DIGITAL EQUITY
IN ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Literature Review – Summary Report

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Legal Aid BC

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Note to Readers:

The links (URLs) to the websites referenced in this document were correct as of March 15, 2021. However, given that web-based information changes frequently, the links or content of the websites referenced may change.

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Introduction

Digital (In)Equity, and Barriers to Use of Digital Legal Resources

Digital technology can create new "pathways to justice" (McGill, Salyzyn, Bouclin et al., 2016, p. 2) for those facing challenges such as lack of knowledge about the legal system and available legal resources, lack of proximity to local legal services, and inability to afford a lawyer. However, alongside the obvious potential of digital technologies to increase access to legal information and resources, concerns about inequitable access—"digital divides"—remain.

A large body of literature has emerged to explore the factors which produce this uneven landscape of technology access and use. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2019) summarize how concerns about the digital divide have evolved from an initial, "first-level", focus on having an internet connection; to indicators of a "second-level" digital divide relating to internet skills and usage. Subsequently, authors have emphasized a "third-level" digital divide in which there is uneven distribution of internet use-related outcomes and tangible offline benefits (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019). As the Digital Justice for BC Working Group has emphasized, "internet access is not only a right itself but an essential gateway to access other fundamental human rights such as health care, education, and community life" (Digital Justice for BC Working Group, 2020, para 9). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust these divides into even sharper relief as use of digital media for education, work, social support, and to access necessary information, goods, and services suddenly transitioned from ubiquitous to mandatory.

Increasingly, critical approaches within the digital equity literature underscore how digital divides are "embedded in social, economic, and cultural contexts" (Hadziristic, 2017, p. 38), and thus necessarily intersect with experiences of racialization, gender, age, settler-colonialism, (dis)ability, and class, among other dynamics. Digital exclusions are being shown to not only reflect, but also exacerbate, the structural inequities of the offline world.

Legal Aid BC's *Achieving Digital Equity Project*

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, questions of digital exclusion and digital inequity have been of critical importance to the work of Legal Aid BC (LABC). LABC has regularly been recognized for leadership in the design and delivery of digital PLEI resources. These include the Aboriginal Legal Aid in BC, Family Law in BC, and MyLawBC websites which feature innovative guided pathway, live chat, and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) features. For instance, LABC's new Family Resolution Centre combines a self-help tool with access to free expert coaching and mediation. While LABC regularly engages in user testing and evaluation to ensure high quality and maximize accessibility, the organization is concerned that an array of structural barriers is preventing many people from effectively accessing and using these digital resources. Consequently, LABC has initiated the *Achieving Digital Equity (ADE) Project*. This multi-method study examines the barriers to access and use of digital resources which are faced by people across British Columbia (BC). LABC gratefully acknowledges the support of the Legal Services Society/Law Foundation Legal Research Fund, which is funding this work.

Literature Review Approach and Methodology

This report summarizes one component of the ADE study: a review of literature on the barriers to access and use of digital technologies. Although the ADE project focuses on use of online *legal* resources, I have framed this review of literature more broadly in recognition of how digital equity issues impact access across a broad range of public sector services and resources. The ADE literature review has entailed an appraisal of published material in the justice and (where relevant) health and education sectors, across Canada and internationally, to identify relevant digital equity themes. In total, I selected well over 200 publications for either high-level or in-depth review.

Three broad questions guided my approach in this review:

- What are the intersecting barriers to accessing and using legal help online?
- Who is affected, how, and at what points?
- What are promising approaches to increasing digital equity in BC's Access to Justice sector?

This literature review has informed the additional components of the study, which include: a population survey of BC residents; tracking referrals to digital resources; surveys and focus groups with community workers, Elders, and service providers; and interviews exploring individuals' digital resource user journeys.

This report is a brief summary of the full literature review conducted for this project. The detailed literature review report is available at the project website: legalaid.bc.ca/about/reports/ Achieving-Digital-Equity-Project.

The remainder of this report overview findings from the ADE literature review in four main sections:

The first section of the review addresses issues commonly referred to as "first-level" divides which relate to digital technology connectivity and access.

The second section focuses on "second-level divide" differences in motivation, digital skills, and trust in relation to digital technology use.

