

2025/26 – 2027/28

Human Rights Legal Support Centre

Accessible Operational Business Plan

Ontario 

HR|SC | Human Rights Legal Support Centre

CA|JP | Centre d'assistance juridique
en matière de droits de la personne

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Section 1: Executive Summary

The [Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#) (HRLSC) is Ontario's leading publicly-funded human rights organization, tasked with helping support individual Ontarians claim and protect their human right to equality and freedom from discrimination under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*) through the provision of legal support services. Established in 2008 under the *Code*, the HRLSC is one of three pillars of Ontario's human rights system, alongside the [Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario](#) (HRTTO or Tribunal) and the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) (OHRC).

The HRLSC provides Ontarians who have experienced discrimination with legal advice and support services. We advise and assist clients who may be looking for early resolutions, or to file a human rights complaint (application) at the Tribunal. We also provide information and advice on the HRTTO processes and the merits of individual cases, and may represent applicants at mediations, hearings, judicial reviews, and follow-up enforcements of decisions and settlements at the HRTTO, as well as appeals litigation.

In 2023, the HRLSC initiated a historic strategic planning process (only the second since its creation) to identify new priority areas – those where proactive and sustained work can have an impact over the coming 2025-2028 planning period. We engaged more than 28 organizations and 180 individuals, including staff, clients, human rights service providers, community organizations, three-pillar partners, other stakeholder partners, the Board and funders, through focus groups, interviews and surveys. We heard about growing discrimination and listened to concerns about the erosion of our human rights system and protections. We also heard that the HRLSC, as a trusted and expert organization, is uniquely positioned to advance a more equitable society.

Our new 5-year (2024-2029) strategic plan, [Realizing Human Rights Together, Empowering Access to Justice](#), will be the main driver of our operational plans over the 2025-2028 period, alongside and in furtherance of our Ministry of Attorney General (MAG) Annual Letter of Direction. Our Strategic Plan builds on our history of successes and inspires us for the future. The plan is informed by a revitalized organizational vision to empower people and communities who have experienced discrimination in Ontario by providing high quality legal services and supports and strengthening people's capacity to navigate the province's human rights system.

With this new plan, we commit to efficiently and responsibly aligning our resources with our priorities, as identified in our Strategic Plan and MAG's Annual Letter of Direction. We further commit to data-driven and evidence-informed approaches that are grounded in people's lived experience, and to building our organizational capacity and investing in our future sustainability. Successfully delivering on this plan will ultimately require us to leverage our collective expertise and to work collaboratively with our partners. In doing so, we will provide leadership in Ontario's human rights system while improving and

expanding access to human rights legal supports and service options for people across Ontario, especially for those who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.

The HRLSC's people-centered new strategic directions are responsive to client and stakeholder feedback, as well as developments in our internal and external operating environment. This context includes ongoing financial sustainability challenges, and backlog and delays at the HRTO. In this environment, the HRLSC is committed to augmenting our early and alternative dispute resolution services, and to seeking out new sources of funding and revenue generating opportunities, including through expanded partnerships and collaboration.

Considering the broader societal landscape of deepening inequality, polarization and civil strife, we anticipate the need for our legal support services will continue to grow in the coming years and become ever more indispensable. We are committed to exploring new business models and partnerships, and monitoring who we serve, to help us meet the increasing demand for our services. We believe that improving public understanding of the value of the HRLSC's human rights legal services will advance access to, and attainment of, social justice for individuals and communities across Ontario.

We also know that we will not be able to do this successfully without continuing to invest in our valued employees. We are thus aspiring to make the HRLSC a human rights employer of choice, which will in turn require concerted and sustained efforts to improve employee recruitment and retention as well as intentional fostering of workplace health and wellbeing.

Section 2: Mandate

Legislative Mandate

The HRLSC is mandated under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* to "be independent from, but accountable to, the Government of Ontario" (s45.11[5]), and to:

- (a) establish and administer a cost effective and efficient system for providing support services, including legal services, respecting applications to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario;
- (b) establish policies and priorities for the provision of support services based on its financial resources (*Code*, s45.12).

More specifically, the *Code* mandates HRLSC to provide the following support services:

1. Advice and assistance, legal and otherwise, respecting the infringement of rights under the *Code*;

2. Legal services in relation to,
 - i. the making of applications to the Tribunal,
 - ii. proceedings before the Tribunal,
 - iii. applications for judicial review arising from Tribunal proceedings,
 - iv. stated case proceedings,
 - v. the enforcement of Tribunal orders (*Code*, s.45.13).

Vision Statement

The HRLSC is committed to advancing an equitable society where everyone lives with dignity and respect and upholds and promotes human rights.

Mission Statement

The HRLSC's role is to empower people and communities who have experienced discrimination by providing legal services and supports, strengthening people's capacity to navigate the human rights system and advancing access to and the attainment of justice in Ontario.

Section 3: Government Priorities Relevant to the HRLSC

Each year, Ontario's Attorney General sends a new Letter of Direction to share the province's government-wide directions and commitments. This letter includes specific expectations of the HRLSC for the coming fiscal year.

In its 2025-2026 Letter of Direction, MAG set out the following priorities specific to the HRLSC:

1. The HRLSC is expected to continue to prioritize addressing the recommendations of the 2022-23 mandate review approved by Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS). This includes specific recommendations focused on the possibility of implementing financial eligibility criteria, strengthening data collection, and leveraging client data to inform decision-making.
2. In accordance with the 2020 TBS audit, the HRLSC is expected to continue to work with MAG's Justice Technology Services and Information Technology Services to migrate the HRLSC IT services to the Ontario Public Service (OPS) network to take advantage of shared infrastructure.
3. The HRLSC is expected to continue to work on developing its new five-year Strategic Plan and share updates with the Ministry as needed.

The 2025-2026 Letter of Direction moreover set out government-wide commitments for board-governed provincial agencies to fulfill, including that the HRLSC (like all such agencies) be innovative, sustainable and accountable in the following ways:

Innovative

1. Simplify client/customer interactions.
2. Expand and optimize digital service offerings.
3. Improve client/customer satisfaction.
4. Share data with Supply Ontario, when requested, regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision-making.

Sustainable

5. Strengthen public service delivery by optimizing organizational capacity and directing existing resources to priority areas.
6. Use Public Resources efficiently and
 - a) Operate within agency's financial allocations.
 - b) Prudently and responsibly manage workforce size. Where an agency requires a material increase in workforce size, the agency must provide the Minister with an HR plan for approval that provides the rationale based on government priorities and/or agency mandate.

Accountable

7. Develop and report on outcome-focused performance measures to effectively monitor and measure performance.
8. Protect individual, business or organization data by actively managing data and cybersecurity and reporting Artificial Intelligence uses.
9. Report on all high risks including effective mitigation plans.
10. Align hybrid work policies with the OPS and identify and assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint and find cost reductions:
 - a) Collaborate with MOI to identify office space opportunities;
 - b) Align with the MBC Realty Directive and the OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS) Standards.
11. Develop and encourage diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace.

The HRLSC's 2026-2027 Letter of Direction from the Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG) included instructions for the HRLSC and its three-pillar partner, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), to maintain regular communication in order to strengthen information-sharing and identify direct opportunities to enhance efficiency and impact in the delivery of their mandated services to the people of Ontario.

Section 11.2 below outlines and specifies how HRLSC's operational plans and initiatives over the 2025-2028 operating period fulfill and advance the priorities and expectations issued by MAG through these documents.

