

### INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS LEGAL SUPPORT CENTRE

The Human Rights Legal Support Centre (HRLSC) was established pursuant to the Ontario Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2006 and first became operational on June 30, 2008. The HRLSC provides legal advice and legal services across the province to individuals whose rights under the *Human Rights Code* have been infringed.

Over its first three years of its operation, the HRLSC responded to almost 72,000 telephone inquiries from across Ontario. Almost half of these inquiries were from individuals seeking legal assistance because of an infringement, or possible infringement, of their rights under the *Human Rights Code*. The HRLSC provided immediate legal services to these 34,000 individuals, including assistance in respect of an application or potential application to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. In addition, HRLSC lawyers have provided a range of in-depth legal services, up to and including representation, to approximately 6000 individuals with applications proceeding before the Tribunal.

The HRLSC has won significant legal victories for individuals who faced discriminatory treatment or conduct, as well as important public interest remedies that changed the practices of employers, landlords and service providers across the province. In a client satisfaction survey of individuals with cases where the HRLSC provided representation, 88% of responding clients surveyed rated the HRLSC services as “very good” and an additional 8% as “good”. Fully 96% reported that their HRLSC lawyer understood their situation and explained their rights and options to them in a way that they could understand.

In recognition of the fact that demand for legal services exceeds its capacity, the HRLSC has introduced innovative programs designed to increase its capacity to serve as many Ontarians who face discrimination as possible, including:

- An emergency/early intervention program that often resolves issues before a human rights application is filed;
- Lawyers based in regional centres of the province, in partnership with local community legal clinics;
- Application “clinics” to assist self-representing applicants to prepare and file their own applications to the Tribunal;
- Legal educational materials to assist individuals in understanding how to enforce their rights through Ontario’s human rights system;

- Training and strategic advice to community workers, legal clinics and local support and advocacy agencies to help them identify and resolve human rights issues;
- A panel of *pro bono* lawyers, including lawyers outside Toronto, that provides free representation at mediation to individuals referred by the HRLSC;
- Partnership with law schools and student legal assistance programs to provide additional legal services to applicants, including in communities outside Toronto.

This strategic plan was developed to guide the HRLSC's future activities and promote continued ingenuity and innovation, ensuring that our programs are responsive, productive and effective.

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## STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The HRLSC initiated a process in 2010 to develop a new strategic plan to guide the organization for the period of 2011 to 2013. The process, directed by a joint Board-Staff Strategic Planning Committee included internal and external consultations (including key informant interviews, survey of stakeholder organizations, client satisfaction survey), the development of a comprehensive environmental scan and a strategic planning retreat with Board and staff.

The strategic plan outlines HRLSC's vision, mission, and core values and identifies key strategic directions for the next three years. Strategic initiatives are also outlined for each strategic direction. Indicators of success are documented in the attached appendix and will be further developed and documented through our annual operational business planning process.

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## VISION STATEMENT

*Our vision describes the future we seek to create. Our vision statement, set out below, defines what success will look like. It builds on our current strengths and reflects our understanding of the needs to which we respond.*

**The Human Rights Legal Support Centre strives to be a leader in advancing equality, in protecting human rights and in supporting every person's right to live and work with dignity and respect.**

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## MANDATE

*Our mandate statement below describes our unique contribution as an organization to the vision we seek to achieve.*

**The Human Rights Legal Support Centre advances equality and protects human rights by providing a range of accessible and high quality legal and support services to those who have faced discrimination contrary to Ontario's human rights laws.**

# CORE VALUES

*Our core values guide our actions and are informed by the diverse needs and perspectives of the people and communities we serve. Through the strategic planning process we affirmed our core values, illustrating how we intend to operate, on a day-to-day basis, as we pursue our vision. The HRLSC's four core values are summarized as follows.*

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## SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY

The HRLSC will establish policies and priorities for the delivery of services that take into account the historic disadvantage faced by individuals and communities identified by a ground of discrimination under the *Code*. Priority will be given to providing legal assistance to members of marginalized communities and to individuals who would be most disadvantaged in self-advocating for equality rights.

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## ACCESSIBILITY

The HRLSC is committed to providing legal and support service in a manner that is free of barriers, including physical and functional barriers as well as barriers created by geography, language and by process. The HRLSC will be responsive to the geographic, cultural, linguistic and accessibility needs of its diverse client communities.

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## EXCELLENT QUALITY OF SERVICE

The HRLSC is committed to delivering high-quality, timely legal and support services through a committed and well-trained staff that respects the dignity of every person seeking advice and assistance. The HRLSC will employ a variety of flexible and innovative service delivery methods to meet the needs of diverse and disadvantaged communities across the province.

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## TRANSPARENT AND CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

The HRLSC will ensure that its policies governing service delivery are informed by community input and are available to the public.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

*To achieve our vision and operate consistent with our mandate, we have identified and described below three strategic directions as our areas of focus for the next three years. These strategic directions both inspire and guide us.*

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## 1. ADVANCING EQUALITY THROUGH LEGAL ADVOCACY

The HRLSC will strive to advance equality and protect human rights through legal advocacy.

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## 2. BUILDING ACCESS TO LEGAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The HRLSC will strive to ensure and enhance access to legal and support services for human rights claimants.

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## 3. CHAMPIONING ONTARIO'S HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

The HRLSC will play a leading role in championing an effective human rights system for Ontarians.

In the following section, the three strategic directions are described in more detail and include specific initiatives that will be pursued over the next three years.

# STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

## 1. ADVANCING EQUALITY THROUGH LEGAL ADVOCACY

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The HRLSC will strive to advance equality and protect human rights through its legal advocacy by:

- a. Continuing to litigate human rights applications to build a culture of compliance;
- b. Identifying and taking forward test cases that will have a broad positive impact on equality rights for historically disadvantaged communities;
- c. Supporting excellent advocacy and successful results at mediation and at hearings through staff training and legal research;
- d. Contributing to a progressive body of human rights jurisprudence through strategic and effective litigation.

## 2. BUILDING ACCESS TO LEGAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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The HRLSC will strive to ensure and enhance access to its legal and support services for human rights claimants by:

- a. Identifying opportunities to improve our capacity to respond to calls to our telephone intake lines in a timely and efficient manner;
- b. Pursuing innovative methods or programs to improve our capacity to effectively deliver legal services, including self-help and representation, within current financial resources;
- c. Developing strategies to ensure and enhance regional delivery of our services
- d. Working with partners including the Ontario Human Rights Commission, community legal clinics, law schools, unions, and community organizations to share resources and support capacity to deliver services across the province.

### 3. CHAMPIONING ONTARIO'S HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

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The HRLSC will play a leading role in championing an effective human rights system for Ontarians through:

- a. Shared leadership with our partners in the Ontario human rights system - the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario;
- b. Building the system's overall capacity through improved co-ordination, clarification of roles and, where appropriate, enhanced collaboration with the Commission and the Tribunal;
- c. "Telling human rights stories" – creating opportunities, including media contacts and events, to bring human rights stories – the stories of our clients - to the attention of the broader public across the province, to build a greater shared understanding of the value of Ontario's human rights system;
- d. Targeted communication and collaboration with community-based services and other potential partner organizations across the province to enhance the visibility of the human rights enforcement system and use of the Centre's services in all communities.

## Strategic Plan - Success Indicators

Strategic Direction	Strategic Initiatives		Success Indicators
	Objective	Directions & Steps	
<p><b>Advancing Equality through Legal Advocacy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To build a culture of compliance with human rights requirements.</li> <li>To have a broad positive impact on equality rights for historically disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>To support excellent advocacy and successful results at mediation and at hearings.</li> <li>To contribute to a progressive body of human rights jurisprudence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide representation and other legal support to meritorious discrimination claims.</li> <li>Apply service eligibility guidelines to make strategic and effective use of litigation resources to assist the most disadvantaged.</li> <li>Focus a portion of resources on high impact or test cases which will have a broad impact on historically disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>Publicize important victories to increase public awareness.</li> <li>Enhance accessibility for meritorious claims by providing options and appropriate referrals where facts do not support a finding of discrimination.</li> <li>Create training opportunities to maximize effectiveness of litigation team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centre can demonstrate high level of success in representing and supporting applicants at mediations and hearings.</li> <li>Centre achieves victory in high impact or test cases on behalf of member of historically disadvantaged group.</li> <li>Centre is able to garner media or other public attention for human rights victories that tell an important anti-discrimination story.</li> <li>Centre can demonstrate an impact in achieving equality for Ontarians, whether through decisions that establish and clarify rights and through broad public interest remedies that achieved at mediation or hearings.</li> </ul>



## Strategic Plan - Success Indicators

Strategic Direction	Strategic Initiatives		Success Indicators
	Objectives	Directions & Steps	
<b>Building Access to Legal and Support Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve our capacity to respond to calls to our telephone inquiries telephone lines in a timely and efficient manner.</li> <li>To improve our capacity to effectively deliver legal services, including representation, within current financial resources.</li> <li>To ensure and enhance regional delivery of HRLSC services.</li> <li>To share resources and develop partnership that support our capacity to deliver services across the province.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to enhance expertise of advice staff to support efficient service.</li> <li>Support, evaluate and expand programs/partnership that increase legal services capacity (e.g. Pro Bono Panel, Osgoode Anti-discrimination Intensive).</li> <li>Explore closer collaboration with OHRC on shared mandate to deliver legal information to the public.</li> <li>Work with community partners (including legal clinics) to support local capacity to identify, support and refer human rights claimants to the HRLSC, as appropriate.</li> <li>Maximize service to the public through effective, efficient allocation and targeting of resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centre increases :                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the volume of telephone inquiries answered annually;</li> <li>the percentage of answered calls that are seeking legal assistance in addressing discrimination; and</li> <li>web site usage.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Centre receives appropriate referrals from agencies across the province based on recognition of its role as a leader in human rights advocacy in the province.</li> <li>Centre draws telephone inquiries from across Ontario and litigates cases regularly at all HRTO regional locations.</li> <li>Centre maintains at least one part-time or full-time lawyer position in each region outside the Toronto area.</li> <li>Centre establishes local service partnerships with regional organizations, (e.g. legal clinics and law schools).</li> </ul>

## Strategic Plan - Success Indicators

Strategic Direction	Strategic Initiatives		Success Indicators
	Objectives	Directions & Steps	
<p><b>Championing Ontario’s Human Rights System</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To build shared leadership with our partners in the Ontario human rights system – the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.</li> <li>To build the system’s overall capacity.</li> <li>To build a greater shared public understanding of the value of Ontario’s human rights system.</li> <li>To enhance the visibility of the human rights system and the Centre’s services in all communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage the OHRC in strategic discussions - how can we provide more service to the public by collaborating more closely?</li> <li>Engage the Tribunal in agency-to-agency discussions as appropriate to find efficiencies to enhance overall service to the public.</li> <li>Identify and share important human rights stories from our work – with government, with communities, with media and within the justice sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media reports reflect increased public support for action against discrimination in employment, housing, services, facilities.</li> <li>The concluding report from the statutory review of Ontario’s human rights reforms finds that the HRLSC has played an important role in building an effective and efficient enforcement system.</li> <li>Ontario’s human rights system wins support from stakeholders in business sector and in designated group communities.</li> </ul>