



Legal Aid Alberta

**Corporate Business Plan
2010/11- 2012/13**

ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

The business plan for the three years commencing April 1, 2010 was prepared under our direction in accordance to government and industry best practice reporting requirements and accounting polices. All of the organization's goals and initiatives in which operational and financial implications are expected, have been considered in preparing the business plan.

On behalf of Legal Aid Alberta and its Board of Directors, we are committed to achieving the planned results laid out in this business plan.



Jacqueline Schaffter
President & CEO
Legal Aid Alberta



Colin Kloot
Chair
LAA Board of Directors

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SUMMARY

Legal Aid Alberta identifies its core business as providing legal services to Albertans. It strives to manage the scope of its legal services to meet the changing legal needs of Albertans. The legal, cultural and economic landscape in which we work is changing and LAA must change with it.

Since the submission of last year's Business Plan, LAA, under the guidance of a Steering committee comprised of representatives from Alberta Justice, Law Society of Alberta and Legal Aid Alberta completed a comprehensive review of the legal aid plan in Alberta. The Review Report was approved by the Board of Directors of Legal Aid Alberta and submitted to the Minister of Justice in December, 2009. A conclusion of the review was that the traditional method of providing legal aid services – full representation focused on the courts, may no longer be sustainable, and a new service delivery model should be developed. The new service delivery model should focus on the identification of the real needs of each client and where appropriate, embrace prevention, dispute avoidance, and collaboration between the legal, social, and government sectors of society.

Over the next three years Legal Aid Alberta is committed to developing a new service delivery model by:

- Building a province wide Legal Service Centre model with the goal of providing clients with immediate, in-person access to legal services that are tailored to meet the specific needs of each client
- Capitalizing on technology and business acumen to create a financial and statistical reporting structure that allows for accurate and timely information. accounting and forecasting, thus ensuring we deliver a sustainable legal aid plan
- Developing a governing document with goals of strengthening the organization through integration of its business units, and strengthening the relationships between the business units and the Board; and the relationship between the Board and the Justice Ministry
- Continue to attract, train and retain high quality staff and roster lawyers to ensure we are able to provide quality legal services to for low income Albertans.
- Review of our guidelines for eligibility to ensure that the right clients are receiving the right services.
- Review our tariff and the compensation paid pursuant to our Tariff of services.
- Develop appropriate performance measures for each of the new strategies/initiatives that LAA is implementing

LEGAL AID ALBERTA AT A GLANCE

OUR PURPOSE

As a registered society incorporated under the provincial *Societies Act*, Legal Aid Alberta, (LAA) is an organization independent from government, mandated to operate and fund services addressing the legal needs of Albertans. Legal Aid Alberta plays an essential role in the justice system and must work with its two partners, the Minister of Justice and the Law Society of Alberta as well as other stakeholders to provide services within the funding provided on an annual basis. Legal Aid Alberta's Management and Board of Directors use strategic planning to ensure an organizational strategy is focused on excellence in providing innovative client services to meet the complicated legal needs of ordinary Albertans.

OUR VISION

The work of Legal Aid Alberta is essential to the fair, effective and efficient operation of the civil and criminal justice systems. It is critical in helping to provide access to legal information, advice and representation to the most vulnerable members of society.

We are changing legal aid so that we can better deliver high quality, accessible services that people need within a framework of cost effectiveness.

HISTORY

Legal Aid in Alberta was officially established on July 1, 1970 by an agreement between the Law Society of Alberta and the provincial Attorney General to provide legal services to Albertans in need in both criminal and civil matters. It was replaced by an agreement signed in 1974, and a further agreement between the Law Society and the Legal Aid Society was also signed in that same year. Governance agreements signed in 2001 and 2006 recognize Legal Aid and its programs as an important and necessary element in the justice system.

