



NCLAP
NORTH CAROLINA
LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NC LAP Annual Report

August 1, 2025 - July 31, 2026



**Protecting the public by
ensuring the health and integrity
of the legal profession.**



Message from the Executive Director



This year marks our 46th year of operation. We opened 132 total files and closed 74 files, resulting in a total of 381 open cases at year's end. The rate of self-referral to the LAP remains high at 56%, while 31% of LAP referrals came from colleagues, friends, and family. Less than half of 1% are 'mandatory' referrals, while more than 99% of LAP clients participate voluntarily. Anxiety, depression, stress, and alcoholism continue to be the primary issues

lawyers face. Research is finally catching up with life, and thanks to recent study findings, we now have reliable empirical evidence pointing to professional stressors as the underlying causes for so many of these conditions.

10-Year Mental Health Study Update

The ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP) was interested in updating the 2015 landmark study on lawyer mental health. North Carolina participated in the (blind, randomized) study. The study window closed in late 2025. Over 36,000 lawyers participated nationally, making it the largest study of lawyer mental health and well-being ever conducted.

The study found that mental health distress, burnout, and hazardous drinking remain common among lawyers and are most closely associated with long work hours, litigation, and conflict between work and family responsibilities. Burnout emerged as particularly important, with higher levels of burnout strongly associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Almost half of lawyers participating in the study (41%) reported that their time in the legal profession had been detrimental to their mental health, and 81% believe it is either very important (52%), or important (29%) for the profession to focus greater effort on lawyer well-being. The findings suggest that efforts to improve lawyer well-being should look beyond individual coping strategies and explore ways to reduce work-related exhaustion and the extent to which professional demands interfere with lawyers' personal lives. View the [published study](#) or the [summary article](#).

Minority Outreach Conference

In light of recent legislation, and in consultation with State Bar leadership, we transitioned organizational responsibility for the Minority Outreach Conference to Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company and the North

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Carolina Association of Black Lawyers. The Minority Outreach Conference, one of my greatest joys, is in good hands.

Crisis Response in Wake of Violence

Unfortunately, violence against lawyers and judges at law firms and court houses continues. Several years ago, we developed a [crisis response plan](#) for use in the wake of a crisis event. Sadly, we have relied on it recently. We learned that lawyer assistance programs in other states have used it in response to crisis events and later, as a blueprint for a similar document applicable in their jurisdictions.

The Village

A note about our volunteers. In the fall of 2025, I received the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Program's Distinguished Service Award. I'm including an excerpt from my acceptance speech. "As I have thought about it, it really feels like I'm accepting this award as a figurehead on behalf of a whole bunch of other people. So much of what I have done involves harnessing other people's energies and helping ideas take shape. ... Our effectiveness as a program lies squarely with the effectiveness of our clinical and administrative staff and our statewide network of volunteers. Doing this work takes a village."

LAP volunteers are our village. They provide the foundation for so much of what we do. From CLE to our support group meetings, from writing articles to recording podcast interviews and mentoring, they understand and embrace the idea enshrined in the service work motto that "we can only keep it [serenity, equanimity, joy, and sobriety] by giving it away." They have a uniquely tailored message of hope for other lawyers, serving as role models for so many who think happiness and serenity cannot coexist with a career in the legal profession. Their honesty, courage, humility and transparency were hailed in a [5-star Sidebar podcast review](#) penned by the creator of Elevate Society, Tal Gur. They don't just "talk the talk," they truly "walk the walk".

Robynn Moraites

Lawyer Assistance Program Overview

History of NC LAP

The North Carolina Lawyer Assistance Program's ("NC LAP") roots began in 1979 with the assemblage of a group of lawyer volunteers who were themselves recovering alcoholics who saw the need to offer assistance to other lawyers suffering from addiction and alcoholism. The group was named the Positive Action for Lawyers ("PALS") committee. In 1994, the State Bar formally recognized the PALS Committee and incorporated PALS as part of the State Bar administration and infrastructure. In 1999, further recognizing the need for additional assistance for lawyers dealing with mental health issues not related to substance use disorder, the State Bar then formed the FRIENDS committee.

Today both programs have been merged into a single Lawyer Assistance Program. NC LAP currently has a staff consisting of a director, two clinicians, a field coordinator and 2 office administration and special projects personnel.

NC LAP has a Board consisting of three State Bar Councilors, three LAP volunteers, and three clinicians or experts in the field of mental health and addiction. NC LAP also has a steering committee of volunteers from around the state who assist in the execution of special initiatives. NC LAP is also part of the ABA's Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP), a network of LAPs serving nearly all 50 states in the U.S.

LAP Services

- Assessment
- Referral
- Case Management
- Peer Support
- Intervention
- Facilitated Support Groups
- Educational Programs

Mission of NC LAP

NC LAP is a service of the North Carolina State Bar which provides free, confidential, non-disciplinary assistance to lawyers, judges and law students in addressing mental health issues, including problems with drugs or alcohol, and other life stresses which impair or may impair an attorney's ability to effectively practice law. NC LAP assistance is designed to promote recovery, protect the public, prevent disciplinary problems for lawyers, and strengthen the profession. In sum, our mission is to:

1. Protect the public from impaired lawyers and judges;
2. Assist lawyers, judges, and law students with any issues that are or may be impairing;
3. Support the on-going recovery efforts of lawyers and judges; and
4. Educate the legal community about the issues of substance use disorder and mental health.

