

**When Lawyers Need Help: Navigating Mental Health Resources**  
**LawCast BC podcast**  
**Law Society of British Columbia**

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**Vinnie Yuen:**

Welcome to LawCast BC, a podcast produced by the Law Society of British Columbia. If you're wondering about what the Law Society does, how we do it and how it impacts you, you've come to the right place. The Law Society regulates lawyers in BC. Our mandate is to protect the public. I'm Vinnie Yuen, your host and producer for LawCast BC. This podcast will cover a wide range of topics that relate to the legal profession regulation and most importantly how it's going to impact the public.

Today we're going to be talking about a really important topic, mental health and how lawyers can access the resources they need. A national survey was published last year on the state of legal professionals' mental health in Canada. The results were alarming. More than half of respondents in BC reported experiencing psychological distress. Many of them said they did not seek help despite needing it and some of their main reasons? They worried that what they say will be shared with the Law Society, they don't know enough about services available or they don't believe assistance programs can help them. We're here to help address some of those concerns. We're really lucky today to have two of our staff members here from the Law Society, welcome Rose and Claire

**Rose Morgan:**

Thank you.

**Claire Marchant:**

Hi Vinnie, thanks for having us!

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you've done to support lawyers' mental health?

**Claire Marchant:**

Sure, so I'm Claire Marchant, I am the director of policy and practice at the Law Society. I've been here since 2017 when I joined the Practice Advice Department as a practice advisor and equity ombudsperson. I think a really important part of what the Law Society does to protect the public is to ensure that lawyers have the tools they need to succeed in the execution of their duty and so I think having access to those resources in the Law Society and then also external to it with respect to mental health is just so important in supporting them in the execution of what they do.

**Rose Morgan:**

And I'm Rose Morgan. I am a UX and content strategist with the Practice Advice Department. I've been with the Law Society since 2021, I started as a summer student. My most recent project I was instrumental in creating the advice decision making assistant which is an interactive tool for lawyers to be able to connect with practice advice, ethical advice and find resources to help them. So it was the first of its kind at the Law Society and it was pretty exciting.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

So let's just dive right into it. There was a national survey that was done. The results were released last year. What do we know about the state of lawyers' mental health in British Columbia and Canada?

**Rose Morgan:**

It was a nationwide study so they interviewed over 7000 legal professionals and it really highlighted the prevalence of mental health issues and it showed that there is an urgent need for supporting professionals with these issues and it's something that we had thought before was that stigma was the biggest issue or the biggest barrier for people seeking help. But it seems as though maybe instead it's more understanding around mental health so that was really illuminating.

Some of the numbers that came out of that were pretty shocking. There was almost 60 percent of legal professionals surveyed reported feeling psychological distress and this number was way higher among women, articling students, folks in the LGBTQ

community and legal professionals living with a disability, it was 74 percent reported feeling psychological distress. The same thing for legal professionals under 35, they're experiencing really high rates of anxiety and high levels of burnout. So we saw that especially in legal professionals between 31 and 35 and women under 40. It also surveyed why people don't get help which was really interesting, especially in terms of creating programs.

So the top reasons were I told myself it's temporary, it will pass, they didn't have the energy to commit right now to improving their mental health. There was also financial reasons. And in terms of what the legal regulator's role is, we saw that people were worried that their information would be shared with the regulator. They didn't believe that the programs offered would help them and they didn't know enough. So that was really valuable information for us definitely in creating some new programs that can help, both on the website and connecting with other services too.

**Claire Marchant:**

I think it's important for us to think about this in the context also of what it means for the public and what lawyers who do well and thriving and why that's important to the Law Society. Do you want to say more about that Rose?

**Rose Morgan:**

Yeah, definitely. So we know that anybody who has experienced mental health issues know that you really do feel your best when you're not in psychological distress, probably won't come as a surprise to many, and I would say like the Law Society has an interest in supporting legal professionals' wellbeing and that is in part for protecting the public interests. We know that people who are in a healthy emotional and mental position will better be able to meet their responsibilities both privately and professionally. And I think also on a personal level, like the Law Society is made up of people and of legal professionals and people like Claire, they always recognize that you know lawyers are people too and it's important to care for your community.

