

**International Legal Aid Group Conference 2015
Country Report: Canada**

A Snapshot View of New Developments in Two Canadian Provinces

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With contributions from: Legal Services Society, British Columbia & Legal Aid Ontario

Introduction

The responsibility for delivering legal aid services in Canada lies with the provincial and territorial governments. The governing legislation and the administrative structure for operationalizing the services differs in each province and territory.

For the purposes of this 2015 National Report, two Canadian provinces, British Columbia (B.C.) and Ontario, are featured. Both are engaged in transformation efforts designed to improve the breadth and reach of their services to low income individuals and disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

In the first section, developments in the two provinces are described in response to a series of eight questions that were posed by Professor Alan Paterson. The information in these sections was contributed by B.C. Legal Services Society (LSS) and Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) staff respectively. I am grateful for their contributions.

In the second and final section, I provide a brief overview of emerging transformation efforts within Ontario's system of 76 community clinics. Ontario's community legal clinic system is unique in Canada and developments in our sector will be of interest to countries who wish to respond proactively to the findings of national legal needs surveys and the recommendations of reports like the 2014 Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales' *Reshaping Legal Assistance Services: Building on the Evidence Base* that call for "targeted, joined-up, timely and appropriate services to priority disadvantaged groups" (p. vii).

SECTION ONE – NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN TWO CANADIAN PROVINCES

British Columbia	Ontario
<p>What measures have been taken to enhance the delivery of legal aid over the last two year period?</p>	
<p>LSS is currently working on a three-year initiative involving five pilot projects that deliver legal aid services in innovative ways.</p> <p><u>Background</u></p> <p>In 2012, the Attorney General asked LSS for advice on ways legal aid could be used to reduce justice system costs and improve access to justice.</p> <p>LSS presented its advice in a report, <i><u>Making Justice Work: Improving Access and Outcomes for British Columbians</u></i>.</p> <p>The report recommends a new approach to justice reform that focuses on outcomes rather than changes to court process.</p> <p>In May 2014, the Attorney General announced that LSS would receive an additional \$2 million a year for three years to implement five justice transformation pilot projects in accordance with recommendations in Making Justice Work. The projects were launched in 2014/15.</p> <p><u>Evaluation</u></p> <p>Independent evaluation will determine the ongoing viability of the projects and will help the society and the ministry determine whether future collaborative projects can be used to develop programs that better address legal aid client needs.</p> <p><u>The five pilot projects</u></p>	<p><u>Eligibility expansion initiative</u></p> <p>LAO is currently implementing the first across-the-board expansion program for legal aid services in Ontario in over two decades. The provincial government committed in 2014 to raise the eligibility guidelines by nearly 20% over a three year-period, via a series of three 6% increases, as part of a longer-term planned expansion initiative that will, when fully implemented in eight to ten years’ time, allow an additional one million low-income Ontarians to become eligible for legal aid.</p> <p>The initial 6% increase came into effect on November 1, 2014, the second was implemented on April 1, 2015, and the will follow on April 1, 2016. These increases to financial eligibility apply to all areas of law covered by LAO and to all of LAO’s service delivery models, including certificate, duty counsel, and clinic services.</p> <p>LAO has completed an initial consultation and funding distribution process with legal clinics to support expanded eligibility. LAO is now consulting on use of the new eligibility funding to expand legal as well as financial eligibility in the areas of family, criminal, mental health and immigration and refugee law, in order to address coverage gaps. For example, many areas of service coverage, including many family law services and coverage for secondary (non-liberty) consequences of a criminal conviction, were eliminated during the recession of the 1990s when the financial eligibility guidelines were also frozen.</p> <p>For more information: http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1504-01_MAGjointannouncement.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1503-31_eligibilityguidelinesdetails.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1503-</p>

