

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Canada

Introduction

Canada has a rich tradition of promoting access to justice through, among other things, pro bono legal assistance. In recent years there has been increased support for the active coordination of pro bono opportunities and, particularly as a result of the efforts of professional bodies such as the Canadian Bar Association (the “CBA”), various initiatives have been undertaken to promote, simplify and encourage pro bono participation across Canada. While pro bono legal services are generally available across Canada, several factors affect the availability of such services, including underfunding, insurance requirements, uneven coverage, fragmented approaches, discretionary eligibility criteria and a lack of information to potential clients/applicants. Notwithstanding these factors, lawyers and law students across Canada increasingly continue to provide pro bono legal services.

At a glance

Minimum pro bono hours requirement for lawyers?	Specific pro bono licence required?	May foreign lawyers practice pro bono?	Insurance required for law firm pro bono?	Insurance required for in-house pro bono?	Rules to limit advertising pro bono work?	Does pro bono work count to CLE credit?	Limitations for in-house lawyers to do pro bono?
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

The landscape

Professional regulation	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of legal services, including any licensing required to provide legal services. Please highlight any differences for lawyers working as in-house counsel. 	<p>The legal profession is governed by provincial/territorial legislation, and this applies equally between private practice counsel and in-house counsel.</p> <p>Each of the fourteen provincial/territorial law societies is established by provincial/territorial law and is principally responsible for regulating the conduct of Canadian lawyers in the public interest of that jurisdiction. For example, the Law Society of Ontario’s (the “LSO”) authority to license and regulate lawyers was granted by the Ontario government through the Law Society Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. L.8, pursuant to which the LSO has developed by-laws and rules of professional conduct setting out the professional and ethical obligations of lawyers and paralegals and the</p>

	<p>manner in which they are regulated by the Law Society.¹</p> <p>The Federation of Law Societies of Canada (the “Federation”), which is the national coordinating body for Canada’s 14 law societies, leads the development of national standards for the legal profession and undertakes initiatives to promote access to legal services and introduce common standards in, among others, admissions, money laundering, codes of conduct and complaints and discipline across all provinces/territories.</p>
Regulatory landscape for pro bono	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>There are no additional rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services, provided that the lawyer is appropriately licensed to practice in the relevant province/territory in Canada.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Lawyers do not require an additional license to provide pro bono legal services in Canada, provided that the lawyer is appropriately licensed to practice in the relevant province/territory.</p>
<p>4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Foreign lawyers do not require an additional license to provide pro bono legal services in Canada, provided that they are appropriately licensed to practice in the relevant province/territory.</p> <p>Foreign-trained lawyers who want to practice in Canada must first obtain an NCA Certificate of Qualification, then complete the provincial bar process (exams and articling) in the jurisdiction where they intend to practice.²</p>
<p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>	<p>Lawyers in Canada are not required to complete a minimum number of pro bono hours. Canadian lawyers are encouraged by their regulatory bodies and professional associations to provide pro bono legal representation to persons who would otherwise be self-represented. The CBA’s Pro Bono Committee suggests that all members of the legal</p>

¹ See <https://lso.ca/about-lso/legislation-rules>.

² <https://nca.legal/>

	profession aim to contribute 50 hours or 3% of billings per year on a pro bono basis ³ and the Federation’s Model Code of Professional Conduct encourages lawyers to enhance the profession’s standard and reputation by providing pro bono legal services. ⁴
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	Aspiring lawyers in Canada are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers. Certain law schools in Canada require law students to undertake public interest placements, but this is not a regulatory requirement.
7. Aside from mandatory targets (if any), are there aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body?	As noted above, the CBA suggests that all members of the legal profession aim to contribute 50 hours or 3% of billings per year on a pro bono basis. ⁵
8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	The practice regarding continuing legal education varies between each of Canada’s provincial/territorial law societies. Some law societies, such as the LSO and the Law Society of British Columbia, have formal Continuing Professional Development (“CPD”) requirements, which explicitly exclude pro bono activities, and others, such as the Law Society of Alberta, have less formal CPD requirements but suggest that their members undertake pro bono legal services.
Insurance and advertising	
9. Do lawyers need professional indemnity legal insurance cover for pro bono legal services they provide? Does the requirement differ for in-house lawyers? If insurance is required, can lawyers meet	In Canada, professional indemnity legal insurance is required for the provision of any pro bono legal services. Whilst all lawyers in Canada are generally required by their relevant law society to maintain

³ Canadian Bar Association – The ABCs of Creating a Pro Bono Policy for Your Law Firm, available at <https://www.cba.org/Publications-Resources/CBA-Practice-Link/2015/2009/The-ABCs-of-Creating-a-Pro-Bono-Policy-for-Your-La>

⁴ Federation of Law Societies of Canada, Model Code of Professional Conduct, available at <https://flsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Model-Code-of-Professional-Conduct.pdf>.

