

BACKGROUND:

- Civil legal services are critical for survivor safety, stability, and mental health (Palmer, Lee, & Michels, 2024).
- Barriers to accessing legal services compound trauma and decrease safety, contributing to a justice gap (Cogan et al., 2025). Justice gaps have legal and psychological implications (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2020).
- Decreases in federal Victims Of Crime Act (VOCA) funding are likely to impact services across the country in 2025. Colorado anticipated a 50% decrease in VOCA funding, affecting essential funding to organizations that support survivors (Colorado Department of Justice, 2024).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

After interpersonal traumas such as sexual assault and intimate partner abuse, what legal needs and barriers do survivors face?

METHODS:

- A partnership between the University of Denver’s Traumatic Stress Studies Group (TSS Group) and the Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center (RMvlc) led to the development of a tool to monitor legal needs and barriers (Wright et al., 2022).
- From 2022-2024, the instrument was administered annually to monitor statewide legal needs, barriers, and services through RMvlc’s victim service provider. Victim service providers in agencies that addressed legal and non-legal issues were invited to participate.

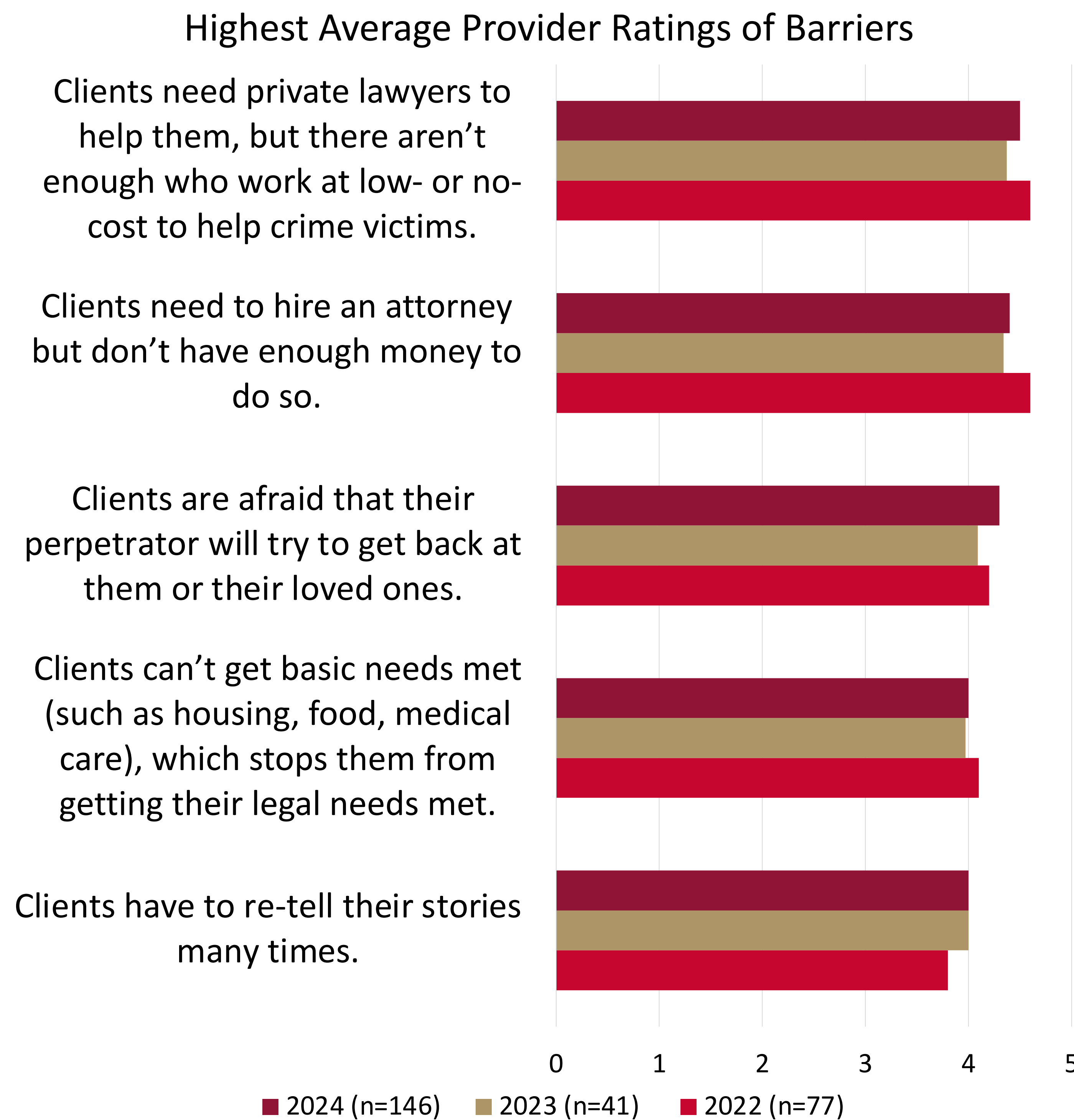
Revealing Justice Gaps: Community-Engaged Trauma Research for Public Impact