**Claire Marchant:**

Well, being a lawyer's stressful, right, and it's just, it's a, it's a, it's a really important job and it's a stressful job. You're dealing with people. You're dealing with their, not only their money but their livelihoods at times, their families, their liberty, and I think it's really important for the institution to recognize that, that lawyers are people and that part of protecting the public is supporting lawyers in the execution of their duty and that means giving them the tools to be their best selves.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Are there some signs that lawyers should look for, for themselves or the people around them that it might be time to seek mental health support or mental health resources?

**Claire Marchant:**

It's a really good question Vinnie and I just think it's so important to emphasize the importance of lawyers taking care of themselves and taking care of their colleagues. I think one of the, the key things folks should look for in themselves and also in others is some sort of observable, noticeable change.

So with people around you, you might notice a change in behaviour, they might lose interest in something they used to enjoy, they might seem to have a shift in their mood or their energy level. They might seem like they're withdrawing a bit. You might see an increase in substance use. You're looking for those observable changes and I think when you're having conversations with your colleagues it's okay to ask how are you doing and it's okay to say I've noticed this change in you because now you're not saying you seem sad or what's wrong, you're saying this is the, this is the change that I, that I have noticed so that there's something more, more objective to frame the conversation. But if you see those changes, it's worthy of a, of a maybe how are you doing, another thought.

Similar with yourself, if you know this'll look different for different people but maybe if you saw in yourself a change in appetite or sleep or energy level, maybe feeling more nervous, more anxious, more mood changes, more irritability, problems thinking so brain fog, your racing thoughts, maybe a change in your ability to concentrate, feeling a bit more forgetful, feeling overwhelmed a big one, like you can't manage everything, those are all things that I think it's worth, it's worth taking a beat, and that's a hard thing for

lawyers, right, they're running fast, there's lots to do. But I think it's always a worthy use of your time to take a moment to say what's going on with me and what's going on with a colleague saying how are you doing to make sure that you can be your best self and your colleagues can too.

It's also really important to be thoughtful for yourself and your colleagues if there's periods of big change. You know some of the biggest changes folks go through in their life are, are moving, changing jobs, change in a relationship, someone passing away in the family and so those can be real moments where I think people should be kinder to themselves and kinder to their friends and colleagues.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Those were really good tips and I especially love the part about observable characteristics or changes in our colleagues. Now I think Rose you mentioned that the Law Society had done some things in response to the national survey and its findings but there are some changes to the website. We recently updated it with something called the new Lawyer Wellbeing Hub, so what is that, what can people expect to find there?

**Rose Morgan:**

So we really wanted to try and organize mental health supports in a way that was comprehensive, really easy to navigate. So once you click onto the Lawyer Wellbeing Hub right on the Law Society's website, you'll see our tile presentation and we have everything from the Mental Health Task Force to their alternative discipline process; you can find more information about that. There's frequently asked questions which I feel is a really good primer for people so those talk about lawyer wellbeing generally and also the Law Society's role in promoting mental health. There's also links to practice advice so you can call up a practice advisor if you need. There's more information on that. And finally there are our services that the Law Society promotes to lawyers so LifeSpeak, TELUS Health One, the Lawyers Assistance Program and a list of external resources that we thought may be helpful.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

So from what I understand, the TELUS Health One service is actually paid for by the Law Society for lawyers in BC. What kind of services does that offer and how can lawyers access it?

**Claire Marchant:**

So TELUS Health One used to be known as LifeWorks and it kind of operates like an employee assistance program that an employer would put forward for its employees but it's available to all practicing lawyers in British Columbia and it offers free confidential 24/7 support for issues related to mental, physical, social and financial wellbeing for articulated students, lawyers and their immediate families. So it's really important that these services are confidential and they are free and it would be great for lawyers that maybe don't have access to an employee assistance program at their firm or in addition to those services, you absolutely can look for support through all avenues. There's not need to stick to just one.

The services at TELUS Health One include confidential consultations, there's access to information and resources, abilities to connect to community agencies, supports and then also referrals to counselling services. I can't speak highly enough of folks speaking to counsellors. I think there is a real value of being able to speak confidentially to a person who doesn't have any skin in the game, that is just there for you. It's great to rely on friends and I'm so happy for folks that have those networks to connect with but having someone in your corner that you can just talk about how things are feeling for you with no fear about how that might impact another party I just think is such an invaluable resource for folks and I really encourage people to take advantage of this and the many other resources we'll talk about today with respect to mental health.

