

The *Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project* (ALSMP) is a province-wide project aimed providing an understanding of the public’s legal needs and the current state of legal service provision. <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/research/mapping-en.php>

Peace River Judicial District – SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The goals of the ALSMP are to:

- Collect and share information about existing legal services in Alberta.
- Gain a better understanding about the characteristics of people and communities across Alberta and their legal needs.
- Identify strengths and gaps in current legal service delivery and resources.
- Strengthen relationships between legal service providers through the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The Peace River Judicial District

- The town of Peace River has a population of 6,315.
- The largest community in this District is Slave Lake (population 6,703).
- The total population of the District is approximately 69,737 people.
- There are eleven Reserves and four Métis Settlements in this District, and high urban Aboriginal populations in most communities.
- There is a very small immigrant and non-permanent resident population in this District. As of 2006, Peace River had 285 immigrants and no non-permanent residents. Slave Lake had 280 and 45, respectively.
- The majority of people who self-identified as being visible minorities were of Filipino, South Asian, Black, Chinese, and Arabic descent.
- High school dropout rates are significantly higher than provincial averages. University/college completion rates are significantly lower than provincial averages.

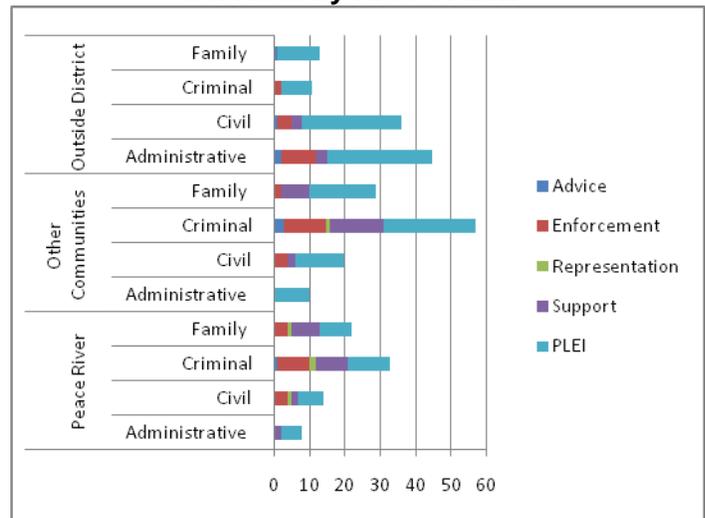
Existing Legal Services

Of the 61 organizations and 120 services that were mapped:

- 68 were sole purpose legal services.
- 29 offered legal as well as social or health components.
- 23 were related social and health services.

All legal services were classified by the types of service available (advice, enforcement, representation, support and PLEI) and area of law (criminal, administrative, family and civil). This District is sparsely serviced (Figure 1) but the existing services are surprisingly widely dispersed among the communities.

Figure 1 – Services by Area of Law



There are very few local options for Civil, Family and Administrative legal services. Criminal services are not much more plentiful. However, yet again, participants identified Family Law services as the most desperately needed.

Understanding Legal Needs in the Peace River Judicial District

Barriers that emerged were based largely around public awareness of resources, legal rights and responsibilities:

- Lack of Knowledge (Service Providers and the Public).
- Language and Literacy Barriers.
- Service Locations.
- Lack of Transportation.
- Lack of Technology.

Common Legal Needs

Participants spoke of needs that local residents commonly experience. These include:

- Administrative – benefits (especially AISH),
- Break and Enters,
- Car Theft,
- Debt,
- Employment Standards (specifically TFWs and migrant workers),
- Immigration (especially TFWs),
- Landlord & Tenant,
- Sexual Assault,
- Summary (petty) crimes (eg. shoplifting, public intoxication, property damage), and
- Wills and Estates.

Family Law eclipsed all of the other identified needs.

Gaps and Priorities in Meeting Legal Needs

Service providers and members of the public identified two main categories of missing or inadequate legal services. These are:

- Services for people who are going to court.

- Lack of options for legal advice and representation.
- Lack of alternative options to going to court.
- Services for people who have health concerns and/or have been victimized.

Improving Legal Service Delivery

Service providers highlighted some things they think are going well in this District. The Report details:

Good Practices to Build On

- Courthouse staff, Crown and Judiciary.
- RCMP.
- Youth Justice Committees.
- Legal Resource Centre (Edmonton).
- Grande Prairie LInC (though outside District).
- Grande Prairie Legal Guidance (though outside District).
- Alberta Children & Youth Services' Provincial Protocol Framework.

District Strengths

- Networking (or willingness to network).

Recommendations

Based on research findings we make 7 recommendations:

1. Enhance access to basic legal information.
2. Provide rural residents with improved telephone access to key legal services.
3. Enhance capacity of NCSA Court workers.
4. Increase access to Internet in remote communities.
5. Provide adequate supports for people with family law needs.
6. Enhance supports for children and youth.
7. Provide increased support for people going to court without representation.

Suggestions are included in the Report for how to achieve these recommendations.