NC LAP Goals and Guiding Principles

NC LAP Program Goals:

- To respond to the referral and identification of legal professionals who may be impaired and need assistance;
- To assist NC LAP clients in their personal recovery from alcohol or drug problems, or mental health conditions;
- To educate the legal community on identification, assessment, referral, treatment and resources available to meet the needs of judges, lawyers, and law students;
- To provide a network of trained volunteers who are available to respond to the needs of NC LAP clients through a peer assistance model;
- To monitor and assist clients while they work to gain admission to practice law, rehabilitate and return to the practice of law or to a better quality of life;
- To establish and maintain a cooperative and on-going working relationship with the Superior and District Courts of North Carolina and their judges, the NC State Bar Office of Counsel, the CLE Board and other administrative offices of the NC State Bar, the Board of Law Examiners and the legal community at large.

NC LAP Guiding Principles:

- The program recognizes that the most effective way to protect the public is to insure the mental health and emotional integrity of the legal profession;
- The program recognizes that addiction, mental health issues and physical disabilities are treatable conditions and are not moral issues;
- The program is motivated by a humanitarian concern for the legal community and the public;
- The program also recognizes that accountability is key in treating many impairments;
- Impaired lawyers and judges are ethically obligated to seek assistance and to participate in services necessary to renew their full effectiveness;
- Lawyers and judges have a moral and ethical responsibility to recognize the signs and symptoms of a colleague who may be impaired and to assist the colleague in accessing appropriate services.

How the Program Works

About 50% of calls to LAP are self-referrals from those who recognize they have a problem and ask for help. About 90% of these problems range from temporary conditions caused by grief, relationship issues, or work difficulties to ongoing struggles with stress, anxiety and depression. About 10% of the self-referred clients are calling about alcoholism or addiction. Usually LAP clinicians do an assessment, in person wherever possible, or refer the individual to an outside professional for an assessment. LAP works with treatment programs throughout the country as well as with individual therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, and often makes referrals to these professionals. We can also arrange peer support with one of our trained LAP volunteers who has experienced a similar problem and successfully managed it. If clinically appropriate, we invite the client to attend the local lawyer support group meeting.

For those clients who are not self-referred, about 40% of calls come from colleagues, judges, friends, and family members who are concerned about a lawyer, judge, or law student who may be showing signs of a mood disorder or a problem with substance use disorder. Of that 40%, about 90% of those calls are concerns about alcoholism or substance use disorder. Our clinician will offer suggestions on ways to express concern and motivate the individual to get help. Often, in the case of these referrals, the person making the referral prefers to remain anonymous and not participate further in the process. Sometimes, LAP will refer the caller to a professional interventionist or the LAP will assist in conducting either a formal or an informal intervention.

Confidentiality is the Cornerstone

All client interactions with LAP are held in strict confidence as are any referrals. The only time information is shared is when an individual signs a release and asks LAP to report on his or her behalf to another organization or individual. Confidentiality is guaranteed by Rules 1.6(c) and 8.3(c), by ethics opinion 2001 FEO 5, and by statute NCGS §84-32.1(d).

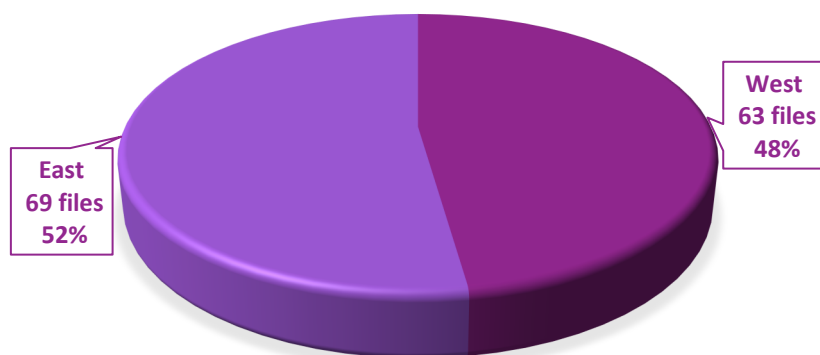
Intervention is a group process that, with respect and concern, helps an individual who may not realize he or she has a serious problem with alcohol or other drug use. The objective is to dismantle denial, stop family and friends from enabling the subject's behavior, and initiate change. For informal interventions without a professional interventionist, LAP uses a peer intervention model with two trained, experienced volunteers who are in recovery from the same issue. The LAP volunteers meet with the subject individual and share their experience with him or her. In the course of that meeting, they inform the individual about the services offered by LAP. Because recovery is an ongoing process, we also continue to work with individuals following treatment as part of an after-care plan.