Legal Aid Alberta's services range from legal information and advice in many areas of law to legal representation in court for a first appearance right through to full representation resulting in a final outcome. In addition to offering a range of services, Legal Aid Alberta has designed a number of programs to assist clients in a holistic way by addressing some of their special needs as well as the strictly legal issues. Legal Aid Alberta is also committed to anticipating and identifying unmet legal needs of low income Albertans – especially family law and related civil law matters – and developing programs and services to ensure those in need obtain equal access to the justice system.

SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

In providing Albertans with legal services, Legal Aid Alberta must be attentive to challenges and opportunities, and must adapt to meet changing client needs, priorities and circumstances within its capacity of funding and resources. These include:

Tailoring Services to Meet Client Needs

In order to keep pace with the demand for our services we must put in place an ease of access process that is focused on empowering and involving the client. Utilizing technology and up-trained skilled staff we will implement a streamlined client service model that will address these issues.

Business Reporting

Reliance on an outdated custom case management system and legacy financial reporting mechanisms has restrained Legal Aid's ability to accurately report, and more importantly accurately forecast, costs and expenditures. The development of a new business and financial reporting structure, based on current best practices, will provide a more contemporary environment for the timely retrieval of accurate data.

Governance

Legal Aid Alberta's Governance Agreement with Alberta Justice and the Law Society of Alberta will expire in March, 2011. Its renewal requires an evaluation of the effectiveness of its current terms. There is opportunity to develop a governing document that more clearly articulates the objectives, goals, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of each party.

Funding/Budget

Although it is forecasted that funding from the Province will remain at 2009/10 levels for the following 3 years of this Business Plan, our overall revenue has decreased significantly from prior years (decrease of 13% from 2008/09) This is mainly a result of decreased Alberta Law Foundation funding of several million dollars. Legal Aid Alberta must balance resources and funding while meeting service demands. Our strategy will focus on the development of innovative service delivery methods that will allow us to operate within the allotted budget.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Legal Aid Alberta contributes to the social well being of Albertans by delivering responsive and cost effective legal service programs on behalf of Alberta Justice. Through the Legal Aid Review, and past stakeholder consultations, we have identified the following critical strategic priorities for 2010/11- 2012/13. They are:

1. Maximize access to quality services to meet the diverse needs of the clients we serve.

What we want to achieve:

Legal Aid Alberta is tasked with providing legal services in mandated areas such as criminal law and child protection matters. The Legal Aid Review identified the legal problems most frequently experienced by low income persons. Legal Aid Alberta must use this information when setting priorities for service and delivery methods. Legal Aid Alberta has at all times and will into the future strive to provide high quality service. We see the need to create multiple entry points into our organization, create a better client assessment and assistance process, develop services tailored to the needs of the individual client, and ensure a seamless transition for the clients as they move through our core services while maintaining high quality legal services at each stage.

Strategies:

a) *Implement a framework for monitoring and Analysis*

A framework will be developed that will enable Legal Aid Alberta to evaluate and assess current processes and operations, monitor and analyze trends relating to the legal needs of low income Albertans, service delivery innovations and models, and other matters which will enable LAA to continually assess, adjust and reprioritize its services and programs, using an evidence-based approach

b) *Tailoring Services to Meet Client Needs -*

Through the implementation of Legal Service Centres throughout Alberta, Legal Aid will develop a model for the assessment of clients' needs and provide a wide range of legal services that extend beyond providing clients with "full certificate" representation which will include information, advice, brief and limited scope service and assistance through Expanded Criminal and Civil Duty Counsel. This is an innovative multidimensional project where addressing client need is the first priority. It will ensure the services provided more closely match the clients need, and it will reduce the cost of full legal services and representation. Over the course of the three year business plan, Legal Aid will implement strategies to address some of the client's unmet needs in the area of non family civil law.

c) ***Review Eligibility Requirements***

In 2011/12 and 2012/13, Legal Aid will, in the context of its budget requirements, review the eligibility policies for services order to ascertain if the right clients are receiving the right services and with a view to increasing the financially eligible income for application.

d) ***Recruit and retain quality staff and roster lawyers***

Legal Aid Alberta has, in previous strategic plans, focused on the recruitment and retention of staff and private bar lawyers to ensure quality legal services are available. This initiative has resulted in an increase in the number of private bar lawyers on our roster. Recruitment and retention remains a priority. Legal Aid will continue to monitor and assess the legal services provided to ensure that we provide access to sustainable, quality services.

