



The *Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project* (ALSMP) is a province wide project aimed providing an understanding of the public’s legal needs and the current state of legal service provision. <http://cfcj-fcjc.org/research/mapping-en.php>

Fort McMurray Judicial District – SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The goals of the ALSMP are to:

- Collect and share information about existing legal services in Alberta.
- Gain a better understanding about the characteristics of people and communities across Alberta and their legal needs.
- Identify strengths and gaps in current legal service delivery and resources.
- Strengthen relationships between legal service providers through the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The Fort McMurray Judicial District is the second of the 11 Judicial Districts in Alberta to be mapped.

- The Team mapped 176 legal and related services in this District.
- Team members interviewed 37 legal and related service providers.
- Three members of the public were interviewed.

The Fort McMurray Judicial District

- The population of the City of Fort McMurray has more than doubled since 1998 to 72,363. The total population for the Judicial District is estimated at 103,424.
- The three industries that employ the most people are oil and gas (30%), construction (11%) and retail (10%).
- The unemployment rate of residents of this District is 4.0%.
- The average home price is \$682,149, which is an increase of 461% over a decade ago.

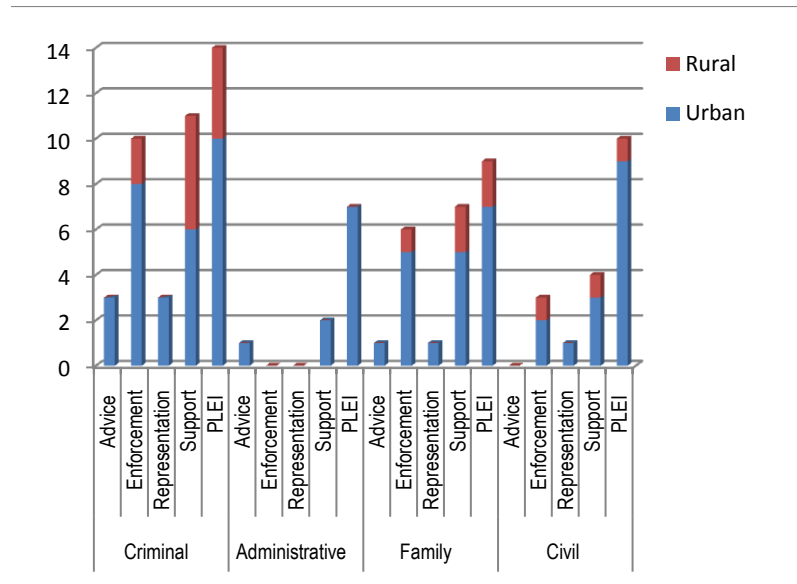
Existing Legal Services

Of the 176 services that were mapped:

- 57 were sole purpose legal services.
- 14 offered legal as well as social or health components.
- 105 were related social and health services.

The 71 legal services were classified by the types of service available (advice, enforcement, representation, support and PLEI) and area of law (criminal, administrative, family and civil). The Table below provides a striking illustration of the low number of services available, particularly outside of the City of Fort McMurray

Services by Area of Law



Understanding Legal Needs in Wood Buffalo

There are four groups for which the need for specialized legal and related services is most urgent:

- People living with addictions.
- People experiencing domestic violence.
- People with mental health concerns.
- New Canadians.

There are currently only 7 legal services that offer any specialization in family violence and 1 legal service each for addictions, mental health and new Canadians.

Gaps and Priorities in Meeting Legal Needs

The gaps in legal service provision in Wood Buffalo can be grouped into seven categories:

- Affordable legal services,
- Services that respond to domestic violence.
- Services for children and youth.
- Services for Aboriginal people.
- Services for new Canadians.
- The need for a Remand Centre.
- Public legal education and information (PLEI).