Section 4: HRLSC Services & Overview of Programs and Activities

In the 2025-26 to 2027-28 planning period, the HRLSC will continue to work to advance equality and protect the human rights of all Ontarians by providing high quality legal services and supports in relation to the HRTO's application, mediation and hearing processes. The HRLSC will work to fulfill the priorities set out in its new 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, *Realizing Human Rights Together, Empowering Access to Justice*, including in ways that significantly dovetail and advance the above-mentioned directives (as discussed in Section 11).

The HRLSC will continue to ensure that its commitments to innovation, sustainability, and accountability are planned and executed in a manner that empowers people and communities with legal services and supports that enable them to navigate the human rights system and access and attain human rights justice.

The HRLSC's services, programs, and activities include:

4.1 Information, Advice, Intake and In-Depth Legal Services

Information, Advice and Intake Line for Inquiries:

The HRLSC provides legal information and advice to individuals who believe they have been subjected to discrimination. Information and advice may be obtained in multiple formats, including through our phone line, internet tools and resources through our website or our online portal, and public awareness initiatives in relation to the HRLSC's services and HRTO's processes.

The HRLSC's services are most frequently accessed through our phone line — which includes a call-back option for clients — operated by our intake staff.

This phone service includes a priority line for individuals incarcerated at correctional facilities operated by the Ministry of the Solicitor General. The HRLSC tracks the number of inquiries coming from this priority phone line to help inform any decisions on future service delivery in this area. These inquiries are logged and tracked separately from general intake data.

In 2023-2024, the HRLSC responded to more than 23,000 inquiries through our accessible, multi-language phone and intake services.

In-Depth Legal Services:

The HRLSC helps individuals determine whether they have a *bona fide* human rights claim. This process includes gathering intake information from the individual, reviewing their case information and documentation, assisting with HRTTO applications, providing legal advice and assessing their initial application if drafted, as well as an in-depth one-hour interview with a Staff Lawyer, Legal Service Representative, or Human Rights Representative, to provide legal advice specific to the client's circumstances. If the case can move forward, the HRLSC discusses options for resolving the claim, emphasizing early intervention and dispute resolution when possible. If early settlement is not possible, the HRLSC helps resolve human rights claims, including by preparing qualifying individuals to apply for redress to the HRTTO.

The HRLSC provided detailed legal advice to more than 1,600 individuals in 2023-2024.

Mediation Services

Mediations are an opportunity for parties to meet with an HRTTO member to try to resolve their dispute before it goes to a hearing. Clients are supported by the HRLSC at mediations through legal advice and legal representation. In the 2023-2024 period, 62% of clients represented by the HRLSC at a voluntary HRTTO mediation were successful in reaching a settlement.

Pre-Hearing Services

The HRLSC provided extensive representation services to individuals facing pre-merit preliminary and procedural hearings, such as in motions brought by Respondents asking for early dismissal of applications, and in Case Management Case Conferences. In 2023-24, the HRLSC provided legal representation at 55 preliminary hearings.

Hearings Services

The HRLSC provides individuals with legal representation with their applications at hearings before the HRTTO with a focus on public interest remedies. In 2023-2024, the HRLSC provided legal representation in 12 merit hearings.

Settlement Services

The HRLSC helps negotiate settlements for individuals who apply to the HRTTO. Settlements may be achieved before or shortly after an application is filed; before or at the mediation stage; or before, or at, hearings. In 2023-2024, the HRLSC settled 220 cases.

Enforcement Services

The HRLSC assists individuals in recovering monetary settlements and enforcing awards issued by the HRTTO following a decision. The HRLSC recovered several awards owed to

its clients as a result of its enforcement efforts, particularly examinations in aid of execution, primarily before the Small Claims Court, but also the Superior Court of Justice for HRTO awards over \$35,000.

Judicial Review & Appeal Services

The HRLSC also provides in-depth legal assistance to individuals applying for judicial review of HRTO decisions.

In 2023-24, the HRLSC participated in three judicial reviews and one appeal. The HRLSC appeared before the Divisional Court and the Ontario Court of Appeal in two landmark cases. The first, securing unionized workers access to the HRTO to enforce their rights under the *Code*; the second striking down barriers to employment for international graduate students that required Canadian citizenship through permanent residency. At Divisional Court, the HRLSC successfully challenged a rule regarding eligibility to a service dog benefit for *ODSP* recipients with multiple disabilities, including mental health disabilities.

4.2 Programs, Partnerships, and Activities

Collaboration with Ontario Human Rights ("Three-Pillar") Partners

The Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO)

In the 2024–2025 fiscal year, approximately 69% of online referral traffic to the HRLSC's website originated from the Tribunals Ontario website, reflecting ongoing efforts to ensure the HRTO's site and online application forms include direct links to the HRLSC's webpage.

The leadership of the HRLSC and HRTO continue to regularly discuss ways to further promote accessible human rights services to all applicants. The HRTO has consulted the HRLSC on some of its practices and procedures and about sharing information regarding the HRLSC's service delivery and self-help guides. The HRTO regularly refers applicants to the HRLSC, and the HRLSC helps the HRTO guide self-represented applicants.

The HRLSC also engaged with HRTO representatives through stakeholder consultations for the development of the HRLSC's new Strategic Plan.

With new strategic priorities regarding service delivery and providing leadership for Ontario's human rights system, the HRLSC will be seeking to work more proactively and deliberately with the HRTO, including to advance Strategic Plan priorities and align services with changing client service needs at the HRTO. Notably, the HRTO's recent introduction of mandatory mediations is one such example where the HRLSC will need to align its resources to meet the growing demand for mediation support services.

Ontario Human Rights Commission

In addition to continuing its consultations with the OHRC, the HRLSC will also be seeking to expand collaborative efforts with the OHRC and improve information-sharing, including ensuring no duplication of services. Maximizing knowledge and understanding of the respective roles and resources to better identify and advance shared human rights priorities will enhance outcomes for the people of Ontario. This will be done through:

- Convening regularly scheduled meetings between the HRLSC's Chair and the OHRC's Chief Commissioner to discuss governance-level priorities and ensure alignment on strategic objectives. The goal of these meetings is to clarify respective mandates, ensure complementary and non-overlapping service areas and promoting three-pillar strategic service coherence.
- Continuing to schedule regular meetings between the HRLSC's Executive Director and the OHRC's Executive Director to share updates on program and service delivery, share data of mutual relevance, coordinate efforts to advance respective mandates, and identify opportunities for efficiencies through collaboration.
- Scheduling regular meetings between HRLSC and OHRC Legal Directors to share insights on litigation trends, including monitoring noteworthy Applications and decisions that are relevant to Ontario's human rights system.
- Having other members of management and/or staff teams meet, when and as appropriate, to support ongoing collaboration efforts arising from the above engagements.

Anti-Discrimination Intensive Program

The Anti-Discrimination Intensive Program (ADIP) continues to be an important experiential learning partnership for the HRLSC with York University's Osgoode Hall Law School. This award-winning program places 12 Osgoode Hall law students with the HRLSC each year. The ADIP students augment the HRLSC's telephone intake capacity and assist the HRLSC's staff in their work with clients, including summary advice, mediations, and hearings. The HRLSC's ADIP students continue to be integral members of the intake and legal team and enhance the capacity and innovation of the HRLSC's services.