In 2011/12 and 2012/13 Legal Aid will review the tariff and the compensation paid to private bar lawyers.

e) ***Leverage other partner organizations***

Legal Aid Alberta will work with other services providers to explore ways in which Legal Aid Alberta can provide the forum through which knowledge sharing, needs identification and service delivery coordination and collaboration can occur.

How will we measure success:

- a) Implementation plan for monitoring and analysis is in place with goals and ongoing performance measures.
- b) Performance measures will be developed for each of the new strategies/initiatives put in place and where appropriate such performance will address/identify outcomes as well as outputs.
- c) All new initiatives are evaluated prior to the end of the first year of operation.
- d) Annual benchmark of LAA services to other Legal Aid plans.
- e) Fewer full certificates are issued yet numbers of clients served remains constant or increases.
- f) Increase in the level of satisfaction from various courts regarding the additional services available to self represented litigants as a result of initiatives of LAA.
- g) Increase in the number of lawyers on the Legal Aid Roster.

- h) Increased client satisfaction and decrease in the number of complaints regarding service.
- i) Reduced Staff turnover.
- j) Number of stakeholder /partner events hosted or facilitated.
- k) Increased number of service delivery collaborations, level of responsiveness and client satisfaction.

2. Deliver a sustainable Legal Aid Plan in an efficient and diverse organization

Strategies:

a) **Improvement of Financial and Management controls**

We are working in a challenging economic and financial climate and we have a fixed budget within which to deliver our services and implement innovative changes. We will seek to make the best possible use of the resources available, including greater oversight of complex high cost cases.

We will continue to implement and improve effective financial controls and financial reporting including expenditure review, and simplified internal/external controls together with service delivery and other statistical reporting in order to assure that adjustments can be made if necessary to live within budget.

b) **Strengthen Internal Processes.**

Sustainability will also require trained, efficient, engaged and diverse workforce. Investment in staff development and leadership capability together with best practice recruitment will ensure a strong workforce and a succession planning framework that will also ensure strong future leadership within Legal Aid.

c) **Governance and Organizational Structure Change**

Sustaining good business practices will require LAA to build a stronger, more integrated organization will necessitate changes to the organizational structure of LAA. Good Governance is a key to fulfilling LAA's requirement of accountability. In order to properly meet this responsibility LAA will enter into negotiations with the Ministry of Justice and Law Society of Alberta with the objective of developing a governing document that more clearly articulates the objectives, goals, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of each party including a requirement for consultation by the Ministry with LAA's requirements.

How will we Measure Success:

- a) Development of more, accurate, timely reporting systems integrated throughout the organization to trigger program and services adjustments.
- b) Monthly KPI reporting for the new and ongoing performance measures. Simplified internal processes.
- c) Increased management and job specific training.
- d) Changes to organizational structure that facilitates more effective and timely decision making.
- e) Amended Governance Agreement

CORE BUSINESS

Core business: Providing affordable, cost effective legal services to Albertans

Key Functions/Programs:

- Client Assessment and Intake
- Provision of information and referral, advice, brief services
- Expanded Duty Counsel Services in Criminal and Family matters
- Brydges Duty Counsel Services
- Family Mediation coverage
- Lawyer Appointing (certificate) Program including use of limited scope certificates
- Representation and advice through Staff Law Offices: Central Alberta Law Office (CALO), Family Law Office (FLO), Youth Criminal Defence Office (YCDO), Siksika Nation Office, Immigration Office