

# RESEARCH SUMMARY

July, 2017



## VULNERABLE CONSUMERS' EXPERIENCES OF LEGAL SERVICES

### 1. About the research

**i** This qualitative research improves understanding of **how consumers (and those caring for them) with mental health problems and with dementia experience legal services.**

Making use of the Legal Services Consumer Panel's guidance: *Recognising and responding to consumer vulnerability*, **the research explored practical steps that these consumers would find useful when engaging with legal professionals.**

**60 in-depth interviews** were carried out across England and Wales with individuals who had used, or tried but failed to use, legal services in the preceding 18 months.

### Key findings

**i** For mental health problems and dementia, a safe space in which people feel comfortable to volunteer information or be sensitively asked about their needs is important.

#### *Mental health problems*

- **Free initial services from third sector and regulated providers are valued.** Reasons include affordability, getting initial advice on options and poor past experience of legal advice.
- **Customer support needs** depend on the severity of problems, but **include extra time for individuals to express themselves, extra communication and increased reassurance.**
- It is important to this group **to feel listened to and understood, have services adapted to support them, have continuity of personnel and costs transparency.**

#### *Dementia*

- **There is a clear cluster of legal needs: wills, power of attorney and property issues.**
- **Those with early stage symptoms** (e.g. less successful dealing with information) **may not flag their needs in advance. Carers for those with later stage symptoms** (e.g. confusion, memory loss and discomfort in unfamiliar surroundings) **are more likely to.**
- **This group welcomes initial phone contact** to discuss service adaptations; **clear information before meeting** on the legal issue, options and costs; **home visits; 'dementia friendly' services** (e.g. plain English, patience and respect); **and a clear meeting record.**

### Regulatory insights

**i** People are often at their most vulnerable when needing legal support, but also feel vulnerable when dealing with lawyers. **Sometimes a small change can make a big difference.**

These findings can **aid regulators' understanding of whether the needs of vulnerable consumers are being met, and if regulatory rules and guidance are supporting providers.**

The work will help to **inform our assessment of performance by the regulators and also our work in our next strategy period.**