A third section of the review addresses the "third-level divide" topic of digital access to justice. In this section, I draw on research from the access to justice, and public or community legal education and information sectors to discuss how digital inequities play out in the context of addressing legal issues.

The final section of the report overviews promising approaches to addressing digital equity within BC's public legal sector, and in public services more broadly.

"First-Level" Divides: Connectivity, Use, and Access

Access to broadband internet, along with the digital technology required to use it, remains a concern throughout what is called British Columbia, and across the lands called Canada. The term "broadband" refers to internet connections that enable download speeds of 1.5 megabits per second (Mbps) or more. However, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CTRC) has set target speeds of 50 Mbps (download) and 10 Mbps (upload) (or 50/10), reflecting the bandwidths considered necessary for full participation in contemporary global online environments (see KPMG, 2019).

Broadband Internet: Availability, Speed, and Affordability

About 94% of British Columbians live in areas where the CRTC's target download speeds of 50/10 Mbps are available (CRTC, 2020a). However, the ability to subscribe to digital services is strongly linked to income. Almost 15% of BC internet users with incomes below $40,000 did not have a home connection, compared with less than one percent of those in the highest income quartile (Statistics Canada, 2019g).

In BC, as globally, there are significant urban-rural divides relating to coverage and affordability (KPMG, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2019b). Only 36% of rural BC communities and only 38% of rural Indigenous communities can access internet speeds of 50/10 Mbps (Government of British Columbia, 2021). Connectivity across diverse rural communities is highly variable; some may be "connected", but at painfully slow speeds or by unreliable satellite connections. Further, "community access" to internet does not mean that each household is connected (Beaton, McMahon, O'Donnell et al., 2016; Cybera, 2020; UBCIC, 2020). Cellular service availability is also much lower in rural areas – especially in reserve communities, where only 86% of residents can access 4G LTE cellular technology, compared with 99.9% of residents in urban areas (CRTC, 2020b, p. 329, p. 45; KPMG, 2019).

Data caps are another barrier to affordability – particularly for rural households. Plans are more expensive in rural areas, while offering less data (KPMG, 2019). Further, rural households and people with low income more often rely on mobile-only plans which is the most expensive per-unit way to access data (Humphry, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2019b). All of this can require users to adopt "frugal practices" to conserve data and phone minutes. This may mean limiting phone calls and texts, and only using free apps and public Wi-fi to avoid running up costs (Hernandez & Roberts, 2018).

Internet Use

While BC has high rates of internet use overall at 94% (Statistics Canada, 2019a), opportunities to use the internet are not distributed equally. Research on internet use commonly focuses on different rates of use amongst seniors and, to a lesser extent, differences according to gender, disability, health, rural and remote residence, immigration status, language, and Indigenous status (e.g., Ali-Hassan, Eloulabi, & Keethakumar, 2020; Crosby, Anderson, & Sevenpifer, 2018; Fang, Canham, Battersby et al., 2019; Statistics Canada, 2019c). Across all of these categories, however, class-based indicators related to income and educational opportunity play an important role (Statistics Canada, 2019c, 2019g). For example, while seniors (especially older seniors) go online at much lower rates, seniors who are wealthier, highly educated and healthy have rates of computer and internet use that are similar to the general population (Davidson & Schimmele, 2019). Use also varies by activity. Digital government services are used by 84% of high-income internet users, versus only 65% of those with incomes below $40,000 (Statistics Canada, 2019g).

Digital Technology Access

Internet use also requires access to online devices. Across Canada, only 63% of households with incomes below $33,000 had home computers, compared with 95% of the highest income households (CRTC, 2020b, p. 52). Likewise, only 78% of BC internet users with incomes below $40,000 had a smartphone for personal use, compared with 96% of those with the highest incomes (Statistics Canada, 2019g).

Complicating Digital Access: Diversity, Quality, Continuity

Digital technology access is perhaps best understood as a gradient impacted by cost, quality and convenience. Those with the highest quality access can afford to own a range of the latest devices— including PCs, smartphones and tablets, and accessory technology like charging ports, printers, scanners, and extra monitors. They can afford plans with unlimited data, subscriptions to a range of online services, and can pay for maintenance and updates. This enables them to maintain constant connectivity and to use whichever device is best suited to a task: using phones for calls and messages 'on the go,' but using PCs for tasks that require more memory, storage, typing functionality and large screens for deep (versus superficial) information-seeking (Hernandez & Roberts, 2018; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019).

