I know what I'm paying for

There wasn't much detail provided to the **increase of costs to the first estimate**

More detailed breakdown of fees/charges and how the estimated amount of total costs was reached would be helpful

The **reason for the additional charges**

It **wasn't itemised** to understand what exactly the costs were for e.g. Time, additional work etc

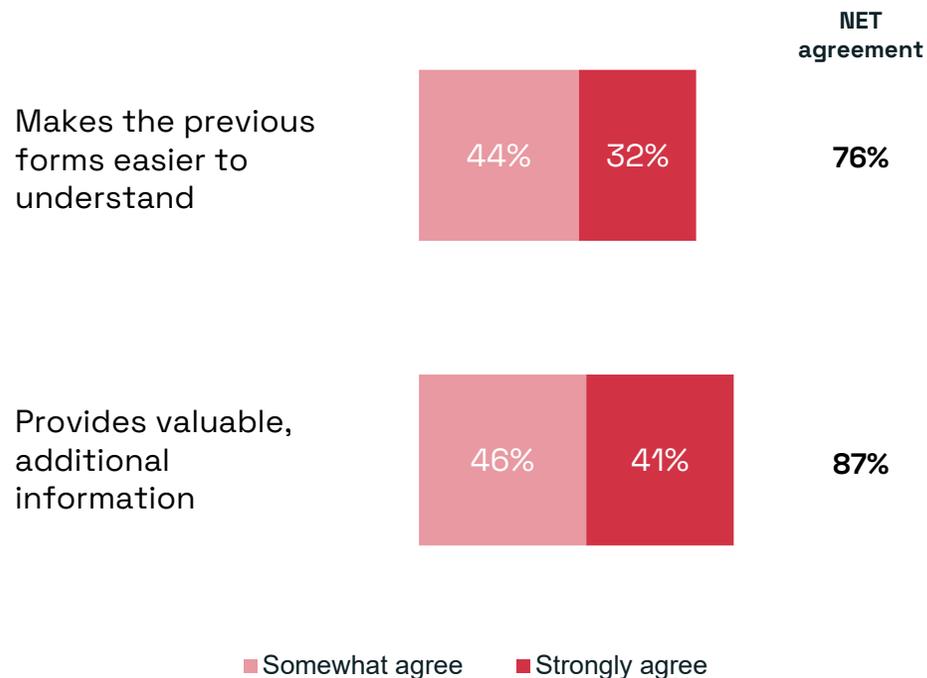
The **"other costs"** for each respective section does not effectively describe what the other costs are

Information Sheet for Consumers

Consumers feel that the information sheet makes the previous forms easier to understand and provides valuable additional information

Information sheet

% that somewhat or strongly agree with each statement



What consumers are taking away from the information sheet

It seemed to clear up any sections that were unclear to me initially

The last form helped a lot with understanding the previous two adequately

Everything is very clear and easy to understand

I fully understand everything thanks to all the information provided

I think it cleared it all up quite well

A little bit to absorb but is explained well

Everything is quite clear

The information sheet after reading all of them were understandable



The information sheet helped to clarify many sections of the previous two forms, in particular detail surrounding billing and cost estimates

Cost Disclosure Form

Sections of the forms that were previously unclear	Sections that the information sheet helped to clarify
CDF Page 1: Your matter	60%
CDF Page 1: Who you should contact about your matter	54%
CDF Page 2: Billing	64%
CDF Page 2: Estimate of your costs	83%
CDF Page 2: How we calculate your costs – Fees & other costs	73%
CDF Page 3: Your rights	55%
CDF Page 3: Additional information	54%
CDF Page 3: Disputing legal costs	55%
CAF Top 1/3: Your matter	26%
CAF Middle: Updated estimate of your costs	44%
CAF Bottom 1/3: Date this form was given to you & below	21%
None	12%

BILLING

Your bill will be: Lump sum ▼

You will be billed: Monthly ▼

ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

This part sets out your estimated total costs. It includes our fees and any other costs that you will need to pay (also known as disbursements). In the next section, we explain how we will charge you for our work and for any other costs you will need to pay.

The estimated total costs are set out below:

Estimate of our fees (excluding GST)	\$6,000.00
Estimate of other costs (disbursements)	
Barrister's estimated costs (excluding GST)	Not required
Estimated other costs (excluding GST)	\$2,500.00
GST on estimated fees and other costs	\$850
The estimated total costs (our fees plus other costs plus GST)	\$9,350

Please note that this is a costs estimate only and not a quote.