In the 2025-2026 year, the HRLSC will be launching a new and exciting expansion of its ADIP program to include a new mediation and early resolution stream. The new Mediation, Early Resolution & Experiential Education Training (MEET) pilot program, also in partnership with Osgoode Hall Law School, will significantly expand HRLSC's early resolution and mediation services for HRLSC clients, and provide up to six Osgoode Hall

law students per year with direct experiential learning and mentorship in human rights mediation and early dispute resolution. This is a much-needed enhancement in light of the HRTO's new rule of procedure requiring mandatory mediation and will also help advance the HRLSC's strategic priority of expanding our early resolution services.

Guided Pathway Partnership with Community Legal Education Ontario

In the 2025-2026 year, the HRLSC will also be launching the development of a new self-administered "Guided Pathway" tool in partnership with Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) that will help Ontarians directly complete and file an HRTO application.

The proposed new interactive online tool will help people claim and protect their rights, especially those whom the HRLSC is unable to directly support due to capacity constraints or eligibility reasons. The HRLSC expects the new tool to be finalized by the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

The HRLSC collaborates with the Barbra Schlifer Clinic to offer women who have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence greater access to justice. Through direct, mutual referrals, and training activities, the HRLSC and the Schlifer Clinic share resources and expertise to provide effective legal supports and engage in safety planning for individuals impacted by gender-based violence. Referrals from the Schlifer Clinic to the HRLSC address the right to be free from sexual harassment. Referrals to the Schlifer Clinic from the HRLSC have been made to provide individuals with additional support in family and immigration law and counselling.

Cybersecurity and Service Delivery

To align the HRLSC with government-wide priorities and proactively meet MAG's expectations, as well as in response to the October 2023 cybersecurity incident, the HRLSC sought to strengthen its existing security systems. The HRLSC continues to work with its cybersecurity consultant to ensure compliance with IT standards and to identify ongoing training for the HRLSC staff on raising awareness on cybersecurity.

Law Foundation of Ontario (LFO) Funded Initiatives

The HRLSC received two grants from the Law Foundation of Ontario (LFO) during this planning period.

- The LFO Responsive Grant, *Leave No One Behind: Empowering Access to Human Rights Justice*, supports early human rights dispute resolution. The LFO Responsive Grant provides \$250,000 in funding for the period covering January 20, 2025, to January 19, 2027, supporting one full-time staff throughout this funding period to supervise twelve new Osgoode Law School student experiential

education placements who are completing their upper year practicum course work at the HRLSC.

- The LFO Strategic Grant, *Realizing Human Rights Together: Empowering Access to Human Rights Justice*, provides \$4.536M in funding for the period covering September 8, 2025, to March 31, 2028.
- Between January and December 2025, the HRLSC used a portion of this funding to hire 11.8 temporary full-time staff positions over this period to support the HRLSC's servicing of the HRTO's Mandatory Mediation.

Strategic Planning and Service Delivery

The HRLSC is seeking to address the growing demands for its services by continuing to work with its government funders and community partners through its new Strategic Plan.

Being responsive to stakeholder and staff feedback, the new Strategic Plan calls for the HRLSC to be highly agile in diversifying its legal support services, securing new and alternative sources of funding, and reaching marginalized and underserved communities.

Key frontline service-facing priorities of the HRLSC's new Strategic Plan include:

- Focusing on, and increasing, early intervention and resolution services; and
- Improving access to legal services and supports for people in Ontario, especially those who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.

Partnerships through Indigenous Services and Outreach Committee

The Indigenous Services and Outreach Committee (ISOC) continues its work in providing accessible legal services to callers to the HRLSC who identify as Indigenous. Its work includes engaging with Indigenous communities to inform them of the HRLSC's legal and support services, the three pillars of Ontario's human rights system, and how to enforce their rights through the HRTO application process, and early dispute resolution. ISOC also engages in targeted outreach for these same purposes through a number of stakeholder partnerships.

Patient Ombudsman

The Patient Ombudsman's role is to help resolve complaints from patients, residents and caregivers about experiences in Ontario's health care system. ISOC continues to work with the Patient Ombudsperson to identify possible opportunities for referrals for clients to the HRLSC.

Disability Justice Network of Ontario

The Disability Justice Network of Ontario (DJNO) advocates for a more just and inclusive Ontario for people with disabilities. ISOC continues to work with DJNO to

receive client referrals, in particular through the DJNO's work with individuals in the custody of Corrections Ontario.

Tribunals Ontario – Indigenous Services

ISOC has included the Indigenous Services Lead at Tribunals Ontario in two of its meetings. These meetings are used by ISOC to share updates on their work and discuss developments about Tribunals Ontario's Indigenous Services.

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres – Indigenous Justice Coordinators

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) provide Indigenous culture-based services to support and advocate for individuals through locations across the province. ISOC continues to build and nurture its relationship with the OFIFC through engagement with Indigenous communities and to provide public awareness opportunities for staff and to drop-in visitors at different events in relation to the HRLSC's services and the HRTTO process.

Chiefs of Ontario

The Chiefs of Ontario are a representative and advocacy body for 133 First Nation communities across the province. ISOC continues to provide information about the HRLSC's services and to discuss potential future project-specific collaboration focused on bolstering the HRLSC's delivery of services to individuals from First Nations.

Indigenous Human Rights Program – Pro Bono Students Canada

The Indigenous Human Rights Program is a partnership between Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC) and the OFIFC. This program provides free human rights legal clinics through Friendship Centres. ISOC continues its role on the Advisory Committee, which consists of two elders, members of the Canadian and Ontario Human Rights Commissions, as well as Indigenous lawyers from across Ontario.

Section 5: Risk Identification, Assessment, and Mitigation Strategies

5.1 Risk Identification

For the 2025-26 to 2027-28 business planning years, the HRLSC has identified the following risks that may impact operations and services:

Risk #1 – HRLSC’s long-term financial sustainability

A major risk for the HRLSC for the upcoming planning years is meeting service delivery objectives in accordance with its statutory mandate, given the current financial pressures.

Wage increases from bargaining with union groups, compensation disparities based on broader public sector salary comparators, salary compression, rising operating expenses and increased costs for benefit premiums place significant financial pressure on the organization and its operations. The latter will have a major impact on service delivery and negatively impact the HRLSC’s ability to effectively fulfill its statutory mandate under the *Code*.

With a limited number of experienced counsel and high demand for services, the HRLSC will not be able to sustain critical services. The net result of this is that fewer Ontarians will receive the HRLSC’s advice and support, and more applicants will be unrepresented at mediations and hearings. Staff turnover also leads to fewer settlements early in the process and at mediation. According to a 2019-2020 study on self-represented litigants, 75% of individuals interviewed (who were pursuing a matter without the retention of legal services or a support person) reported not settling in cases involving mediation.¹ Comparatively, the HRLSC’s settlement rate at mediations in the 2023-2024 fiscal period stood at 62%.² From this comparison, there is a clear indication that unrepresented applicants can face worse case outcomes, with potentially lower mediation settlement rates. The long-standing experience of HRLSC counsel over the past 15 years further corroborates this data concerning lower settlement rates for unrepresented HRTO applicants. Unrepresented applicants at HRTO mediations face many barriers, including being frequently unable to clarify what the real issues at stake are, misunderstanding the powers (jurisdiction) of the HRTO, and lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities under the *Code* and the relevant legal procedures. Such conditions contribute to delays in the human rights resolution process at the HRTO and an overall

¹ Fragomeni, Brandon, et. al. *Litigant Phenomenon: Data from the National Self-Represented Litigants Project, 2018/2019*, pages 15 and 25. January 2020. <https://representingyourselfcanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Intake-Report-2019-Final.pdf>. As a note, 65% of the 259 individuals surveyed identified as a “plaintiff” or petitioner in their case. 62% noted they were involved in a civil case. However, the matters facing individuals surveyed in this study provided analogous comparisons to issues facing self-represented applicants in human rights cases in Ontario. From cited testimonials 17-23, it is clear that the key concerns for the individuals surveyed are not hyper-focused on their particular legal venue, but upon the more universal difficulties such as feeling overwhelmed or otherwise unfairly matched or treated against parties with legal representation, accommodation needs, as well as difficulty understanding and responding correctly to legal procedures that would otherwise be done by highly specialized legal professionals.