⁵ Canadian Bar Association – The ABCs of Creating a Pro Bono Policy for Your Law Firm, available at <https://www.cba.org/Publications-Resources/CBA-Practice-Link/2015/2009/The-ABCs-of-Creating-a-Pro-Bono-Policy-for-Your-La>

<p>the requirement by working under the cover of another pro bono provider, e.g. in partnership with a private law firm or organization working on the same pro bono project?</p>	<p>adequate professional indemnity insurance in order to practice, some provinces provide an exemption from maintaining insurance for certain groups of lawyers, such as in-house, government/public, non-practicing and retired.</p> <p>Some provincial/territorial law societies and insurance providers have made arrangements for such uninsured members to benefit from extended indemnity insurance coverage when providing pro bono legal services, although this is not currently available in all provinces/territories and, where it is available, is generally subject to limitations, such as only extending protection for certain “approved” services and programs. Some provincial law societies provide insurance coverage for a nominal annual fee to retired or non-practicing lawyers with a status of “active for pro bono only.” Please see the websites of the provincial pro bono organisations for more information on insurance.⁶</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>There are no rules that prohibit advertising of pro bono successes, provided that the rules governing client confidentiality are complied with. In general, client consent is required before any specific details of a pro bono matter may be disclosed. There are no restrictions on soliciting new pro bono clients.</p>
<p>Pro bono practice and culture</p>	
<p>11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?</p>	<p>The main areas of law which require the provision of pro bono legal services and where there are unmet legal needs in Canada include criminal, family, employment, immigration advice, human rights and welfare rights.⁷</p>
<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>The main providers of pro bono legal services in Canada are NGOs, such as Pro Bono Ontario, Pro Bono Law Alberta, Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan, Access Pro Bono – British Columbia and Pro Bono Quebec, private law firms such as McCarthy</p>

⁶ See e.g., the insurance provisions of Alberta, available at <https://www.lawsociety.ab.ca/lawyers-and-students/membership-services/applying-for-insurance-and-insurance-exemptions/> and Ontario, available at <https://www.lawpro.ca/your-policy/are-you-working/pro-bono/>.

⁷ <https://www.cleo.on.ca/en/about/about-cleo>

	Tétrault LLP ⁸ and Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP ⁹ and programs run by law students under supervision of lawyers in pro bono legal clinics and in programs run by Pro Bono Students Canada. ¹⁰
<p>13. Are there any noteworthy examples of how innovative technology or artificial intelligence is being used to enable access to pro bono or otherwise as part of pro bono cases or matters?</p>	<p>Though still in early stages, we understand that a number of pro bono agencies in Canada, including Pro Bono Ontario (the largest pro bono organization in Canada) are exploring AI tools to assist with intake processes and knowledge management tools.</p> <p>The Law Foundation of Ontario is supporting the Conflict Analytics Lab and the Harvard Access to Justice Lab on a collaborative project to enhance Pro Bono Ontario client access to housing law through a lawyer-controlled AI system.¹¹</p> <p>Beagle+ is a chatbot powered by generative AI, developed by People’s Law School in British Columbia. The chatbot assists people (including those who can’t afford lawyers) with step-by-step guidance on everyday legal problems by allowing users to input their legal concerns in their own words. The chatbot responds with appropriate information, relevant resources, and possible next steps.¹²</p> <p>A2AJ provides open datasets, AI models, toolkits, and research to help clinics, students, and pro bono groups build legal AI tools (e.g., tenant advocacy analytics and automated citation checks). It has a Legal AI Benchmarks project that evaluates AI models on tasks involving Canadian law, focusing on topics that impact marginalized and low-income people.¹³</p> <p>The UBC Peter A. Allard School of Law collaborated with UBC Cloud Innovation Center to build an AI-powered legal support tool. It aims</p>

