LEGAL AID ONTARIO
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Legal Aid Ontario:
Advancing Shared Access to Justice Goals

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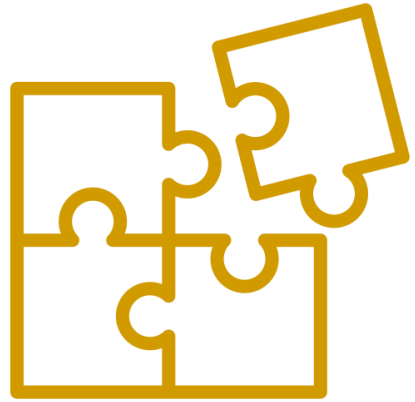
November 5, 2026

Agenda

1. Shared access to justice goals
2. Initiatives supporting sustainable legal aid practice
3. 2025-26: Additional updates and achievements

Shared access to justice goals

- In 2023, Federation of Ontario Law Associations (FOLA) brought forward a motion addressing lawyer shortages in underserved communities and key practice areas.
- The motion informed subsequent work by the Law Society of Ontario (LSO)'s Access to Justice Committee and recommendations approved by Convocation.
- Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) participated in these discussions and shares the following objectives:
  - Recruit and retain lawyers
  - Strengthen mentorship and professional development
  - Expand pathways to practice in Northern, rural and underserved communities
  - Increase awareness of legal aid and public-interest practice
  - Improve access to justice for vulnerable Ontarians



The initiatives on the following slides demonstrate how LAO is advancing these shared priorities

Initiatives supporting sustainable legal aid practice

Building & strengthening LAO’s roster

- A strong and sustainable roster is essential to ensuring access to legal aid services across Ontario
- LAO is pursuing a range of initiatives to:
  - Support and retain current roster members
  - Increase awareness of legal aid practice among students and early-career lawyers
  - Strengthen pathways into legal aid work
  - Reduce barriers to roster participation
  - Expand access to services in Northern, rural and other underserved communities



LAO's approach focuses on both supporting current lawyers and encouraging future participation in legal aid practice

Supporting roster members

LAO continues to invest in initiatives that support roster members throughout their careers:



Retaining experienced roster members is critical to maintaining access to legal services for clients and supporting the next generation of practitioners





Creating pathways to practice

LAO is working with the Law Society of Ontario (LSO), law schools and justice sector partners to increase awareness of legal aid practice opportunities and encourage future participation. Recent initiatives include:

LAO / TMU System Navigator pilot	Law school outreach and career events	Legal Aid Summit
• A partnership with TMU's Lincoln Alexander School of Law that provides students with experiential learning opportunities in a court-based setting, assisting individuals navigating the criminal justice system • Exposes future lawyers to client needs and access-to-justice challenges	• Promotes awareness of LAO and career opportunities in access to justice • Connects students with legal aid practitioners and organizations	• Annual event in partnership with LSO that brings together roster members, students and new lawyers • Provides practical guidance on building and sustaining a legal aid practice • Showcases practice insights and professional development opportunities

Addressing service gaps

LAO is taking steps to increase awareness of legal aid practice opportunities in areas experiencing roster pressures, particularly Northern Ontario and other underserved regions. A recent example:

LAO-developed course at Bora Laskin Faculty of Law, Lakehead University

In September 2026, LAO launched a new for-credit course at Bora Laskin Faculty of Law. Developed and delivered by LAO, the course introduces students to legal aid practice and access-to-justice issues,, with a focus on Northern rural & Indigenous communities.

Legal Aid in Practice: Advancing Access to Justice in Ontario

- Introduces students to LAO's mandate, services & client populations
- Examines access-to-justice challenges in Northern, rural and Indigenous communities
- Highlights opportunities to build rewarding legal aid practices outside major urban centres
- Encourages future lawyers to consider practicing in communities experiencing legal service shortages

Looking ahead

LAO will continue working with educational institutions, the LSO and legal associations to support a sustainable and geographically diverse roster.