This kind of advantaged, optimal access relates to income, and urban versus rural residence among other factors. Across various studies, people with low-income, seniors, people with disabilities or mental health issues, gender diverse people, new immigrants, refugees, people who are Indigenous, Black, and/or racialized are identified as groups who disproportionately face affordability and access-related barriers to internet use (e.g., Davidson & Schimmele, 2019; Drake & Bielefield, 2017; Golub, Satterfield, Serritella et al., 2019; Greer, Robotham, Simblett et al., 2019; Sturm, 2017; UBCIC, 2020). In general, these user groups more often have mobile-only internet access, which can significantly reduce the quality of online experiences. Many who experience deep poverty, especially those who are homeless or precariously housed, struggle to maintain any access to a functional phone, data plan, and even access to electricity for charging (Harris, 2019; Selfridge, 2017). Residents of institutions (such as correctional facilities or mental health facilities) may have no access to online technology at all (Greer et al., 2019; Shook & McInnis, 2017). Adverse life events like health issues, family breakdown, or violence, can also significantly interrupt technology access (see, e.g., Chen, 2017; Faria, 2020; Greer et al., 2019).

Internet access at home is key in enabling full participation in online environments, especially for seniors (Denvir, Balmer, & Pleasence, 2014). Public access to Wi-fi and computers are important for those with few other options, but public computer use entails constraints such as restricted hours, time limits, unfamiliar devices or software, lack of quiet and privacy, and traffic-related pressures on quality of internet. Further, many access spaces were suddenly closed during the COVID-19 pandemic (see, e.g., Prochuk, Blair, & Bendo, 2020; Smythe, 2020).

Downloaded Costs

Several studies also raise an important, overarching concern: "digital only" service delivery requires those accessing services to purchase devices, internet services, and data, and assume other transaction fees (e.g., for printing or scanning.) In this way, digitization of services can entail shifting costs from service providers to service users – many of whom are already facing poverty and disadvantage (BCPIAC, 2015; Humphry, 2019; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016).

"Second-Level" Divides: Motivation, Skill, and Qualities of Use

Discussions of "digital literacies," "digital readiness" and "digital capability" highlight differences in peoples' abilities to use the internet in ways that benefit them from day to day (e.g., Beaton et al., 2016; Horrigan, 2016). This research shows that digital technology experience, interest, and comfort varies considerably across the population. Further, these factors vary by task; people tend to have online "repertoires" (a range of activities they are inclined to do online) which depend on their opportunities, needs, and preferences (see, e.g., Denvir et al., 2014; Lee, 2018). Aross Canada before COVID, many went online to use email (94%), or research information (87%), but far fewer made voice or video calls (52%), or booked health appointments (6%) online (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2019d).

Assessments of Digital Motivation and Digital Skill

Interest, motivation and/or the perceived relevance of digital technology is grasped as a foundational element determining digital technology use, especially among seniors. Lack of digital skill is likewise identified as a key barrier (Davidson & Schimmele, 2019; Horrigan, 2016; van Dijk, 2005). However, qualitative studies reveal how, for many non-users, "the issue of skills and knowledge shortages is not a *cause* of non-use, but rather a *result* of different circumstances..." (Lee, 2018, p. 168, my emphasis).

Interest and Skill as Grounded in Opportunity

Differences in digital motivation and skill are tied to inequitable opportunities to access, learn, use, and benefit from digital technology—namely, intersecting, classed, dynamics of advantage and disadvantage related to income, education, generational and employment-based opportunity, language, health, (dis)ability and environmental supports. Even in survey research that concludes lack of motivation or interest is the most significant barrier to internet use, reported "interest" differs by factors like education, employment, income, and urban versus rural residence (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2015, 2016).

Key barriers to developing digital skill include: lack of a suitable device and home internet, and lack of opportunity for regular, supported technology use (e.g., Baum, Newman, & Biedrzycki, 2012; Davidson & Schimmele, 2019; Lee, 2018; Marston, Genoe, Freeman et al., 2019). As a result, those who are highly educated, wealthier, and who had pre-retirement exposure to computers—especially in professional, "white collar" versus "blue collar" roles—consistently show higher levels of comfort with digital tasks (Statistics Canada, 2019e, 2019f). These same factors diminish age-related differences in skill (Statistics Canada, 2013). Figure 1 (p. 6) shows how different groups of digitally advantaged or disadvantaged users across Canada have very different levels of experience[1] with skill- and privacy-related tasks. The same data also reveal that considerable proportions of internet users *overall* do not have experience with many types of tasks that might be needed to use digital legal tools or online government services.

