What Do Paralegals Do in Canada? A Complete Guide

Written by Misha Berveno

Paralegals play a vital role in Canada's legal system, but that role varies depending on the province. Because of that, the answer to "what is a paralegal in Canada" will change based on where they are located.

In Ontario, for example, paralegals have more responsibilities than most other provinces. But either way, they are often the ones strengthening a firm's operations and client experience.

Let's do a breakdown of what paralegals can do in Canada, how the role varies by province, and what it takes to build a career in this field.

Give yourself the tools to excel. Discover how Clio supports paralegals across Canada with streamlined workflows and easier day-to-day management. Book a free demo today.

What is a paralegal in Canada?

A paralegal in Canada is a trained legal professional who provides legal services, either independently or under lawyer supervision, to help clients navigate legal matters.

In Ontario, paralegals are licensed and regulated by the Law Society of Ontario. They can operate independently, represent clients in certain courts and tribunals, and provide legal advice within their authorized scope of practice.

In other provinces, the role takes a different form. Paralegals generally work under lawyer supervision and contribute through research, document preparation, client communication, and file management. They play a vital part in legal work, even though they can't independently provide legal services.

Regardless of the model, paralegals take on the essential work that keeps legal practices and individual cases moving. Their support allows lawyers to focus on the matters that require their direct involvement.

What do paralegals do?

Paralegal duties vary depending on the practice area, firm size, and province, but most paralegals handle a combination of the following:

- **Legal research and drafting:** Paralegals research case law, statutes, and precedents, and draft contracts, pleadings, affidavits, and correspondence.
- **File and evidence management:** Organizing case files, managing documents, and maintaining evidence are core responsibilities, including assembling materials for discoveries and trials. With the rise of e-discovery, paralegals with strong skills in legal technology have become increasingly valuable.
- **Client intake and communication:** Paralegals are often the main point of contact for clients. They handle intake, answer questions, and provide updates, making them the person many clients hear from most throughout their matter.
- **Court preparation:** Court preparation involves preparing forms, filing documents, scheduling hearings, and staying on top of deadlines. In Ontario, licensed paralegals can also appear in court for clients within their scope of practice.
- **Administration and billing:** Many paralegals manage calendars, track billable hours, coordinate schedules, and support firm billing processes.

In smaller firms, paralegals often take on an even broader role and are the ones who actually improve how things run. They flag slow intake processes, identify where time gets wasted, and push for technology that makes the work easier.

According to our *2025 Legal Trends Report*, the right tools can reduce cognitive load by up to 25%, and it's often paralegals who drive these changes.

Paralegal responsibilities by province

The work paralegals can legally do varies across Canada, and the differences aren't minor. If you're considering a paralegal career or thinking about hiring one, the province matters more than you might expect.

Ontario

Ontario is the only province where paralegals are independently licensed. So what can Canadian paralegals do there? The Law Society of Ontario regulates the profession, and licensed paralegals can:

- Represent clients in Small Claims Court (claims up to $50,000)

- Appear before the Provincial Offences Court for traffic and minor criminal matters
- Represent clients at various administrative tribunals, including the Landlord and Tenant Board, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario
- Handle certain summary conviction offences where the maximum term of imprisonment doesn't exceed six months

Ontario paralegals can operate their own practices, set their own fees, and provide legal advice within their authorized areas. It's a higher level of independence than anywhere else in Canada.

In 2025, the Law Society of Ontario launched the Family Legal Services Provider (FLSP) program, opening up an area of law historically reserved for lawyers. Through this program, specially trained paralegals can help clients navigate family court, file joint and uncontested divorce applications, bring motions to change child support in specific situations, and file domestic contracts. Fanshawe College delivers the training in partnership with the LSO.

British Columbia

British Columbia may soon become the second province to license independent paralegals. In May 2024, BC's Legal Professions Act received Royal Assent, which would create "regulated paralegals" who can provide certain legal services independently. However, the legislation faces constitutional challenges and will not take effect while a BC Supreme Court decision remains reserved.

For now, paralegals in BC continue to work under lawyer supervision. Watch Bill 21 closely, as it could reshape the profession in Western Canada.

Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba

In the prairies, there's no independent licensed paralegal profession. Paralegals work under lawyer supervision and can't provide legal advice or represent clients in court on their own.

That doesn't diminish the role. Paralegals in these provinces handle legal research, draft documents, manage files, prepare clients for hearings, and keep workflows running. Many firms depend on skilled paralegals to take on more work without adding lawyers.

Quebec

Quebec operates under a civil law system with its own regulatory framework. Paralegals, also referred to as legal technicians (techniciens juridiques), work under notary or lawyer supervision. They can't give legal advice directly to clients or represent them in court—those responsibilities are reserved for lawyers and notaries. The role is not independently licensed.

Atlantic provinces and territories

The Atlantic provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador) and the territories (Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories) follow a similar model. Paralegals work under lawyer supervision rather than practising independently.

What can paralegals not do?

Clear boundaries protect both paralegals and the clients they serve. Across Canada, paralegals generally can't:

- **Give independent legal advice.** In Ontario, paralegals can only provide advice within their authorized scope; elsewhere, they must work under a lawyer's supervision. They can explain processes and options, but they can't recommend a legal strategy outside their permitted areas.
- **Appear in higher courts.** Paralegals can't represent clients in Superior Court, the Court of Appeal, or the Supreme Court of Canada. These matters require a lawyer.
- **Handle certain complex matters.** This includes serious criminal charges, family law disputes involving property division or custody, and immigration applications. These areas involve higher stakes and require the training and authority that comes with a law licence.
- **Act independently on fees and opinions.** Outside Ontario, paralegals can't set their own fees. Anywhere in Canada, they can't sign legal opinions or act as counsel of record in matters beyond their jurisdiction.