Although we address serious mental health and addiction problems, we address and offer assistance for a range of issues within the category of general life problems. We encourage lawyers to seek assistance for less severe issues of stress, grief, or simply feeling overwhelmed. Everyone has problems at times and the confidential help available through LAP can prevent problems from becoming more severe.

Whatever the issue is that brings an individual to LAP for assistance, we offer peer support, on-going follow-up and case management services.

The Year in Review ~ Statistical Snapshot

132 NEW & REOPENED FILES BY REGION



New cases/files

NC LAP is now in its 46th year of operation. For the 2025-2026 reporting year we opened 132 total files (94 new and 38 reopened) resulting in 455 total files. We closed 74 files resulting in a combined total of 381 open cases at year's end.

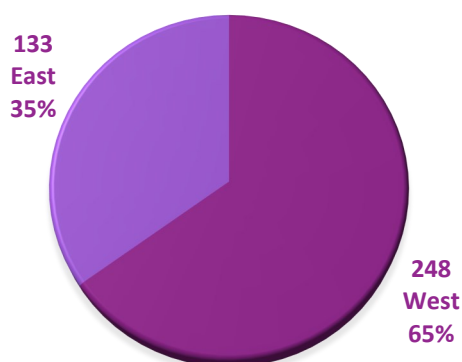
These numbers tracking new case volume remain consistent year after year. Any given year's numbers taken in isolation, may lead to a

misperception that the LAP only touches a small population of the Bar. However, based on cumulative data collected beginning in the mid-1990's, we know that LAP has actively worked with +/- 15% of the Bar (including judges).

Many of the calls that do not result in the opening of a new file include situations where a lawyer or a judge calls seeking guidance for next best steps. For example:

- Lawyers who have attended a CLE where we spoke and are seeking a recommendation for a good therapist in his or her local area, but where it is clear there is not a need for full LAP involvement or case management.
- An older lawyer may need to wind down a practice and the judge or lawyer who is concerned does not know how to approach the individual or what to say. We coach them and eventually become directly involved if needed, but we typically do not open a file.
- A Bar Councilor, judge or lawyer may call to ask for guidance about a certain lawyer or situation without giving us the name of the lawyer at issue. We will often coach the caller through that situation and/or provide some referral resources.
- A lawyer has a child (ranging from teen to middle aged) who has an impairment requiring treatment and needs a referral for a treatment center or mental health provider.
- Lawyers sometimes call because they need treatment center recommendations for non-lawyer friends or clients who are impaired.

TOTAL CLIENTS BY REGION



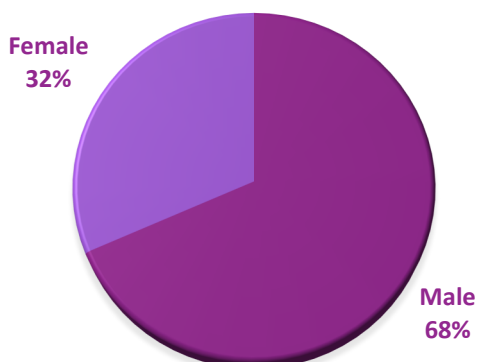
Referral Sources

The rate of self-referral to LAP remains high at 56%, while 31% of LAP referrals came from colleagues, law firms, friends, family and judges who expressed concern about a lawyer or judge. The remaining 13% of referrals came from law schools, the board of law examiners, other LAPs, therapists, physicians, state bar staff, the grievance committee or the DHC.

Referred by	
Another LAP	2
Another Lawyer	72
Bar Staff	7
Board of Law Examiners	8
DA	0
DHC	4
Employer	2
Family	6
Firm (his or hers)	16
Friend, non-lawyer	2
Grievance	5
Investigators/SCA	0
Judge	19
Law School	17
Law Student	0
Local Bar	1
Other	5
Physician	1
Self	212
Therapist	2
Client Grand Total	381