While some people can learn on their own, in training programs, or through personal networks, other people describe being discouraged or feeling "dependent" because of unsupportive learning contexts (Barlott, Aplin, Catchpole et al., 2020; Lee, 2018; Marston et al., 2019). Researchers also express concern that reliance on proxy helpers for internet use can entail privacy risks (e.g., needing to share passwords, or financial information) and potential for exploitation (Chen, 2017).

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[1] Respondents were asked: had they undertaken each task in the past year, on any device (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Figure 1: Percentage of Internet users reporting skill-related and cyber security activities, 2018

	All Internet users, aged 15+	Internet users aged 15-24 with Bachelor's or more	Internet users aged 45-64 with highschool or less	Internet users aged 65+
Activity related to digital skills				
Used word processing software	69%	94%	36%	44%
Copied or moved files or folders digitally	66%	84%	42%	41%
Downloaded files from the Internet to your computer or other devices	56%	82%	29%	29%
Uploaded files or photos to an online data storage space	49%	84%	26%	23%
Type of cyber security activity				
Deleted your Internet browser history	61%	64%	49%	42%
Changed the privacy settings on your device to enable or disable your location	45%	64%	25%	17%

Data Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019f. Table 22-10-0112-01 Activities related to digital skills by age group and highest certificate, diploma or degree completed; and Statistics Canada, 2019e. Table 22-10-0108-01 Internet security and privacy related practices by age group and highest certificate, diploma or degree completed.

Also apparent in the literature is a circular dynamic wherein a lack of supported opportunities to gain experience with digital technology leads to lack of confidence, which can become a further barrier. Rapid technological change, "big data" mining, and frequent media reports about online fraud, "fake news," and cyber attacks increase fears about making mistakes online (Lee, 2018; Marston et al., 2019). In qualitative research, participants described how technology-related anxiety was heightened in "high stakes" situations—such as where their failure to accurately use an online system might result in their benefits being cut off (Harris, 2019; Taylor & Packham, 2016).

Digital Design, Digital Content, and Harm

A final set of "second-level" barriers identified in the literature relates to online content and design. People are unlikely to use resources that cause frustration and/or which don't meet their needs. Even if a person with a disability is well-equipped with respect to technology, their engagements with online resources may still be limited by an absence of accessible features on websites and apps. Text-heavy content (common to many law-related sites) and complicated language can pose significant barriers to those with literacy challenges. The absence of multi-lingual content is a significant barrier for those who use languages other than English. Sites that are poorly designed (e.g., where content is buried and navigation is unclear) cause frustration. Other useability issues emerge when sites are not compatible with a user's device or when designers assume all users have the latest technology and interrupted high-speed internet (Chen, 2017; Massey, Langellier, Sentell et al., 2016; Taylor & Packham, 2016).

Online content can also reflect prejudice and harmful assumptions; media representations often omit or distort the stories and experiences of whole groups of people—including Indigenous people, people with disabilities, LGBTQ2SAI+ and gender diverse people, people of colour, and religious groups. Several studies describe how encountering content that reflects prejudice or is not culturally relevant or safe creates a further barrier to engaging with digital resources (see, e.g., McMahon, 2020; Media Smarts, nd; O'Donnell, Beaton, McMahon et al., 2016; Reedy, 2019).

"Third Level" Divides: Digital Access to Justice

Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) sector research is increasingly concerned with digital access to justice. McDonald et al. (2019) note that even where "first" and "second" level digital divides are bridged, a third divide – involving use of technology to effectively resolve legal problems – exists.

The Complexity and Inaccessibility of Legal Systems

Certain qualities of the justice system itself act as barriers to accessing digital legal help. Legal processes are highly technical and "set up for experts" (Brousalis & Mathews, 2016, p. 2), yet expert help is prohibitively expensive (Farrow, Currie, Aylwin et al., 2016; Salter & Thompson, 2017). In this context, research on legal help-seeking finds many people do not recognize legal aspects of issues and are uncertain about what to do, and whether affordable help is available (Currie, 2016; Pleasence & Balmer, 2019; Walkem, 2020). A sizable minority of people do not take steps to resolve their issue, and those who do are often seeking help on an urgent, "just in time" basis, under conditions of considerable stress (Currie, 2016; Forell & McDonald, 2015; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016).