We will continue to developing programs and initiatives guided by the following principles:



Early exposure to legal aid work helps build interest in serving legally aided clients and communities

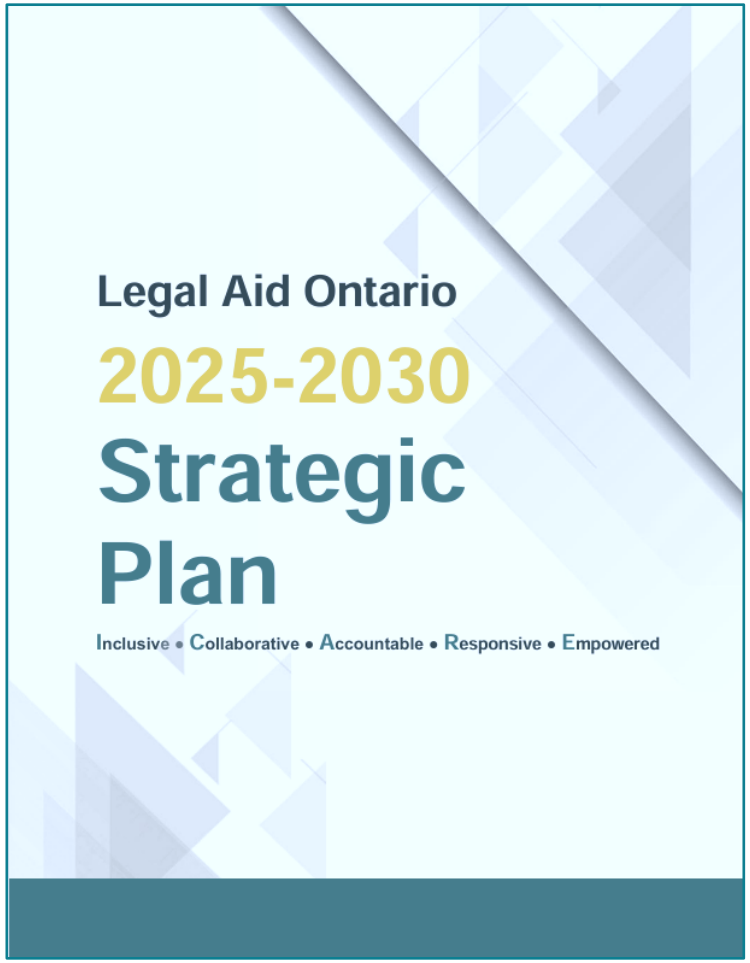
Expanding access to legal services in underserved communities requires long-term investment in awareness, education and pathways to practice



2025-26: Additional updates and achievements

2025-2030 Strategic Plan

https://www.legalaid.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/LAO-Strategic-Plan-2025-2030-EN.pdf



Vision	Mission	Values
Low-income Ontarians are empowered to navigate the justice system with dignity and fairness	Promoting access to justice through high-quality, efficient and sustainable legal aid services	I CARE Inclusive + Collaborative + Accountable + Responsive = Empowered



Services delivered in 2025-26

In fiscal year 2025-26, LAO delivered over **1.8 million services.**

This a **22% increase** over FY 2024-25.

Certificates	Duty counsel	Clinics
LAO issued over **131,000 certificates**	Duty counsel assisted in approximately **1.6 million matters**	Community legal clinics delivered **131,000 services**



Financial eligibility expansion

- LAO expanded its financial eligibility threshold (FET) in March 2025 for criminal and family DC and criminal certificate services
- We hired ~50 court-based staff across 28 high-backlog locations
- More than 4,700 newly eligible clients received criminal certificates in the first year of this 3-year pilot initiative
- 140,500 additional DC clients were assisted due to the expansion

Family size	Previous criminal certificate / duty counsel income thresholds	Expanded income thresholds for family and criminal duty counsel / criminal certificates	Expanded asset thresholds for family and criminal duty counsel / criminal certificates
1	$18,795 / $22,720	$45,440	$15,000
2	$32,131 / $32,131	$45,440	$15,000
3	$39,352 / $39,352	$45,440	$15,000
4	$45,289 / $45,440	$45,440	$15,000
5+	$50,803 / $50,803	$50,803	$15,000

Expanded services in court

Baseline DC services

On March 31, 2025, LAO introduced baseline DC services across the province which include resolution-focused judicial pre-trials in criminal court and settlement conferences in family court.



