

Legal Aid Ontario

Strategic Plan



2019-2024



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Our plan at a glance



Message from the CEO

I am pleased to present Legal Aid Ontario's new five-year strategic plan.



David Field
President and CEO
Legal Aid Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario's new strategic plan serves as a roadmap for the next five years, guiding how we develop and deliver our programs and services. I want to thank everyone who generously dedicated their time to participating in the planning process.

The needs of the client are paramount, and this sentiment was echoed by all, both inside and outside the organization. I want to assure everyone that we will place the best interests of our clients at the forefront of any discussions that we embark on.

To ensure that everything that we do is always client-focused, we must tap into our greatest strength—our staff and our clinic and lawyer partners.

LAO's new strategic plan focuses on five key areas, also referred to as strategic goals: client-centred focus, demonstrated value-for-money, innovative services, an engaged staff, and effective collaboration. The goals that set out our plan lay the groundwork for us to:

- Develop a services delivery model that ensures that clients are served well, and public dollars are used effectively
- Participate in and encourage justice system reforms to ensure that our clients' interests and our ability to deliver a cost-effective top-notch legal aid program are not impeded
- Expand our collaboration with others in the justice sector and leverage technology to facilitate new ways of delivering our services, always providing tailored services to clients who face unique barriers
- Create the appropriate environment to enable our staff and service providers to provide high quality services

Our new strategic plan will be used as a springboard to create nimble, flexible and responsive programs that can be recalibrated based on the evolving needs of those who access our services, or to respond to changes in our environmental landscape. We recognize that what

we've put forward in our strategic plan is ambitious; however, together, we will collaborate and find ways of translating goals into action.

I know that we are all up to the challenge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Field".

David Field
CEO, Legal Aid Ontario

What we do

LAO provides legal help for financially eligible low-income people in:

- family law
- refugee and immigration law
- criminal law
- mental health law
- clinic law

If someone qualifies both financially and legally, we can:

- help them the day they show up at court
- give advice over the phone
- pay for a lawyer to represent them at trial
- direct them to one of our legal clinics, which provide help with social assistance, landlord and tenant issues and human rights.



Our strategic plan

Our strategic plan outlines the future path for LAO and begins with our mandate, values and strategic goals. Our mandate also provides the vision for LAO as an organization.

Our mandate

LAO has a statutory mandate to promote access to justice throughout Ontario for low-income individuals by:

- providing consistently high-quality legal aid services in a cost-effective and efficient manner;
- encouraging and facilitating flexibility and innovation in the provision of legal aid services;
- identifying, assessing and recognizing the diverse legal needs of low-income individuals and of disadvantaged communities in Ontario; and
- providing legal aid services to low-income individuals through a corporation that will operate independently from the Government of Ontario but within a framework of accountability to the Government of Ontario for the expenditure of public funds.



In fulfilling this mandate, LAO is committed to providing services which recognize the importance of diversity, access, equity, creativity and quality.

Our values

Our four core values reflect the attitudes, behaviours and culture we encourage across our organization. Our management and staff demonstrate their commitment to these core values in their daily activities and interactions with others. These values guide our decision-making, the delivery of programs and services, and how we interact with our clients, stakeholders and one another.

Leadership

We will be accountable and committed to working towards achieving our mandate. We will listen to our clients, and be a strong voice in representing them and promoting access to justice. We will take initiative and lead by example. We will actively communicate and engage our colleagues and stakeholders in effective collaboration to achieve our goals.

Excellence

We will always focus on providing exceptional service to our clients. This means thinking about the big picture as well as individual needs. We will work hard and continuously improve ourselves to be better.

Creative thinking

We will actively identify and solve complex problems. Together, we will face problems head-on and offer different ideas and solutions to advance the goals of the organization.

Respect

We will approach everything we do honestly and with integrity. We will have empathy and respect for everyone we interact with, including our clients, colleagues and stakeholders. We will be culturally sensitive to our clients' needs and circumstances.

Strategic goals

To accomplish our mandate, we must identify areas on which to focus our resources and efforts. Over the next three to five years, we will focus on five strategic goals that will solidify and refine LAO's core operations and forge a path forward towards our mandate.