In Ontario, licensed paralegals must stay within the practice areas the LSO authorizes: Small Claims Court, certain tribunal matters, provincial offences, and summary conviction cases. Working outside that scope, or practising without a licence, can result in disciplinary action or prosecution.

How to become a paralegal in Canada

The path to becoming a paralegal depends on where you plan to work.

In Ontario:

1. Complete an accredited paralegal education program (typically a two-year diploma).
2. Pass the Law Society of Ontario's paralegal licensing examination.
3. Complete the LSO's good character assessment.
4. Maintain your licence through continuing professional development.

In other provinces:

Paralegal or legal assistant diploma programs provide the foundation for working in law firms. While there's no licensing requirement, completing an accredited program demonstrates competence and improves job prospects. Many employers look for candidates with formal training in legal research, document preparation, and office administration.

Career advancement opportunities exist in both models. Experienced paralegals often move into senior roles managing teams, oversee intake operations, or lead technology implementation across their firms. Those who embrace these opportunities often become the people no one can imagine the firm without.

For tips on standing out and advancing your career, check out our guide to paralegal interview questions. You can also explore different types of paralegals to find the specialization that fits your interests.

How much do paralegals earn in Canada?

Paralegal salaries vary based on experience, location, and specialization. According to recent salary data, entry-level paralegals typically earn between $46,000 and $10,000, while those with a few years of experience can expect $55,000 to $75,000. Senior paralegals, particularly in major cities or specialized practice areas, often earn $80,750 to $103,750.

Location makes a difference as well. Toronto and other major centres pay more, reflecting both the cost of living and stronger demand. Specializing in corporate law, real estate, or litigation can also push compensation higher.

Beyond salary, there's value in expanding what you do, not just your title. Senior paralegals

increasingly take on responsibilities as workflow managers, intake leads, or operations specialists. If you're the person who understands how the firm runs, that expertise creates leverage, whether you're negotiating a raise or pursuing your next opportunity.

Why paralegals are essential in Canadian law firms

Paralegals shape how a firm operates. They spot bottlenecks, push for better processes, and catch problems before they spiral. They notice things that lawyers, buried in casework, often miss, and are often the ones who drive improvements in how things run.

This operational value shows up in the numbers. According to the *2025 Legal Trends Report*, firms that embrace AI are growing revenue four times faster than headcount. Paralegals are often central to that shift, helping firms evaluate new tools, bring colleagues up to speed, and make sure the technology actually gets used.

There's an access to justice dimension here, too. While more than half of consumers now turn to AI first when they have legal questions, many do need professional guidance. Licensed paralegals in Ontario help close the gap for Canadians who can't afford traditional legal fees but don't qualify for legal aid. A tenant facing an eviction hearing or someone dealing with a traffic matter in provincial court can get professional support that would otherwise be out of reach.

How the right tools help paralegals succeed

When the administrative side of legal work runs smoothly, paralegals have more capacity for the substantive work that drew them to the profession in the first place.

Practice management software brings everything together—matter management, deadlines, time tracking, and billing—so paralegals can stay on top of cases without jumping between systems. AI-powered features like Manage AI take it further by transforming documents into calendar events, drafting client updates from matter activity, and converting time entries into payment-ready bills.

On the intake side, Clio Grow automates appointment booking, intake forms, and follow-up communications. Prospects can schedule consultations directly, information flows into the system without manual entry, and no one has to chase down missing paperwork.

None of this replaces judgment. Paralegals still review what the tools produce and catch what they miss. But when the administrative load is lighter, there's more capacity for substantive work, process improvements, or just getting home at a decent hour.

Curious about how this works in practice? Check out our paralegal resource hub to explore more ways to level up your work.

Conclusion: Paralegals in Canada

Paralegals are essential to the Canadian legal system, whether independently licensed in Ontario or working alongside lawyers elsewhere. They do critical work that keeps firms running and clients served.

The profession is evolving. Ontario's expansion into family law services, BC's potential to become the second province with licensed independent paralegals, and the growing sophistication of legal technology all point toward a future where paralegals take on even more responsibility. For those who build expertise with technology, understand firm operations, and continue expanding their capabilities, the opportunities are significant.

Ready to see how the right tools can help your firm work smarter? Learn more about Clio and discover how **legal technology supports paralegals** and the firms they work for.

Book a Clio demo

Frequently asked questions

Can a paralegal give legal advice in Canada?

In Ontario, licensed paralegals can provide legal advice within their authorized scope of practice. In other provinces, paralegals work under lawyer supervision and can't independently give legal advice.

Can paralegals represent clients in court?

In Ontario, licensed paralegals can represent clients in Small Claims Court (up to $50,000), provincial offences court, and certain administrative tribunals. In other provinces, paralegals cannot represent clients independently.

What is the difference between a paralegal and a legal assistant in Canada?

In Ontario, a paralegal is a licensed professional who can independently provide legal services, while a legal assistant provides administrative support under lawyer supervision. In other provinces, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

How do you become a licensed paralegal in Ontario?

Complete an accredited paralegal program, pass the Law Society of Ontario's licensing exam, and meet the LSO's good character requirements. Licensed paralegals must also complete continuing professional development to maintain their licence.

About Clio

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