Some reasons why your costs estimate might change include:

- if you change what you want us to do
- if the law changes
- if what we need to do to complete your matter becomes more complex (for example, as more information becomes available)
- if the actions of other people involved are unreasonable or obstructive (such as witnesses, another party or their lawyers)

- if the number and length of our phone calls or other communication between us are more than we expected
- how quickly and efficiently you respond when we ask you for information.

If we believe the estimate will change significantly, we will give you an updated estimate and the reasons why it has increased.

HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR COSTS

FEES

Our fees will be based on the time it takes us to do the work we have agreed to do in your matter. We charge our time based on units of 6 minutes. Where the time we spend on a task includes part of a unit, you will be charged for that whole unit.

For example, if a task takes up to 6 minutes you will be charged 1 unit.

Or if a task takes between 7 - 12 minutes you will be charged 2 units.

Our rates are reviewed regularly and may change during your matter. We will give you notice in writing 30 days before any change to our hourly rates.

The hourly rate(s) and cost(s) per unit (ex.GST):

- Paralegal - \$250.00/hour (\$25.00/unit)
- Solicitor - \$400.00/hour (\$40.00/unit)
- Senior Solicitor - \$500.00/hour (\$50.00/unit)
- Director - \$600.00/hour (60.00/unit)

OTHER COSTS

You will be charged for any other costs that you will need to pay (also known as disbursements).

These may include filing fees, printing costs, costs for postage, archiving fees and third party costs such as ABC TECH

You will also be charged for internal office expenses.

UPDATED ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

This part sets out the updated estimate of your total costs, including GST and other costs that you need to pay (known as disbursements). It covers the cost of our work so far plus the estimated cost of the future work we will do for you.

Please select your costing method below to continue completing the form.

Time-based costs

Scales of legal costs or determinations

Fixed fee costing

Updated estimate of our fees (excluding GST)	\$9,000
Updated estimate of other costs (disbursements)	
Barrister's estimated costs (excluding GST)	NA
Estimated other costs (excluding GST)	\$3,000
GST on updated estimated fees and other costs	\$1,200
The updated estimated total costs (our fees plus other costs plus GST)	\$13,200

While only **8% of consumers feel that the information sheet is difficult to understand...**

...when prompted on what, if anything, is **still unclear** in the forms, consumers mention specificities relating to **costs and billing** and **who to contact** about their matter

SOURCE: D4. Is there anything in the cost disclosure form or cost amendment form (the first two forms that you were shown) that is still unclear or unanswered for you, that this final information sheet has not clarified?
Base: Those who rated any part of any form difficult to understand (n=246)

Costs & billing

Just the part where it says the fee will be paid as a lump sum, but then says the frequency is monthly

It would be better if **greater detail was provided as to why the additional costs will be incurred**, rather than a simple sentence

How the **billing can be done in units**

How long each component of the process will take, to determine the actual costs

I feel like GST was provided in the total but not the breakdown. I guess the information sheet makes it clear though that the itemised bill can be provided on request but may end up being higher so I'm guessing that's why there's not a full breakdown of the costs

How interest and other people's legal costs are paid should I have to cover them

Who to contact

Not much is unclear - though **who to specifically contact still evaded me if there was a problem** - it is just likely to be overwhelming despite being clear. I could be given a form with 60 random numbers, and I would understand those numbers, but struggle to recall them

Recommended Form Optimisations to Aid Consumer Comprehension

These optimisations will provide most benefit to consumers with a lower HH income and to the Family Law matter version of the form

There are two recommended optimisations to make to the existing forms to aid consumer comprehension



Legalese & Jargon

Some consumers find it **difficult to understand some of the words, phrases and acronyms** used in the forms (e.g. VCAT, interlocutory). Consider including a **hover over, glossary of terms** or **translating** less common **words or phrases** into plain English.



