

Results at a glance

Evaluation of the Centres of Expertise (October 2021)

The Department of Justice Canada has established Centres of Expertise (Centres) to respond to the ever-evolving needs of the organization.

Centres are intended to provide integrated services, new ways of working, and a whole-of-Justice approach as part of Canada's legal team vision.

Centres bring together talent to maximize expertise in a specific area of the law in order to provide consistent and effective legal advice, including legal policy advice or litigation support. Other types of services Centres may provide include policy work and knowledge management and outreach activities. Based on the Centres mandate and service delivery model, services can be provided to either client departments and agencies, legal services units, National Litigation Sector, or other areas within Justice.

Eight Centres were included in the evaluation: Centre for Labour and Employment Law (CLEL); Commercial Law Section (CLS); Aboriginal Law Centre (ALC); Centre of Information and Privacy Law (CIPL); Constitutional, Administrative and International Law Section (CAILS); Human Rights Law Section (HRLS); Official Languages Directorate (OLAD); and, Centre of Expertise in Procurement Law (CoEPL).

WHAT WAS FOUND

- The Centres continue to meet a demonstrated need within Justice by providing expert legal advice in specific areas of the law that incorporates a whole-of-government perspective.
- The mandates of the Centres are generally understood. There is an opportunity to explore a more centralized approach to defining and communicating these mandates to stakeholders to support a broader recognition and understanding of them.
- The service delivery models of the Centres offer some successes as well as challenges to their operation. Irrespective of the model, having clear protocols and processes enhanced opportunities for meaningful engagement between stakeholders and the Centres.
- The human resources and staffing models generally support day-to-day work processes of the Centres. However, several Centres with A-base funding

experienced challenges with expanded mandates without changes to resources, while other Centres with cost-recovery funding had challenges adequately funding some aspects of their mandates (e.g., knowledge products for multiple client departments).

- The Centres conduct policy work and deliver high-quality and consistent legal advice, which is generally timely, but can be impacted by the Centres' overall capacity. The Centres provide knowledge products that are valued by stakeholders.
- The Centres have developed collaborative working relationships with their stakeholders. Strategic partnerships can be enhanced through clarification of roles and responsibilities, proactive information sharing and engagement, and development of positions on cross-cutting issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: Ensure that mandates are clear and effectively communicated to stakeholders through a coordinated approach.

Recommendation 2: Ensure adequate protocols and/or processes are in place to support effective and efficient Centre functioning and promote stakeholder awareness and adherence.

Recommendation 3: Review and adjust resource levels and/or funding models as necessary to ensure that Centres are able to fully deliver all aspects of their mandates.

Recommendation 4: Enhance information sharing and engagement with stakeholders to best support strategic partnerships.

Recommendation 5: Ensure consistent recording of activities in LEX to better support departmental reporting and decision making.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION: The Evaluation of the Centres of Expertise was conducted by the Department of Justice Evaluation Branch and covered fiscal years 2015-2016 to 2019-2020. Its main objectives were to examine relevancy, effectiveness and efficiency of the Centres, in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* (2016).