British Columbia	Ontario
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded Family Duty Counsel: This service focuses on legal coaching intended to provide clients with the tools they need to manage and resolve their family law problems on their own. Expanded Family LawLINE: The Family LawLINE is a province-wide telephone advice service that provides brief next-step help for people representing themselves. The expanded service includes preparation and review of legal documents, and coaching for self-represented clients. Family Law Mediation Referrals: This is a joint project with Mediate BC that provides mediation services to people with family law problems who qualify for legal aid financially but whose legal issue is not covered by LSS such as property, debt and spousal or child support issues. Parents Legal Centre: The centre focuses on early, collaborative resolution of child protection issues involving the Ministry of Children and Family Development or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency. Expanded Criminal Duty Counsel: In this pilot project, duty counsel retain conduct of uncomplicated files and provide services to a broader range of clients. This initiative complements two other criminal justice system reforms: the Provincial Court Scheduling Initiative and the Crown File Ownership initiative. 	<p>13 increasedclinicfunding.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1503-23_allocatedclinicfunding.asp</p> <p><u>Introduction of new family law services</u></p> <p>In 2013 LAO received three years of dedicated new funding from the Ontario government to improve and strengthen family law and poverty law services. A number of new family law initiatives have been funded through the family law component of this investment. One of the primary aims of these initiatives is to address the large number of unrepresented litigants in family courts. LAO has used the funding to make improvements to existing services and introduce new services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening new Family Law Service Centres (FLSCs) and expanding existing FLSCs. LAO now operates ten FLSCs around the province. These centres offer a range of services, including advice and assistance with document preparation, from staff lawyers and legal aid workers Offering coverage for up to six hours of assistance from a family lawyer for clients who choose mediation to settle their family matter. The Independent Legal Advice (ILA) program to support mediation is now available province-wide to eligible clients Introducing new certificate coverage for separation agreements; the new certificates cover up to ten hours of assistance with issues related to custody, access, child or spousal support, and division of property Improving the child protection tariff: increasing the number of hours available for lawyers assisting parents involved in child protection proceedings Introducing new family law services at the student legal aid clinics (Student Legal Aid Services Societies) located within Ontario law schools

British Columbia	Ontario
<p>Board priorities Four of the five pilot projects involve services for children and families. This reflects the LSS board's priorities and its concern that more legal aid family law services are needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding a three-year partnership with Luke's Place to provide holistic, wraparound services to clients who have experienced domestic violence <p>For more information: http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/contact/contact.asp?type=flsc; http://legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1409-30_OshawaFLSC.asp http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/familylawservices_ilaformediationclients.asp http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/familylawservices_separationagreementcert.asp http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/familylawservices_childprotectiontariff.asp http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1409-03_familyfundingSLASS.asp</p> <p>LAO support for clinic law transformation</p> <p>As of March 2015, clinic-led transformation initiatives were well underway; 69 of 76 clinics are currently engaged in some form of transformation work to improve and expand client access to clinic services. LAO has committed to ensuring that the resources in the current clinic system remain there to be used to enhance services on the front-line and support models that build a greater capacity for clinic staff to respond to their clients. Additionally, new money provided by the .government of Ontario in 2013 for the strengthening of clinic law services has been used by LAO to create two special funds: a fund for proposals to strengthen the capacity of community and other legal clinics; and a Clinic Transformation Fund to support legal clinics in developing their transformation initiatives. A number of innovative clinic projects are being supported through this new money.</p> <p>For more information: http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/policy/clinics.asp http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1406-19_15clinicprojects_list.asp</p>

New approach to supporting test case and public interest work

Public interest cases are an effective tool in supporting LAO's access to justice mandate. Individual applicants, groups of applicants, and organizational litigants (including agencies and associations) can apply to LAO's Group Applications and Test Case (GATCC) committee for funding.