² HRLSC-CAJDP. *2023-2024 HRLSC Annual Report*, page 44. October 2024. <https://hrlsc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2023-2024-HRLSC-Annual-Report-English.pdf>

less efficient and effective human rights system in Ontario. This may negatively impact the Ontario human rights system reputation, domestically and internationally.

Risk #2 – Stabilization of HRLSC’s IT infrastructure and systems

Another major risk concerns HRLSC’s ability to stabilize and protect its IT infrastructure and systems. Following the fall 2023 cyber security incident, the HRLSC received one-time funding from MAG to deal with the incident and assist with rebuilding the IT infrastructure. The HRLSC created a 2024 IT security plan that identified the need to further stabilize the IT infrastructure to ensure long-term security. The HRLSC will onboard to the OPS’ Justice Technology Service (JTS) network to ensure long-term IT infrastructure security and stability. Onboarding is expected in 2026.

5.2 Risk Mitigation Plan

Risk #1 – HRLSC’s long-term financial sustainability

In February 2024, the HRLSC submitted an Emergency Business Case and long-term financial sustainability proposal to MAG to address the HRLSC’s overall ongoing and accumulating financial sustainability challenges. Sustainability risks are managed, in part, by not replacing or backfilling vacated positions, as well as by identifying and focusing ever more rigorously on strategic priorities and allocating resources accordingly and appropriately, including through medium to longer term investments in the HRLSC’s capacity to acquire new funding and resources. The HRLSC continues to have ongoing discussions with MAG and TBS.

For rising Other Direct Operating Expense (ODOE) levels, the HRLSC will initiate a procurement process to compare market costs. However, it is not able to make adjustments to the current benefit package at this time until collective bargaining is completed. MAG has provided one-time funding to support this financial pressure. However, this is not a permanent increase, and ongoing sustainability is becoming ever more challenging.

The HRLSC is working on diversifying its funding by securing other sources of funding to help manage any service gaps and needs to support its 5-year strategic plan.

Section 6: Environmental Scan (External and Internal Factors)

The following section outlines developments of note in the HRLSC's business operating environment, including significant changes to its external or internal environment that may affect the agency.

External Factors

6.1 Legislative, regulatory, or policy changes

The HRLSC anticipates that several government publications and statutes tabled in 2024 may impact the HRLSC's legal support services.

New Agency and Appointment Directive and Memorandums of Understanding for Provincial Agencies

The government recently updated the Agency Appointment Directive (AAD) effective October 1, 2024. The AAD governs relations with provincial agencies, and clarifies roles and responsibilities, which will be implemented through a new MAG-HRLSC Memorandum of Understanding, effective upon final approval. The HRLSC's last Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MAG dates back to 2011.

According to Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), AAD changes include:

1. **Strengthening alignment between government and agencies** (e.g. through annual mandate letters, operational business plans, performance management etc.).
2. **Improving agency business plans and quarterly reporting**
3. **Strengthening and standardizing MOUs and communications protocols** (agency communications require Ministry approval etc.); **and**
4. **Increasing access to agency data** – this is where research, evaluation and data become vital, including to satisfy new reporting requirements and validate the need for our services etc.

Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024

In May 2024, Bill 166, the [*Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024*](#), achieved Royal Assent. The main elements of the Act require colleges and universities in Ontario to have policies in place for student mental health, and policies and rules to address racism and hate with respect to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia. Given recent heightened campus tensions and prior

reliance on the HRLSC's expertise, increased inquiries for the Centre's legal advice and support line are likely.

Working for Workers, Women's Economic Security Program and Ontario-STANDS

In the 2023-2024 fiscal period, the HRLSC engaged with the Province to discuss potential initiatives to support recent legislation supporting the economic wellbeing of women, through employment supports and fostering improved safety in workplaces and other areas of life from gender-based violence. This legislation includes:

- The [*Working for Workers*](#) series of bills, through which the Province seeks to provide new protections for workers, including by removing barriers for women in the construction sector to make the skilled trades more accessible to women and working with stakeholders to prepare students to enter the Skilled Trades faster;
- The [*Women's Equity Security Program*](#), which provides women who are considered low-income access to pre-employment, pre-apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training. This program includes referrals to legal support; and
- [*Ontario-STANDS*](#) (*Standing Together Against gender-based violence Now through Decisive actions, prevention, empowerment and Supports*) four-year plan to engage and connect professionals, as well as its social service sector and justice system partners to collaborate, share information, and work together to keep women safe and hold perpetrators accountable for gender-based violence. This plan includes mandatory learning for students (including in secondary schools) about what consent looks like and how to recognize exploitative behaviours, how to stand up for themselves and others, and get help if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

The HRLSC's work aligns with these legislative priorities in Ontario, while also recognizing how the introduction of such new directives and policies may lead to more Ontarians seeking to assert their rights under the *Code*, and by extension more HRTO applications. The HRLSC stands ready to provide legal support services, which includes assistance with HRTO applications and early dispute intervention.

6.2 Fiscal environment and economic outlook

The HRLSC will need to be prepared to deal with cases arising out of the growing social and economic inequality in society, occasioned in part and exacerbated by the pandemic and post-pandemic inflation, economic uncertainty, and ongoing affordability challenges (See Appendix A for more on inflation, economic stability and housing).

6.3 Growing Cybersecurity Threats

In 2023, the risks of cybersecurity incidents for organizations, regardless of size or relative IT infrastructure across Canada, remained significant. As the [Canadian Centre for Cyber Security's 2023-24 National Cyber Threat Assessment](#) makes clear, state sponsored and financially motivated cyber threats are increasingly likely to impact the lives of ordinary people. This trend is expected to continue to grow, necessitating long-term and yearly expenditures to ensure secure and robust systems for organizations including the HRLSC.

6.4 Changes and trends in the operating environment

6.4.1 HRTO

From the HRTO's annual reporting through Tribunals Ontario, the HRLSC notes several trends requiring consideration in the 2025/26-2027/28 planning period:

- the HRTO continues to work on solutions to decrease case processing times;
- the HRTO reiterates its commitment to building up to its full complement of adjudicators and is currently in the process of training new adjudicators; and
- the HRTO continues its focus on reviewing backlogged applications, placing a priority on reviewing files for completeness and addressing jurisdictional issues.

On the point of reviewing applications, the HRLSC continues to monitor the effects of increased HRTO use of Notices of Intent to Dismiss (NOIDs). Early dismissals and case processing times have become a point of public concern including significant backlog, delays, and the decreasing number of merit hearings (see Appendix B for more on HRTO case trends by decision type).

