



November 4, 2021

The sixth annual Access to Justice Week (A2J Week) in Ontario took place from October 25 to 29, featuring 25 virtual programs centered on the themes of inclusive justice and community building. The development of this year's [Access to Justice Week](#) was guided by six priorities identified by The Action Group on Access to Justice (TAG):

- Greater sharing of data and innovations
- Using a leave no one behind lens
- Generating new data and making evidence-based decisions
- Engaging with the Indigenous community, tribunals or self-represented litigants
- Promoting A2J issues to the public
- Advancing the national justice development goals.

Building on this foundational work, combined with the learnings from this year's diverse programming, some of the themes that are emerging to guide TAG's work over the next 12-months, include:

- Accessibility, particularly with respect to technology
- Mental health, mentoring and supporting new licensees for a sustainable legal profession
- Skill development for new professionals in court and tribunal settings
- Promotion of services and information to the public
- Authentic engagement with the Indigenous community and taking meaningful steps on the path to Reconciliation
- Collaboration with non-legal partners to expand front-line services and increase public awareness to help navigate the justice system
- Data collection and information sharing
- Increasing capacity of lawyers to provide affordable legal services and legal aid
- Advancing the national justice development goals.

Work underway and key takeaways from this year's A2J Week, include:

- **Access to justice through Access to Innovation:** The Law Society is in the process of launching its Access to Innovation project, or A2I, to increase access to justice by facilitating the provision of new technological legal services. A2I will provide consumers with new options to obtain legal services, including websites, apps and software, while protecting the public interest. Read the [news release](#).
- **Women in law:** In April, the Law Society hosted the inaugural Treasurer's Roundtable on Women in Law in collaboration with the Canadian Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges. The Law Society's Women in Law Advisory Group will consider the [summary report](#) and its recommendations and provide advice on how the Law Society can demonstrate leadership to support women in law.
- **Enhancing the professions' relationships with Indigenous Peoples:** Sessions on enhancing the legal professions' relationships with Indigenous Peoples were featured prominently in the week's programming. Key takeaways include:
 - Recommendations 27 and 28 of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action were examined along with strategies to address resistance to cultural competency training. Panelists reported on positive implementation and feedback on Indigenous law courses in law schools and explored how to appropriately engage Indigenous Peoples in the development and implementation of cultural competency training at law schools and in the legal professions.



- Other key takeaways include the need to invest in Indigenous communities to promote Indigenous legal orders, languages and cultures; transforming legal aid to be provided for and by Indigenous Peoples; and the need for legal professionals providing services to Indigenous Peoples to be trauma informed.
- **Public legal seminars:** Over the course of two days, three virtual public legal seminars welcomed both English and French speaking members of the public to ask general questions on civil, criminal, family and real estate law, share tools and resources and provide information on French-language rights.
- **People-centered access to justice: Best practices for serving clients with mental health needs:** Key outcomes from this session included teachings of people-first language and sharing of a language guide, learnings of intersectionality in mental health, legal professionals' role in reducing stigma and providing accommodations and support to clients with mental health needs.
- **Inclusive Innovation: Best practices for "digital first" virtual courts and tribunals:** Participants discussed ideas on how to improve virtual court and tribunal processes now and post-pandemic.
- **Justice on the ground:** This session brought together front-line community workers who often help members of their communities navigate the justice system. Participants learned about the obstacles faced by members of the public on a day-to-day basis, the support provided by community workers and the transformational changes needed in policing, public policy and the justice sector to provide access to justice to vulnerable communities.
- **A2J in practice: Tips for successfully building access to justice into your law practice:** Participants in this session learned how to incorporate access to justice processes and strategies into their practice to help clients experiencing financial barriers to the justice system. Panelists shared real-life experience using sliding scale rates, unbundling, volunteering and legal aid to serve clients while building successful practices and managing risk.
- **Making connections: Promoting the role of paralegals in access to justice:** Paralegals play an important role in access to justice by providing affordable legal services. Participants in this session learned how paralegals can promote both their services and the profession to external audiences, as well as how paralegals can leverage their own networks to promote the profession's role in access to justice. A public awareness effort is currently underway across Law Society and partner channels, and a [fact sheet](#) and [webpage](#) about the role of paralegals is available.
- **Guidelines for better legal workshops:** Participants in this session learned how to advance access to justice through hosting better public legal workshops. Panelists shared how to effectively design and deliver legal workshops for the public by considering content design, working with community partners and creating an engaging workshop structure.
- **Use your legal training - Afghan crisis:** Lawyers with expertise in private sponsorship and refugee claims shared the historical context of the Afghan crisis as well as personal stories to empower and inspire participants to use their legal training to help Afghan refugees hoping to come to Canada.
- **Working together to increase access to justice:** This session explored the important role Pro Bono Ontario has played in facilitating access to justice, the support required to achieve access to justice in Ontario, as well as practices that can support licensees in building a pro bono culture.
- **Access to justice tools and resources for sole practitioners and small firms:** Participants were guided through a case study on how to efficiently use the resources available to them, including legal library services, to facilitate access to justice. This session also examined how the LA Law



Library works with justice sector participants to develop innovative and meaningful programs for the public, highlighting the effectiveness of providing services in non-traditional settings.

- **How journalism is advancing the public dialogue on criminal justice reform:** During this session, journalists shared their ongoing challenges in reporting on criminal matters, including access to information, the need for public media literacy and engaging the general public on criminal justice reform.
- **The right to be heard - the future of advocacy in Canada:** Participants in this session learned about the future of advocacy in Canada through a report by the Advocate's Society. Speakers discussed the roles of both in-person and remote oral advocacy and a framework for determining which format is most appropriate for hearing a matter.
- **Breaking down the unfair stigma of a criminal record:** This session shared insights on the challenges faced by people with criminal records and what solutions are required to help break down the stigma. Panelists discussed inequities in cannabis enforcement, reform of the Criminal Records Act and both the challenges of and resources for employment issues faced by individuals with a criminal record.
- **Why be optimistic about bail reform in Ontario:** Participants in this session learned of the unique challenges of Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities as they relate to bail, new programs in place from the Ministry of the Attorney General, changes in approaches by justices of the peace and innovations brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Panelists shared how criminal justice lawyers can be engaged in systemic change.
- **Family law roundtable:** Members of The Action Group on Access to Justice met to review family law services available in Ontario from both public and private entities. Discussions centered on how to better direct and inform clients about innovative solutions to affordable family law, including flexible pricing options, normalizing the concept of unbundled services, coaching tools and more.

In addition to Ontario-based programming, a series of national events were held across the country hosted by justice sector partners. These events covered a wide range of topics from Indigenous and Reconciliation-related programs to rural justice, the impacts of COVID-19 on online adjudication, disability justice and community-based access to justice.

Program recordings will be available on the [TAG website](#) in the coming days.

The Law Society regulates [lawyers and paralegals](#) in Ontario in the public interest. The Law Society has a mandate to protect the public interest, to maintain and to advance the cause of justice and the rule of law, to facilitate access to justice for the people of Ontario and to act in a timely, open and efficient manner.

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