

# ‘What did CAB do for you?’

## Findings from our national outcomes and impact research

During 2013/14 the Citizens Advice bureau (CAB) network, part of the Citizens Advice service, advised two million people with 5.5 million problems relating to issues including debt, benefits, employment, housing and immigration.



In 2014 Citizens Advice completed a large-scale national follow-up phone survey of over 2,700 clients to find out what happened to them following that advice.

The overarching idea was to pose a simple question: ‘What did CAB do for you?’ We wanted to see whether we succeed in our aim to solve clients’ problems and change their lives, and to understand the difference our bureau network therefore makes to society.

The results provide our most robust evidence to date of the effectiveness of our advice services:

<p><b>CAB advice is effective</b></p>  <p>We solve problems for 2 in every 3 clients - that’s 1.3 million clients in 2013/14</p>	<p><b>CAB delivers equitable outcomes</b></p>  <p>Our problem resolution rate is the same whoever you are, whatever your problem and however you access our service</p>	<p><b>CAB does change lives</b></p>  <p>Our holistic service helps over 4 in every 5 clients to experience a positive change in their lives</p>
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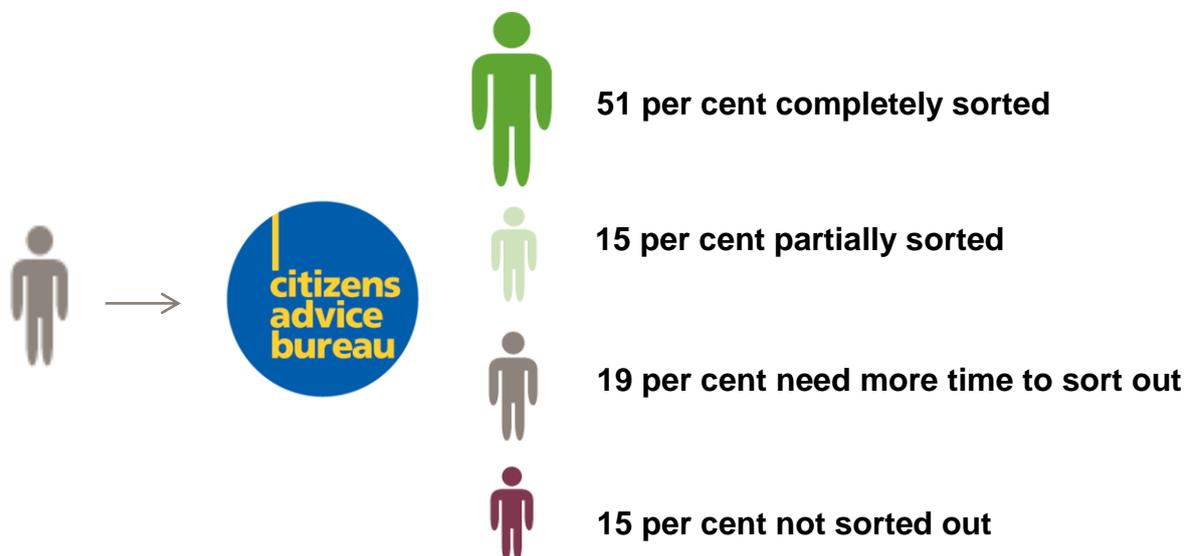
At this time of the Citizens Advice service’s 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, these results provide compelling evidence on the role that CAB play in supporting people and communities across England and Wales, helping them find a way forward.

This is a summary of the high-level findings covering problem resolution, the effectiveness and impact of advice, as well as client satisfaction with our service.

## How effective is the advice offered by our bureau network?

All client respondents completing the survey had been seen by a bureau about a particular problem three to five months previously.

**2 in every 3 clients** said their problem is now partly or completely sorted out.

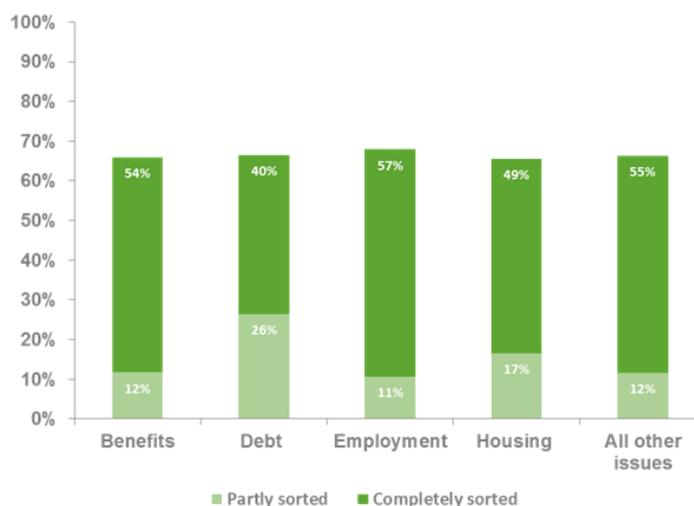


We are therefore confident that in 2013/14 we helped 1.3 million people solve their problem through our bureau network.<sup>1</sup>

Of those who had their problem solved (excluding referrals), 78 per cent said they would not have been able to sort out the problem without help from the bureau.