I think something that's important to emphasis with respect to reaching out to these resources too is there's no need for a question to be big. There's no reason for, to wait for a problem to get to a certain size before you engage with mental health services. You will never, by the practice advisors, by any service you contact that supported by the Law Society ever be made to feel like your question is silly or your question is small. If you feel the need to reach out, do, don't give a thought to ooh, is this a big enough problem. If you want to reach out that's exactly what it's there for.

**Vinnie Yuen**

And because these services are provided or paid for by the Law Society, does that mean the Law Society has any access to that information? I know a lot of lawyers one of their reasons for being afraid to seek help is that somehow it will get back to their regulator.

**Claire Marchant:**

It's such an important question Vinnie and absolutely the question of will we have access to that information, absolutely no, the Law Society is committed to respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the services that lawyers access. All the services that the Law Society supports are confidential. No one at the Law Society will know that you accessed any of those services, we don't monitor, investigate or discipline lawyers on the basis that they're experiencing a wellbeing issue or seeking support and there's no exchange of personal information between the Law Society and TELUS Health One or any of the other services we use. When you access these services, it's absolutely confidential.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Thanks for dispelling that myth for lawyers. And aside from TELUS Health One, I notice there's also a new service called LifeSpeak; what is LifeSpeak and what can lawyers expect to find?

**Rose Morgan:**

So I love LifeSpeak. It's a, in short it's a digital wellness platform. I've described it to Claire as responsible mental health TikTok because all the people who are on the videos are a professional and they're handpicked to create those kind of videos. So in addition to those videos, which again those are my favorites but I think Claire is actually partial to the ask an expert function which if anybody knows about our Reddit AMA, like an ask me anything, it's kind of like that but again for mental health. So there, there'll be an expert there, you can log on and ask your questions anonymously and they can get answered in real time or you can go back and read the transcript. Same with the videos, you can read the transcript, that's what I like to do if I'm in a bit of a rush and I just need those little nuggets of information. They also always include digestible ready to implement tips in your life. I think that the guided meditations as well are really cool,

there's really just something for everyone. I think they're also great to share with people in your life who might be struggling but don't necessarily have the vocabulary to explain how or why or what this means because they give clear examples and definitions which I find is very lawyerly to define your terms from the start might be appealing for some folks and gives you some tips for moving forward too so I'm obviously a big fan.

**Claire Marchant:**

Something else that LifeSpeak offers to us, which I think is timely at this time of year is continuing professional development content and so folks, if they want to, they can access the entire LifeSpeak platform and the ask me anythings, they ask an expert anonymously. If they choose to they can create a separate profile through which they can access a bunch of content that's, that is eligible for continuing professional development credit so something to keep in mind as the season turns to CPD season.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

That's always a nice little bonus.

**Claire Marchant:**

Yeah.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

And aside from these online platforms, I know some people just really want to pick up the phone and call someone. What services are available?

**Claire Marchant:**

Sure, well I can't say enough good things about the Lawyers Assistance Program which is a confidential service that provides peer support, counselling, referrals and peer interventions for lawyers, their families, support staff and articulated students. This is a really important service, it's another counselling service that is entirely confidential in addition to the services through TELUS Health One and again, never feel the need to only use one service, they're all available there for, for lawyers to access and so it's really important I think to have in addition to the TELUS Health One counselling, that ability for that peer support through the Lawyers Assistance Program. Being a lawyer's a pretty



unique thing and I think being able to speak to people that have been in your shoes, been in the position you've been in is, is just such an invaluable thing that the Lawyers Assistance Program provides.

Another one I'm partial to of course is the practice advisors as I joined the Law Society as a practice advisor in 2017 and now I oversee the group. The practice advisors give confidential ethics and practice management advice to lawyers and articulated students. I kind of think of us as a, as an ethics crisis line so any time you find yourself in a situation where you need help with an issue with the code or the rules or honestly even if you're, you're feeling overwhelmed, you're feeling stressed and you're not sure who to call, pick up the phone, phone a practice advisor, they are very, every single one of them has taken mental health first aid training in addition to be very well equipped to describe the mental health and wellbeing supports that are available through the Law Society and associated services.