In October 2014, the LAO Board approved a new "Public Interest Matter" test for GATCC. The new test supports a more strategic approach to supporting test case work. Under the new test, a public interest matter is one that demonstrably, based on specific factors established by LAO:

- advances important public interests, in alignment with LAO's access to justice mandate and strategic goals
- transcends individual interests
- addresses a serious issue that fundamentally affects low-income Ontarians or disadvantaged communities whose perspective would be unlikely to come before the courts but for the involvement of LAO
- is an effective and efficient use of resources – a practical and realistic means of bringing an issue before the court

Also in 2014, LAO's Refugee Law Office (RLO) adopted a refugee law test case strategy that includes the articulation of priority (but not exclusive) areas for test case litigation in the refugee law area. Under the strategy, test case litigation may come forward involving clients represented by the RLO, or it may be developed and conducted in collaboration with clinics or the private bar, and/or with counsel for public interest parties or interveners.

For more information:

http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/testcases_committee.asp

http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/refugee_testcasestrategy.asp

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What are the procurement initiatives over the same period?	
<p>LSS does not use block contracting. Representation services are provided by private lawyers who are compensated pursuant to a standard tariff.</p>	<p><u>Alternative Fee Arrangements</u></p> <p>A new venture for LAO in the past two years has been the introduction of a pilot program using Alternative Fee Arrangements, or AFAs, to experiment with moving from payment for services based on hourly fees to payment in regular instalments based on an agreement that the lawyer will manage a certain case load including a particular range and mix of cases. The range of cases is determined based on the lawyer’s practice over the past three to five year period, but has flexibility built in to address changes that may occur in the lawyer’s practice during the course of the AFA.</p> <p>AFAs were first introduced in criminal law in 2014, and they are now being used in the areas of family and immigration and refugee law.</p> <p>The objective of the AFA program is to reduce administrative work for participating lawyers and to guarantee those lawyers a regular cash flow.</p>
What is the current state of quality assurance?	
<p>LSS’s Audit and Investigation Department is responsible for investigating lawyer complaints, to ensure lawyers are providing quality services to our clients, and managing other audit programs, including Top-Billers Audit, disbursements, and meterage. It conducts spot audits to ensure that lawyers are billing LSS appropriately.</p>	<p><u>Quality Assurance</u></p> <p>LAO has a statutory duty to provide high-quality legal aid services. LAO’s Quality Service Office (QSO) works with LAO staff, clinics and Student Legal Aid Services Societies, the private bar and justice sector stakeholders on a range of initiatives designed to enhance the quality of service provided to clients.</p> <p>Over the past ten years significant steps have been taken to transform LAO from an organization that only required panel lawyers to be in good standing with the provincial regulator of lawyers (the Law Society of Upper Canada) in order to represent legal aid clients, to one that has worked with the bar and other stakeholders to establish quality standards, requiring minimum related experience and mandatory annual professional development, for duty counsel work as well as for lawyers working in the areas of criminal, family, refugee and mental health law.</p>

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	<p>An electronic panel management system now oversees private bar lawyers' activities and ongoing compliance with the quality standards. The new block fee billing system includes capture of case outcomes. Client satisfaction surveys and a centralized complaints process also support quality service. Training supports include access to a centralized legal research service that can provide general or specific-issue research support, and recorded webinars and "lunch and learn" sessions that are accessible to the private bar as well as to LAO's legal staff.</p> <p>Client service standards for legal clinics have been established and results are reported to LAO through clinic funding applications. On-site quality reviews occur as needed. The new Clinic Information Management System, when fully implemented later this year, will enable electronic capture of performance data related to quality and effectiveness. Quality supports provided by LAO to clinics include a centralized legal research service, training, and support for clinic knowledge transfer.</p> <p>Recently, mentoring for the private bar is an area where LAO has been focusing attention. To build the legal aid bar and promote quality, LAO has invested \$1.8 million over three years to promote mentoring through a "Second Chair Fund" that is available to lawyers in the areas of criminal, family and immigration and refugee law. The fund, as the first step in implementing a broader mentoring strategy at LAO, provides paid "second chair" opportunities for private lawyers, enabling new or mid-level lawyers to apply for mentoring on a complicated matter or to be paid as a second chair working with senior counsel on the matter. The fund also allows senior counsel on complicated matters to apply to work with a junior counsel.</p> <p>In 2014 LAO began to introduce a new panel application process which will allow private bar lawyers who are seeking to belong to more than one panel to submit a single general application. LAO is also exploring the development of new, more streamlined, General Terms and Conditions for panel membership applicants. The benefits of implementing these improvements include less red tape for lawyers joining the panels and less administrative work for LAO.</p>

