

# Summary Report

## Survey of Members in Rural, Remote and Isolated Communities

Presented to:

The Canadian Bar Association



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# Summary Report of Findings

## 1. Project Overview

Vision Research was hired by the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) to conduct market research on behalf of the association, as part of a national project on health and wellness programs for lawyers, judges and law students in rural, remote and isolated communities.

The project was initiated by the Legal Profession Assistance Conference (LPAC) of the CBA. LPAC is the umbrella organization that works with the provincial and territorial Lawyer Assistance Programs (LAPs). LPAC offers national services such as a 24/7 helpline. The LAPs provide professional support in the form of confidential counseling, advisory and information services, as well as, personal support and peer group volunteers.

The goal of the research project was to assess how the LPAC and the LAPs provide professional support and assistance that meets the specific needs of members and their families living in rural, remote and isolated communities across Canada. The findings are presented in this report.

## 2. Methodology

An online survey was prepared and developed in English and French and distributed via email to a small and randomly selected group of CBA members identified by their postal code as living in rural, remote or isolated communities across Canada. Given the difficulty and sensitivity of the subject matter, the CBA's goal was to obtain a 10% response rate, which was achieved; 118 surveys were completed between June 21<sup>st</sup> and July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The resulting confidence interval is plus or minus 8.5 %, which is acceptable for a survey of this kind, where precision beyond this point is not critical. Our confidence is bolstered by the fact that many of the findings are quite strong, with large portions of the respondents agreeing on key points. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed by a Vision Research specialist.

Nearly all (95%) respondents completed the survey in English. Of all the responses, 25% (28 responses) were from British Columbia. There were no respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador or from Prince Edward Island.

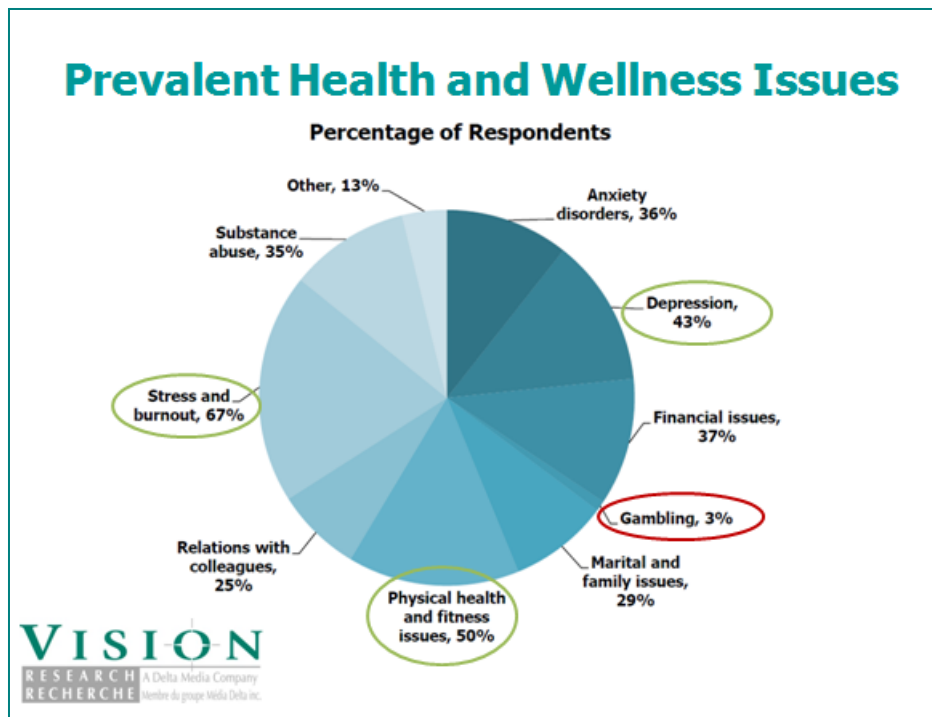
### 3. Data at a Glimpse

#### 3.1 Living in Rural, Northern and Isolated Communities

Respondents were first asked to identify the advantages which attract them to live and practice in the rural and northern communities where they do. Respondents said they live and practice in their hometown, where they were born and/or raised, or they enjoy one or more lifestyle advantages associated with "small-town" living. Another common response was that more professional opportunities are available to them in rural, remote and/or isolated settings. For example, respondents mentioned advantages such as less competition, better income/benefits, and an increased variety of legal/interesting work.

#### 3.2 Health and Wellness Issues

Sixty-two percent agreed that the health and wellness issues prevalent among lawyers, judges and law students in rural, remote and isolated communities are different from those experienced in urban communities. When asked which issues were most prevalent (or common) in rural, remote and isolate communities, respondents identified stress and burnout, physical health and fitness, and depression as their top choices.



### 3.3 Health, Wellness and Leaving to Practice in Urban Areas

However, 64% do not think that the challenges that accompany practice in rural, remote and isolated communities would make it more likely they will leave a rural setting to practice in an urban area. This suggests that although common in rural, remote, and isolated communities, the effects of such issues mentioned above are not enough to cause them to seek employment opportunities elsewhere.