GENDER

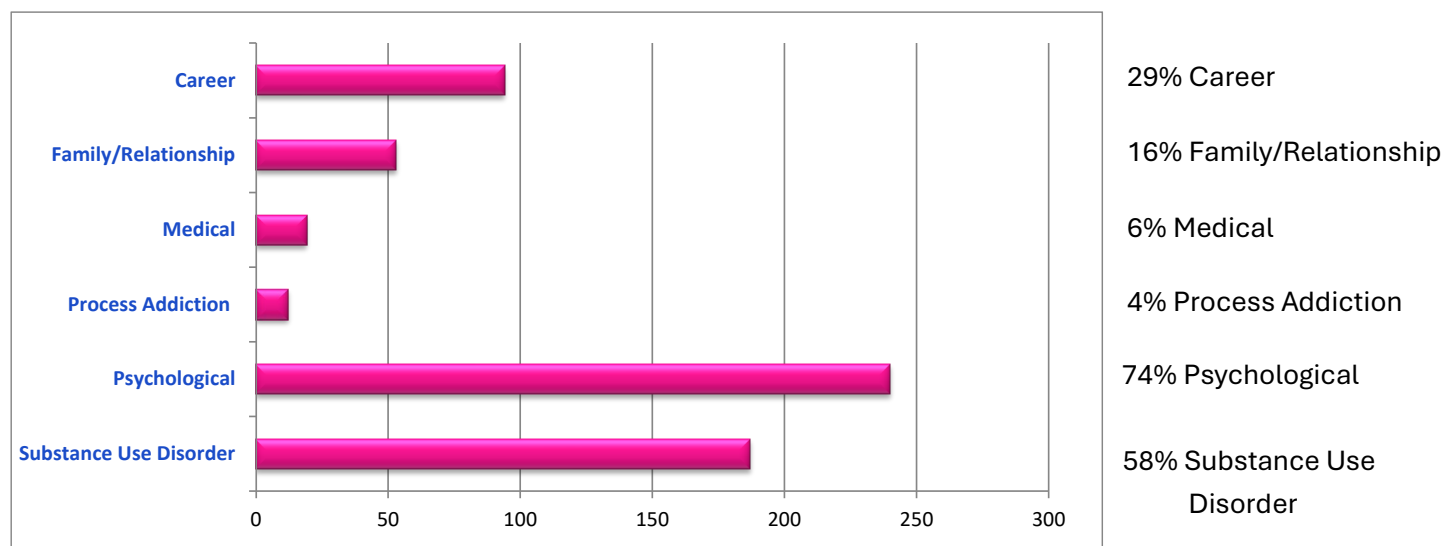


Gender

The gender breakdown for clients seeking services is the same as last year: 68% men and 32% women. This statistic stays generally consistent year after year, shifting only a percentage point or two.

Many clients exhibit problems in more than one category, so there is overlap in documenting the issues. We continue to see psychological problems more often than other issues and these frequently coexist with substance use disorders. Although lawyers rarely come to us with only career related issues, many describe their job-related concerns that exist along with depression, anxiety and problem drinking. The term “process addiction” refers to compulsive behaviors such as problem gambling, compulsive spending or sexual addiction including overuse of internet for sexual reasons. And more lawyers are turning to the LAP for assistance in dealing with spouses or children that are having serious mental health issues or substance use disorders.

The table below shows the breakdown of the issues in real numbers and percentages*:

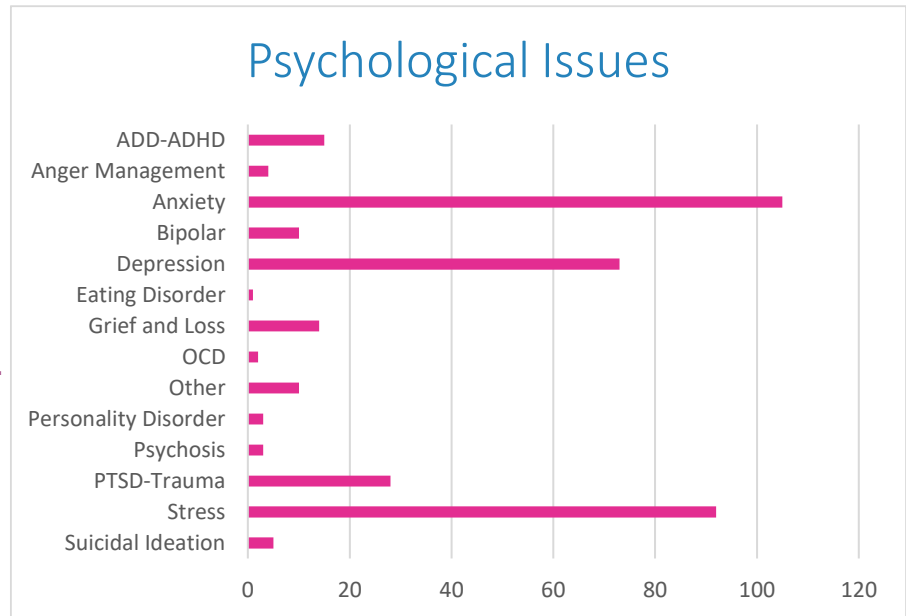


* Because lawyers often have more than one issue, these percentages do not equal 100%. Instead, they show the total percent of 381 clients that are dealing with a given issue.

Psychological Issues

This year we assisted 240 lawyers, judges, and law students with psychological issues. The data indicates that lawyers struggling with psychological issues are often dealing with more than one single issue. Anxiety, depression and debilitating stress are the most frequent issues.

