

Lawyer Quality Assurance Framework for Legal Aid Representation Services

Purpose

This paper seeks to inform interested and impacted parties about Legal Aid BC's (LABC) current work to develop a Lawyer Quality Assurance (QA) Framework for the legal representation services provided by contracted lawyers. LABC invites your input at this early stage.

Timeline and Approach

LABC is taking a phased approach to developing and implementing a Lawyer QA Framework. During Phase 1, running from November 2025 to March 2026, we will define provisional practice standards, outline measures to help lawyers meet them, and identify monitoring mechanisms to ensure that clients receive quality service.

Phase 1 work will involve a gap analysis of LABC's current QA practices; further examination of QA practices used by other legal aid programs in Canada and abroad; and engagement of interested and impacted parties through a range of means, including surveys, focus groups, and an invitation to submit feedback in response to this discussion paper. **The outcome of Phase 1 will be a proposed Lawyer QA Framework with a roadmap for phased implementation.** Any implementation of new QA practices or revision of existing QA practices is outside the scope of Phase 1.

In approaching the work ahead, we are guided by several principles. First, client-centredness: LABC's goal of delivering quality representation services to improve legal and life outcomes for clients is the engine for this work. Second, transparency and engagement: we are committed to keeping interested and impacted parties informed along the way and to creating opportunities for input and engagement throughout the process. Third, equity: a key organizational goal is to embed Truth and Reconciliation and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in everything we do. Thus, we are focused on analyzing QA options from a GBA+ lens and on ensuring that quality standards reflect the importance of providing culturally safe legal representation services.

Background

The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) audited LABC for the period of April 1, 2023, to August 31, 2024, releasing its [final report](#) on April 29, 2025. **One of the OAG's key recommendations was that LABC define and monitor quality expectations for its legal aid representation services.**

LABC has long recognized the importance of assuring service quality and has implemented several practices to support it, which are outlined later in this paper. However, LABC's current approach focuses heavily on lawyer training, access to resources, and other 'quality promotion' efforts without proactively defining the standards of quality service, monitoring performance, or remedying deficiencies. The OAG recommendation has reinforced the need for LABC to develop a more proactive, holistic Lawyer QA Framework.

A QA framework is a structured set of processes, standards, and measures designed to promote, monitor, assess, and improve the quality of a service or product. Comprehensive QA frameworks incorporate both proactive mechanisms for quality promotion (e.g., mentorship opportunities, training support) and responsive mechanisms for quality control (e.g., complaints processes, targeted practice reviews, remedial measures). They also include a reflexive process of continuous improvement to ensure QA measures themselves are regularly evaluated and refined. A Lawyer QA Framework for LABC will help ensure that clients, lawyers, funders and the public can have confidence in the quality of services provided by legal aid lawyers.

A QA framework for legal aid can encompass the full spectrum of legal aid services—legal information, advice, and representation—as well as the administrative systems supporting service delivery (e.g., the intake process). However, **LABC's Lawyer QA Framework will initially focus exclusively on the legal representation services provided by contracted lawyers.** This narrower focus will allow LABC to establish strong foundational components before it considers expanding the framework to additional service areas.

It is worth noting that medicine, another independent profession with a strong tradition of self-regulation and many sole practitioners, has embraced the quality movement. See, for example, the [Physician Practice Enhancement Program](#) administered by the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons, which assesses doctors who provide community-based care in private offices to ensure safe, competent, and ethical care for patients.

Snapshot of LABC's Current QA Practices

Current practices and tools that contribute to assuring the quality of LABC's legal representation services include:

- **The Working with Your Legal Aid Lawyer Form** — *sets clear expectations*
This form establishes baseline expectations between the client and the lawyer, supporting quality service delivery by informing clients about what they can and cannot expect from their lawyer.

