The Top Big Law Firms in Canada in 2026

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Many lawyers, aspiring practitioners, and *Suits* fans are drawn to the allure of "Big Law." Typically consisting of Canada's largest and most prestigious firms, Big Law offers opportunities for high pay, career advancement, and professional prestige. Landing a role at one of these firms is a huge milestone in any legal career.

But what exactly is Big Law, and how do firms earn this distinction?

In this article, we take a closer look at what Big Law means and the criteria for this elite category of firms. We highlight some of the biggest law firms in Canada and explore the pros and cons of pursuing a career in this fast-paced, lucrative, and competitive environment.

What is Big Law?

Big Law refers to Canada's largest and most prestigious corporate law firms, often with multiple offices in major cities. They're defined by factors like number of lawyers, annual revenue, demanding work, and high salaries.

In Canada, Big Law often overlaps with the "Seven Sisters," an informal label for the historically dominant corporate firms based in Toronto. Today, however, the landscape has expanded to include several other prominent national and international firms.

With that in mind, let's dive into some of the top Big Law firms in Canada in 2026.

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The top Big Law firms in Canada

The following list includes some of the top Big Law firms in Canada, ranked by factors such as annual revenue and number of lawyers.

	ANNUAL REVENUE*	NUMBER OF LAWYERS	ABOUT
Bennett Jones LLP	$585,692 million	463	One of Canada's leading full-service law firms. Known for its energy, natural resources, corporate, and litigation practices, with offices across Canada and in international hubs like New York.
Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP		649	Top-tier firm recognized for its broad corporate, financial, and regulatory practices, with offices across Canada and around the world.
Borden Ladner Gervais LLP	$611.49 million	809	Headquartered in Toronto, specialized in corporate, litigation, and intellectual property matters.
Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg LLP		280	Elite firm excelling in high-stakes M&A, securities, and tax work, with offices in Toronto and Montreal.
Dentons LLP	$3.79 billion	583	Formed in 2013 through a series of mergers. Offers full-service legal expertise across corporate, litigation, and regulatory matters.
Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP		851	Founded in 1863, known for expertise in corporate, litigation, and international matters.
Gowling WLG (Canada) LLP		791	Headquartered in Ottawa, excels in corporate, intellectual property, and litigation.
McCarthy Tétrault LLP		803	Prominent full-service firm, respected for corporate, litigation, tax, and real estate law, with offices across Canada and an international office in New York.
Norton Rose Fulbright Canada LLP		597	Global law firm with strong presence in Canada, focused on corporate, banking, energy, and litigation matters.
Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP		565	Leading Canadian business law firm founded in Toronto in 1862, known for corporate, litigation, and financial services expertise.

	ANNUAL REVENUE*	NUMBER OF LAWYERS	ABOUT
Stikeman Elliott LLP	$508,182 million	542	Headquartered in Montreal, renowned for M&A, securities, and cross-border transactions with an international presence.
Torys LLP	$405,716 million	366	Prominent Canadian firm, strong in M&A, private equity, and banking, with Toronto, Calgary, Montreal, and New York offices.

*Revenue figures for large law firms in Canada are generally not publicly available. As a result, it can be difficult to find reliable data on their financial performance.

The benefits of working at a Big Law firm

Now that we have a working definition of Big Law and numerous examples, let's explore the advantages of a Big Law career.

1. Name recognition

One of the biggest draws of Big Law is the prestige and name recognition associated with these firms. This prestige is partly due to the exclusivity of the firms, since they recruit from the top law students in the country.

If you aspire to have a career in Big Law, think about:

- Attending a highly ranked law school
- Performing well academically
- Specializing in the practice areas that Big Law firms focus on

Top grades, the right skills, and a focus on sought-after practice areas are the keys to breaking into Big Law.

2. High salaries

Another clear advantage of Big Law is the high earning potential. In Toronto, first-year associates at Big Law firms make around $135,000, with salaries rising to approximately $200,000 by the fourth year. By contrast, a first-year associate at a small Toronto firm may start closer to $90,000, while those at mid-sized firms typically make around $110,000.

In addition, associates at Big Law firms in Canada often receive annual bonuses tied to performance and firm profitability. And for those who advance to partner, the income potential is significantly higher, depending on whether the role is equity or non-equity.

These strong financial incentives make Big Law one of the most attractive career paths in the Canadian legal market.

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3. High-profile cases

Whether it's advising the buzziest tech startup in the country or steering a multibillion-dollar acquisition, Big Law firms represent high-profile clients and handle headline-making cases. For many lawyers, the opportunity to work on these exciting, influential matters is one of the most rewarding aspects of a Big Law career and provides valuable experience early on.

4. Networking opportunities and mentorship

Working in Big Law gives you the chance to observe and work alongside some of the most respected and important lawyers in the country. This environment creates opportunities for networking and mentorship that may not be available at smaller firms.

The downsides of working at a Big Law firm

While Big Law has clear advantages, it also comes with challenges. Here are some downsides you might encounter with a career in Big Law:

1. Long hours and demanding workload

Associates often work extremely long hours, including late nights and weekends, to meet client and partner demands. As a result, many lawyers struggle (and often fail) to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

One way to ease the pressure on lawyers is by leveraging legal technology to handle routine tasks. Tools like Clio Manage can help reduce the time spent on administrative work, giving lawyers more space to focus on meaningful work—and on life outside the office.

2. High pressure and stress

The work itself is high-pressure, with tight deadlines and demanding clients. Additionally, the culture can be intensely competitive, with lawyers expected to always perform at the highest level.

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3. Billable hour requirements

In Canada's Big Law sector, billable hour targets for associates typically range from 1,750 to 1,900 hours per year, which translates to about 36 to 38 hours per week. However, achieving these targets often requires working 60 to 80 hours per week, including evenings and weekends, due to the demanding nature of the work and the inclusion of non-billable tasks like administrative duties, business development, and training.

4. Slow path to partnership

For Big Law associates who aspire to partnership, be forewarned: there are no guarantees. The process of becoming a partner often takes eight to ten years, and even then, only a few lawyers make it.

To make an informed decision about your career, it's important to consider the full picture, including the potential downsides of working at a large firm. Even with top grades from an excellent law school, Big Law won't be the right fit for everyone. Fortunately, there are many other paths to a fulfilling legal career, whether that means joining a smaller firm or even starting your own. And with tools like Clio, it's never been easier to run a smooth, successful law practice.

Final thoughts on the top Big Law firms in Canada

Knowing what Big Law entails will help you judge whether a career in this environment is right for you. To guide your decisions, explore our resources for becoming lawyer, which include information on specializing in the most common practice areas. You can also see how Clio's large law firm software helps manage these practices efficiently at scale.

Whether you join a Big Law firm or choose to go in a completely different direction, the key is finding a path that aligns with your goals and strengths. And for all the *Suits* fans out there, remember: every lawyer's journey is unique, and your career can be just as compelling off-screen as it is on.

From managing client intake with Clio Grow to tracking payments with Clio Manage, discover how these tools can simplify your law practice, streamline workflows, and help you focus on what matters most.

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Frequently asked questions

What is considered Big Law in Canada?

Big Law refers to the largest and most prestigious Canadian law firms that operate across multiple offices, provinces, or even countries. This term can also describe firms with the highest numbers of lawyers or the highest annual revenue.

What is a Big Law salary in Canada?

Salaries at Big Law firms in Canada are typically higher than those at other firms. A first-year associate at a leading Big Law firm in Toronto can earn around $135,000 plus bonuses, with salary generally increasing each year with experience.

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