⁸ <https://www.mccarthy.ca/en/community/community>

⁹ <https://www.blakes.com/about/social-responsibility/pro-bono/>

¹⁰ Pro Bono Students Canada, available at <https://www.probonostudents.ca/>

¹¹ <https://law.queensu.ca/news/Conflict-Analytics-Lab-funded-to-improve-client-access-to-Pro-Bono-Ontario-services#:~:text=Bono%20Ontario%20services-,Conflict%20Analytics%20Lab%20funded%20to%20improve%20client%20access%20to%20Pro,Photo%20by%20Bernard%20Clark>

¹² https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/ai-in-courts/chatbots-pro-se-litigants/?utm_source

¹³ https://a2aj.ca/?utm_source

to support students or legal professionals to formulate legal advice by taking user-entered information about a case, acting as a search assistant, and providing LLM-generated prompts.¹⁴

Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts

14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.

Governmental

Free legal support funded by the governments in Canada takes the form of legal aid which is offered under separate programs in each province and territory.¹⁵

The administration of legal aid services in Canada falls mainly within the responsibility of the provincial/territorial governments. Each province/territory has established its own legal aid plan, utilising different delivery mechanisms, employing varying eligibility criteria and coverage provisions.

For criminal matters, legal representation is generally provided for indictable offences and for certain summary offences if there is a likelihood of imprisonment or, for some schemes, loss of livelihood, if convicted. For civil matters, most plans provide legal representation for disputes involving child protection/welfare matters, while some also cover matters such as child custody and immigration/refugee issues.

Non-governmental

Several province-wide pro bono organizations have been established (i.e., Pro Bono Ontario,¹⁶ Pro Bono Law Alberta,¹⁷ Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan,¹⁸ Access Pro Bono - British Columbia¹⁹ and Pro Bono Quebec²⁰) to increase access to justice by creating and facilitating opportunities for lawyers to provide pro bono legal services particularly through referral programs. In addition, Pro Bono Canada serves as an umbrella organization with the goal of promoting the provision of pro bono services by

¹⁴ https://cic.ubc.ca/project/legal-aid-tool/?utm_source

¹⁵ <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fund-fina/gov-gouv/aid-aide/index.html>

¹⁶ See <https://www.probonoontario.org/>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.pbla.ca/>.

¹⁸ See <https://pblsask.ca/>.

¹⁹ See <https://www.accessprobono.ca/>.

²⁰ See <https://justiceprobono.ca/en/>.

	<p>Canadian lawyers. However, it does not itself coordinate any specific programs.²¹</p> <p>Pro Bono Students Canada (“PBSC”) relies on volunteer lawyers supervising its various projects. PBSC has a chapter in 22 law schools across Canada, with about 1,450 law students volunteering approximately 115,000 hours of free legal services to 360 public interest groups, community organizations, pro bono lawyers, courts and tribunals across the country.²²</p>
15. Is there any public or private organization with which a local or foreign lawyer can register to be made aware of pro bono opportunities?	Provincial pro bono organizations such as Pro Bono Ontario, ²³ Pro Bono Law Alberta, ²⁴ Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan, ²⁵ Access Pro Bono British- Columbia ²⁶ and Pro Bono Quebec ²⁷ provide opportunities to register as a volunteer.
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	<p>In 2023 Canadian Lawyer Magazine and Pro Bono Ontario published a list of firms engaged in pro bono activities and awarded Five Star Pro Bono Status to a number of firms to recognize their contributions.²⁸</p> <p>At the bi-annual National Pro Bono Conference awards are given for Law Firm, Professional and Program.²⁹</p>

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McCarthy Tétrault LLP

Learn more

[Navigate the full Global Pro Bono Guide](#) to explore the global landscape and pro bono practices and opportunities across 100+ jurisdictions.

²¹ <https://probonocanada.org/>.

²² See <https://www.probonostudents.ca/impact>.

²³ See <https://www.probonoontario.org/>.

²⁴ See <https://www.pbla.ca/>.

²⁵ See <https://pblsask.ca/>.

²⁶ See <https://www.accessprobono.ca/>.

²⁷ See <https://justiceprobono.ca/en/>.

²⁸ <https://www.canadianlawyermag.com/rankings/best-pro-bono-law-firms-in-canada-5-star-pro-bono-firms-2023/375270>

²⁹ <https://www.probonoconference.com/en/national-pro-bono-awards/>.