

Quality.

Access.

Accountability.

Continuing our commitment to Albertans



Strategic Plan 2026–2029



Legal Aid Alberta





Legal Aid Alberta respectfully acknowledges that we are located on the Traditional Territory of the Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Nakota and Saulteaux — lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7 and 8 and homeland of the Métis. We are honoured to live, work and learn on these lands with all Indigenous Peoples as we move forward together in reconciliation.



About Legal Aid Alberta

Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) exists to protect access to justice for all Albertans, especially for those who need it most.

Across the province — urban, rural and remote — LAA provides legal services that help people navigate some of the most complex and high-stakes situations of their lives. From family breakdown and child protection to criminal charges and immigration matters, we provide legal counsel at critical moments — when it matters most.

By combining staff expertise with a province wide network of high-quality private practice lawyers, we can better serve Albertans across the province, including in their own communities. This approach helps us respond to changing legal needs while ensuring independent, effective representation.

Established in 1973, Legal Aid Alberta is a publicly funded, non-profit organization accountable to Albertans through the Ministry of Justice and the Law Society of Alberta. We play a critical role within the justice system — not only by providing representation, but by reducing barriers, improving system navigation and supporting more equitable legal outcomes.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on strengthening access to justice, modernizing service delivery and working with partners across the justice and social sectors to better meet the evolving needs of disadvantaged Albertans.

Our Vision

An Alberta where everyone is able to understand and protect their legal rights.

Our Mission

We resolve legal problems for disadvantaged Albertans and, in doing so, protect the rule of law for the benefit of everyone.

A Stronger Foundation for Access to Justice

A message from Legal Aid Alberta's Board Chair and President and CEO

Since the release of our last strategic plan, Legal Aid Alberta has made meaningful progress to strengthen our role in advancing access to justice and advocating for the legal rights of all Albertans, especially our most disadvantaged citizens. The latest iteration of *Quality, Access, Accountability* builds on this foundation with a three-year roadmap that will guide our work as an essential independent pillar of Alberta's justice system.

A new Governance Agreement extending from 2025–2030 provides a strong foundation that ensures stability for our organization and reaffirms our essential role as an independent pillar of the justice system. This agreement, created in collaboration with the Government of Alberta and the Law Society of Alberta, reflects our shared commitment to the value of legal aid and our role in protecting access to justice.

At the core of our work is an unwavering dedication to delivering high-quality legal representation for our clients. The introduction of a new, integrated Certificate Standards Compliance unit underscores our commitment to ensuring concerns are rigorously and transparently reviewed and that we are accountable to Albertans and the clients we serve. New legal panels focused on specific areas of practice, such as child representation in high-conflict parenting disputes and youth criminal law, also strengthen our ability to ensure quality representation through in-depth knowledge and experience.

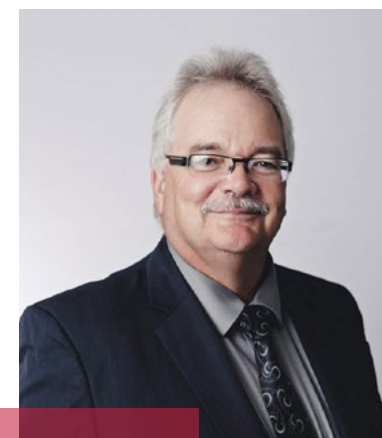
We made considerable strides working to reduce barriers that contribute to inequitable experiences within the justice system, reflected in issues such as the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in the justice system. Our new Indigenous Action Plan 2025–2028 focuses on core actions to establish strong relationships, remove barriers and improve cultural competency. This includes new education and resources for our staff and roster lawyers to improve their knowledge of Indigenous Court and Indigenous communities.



As LAA celebrated a remarkable milestone of 50 years of delivering legal aid to Albertans, we implemented a historic change to financial eligibility guidelines set by the Ministry of Justice. The new guidelines raised income caps, effectively ensuring thousands more Albertans can qualify for representation to help resolve their legal problems. For Albertans facing legal and financial hardship, these changes can be life-altering.

