



Proposed National Benchmarks for Public Legal Assistance Services

In 2014, a joint Working Group of the Association of Legal Aid Plans of Canada (ALAP) and the Canadian Bar Association's Access to Justice Committee (CBA) agreed to collaborate to formulate national legal aid benchmarks for Canada. This work advances the commitment of both organizations to achieve a robust legal aid system in Canada, and key aspects of the CBA's 2013 *Reaching Equal Justice* report.

After extensive discussion, consultations and research commissioned by the CBA from Dr. Melina Buckley, the Working Group has developed six benchmarks. They constitute guiding principles to achieve the shared goal of a national, integrated system of public legal assistance to improve access to justice and meet the needs of disadvantaged people across Canada.

With this strong foundation, ALAP and the CBA will use the benchmarks to support their respective efforts to improve Canada's legal aid system. As an initial example, see *A Framework for Meeting Legal Needs: Proposed National Benchmarks for Public Legal Assistance Services* (Ottawa: CBA, forthcoming).

The Benchmarks

1. A National Public Legal Assistance System

Canadian public legal assistance systems are sustainably-funded and provide comprehensive, people-centred legal services tailored to local, regional, provincial and territorial circumstances to meet essential legal needs and contribute to the health and well-being of disadvantaged and low-income Canadians.

2. Scope of Services

Public legal assistance services are provided to individuals, families and communities with essential legal needs who are otherwise unable to afford assistance. Essential legal needs are legal problems or situations that put into jeopardy a person or a person's family's liberty, personal safety and security, health, equality, employment, housing or ability to meet the basic necessities of life.

3. Service Priorities

Public legal assistance services are provided on a priority basis to individuals, families and communities who are financially disadvantaged or are otherwise vulnerable to experiencing unmet essential legal needs.

4. Spectrum of Services

Public legal assistance service providers use discrete and systemic legal strategies and work in collaboration with non-legal service providers to offer a broad range of services – from outreach to after care – targeted and tailored to people's legal needs, circumstances and capabilities.

5. Quality of Services

Public legal assistance services in all provinces and territories are fully accessible, timely, high quality, culturally appropriate and cost-effective. Services will lead to evaluated meaningful participation and fair and equitable outcomes, and contribute to the empowerment and resilience of individuals, families and communities.

6. A Supported, Collaborative, Integrated Service Sector

Public legal assistance service providers participate in collaborative service planning across this sector and are mandated and supported to innovate and to fulfill their integral role of ensuring access to justice and an effective justice system, working in partnership with all stakeholders.

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