Billing & Costs

The billing & cost information raises the most questions with consumers. Clarity on how fees and costs are calculated and disputing legal costs is required. **Specific areas to address below:**

- Providing an **indicative timeframe** when legal **fees** would be **confirmed** *(concerns surrounding the cost estimate rather than final confirmation of costs)*
- If the cost amendment form is required, provide **more detail** surrounding **why additional costs have been incurred**
- **Frequency of payment** *(says lump sum then frequency is monthly)*
- **How interest is paid** and **when you'd be required** to cover someone else's legal fees

03

How Solicitors & Barristers
engage with the forms

Overview of the stimulus tested with legal practitioners

01 Cost disclosure form

SOLICITOR STANDARD COSTS DISCLOSURE FORM
Legal Profession Uniform Law s 174D

YOU SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT:

- You have received enough time to read and understand the form
- You have read the form and you are satisfied with it
- You have read the form and you are satisfied with it
- You have read the form and you are satisfied with it

ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

The estimated total costs are set out below:

- Estimated other costs (including GST)
- Estimated other costs (including GST)
- GST on estimated fees and other costs
- Estimated total costs (see how your costs plus GST)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR COSTS

CLIENT DETAILS

WHO YOU SHOULD CONTACT ABOUT YOUR MATTER

OTHER COSTS

02 Cost amendment form

SOLICITOR STANDARD COSTS DISCLOSURE FORM
Legal Profession Uniform Law s 174D

YOU SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT:

- You have received enough time to read and understand the form
- You have read the form and you are satisfied with it
- You have read the form and you are satisfied with it
- You have read the form and you are satisfied with it

UPDATED ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS

The updated estimate of your total costs is:

- Estimated other costs (including GST)
- Estimated other costs (including GST)
- GST on updated estimated fees and other costs
- Updated estimated total costs (see how your costs plus GST)

HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR COSTS

CLIENT DETAILS

WHO YOU SHOULD CONTACT ABOUT YOUR MATTER

OTHER COSTS

03 Information sheet

Information sheet for consumers
LSC
Legal Profession Uniform Law

Standard costs disclosure form

What is a legal costs or determination?

How will I know the cost of a barrister or other law practice suggested by my lawyer?

Can I request an updated bill?

What are my rights as a consumer?

Can I request an updated bill?

What are my rights as a consumer?

Can I request an updated bill?

What are my rights as a consumer?

How the forms were shown to practitioners

The moderator screenshared the relevant forms one-by-one to practitioners to discuss feedback on each in detail:

- **Forms 1 & 3** were shown to Barristers
- **Forms 2 & 4** were shown to Solicitors

Context Setting

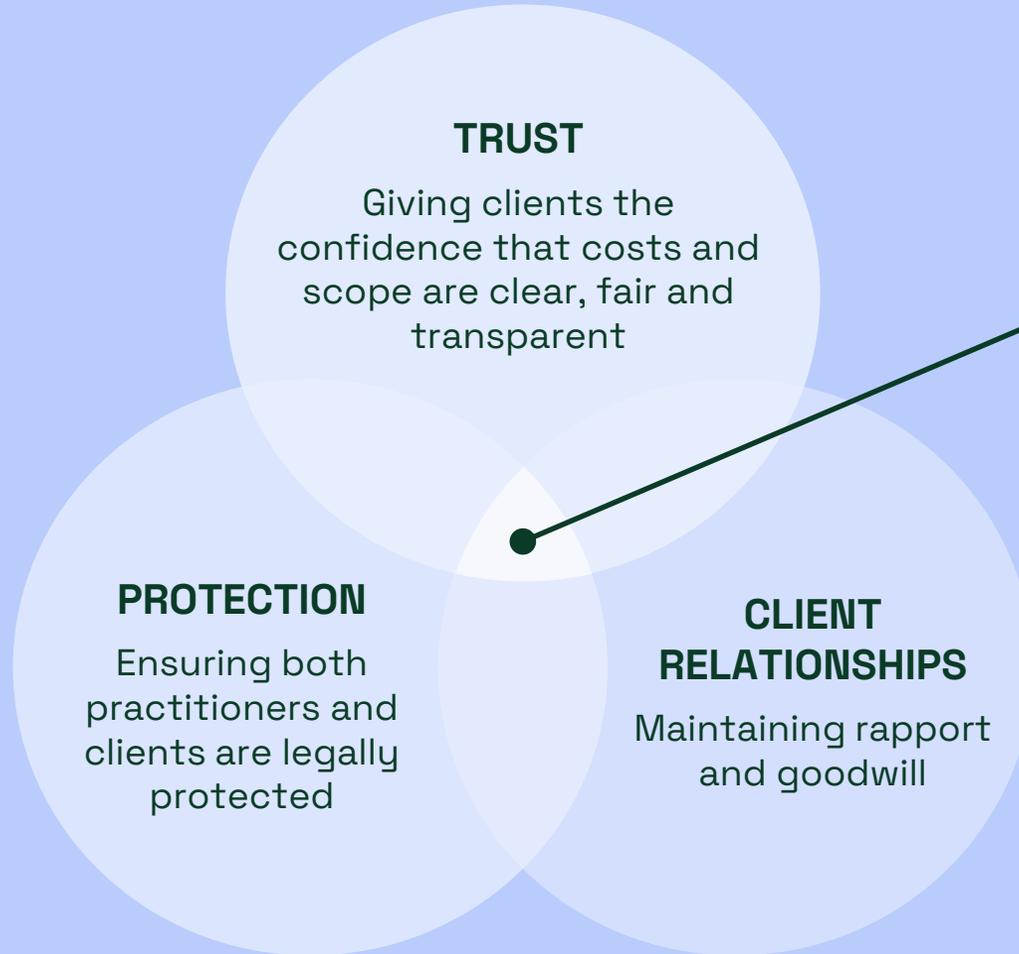
Setting the scene by understanding how cost disclosure forms are currently used and the role they play in practitioners' day-to-day work.