Legal processes can require advanced capabilities in official language literacy, oral and/or written communication skills, numeracy, and the construction of arguments and evidence according to specific legal criteria (Brousalis & Mathews, 2016). Many who experience poverty or mental health issues, and those who are racialized, Indigenous, and/or gender diverse have experienced systemic discrimination from service providers and within legal systems – including in interactions with police, lawyers, judges, and prison workers (Bennett & Larkin, 2018; Prochuk et al., 2020). For this reason and others, many lack confidence in legal systems, and/or in their own ability to access justice within these systems (Brousalis & Mathews, 2016; Denvir, Ayad, Cordoba et al., 2018; Sentis, 2020; Walkem, 2020; Wintersteiger, 2015).

Locating and Accessing Digital Legal Resources

During searches for legal help, the complexity and inaccessibility of legal systems can intersect with conditions of digital exclusion to exacerbate inequities in access to justice. While legal needs research shows an increase in online help-seeking over time, the proportion of people who go online for legal help appears to be about 30% (Currie, 2016; Sentis, 2020). Further, about a third of those who go online don't find the kind of help they were looking for (Currie, 2016). Studies in this area suggest that those who do seek help online are more likely to be those who are already advantaged in terms of technology access, comfort and skill, and whose circumstances enable them to feel confident in their ability to navigate legal systems. Seniors, people with fewer years of formal education, people with low income, those who speak languages other than English, and youth may be less likely to seek legal help online (Denvir et al., 2018; Denvir et al., 2014; Pleasence & Balmer, 2019; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016).

Research suggests these seemingly low rates of online legal help-seeking may also relate to a combination of awareness and digital confidence. People may not be aware that online legal resources exist, or they may have a relatively "narrow" online repertoire (see, e.g., Denvir et al., 2014; Lee, 2018). Further, because of legal complexities, inaccessibility, and costs, and/or experiences of systemic discrimination, many people don't expect to be able to understand or use the digital legal information that they find (McDonald, Forell, & Wei, 2019; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016).

Those able and inclined to search for legal resources online are likely to encounter an overwhelming mass of information. The vast, decentralized online universe of legal resources and the nature of search engines means that top-performing web pages may not be applicable, accurate, actionable (providing clear process-related information and 'next steps'), or jurisdictionally relevant to a user's legal issue. Further, the technical nature of legal terms and processes means it can be difficult to evaluate online information without legal training (Crowe, Field, Toohey et al., 2019; Denvir, 2014; Hagan & Li, 2020).

Additional research underscores how finding and using online legal information can be significantly constrained by trauma, and by the stress that accompanies legal problems. Trauma and stress limit abilities to focus, retrieve and apply information, plan or problem-solve, act, and think critically. The effects of stress and trauma are compounded by language and literacy barriers, mood and/or mental health issues, self-perceptions of competence and efficacy, and expectations about the outcome of a legal issue – barriers more often faced by those who have experienced systemic discrimination. Some research participants have reported that online searches for legal help heightened their stress through information overwhelm, and/or when the resources they found presented "worst case" scenarios associated with their issue (Perry, 2006; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016).

Given all these challenges, the literature suggests that people are often looking for legal help in the form of a service provider, advisor, or navigator who can help them understand legal processes, clarify their options, and identify next steps. People turn to trusted personal and community networks for help, and expect that trusted community intermediaries should be able to refer them to appropriate online or offline resources (Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016). Many people look online at some point, but this is typically only one strategy among many (McDonald et al., 2019). In some cases, people use the internet as a kind of directory to locate offline services or help, rather than specifically searching for self-help resources or information about their issue. This latter practice may be more common for seniors (Denvir et al., 2014).