Type of Decisions	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Final decision on the merits	33	16	55	50
Discrimination found	16	9	33	26
Discrimination not found	17	7	22	24
Final decisions other than on the merits*	1,406	1,126	N/A	N/A
Interim decisions (to address procedural issues)	354	119	422	424

Reconsideration	121	219	185	90
Breach of settlement	7	2	17	10

Note:*The HRTO began to report on this data point in the 2021-22 fiscal year.

As noted above, the HRTO's introduction of mandatory mediation will have a significant anticipated impact on client demand for HRLSC mediation support services.

6.4.2 Social Areas

The HRLSC's published service delivery data on the social areas involved in the cases the Centre handled this past year, as profiled in its most recent 2023-2024 Annual Report, more or less mirror trends at the HRTO (as documented in the table below), with employment consistently being the most common social area or location for complaints of discrimination (see Appendix C for more on Statistics Canada analyses of discrimination and unfair treatment trends across various social areas over the past 5 years, and related research findings).

Social Area*	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Employment	60%	53%	55%	62%
Goods, services and facilities	28%	35%	33%	25%
Housing	9%	8%	9%	9%
Contracts	1%	1%	1%	1%
Membership in a vocational association	2%	2%	1%	1%
No social area	0%	1%	1%	2%

Note: *Some applications allege discrimination in more than one social area, so the total may exceed 100%.

6.4.3 Prohibited Grounds

Disability, followed by race-related grounds, and then sex, pregnancy, and sexual harassment, continue to be the most frequently cited prohibited grounds at the HRTO (see Appendix D for more on discrimination trends by prohibited grounds, including at the HRTO, in Statistics Canada analyses, and related research, as may be expected to impact on current and future demand for HRLSC services).

6.5 Demographic shifts, labour market conditions, labour relations and employment conditions

Projected employment growth, coupled with documented disparities in unemployment affecting racialized groups and provincial policy initiatives to expand recruitment in health care and skilled trades, points to a heightened risk of employment-related human rights issues. The labour market data (cited in Appendix E) and associated policy directions suggest an increased likelihood of discrimination and harassment claims in Code-protected sectors, reinforcing the need for expanded HRLSC service capacity.

Hate trends, Impacts of global conflict and displacement in Ontario, and Origin, Ancestry, and Creed Based Discrimination

Recent data demonstrates a sharp increase in hate crimes across Canada, with Ontario reporting the highest incidence in 2023 both in absolute terms and relative to population, reflecting the mutually reinforcing relationship between discrimination and hate, particularly along racial, religious and sexual orientation grounds (See Appendix F for more on hate crime research). At the same time, a marked rise in asylum seekers since 2023–2024, compounded by barriers to shelter and social supports and increasingly polarized public discourse, has intensified social tensions affecting Code-protected communities, including Indigenous, Black, Muslim, Jewish, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and creed-based diasporic groups. Together, these trends, alongside global instability and shifting immigration dynamics, underscore a growing risk of hate-related incidents and discrimination in Ontario, notwithstanding provincial anti-hate initiatives. This is likely to give rise to heightened human rights issues, increasing demand for HRLSC services in *Code*-protected social areas.

Internal Factors

6.6 Budget and Funding Management

The HRLSC's ongoing financial sustainability pressures require a strategic approach to resource allocation, ensuring fiscal responsibility while maintaining service delivery standards. Additionally, the organization remains committed to exploring and securing other sources of funding to diversify its financial resources. This diversification will address service gaps, with a plan to enhance and support future growth.

In March 2024, the HRLSC's three-year federal grant from the Department of Justice which supported the HRLSC's Sexual Harassment and Resource Exchange Program came to an end.

The HRLSC received time-limited grant funding from the LFO in January 2025 (\$250K; January 20, 2025-January 19, 2027) and in July 2025 (\$4.536M; September 8, 2025 - March 31, 2028) to support targeted initiatives such as access to justice for unrepresented human rights claimants, particularly at the early stages of disputes and through HRT0 mediations.

6.7 Strategic Planning and Prioritization

With the assistance of experienced strategic planners, the HRLSC Board undertook comprehensive strategic planning and consultations with diverse stakeholders and engaged with staff multiple times throughout the process in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 fiscal years. Being responsive to the stakeholder and staff feedback, the new Strategic Plan calls for the HRLSC to be creative and innovative in our delivery of legal support services.

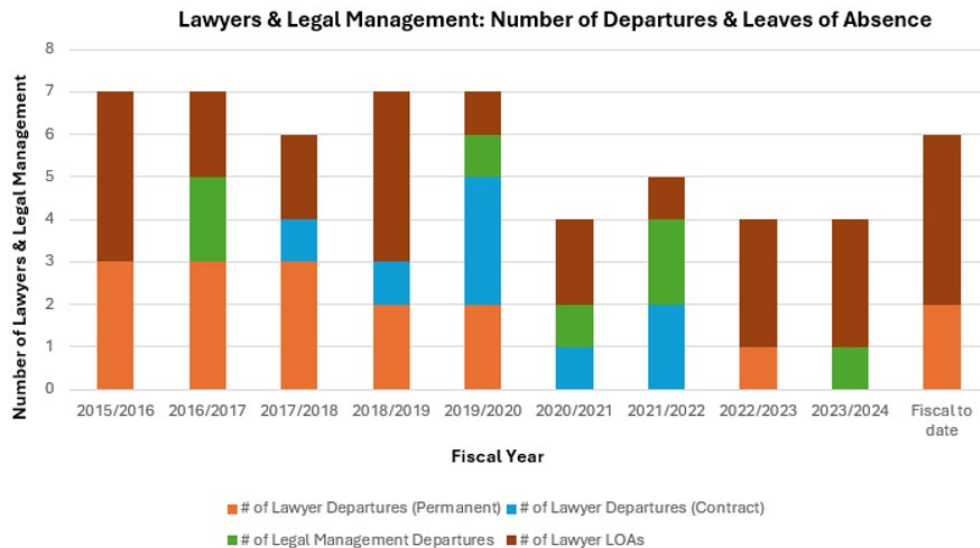
Elaborated in detail in Section 11 below, the Strategic Plan focuses on the need for the HRLSC, as a provincial center of human rights excellence, to advance its early resolution services and supports, focused advocacy, as well as targeted community engagement to promote public awareness about the HRLSC's legal services and strategic use of media and communications to improve access to human rights supports and service options for people across Ontario, especially for those who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.

To help ensure continued responsiveness to growing and evolving public demands for new and different kinds of human rights support services, it was also widely recognized that the HRLSC will need to seek out creative means and partnerships to diversify its funding in order to expand its resource capacity. It will also need to advance targeted, data-driven, evidence-based, and priority-informed approaches to service delivery, so as to put the HRLSC on a more intentional and sustainable footing, including as a human rights employer of choice.

6.8 Workforce Trends

6.8.1 Turnover of experienced staff

The HRLSC continues to experience the departure of senior legal staff to other-public agencies including universities, school boards, provincial government, etc., where legal salaries are significantly higher. This is directly related to the Centre's inability to offer competitive salaries for experienced lawyers with specialized human rights knowledge.



The HRLSC continues to seek MAG support to help develop a sustainable financial model including to improve retention of experienced staff and lawyers.

6.8.2 *Bargaining with Unionized Staff (non-Legal and lawyer groups)*

The HRLSC will be negotiating a new collective agreement with two OPSEU bargaining groups (non-counsel and counsel) in 2025, and it is anticipated that compensation to address serious pay disparities will be a significant item for negotiation.