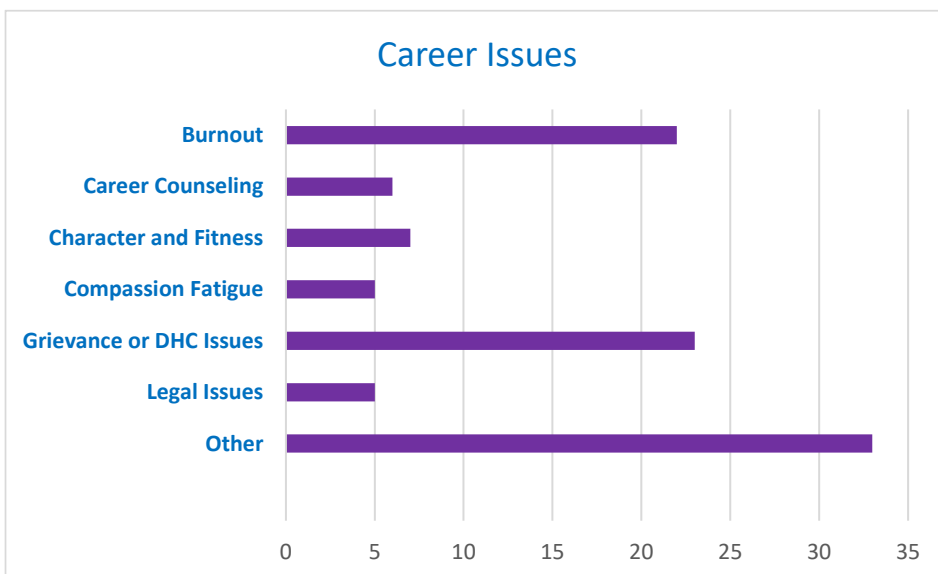
We now have reliable empirical evidence demonstrating that the culture and demands of the profession itself are the greatest factors causing these issues for most of the lawyers who are struggling with them.



The Well-Being in Law movement is trying to address the toxic culture issues by advocating for structural changes across the nation. In the meantime, behavioral and job-related changes will make the greatest impact as opposed to pharmacological interventions. Anti-depressants certainly have a place and can play a key role, but for lasting happiness and satisfaction in the profession, most lawyers will need to do additional work to move from surviving to thriving.

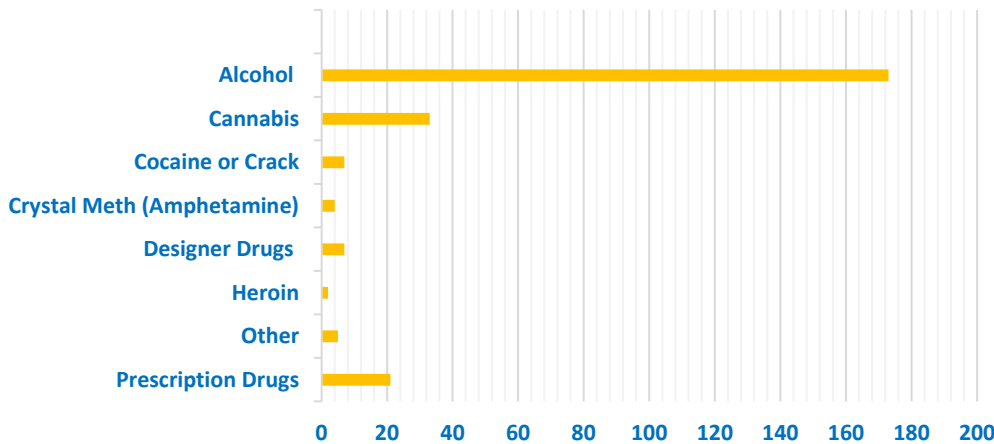
Career Issues

We assisted 94 lawyers and judges who were dealing with career issues. As stated above, a large percentage of the depression, anxiety and debilitating stress cases we see are caused by the profession itself. The specific issues related to their work in the profession are indicated in this graph.



Alcohol & Drug Problems

Substance Use Disorder

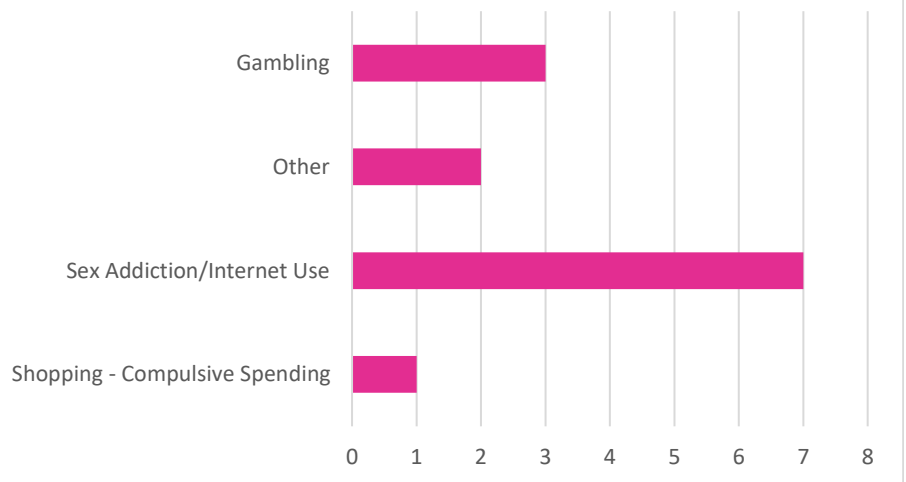


We assisted 187 lawyers, judges, and law students with alcohol or drug problems. Alcohol abuse and dependency continue to be the single largest problem lawyers face when there is a substance use disorder present. Based on the ABA-Hazelden study, we know there are many more lawyers with this problem than are involved with the LAP.