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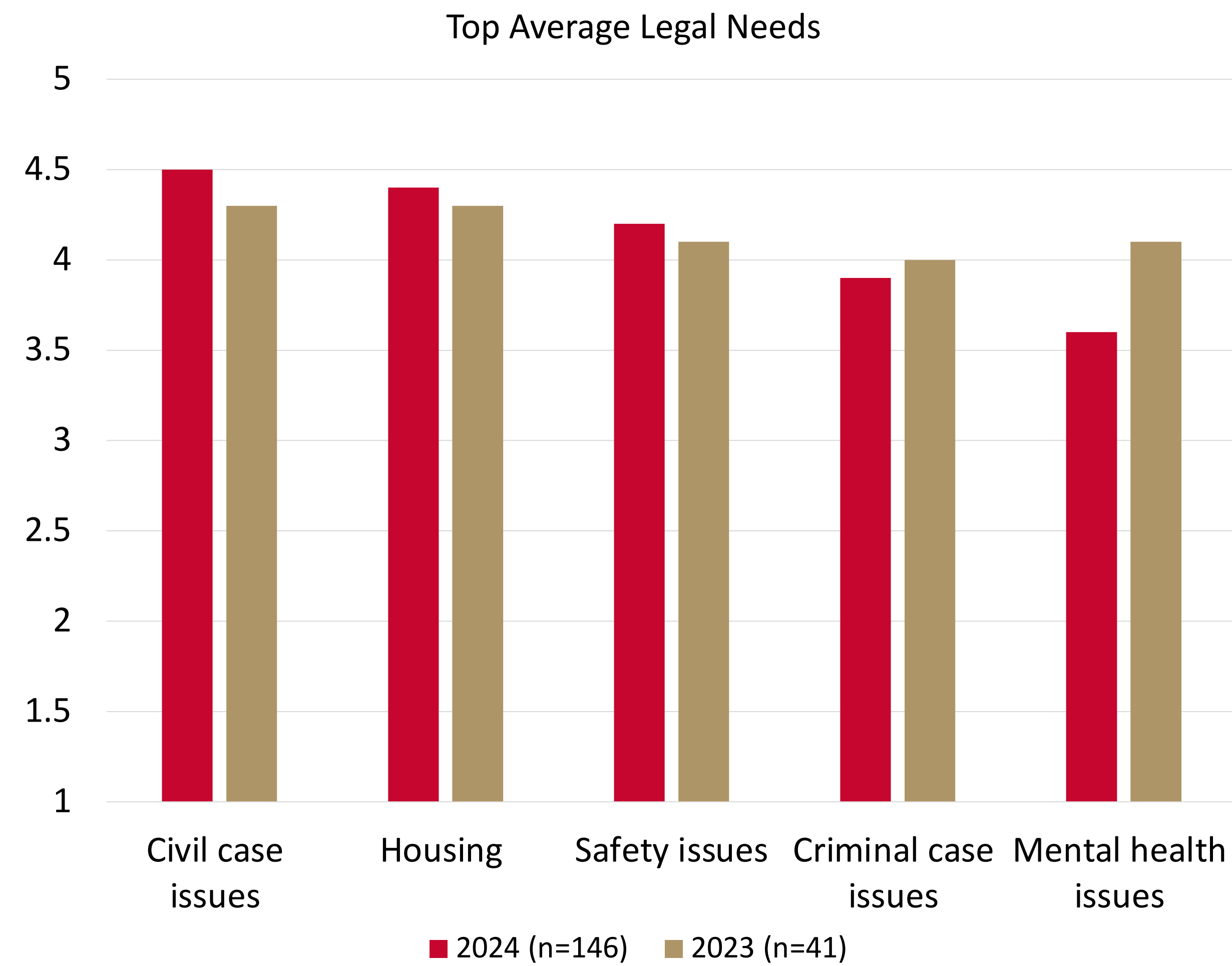
PARTICIPANTS: Participants included victim service providers in community- and system-based agencies (e.g., District Attorneys’ Offices). Community-based agencies provided a range of services – not only legal services. As illustrated below, providers worked in agencies with service areas that reached across the state.

	2024 (n=146)	2023 (n=41)	2022 (n=77)
Denver Metro	39%	43%	30%
Outside Denver Metro	22%	37%	55%
Statewide	20%	13%	13%
Both in and out of Denver Metro	20%	8%	-

BARRIERS TO LEGAL SERVICES were assessed through 32 items, rated from 1 (not a problem) to 5 (very big problem).



LEGAL NEEDS were assessed with 9 items, rated from 1 (no help needed) to 5 (lots of help needed).



- **ANTICIPATING IMPACTS:** In 2024, 53 (of 146) participants described anticipated service impacts due to VOCA cuts. Many described that the anticipated funding loss was expected to create **bigger gaps in care**, especially in rural areas.

Anticipated Service Impacts: Themes

1. Reduction in staffing and trainings
2. Reduction in services (financial assistance, safe shelter)
3. Lower quality services & higher provider burnout
4. Larger gaps to accessing care in rural areas

DISCUSSION:

- **Multiple Kinds of Legal Needs.** Providers noted many unmet legal needs beyond just criminal legal needs.
- **Persistent Barriers to Getting Legal Needs Met.** Providers reported **persistent** economic and resource barriers across years.
- **Anticipating A Worsening Situation.** Providers anticipate reductions in trainings and services, which might increase gaps to care.

Take-Aways for Psychologists

- After interpersonal traumas, such as sexual assault and intimate partner abuse, clients may have unmet legal needs.
- Psychologists have a role to play in advocating for resources to reduce economic barriers and increase access to legal resources.
- Psychologists can also play a role in mulitdisciplinary research partnerships to evaluate client needs and barriers over time.
- Psychologists who are working with survivor populations should consider providing referrals to additional services in order to meet gaps in care.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This work is supported by a partnership with RMvlc and funding from Colorado Statewide Legal Services for Crime Victims, Subcontract from Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center, State of Colorado, Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Award #2022-VA-23-176-00.