Client-centred focus

Navigating the justice system in Ontario is often challenging and complex. Too many Ontarians face significant barriers to accessing justice, and this must change. We want to make sure that the people of Ontario, especially those who are more vulnerable, are able to access timely, high quality legal aid services when they need it. We are committed to ensuring that our clients' voices are heard, communicated and acted upon.

For LAO, this means:

- We will put clients at the centre of everything we do, and measure the impact to clients.
- We will deliver culturally appropriate services and be sensitive to the specific needs of client communities.

Strategic initiatives:

- Implement a comprehensive client experience strategy
- Support clinics and student legal aid services societies to effectively meet the needs of their communities
- Improve the quality of legal representation of clients
- Work with Aboriginal communities and the provincial and federal governments to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, particularly those addressed to the justice community
- Implement a customized client-centred approach for marginalized communities and vulnerable client groups



Demonstrated value for money

We will maximize every taxpayer dollar spent on the most valuable activities that will benefit the people of Ontario. We will be accountable and transparent in how we spend money, and ensure funds are allocated efficiently and effectively. We will measure the impact of all our investments and report our progress to the people of Ontario on a regular basis.

For LAO, this means:

- We will develop metrics, measure and report outcomes.
- We will monitor access to, timeliness and quality of services.
- We will improve operational efficiency and fiscal sustainability.
- We will have open data and provide access to information.

Strategic initiatives:

- Streamline processes to maximize efficiency and effectiveness
- Demonstrate impact and outcome of money spent
- Forecast demand for and supply of legal aid services
- Demonstrate openness and transparency



Innovative services

As the demand for legal aid increases, and needs become more complex, we need to make sure that our services are keeping up. This will require more innovation to ensure our services are being delivered in the most efficient and effective way.

We need to be responsive to evolving needs and decisive in our leadership and delivery of services. We want to invest in the right technology to help us reduce costs, save time, and to make it easier for the people of Ontario to access legal aid services.

This also means reducing the administrative burden and non-value-added activities that hinder our staff and service providers from being effective so they can focus on delivering the best services to our clients.

For LAO, this means:

- We will continuously research and develop more innovative ways to improve access to services.
- We will generate new ideas and ways of doing business and delivering services.
- We will create an environment that fosters innovation, and rewards creativity and quality.

Strategic initiatives:

- Align services to client needs and efficiency goals
- Foster a culture of innovation and ensure effective decision-making
- Implement a comprehensive digital strategy focused on interactive client services



Engaged staff

We have passionate, dedicated and talented people who work hard for Ontarians to have better access to justice. We could not achieve any of our goals without exceptional staff who are highly engaged. Each of our staff members will have an important role contributing to us achieving our mandate.

We will stand together as a united front and work collaboratively to ensure that we are consistent, deliberate and focused on supporting our people to be in the best position to move the organization forward into the future.

For LAO, this means:

- We will provide staff with supports they need to provide service to clients.
- We will translate the mandate to day-to-day activities of our staff.

Strategic initiatives:

- Implement a comprehensive talent management strategy
- Develop and implement mechanisms for engaging, communicating and encouraging feedback from staff at all levels and locations
- Continue learning and development programs for all staff
- Foster an inclusive and diverse workplace that reflects the people, cultures and languages of the communities we serve



Effective collaboration

Improving access to justice and the provision of legal aid services requires working with other stakeholders in the justice sector. Our clients have a wide range of backgrounds and very different needs. It is important for us to understand what their needs are and how best to serve them.

By collaborating with communities and other organizations, we can ensure that our services and resources are coordinated to work seamlessly across the justice system to achieve the best client outcomes.

