

# Justice Sector Constellation

## Synopsis Update

### December 2020



#### Background

The Justice Sector Constellation (the “**Constellation**”) seeks to intervene at the intersection of poverty and the legal system so that everyone facing a legal issue can access the justice sector resources and services they need. The Constellation has been working to this end since April 2013.

#### Update

Since the last Synopsis Update, the Constellation has advanced work under each of its Strategic Plan priority areas. Some of that work is described below.

##### **Accessibility of the Legal System**

Albertans need to know what justice sector services are available and how to access those services when they are facing a legal issue. At the same time, research shows that legal issues often occur in the context of other problems, such as health issues, financial pressures or relationship breakdown. Similarly, legal issues may exacerbate these other issues.

Over the years, the Constellation has worked toward its goal of one current, comprehensive database of justice sector services that is integrated with information regarding other social services. [211 Alberta](#) helps Albertans find the right resource or service for whatever issue they face, legal or otherwise. 211 is available 24/7 by phone, text and chat. The service is free, confidential and available in over 170 languages over the phone.

The Constellation has worked with 211 Alberta to integrate justice sector services from now-defunct databases into the database used by 211 Alberta. In addition, the Constellation worked with 211 Alberta to develop directory categories for the justice sector services included in the 211 database. The directory categories are expected to make it easier to identify appropriate justice sector services on the 211 website.

##### **Coordination of Justice Sector Services**

Individuals remanded in custody or serving time in custody must overcome many barriers to achieve reintegration into society after release. The Constellation has found that gaps most often arise for those released from remand rather than custody, in part because the shorter time spent in remand provides less time to prepare for release.

To help address these gaps, [Client Journey Maps](#) have been developed for specific areas of need: addiction, education and employment, housing, identification, mental health and transportation. Client Journey Maps are visual representations of the process individuals can follow to find support and resources at transition points in life, such as on release from custody. The maps are designed to improve the process of connecting individuals with the appropriate agencies and resources to meet essential needs and foster successful community integration. The maps are also available as a resource to remand and correctional staff, justice serving agencies, and other service providers.

## **Education and Engagement**

Many people lack knowledge about legal issues and where to find legal information. Also, people are not aware of how legal issues may be related to other life challenges, or of the societal cost of unresolved legal issues.

The Constellation's goals under Education and Engagement include education regarding legal rights and how to access and navigate the legal system. In addition, the Constellation seeks to increase awareness of how poverty and the legal system intersect, to encourage engagement and effect systemic change that will benefit all Albertans.

To that end, the Constellation developed [Poverty and the Law: Expanding Perspectives](#), an educational module regarding the context, causes and impacts of poverty, and the intersection of poverty and the law. In light of what they have learned, the Module encourages participants to address client needs in a holistic manner, practice compassion with those facing economic hardship and vulnerability, and work for systemic changes that will benefit everyone.

The Module is being used by instructors in various faculties and departments in several post-secondary institutions in Calgary. In addition, content from the Module has been included in the bar admission course for lawyers in Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan. An [Instructor's Resource](#) is available to facilitate instruction of the Module. Thanks to funding from the Enough for All Catalyst Fund, both the Module and the Instructor's Resource are available at no cost.

Since its launch earlier this year, over 250 people have taken the Module. Those who completed the Module are professionals or students in a variety of disciplines, including education, health care, law, psychology and social work. Participants overwhelmingly report that the Module increased their understanding of the causes and impacts of poverty, and of how poverty can contribute to legal problems and how legal problems can contribute to poverty. In addition, as a result of the Module, participants reported having confidence in addressing current and/or future client needs in a more holistic manner.

## **Sustainability**

The vision of the Constellation is a community where each person has the knowledge, resources and capability to understand and address their legal issues, and the legal system does not contribute to or perpetuate poverty. But how would it look if these outcomes were realized? How can progress toward these outcomes be measured?

Research shows that progress toward goals like these cannot be attributed to any one group or organization. In fact, the Constellation is one of many stakeholders working to improve access to justice.

Thanks to funding from Innoweave, the Constellation is conducting developmental evaluation to assess the Constellation's contribution toward its outcomes. The process draws on input from people living in poverty, Constellation members, and justice sector and other stakeholders, and will be completed by spring 2021. The information collected will inform the Constellation's theory of change and strategic plan.

## **For More Information**

For more information about the Constellation and its work, please visit the [Justice Sector Constellation website](#).