

## **Backgrounder**

### ***Legal Aid Ontario: Transforming the Way we Deliver Client Services***

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) has been working with staff, stakeholders and the Ministry of the Attorney General for several years to modernize all aspects of legal aid, improve client services, provide value for taxpayers and support Ontario's justice system reforms.

The coming changes will be built on the solid foundation that has been put in place since LAO was established. The changes will advance the developments that have been successfully implemented more recently:

- Regionalization of operations has improved coordination and accountability of LAO services;
- The new Simplified On-line Application Process is making it much easier and quicker for clients to get answers about their eligibility;
- The push to have LAO more accessible in courthouses has made it easier for clients to access our help and has been more effective in helping the justice system to process cases;
- The new client service centre is making access to legal aid information and advice just a telephone call away;
- The revised LAO website makes legal aid information much more accessible to many more Ontarians;
- A lawyer workforce strategy to ensure that legal staff develop experience in all areas in which LAO services are available

LAO has also taken a more comprehensive approach to safeguarding the taxpayer's interests through initiatives in a number of key areas:

- Significantly expanded our oversight and management capacity of more complex criminal cases

- Begun a complex process of determining proper measurements of program effectiveness
- Established a new internal audit and evaluation capacity to give better insights into protecting the taxpayers investment in our program;
- A greater emphasis on improved strategic planning at the corporate level and greater attention to determining and meeting specific objectives by senior management; and
- Expenses of senior management have been transparent to the public via our web site for the last 18 months.

The future of Legal Aid Ontario will expand on these initiatives considerably and help ensure that we are giving full expression of our mandate under our legislation. The transformation process will be based the following principles:

### **More tailored client services**

Without reducing the current spectrum of the services we now offer, we will, nevertheless, endeavour to more creatively match what the client needs to new and existing services. Clients will be able to obtain the right service at the right time. This will mean greater emphasis on the provision of legal information, further significant emphasis on the presence of LAO in courthouses and enhanced duty counsel service where it better suits the client's interest.

### **Less costly infrastructure**

Initiatives aimed at increasing access to client services such as effective referrals, legal support and significantly streamlining the certificate application process, will in turn reduce the need the need for certain administrative and overhead costs at the Area and Provincial Office levels. Over time, the role of the new District Office structure will become a key hub of LAO activities supporting our work with service providers and networks with our justice system partners in the field.

### **Much greater oversight of and support for service providers**

This will be a key new role of regional vice-presidents and their District Offices. It will mean that LAO will be much more focussed on working with service providers to enhance their effectiveness, efficiency and quality as required under our legislation. The role of Area Committees will also evolve to ensure faster and even more effective service to clients who need to know the status of their appeals as soon as possible. There will be further structural and program changes at provincial office to enhance LAO's role to ensure compliance with corporate policies and procedures relative to payments to service providers.