Process Addictions

We assisted 13 lawyers and judges with process addictions. While the word addiction traditionally refers to dependency on alcohol and drugs, it also applies to compulsive behaviors, such as gambling, sex, work, shopping/spending, internet usage, or other technologically driven activities such as video gaming. The suffering, losses, and devastating consequences stemming from process addictions

Process Addiction

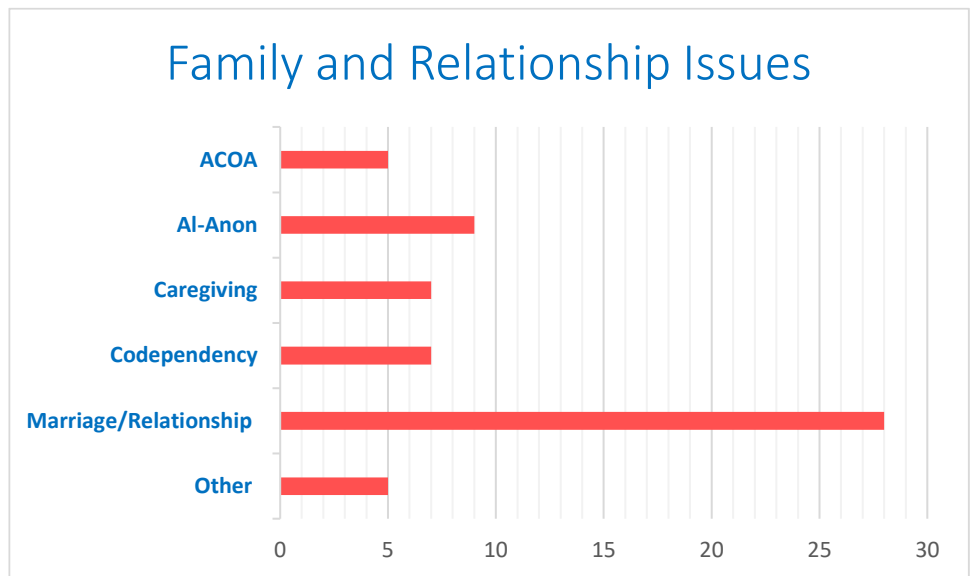


are similar to those of substance use disorders. Process addictions follow a characteristic course with similar phases and stages. A process addiction follows a destructive process characterized by a recognizable set of signs and symptoms. It is also progressive in nature like a substance use disorder; left untreated, it will only continue to get worse over time. The highest percentage we are currently seeing involve use of sexual internet websites.

Family Issues

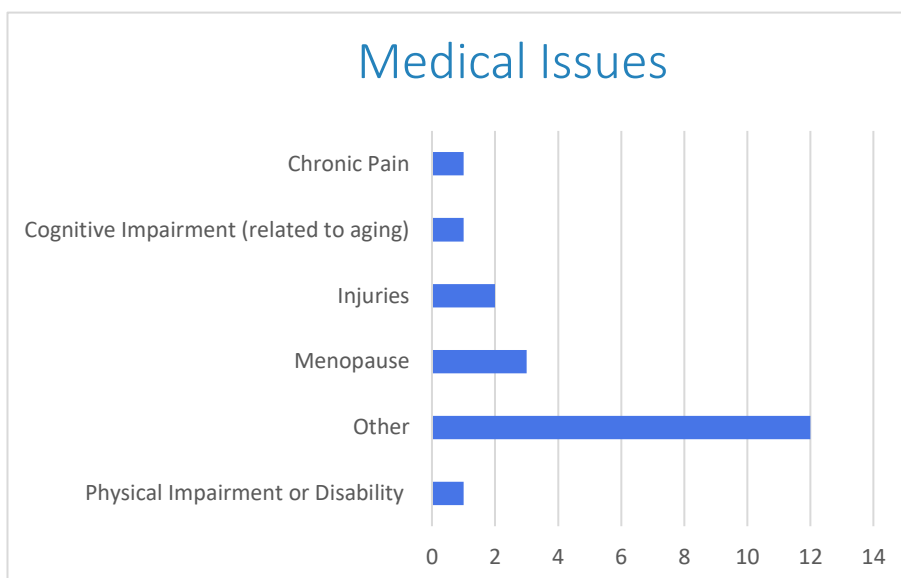
We assisted 53 lawyers, judges, and law students experiencing family issues. Some lawyers have been deeply affected emotionally and psychologically by the substance use disorder of a parent or a grandparent. The syndrome and symptoms associated with such a scenario is “ACOA” which stands for Adult Child of an Alcoholic. We have lawyers who also seek our assistance because they have a

spouse, partner or child who is having problems with alcohol or drugs (Al-Anon). The stress of having to be a primary caregiver for a disabled or chronically ill parent or spouse can also take a toll. A majority of our clients experience some form of marriage or relationship difficulty, but we only track those who have this issue as a primary issue.



Medical Issues

We assisted 20 lawyers and judges experiencing medical issues. Sometimes lawyers face a medical issue, physical disability or injury that is problematic enough that it affects the lawyer’s ability to practice. Often the issue warrants assistance with coping and management strategies as well as support for the on-going emotional strife of dealing with a medical issue.