The HRLSC is obligated under the Agencies and Appointments Directive (AAD) to seek TBS's approval on monetary and non-monetary matters prior to bargaining commencing, and any final agreement will require TBS approval.

6.8.3 Executive Compensation

The compensation strategy for the HRLSC's three executive positions complies with the *Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act*. However, compensation remains significantly below market comparators.

Section 7: Summary of HR Impacts Over the Upcoming Three Fiscal Years

The HRLSC aims to maintain an adaptive and dynamic human capital plan that aligns with the priorities outlined in MAG's Mandate Letter and the Centre's five-year strategic plan. To respond to its changing budgetary needs while preserving the scale and resources of operational delivery, and advancing its new 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, the Centre foresees the possibility of subsequent changes to its existing Human Capital Plan below.

Strategic Context

The HRLSC's capital planning embodies its fundamental principles of equality, accessibility, quality service, and transparency. At the HRLSC, human capital planning is seamlessly integrated with operational and service delivery strategies, ensuring these values are consistently reflected in all HR decisions.

The HRLSC continues to evaluate the performance review process to align with OPS policies in accordance with the updated Agencies and Appointments Directive (AAD). Key indicators based on overall expectations will be measured and data will be used to support any performance evaluation.

Board Composition

The HRLSC is governed by a Board of Directors. The Board consists of no fewer than five, and no more than nine Directors. Directors are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council. There are currently eight Directors. The HRLSC strives to ensure that the Board is representative of the diversity of Ontario's population and representative of the geographic regions of the province. As part of the Government Board of Directors appointment process, the HRLSC evaluates and recommends potential candidates based on a skills matrix of key requirements.

Staff Composition

Alongside the HRLSC's Board of Directors and management team is a dedicated team of full-time staff.

The HRLSC continues to work with MAG to underscore the need for sustainable funding for staffing and services. Should that occur, this will be a matter of discussion between HRLSC and the OPSEU bargaining agents. The Centre continues to look for innovative ways to expand its resource base.

HRLSC's Workforce

Alongside the HRLSC's Board of Directors and management team is a dedicated team of full-time staff.

The HRLSC's staff complement is 52.8 positions as of December 31, 2025.

Human Resource Strategies

The HRLSC's overarching goal is to maintain a safe, diverse, inclusive and healthy workplace free from discrimination, harassment, and violence. Service delivery needs, strategic goals, staff recruitment, retention, and fiscal realities are the most significant factors impacting human capital planning and management at the HRLSC. The HRLSC will continue to approach human capital planning with flexibility and innovation to support its human capital, mandate, operational and strategic plan.

The HRLSC will be conducting an employment equity survey with all staff to obtain updated demographic data.

Human Capital Planning Goals

The HRLSC's overarching priorities for this planning period include:

- **Flexible Work:** Keep a mix of remote and in-person work, focusing on health and wellbeing.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** Improve hiring and keeping staff.
- **Equity:** Maintain a diverse, inclusive, equitable workplace, including meeting or exceeding employment equity goals.
- **Modernization:** Update hiring and onboarding processes.
- **Compensation Review:** Review job roles and pay, including to ensure fair, competitive and sustainable salary structures for the HRLSC's workforce.
- **Confidentiality:** Protect staff information.
- **Succession Planning:** Plan for future leadership.
- **Professional Development:** Provide training and career development opportunities, including to ensure competencies in place to support management and execution of organizational and strategic plan goals.
- **Wellness:** Protect and promote mental health and wellness of HRLSC workforce and the maintenance of a healthy working environment.
- **Service Flexibility:** Maintain flexible and digital services.

Compensation Strategies

The HRLSC has established compensation principles that align with the fundamental Paris Principles. These principles seek to ensure equitable, fair, competitive, and consistent application of compensation. The HRLSC continues to review and analyze compensation disparities.

Unionized Staff

In the Summer of 2024, the HRLSC and OPSEU reached a tentative Collective Agreement for the period covering January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024, for its non-legal bargaining unit.

In 2024, the HRLSC was served by OPSEU with a Notice to Bargain to initiate the collective bargaining process for both unionized groups (lawyers and non-legal group). Bargaining is expected to commence with both groups some time in 2025.

Lawyers and Legal Management

In September 2023, the HRLSC was served with a certification application by OPSEU on behalf of the HRLSC's lawyer staff complement.

The HRLSC's counsel and legal management salaries remain significantly below market in comparison to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) & the Ontario Public Service (OPS). This discrepancy continues to impact recruitment and retention of our legal staff, which affects the HRLSC's operations due to frequent turnover. The HRLSC continues to work with MAG to identify innovative ways to expand its resource base.

Executive Compensation

The HRLSC's executive team consists of incumbents with senior level experience in the Human Rights Sector and compensation has remained significantly below market for similar positions within LAO, the OPS and the broader public sector.

Section 8: Performance Measures

OBP Performance Measures and Targets

The HRLSC is currently in the process of developing and finalizing key performance indicators for its new (2024-2029) HRLSC Strategic Plan (2024-2029). The HRLSC anticipates renegotiating its performance measures with MAG during this planning period to better reflect its evolving priorities.

Consequently, the measures and targets which follow should be understood as already established and approved measures that will likely be subject to further review and revision and/or supplementation.

Performance Measure 1: Ontarians who believe they have experienced discrimination have access to human rights legal information and advice. This performance target is in alignment with government priorities for the HRLSC. Achieving or exceeding the target is contingent on the retention of experienced intake staff.

Year	Performance Target Intake calls answered:
2024-25	80%
2025-26	85%
2026-27	85%
2027-28	85%

Performance Measure 2: Increased and quick access to justice for Ontarians and increased efficiency and capacity in the human rights system through early resolution of human rights cases, reducing costs for applicants, respondents, and taxpayers, while lowering backlogs at the HRTO. Future projections for this performance measure are dependent upon the retention of the HRLSC's current complement of full-time legal staff and may vary in response to unforeseen environmental factors.

Year	Performance Target Cases resolved at mediation stage:
2024-25	70%
2025-26	65%
2026-27	70%
2027-28	70%

Performance Measure 3: Increased and quicker access to justice for Ontarians and increased efficiency and capacity in the human rights system by resolving cases at all stages of the application process, reducing costs for applicants, respondents, and taxpayers, while lowering backlogs at the HTRO. This performance target aligns with updated government backlog-related priorities for operational service agencies.

Year	Performance Target Cases settled at any stage of the application process:
2024-25	200
2025-26	250
2026-27	250
2027-28	300

Performance Measure 4: Increased and quicker access to justice for Ontarians and increased efficiency and capacity in the human rights system by resolving meritorious claims at the HRTO hearing without the need for full litigation, reducing costs for applicants, respondents, and taxpayers.

As with projected performance targets for cases resolved at mediation, these settlement numbers will be based upon the retention or expansion of the HRLSC's current legal counsel and may vary in response to unforeseen environmental factors.

Year	Performance Target Cases settled at beginning of hearing:
2024-25	80%

2025-26	80%
2026-27	85%
2027-28	85%

Performance Measure 5: High quality legal services are provided to Ontarians who have experienced discrimination, an objective in line with government emphases on tracking client satisfaction and making service-delivery adjustments when needed.

Year	Performance Target Clients rate services as good/very good, at least:
2024-25	85%
2025-26	85%
2026-27	85%
2027-28	85%

Performance Measure 6: Ontarians are informed about discrimination, the human rights system and the HRLSC's services.

