



Expanded Family Duty Counsel (FDC) is a legal advice service offered in Victoria that builds on the success of regular family duty counsel services at courthouses throughout BC. The expanded program permits clients to make appointments so they can work with the same lawyer throughout the service. (Elsewhere, people usually speak with a different lawyer every time they come to see duty counsel.) Sometimes the same lawyer is unavailable, in which case the new lawyer continues with the same client file to ensure consistent service.

Clients get up to six hours with the same lawyer for each current legal matter they have compared to three hours outside the program. Another enhancement to regular FDC services is coaching to help people to represent themselves more effectively.

Clients with a family law issue can access the expanded service in person at the Justice Access Centre (JAC) located at the Victoria Provincial Courthouse. Expanded FDC is one of four justice transformation initiatives funded by the Ministry of Justice. It was piloted for three years ending March 31, 2017. The provincial government has renewed funding until March 31, 2020.

Innovative services

Under the program, family duty counsel will provide the following:

- Legal advice on family law issues
- Information and advice on court processes, both Provincial and Supreme Court
- Information and advice on options for resolving legal issues out-of-court
- Referrals to other services, including online resources and other public agencies
- Help with preparing documents for court or for other legal issues
- Help with preparing for court appearances
- Appearing in court on brief uncontested issues
- Coaching to help people who are representing themselves in court

Benefits for families

Enhanced in-person service, along with integration with the resources at the Justice Access Centre and improved referrals to outside agencies support and empower clients to find affordable, fair and enduring resolutions to their family law issues, bringing stability to their lives and the lives of their children.

The presence of family duty counsel in the courthouse and its integration with other JAC services has a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the court by helping clients reach out-of-court resolutions, as well as be better prepared for court hearings if they are needed.