Cost disclosure is not just an administrative task – it's a **risk management tool**

- Forms are judged by practitioners for **defensibility** as much as clarity to clients
- **Rising litigation** and **regulations** (privacy, AI, cybersecurity) has increased perceptions of professional risk
- **Lawyer-client relationships** carry serious consequences if terms are unclear
- Ultimately, a cost disclosure doesn't just inform, it **manages expectations** and **mitigates risk** for practitioners

Cost disclosure sits at the **intersection** of trust, protection and maintaining overall client relationships

The form needs to highlight that this is a strictly professional legal relationship. I'm not your psychologist, but I'm your lawyer.
BARRISTER



Lawyers must balance preserving client relationships with clearly defining scope, fees and contingencies.

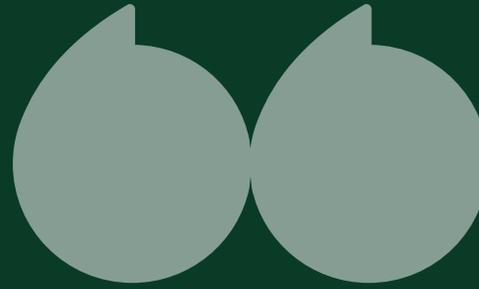
Overweighting either area risks creating **imbalance**.

Cost disclosure forms must hold this tension, enabling **transparency** and **protection** for both parties without feeling generic or impersonal.

At the same time, lawyers are operating under extreme **time pressure**

Administrative tasks are seen as a necessary burden - time-consuming, low-value work that competes with billable activity and client-facing priorities.

As a result, documentation is expected to be fast, efficient and frictionless, rather than another task to manage.

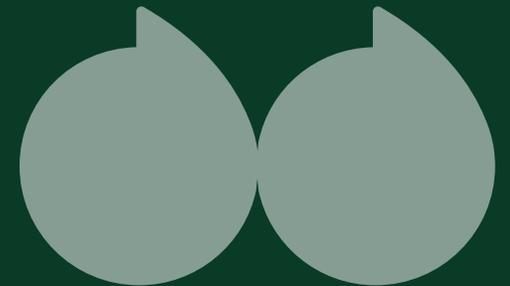


There's a lot of work that needs to be done and when I say **busy**, we're talking about sometimes **8 to 10 hours a day including weekends** to meet deadline expectations. **All the admin stuff adds up.**

SOLICITOR

Being simple and easy to use is key because the most important thing to account for is **the time it takes to do these things.**

SOLICITOR



As a result, cost disclosure is handled in multiple ways, with no single default approach



Email

Cost disclosures for routine, standard matters are sometimes communicated in an email



Bespoke

Some larger firms rely on bespoke templates developed specifically for their practice



Adapted

Templates are adapted from the respective law societies and bar associations



Combined

Most send cost disclosure forms in a combined document with the cost agreement

We have our **own system** of doing so and I take the **standard terms and conditions from the Law Society**. I **annex that, to our own cost estimate**, which is based on a precedent that the Law Society circulated many years ago.
SOLICITOR

The **firm has a template** that was **drafted at the time with input from a costs lawyer**.
SOLICITOR

I based mine on **information that we received as part of the bar practice course**, and some information available online through **the bar association portal**.
BARRISTER

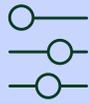


The cost disclosure landscape is shaped by **pressure, control** and **choice**



Pressure

Limited time and high cognitive load means documentation must be fast, familiar and defensible



Control

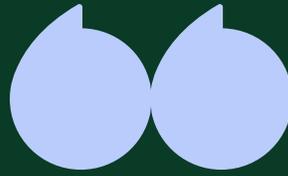
Practitioners want to shape how costs are framed to suit their practice, matter type and client relationship



Choice

With many viable templates already in circulation, adoption of new processes depends on clear added value

As a result, appetite to adopt the LSC forms varies across the profession



I probably wouldn't use [LSC] because what we use is something we're used to and has been working well for us – it's a Word format which is easy to update and use.

