

Legal Secondary Consultation: Expanding the Reach of Ontario's Community Legal Clinics through Community Partnerships

Many people do not know when they have a legal problem. When they do seek help, they often turn to a range of community organizations and social service providers. Community legal clinics struggle to identify these individuals and address their unmet legal needs. This chapter demonstrates that legal secondary consultation (LSC) successfully innovates legal aid delivery to address these problems. LSC occurs when a community legal clinic lawyer, licensed paralegal, or experienced legal worker provides one-on-one advice, by telephone or e-mail, to a community organization or social service provider, helping them to resolve problems for their own clients.

The LSC service is the first to have been permanently implemented in the service delivery models of three community legal clinics in Ontario, Canada. The authors evaluated the pilot study of the LSC service at these three clinics which ran from September 2016 to April 2017. Data was collected from four sources: (1) data on the community organizations and the social service providers requesting the LSC service for each clinic; (2) interviews with LSC advisors; (3) interviews with social service providers and community organizations that used the LSC service; and (4) case notes from each clinic.

The authors conclude that the LSC service worked for a wide range of community organizations and social service providers. Three main benefits of the LSC service were identified: (1) it extended the reach of community legal clinics by identifying and addressing unmet legal needs in the community that would otherwise have gone unnoticed; (2) it improved community organizations' and social service providers' legal capacities by involving them in direct, legal problem-solving for their clients; and (3) it was cost-effective. A major risk associated with the LSC service was also identified: that a community organization or social service provider may misunderstand or misapply the

LSC advisor's legal advice when assisting their client. LSC advisors used a common risk-mitigation strategy to address this concern.

The chapter concludes by presenting updated data from 2018-2019 and findings from interviews conducted with clinic staff in 2020. They demonstrate that the LSC service has proven itself sustainable at each clinic for two years following the pilot study and that it remains highly valuable at the community level.

KEYWORDS: *Legal secondary consultation; Innovation; Everyday legal problems; Community legal clinic; Access to justice; Legal capacity; Medical legal partnerships; Canada.*