



Federation of
Law Societies
of Canada

Fédération des ordres
professionnels de juristes
du Canada



THE CANADIAN
BAR ASSOCIATION
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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 profession, and (iv) make recommendations to support wellness among legal professionals.

Launched in fall 2020, 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 are better able to consider and act on evidence-based recommendations to improve the conditions of law practice in Canada.

Who is leading the study and how is it organized?

Conducted under the direction of Dr. Nathalie Cadieux and her team, the study was made possible thanks to a partnership between the Université de Sherbrooke, the Federation of Law Societies of Canada ("Federation"), and the Canadian Bar Association ("CBA"), as well as with the participation of all law societies across Canada.

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 and recommendations followed in December 2022. In Phase II, interviews will be conducted with legal professionals working in each province and territory to enrich the data obtained in Phase I and contextualize the challenges faced by legal professionals. Based on the data collected in Phase I and the results of Phase II, the research team will produce a tailored report, including targeted recommendations for each provincial and territorial law society. Phase II is expected to conclude in 2024-2025.

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 requires 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 funded by a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council as part of the Partnership Development program, including an in-kind contribution from the Federation and the CBA.

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. However, these particular professionals responded to a more limited number of questions and were thus not included in the majority of the analyses in Parts II and III of the report.

How many people participated in the study?

More than 7,300 legal professionals responded to the entirety of 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 nonwork-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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What are the main findings of Phase I and the recommendations that flow from them?

The Phase I report provides a detailed analysis of health and wellness indicators, as well as the risk factors and the protective factors which explain the presence of these health and wellness indicators among legal professionals. The report includes ten global recommendations and approximately fifty targeted measures. An **executive summary** synthesizes the main findings of the study.

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.

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 acting in coordination with other stakeholders and legal professionals themselves.

We are studying the results and recommendations of the Phase I report and will assess what specific actions to take based on these results and the findings from Phase II. We believe the first step is to establish a collaborative body, with representatives from the Federation, the CBA and other stakeholders, to consider how to move forward as a community. While there will be specific measures best suited for certain segments of the profession or particular geographical locations, we need a vehicle for sharing information and for working at a national level where appropriate.



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