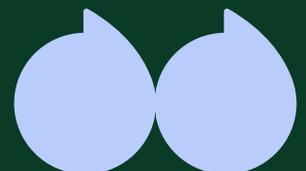
SOLICITOR

I wouldn't use [the LSC] template solely. I would consider adding it to my agreement because I don't think it covers information that protects the practitioner – it doesn't make clear it's a contractual agreement.

BARRISTER

It would save me a lot of time for cases under \$10,000. If the changes I suggested were made and it was being supported by the Victorian Bar or the LIV, I would be highly likely to use it.

BARRISTER



This inconsistency is explained by preference and practice-based factors

More open to LSC form uptake

Sole practitioners & some barristers

Benefit more from a ready-made structure

- Personally complete cost disclosures, so value the LSC form's simplicity and time savings
- Fewer internal branding and document constraints
- More open to adopt if supported by recognised legal bodies (e.g. law societies, bar associations)

I'd definitely try the [LSC] form for smaller matters or pro-bono matters. I like that it's standardised and it keeps it simple.

BARRISTER

Less open to LSC form uptake

Practitioners at larger firms

Rigid guidelines, higher barriers to switch

- Strong branding, tone and formatting requirements limit use of external templates
- Existing templates already integrated into practice management systems
- Lower perceived benefit in switching from processes that already work well

At my firm we all use the same template, we have brand guidelines and our logo. I'd only use [LSC] if we were mandated to.

SOLICITOR

Each document's potential is recognised, but there's a need for further optimisation to maximise utility and purpose

Cost Disclosure Form

Simple and clear, but limited flexibility in practice

Practitioners see the benefit in simplicity for consumer understanding and for straightforward matters. However, its **rigid layout** and **limited ability to tailor content** reduces perceived fit for more complex matters. We note that it may be **challenging to allow extensive customisation** of the cost disclosure and cost amendment forms given they are designed to function as standardised templates aligned with statutory requirements.

Cost Amendment Form

Valued as a tool to formalise changes, but weaknesses mirror the cost disclosure

The form's **concise structure** was seen as a strength. Practitioners stated the form would be further strengthened if it allowed them to **tailor content** and include a **comparison of previous and updated costs**.

Information Sheet

Helpful reference but has opportunity to improve practical impact

Would benefit from **closer integration** with the forms to improve usability.

Clearer tailoring for Solicitors and Barristers, along with **improved formatting**, would further strengthen its effectiveness.

COST DISCLOSURE FORM FEEDBACK

Looking at the feedback in more detail helps us understand practitioner sentiment further

This section will cover the form's overall appeal, clarity, functionality and where needs are, and aren't being met.

The form performs well when matters are **simple and low risk**, offering a quick shortcut for practitioners

SIMPLE

A clean, easy-to-navigate layout

The **layout is very clean** in terms of a client being able to understand but also usually paralegal or support staff will complete it. This makes it easier for both sides.
SOLICITOR

CLEAR

Headings and section breaks separate key form sections for clarity

Easy-to-understand language

The **headings make it very clear** as to what we're talking about. The way it's been set out, I think is very **easy for a layperson and for us to complete.**
SOLICITOR

CONVENIENT

Drop down menus and costing method toggles reduce writing effort whilst providing guidance for junior & admin staff

I really like the dropdown menus, it is **less I have to write**, it is easier to use for anyone using the form.
BARRISTER

LSC branding adds credibility and reassures consumers of compliance

Practitioners also saw **endorsements from law societies** and **bar associations** as a way to strengthen credibility, awareness and highlight the value of LSC forms.

It's drawn up by a **legitimate, reliable** organisation rather than me putting some random thing on paper.

BARRISTER

It gives **weight** to the fact that this is something that's **across the profession**.

SOLICITOR

Engaging with the law societies would be helpful to communicate the benefit of the forms and get it out there.