- **Mentoring/Junior Counsel Support** — *strengthens practice quality*
LABC connects junior lawyers with experienced practitioners for guidance, feedback, and practical learning, helping lawyers build skills and improve the quality of their practice.
- **Training and Legal Resources** — *supports continuous professional development*
LABC provides lawyers with access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and legal resources (e.g., Criminal Law Bootcamp), promoting up-to-date knowledge and competencies in legal aid practice.
- **Criminal Case Management (CCM) Program** — *monitors quality through funding review*
The CCM program provides ongoing oversight during the funding-request process. Where quality concerns arise, LABC may implement remedial actions (e.g., reassignment to different counsel, pairing with senior counsel, or referral to Audit under the Lawyer Compliance Policy).
- **Biennial Client Survey** — *measures perceived service quality*
Every other year, LABC surveys a representative sample of clients about their experiences with their lawyers, generating system-level insights into client satisfaction and areas requiring improvement.
- **Client Pulse Surveys** — *monitors client satisfaction*
LABC recently introduced email surveys sent to clients twice throughout their case—once near the outset and once after its conclusion—that ask clients about their experiences with their lawyer. While response rates are too low to permit broad conclusions, the pulse surveys allow for the quick identification of issues and provide rich qualitative insight into client experiences.
- **Lawyer Compliance Policy** — *promotes accountability to minimum standards*
This policy outlines the circumstances in which LABC, having validated complaints from clients or other parties, can impose conditions on, or temporarily or permanently suspend, a lawyer's eligibility to receive representation and/or duty counsel contracts from LABC.

Opportunities to Strengthen Existing QA Practices

We have begun to identify areas where LABC could build on existing QA practices to more effectively define, promote, monitor, and improve service quality.

Training and Resources — *proactive quality support*

- Continue and expand LABC support for lawyer education, skills development, and access to resources tailored to legal aid practice and to specific needs of LABC clients, particularly those who are vulnerable or belong to equity-denied groups.

Remedial Measures — *corrective quality control*

- Build on existing Lawyer Compliance Policy to develop a wider range of interventions outside audit or complaint scenarios.
- Support accountability and correction of service deficiencies.

Client Outcome Data — *input for monitoring system-level service effectiveness*

- LABC recently completed a structured review of the types of legal outcomes clients experience in each area of law.
- LABC is beginning to identify system-level indicators that could be used to monitor service effectiveness over time (e.g., % of protection orders granted, % of successful asylum claims)

Client Satisfaction Measures — *input for monitoring client satisfaction at the system-level*

- Introduce processes for regularly and systematically monitoring client satisfaction data, like that gathered through the biennial client survey and client pulse surveys
- Results could be combined with other measures (e.g., outcome data, demographic information) for a fuller understanding of service quality at the aggregate level for all clients and for specific groups (e.g. Indigenous clients).
- *Note:* It is understood that client feedback is useful and necessary but not determinative as a standalone measure of service quality.

Additional QA Tools and Practices Under Consideration

As preparatory work for Phase 1, over the past six months we have reviewed the QA literature and conducted a preliminary scan of the QA practices used by legal aid organizations worldwide. The scan identified a handful of common practices that LABC could adapt. This section provides a high-level overview of these practices, with examples where available.

Minimum Eligibility Requirements — *proactive quality control*

- Legal aid organizations can set and adjust the minimum experience or competency standards lawyers must meet to join and remain on the provider roster.
- Standards can be tailored by area of law or specialized services (e.g., complex criminal cases). They may include prerequisites such as practice experience, specialist certification, or completion of area-specific learning materials.
- See Legal Aid Ontario's [Minimum Experience Requirements](#) for an example.
- In some jurisdictions, lawyers who do not yet meet full eligibility requirements can participate conditionally: in Ontario, they must meet all requirements within two years; in New Zealand, they may serve as supervised providers under a lead provider until they acquire the necessary knowledge, experience, and skills (see conditions [here](#)).

- Minimum requirements help ensure consistent baseline skills and competence, promoting higher-quality legal aid services and supporting public confidence.

