

The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans

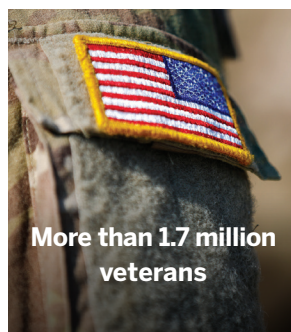
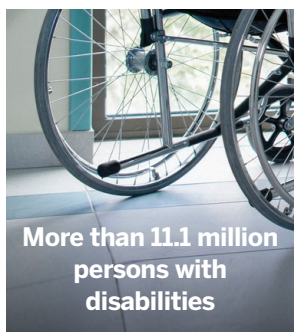
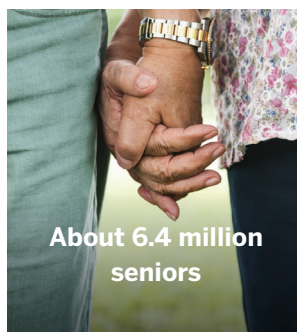
The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) contracted with NORC at the University of Chicago to help measure the justice gap among low-income Americans in 2017. LSC defines the justice gap as the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs. NORC conducted a survey of approximately 2,000 adults living in households at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) using its nationally representative, probability-based AmeriSpeak® Panel. This report presents findings based on this survey and additional data LSC collected from the legal aid organizations it funds.

86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans in the past year **received inadequate or no legal help.**

In the past year, **71%** of low-income households **experienced at least one civil legal problem**, including problems with domestic violence, veterans' benefits, disability access, housing conditions, and health care.

In 2017, low-income Americans will approach LSC-funded legal aid organizations for support with an estimated **1.7 million** problems. They will **receive only limited or no legal help for more than half of these problems** because of a lack of resources.

More than **60 million** Americans have family incomes at or below 125% of FPL, including:



Data Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2015 1-year estimates

Key Findings: Experience with Civil Legal Problems

Data Source: 2017 Justice Gap Measurement Survey



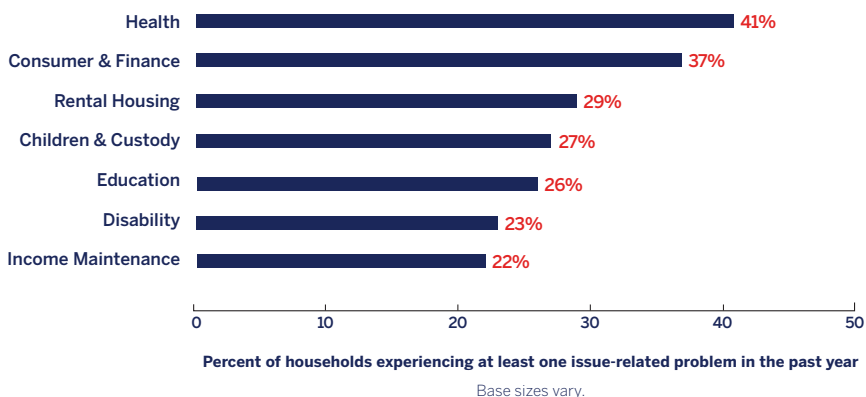
71% of low-income households have experienced a civil legal problem in the past year. **The rate is even higher for some:** households with survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault (**97%**), with parents/guardians of kids under 18 (**80%**), and with disabled persons (**80%**).

1 in 4 low-income households has experienced 6+ civil legal problems in the past year, including **67% of households with survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault**.

7 in 10 low-income Americans with recent personal experience of a civil legal problem **say a problem has significantly affected their lives**.

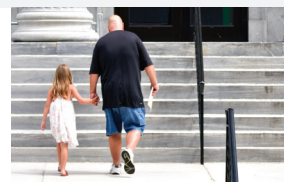
71% of households with **veterans or other military personnel** have experienced a civil legal problem in the past year. They face the same types of problems as others, but **13%** also report problems specific to veterans.

Common Civil Legal Problem Areas



Key Findings: Seeking Legal Help

Data Source: 2017 Justice Gap Measurement Survey



Low-income Americans seek professional legal help for only **20%** of the **civil legal problems they face**.

Top reasons for not seeking professional legal help are:

- Deciding to deal with a problem on one's own
- Not knowing where to look for help or what resources might exist
- Not being sure whether their problem is "legal"

Low-income Americans are most likely to seek professional legal help on problems that are more obviously "legal," like **custody issues** and **wills/estates**.

Key Findings: Reports from the Field

Data Source: LSC 2017 Intake Census and LSC 2016 Grantee Activity Reports



The 133 LSC-funded legal aid organizations across the United States, Puerto Rico, and territories will serve an estimated **1 million** low-income Americans in 2017, but **will be able to fully address the civil legal needs of only about half of them.**

Among the low-income Americans receiving help from LSC-funded legal aid organizations, the top three types of civil legal problems relate to **family, housing, and income maintenance.**

In 2017, low-income Americans will **receive limited or no legal help** for an estimated **1.1 million** eligible problems after seeking help from LSC-funded legal aid organizations.

A lack of available resources accounts for the vast majority **(85% - 97%)** of civil legal problems that LSC-funded organizations **do not fully address.**

Special Focus

The Special Focus section of this report presents key findings for several groups of interest.

Seniors

56% of seniors' households had at least 1 civil legal problem in past year.

65+

Rural Residents

75% of households in rural areas had at least 1 civil legal problem in past year.



Veterans

71% of households with veterans or other military personnel had at least 1 civil legal problem in past year.



Persons with Disabilities

80% of households with persons with disabilities had at least 1 civil legal problem in past year.



Parents of Children under 18

80% of households with parents or guardians of minor children had at least 1 civil legal problem in past year.



Survivors of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault

97% of households with survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault had at least 1 civil legal problem in past year in addition to domestic violence or sexual assault.



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