Using Digital Legal Resources

Finally, various reports emphasize that even when people are able to locate and access an appropriate digital legal resource, many of the aforementioned barriers – including those related to technology access, accessibility, language, and cultural relevance or safety – can prevent effective use of that resource (e.g., Chen, 2017; McDonald et al., 2019). Further, a key insight in this area is that "digital capability is not the same as legal capability and both forms of capability are likely to be required" to successfully navigate many kinds of legal resources and services (Denvir et al., 2018, p. v). Sufficient access and skill for emailing, browsing, or using social media may not equate to the types of connectivity, convenient technology access, digital experience, and legal knowledge that may be required for legal tasks. Such tasks can be complex, unfamiliar, stressful, and/or technology intensive— for instance, involving lengthy applications and/or online forms; scanning, printing, and assembling documents; or indexing, paginating and hyperlinking bundles of evidence (BCPIAC, 2015; Koshan, Mosher, & Wiegers, 2021). They can also require technical legal knowledge (Denvir et al., 2018; Salyzyn, Isaj, Piva et al., 2017). Research on self-help resources suggests a minority of people are able to use them effectively, and that using self-help resources in conjunction with an advisor significantly increased satisfaction with legal outcomes (McDonald et al., 2019; Sykes, Dickson, & Ewart, 2020). However, lack of access to digital and/or legal navigators has also become a more significant barrier in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Prochuk et al., 2020; Smythe, 2020).

Promising Interventions

The ADE review of literature also sought out promising approaches to increasing digital equity in BC's public legal sector. Many interventions respond to two challenges: First, "how can those users who feel able to use digital legal resources be best supported to do so?" Second, what measures are necessary to safeguard access to justice for those who may otherwise be excluded? (McDonald et al., 2019, p. 21.)

Connectivity and Affordability

The studies reviewed highlight connectivity and affordability issues throughout BC. While broad public policy and digital infrastructure initiatives may be beyond the mandates of public legal service providers, such organizations can seek to support community-led projects and advocacy whenever possible (see, e.g., Beaton et al., 2016; Digital Justice for BC Working Group, 2020). These efforts can recognize the technology leadership of Indigenous governments and communities in BC, who have co-developed the Indigenous Framework for Innovation and Technology (IFIT) (First Nations Technology Council, nd).

"Digital Ecosystems" and "Enabling Environments": Community-level Supports

Several reports discuss community-level "enabling environments" or "healthy digital equity ecosystems." Interventions in this area highlight accessible technical support, and digital skills or mentorship programs (Beaton et al., 2016; Digital Justice for BC Working Group, 2020; First Nations Technology Council, nd; Rhinesmith & Kennedy, 2020), for example – a "Digital Navigator" model (NDIA, nd). Other studies call for community access points with public Wi-Fi, connected computers, printers, scanners, and technical support as needed (e.g., Denvir et al., 2018; Smythe & Breshears, 2017).

At the same time, Denvir et al. (2014) stress that technology access and general digital skills do not, in themselves, guarantee users' ability to benefit from digital legal resources. Further, advocates stress that public access points, while necessary, are not adequate replacements for the kind of high quality, at-home access that so crucially impacts opportunities to fully engage online (Smythe, 2020). Research stresses the value of pursuing skill- and access-related initiatives in community-specific and community-designed ways (McMahon, 2020; Salemink, Strijker, & Bosworth, 2017); this highlights the importance of digital equity coalition-building and planning at the community level (Rhinesmith & Kennedy, 2020).

Legal Resource Outreach and Integration

Other relevant studies call for increased outreach, and integration of legal resource provision with delivery of other services. As is well-known in the PLEI sector, supporting "trusted intermediaries" to effectively recognize legal issues, clarify options, and refer people to appropriate resources is key in facilitating access to justice (see, e.g., Cohl, Lassonde, Mathews et al., 2018; Forell & McDonald, 2015; McDonald et al., 2019; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016). Several reports note that assistance often requires "joined up health, social and legal support to be effective" (Wintersteiger, 2015, p. 25; see also Pleasence, Balmer, & Hagell, 2015; Victoria Law Foundation, 2019).

Several studies suggest co-locating computer and phone access with legal and other kinds of services – providing access to technology and technical support, alongside help from a knowledgeable navigator who can assist with digital services tasks (e.g., Chen, 2017; Denvir et al., 2018). This can occur through a "hub and spoke" approach, wherein digital services are made available via "satellite" locations in local community spaces where people already access help (e.g., Fenske & Froese, 2017). Libraries, among

other community organizations, are often highlighted as key points of access (Gann, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2016, citing Hudson, 2012, 2015; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016). However, digital service delivery should be adequately funded to avoid shifting costs to underfunded community agencies and front-line staff (BCPIAC, 2015; Chen, 2017; CMHA-BC, 2018; Harris, 2019; Smythe, 2020).