Year	Performance Target Obtain positive media coverage for stories of the HRLSC's services, at least:
2024-25	7 stories
2025-26	8 stories
2026-27	8 stories
2027-28	9 stories

Section 9: Financial Budget Over Three-Year Life of Business Plan

The HRLSC continues to assess business, service requirements, and resource allocation to successfully meet its mandate. To meet current and future business needs, the HRLSC will require effective budgetary stewardship and creative resource-generation strategies to address its budgetary constraints and expand its resource base. Long-term sustainability concerns continue to grow for the HRLSC, as funding has failed to keep up with inflation and annual salary increases.

The HRLSC will continue to work with MAG to address pressures created by any annual increases stemming from ongoing negotiations. General staffing projections, in conjunction with forecasted service demand and caseloads, have been incorporated into fiscal planning for the 2025-2026 period and future years. These projections are analyzed and modified on an ongoing basis to ensure that funds are utilized most effectively, and financial risks are identified early.

There are five key financial challenges facing the HRLSC:

1. Maintaining sufficient resources to meet operational and service needs;
2. Achieving competitive salaries for all our staff, including legal and non-legal staff;
3. Maintaining and sustaining annual increases paid to date and arising from bargaining with OPSEU for both non-legal and counsel members;
4. Managing and sustaining rising employee benefit premiums; and
5. Managing operational needs due to rising inflation.

The HRLSC has prepared and submitted a Business Case to address pay equity disparities for its legal counsel, management, and executives. However, our financial challenges extend beyond these disparities. We have also submitted a long-term financial sustainability plan to MAG to address ongoing and future financial needs, including maintaining and sustaining annual increases, competitive salaries, compression issues, and maintaining its operational commitments.

The HRLSC will also be seeking to increase organizational funds and revenues and to diversify its revenue and funding sources. High level performance objectives related to this goal include:

- Establish diverse revenue generation options and strategies to secure funding from diverse governmental and non-governmental sources; and
- Develop a resource generation strategy.

9.1 Operations

For the next three years, the HRLSC will focus on analyzing past spending and finding ways to improve efficiency, particularly in relation to ODOE. This includes renegotiating or securing new service contracts and exploring consolidated services or partnerships to potentially reduce operating costs. For example, costs are shared with partners, such as Osgoode Hall Law School, to support the maximization of the HRLSC's financial resources. The ADIP program provides a value of approximately \$107,000 (the equivalent of two front-line staff positions) which will continue through the planning period.

9.1.1 Achieving Competitive Salaries

The challenge of achieving competitive salaries is managed through ongoing planning, monitoring, and reviewing of human resource needs and operational costs, while ensuring alignment with service delivery goals and service targets, priorities set out in the HRLSC's mandate and strategic plan. Human resource changes are planned and analyzed with the goal of achieving salaries that are competitive in the broader public sector. During the upcoming planning period, the HRLSC will conclude a comprehensive compensation review of HRLSC non-legal staff positions.

Additionally, the ongoing serious challenge of non-competitive salaries for the HRLSC's lawyers remains, making it difficult to recruit and retain experienced lawyers. The HRLSC

has raised concerns regarding salary disparities for its lawyers and legal management positions, for example compared to its key counterpart LAO. In February 2024, the HRLSC presented an Emergency Business Case and long-term financial sustainability submission to MAG and TBS to address the financial hardships faced by the HRLSC. The HRLSC remains optimistic as conversations between these parties continue.

The HRLSC will continue to work with MAG and TBS to develop solutions that address the salary disparities while addressing the impacts upon staff and the number of full-time employees the HRLSC can sustain. In addition, the HRLSC is making efforts to secure other sources of funding to fill in service gaps that may result from staff reductions.

9.1.2 Maintaining and Sustaining Annual Increases

The HRLSC and OPSEU bargaining were able to ratify the collective agreement with its unionized non-legal staff which expires December 31, 2024. This included annual increases along with annual increases for other staff, supported and paid for by the HRLSC, without any new funding.

HRLSC lawyers unionized in 2024 and the HRLSC will be entering two separate rounds of negotiations with both its non-legal and lawyer unionized group sometime in 2025.

9.2 Capital Assets

9.2.1 IT Systems and Infrastructure

The HRLSC's primary capital asset is its IT systems and infrastructure, managed over five years. By staggering equipment replacements and software renewals, the financial impact is distributed over time. Future IT projects aimed at enhancing efficiency, client accessibility and user friendliness will be implemented as funding allows. IT subscription renewals for 2025 will be included in the amortization plan.

IT security upgrades due to the Fall 2023 cyber security incident will continue to be assessed, and discussions with the Ministry to help manage the ongoing financial impact of this on the HRLSC will continue.

9.3 Multi-Year Operating Budget

The 2024-25 budget variances are due to unexpected staff vacancies from temporary, medical, or other leaves. These variances are monitored and managed throughout the year, with human resources realigned to optimize fund usage, prioritizing direct services and the HRLSCs mandate and strategic priorities.

	Expense Category	2024-25 Budget	2024-25 YE Forecast	Explanation of Variance	2025-26 Budget	2026-27 Budget	2027-28 Budget
MAG Core Funding	Salaries and Wages (S&W)	4,051,146	3,592,576	Due to unexpected vacancies not backfilled due to future funding uncertainty	3,715,228	3,740,380	3,750,550
	Benefits	888,116	817,901	Benefits are lower due to unexpected vacancies, noted in S&W column	815,110	820,428	822,881
	ODOE	335,723	864,508	In-year savings from S&W have been realigned to ODOE to help manage ongoing and unexpected operational needs and business priorities	744,647	714,177	701,554
	Board Expenses	61,215	61,215		61,215	61,215	61,215
MAG In-Year Funding	Salaries	-	46,950	Further explained in Revenue section below.	-	-	-
	Benefits	-	84,300				
	ODOE	-	221,830				
LFO Responsive Grant * (Temporary)	Salaries and Wages (S&W)	-	9,978		75,439	39,201	-
	Benefits	-	2,180		15,921	0	-
	ODOE	-	33,000		33,000	41,281	-
LFO Strategic Grant ** (Temporary)	Salaries and Wages (S&W)	-	-		609,023	1,126,861	1,160,667
	Benefits	-	-		140,075	264,811	272,756
	ODOE	-	-		450,800	252,342	258,772
	TOTAL Operating	5,336,200	5,734,438		6,660,458	7,060,696	7,028,395

Operating Budget*

* The funding period runs from January 20, 2025, to January 19, 2027.

** The funding period runs from September 8, 2025, to March 31, 2028.

Revenue Budget

Expense Category	2024-25 Budget	2024-25 YE Forecast	Explanation of Variance	2025-26 Budget	2026-27 Budget	2027-28 Budget
MAG Core Funding	5,336,200	5,336,200		5,336,200	5,336,200	5,336,200
MAG In-Year Funding	-	353,080		-	-	-
LFO Responsive Grant	-	45,158		\$124,360	\$80,482	
LFO Strategic Grant	-	-		\$1,199,898	\$1,644,014	\$1,692,195
TOTAL Revenue	5,336,200	5,734,438		6,660,458	7,060,696	7,028,395

The Ministry provided one-time additional funding in 2024-25 of \$131,250 – over and above our usual annual core funding of \$5,336,200 – including \$46,950 for the purpose of maintaining the 1% increase to lawyers’ compensation provided in the 2023-24 fiscal year and \$84,300 to cover the cost of a benefit premium increase. The Ministry has also provided one-time additional funding in 2024-25 of \$221,830 to cover various cybersecurity consulting and software expenses.

