

Aboriginal Justice Strategy Update

The mandate of developing an Aboriginal Justice Strategy is to create a three to five year plan to achieve measurable improvements in LAO's services to Aboriginal people. The plan will provide specific options and recommendations to enhance legal aid services.

So far, over 250 individuals including First Nation, Métis and Inuit people, Aboriginal service agencies, Aboriginal political organizations, LAO area office and clinic staff, private bar lawyers, federal and provincial governments have participated in the development of the Aboriginal Justice Strategy.

We valued the input all participants provided and have organized the feedback based on the most commonly heard comments and services issues identified. Many of the ideas and recommendations LAO heard are useful, feasible and affordable.

On June 20, 2008, the Board of Directors approved a Development Paper and 12 immediate initiatives to provide better services to Aboriginal clients.

LAO will be seeking further input and feedback regarding how to prioritise and implement future service initiatives, and seek further input on developing the three to five year strategic plan.

WHAT LAO HAS HEARD FROM PARTICIPANTS:

The service issues and concerns have been identified by participants and their ideas and recommendations to improve services have been organised into four general areas with sub-issues, briefly these include:

1. Barriers to Accessing Justice

- (a) Administrative and Operational Issues
- (b) Cultural Competency Training of LAO staff and legal aid lawyers
- (c) Public Legal Education and accessible information for Aboriginal people, Aboriginal service agencies and other service providers
- (d) Active Outreach to Aboriginal communities and service agencies to build partnerships and networks

2. Lack of Aboriginal representation within LAO and LAO's Advisory Systems

- (a) Senior position to direct and supervise implementation of the Aboriginal Strategy and an Aboriginal Department
- (b) Inclusion at all levels and positions within LAO of Aboriginal people
- (c) Active Recruitment of Aboriginal Staff
- (d) Aboriginal Representation at the Board level
- (e) Increase in the representation of various Aboriginal peoples in the composition of the Aboriginal Issues Advisory Committee

- (f) Models and mechanisms for continued advisory participation from Aboriginal people

3. Lack of Aboriginal Legal Representation or Legal Representation that is appropriately informed on the Unique Needs of Aboriginal clients

- (a) Aboriginal Legal Representation- Development and Recruitment
- (b) Aboriginal Articling Students and Law Students
- (c) Development of all LAO Legal Representatives providing services to Aboriginal people

4. Improving service on Aboriginal specific legal issues and addressing the role of LAO in participating or supporting Aboriginal specific or driven processes

- (a) Aboriginal Legal Issues
- (b) Aboriginal Legal Services Corporations
- (c) Aboriginal Community Justice Programs in partnership with the Canadian legal system AND Aboriginal Justice Initiatives as an alternative to Canadian legal system or as front line approach

THE IMMEDIATE INITIATIVES

- (1) Hire an Aboriginal Policy Counsel;
- (2) Hire an Aboriginal Project Manager ;
- (3) Provide Cultural Competency Training for LAO Staff and Lawyers;
- (4) Review and improving legal resources for LAO service providers;
- (5) Provide extension of legal aid certificate coverage for Gladue submission preparation;
- (6) Create the ability to identify Aboriginal Clients;
- (7) Increase the accessibility of LAO information (pamphlets, brochures)'
- (8) Create policy defining Aboriginal Services as a priority;
- (9) Increase the composition and capacity of the Aboriginal Issues Advisory Committee;
- (10) Develop minimum panel standards regarding Aboriginal specific legal issues;
- (11) Develop a recruitment policy aimed at hiring Aboriginal people;
- (12) Refine the 3 to 5 year strategic plan with Aboriginal participation and input.

The Development Paper will be available on this site in early September. Please be sure to check back so that you can access and provide feedback!.

For more information, please feel free to contact:

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