For LAO, this means:

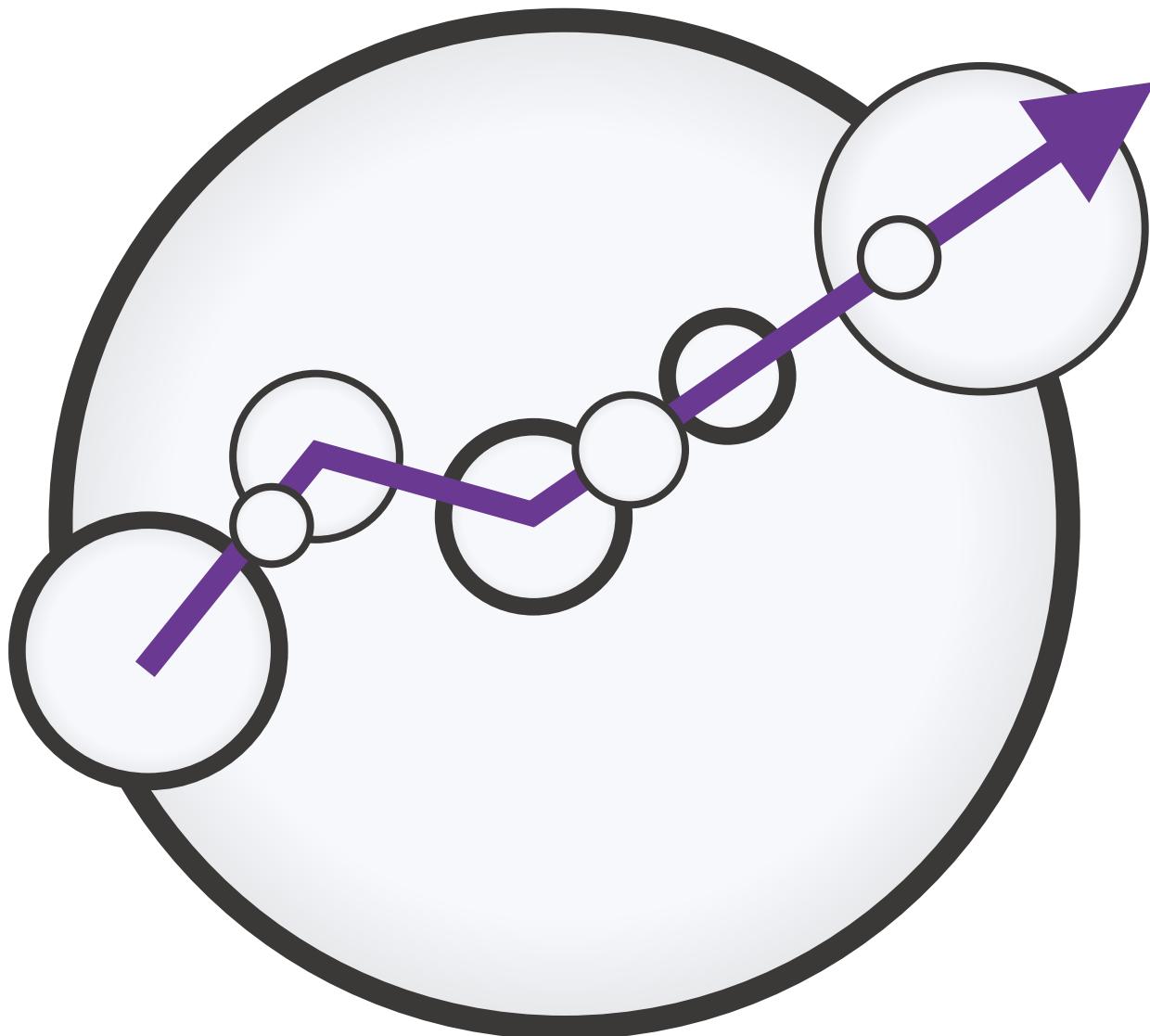
- We will represent and advance client interests to address systemic barriers to increase access to justice for vulnerable communities.
- We will collaborate with other organizations to achieve common goals.
- We will partner with the justice system to improve the coordination and effectiveness of services.

Strategic initiatives:

- Implement an LAO collaboration model with allied organizations
- Facilitate prevention and early intervention programs for high-risk individuals and communities

Measuring our progress

We want to be transparent and accountable for the progress we make towards this plan. Ongoing measurement, monitoring and reporting will be crucial to track our progress. Key measures will be developed to help us determine whether we are successful in achieving our strategic goals. We will use a combination of strategic outcome-based and activity-based measures to ensure that we meet our objectives and contribute to improving access to justice for the people of Ontario.



What does success look like?