Challenges to Filling Legal Gaps

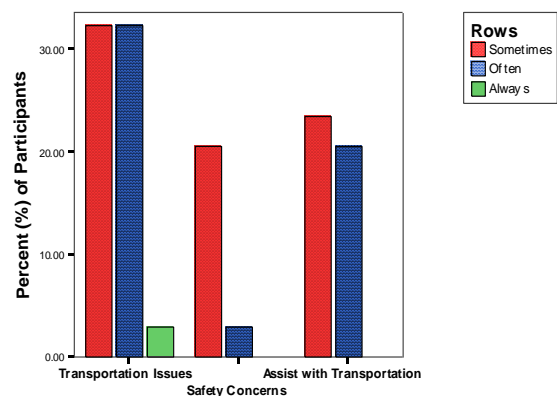
The most significant challenges that legal service providers face in filling these gaps are:

- lack of funding and resources,
- difficulties attracting and retaining staff,
- challenges retaining law enforcement personnel,
- shortage of lawyers
- fragmentation of legal and related services.

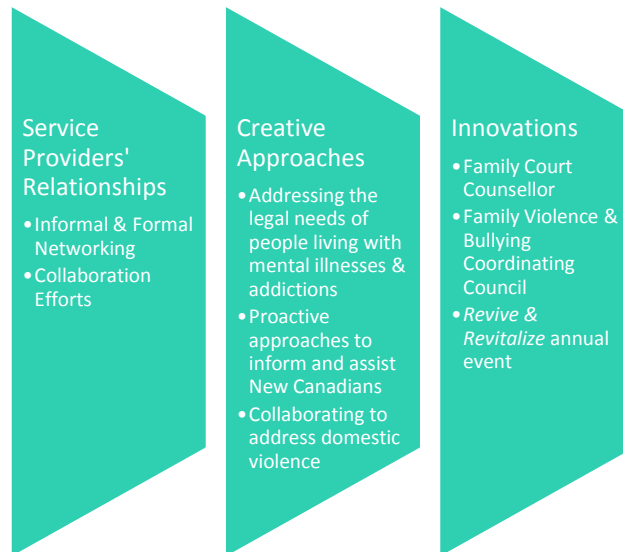
Social, Health and Infrastructure Barriers

- High cost of living, housing costs, shortage of affordable rental properties and absence of services in rural communities have contributed to rates of homelessness that are at least double those of Calgary and Edmonton (441 per 65,000).
- Lack of specialized training, shortage of hospital beds and the absence of a residential treatment facility for Non-Aboriginals prevent legal service providers from effectively addressing the needs of people living with mental illness and addictions.
- The remoteness of this District, the large geographic area it covers, as well as the harsh climate prevent people from travelling to access the legal services available in Fort McMurray.
- Public transportation is unreliable in Fort McMurray and virtually non-existent outside of the city.

Transportation in Wood Buffalo



Good Practices to Build On



Recommendations

Based on research findings we make 24 recommendations aimed at:

- supporting good practices,
- removing barriers, and
- filling gaps in legal services.

These are presented in Section 8 of the Report.

Where to Begin: Suggestions for Funders

Suggestions for legal services funders to focus on in order to have the greatest impact in removing barriers and filling gaps are:

1. Encourage lawyers to set up practices in Wood Buffalo.
2. Establish a LInC.
3. Establish a Community Legal Clinic.
4. Offer incentives for RCMP officers to stay in this District long term.
5. Create and translate PLEI related to common legal needs into additional languages:
 - abuse (legal recourse for victims

- and concerned third parties),
- domestic violence (definitions, rights and responsibilities),
- criminal records (what they are and the repercussions of a criminal record),
- landlord/tenant issues, and
- substance-related charges.

6. Create a local Remand Centre.

There are options to address the needs that result from this situation, and which provide guidance for funders:

- The creation of broad-based, one-stop entry point (such as LInCs and community clinics).
- Encourage lawyers to open practices in Wood Buffalo through opening a legal clinic and hiring legal staff, providing targeted funding to LAA or recruiting summer students to work in the Region, as is done under the REAL initiative in BC: <http://www.cba.org/BC/Initiatives/main/real.aspx>.
- Alternatively, funders could prioritize the provision of services related to specific legal areas (and perhaps locations) such as family law and domestic violence.
- Funders could request and/or prioritize an initiative designed to address the much-needed coordination and delivery of PLEI.
- Funders might choose to prioritize PLEI initiatives, either separately or in liaison with any of the above priority options.
- An additional recommendation that would require significant financial investment would be to establish a Remand Centre in Fort McMurray.

Addressing any of these recommendations will have a significant positive impact on legal service delivery in the District.