Practice Standards/Quality Service Expectations — *proactive quality control*

- Legal aid providers in [Victoria \(AUS\)](#), [New South Wales \(AUS\)](#), the [Australian Capital Territory](#), and [New Zealand](#) have developed bespoke Practice/Quality Standards defining minimum expectations for lawyers' performance.
- These often include general standards, standards for specific areas of law, and standards for particular client populations (e.g., children, clients with a mental illness).
- Legal Aid Ontario has developed bespoke Quality Service Expectations for lawyers taking on [refugee and immigration cases](#), [refugee and immigration appeals](#), and [consent and capacity \(mental health\) cases](#).
- Practice Standards/Quality Service Expectations provide clarity and transparency about expectations for the quality of work delivered to all clients, and equity-denied groups in particular, and serve as the basis for monitoring and assessment (e.g., via peer review).
- They can be accompanied by measures outlining how lawyers' adherence to the standards is assessed (see Victoria Legal Aid's [Measures for Practice Standards](#)).

Peer Review/Practice Reviews — *monitoring individual lawyers' performance*

- A structured evaluation process in which a lawyer's work is reviewed by experienced peers in the same area of practice, using defined criteria to assess the quality of representation.
- Applied selectively (e.g., high-value cases, top billers, or lawyers with frequent complaints) or using a hybrid selective/random approach to focus resources where most beneficial.
- Review methods can include interviews, closed file reviews, courtroom observation, and assessments of office systems.
- Supports both targeted quality assurance and promotion of high-quality practice by helping lawyers identify strengths, gaps, and areas for growth.
- See high-level descriptions of this practice in [the UK](#) and in the state of [Victoria, Australia](#)

Expected Impact

The development and implementation of LABC's Lawyer QA Framework is expected to bring about a range of positive outcomes for clients, lawyers, and the broader justice system. For LABC clients, the framework will foster greater consistency in the quality of legal representation, which is expected to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. It will also help ensure that vulnerable clients and those from equity-seeking groups are served by lawyers who are equipped to provide appropriate, trauma-informed and culturally safe representation.

For tariff lawyers, the practice standards will offer clear guidance on what LABC expects of them. The framework can promote increased access to resources, mentoring, and support for professional development to ensure lawyers are prepared to meet the legal needs of the diverse communities LABC serves. It may also create opportunities for targeted feedback and improvement through mechanisms such as peer review. Additionally, the framework is expected to improve the public perception of legal aid, raising the status of performing this important work.

At the system level, the framework should lead to more effective delivery of legal aid services, improving overall efficiency in the justice system while contributing to efforts to address systemic barriers and discrimination that legal aid clients face in varying and often intersecting ways. For community partners, the framework will provide stronger assurance that clients will receive high-quality legal services, contributing to better outcomes for all clients, especially those from vulnerable populations and equity-seeking groups.

Finally, for funders, the framework will enhance transparency and accountability in the delivery of legal aid services, building trust in how public funds are used and ensuring responsible stewardship of government funding.

How to Provide Feedback

We welcome your input on the development of the Lawyer QA Framework. Please share your thoughts, questions, or suggestions by emailing lawyerqaframework@legalaid.bc.ca. **Please provide your written feedback by January 17, 2026.**

You may wish to consider some of the following questions in preparing your response:

1. How should Legal Aid BC define high quality legal representation services?
2. What are the most important aspects or features of high quality legal representation services?
3. What measures should Legal Aid BC adopt to ensure its clients receive high quality legal services?
4. What specific measures should Legal Aid BC adopt to ensure that lawyers provide high quality legal representation services to vulnerable clients or those from equity seeking groups that face systemic barriers and discrimination.

5. When Legal Aid BC identifies problems or concerns regarding the quality of legal representation services, what measures should it take to respond?
6. What else should Legal Aid BC consider when looking at ways to improve the quality of legal representation services?

Your feedback will help ensure that we consider a wide range of perspectives as we develop an approach to QA that meets the needs of clients and lawyers alike. All feedback will be considered for relevance and direction-setting value, though service realities and the roles of governing bodies will guide the final framework design.

Next Steps

We will continue engagement activities over the coming months. The project team will synthesize this input to guide the framework's design. We may share an update in the early spring summarizing key engagement themes and outlining high-level progress on the framework's development.