



Aboriginal Justice Strategy

Legal Aid Ontario's (LAO) Aboriginal Justice Strategy (AJS) is an organizational priority. Its goal: to improve legal aid services to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and individuals.

The first five years of the AJS: 2008-2013

In 2008, LAO began to develop an Aboriginal Justice Strategy. Its mandate: development of a three-to-five-year plan to achieve measurable improvements in LAO's services to Aboriginal people.

In 2008, LAO released [The Development of Legal Aid Ontario's Aboriginal Strategy](#) paper, which set out the main priorities for the AJS:

1. Removing barriers to accessing justice
2. Addressing the lack of Aboriginal representation within LAO and its advisory systems
3. Addressing the lack of Aboriginal legal representation or legal representation that is appropriately informed on the unique needs of Aboriginal clients
4. Improving services on legal issues specific to the Aboriginal community and addressing the role of LAO in participating in or supporting those processes specific to or driven by Aboriginal people

Fast Facts

Between January 2014 and July 2014, Aboriginal clients represented 15 per cent of all LAO's certificate clients. Of these clients:

- 88 per cent identified as First Nation
 - 10 per cent identified as Métis
 - 2 per cent identified as Inuit
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LAO has achieved significant milestones, based on these priorities, over the past five years, including:

- developing panel standards for representation of Aboriginal clients in criminal matters through the *Gladue* panel
- providing five extra hours on criminal certificates to allow counsel to prepare *Gladue* submissions at bail and sentencing.

- providing ongoing duty counsel services in *Gladue* court locations in Toronto, Brantford, London and Sarnia.
- forming partnerships with Aboriginal defence counsel to provide on-reserve legal advice services to First Nation community members.
- providing ongoing funding for:
 - The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres' Community Justice program
 - Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto's *Gladue* report program
 - Community Legal Assistance Sarnia for their award-winning Baamsedaa (Let's Walk Together) program
 - Hamilton Community Legal Clinic's Aboriginal Justice outreach worker
- providing more than 500 LAO staff with intensive two-day Aboriginal cultural competency training
- ensuring Aboriginal representation on LAO's Board of Directors
- implementing a recruitment policy aimed at hiring more Aboriginal staff at LAO

The next five years of the AJS: 2013-2018

LAO is committed to increasing the services it provides to Aboriginal clients and communities. Over the first five years of the AJS, environmental scans and recent reports highlighted the situation of Aboriginal people in Ontario's justice system. It remains dire. Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal and child protection systems, the growing young Aboriginal population, and increasing poverty all suggest that the AJS needs to continue.

The goal of the renewed AJS is to expand important client services and increase LAO's ability to respond to local needs.

To meet this goal, LAO has developed four strategic priorities that will guide the AJS over next five years:

1. Improve and increase access to *Gladue* services for Aboriginal peoples and communities
2. Develop a localized model for the delivery of legal aid services to ensure that such services respond to the needs of Aboriginal individuals and communities
3. Improve relationships and increase LAO's understanding of the legal needs and unique circumstances of Aboriginal populations in Ontario and how to address them
4. Strengthen LAO's internal capacity to enhance services to Aboriginal clients and communities, and ensure sustainability of improvements

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