

LSS introduces new family law initiatives

Effective November 1, 2006, the Legal Services Society (LSS) will implement additional family law services, including enhanced family coverage, expanded duty counsel services and a new Dispute Resolution referral.

New policy statement

LSS has adopted the following policy statement as its fundamental objective for family legal aid services:

To help eligible people resolve their family law legal problems by:

- focusing on the needs of children and families,
- encouraging the use of non-adversarial settlement processes, and
- supporting court processes to resolve disputes when non-adversarial approaches are not appropriate or effective.

This reflects the LSS goal of providing legal aid services that are proportionate to client needs, and will guide the society in its delivery of family legal aid services and its participation in family justice system reform.

New initiatives

To further this fundamental objective, LSS will launch several new family law initiatives that reflect an emphasis on early consensual dispute resolution (CDR) and a more discretionary approach to coverage decisions. The key changes include:

- expanding the role of family duty counsel by enabling lawyers to prepare for and attend Family Case Conferences and Judicial Case Conferences (to be piloted this fall in Kamloops, Kelowna, Port Coquitlam, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Surrey, Terrace, Vancouver, and Victoria);
- expanding the Family Tariff to allow preparation and attendance time for mediation and collaborative law processes for each type of family law referral;
- replacing the Limited Scope referral with the Dispute Resolution referral, which authorizes use of CDR methods and extends coverage to more clients with significant custody, access, and financial security issues (clients requiring additional time for negotiation or litigation can apply for Extended Services referrals); and
- expanding coverage for CDR processes as well as litigation under Extended Services referrals. LSS will use case management to allocate available funding in cases where the client has made good faith efforts to negotiate a settlement and resolving the financial or custody and access issues will result in a significant benefit to the client.

Upcoming tariff revision

The next revision of the *Guide to Legal Aid Tariffs* is scheduled for release on November 1, 2006, and will incorporate all the changes to family legal aid services. For background information on the changes, go to the LSS website at www.lss.bc.ca (under For lawyers > Online resources > LSS programs and policies). LSS will be evaluating the effectiveness of these new initiatives in the coming year and would be pleased to receive your feedback. You may direct any comments to lawyersresources@lss.bc.ca.

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