Innovation continues to play a central role in how we deliver on our commitments. Initiatives such as the Client Gateway help ensure we are delivering on accessibility and accountability by streamlining process and leveraging advances in technology. This secure online portal removes barriers by enabling lawyers, partners and stakeholders to help clients sooner, with a better overall experience.

As we look to the future, we will build on the successes of *Quality, Access, Accountability* with the same priorities and laser focus to ensure Legal Aid Alberta remains independent and essential to the justice system. As we navigate economic, social and political changes near and far, we remain focused working with our partners and delivering on our commitments to Albertans to resolve legal problems for disadvantaged Albertans and, in doing so, protect the rule of law for the benefit of everyone.



Brad Pickering
Board Chair, Legal Aid Alberta



John Panusa, KC
President and CEO, Legal Aid Alberta

Service Locations

Across 76 communities, from urban cities to rural and remote towns, Legal Aid Alberta provides legal support to hundreds of thousands of Albertans a year.



Calgary



Edmonton



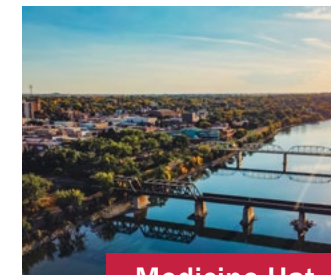
Fort McMurray



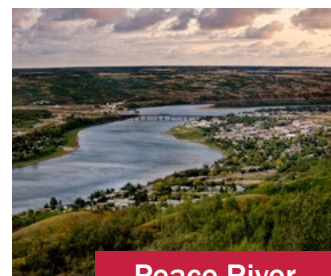
Grande Prairie



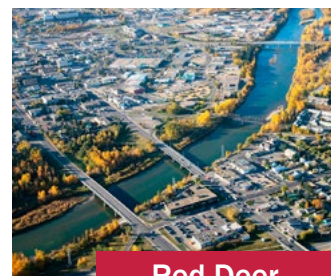
Lethbridge



Medicine Hat



Peace River



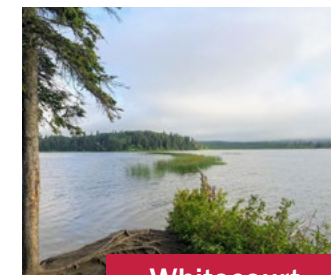
Red Deer



St. Paul



Wetaskiwin



Whitecourt

Strategic Foundation

Legal Aid Alberta serves as an essential, independent pillar of Alberta's justice system, and a voice for disadvantaged people across the province.

We resolve legal problems through high-quality representation, counsel and advice in criminal, family and immigration matters. In doing so, we protect the rule of law for everyone.

Building on the foundation of the prior strategic plan, LAA remains committed to maintaining strong, effective relationships with the Government of Alberta and our justice system partners. Success for LAA means protecting access to justice and fighting for the legal rights of Albertans everywhere, through high-quality legal counsel and clear accountability to our mandate.

The 2026–2029 Strategic Plan builds on LAA's unique position to deliver innovative services to our clients while building intentional relationships with justice and community partners that enhance both access to and the administration of justice. A new Governance Agreement is the foundation that provides LAA with the stability and independence to advance our mandate and affirms our responsibility to Albertans.



The Evolving Legal Landscape

Alberta is experiencing a period of population growth while also navigating a restrained fiscal environment. Rising rates of poverty, homelessness, substance use and mental health challenges have resulted in more clients with complex challenges in need of legal representation. LAA file volumes are also increasing, as are the resources required to resolve each case.

This is due to several factors, including intersecting vulnerabilities, growing legal complexities and a changing legal profession. LAA is prepared to meet these challenges through affirming its commitment to operational efficiency and innovative service delivery. Whether through leveraging new technologies that optimize administrative functions, or partnerships that develop new pathways, we can ensure our essential role within the justice system is of the highest standard, sustainable and cost effective.

