



Federation of
Law Societies
of Canada

Fédération des ordres
professionnels de juristes
du Canada



THE CANADIAN
BAR ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION DU
BARREAU CANADIEN

National Study on the Wellness of Legal Professionals in Canada

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

What is this study about?

The **National Wellness Study** aims to understand the determinants of wellness among legal professionals, and to identify specific intervention strategies to support members' wellness. More specifically, its purposes are to (i) gather evidence in order to determine if there is a problem and the scope of that problem, (ii) identify variations in the level of wellness across the country, (iii) explore the causes of poor mental health in the legal professions, (iv) and make recommendations to support wellness among legal professionals.

This is the first comprehensive national study of its kind of legal professions in Canada. With access to national data, we can better understand the issues that affect the mental health of Canadian legal professionals, and be in a position to consider and act on evidence-based recommendations to improve the conditions of law practice in Canada. The national study was officially launched in fall 2020 and is expected to conclude in 2024.

Who is leading the study and how is it organized?

The study is a collaborative initiative of all law societies in Canada, the Federation of Law Societies of Canada ("FLSC"), and the Canadian Bar Association ("CBA"), and is being carried out in partnership with a research team at the Université de Sherbrooke led by Dr. Nathalie Cadieux.

The study is organized in two phases. Phase I involved a national survey on the wellness of legal professionals in Canada. A report on the Phase I findings was released in October 2022, with recommendations to follow later in fall 2022. In Phase II, the research team will conduct interviews with legal professionals to obtain more detailed information and explore differences by province and territory. This will culminate in reports and recommendations for each provincial and territorial law society. Phase II is expected to conclude in 2024.

What was the impetus for the study?

The idea for this study arose from the FLSC's 2019 Annual Conference, *The Practice of Well-Being: Exploring the Legal Regulator's Role*. At the Conference, Dr. Cadieux gave a presentation on a study she conducted on the mental health of Quebec lawyers in partnership with the Barreau du Québec. Feedback from the conference and results from the Quebec study supported the need for a national study on these issues. The lack of substantive data on the mental health of legal professionals across Canada represents a critical knowledge gap that must be filled to properly inform and advance progress on bettering mental health and improving wellness initiatives. This national study fills that gap.

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A significant impetus for the study is the protection of the public, which necessitates that legal professionals who serve the public are in good mental health. Healthy legal professionals are happier, more productive and better able to achieve positive outcomes for their clients. The wellness of legal professionals is a growing concern in Canada. As the Quebec study confirmed, stress, depression and substance use are strongly linked to the rigours of a career in law.

How is the study funded?

Phase I of the study (national data collection) was funded by the Federation and the CBA. Phase II (interviews in provinces and territories) is fully funded by a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Is the study on wellness limited to practising lawyers in Canada?

No. All regulated legal professionals were eligible to participate in the survey, including articling students, lawyers, Quebec notaries and Ontario paralegals. Legal professionals who were unemployed, on leave, retired or who had left the practice of law in the year preceding the survey were also eligible to participate.

How many people participated in the study?

More than 7,300 legal professionals responded to the survey.

Is the study about wellness during COVID?

No. The pandemic was not the impetus for the study, although the data was collected during that period and the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellness was explored in the survey.

Phase I: Study and Findings

What does the Phase I Report cover?

The Phase I Report analyzes the data and sets out findings on:

- the prevalence of health indicators such as psychological distress/perceived stress, depression and anxiety, burnout and suicidal ideation in legal professionals;
- the extent to which legal professionals seek help for issues related to wellness;
- the impact of various work and non-work related factors on wellness, including work setting, billable hours, technology, the COVID-19 pandemic, incivility, compassion fatigue, work culture and the regulatory framework;
- the role that personal, social and family elements play in the wellness of legal professionals;
- stigma attached to mental health issues;
- the intersection between wellness and specific demographic profiles, including stage of practice/age, gender, race and ethnicity, Indigeneity, identification as a person with a disability, and membership in the LGBTQ2S+ community;
- variations in the impact on legal professionals in different work settings and in the different legal professions – lawyers, Quebec notaries and Ontario paralegals; and
- variations in the impact on legal professionals in each province and territory.



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Recommendations will be made for specific actions that can be taken to support the wellness of legal professionals in Canada. They will be released in late fall 2022.

What are the main findings of Phase I?

The Phase I report provides a detailed statistical analysis on all the factors set out above. Some of the main findings include:

- legal professionals suffer from significantly high levels of psychological distress, depression, anxiety, burnout and suicidal ideation;
- the prevalence of these mental health indicators is significantly higher in legal professionals in the early stages of their career;
- nearly three-fourths of legal professionals with less than 3 years of practice experience psychological distress;
- burnout rates do not start dropping until after 25 years of practice;
- women are more affected than men by all the mental health issues identified in the study, but age/experience has more of an impact than gender;
- almost half of legal professionals who recognize they need help do not seek help;
- there is a low level of confidence in organizational and law society assistance programs;
- stigma and perceived stigma present a significant barrier to seeking help;
- the pressure associated with the billable hours model has a highly negative impact on mental health;
- the emotional demands of clients is the risk factor with the most significant impact on the mental health of legal professionals;
- work–life conflict is a critical stressor and is just as prevalent among legal professionals with children as those without children, and is prevalent among both men and women (45.4% v. 53.9%);
- work–life conflict is associated with a significantly lower level of commitment to the profession and a substantially higher level of intention to leave the profession;
- legal professionals living with a disability and from other equity-seeking groups (Indigenous, ethnicized, LGBTQ2S+) experience higher levels of mental health concerns;
- alcohol and drug use among legal professionals are at a worrying level; and
- the key skills to build resilience and shield legal professionals from stressors are the abilities to psychologically detach from work and to set limits.

Phase II: Next Steps

What is involved in Phase II?

Phase II of the study will involve one-on-one interviews with legal professionals from across Canada to contextualize the quantitative data and provide detailed feedback to inform recommendations that consider regional factors. Those interviews will take place in late 2022 and through 2023. Following the interviews, customized reports will be prepared for each law society.



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What do the study partners plan to do with this information?

Phase I findings have clearly identified worrying levels of mental health issues for every facet of the legal profession, and in every jurisdiction of the country. This is especially true of legal professionals in the early stages of their career. In the interest of protecting the public, and to ensure the future sustainability of the legal professions, we are committed to taking action in coordination with other stakeholders and legal professionals themselves. We are studying the results of the Phase I report, while we anticipate its recommendations, and will assess what specific actions to take based on the Phase I results, the Phase I recommendations and the findings from Phase II.

You can download the [Phase I report here](#).



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