SOLICITOR



The cost disclosure form was considered **too simplistic** by some practitioners

I don't think it addresses the complexity that some matters require and **doesn't allow for staged costing**, which makes the form **harder for us to use.** SOLICITOR

You run the risk if it's too truncated that practitioners will **create their own form**, be more **vague** about what they're doing or use **overarching statements** rather than be specific. SOLICITOR

FORM FEEDBACK

Your Matter

Text boxes seen as too small for complex matters. Inability to expand the boxes were a pain point.

Lawyer Contact

Practitioners required option or space to add more lawyers to the contact list.

Estimate of costs

Does not account for staged billing matters, or a more detailed breakdown of costs. These are perceived as important to convey to clients for transparency.

Estimate of our fees (excluding GST)	
Estimate of other costs (disbursements)	
Barrister's estimated costs (excluding GST)	
Estimated other costs (excluding GST)	
GST on estimated fees and other costs	
The estimated total costs (our fees plus other costs plus GST)	

The simplicity of the form assumes standardisation, while some practitioners demand choice

Some practitioners present and structure information differently

As it is a standard form, fields cannot be switched, reordered, or expanded.

Examples of differing preferences include:

- Hourly vs. daily rates
- Showing costs with vs. without GST
- Sequencing of information
- Firm’s branding vs. LSC branding
- Itemised disbursements vs. lump disbursement sum
- Including an ‘I will not’ section vs. not

FORM FEEDBACK

Ordering of costs

Some practitioners want upfront details on cost calculations before the estimate.



Disbursements

Placing this below the estimates felt disjointed, and some wanted more space to itemise them clearly.



Your Matter

The ‘I will not’ section divides opinion. It clarifies scope for some but risks creating ambiguities unless thoroughly detailed



Guidance exists in the form, but could be expanded to simplify completion

Practitioners preferred **more embedded instructions**, since a separate information sheets adds steps and risks oversimplifying key details.

I didn't realise there were hover-over instructions. Having some pop-up boxes that explain what information needs to go in there, or even examples would be helpful rather than having to refer to a separate document.

SOLICITOR



FORM FEEDBACK

Form guides

Seen to be helpful and allowed tailoring to some extent. However, when these were 'hidden' it was not clear how to make them visible again, detracting from the experience.

The screenshot shows a form with several sections. The 'BILLING' section includes fields for 'Your bill will be' (with a dropdown set to 'Lump sum') and 'You will be billed' (with a dropdown set to 'Monthly'). The 'ESTIMATE OF YOUR COSTS' section has a heading 'Please select your costing method and explain how you estimate your costs' and two buttons: 'The lowest costs' and 'Close to my actual or estimated costs'. Below this is a table for 'Estimate of our fees (including GST)' and 'Estimate of other costs (disbursements)'. The 'HOW WE CALCULATE YOUR COSTS' section includes a 'FEES' section with a table for 'Our fees will be based on the time it takes us to do the work we have agreed to do in your matter' and a 'OUR RATES ARE REVIEWED REGULARLY' section.

Hover text

Easily missed and did not provide enough detail in instructions (e.g., no examples)

The screenshot shows a section titled 'YOUR MATTER' with the label 'Why you have come to me:' and a large text input field. A small tooltip box is visible over the input field with the text 'Insert brief description of matter'.

Purpose

It was not clear to practitioners that the form was for matters under the higher threshold until prompted by the moderator.

Beyond usability, functional concerns hindered a desire to integrate the form into daily practice

FUNCTIONALITY CONCERNS

Format

PDF-only format was a limitation and seen to hinder flexibility to move sections around or expand textboxes.

Availability in a **Word document** was a key request.

Being in a **Word format**, it's **easy to update** and use and do things with, having the **option to download a PDF or a Word version** may assist with formatting.
SOLICITOR

Practice management system integration

Questions were raised about integration with PM systems to increase efficiencies.

If we can **incorporate it into our practice management system** and they can just **hit a button and it all autofills**, then I think there'd be a much **higher uptake**.
SOLICITOR

Cost agreement integration

Practitioners preferred to edit and send both cost disclosure and cost agreement as one combined document.

A Word document would better address these needs.

I'd prefer to have **one document that has both the cost agreement and disclosure** in it rather than having to send two separate documents to the client.
BARRISTER

The next step is to enhance the form's **utility** and **purpose**

Opportunities

Build flexibility into the structure

- Explore options for allowing practitioners to reorder sections within the form, while preserving its integrity as a **standardised document**.
- Ensure text fields can **expand** to accommodate detail

Bring clarity closer to the task

- **Provide examples** demonstrating how to complete the form clearly, concisely, and with minimal jargon
- Provide **direct links** to info sheet sections where relevant
- Consider adding more detailed instructions or examples in **hover text** and make it clear that they are there

Improve functionality

- Make **form guides** clearly visible with instructions on how to show and hide
- Offer both **Word** and **PDF** formats
- Enable integration with **practice management systems**

COST UPDATE FORM FEEDBACK

The update form inherits many of the same strengths and limitations as the cost disclosure form

This section will cover the form's overall appeal, clarity, functionality and where needs are, and aren't being met.