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	<p>LAO has also begun to develop updated, strengthened panel standards for lawyers working on legal aid matters. The new standards will include updated accreditation requirements, a streamlined panel application process and a “best practices” appendix specific to each area of law. The first of these new standards to be rolled out are the new refugee law panel standards. LAO began consultations with the refugee bar on new standards in fall 2013 and the standards were finalized and approved by LAO’s Board of Directors in fall 2014. A panel renewal process, in which existing panel members are required to re-apply to confirm their continued membership, is currently underway at LAO for the refugee panel.</p> <p>For more information:</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/about/qualityservice.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/panel_standards.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/info/panel_standards_refugee.asp</p> <p>http://legalaid.on.ca/en/info/second_chair.asp</p>
How is technology being used? What is being planned?	
<p><u>MyLawBC website</u></p> <p>LSS is embarking on a new project called MyLawBC that will use online technology to tailor legal information for an individual’s specific needs.</p> <p>It works by asking the user a series of online questions similar to those a mediator or lawyer would ask in a face-to-face meeting. The system then “diagnoses” the legal issue and provides appropriate resources, such as legal advice through lawyer referral, a self-help guide, or a template for a simple will.</p> <p>MyLawBC is being developed in partnership with the Hague Institute for the Internationalization of Law which developed</p>	<p><u>Technology initiatives</u></p> <p>A primary area of focus for LAO has been streamlining and reducing administrative costs, including through the effective use of technology. Some of the major achievements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of the Client Legal Service Centre (CLSC), which handles over 1,300 calls a day (300,000 calls a year) and offers toll-free access to clients anywhere in the province, with the capacity to provide interpretation in over 100 languages including 18 Aboriginal dialects. The CLSC currently issues approximately half of all legal aid certificates and provides information, referrals and access to summary legal advice services (in criminal, family and refugee law) over the telephone.

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<p>a similar service for the Dutch legal aid program. The service is expected launch in the fall of 2015.</p> <p><u>Improved efficiency</u></p> <p>LSS is replacing its obsolete case management system, which has become increasingly challenging and expensive to maintain. The new system will manage all of our business processes from client intake to lawyer referral and tariff payments.</p> <p>The system represents a change in the way LSS will interact with clients and lawyers and will increase the opportunities for reporting, and for understanding the breadth of services LSS provides to our clients.</p> <p>For lawyers, the new system means there is a central place for almost all their interactions with the society. Efficiencies include the ability of lawyers to see what they can bill for, what items require authorization, which authorizations have been granted, and if they've billed, what amount is remaining on their referral contract.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of technology to offer services to clients, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Telephone Summary Legal Advice Services: up to 20 minutes of summary legal advice (SLA) on criminal, family and immigration and refugee law matters is available through the CLSC to eligible clients; ○ The online Family Law Information Program (FLIP); ○ Lawfacts.ca: an online legal information service (introduced 2011) that provides free information about the legal process • Use of mobile technology to assist LAO duty counsel working in courthouses <p>LAO also plans to advance its use of client-focused technology by developing client “apps” (applications) for use with mobile devices.</p> <p>LAO has been investing in clinic technology. With the assistance of a \$3.2 million grant from the Law Foundation of Ontario, LAO has been working with clinics on implementing a Clinic Information Management System (CIMS). To support the implementation of CIMS, LAO has invested in upgrading clinic information technology infrastructure, a process that was recently completed. A number of legal clinics are using technology in innovative ways.</p>
Are other service providers like community-based organizations being funded to do work and if so what?	
<p><u>Local agents</u></p> <p>LSS contracts with lawyers in 33 communities who take legal aid applications and provide legal information. Local Agents are available at most courthouses and in several Aboriginal communities.</p> <p><u>Community partners</u></p> <p>LSS contracts with social services agencies in 35 locations who provide legal information and connect people to legal aid services.</p>	<p><u>Holistic services for victims of domestic violence</u></p> <p>LAO has entered into a three-year partnership with Luke’s Place, which is a centre in Oshawa, Ontario that is devoted to assisting abused women and their children as they go through the family law process. Through this initiative, low-income women who have experienced domestic violence will have access to a lawyer and to holistic wrap-around services offered by Luke’s Place that include the assistance of a legal support worker.</p> <p><u>Working with Aboriginal partners to provide Gladue report services</u></p>