We succeed in maintaining a consistent level of problem resolution across the range of problems that our clients experience (see chart right).

Our analysis also reveals that clients in different demographic groups, and those accessing different levels of help and using different channels, also achieve a consistent level of problem resolution.

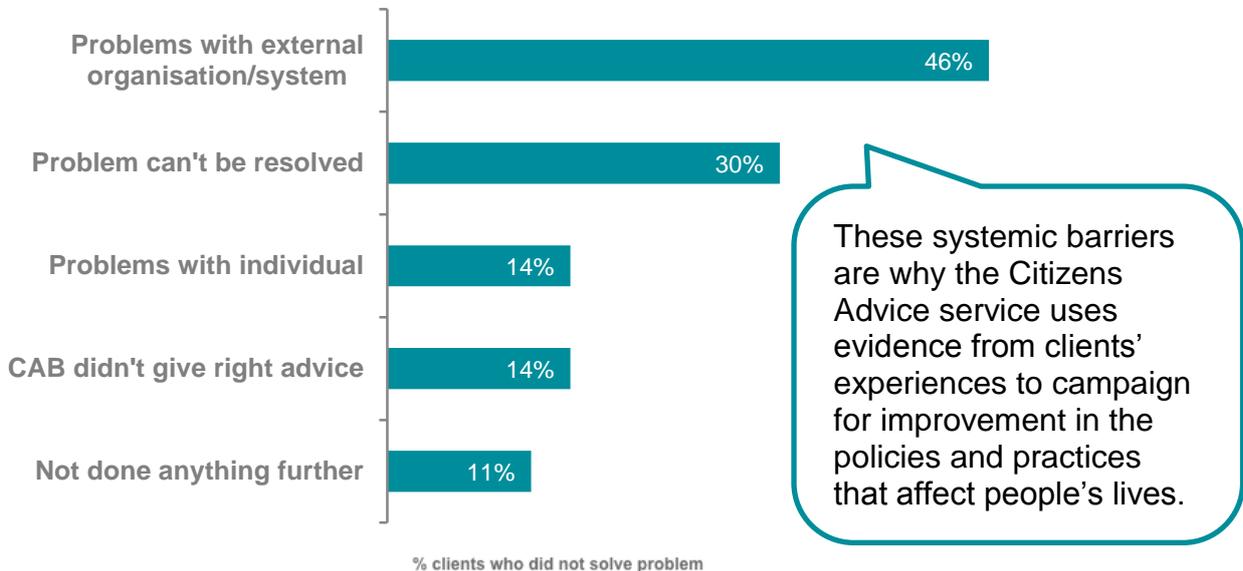


This demonstrates that the Citizens Advice service is effective in helping people to resolve problems: whoever they are, whatever their problem and however they access our service.

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the methodology section at the end for a further explanation.

## Why are some clients unable to resolve their problems?

One in every three clients seen by the bureau network said that their problem was not yet resolved three to five months after advice, including those that needed more time to sort the problem out. These clients reported a mixture of barriers to problem resolution, with systemic barriers predominating.

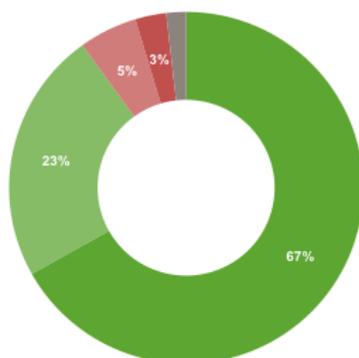


These results suggest that enabling people to sort out their problems and take control of their lives does not only depend on getting the advice right. It also means ensuring that, once people have taken steps to resolving their issues, they do not then encounter additional barriers.

We also have the potential to mobilise those affected by their problems:

**71 per cent of clients** said they would be willing to help change things in their local area so that other people might not have the same problem that they had.

## Are clients satisfied with the service they receive?



■ Very satisfied    ■ Satisfied  
■ Dissatisfied    ■ Very dissatisfied  
■ Don't know / refused

Client satisfaction reflects the extent to which clients' experience of the service measures up to their expectations.

90 per cent of clients said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received. In addition, 95 per cent of all clients said they would recommend the service to other people.

Overall, the results show that our clients value a holistic service that helps to sort out their problems but also supports them in finding a way forward in their lives as a whole.