Legal aid worker (LAW) service expansion

LAO is continuing to expand the role of LAWs (non-lawyers) in court-facing roles for administrative appearances to create capacity for DC to assist with resolution earlier in the process.



LAO's DC service guides are available online:

https://www.legalaid.on.ca/duty-counsel-service-guides/

Self-represented court pilot

- LAO partnered with MAG and OCJ leadership on a case management court pilot for self-represented accused at the Ontario Court of Justice – Toronto (OCJ-T), launched in May 2025
- LAO introduced System Navigators (SNs), a new role created for this initiative to support seamless navigation and access to justice, to support clients by:
  - Providing referrals
  - Assisting with disclosure, forms, and court processes
- With clients attending in person, DC can:
  - Review disclosure
  - Provide advice and representation
  - Conduct same-day Crown pre-trials
- In November 2025, the pilot expanded from four to five days per week

Courthouse applications:

- A LAW is available daily to support legal aid applications and status inquiries
- Clients can apply through LAO's contact centre using courthouse phones
- LAO is exploring expansion to other locations

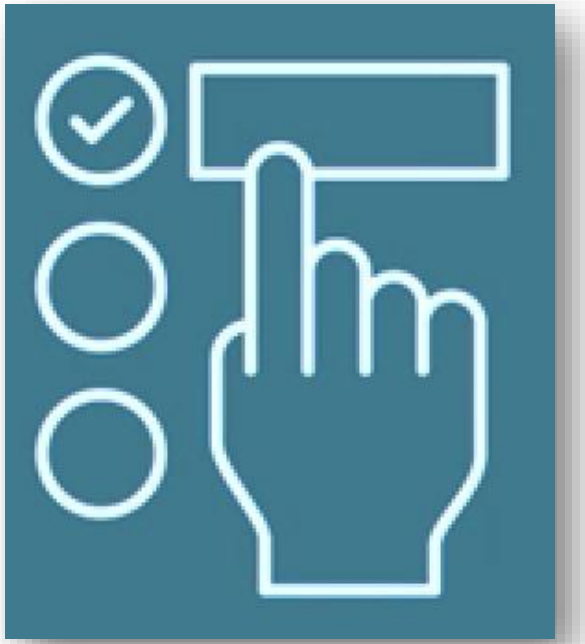
Since time of launch to August 31, 2026, approximately **7,500** accused have received legal aid services and navigational supports and approximately **1,920** cases have resolved in the self-represented court

Launch of Service Finder tool

In June 2025, LAO launched the Service Finder, a guided pathway self-triage tool on our public website.

The tool:

- Allows users to find legal services and access legal information and resources for their legal matter
- Uses Google Maps services to guide users to their nearest service provider location (physical or virtual) to get help on their specific legal issue
- Assists service providers in referring existing and potential clients to services they require in a streamlined, efficient manner
- Is accessed by approximately 1000 members of the public every week



https://www.legalaid.on.ca/news/legal-aid-ontarios-service-finder-tool-is-now-available/

Action Plan for Indigenous Services

- Launched in June 2025
- Establishes priorities to deliver culturally appropriate legal aid services and advance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action
- Guides Indigenous services initiatives over the next five years to better support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit clients



The Plan's Year 1 Report was published in September 2026: https://www.legalaid.on.ca/news/2026-09-29_indigenous-services-action-plan-celebrates-achievements-and-progress/

Thank you

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