

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

THE PATH TO LAWYER WELL-BEING

Across the nation, lawyers' assistance programs are encouraged by a new report that has every potential to be the catalyst for long-overdue change in the legal profession.

The report calls for all major stakeholders to get involved firsthand in a mission to support the wellness and mental health of judges, lawyers and law students. Titled "The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change," the report is by far the most comprehensive document ever generated as to precisely how courts, regulators, law firms, law schools, bar associations, liability carriers and lawyers' assistance programs can best work in concert to improve our collective well-being.

All stakeholders are encouraged to apply their respective experience and influence within a unified mission to effectively address the plague of substance abuse, mental health and general well-being threats that damage so many lives and careers in our profession (and often clients as well).

The report was generated by a national task force initiated by the American Bar Association's Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs (ABA CoLAP), the National Organization of Bar Counsel (NOBC) and the Association of Professional Responsibility Lawyers (APRL). Their recommendations represent literally thousands of hours of work. Scores of dedicated individuals participated, all with the experience required to provide a realistic road map to improved wellness. The full report can be accessed at JLAP's website: www.louisianajlap.com.

In 2015, a prior report was released, "The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys" (also available at www.louisianajlap.com). It confirmed what we already knew — a shocking

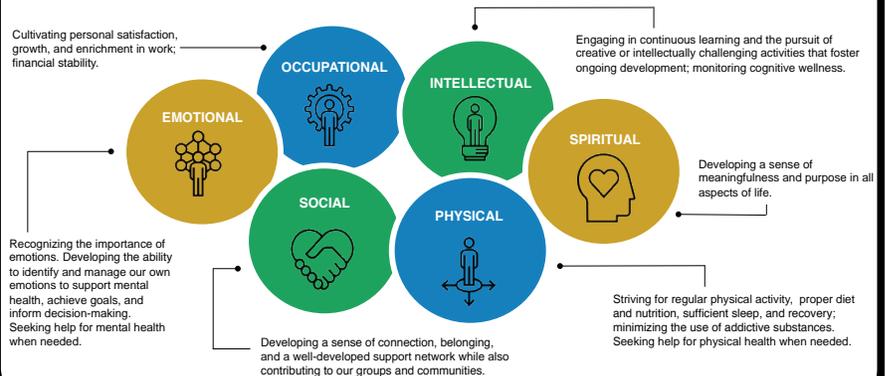


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"...if you can, lend a hand. Reach out to JLAP
for ideas on how you can get involved."

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Defining Lawyer Well-Being

A continuous process in which lawyers strive for thriving in each dimension of their lives:



From *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being Report*

percentage of our colleagues in the legal profession are suffering from various degrees of diagnosable substance abuse and mental health disorders. In addition, many more still are simply unhappy and unfulfilled to various degrees in the practice of the law.

To sum it up neatly, this has been a two-stage process. The 2015 study provided a stunning snapshot of the true pervasiveness

of mental health and well-being issues within our profession. Now, in 2017, and in direct response to the very serious challenges identified in the 2015 study, we have in-hand a comprehensive report that realistically sets a new course for all of us to steer toward if we are, in fact, going to do what must be done to improve the health and well-being of legal professionals.

There are five central themes of focus in

the 2017 report: 1) identifying stakeholders and the role each of us can play in reducing the level of toxicity in our profession; 2) eliminating the stigma associated with help-seeking behaviors; 3) emphasizing that well-being is an indispensable part of a lawyer's duty of competence; 4) educating lawyers, judges and law students on lawyer well-being issues; and 5) taking small, incremental steps to change how law is practiced and how lawyers are regulated to instill greater well-being in the profession.

As to the overarching, general recommendation for all stakeholders, the authors suggest that the first step is for everyone to acknowledge the problems and take responsibility. Every single person can make a difference within his/her own spheres to shift from "passive denial of problems to proactive support for change."

The report recommends that all stakeholders partner directly with, and ensure stable and sufficient funding for, their state-based lawyer assistance program to deliver specialized clinical assistance and programming specifically tailored for the needs of lawyers, judges and law students.

Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP)

Your call is absolutely confidential as a matter of law.

Toll-free (866)354-9334
Email: jlap@louisianajlap.com

The Louisiana JLAP (Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program) has been aggressively and proactively improving its programming and services in the last five years. JLAP is now a comprehensive, full-service professionals' program that provides a complete array of confidential mental health support services to the profession. For information on all of JLAP's various services, go to: www.louisianajlap.com.

JLAP remains dedicated to delivering the finest professional support possible to the Louisiana legal profession and its stakeholders as we all begin to traverse this new path together toward significantly improving lawyer mental health, wellness and well-being.

We need *your* help, too! Per the authors

of the 2017 report: "We invite you to read this report, which sets forth the basis for why the legal profession is at a tipping point, and we present these recommendations and action plans for building a more positive future. We call on you to take action and hear our clarion call." So, if you can, lend a hand. Reach out to JLAP for ideas on how you can get involved. Encourage those within your sphere of influence to get involved, too.

If you or someone you know is suffering right now, reach out confidentially to JLAP for help. Call the helpline at (866)354-9334, email jlap@louisianajlap.com, or visit the website: www.louisianajlap.com.

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