



# Legal Aid Facts

## Expanded Family Duty Counsel

---

Family duty counsel is a proven program that gives eligible clients brief advice services. Expanded Family Duty Counsel (FDC) is a pilot program in Victoria that provides greater continuity of advice through support on the same legal matter. Expanded FDC will also offer new services such as legal coaching and guidance to help people who are representing themselves in court.

Clients with a family law issue can access this service in person at the Justice Access Centre (JAC) located at the Victoria Provincial Courthouse. It is one of five Justice Innovation and Transformation Initiatives funded by the Ministry of Justice until 2017.

### Innovative services

Under the program, family duty counsel will provide the following:

- Legal advice on family law issues
- Information and advice on court processes, both Provincial and Supreme Court
- Information and advice on options for resolving legal issues out-of-court
- Referrals to other services, including online resources and other public agencies
- Help with preparing documents for court or for other legal issues
- Help with preparing for court appearances
- Representation in court on brief uncontested issues
- Coaching to help people who are representing themselves in court

Family duty counsel will set appointments so that the client can work with the same lawyer throughout the service. Previously, people usually spoke with a different lawyer every time they came to see duty counsel. Clients get up to six hours with the same lawyer for each current legal matter they have compared to three hours outside the pilot program.

Another enhancement to regular FDC services is coaching to help people to represent themselves more effectively.

### Benefits for families

Expanded in-person service, along with integration with the resources at the Justice Access Centre and improved referrals to outside agencies will support and empower clients to find affordable, fair and enduring resolutions to their family law issues, bringing stability to their lives and the lives of their children.

The presence of family duty counsel in the courthouse and its integration with other JAC services has a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the court by helping clients reach out-of-court resolutions, as well as be better prepared for court hearings if they are needed.

An independent evaluator will evaluate the program to determine whether the pilot meets its objectives.