British Columbia	Ontario
<p><u>Prisoners legal services and mental health services</u></p> <p>LSS contracts with an agency that provides legal services to people who have been detained for mental health reasons or who face review hearings after being found not responsible for a crime due to mental health issues. The society also contracts with an agency that provides legal services to prisoners who face disciplinary issues for which the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides the right to a lawyer.</p>	<p>to clients</p> <p>For many years LAO has partnered with Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto (ALST), the acknowledged best practice leader in providing Gladue report writing services, to make these services available to Aboriginal clients in a number of Ontario locations. As part of LAO's Aboriginal Justice Strategy, LAO has been working to make Gladue services available province-wide.</p> <p>In 2014, additional funding from LAO allowed Gladue services provided by ALST to be expanded to four new Ontario locations; a further expansion to an additional four locations was announced in March 2015. In November 2014, it was announced that LAO was funding Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services Corporation to launch a Gladue program in Ontario's North.</p> <p>Mental health partnerships</p> <p>The Mental Health Commission of Canada is working with LAO on a comprehensive mental health training program. LAO is working with Connex Ontario to enhance telephone referral services delivered through LAO's Client Legal Service Centre (CLSC), and is partnering with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario on the development of a mental health disabilities and addictions resource, to help legal aid service providers identify mental health issues and needs.</p> <p>For more information:</p> <p>http://legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1410-08_lukesplace.asp</p> <p>http://legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1406-26_gladuereportservices.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1411-25_Gladuereportservices.asp</p> <p>http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/news/newsarchive/1504-01_MAGjointannouncement.asp</p>

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Additional items of interest from Ontario: LAO's dedicated priority client strategies

LAO has developed major strategies to address the legal needs of priority client groups. These strategies are important client-centred initiatives that transcend – and in some cases break down – traditional legal boundaries. The development of these strategies has required extensive consultations with stakeholders, including client communities and agencies who have been traditionally left out of legal aid service planning.

Aboriginal Justice Strategy

The first of LAO's priority client strategies, the Aboriginal Justice Strategy (AJS) was established in 2008 to respond to the over-representation of Aboriginal persons in the criminal justice and child protection systems. Approximately 15% of all LAO certificates are issued to clients who self-identify as First Nation, Métis and Inuit

In 2013 the AJS was renewed by the LAO Board for a second five-year phase. Over the past two years, the AJS has been focusing on:

- Improving and increasing client access to Gladue report-writing services (so named for the Supreme Court of Canada decision holding that courts must consider the circumstances of Aboriginal accused): LAO has been working with partners in the Aboriginal community to make these services available throughout Ontario
- Expanding responsive “place-based” Aboriginal services, working closely with local communities: local advice service locations have increased from 9 to 20 across Ontario
- Developing a comprehensive LAO response to the Iacobucci Report, which was written by the Honourable Justice Frank Iacobucci, a former Supreme Court of Canada justice, and which makes several important recommendations about addressing systemic problems and improving the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Ontario justice system
- Expanding Aboriginal services in family law (including child protection services)
- Improving LAO's capacity to enhance its Aboriginal services, including through updated cultural competency training for all staff and an ongoing engagement strategy to increase local knowledge and service capacity

Mental Health Strategy

LAO's Mental Health Strategy (MHS) has been in development for nearly two years. The work began with a comprehensive research and consultation process that resulted in an initial consultation paper, released to the public in December 2013, outlining LAO's thinking on key issues and proposed first principles. Over the next year, the formal strategy was developed and will soon have its public debut.

