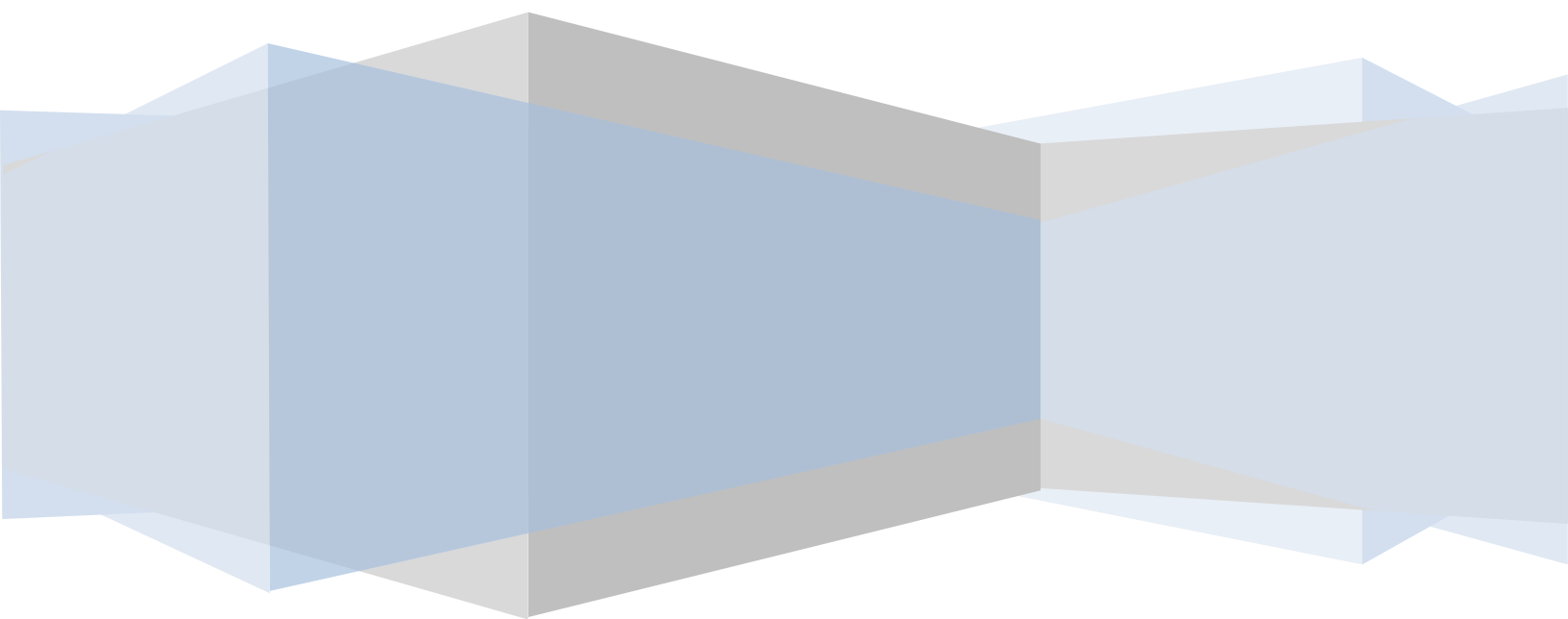


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACCESS ACROSS AMERICA: FIRST REPORT OF THE CIVIL JUSTICE INFRASTRUCTURE MAPPING PROJECT

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OCTOBER 7, 2011



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ACCESS ACROSS AMERICA is the first-ever state-by-state portrait of the services available to assist the U.S. public in accessing civil justice. The report documents, for the nation as a whole and individually for the 50 states and the District of Columbia:

- Who is eligible for free civil legal information, advice or representation (civil legal assistance services);
- How civil legal assistance services are produced and delivered;
- How eligible people may connect with services;
- How civil legal assistance is funded;
- How civil legal assistance is coordinated;
- How both no-fee and fee-generating limited-scope civil legal services are regulated.

The overall picture is one of a great diversity of programs and provision models, with very little coordination at either the state or the national level.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

➤ DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY

The existing civil legal assistance infrastructure is, in effect, the output of many public-private partnerships, most of them on a small scale. Publicly supported programs exist to provide assistance in accessing civil justice to a wide range of groups, including the low-income population, the elderly, American Indians, veterans, homeless people, people with disabilities, and people with HIV/AIDS. In addition, some free services are offered to the general public. States exhibit a great diversity of models for delivering civil legal assistance and for connecting with eligible populations. Innovative means of connecting with clients and delivering services are becoming more wide-spread, including co-located services, hotlines, and various forms of court-based limited legal assistance. Funding for civil legal assistance comes from a wide range of public and private sources.

➤ FRAGMENTATION AND INEQUALITY

States differ substantially in the resources available to support civil legal assistance, in the kinds of services that are available, and in the groups served by existing programs. Little coordination exists for civil legal assistance, and existing mechanisms of coordination often have powers only of exhortation and consultation. Thus, in most states, the public's civil legal needs are not routinely assessed and no entity can ensure that services in specific areas match the needs of the eligible populations in those areas. However, even with these limited powers, the presence of coordination mechanisms is related to some of the differences between states in funding for civil legal assistance and may affect the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

➤ GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY

Diversity and fragmentation combine to create an access to civil justice infrastructure characterized by large inequalities both between states and within them. In this context, geography is destiny: the services available to people from eligible populations who face civil justice problems are determined not by what their problems are or the kinds of services they may need, but rather by where they happen to live.