

Access to Justice Advisory Committee

Terms of Reference

Updated: February 7, 2025

Mandate

Access to justice is critical to the public interest in the administration of justice. The ability of the public to access legal services is an important component of public confidence in the legal profession. The Law Society's mandate of protecting the public interest in the administration of justice includes promoting access to justice for all citizens of British Columbia. Accordingly, the Law Society should engage in the review and reform of matters within the jurisdiction of the Law Society for the purpose of improving access to justice.

The Committee shall monitor and advise the Benchers about key access to justice issues, with particular emphasis on access to legal services, including legal aid. The Committee shall recommend to the Benchers actions or initiatives to address access to justice issues as they arise. This advisory function supports the Law Society's strategic planning process and the Vision for Publicly Funded Legal Aid. The role of the Committee is to assist the Law Society in discharging its mandate to improve access to justice.

Composition

1. Under Rule 1-49, the President may appoint any person as a member of a committee of the Benchers and may terminate the appointment.
2. At least half of the Committee members should be Benchers, and the Chair of the Committee must be a Bencher.

Meeting Practices

1. The Committee operates in a manner that is consistent with the Benchers' Governance Policies.
2. The Committee meets as required.
3. Quorum consists of at least half of the members of the Committee. (Rule 1-16(1))

Accountability

The Committee is accountable to the Benchers. If the Benchers assign specific tasks to the Committee, the Committee is responsible for discharging the work assigned. If a matter arises that the Committee believes requires attention by the Benchers, the Committee will advise the Executive Committee.

Reporting Requirements

The Committee provides status reports to the Benchers twice a year.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Where possible, adopt an evidenced-based, outcomes-focused approach to the Committee mandate and to any Committee recommendations to the Benchers;
2. Promote the creation of data analytics systems within the justice system in order to better evaluate access to justice and legal aid issues;
3. Keep the Benchers informed of important access to justice matters, to assist in setting policy or in recommending that specific action be taken by the Benchers;
4. Explore opportunities for collaboration with third parties to advance the Law Society's Strategic Plan and to better understand access to justice issues for potential inclusion on future Strategic Plans;
5. Ensure the work of the Committee provides for input from the public, the profession and the Benchers in regard to matters within the Committee's mandate;
6. Identify stakeholders engaged with access to justice and legal aid in British Columbia and consult with those stakeholders, other professional organizations and experts as appropriate to ensure a broad engagement on the matters identified in the mandate.

Staff Support

Staff Lawyer, Policy and Planning