The development of the MHS reflects LAO's need to respond to the strong correlation that has been established between mental illness and the demand for legal aid services in every area of coverage. The degree to which legal aid resources and dollars are allocated to responding to the mental health crisis in the justice system is only now becoming more fully understood. LAO's data analysis indicates that services to clients with mental health and addictions issues account for nearly 25% of LAO's annual budget. As many as one in three legal aid certificates is issued to a client with mental health or addiction needs.

Although the formal introduction of the MHS itself is not taking place until spring 2015, the development of the MHS has coincided with the development of a number of related initiatives, including:

- Creation of a new certificate-based Mental Health Appeals Program for appeals from the Consent and Capacity Board (civil) and Ontario Review Board (criminal). The program will expand mental health appeals, strengthen the bar and improve access to justice
- Comprehensive mental health “core competency” training, to be developed with the assistance of the Mental Health Commission of Canada and others
- A partnership to enhance telephone referral services delivered through LAO’s CLSC
- Working with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario: to develop a rights-based “guided interview resource” to better help lawyers identify the legal and service options of clients with mental health and addiction needs, and to better identify secondary consequences and inter-related legal matters

Domestic Violence Strategy

LAO is also currently developing an equivalent priority client strategy for victims of domestic violence. Feedback sessions and consultations have been underway with stakeholder groups over the past year. A number of related initiatives are ongoing or in development, including a review of LAO’s Domestic Violence Protocol and the provision of mandatory domestic violence training for all staff.

For more information:

<http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/policy/aboriginaljustice.asp>

<http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/policy/mentalhealth.asp>

SECTION TWO: TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES IN ONTARIO’S COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC SYSTEM

Michele M. Leering

Ontario’s community legal clinics (clinics) have been in existence for more than 40 years. As not-for-profit organizations, the 76 clinics that make up the clinic system are governed by elected volunteer Boards of Directors. Clinics enter into Memorandums of Understanding and annual funding agreements with Legal Aid Ontario (LAO); some clinics have additional government and charitable funders to support special project work or larger mandates. Full geographic coverage of the province was achieved by 2002 after the recommendations of the 1997 “McCamus Report” contained in the [Blueprint for the Delivery of Publicly Funded Legal Aid Services](#) were implemented. General service clinics have a geographic mandate to serve the low income residents of every county in Ontario. Additionally, the 17 speciality clinics have a mandate to serve specific client populations (First Nations, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, ethno-racial groups, etc.) or address specific communities of interest or issues like income security, housing, injuries at work, and the environment. In Ontario, the governing legislation, [Legal Aid Services Act, 1998](#) names clinics as the foundation for clinic law services (referred to in practice as “poverty law”), while private bar lawyers are the foundation for the delivery of criminal and family law legal aid services.

In order to work together more effectively and cohesively to advance the interests of the individuals and communities served by them, clinics embarked on a collaborative strategic planning process in 2012, with funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The result of that planning process, led by the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO), and facilitated by Karen Cohl and George Thomson (who also authored [Connecting Across Language and Distance: Linguistic & Rural Access to Legal Information and Services](#)), was the development of the first [Ontario Community Legal Clinics Provincial Strategic Plan](#). Hailed as a “watershed” moment by former Attorney General and Chief Justice Roy McMurtry, who is considered by many as the founding force for Ontario’s clinic system, this plan set the stage for strengthening and enhancing the services provided to Ontario’s poorest and most vulnerable communities.