How cost estimate changes are communicated plays a crucial role in upholding client relationships and managing expectations

As such, the cost update form is valued as a simple way to formalise cost changes



Communication on cost updates is **currently inconsistently managed**

- Currently, cost estimate updates are relatively **uncommon**
- Update approaches are **inconsistent**
- The LSC form is perceived to **effectively standardise cost updates** and make it **simpler**

Usually if it's just a **small increase**, we **absorb** it rather than going through the process of **updating the costs agreement**.

SOLICITOR

For **minor variations** we tend to just **send an email** rather than formal documentation. It's **only for significant changes** that we do a formal update.

SOLICITOR



The standard nature of the form limits opportunities for customisation

Structure & content

Inability to reorder, expand or tailor, and the absence of an acknowledgement or signature field reduces the perceived effectiveness of the form.

There should be a way to **add or remove sections** based on what's relevant for the update.

SOLICITOR

No way to acknowledge prior invoices or payments

Lacks fields to confirm invoices issued or payments already made by the client, which is important for visibility.

It's important to acknowledge **how much the client's paid already**, and how many **invoices** we've sent so that it's all clear what the remaining amount is.

BARRISTER

Old vs new costs not clearly communicated

Practitioners want a side-by-side or tabular comparison of old vs new fees by item or stage.

I'd need to **create separate documents** to show the breakdown of what's **been billed versus new estimates**.

BARRISTER

PRACTITIONER INFORMATION SHEET FEEDBACK

The information sheet is a critical part of the LSC ecosystem but there are opportunities to improve its clarity, functionality, and overall appeal

This section will cover where needs are and aren't being met.

A key strength of the document lies in its **helpful and detailed explanations**

It is helpful for **junior lawyers** who have never done any of this sort of stuff before and **everyone who's going to be completing the forms.**

SOLICITOR

I found the **'Assumptions' examples** to be useful as they are laid out to help protect the practitioner and make it less one-sided.

BARRISTER

I like it. I think it makes **it very clear through the examples** they've given on how to complete the forms.

SOLICITOR



Formatting was not always considered effective

FORM FEEDBACK

Solicitor vs Barrister differences

Nuances were not clearly separated, making it hard to distinguish what is relevant for which cohort and requiring additional reading time to discern.

- You have given us all the relevant documents and information.
- You do not have a previous will or power of attorney.
- You have not been charged with or convicted of a drink driving offence previously.
- Your former partner also intends to receive legal advice in relation to this matter and will be represented by a lawyer at the mediation.
- You have pre-approval from the Commonwealth Bank for the purchase of a property up to \$1 million.
- You have given us all of the relevant documents and information. The builder will not start court action. We will not need to get an expert report on the quality of the building work.
- For a barrister: You have given me all of the relevant documents and information. There are no mental health issues which could have an impact on your sentence. You do not have a criminal history.

Formatting Dense, two-column formatting works against logical reading flow.

Standard costs disclosure forms may be used to provide costs disclosure where the estimated legal costs are not likely to exceed \$10,000 (excluding disbursements and GST).¹

This information sheet explains the information to be included if you use the forms.

Standard costs disclosure forms

The standard costs disclosure forms are prescribed by the Legal Profession Uniform General Rules 2015.² There are four standard forms:

- Form 1: Standard costs disclosure form for solicitors.
- Form 2: Standard costs disclosure form for barristers.
- Form 3: Standard costs disclosure form for solicitors to update estimate.
- Form 4: Standard costs disclosure form for barristers to update estimate.

The forms can be found in Schedule 1 to the Legal Profession Uniform General Rules 2015. A user-friendly version of the forms is available on the Legal Services Council website <https://legalprofessionscouncil.org.au/for-legal-practitioners.html>

When the forms can be used

You may use the standard costs disclosure forms to provide costs disclosure if the estimated costs are likely to be no more than \$10,000 (excluding GST and disbursements).³ This means the standard forms can be used if the estimated fees for the legal work, before adding GST and any disbursements, are \$10,000 or less.