Continuing Legal Education and Outreach

Professional Well-being CLE Presentations

We presented 44 live or live webinar CLE programs this year (see Appendix A). We cannot track how many video replays are offered.

Continuing legal education programs remain the single most effective outreach tool we have available. On average, we receive at least one referral from almost every CLE talk we give. North Carolina remains a leader in its CLE requirements and many states around the country are only beginning to add mental health topics as either an approved ethics hour or a mandatory stand-alone hour.



Volunteers

LAP's Trained Volunteers Make a Difference

LAP volunteers are the core foundation of NC LAP. We could not accomplish a fraction of what we accomplish without their dedication and hard work on our behalf. They do any number of the following activities:

- Speak at CLE, both stories and specific topics
- Visit lawyers who have been referred to LAP to explain the assistance the program can offer
- Attend local discussion/support groups
- Write articles for the Sidebar or the quarterly State Bar Journal
- Be a guest on our Sidebar podcast
- Serve on leadership committees and boards that undertake specific initiatives to support the program
- Meet lawyers for coffee or lunch to mentor and introduce them to others
- Monitor lawyers who are on recovery contracts that require monitoring
- Secure speakers and workshop leaders for retreats

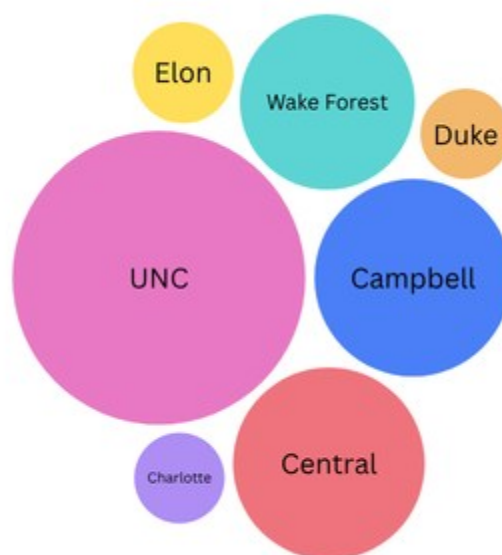
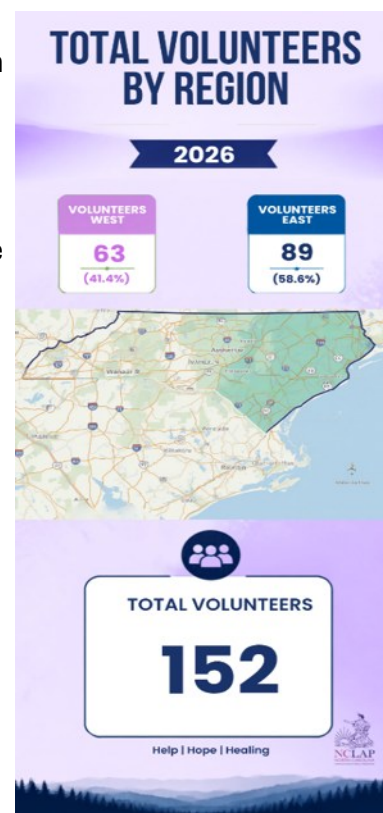
LAP has volunteer opportunities for attorneys and judges 1) who themselves are in recovery from alcohol or drug problems, depression, anxiety or other mental health issues, or 2) who have experienced a family member or friend who has suffered from these ailments and who learned how to effectively deal with that situation. We are continually trying to build our volunteer base on the family side.

LAP volunteers are not volunteers in the usual sense. All LAP volunteers receive formal and informal training from LAP staff. Volunteers are individually selected to be paired with clients based upon the facts and circumstances of their experience and that of the lawyer who is of concern.

We currently have **152 actively licensed** volunteers as more volunteers continue to retire and transfer to inactive status. **Retired or inactive volunteers remain meaningfully engaged in service to our program, bringing the total to 189.**

Our volunteer base is represented by the following NC law schools (some of our volunteers did not attend law school in NC).

NC Law School	
Campbell	19
Charlotte	4
Duke	4
Elon	5
Central	18
UNC	42
Wake Forest	15
Total	107



Volunteers

LAP Volunteer Involvement

We continue to rely on our active volunteer network as much as ever.

In 2021, we launched [Sidebar](#), a podcast, to accompany our [quarterly Sidebar e-newsletter](#). From the beginning, we had a national and international audience. We currently show over 4,100 downloads/unique listens. This represents 900 more than last year. A law school professor let us know that she has integrated our podcast as required listening for many of the class assignments.

Our volunteers have been submitting stories and articles to be used as a basis for a podcast interview. Their stories are honest, self-reflective, insightful, and inspire hope. We have released about [45 episodes](#) so far, having added several episodes this year. Topics include [imposter syndrome](#), [compassion fatigue](#), the [fight or flight](#) response, [stigma and anonymity](#), being a [parent of an alcoholic](#), [depression](#), [suicide](#), [alcoholism](#), and regular [mindfulness-based tools](#) with Laura Mahr. One can listen to the podcast directly from the LAP website or on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), or anywhere you listen to your podcasts. You can subscribe to the podcast directly on your player of choice to be alerted when new episodes drop.