The results are somewhat different among respondents who are *not* aware of the support programs available to them or are not aware of how to access these. Among those who were not aware of the support programs, 28% feel the health and wellness challenges that accompany practice in rural, remote and isolated communities make it more likely they will leave their rural community and practice in a more urban area. Similarly, among those who do not know how to access these services, 27% feel the challenges make it more likely they will leave the rural community. The national average for this question is 21%, which suggests that, within the limits imposed by the small data set, those who are not aware of the support programs or how to access them are marginally more likely to leave their rural practice in the future. Awareness of the support programs and how to access them might predispose members to remain in their rural practice.

### 3.4 Seeking Help

When asked where they would turn to if experiencing a health and wellness issue, slightly more than half (57%) of all respondents said a family physician or other health care provider. Nearly half (49%) said they would turn to the LAP in their province/territory. This is an indication that respondents prefer the social element of discussing a health related issue and/or topic with a health care professional (e.g., family physician and/or counselor).

Where respondents would turn	%
Family physician or other health care provider	57
Provincial/territorial Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP)	49
A friend	34
A colleague	20
Legal Professional Assistance Conference (LPAC) helpline	16
None. I prefer to handle these issues myself	12
Other means	9
Religious or spiritual leader	5

### **3.5 Program and Services to Offer**

The survey asked participants for their suggestions on the kinds of programs and services the LPAC could offer to address the needs of members in rural, remote and isolated communities. Generally, respondents were split on three of the four options put before them: a confidential online forum, online peer support and online counseling (i.e., delivered via Skype). Nearly half were “not interested” in these services and the remaining half was split between those who considered themselves “only somewhat interested” or “interested.” For the fourth option – online information on health and wellness – half of the respondents deemed themselves “interested” and only 21% of respondents indicated they were “not interested.”

When asked to identify other programs and services the LPAC and LAP could offer to meet the needs of members in rural, remote and isolated communities, the most common suggestions from respondents included:

- more counseling programs and/or services (both online and in-person);
- more social and/or in-person events; and
- more opportunities to continue legal education.

Anxiety, depression and suicide, dealing with challenging client and colleague relationships and substance abuse were identified as the top health and wellness issues that LPAC and LAP should address by means of these programs and services. Stress and burnout was the top ranked issue needing attention. Ninety percent (101 respondents) of those surveyed cited stress and burnout as either important (4) or very important (5).

### **3.6 Promoting Access to Support Services**

Twenty-two percent indicated the CBA website as the best source of information about the LPAC and LAPs. Only 9% said they turn to the LPAC and/or to a LAP website to find similar information. Instead, respondents cited publications such as *BarTalk*, *The Advocate* and *OBA Magazine*, as well as meetings, conferences, presentations, and involvement with their local law societies as alternate sources of information.

Between 69% and 76% of survey respondents know how to access the services of the LPAC and the LAPs and were aware of them prior to completing the survey. This demonstrates good momentum for the services offered and the ability to continue to improve the awareness and education about these services.

Many respondents commented on the issue of confidentiality and lack of anonymity as a primary concern to legal professionals in rural, remote and isolated communities. Others challenges included addressing issues related to isolation, peer support and access to resources.

## 4. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, Vision Research has proposed the following recommendations to improve the LPAC, the LAPs and the programs and services offered to legal professionals in rural, remote and isolated communities.

- **Ensure online information** related to health and wellness issues and/topics is easily accessible to all CBA members. Once this is established, begin pilot testing other forms of online support, such as counseling and peer support, using the online information site as a means to promote and link to the support.
- **Develop new programs and services** that focus on the most prevalent health and wellness issues among legal professionals in rural, remote and isolated communities, as identified by CBA members: stress and burnout; physical health and fitness; and depression.
- **Create new programs and services** that focus on addressing the other health and wellness issues CBA members rank as most important:
  - Suicide
  - How to deal with challenging relationships with clients
  - How to deal with challenging relationships with colleagues
  - Anxiety
  - Substance abuse
  - Weight and nutrition
  - How to deal with challenging relationships with family and friends
  - Money management
- **Offer more opportunities (both online and in-person)** for legal professionals in rural, remote and isolated communities to meet with and be assisted by a professional counselor, family physician, or other health care provider in their home community.
- **Continue to leverage the LPAC and LAPs website, publications, and presentations** as effective tools to communicate information about health and wellness issues and/or topics with CBA members.
- **Continue to leverage the provincial law societies, meetings and conferences, and local LAPs** as additional methods to communicate key messages about health and wellness issues and/or topics with CBA members.
- **Research and identify new communication products, tools, and channels** to inform CBA members who are not aware (or are less aware) of LPAC and LAPs and their programs and services.
- **Conduct a communication audit on all LPAC communication and marketing products** to evaluate the association's ability to transfer information about health and wellness issues and/or topics to its members. Through various market research tactics (e.g., surveys, executive interviews, focus groups, etc.), a communication audit will uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the association's communication products.