Rooted in the principles of equity, social justice, community-based, and client driven services, the Strategic Plan outlines four strategic directions. These include:

1. **Expand Client Access to Poverty Law Services:** Collaborating to expand client and community access to poverty law services to address challenges such as changing demographics and the racialization of poverty, evolving service needs, and limited resources.
2. **Enhance Capacity for Systemic Work:** Strengthening our capacity to do preventive and systemic poverty law work – including community development, law reform, test cases, and public legal education – to achieve the greatest positive impact for our client communities.
3. **Strengthen Community Connections:** Increasing clinic accountability to the clients and communities we serve and pursue a range of ways for clinics to be an integral part of community efforts to meet the needs of persons living in poverty.
4. **Enhance System-Wide Coordination and Support:** Strengthening our capacity for provincial coordination and support to enable clinics collectively to provide the highest quality service and to ensure the clinic system is accountable for the services it provides with public funds.

About the same time, LAO released a [Strategic Directions Paper](#) to provide its vision for the future development of the system. The stated goal was to restructure the clinic law service delivery system to expand access to justice and to enhance the quality and quantity of legal services. Ultimately, clinics were offered the opportunity to apply for special funding grants to carry out special projects and innovations to achieve these goals. A number of different funding streams were made available to strengthen clinic capacity, coordinate client services, experiment with new innovations, or support transformation. There has been a strong response from clinics. More recently, the provincial government has provided LAO with additional funding to increase the financial eligibility guidelines. This funding will also support new initiatives in the clinic system to enlarge the quantity, scope, depth and reach of poverty law services.

A broad range of new initiatives are underway. LAO appointed a Senior Counsel for Legal Clinic Transformation to oversee and support the process. Further information about her work can be found [here](#); she also tweets and periodically blogs about clinic transformation. These initiatives join many smaller scale projects that were already underway, or have been since started to enhance the ways in which poverty law services are delivered. Some have been funded by other supportive sources like the Law Foundation of Ontario. Clinics are already known for creative and innovative responsiveness to local community needs within constrained budgets. Many have been building their capacity to break new ground by taking novel approaches to emerging challenges for many years.

The transformation has been highly influenced by the growing literature on legal needs and appropriate service delivery approaches, while building on 40 years of “lived experience” as community-based advocates for the poor and vulnerable. The types of transformative initiatives are myriad. They include:

- Strategies to improve the capacity for **prevention, early intervention and holistic services**
- Increasing the **internal capacity of clinics** and building the strength of **inter-clinic collaborations**
- Reinvesting administrative savings resulting from back-office simplification and integration and operational budget scrutiny into **new client-focused initiatives**
- Supporting **multi-disciplinary and partnership approaches** to service delivery
- Creating **regional coordination** and strategic planning approaches to meeting new legal needs
- Working more effectively and in novel ways with Legal Aid and other justice system partners to ensure “no wrong door”, **increased service coordination and holistic approaches and seamless legal aid service delivery**.
- Experimenting with **using technology** more effectively to increase internal clinic capacity and external capacity to reach clients and communities

Specific examples of the developments are set out below.

- **Four regional transformation projects** that include legal needs assessments, demographic research, literature reviews, community engagement, action learning, and strategic planning initiatives that are intended to improve service delivery and also to realize administrative and back-office savings to be reinvested in direct client service within those regions. Examples include the [Greater Toronto Transformation Project](#) and the [Eastern Clinic Region Transformation Project](#).
- A [Rural and Remote Boldness social innovation project](#) led by four clinics that seeks to improve access to justice and provide better legal outcomes for rural and remote low-income residents. Under consideration are projects to reach the hard-to-serve, engage trusted intermediaries, develop a prototype for Justice & Health partnerships, recruit and enhance the presence of legal professionals in rural and remote areas, build the internal capacity of clinics to provide a broader service menu, use technology, build an evidence base, and create strategic alliances for action.
- A **medical-legal partnership project** co-sponsored by ARCH Disability Law Centre (as the lead of four clinics including HIV and AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario, Aboriginal Legal Services Toronto, Neighbourhood Legal Services) and St. Michael’s Hospital Academic Family Health Team.
- A **“legal health checklist” project** led by Halton Hills Community Legal Services that works with seven community partners to diagnose legal needs and intervene earlier to prevent cascading legal problems. Dr. Ab Currie is the lead researcher for the evaluation report released in early May [“The Halton Legal Health Check-up: Seeking the solutions to the legal problems in everyday life that maybe harmful to your health”](#).
- Clinics considering **mergers** with other clinics to increase capacity and reach which include the newly-formed “The Legal Clinic” and the [Ottawa Legal Clinics Transformation project](#).

