

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://cfci-fcjc.org/research/mapping-en.php>

Grande Prairie 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 Grande Prairie Judicial District

- The city of Grande Prairie currently has a population of 47,076.
- The total population of the District is approximately 98,988 people.
- There are three reserves in this District, and an urban Aboriginal population in Grande Prairie of approximately 4,365.
- There are roughly 2,985 immigrants and 285 non-permanent residents in the city of Grande Prairie.
- In the 2006 Census, the majority of people who self-identified as being visible minorities were of Filipino, South Asian and Chinese descent.
- The population is young (largest proportion falls between ages 20 and 34) and transient. This is influenced by the oil and gas industry.
- High school dropout rates are significantly higher than provincial averages, and university/college completion rates are 25% lower.
- Poverty and addictions were identified as two major factors that impact legal needs in this District.

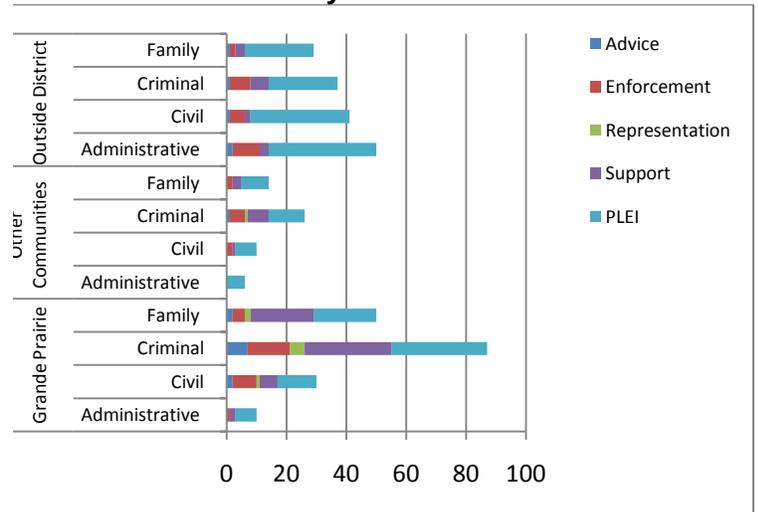
Existing Legal Services

Of the 57 organizations and 155 services that were mapped:

- 77 were sole purpose legal services.
- 39 offered legal as well as social or health components.
- 39 were related social and health services.

All 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). Based on population, this District is the most sparsely serviced of the Districts that we have mapped thus far (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Services by Area of Law



There are few local options for civil and administrative legal services. However, participants identified that it is family law services that they desperately need more of.

Understanding Legal Needs in the Grande Prairie Judicial District

What barriers that did emerge were based largely around public awareness of resources, legal rights and responsibilities:

- Lack of Public Knowledge.
- Lack of Transportation.
- Lack of Technology and/or Computer Literacy.

Common Legal Needs

Participants spoke of needs that local residents commonly experience. These include:

- Criminal Matters (theft, drugs, young offenders),
- Family Violence,
- Family Law (divorce, custody and access, international or interprovincial relationship breakdowns),
- Child Protection,
- Mental Health, and
- Debt.

Gaps and Priorities in Meeting Legal Needs

Service providers and members of the public identified two main categories of missing or inadequate legal services. These are:

- Lack of options for legal advice and representation.
 - More local lawyers, especially those who practice Family Law.
- Lack of alternative options to going to court.

Improving Legal Service Delivery

Service providers highlighted some things they think are going well in this District. The Report details:

Good Practices to Build On

- Addictions Services (Alberta Health).
- PACE Sexual Assault Centre.
- The Community Village.

District Strengths

- Networking (or willingness to network).

Recommendations

Based on research findings we make 8 recommendations aimed at;

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

These are presented in Section 7 of the Report:

- Improve access to PLEI.
- Facilitate the dissemination of procedural PLEI.
- Provide rural residents with improved telephone access to key legal services.
- Facilitate increased access to legal support for people going to court.
- Ensure adequate access to legal supports.
- Provide adequate supports for people with family law needs.
- Provides alternative options to going to court.
- Increase accessibility of the Legal Services Centre.

Suggestions are included in the Report for how to achieve these recommendations.