You may also choose to use the forms to provide information to your client if the estimated costs are not likely to be more than \$10,000 (excluding disbursements and GST) disclosure is not required.⁴

The forms should not be used to provide costs disclosure matters involving a conditional costs agreement.

Description of the matter

Part 4.3 of the Uniform Law deals with legal costs. One objective is 'to ensure that clients of law practices are make informed choices about their legal options and the associated with pursuing those options'.⁵

It is important that both the client and the law practice clear about why the client has sought advice, the scope of work and the estimated costs. The standard disclosure forms cover each of these areas.

Why the client has come to you

You should include a summary of the instructions provided to the client. For example:

- You have asked us to prepare a will and power of attorney for you.
- You have asked us to represent you in relation to a guilty plea for drink driving.
- You have asked us for advice and representation, mediation in relation to the division of your property following your divorce.
- You have asked us to review and advise you on the purchase of a residential property.
- You have asked us for advice because your builder has not completed the work on your kitchen to an acceptable standard and is now demanding full payment for the work.

You may also choose to use the forms to provide information to your client if the estimated costs are not likely to be more than \$10,000 (excluding disbursements and GST) disclosure is not required.⁴

It needs to be **split by solicitors and barristers**. It's two very different things. And I have **limited time to read** what is not relevant to me.

BARRISTER

It is **hard to read** with **two columns** on the screen. See how that part with assumptions drops off at the end and would continue at the top. I would like to **keep it together**

SOLICITOR

Given the time scarcity of practitioners, consideration should be given to:

1. Directly integrating instructions into the cost forms; and
2. Making the detail in the information sheet audience-specific

Having information **directly on the form** with a few examples would probably be better, even in textboxes that can be deleted...

In this profession we really **drown in documents**, we're just dealing with so many documents, so **the less documents the better.**

BARRISTER



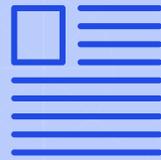
Opportunities to **maximise the effectiveness** of the information sheet

Suggested improvements to make information more accessible



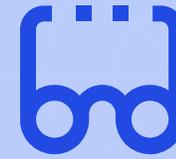
Practitioner nuances

Consider a separate form for Solicitors and Barristers, or having a button that can toggle the information between audiences



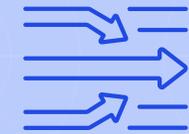
Formatting

Move from dense, two-column layouts to single-column formats that are easier to follow



Readability

Leverage tables, dot points and an index/table of contents to support efficient reading



Streamlining access

Within the respective forms, embed direct links to the relevant section of the information sheet gain efficiencies

Implications for LSC

Understanding what findings mean for the LSC's documents, and identifying opportunities to increase usage

Driving uptake requires designing for how legal practitioners work

Motivation will come from **ease** and seeing the **direct benefit** the form offers

Lawyers operate under **scarcity of time** and **high cognitive load**.

Status quo behaviour will dominate unless a new tool provides clear advantages over existing habits.

There are key opportunities for LSC to consider in optimising the documents and driving uptake

Usability

Increase flexibility while maintaining risk protection

Make key functionalities visible, intuitive and easy to use

Embed instructions and guidance directly in the form

Use clear, easy-to-follow formatting and layout

Provide examples demonstrating how to complete the form clearly, concisely, and with minimal jargon

Integration

Position the form as a customisable template for practitioners

Enable integration with practice management systems

Allow custom branding options

Provide opportunities for LSC to support bespoke versions

Purpose

Clarify the form's role as a consistent tool for delivering trust, protection, and clarity in the client-lawyer relationship

Leverage law society and bar association relationships to amplify the form's purpose and communicate its value

04

Overall considerations

Bringing these learnings together, we've identified the key opportunities for LSC moving forward



Consumers

Translate some of the acronyms & jargon that is currently unclear

Consider including a hover over, glossary of terms or translating less common words or phrases into plain English.

Provide more detail on fees & costs

Offer a timeframe for when costs will be confirmed, provide more detail on why additional costs have been incurred, confirm frequency of payment, how interest is to be paid and when required to cover someone else's fees.



Legal practitioners

Improve flexibility to support real-world complexity

Introduce greater ability to tailor and adapt content so forms remain fit for both straightforward and complex matters without undermining compliance.

Clarify purpose to help drive behaviour change

Beyond form optimisation, LSC has an opportunity to position the form as a trusted, consistent tool that underpins protection and transparency in the client-lawyer relationship.

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