The research surveyed also discusses online presence and online outreach. Several studies stress the importance of discoverability – ensuring digital tools are optimized to perform well in search engine results (Hagan & Li, 2020; Tandan & Djwa, 2019). Other discussions of online outreach relate to the popularity of social media (especially Facebook) and how these platforms can be better used to reach people in online spaces where they already engage (Chen, 2017; Selfridge, 2017). Finally, some reports discuss the potential of a "one-stop-shop," or single point of entry, such as a web portal or domain (e.g. LegalHelpBC.ca) that can be widely advertised, known as credible, and act as a directory or path to BC's many legal education and information sites (Byrne, 2014; Currie, 2016; Fenske & Froese, 2017).

Digital Design and Digital Content

Many reports discuss web and content design – a large, technical area that could not be fully covered in this review. Generally, the PLEI literature advocates clarity about what kind of material is being created, for who, and for what purpose. Forell and McDonald note there may be less scope for digital and self-help resources for those who face barriers in accessing justice, and who are seeking legal help "just in time" (Forell & McDonald, 2015). Various studies also call for content that is practical and actionable – meaning, it is relevant to the user's specific issue, and clearly identifies a series of actions and/or "next steps" (Denvir et al., 2018; Hagan & Li, 2020; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016).

A related body of literature emphasizes the principle of user-centred design, which calls for both online and offline services, processes, and content to be designed from the perspective of users entering a service environment (as opposed to from the perspective of the service provider) (Sossin, 2017). Guided pathways (in which users move through their legal issue step-by-step) and/or triage-based approaches are also widely endorsed – whether in portals or in specific sites (Hagan & Li, 2020; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016; Smith, 2018, 2019). Such tools "diminish the number of inferences clients are required to make" and thus benefit stressed learners, among others (Public Interest Strategy & Communications, Inc., 2016, p. 18).

Much research reinforces the importance of WCAG[2] and other features related to accessibility, content navigation, plain language, audio and video content, bandwidth constraints, multi-lingual content, and cultural relevance and safety (Byrne, 2014; Chen, 2017; Media Smarts, nd; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016; Taylor & Burnett, 2019). Assisted digital supports – such as phone or chat-based help – can further assist users to navigate unfamiliar tools. However these can also entail barriers (Denvir et al., 2018). Additional reports stress the importance of co-design, user testing, meaningful data collection to inform evaluation and improvement of digital legal tools, and best practices in the secure, private, and ethical management of data (Chen, 2017; Finlay, 2018; Smith, 2018; Tandan & Djwa, 2019).

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[2] Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. See: https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/

Enhancement of Offline, One-to-one, and Complementary Supports

Finally, within many bodies of research, a cross-cutting series of suggestions stress the need to preserve and enhance relationship-based and offline channels for legal help—whether in the form of knowledgeable referrals, legal "navigation" guidance, or more intensive advice. Digital legal resources are seen to have high value as part of a suite of options that should be made available to people in ways that are timely, targeted, "joined-up," and appropriate in relation to their situation and needs (Chen, 2017; Pleasence & Balmer, 2019; Pleasence, Coumarelos, Forell et al., 2014; Wintersteiger, 2015). For instance, some research highlights videoconferencing as a promising way to leverage digital technology benefits yet also provide personalized support and guidance (Fenske & Froese, 2017; Jones, Jacklin, & O'Connell, 2017; Prochuk et al., 2020; Ries, Johnston, & McCarthy, 2016).

A clear lesson from the literature is that digital legal tools cannot be viewed as stand-alone or cost-saving substitutes for more personalized and sustained kinds of legal help (CHRC, 2016; Forell & McDonald, 2015; Public Interest Strategy & Communications Inc., 2016; Smith, 2019). Because the barriers discussed throughout many studies are structural, systemic and complex, they cannot be resolved only through good digital design. Taken together, the combined literatures on digital equity and access to justice underscore that digital legal resources may be very effective for some people but not for others; further, they may be most effective when used in combination with face-to-face, trauma-informed and relationship-based assistance.

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