The 2025–2030 Governance Agreement renews our relationship with the Government of Alberta and the Law Society of Alberta and provides the stability and independence necessary for LAA to operate as a trusted partner and subject-matter expert in advancing justice for Albertans. It also strengthens LAA's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of professional and fiscal accountability. Building on this foundation, LAA will work collaboratively and intentionally with stakeholders in the justice ecosystem to create the shifts required to address long-standing systemic challenges and external pressures that impact LAA's cost structure.



Indigenous Representation

LAA recognizes our unique position to confront the systemic inequities that continue to lead to the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples within the justice system. We acknowledge that historic and socio-economic marginalization creates significant and persistent barriers to access to justice. LAA is committed to moving beyond foundational frameworks toward the implementation of culturally responsive legal services, including customized programming designed in partnership with Indigenous communities. We aim to ensure that our advocacy and programs are legally effective, culturally safe and grounded in the realities of the people we serve.

Collaborative Journey

Over the past several years, LAA has engaged in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous Nations across the province. These conversations have helped shape our understanding and approach to delivering culturally responsive legal services.

The following Nations have been part of this journey:

- Alexander First Nation
- Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation
- Bigstone Cree Nation
- Blackfoot Confederacy (Kainai, Piikani, Siksika)
- Enoch Cree Nation
- Louis Bull Tribe
- Ermineskin Cree Nation
- O'Chiese First Nation
- Stoney Nakoda Nation (Bears paw First Nation, Chiniki First Nation, Goodstoney First Nation)
- Sunchild First Nation
- Tsuut'ina Nation

We remain committed to deepening these relationships and building new connections with Indigenous communities across Alberta.

Our Clients

Every year, LAA assists hundreds of thousands of Albertans, from urban centres to remote regions across courtrooms and communities to advance access to justice for some of the province's most disadvantaged. Many of the people we serve are navigating complex challenges — such as mental health concerns, substance use, housing instability and the impacts of intergenerational trauma — alongside their legal issues.

67%

Clients with income less than \$10,000

40%

Clients with no income

Representing clients of all ages

7% 17 and younger

39% 18 - 34

42% 35 - 49

13% 50 and older

Our Impact

115,700

Intake calls to our contact centre

27,400

Calls to our 24/7 Brydges phone line for immediate legal advice

164,100

Legal issues handled annually

33,300

Justice of the Peace Bail Hearings

125,500

Duty Counsel assists

The number of people duty counsel lawyers see during the year

Albertans

Serving Albertans

Legal Aid Alberta is a team of dedicated and talented professionals who are committed to the communities we serve. We are driven by a sense of duty to our clients and to the justice system, ensuring it remains accessible and responsive.

Collaboration

We take our role as a partner within the justice system seriously and work to advance our clients' interests with the courts, the Ministry and other partners in the justice community. Strengthening these relationships is an important part of LAA's strategy so that, together, we can create a more efficient and effective system for all.

Financial Sustainability

As stewards of public resources, we are committed to delivering maximum value for Albertans. As we collaborate with justice-system partners in an environment where external drivers directly impact LAA costs, we will continue to ensure long-term sustainability by fulfilling our mandate through continuous improvement of internal operations.

Our Values

Our operational and strategic pillars reflect who we are. Our strategic direction and fundamental values are a bridge between who we are today and our future goals.

We are One

We work together in a collaborative and supportive manner to deliver unwavering and innovative services to our clients as one unified organization.

We advance and harness relationships to advance our clients' interests within the justice system.

We are Exceptional

We are experts at what we do and we continually strive for improvement.

We provide quality legal counsel, continuously elevate the knowledge and practice standards of our staff and roster lawyers and educate the public about their legal rights.

We are Protectors

We serve Albertans, often the most vulnerable of us, and work tirelessly to protect their rights and to ensure a fair process.

As legal advocates, we address the barriers disadvantaged and vulnerable Albertans face and help ensure the justice system remains accessible and accountable.

We are Independent

We operate and provide legal counsel free from outside involvement.

As an affirmed, independent partner of the Government of Alberta and the Law Society of Alberta, we maintain the expert perspective and space necessary to uphold the rule of law and provide objective, high-value guidance to our clients and the provincial justice system.



