

Legal Aid BC Update

From the desk of Mark Benton, QC
Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Society



Legal aid in the time of COVID-19

I hope this spring message finds you safe and well during these challenging, uncertain and unprecedented times. I'd like to provide an update on the steps we are taking at Legal Aid BC (LABC) to ensure we continue to provide services while coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this crisis, our top priority remains the health, safety and well-being of the public, and of the people who work for and with us. We've worked hard to respond to Provincial Court changes, and have adjusted our services accordingly. Most of our staff members are working from home, when operationally feasible, and we've switched to [phone-only applications for legal aid](#).

Family law representation is proceeding for urgent matters; otherwise cases are being prepared on behalf of clients to the extent possible. Family duty counsel and advice lawyers are providing phone-only services, while our existing Family LawLINE phone advice service continues to be busy. For child protection matters, lawyers at our Parents Legal Centres are continuing client and collaborative meetings over the phone or by videoconferencing.

For criminal law matters, people who qualify for assistance from a lawyer on an on-going basis are still being referred to one. In-custody clients are being assisted by duty counsel, and bail hearings are being conducted by telephone and video.

Outreach and legal information

We recently launched a COVID-19 Outreach Project to connect with our community contacts across the province. Through the project, we'll gather feedback, identify the legal aid needs of communities and provide follow-up assistance.

We're also encouraging people to use our free online legal aid services. For example, on [MyLawBC](#), the family mediation tool helps separated and divorced couples [make a parenting plan](#). There's also a dialogue tool that assists people in [creating a separation agreement](#), and one of the guided pathways helps people [form a safety plan](#).

Law students and our legal information outreach workers are helping people find answers to their legal questions via online chats through LiveHelp on [Family Law in BC](#). We've created a dedicated [coronavirus updates page](#) offering information on how COVID-19 is affecting family law in BC, and a [coronavirus FAQs page](#).

On social media, we've rolled out a "Getting help without leaving home" series of messages via the [Factum blog](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). We'll also continue to provide communities with information about legal aid, court services and new procedures through our free [publications](#) and [YouTube videos](#).

It's impossible to predict what the future will bring, but we know that legal aid will continue to be needed. We've learned from past recessions that when unemployment increased, so did the demand for legal aid.

In my 35 years of working in legal aid, and dealing with many difficult and complex situations, this crisis is surely the most challenging. Our commitment at LABC is to continue to provide legal aid services with compassion and empathy while working together through these complicated times.

I wish you and all who you work with good health and well-being as we continue to search for the paths towards improved access to justice.

Mark Benton, QC
CEO, Legal Aid BC

Sent from the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.