- A number of speciality clinics are **co-locating** to create new synergies in law reform and systemic impact work through close proximity, to save on administration costs by streamlining back office functions, to reinvest those savings in direct client service, and to benefit from an IT and communication infrastructure that supports collaborative work.
- Clinics co-locating in **multi-service hubs** like Rexdale Community Legal Services exploring holistic wrap around services with partner agencies and also partnering with Legal Aid Ontario staff co-located within the clinic to provide family, immigration and criminal law services all under one roof.
- An inventive coordinating and planning approach being taken in a five counties in Eastern Ontario (**Legal Aid Services Together @LAST**) to support seamless legal aid service delivery and service expansion involving LAO provincial office, a regional office, Queen’s University law student clinics, and four community legal clinics. Successes have included a new law externship and reflective practicum program, local access to justice forums, Paths to Family Justice guides, legal information “road shows”, collaboration agreements, and streamlined referral processes.
- A “Wrap-around” project explores, pilots and evaluates service delivery models that bring **social workers** into the staffing mix to deliver services holistically, working alongside legal workers with the goal of documenting best practises and models that can be scaled out to other clinics.
- Expanding the use of **paralegal** placement students in clinics and creating paralegal student legal information and advice clinics in several community colleges.
- Community Legal Education Ontario’s (CLEO) launching of new **legal capability** initiatives like:
 - the [Shared Steps project](#), that helps build better problem-solving capabilities around common legal issues and can be embedded in all clinic websites
 - [Connecting Communities](#), which seeks to create new partnerships between legal and non-legal organizations, using the power of trusted intermediaries to reach the hard-to-serve in rural, remote and diverse language communities
 - A [PLE Learning Exchange](#) that provides a virtual platform for sharing promising practices in community legal education, learn from one another, and build new partnerships.
 - A common platform for all clinics to use as the foundation or back end for their local websites with all the legal content managed by CLEO. This will greatly increase the reach of quality legal information across the province and enhance the credibility and visibility of local clinics as paths to justice
 - Research into “what works” in the field of public legal education.
- A **new strategic plan for learning** that is led by the Provincial Learning Action Committee, a collaborative effort between Legal Aid Ontario staff and clinic system staff and Board members.

- A significant **knowledge management, sharing and creation** venture that is led by the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario (ACLCO) and that is undertaking a number of important projects including the development of a clinic system intranet.
- A **major case management software** initiative that will be launched in the fall of 2015 that will also support clinic outreach, public legal education, community development, systemic advocacy and law reform initiatives in addition to enhance record-keeping, document generation and client file management.
- A novel project involving 15 clinics who will use a recently **customized interactive technology platform** powered by [A2J Author](#) software (originally developed by the Chicago-Kent College of Law) to create Clinic Interview Partnerships. These will assist with clinic intake, data entry, and forms creation directly by potential clients, trusted intermediaries, or volunteer clinic staff.

A collaboratively-developed Eastern Ontario Clinic conference presentation on May 13, 2015 highlighted some of the above promising developments and also featured a closer look at a multitude of clinic-specific examples of transformative and novel approaches and can be found [here](#).

Additionally, clinic clients and communities will benefit from clinic staff working with LAO to implement the new strategic initiatives discussed in Section 1 to improve services for domestic violence survivors, people with mental health issues and the Aboriginal Justice Strategy.