

Legal Aid Facts

Mediation Referral

Mediation Referral was a pilot program offered by the Legal Services Society (LSS) and Mediate BC to increase access to affordable mediation services. LSS is no longer taking applications for the program, which ends in March 2017. Those clients already in the program will continue to receive mediation services.

Under the program, mediators work with clients to achieve early resolution of family disputes. It is one of five Justice Innovation and Transformation Initiatives funded by the Ministry of Justice.

Innovative services

The program provided services to people with family law issues who are willing to participate in mediation. It included:

- Mediation services by a private family mediator
- Information and options for resolving legal issues out-of-court
- Helping families to reach an out-of-court agreement
- Referrals to advice services to prepare and support the client through mediation

Under the program, clients who are financially eligible but do not have a legal issue that qualifies them for representation by a legal aid lawyer were referred to Mediate BC for 6 hours of paid family mediation services.

The program also funded a limited amount of mediation services to help eligible families address property, debt, and spousal support issues in addition to any child-related issues.

As part of the program, Mediate BC offered mediation services beyond the 6 paid hours at sliding scale rates based on income and assets.

Mediation was provided by mediators throughout the province who, in some cases, mediated by phone or a web-based platform (known as “distance mediation”).

Benefits for families

The goal of the Mediation Referral program was to benefit families by giving them an opportunity to minimize conflict and resolve their family law problems out of court where possible. Collaborative problem-solving on separation and divorce was expected to result in enduring outcomes that support the well-being of children and families. The program was also expected to free up court resources because by focussing on early resolution, fewer cases will proceed to trial.

An independent evaluation of the Mediation Referral program can be found on the [LSS website](#).