You know I say to folks, much like with accessing mental health resources, no question is too silly, no question is small, phone early, phone often. The practice advisors they will always welcome your call. I would say in particular feel free to phone even if you can't really put your finger on yet what the problem is. If your gut's telling you something's off, even just phoning and saying I feel funny about this thing that's going on in a file, I feel funny that I've had an interaction with a, with a client, with opposing counsel, with another lawyer at my firm that's left me feeling a bit empty, a bit off balance. Phone a practice advisor, talk it out and then my greatest hope is when folks hang up the phone, they'll be in a position to you know take that issue, put it down and move on with their day.

And so I think it's just a really important resource that's available to folks and if you want to get in touch with a practice advisor, there's information that you can access on the Law Society website. You can email, you can phone and then also we have our new feature through our advice decision making assistant that Rose mentioned where you can book a call with a practice advisor in advance so if you want to schedule a call, that's a really great way to get in touch with us. Another person I should mention who's on the practice advice team is our practice and equity advisor. This is the role that I used to occupy as the

equity ombudsperson that we've changed now to the equity advisor and that's held up now by Sarah Sharpe who's our practice and equity advisor. So in addition to being able to give advice on ethics and practice management issues, Sarah can also give advice on issues of discrimination and harassment including bullying so if you find yourself in a circumstance where you'd like to or need to discuss an issue like that, Sarah is great, Sarah is the person I call when I don't know what to do so I would really encourage folks to reach out.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Thank you so much for the overview of all the services. Can you tell us how lawyers can access them?

**Claire Marchant:**

Sure, so information about accessing the practice advisors is available on the Law Society website. There's information on the Lawyers Assistance Program website which is [lapbc.com](http://lapbc.com) and then if you're wanting to access LifeSpeak or TELUS Health One, both of those are, have a username and a password. If you log into the member portal, you'll be able to see the access information.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

And then lastly, what can we do as a profession overall, what can we do to reduce the stigma around mental health?

**Rose Morgan:**

I think that first and foremost, approaching these issues with compassion and understanding, just knowing that you don't have to be perfect. I know Claire mentioned earlier that you know it's okay to ask somebody if they're okay. I think that educating yourself about how widespread these issues are, especially in the legal profession but elsewhere too, and learning about stigmatizing language and how to avoid that, really understanding how to have these difficult conversations will just make it so much easier.

Something that I have really enjoyed is another podcast too, the Trauma-Informed Lawyer podcast with Myrna McCallum, that's a really great place to start. I would also say that recognizing your ability to create change especially if you're in a position of

power but also you know by being open about your own experiences if that's something you do feel comfortable sharing and doing.

I think that something that we have mentioned a couple times is that national study on the health and wellness determinants of legal professionals in Canada, the executive summary is excellent, a pretty short read and the recommendations. They go into some depth and provide some great evidence and examples so especially if you are in a position in a law firm or in your workplace where you can create some of those changes that would be great.

I think mostly something to remember is that your overall wellbeing includes your mental health. Everybody has it, it can really impact your ability to focus, to make decisions, to solve problems effectively and it's something that's really important to take into account. I know that personally for me talking about, talking about it has been really important and seeking therapy when needed, it seems like a big step at first but believe me, it just gets easier as time goes on, you know it's like checking in with the doctor or the dentist. If you do have a diagnosis, that can be something that is really empowering. For me it's really helped me putting a name to you know some of my I guess you would call them symptoms but to me it's just, it's just regular life.

**Claire Marchant:**

I think the opportunity is there for every single person in every single office who is a lawyer or working in a legal profession to be an example. It's important for people in power to be an example but just every single person, you have the opportunity to be an example of what being a lawyer can be and there's you know we see traditional examples of, of what that might be in media but there's nothing wrong with being kind and being well and being a ray of sunshine to the people around you.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Thank you. That ends our discussion on such a positive note.

Thank you so much for listening. We hope that we're able to help you navigate some of the mental health resources and services available and debunk some myths on the subject. Please check out all the resources we talked about on the Lawyer Wellbeing Hub on the

Law Society's website and I'm going to be linking it in the show notes as well. If you look this episode, please give us a five star rating and subscribe to LawCast BC on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. If you have feedback for us please send us an email at [podcast@lsbc.org](mailto:podcast@lsbc.org).