Lawyers and judges are inundated with email and reading material; it is easy for LAP's outreach messaging to get lost in the shuffle. We are excited about the podcast as a compelling way to reach a broader audience, to destigmatize and reinforce recovery seeking behavior.



Administration

Training

- Our 44th Annual LAP Conference was held Nov. 7-9, 2025 at the Hotel Ballast in Wilmington. Our 45th Annual LAP Conference is scheduled for Nov. 6-8, 2026 at the Crowne Plaza Resort in Asheville.

Local Volunteer Meetings

The LAP continues the facilitation of local volunteer meetings to provide greater continuity and support in meeting the needs of lawyers new in recovery and allowing volunteers the chance to grow in their own recoveries. Local volunteer support meetings are held in the following areas (contact the clinical coordinator in the area for more information as to time and location).

Asheville	Greensboro
Charlotte	Greenville
Durham-Chapel Hill	Raleigh
Winston-Salem	Wilmington

LAP Board

Takiya Lewis Blalock, Chair
 Shelli Buckner, Vice Chair
 Chris Budnick
 Tim Carroll
 Paul Derrick
 Anthony Flanagan
 Bill Ingraham
 Craig Lynch
 Jay Vannoy



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 LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Crawford Cleveland rotated off the board and Paul Derrick was appointed to fill the LAP Volunteer seat. Bill Ingraham was reappointed for a second term for the “clinician/special knowledge” seat. Takiya Lewis Blalock was reappointed for a second term to fill the Bar Councilor seat. She was also reappointed chair and Shelli Buckner was appointed as vice chair.

LAP Board Meetings

LAP Board meetings were held in-person with a hybrid option for those unable to travel on January 22, 2026 and April 23, 2026 as part of the quarterly Bar Council meetings. The July 17, 2026 meeting was held by Zoom the week before the quarterly Bar Council meeting.

Appendix A—CLE

2025		
August		
8/1/2025	NCAMA Summer Conference	Asheville
8/21/2025	NC Child Support Conference - NC Child Support Council #122	Charlotte
September		
9/4/2025	Duke Energy	Charlotte
9/12/2025	Judicial District Bar 17	Burlington
9/12/2025	NC Association of County Commissioners	Raleigh
9/25/2025	UNC Law School	Chapel Hill
9/26/2025	AILA Carolina	Charlotte
October		
10/3/2025	NC Association of Women Attorneys	Raleigh
10/9/2025	Wake County Bar	Raleigh
10/9/2025	NC Department of Justice	Raleigh
10/10/2025	District 2 Bar CLE	Virtual
10/10/2025	Buncombe County Bar	Virtual
10/15/2025	Smith Anderson Law Firm	Raleigh
10/17/2025	Moore County Attorney's Office	Pinehurst
10/30/2025	NC School of Government	Virtual
November		
11/3/2025	Moore County Bar Association	Pinehurst
11/19/2025	Chief Justice Commission on Professionalism	Lincolnton
11/21/2025	NC Bar Association	Greensboro
December		
12/2/2025	Lewis and Roberts Law Firm	Raleigh
12/3/2025	NC Bar Association	Cary
12/8/2025	Judge Beth Tanner - Hoke County District Court	Raeford

Appendix A—CLE (continued)

12/3/2025	NC Bar Association	Cary
12/8/2025	Judge Beth Tanner - Hoke County District Court	Raeford
2026		
January		
1/8/2026	Charlotte Estate Planning Council	Charlotte
1/13/2026	Legal Aid	Raleigh
1/29/2026	Cumberland County Bar Association	Fayetteville
1/29/2026	K&L Gates	Chapel Hill
February		
2/5/2026	NC Bar Association Anti Trust Section	Cary
2/5/2026	Kilpatrick Law Firm	Winston Salem
2/11/2026	Ricci Law	Raleigh
2/17/2026	Mecklenburg Bar Foundateion	Charlotte
2/20/2026	NC Bar Association Business/Corporate Council Section	Greensboro
2/27/2026	Wake County Bar Association	Raleigh
March		
3/5/2026	Chicago Title	Charlotte
3/6/2026	Judicial District Bar 28 Meeting	New London
3/10/2026	Chicago Title	Raleigh
3/12/2026	Cabarrus Co Judicial District Bar Association	Concord
April		
4/8/2026	NC Central University	Durham
4/17/2026	UNC School of Government	Chapel Hill
4/23/2026	Office of Capital Defender	Chapel Hill
May		
5/4/2026	UNC School of Government - Superior Court Judges	Chapel Hill
5/6/2026	Novant Health	Charlotte
5/15/2025	Judicial District Bar 18 Meeting	Chapel Hill
5/15/2025	Capital City Lawyers Assoc/Wake Co Bar	Raleigh
June		
6/5/2026	Judicial District Bar 36 Meeting	Hickory
6/26/2026	NC Creditors Bar Association	Winston Salem