

Results at a glance

Evaluation of the Federal Support for Family Justice: Canadian Family Justice Fund

Family law is an area of shared responsibility between the Federal Government and the provinces and territories (PTs). The Government of Canada is committed to improving access to justice for families experiencing separation and divorce. The Canadian Family Justice Fund's (CFJF) ultimate outcome directly supports this commitment by fostering 1) an increased awareness of family justice issues, and 2) an increased capacity in the PTs to deliver family justice services. CFJF's funding to PT governments, not-for-profit organizations, associations, academic institutions and individuals targets five priorities through two components: the activities component and the projects component.

WHAT WAS FOUND

- There is a continued need to support the delivery of family justice services through the CFJF due to the high and increasing prevalence of family violence, high conflict families, and self-represented litigants, and an ongoing need to expand support for mediation, child support recalculation, maintenance and enforcement, and supervised access. There are also continued needs with respect to accessing family justice services for diverse and underserved groups. The CFJF was generally responsive to these needs. There is a low likelihood that activities and projects would have proceeded as planned in the absence of the CFJF.
- The CFJF is consistent with federal and PT government priorities, and with federal roles and responsibilities.
- The CFJF supported an increase in awareness, knowledge, and understanding of family law and children's law issues among targeted audiences through the development, update, and delivery of Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) materials. It also contributed to increased access to family justice for Canadians, particularly through mediation and recalculation services, as well as through PLEI resources and courses that have been developed to help families navigate the justice system.
- The CFJF contributed to improved family justice services for diverse and underserved populations through innovative projects and activities. The CFJF is generally flexible in addressing the needs of diverse groups.
- The CFJF supported improved PT capacity to provide and deliver family justice services, particularly through

enhanced funding to ongoing family justice services and funding pilot projects for new services.

- The COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift to offering more services virtually that were previously in-person, while the delivery of PLEI resources was largely unaffected. The shift online had both positive and negative impacts on effectiveness.
- The CFJF is managed efficiently due to good working relationships between funding recipients and CFJF staff, reasonable reporting, and multi-year funding. Some constraints were identified regarding communication, the availability and consistency of performance data, and the limited program budget.
- For CFJF activities and projects, best practices and lessons learned included engaging diverse and underserved stakeholders when developing services for these groups, ensuring sufficient time for meaningful engagement and collaboration, implementing strategies to mitigate negative impacts of virtual service delivery, and ensuring services are accessible in both Official Languages (among others). For Justice Canada's management of the CFJF, best practices consisted of maintaining flexibility in working with funding recipients and keeping reporting simple. Best practices are well-communicated and shared across FPT stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: Work with provincial and territorial partners to identify gaps and needs relating to family justice services.

Recommendation 2: In collaboration with partners, build on recent improvements to performance reporting by finding opportunities to further standardize and refine performance reporting mechanisms and information. The utility of performance data for program management should be a key consideration.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION: The Evaluation of the CFJF was conducted by the Department of Justice Evaluation Branch and covered fiscal years 2018-19 to 2021-22. Its main objectives were to examine the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Fund, in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* (2016).