Priority 1

Quality

Advancing the Excellence and Integrity of Legal Representation

Our clients rely on high-quality, effective legal counsel. We foster an environment of excellence by providing specialized professional development, leveraging data to ensure accountability while also developing critical education to fill gaps in the legal community. By collaborating with partners and communities, we ensure our counsel is supported and equipped to meet the evolving complexities of the law and the specific needs of Albertans.

1. Enhance roster management and quality of legal service

We will ensure legal representation remains consistent, ethical and high-performing across all service areas through fair and transparent processes and metrics.

2. Enhance professional competency through strategic education

We will equip counsel to handle the increasing complexity of client files and systemic requirements by providing specialized education and developing education partnerships.

3. Elevate the standard of Indigenous representation

We will support a standard of professional representation that empowers counsel to address systemic inequities for Indigenous Peoples and ensures their legal representative is effective and protective of their unique legal rights.

Expected Results

By focusing on these aspects of quality, we will raise standards of care, leading to consistent, high-quality representation. Counsel will feel empowered and be strong advocates equipped with the tools, education and experience needed to boost their effectiveness. Our excellence will be based on data, demonstrating and addressing gaps to ensure the integrity of legal services across the province. Through proactive leadership and efforts to reduce barriers, we will contribute to a more equitable justice system and create an internal environment capable of prioritizing high-value interactions that result in better legal outcomes for Albertans.



Priority 2

Access

Enhancing the Accessibility of Legal Services

Access to justice requires innovative approaches and strong community partnerships to reach Albertans where they are. By combining technology with a human touch, we work intentionally with justice-system and community partners to break down systemic and geographic barriers. We make sure our programs and services offer a seamless entry to a fair process, regardless of a client's location or the complexity of their needs.

1. Diversify outreach through community integration

Expand the visibility of Legal Aid Alberta at precise points where vulnerable Albertans seek help, creating opportunities for early intervention before legal issues escalate.

2. Advance leadership readiness and evaluate emerging technologies

Research and assess the viability of modern tools, including artificial intelligence and automated systems, while enhancing leadership's knowledge of these technologies to determine their potential to enhance services and access.

3. Advancing culturally responsive programs

Co-design service delivery models with Indigenous communities to ensure programs reflect the unique legal rights and socio-economic realities of Indigenous Peoples.

Expected Results

Proactive and inclusive access will provide Albertans with a seamless entryway to legal counsel, supporting early interventions that resolve legal issues before they escalate. By researching AI tools and adapting our delivery models to reflect the cultural and evolving socio-economic realities of our clients, we identify the most effective pathways to improve access. This co-ordinated, evidence-based approach ensures LAA remains a sustainable partner in providing equitable access while reducing the overall strain on the justice system.



Priority 3

Accountability

Demonstrate Fiscal Stewardship and Systemic Value

We demonstrate our value as a subject-matter expert and essential partner in the administration of justice through exemplifying the highest standards of professional and fiscal accountability. By continuously optimizing our internal processes and aligning our operations, we ensure that LAA remains a sustainable, transparent and trusted steward of public resources.

1. Strengthen performance and system-impact reporting

By fostering a transparent, close working relationship with the Ministry of Justice, we can enhance and broaden performance measures to gain a deeper understanding of LAA's operations and cost drivers.

2. Drive operational efficiency and fiscal stewardship

Enhance resource use by identifying service improvements and implementing a proactive internal oversight model that leverages data to detect and resolve issues early.

3. Foster a sustainable and high-performing workforce

Prioritize organizational stability, specialized development and succession planning to attract and retain high-quality talent to deliver on our mandate in a complex environment.

Expected Results

Focusing on these aspects of accountability will result in LAA being recognized for its stewardship and oversight, which are foundational to high-value representation and expertise. By fostering a stable and resilient internal environment, we mitigate institutional risk and ensure the continuity of our expertise. Improving how we operate within the broader system allows LAA to build a sustainable foundation to fulfill our mandate with excellence.



Legal Aid Alberta

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