## What difference do we make to clients' lives?

When clients seek help from a bureau, their personal stories often illustrate the far-reaching consequences that problems can have on their overall lives.

We asked clients to consider whether or not their problem had resulted in any of six potential negative impacts:

<b>Mental wellbeing</b>	Felt stressed, depressed or anxious
<b>Physical health</b>	Felt their physical health had got worse
<b>Money and finances</b>	Had less money or escalating financial difficulties
<b>Housing</b>	Had to move home or worried about losing it
<b>Employment</b>	Struggled to keep their job or find a job
<b>Relationships</b>	Had difficulties in relationships with other people

**71 per cent** had experienced at least one negative impact prior to advice

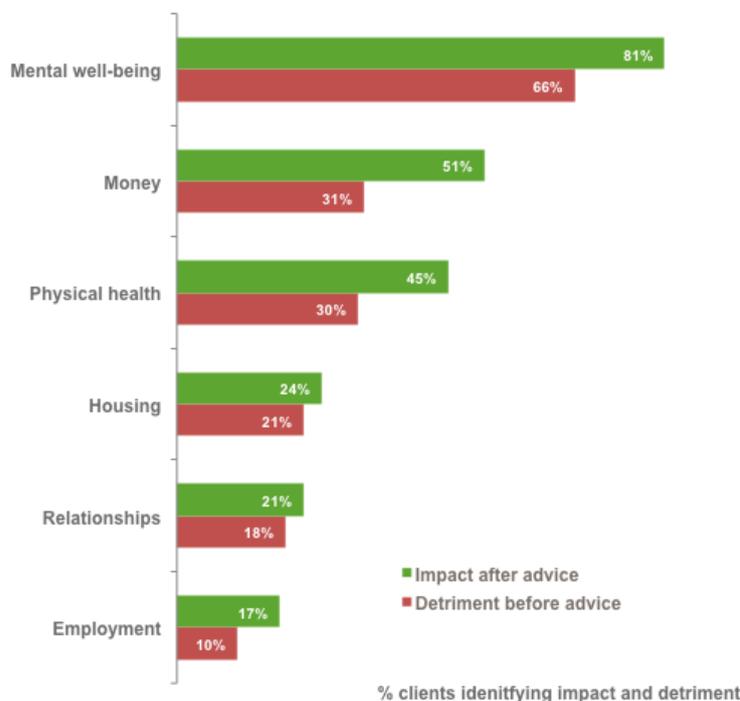
This suggests that this is more normal rather than exceptional for our clients, with many experiencing more than one negative consequence.

In order to assess how effectively we help our clients to deal with these additional negative impacts, we then asked clients whether the help they had received from us had resulted in any positive impacts across the same areas.

**86 per cent** had experienced at least one positive impact following advice

We have significant impact in the areas where clients experience greatest need, particularly in supporting mental well-being (see chart right).

Across all areas, the proportion of clients reporting a positive impact is higher than those that initially reported a detriment prior to advice, indicating that there may be a positive 'booster effect' associated with the help CAB provide.



## Methodology

The national outcomes and impact research was designed to offer an accurate reflection of the experience of clients who use our service.

<b>Research method</b>	<p>The national outcomes and impact research focuses on the activities of the bureau network.</p> <p>The research comprised a short follow-up questionnaire with clients, completed over the phone and focusing on the client journey from beginning to end. Respondents completed the survey three to five months after seeking help from a bureau, with fieldwork completed between March and May 2014.</p>
<b>Sampling</b>	<p>The sample frame was drawn from clients seen by the bureau network in December 2013. The sample was stratified to provide comparable samples (approximately 500 responses) across five categories of problem: benefits and tax credits, debt, employment, housing and all other issues. Results have been weighted to reflect the relative proportion of these problems among clients seen across the network in 2013/14.</p>
<b>Robustness</b>	<p>The national outcomes and impact research was completed by a sample of 2,728 client respondents across England and Wales.</p> <p>A margin of error of +/- 2 per cent is associated with key statistics.</p>
<b>Reflects Citizens Advice service client profile</b>	<p>The profile of respondents completing the survey closely matched the profile of the clients seen across the network in 2013/14.</p> <p>The variables considered include: country (England/Wales), level of help provided (limited advice/full advice), primary channel (face-to-face/phone and digital) and demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity and disability/health status).</p>

## About the Citizens Advice service

The Citizens Advice service aims to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. It offers information and advice through face-to-face, phone and email services, and online via [Adviceguide.org.uk](http://Adviceguide.org.uk).

Between them, Citizens Advice bureaux make advice available from over 3,000 locations in England and Wales including high streets, community centres, doctors' surgeries, courts and prisons.

### For further information about this research, please contact:

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