



The Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project Calgary Judicial District

Brief Overview

During 2009, 794 services were mapped and entered into an online, searchable database. Of these, 621 are located within the City of Calgary and 173 are disbursed among 18 smaller communities within the judicial district. The database prototype can be accessed at <http://albertalegalservices.ca/admin/> (access username/password is guest/mapping data).

In total 226 interviews were completed with legal, social and health providers (175), public (31), lawyers (11), judiciary (4) and tribunal members (5), providing numerical and in-depth data.

The following are a few of the key findings:

- 242 primarily legal services were mapped (72 of which offered a social component to their services); another 259 were primarily health and social services that provide some kind of legal information or support. The remaining 293 serve clients likely to have legal needs of a critical nature (eg. AADAC, FCS, Calgary Health – Forensic Inpatient Psychiatry).
- Some legal services are classified as dealing exclusively with one area of law, but many offer multiple kinds of assistance, often spanning more than one area of law, and offering several different types of services ranging from information through to representation.
- In Calgary 196 legal services were mapped. In contrast, a total of only 46 legal services were mapped for all of the other 18 communities.
- Some types of legal service are more readily available than others. In the City of Calgary, public legal information (PLEI) is most frequently offered, accounting for 216 of the identified services. A further 82 services offer legal support of some kind, while 67 are concerned with enforcement, and 45 provide legal advice. Just 18 were identified as offering actual representation.
- In the outlying judicial district there are far more criminal services (93) than any other. These break down into the following types of services: 26 PLEI, 26 support, 20 enforcement, 16 advice and 5 representation.
- Low knowledge about services hampers access and is not just a problem of poor public understanding. The Team of trained researchers very often found it difficult to locate clear information that accurately described services and related eligibility criteria. Furthermore, service providers often had an incomplete understanding of other services offered.
- Eligibility criteria further reduce the number of services available to all members of the public and serve to dictate user patterns. Most of the advice and representation services are tied to financial criteria which are considered low or very low by the City of Calgary. Other services are directed to specific populations such as youth, victims of violence, and women among others. Additionally, the mandate of some important services only allows them to assist with court-involved matters in particular courts.
- Examined in detail, services in Calgary might be described as fragmented, but little if any actual duplication was identified. Outside of Calgary, only criminal services appear to be even close to adequate for the geographic dispersment involved.
- People usually only look for information about legal issues when they realize they have a legal matter (usually of a pressing nature). They then attempt to gain information via multiple sources,

most often beginning with personal contacts (who tend to be inaccurate) and/or the Internet, where there is considerable room to improve legal service information.

- There is a lack of available service statistics making it difficult to reliably establish service capacity levels or identify groups that use services more or less than others.
- People with the following kinds of legal need are more likely to find appropriate services: indictable criminal charges; youth criminal charges; domestic violence; family or civil court proceedings; matters that can be resolved without advice or representation.
- Vulnerable populations with special needs (Aboriginal peoples, those with disabilities of any kind, immigrants, the homeless) are generally underserved but tend to have multiple and interrelated legal and social problems and face very significant barriers to accessing existing services.
- The public participants had experienced a range of legal problems and related services. They provided mixed reviews, being most positive about services accessed in the courthouse and most critical of those provided by lawyers. Aspects of Legal Aid and police services were also heavily criticized. Neither the public nor service providers spoke much about community non-profit services.

Based on findings in the Calgary Judicial District, the following areas of service gaps were identified, generating 42 recommendations provided in the report:

a) Gaps generally relevant to all legal service delivery

- *A need for improved information about legal processes and services*
 - ✓ Knowledge about existing services
 - ✓ PLEI to ensure an effective foundation
- *More affordable legal advice and representation options*
 - ✓ The possibilities of unbundling
 - ✓ An increased role for paralegals
- *Increased services outside of Calgary*
- *Enhanced legal services to meet special needs*

b) Gaps with particular organizational relevance

- *Coordinating and enhancing government services*
 - ✓ Doing better with justice for children and youth
- *Public Services - delivery that meets the public need*
 - ✓ Legal Aid Alberta
 - ✓ Police Services
- *Community non-profit – building on successes*
- *Private legal services – building client satisfaction*