The HRLSC converted its operating account to a “dual rate investment account” with fluctuating interest rates based on the decisions made by the Bank of Canada. In addition, it was recommended by the banking institution to create a GIC account, to lock in the high interest rate because the rates were projected to go down (which did occur). This was assessed and discussed by the Centre’s ED, CAO, Board of Directors and its Treasurer. A recommendation to the Board of Directors was made by the Centre’s executives and the Board’s Treasurer which approved this move to help generate more revenue.

Section 10: Information Technology (IT) Plan

The HRLSC continues its digitizing and online service delivery while still providing services to clients who face technological barriers.

The HRLSC's key projects in this field include:

Ontario Public Sector IT Onboarding

The HRLSC has commenced the process to be onboarded to OPS's IT infrastructure by engaging in communication with JTS and ITS. This onboarding will help with cost efficiencies as directed in the 2019 value for money government audit. The first phase, currently underway, is to develop a holistic review of all the HRLSC IT requirements and infrastructure and how they can be supported by JTS and ITS, who have also completed a preliminary onboarding plan and cost estimate.

Discussions between the HRLSC and MAG are underway to mitigate any associated costs relating to the onboarding process. Once funding is managed, we are expected to be fully onboarded onto the OPS network by fiscal year 2025-2026.

The JTS onboarding provides several advantages for the HRLSC, specifically in the areas of security with its data and infrastructure. Until the onboarding is completed, the HRLSC will continue to remain vigilant in its management of its IT infrastructure and security and will seek out additional MAG funding to address any immediate interim IT security needs that may be caused by any potential delay in the JTS onboarding process.

HRLSC Guided Pathways – Filling out a Human Rights Application tool

The HRLSC will be creating a new self-administered online **Guided Pathway** tool, in partnership with Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), to assist Ontarians fill out Human Rights applications. This will help guide and support Ontarians in directly completing and filing a HRTO human rights application. The proposed new interactive online tool will help people claim and protect their rights, especially those HRLSC is unable to directly support due to capacity constraints or eligibility reasons. This will help reduce the high demand for written assistance and filling out applications, a service that is very time consuming due to limited staff capacity. The solution we are envisioning will be an online guide which should lower the barriers for Ontarians to find information and fill in applications.

Scheduling Tool

As we continue our efforts to reach vulnerable and marginalized individuals who have experienced discrimination in Ontario, HRLSC continues to seek digital tools to enhance access to its services. At the end of 2023, the HRLSC successfully launched its Client

Portal, giving individuals the tool to fill out an intake form at any given time (24/7) without waiting in the queue or trying to call us outside of the HRLSC's regular business hours.

In the upcoming years, the next phase will be adding the capability for applicants who have received a notice of mediation or hearing to schedule an interview with an HRLSC legal staff using the online portal, including uploading relevant documentation. This will increase staff time efficiency at intake and when providing in-depth legal services.

Client Case Management System

As prioritized in our five-year Strategic Plan, the HRLSC will continue to utilize and increasingly leverage data from its existing database to help inform decision making around services.

The HRLSC has formed an internal data working group to enhance and regularize data collection and use in decision-making. Work has commenced to better define and standardize terms (for compilation in a glossary) and expectations for data input and reporting, as well as to enable the HRLSC to increase transparency around its case decision-making, and to more easily identify discrimination trends, and the needs of HRLSC clients and vulnerable communities. The introduction of new data fields will also help identify service gaps and communities that are not accessing our services.

The HRLSC continues to seek opportunities for efficiencies in service delivery by enhancing internal tools including upgrading and customizing its case management system.

Website

As funding permits, the HRLSC will continue to explore the use of web-based tools to convey information about human rights and its legal services in responsive, creative, and accessible formats.

The HRLSC will continue to use analytics to monitor and interpret site usage and inform changes to its website. The HRLSC also uses analytics from its social media and website traffic to assess and adjust communications strategies and products, which will assume increasing importance over this planning period.

Section 11: Implementation Plan

The HRLSC's new five-year (2024-2029) Strategic Plan, *Realizing Human Rights Together, Empowering Access to Justice*, reflects extensive stakeholder feedback from more than 180 people and 28 organizations, including community organizations, service providers, funders and policy makers, and HRLSC clients, staff and Board. The Plan is responsive to changes in the operating environment, including but not limited to ongoing challenges

with delays and backlog at the HRTO and ongoing HRLSC funding and sustainability challenges.

The Strategic Plan aligns with MAG's priorities as outlined in its 2025-2026 Annual Letter of Direction to the HRLSC (as outlined in section 11.2 below) and provides the Centre with clear direction for supporting priority-focused, data-driven decision-making in service delivery, human capital planning, collaborative engagement with stakeholders and other organizations, whilst also supporting and strengthening internal governance, and the Centre's ability to financially sustain effective service provision.

11.1 Overall Performance Priorities, Goals & Desired Outcomes

This planning period's Operational Business Plan seeks to advance four key strategic priorities, and eight associated goals as set out in HRLSC's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan:

HRLSC STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	CORRESPONDING GOALS
1. Improve access and service options for people across Ontario	a. Increase and improve access to human rights legal services and supports for people in Ontario, especially those who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination
	b. Enhance the availability of early intervention/resolution service options to strengthen our service continuum
2. Provide leadership in Ontario's human rights system	a. Improve the HRLSC's capacity to use data, client feedback and evidence to inform decisions and service delivery
	b. Strengthen the HRLSC's leadership role in systemic change, jurisprudence, reconciliation and experiential education
3. Be an employer of choice	a. Improve employee recruitment and retention
	b. Enhance workplace health and wellbeing
4. Enhance organizational effectiveness and sustainability	a. Strengthen organizational infrastructure
	b. Increase organizational funds and revenues and diversify revenue and funding sources
	c. Strengthen the Board's governance capacity

Strategic Priorities 1 and 2 focus on clients and services, while priorities 3 and 4 focus on supporting internal organizational development, as will enable the Centre to better achieve our outward facing service goals. Overall desired outcomes for this 5-year strategic plan include:

- People have improved access to human rights legal supports and services
- People have more service options, including alternate dispute resolution and early settlement pathways
- Clients are satisfied
- Decision making is data-driven and evidence-informed
- The HRLSC is engaged in more strategic partnerships
- The HRLSC provides leadership in human rights legal analysis and strategy

The HRLSC's four key strategic priorities, and their related goals and objectives, are further elaborated below, followed by an outline of how these align with Ministry of Attorney General Mandate Letter directives.

1. Improve access and service options for people across Ontario

The focus of high-level performance objectives for 2024-2027 under this strategic priority, which includes the goal of increasing and improving access to legal services and supports for people who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination, include:

- Identify, and establish a range of proactive community engagement strategies to increase access to legal services and supports for people who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination so that the HRLSC is servicing those most in need;
- Implement a communications strategy to improve the public's understanding of the HRLSC's services, how to access services and supports, and to navigate Ontario's three pillar system;
- Collaborate with diverse organizations to establish referral pathways for people who are most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.

Another high-level performance goal under this strategic priority is to enhance the availability of early intervention/resolution service options to strengthen the Centre's service continuum. Related objectives include:

- Realigning the HRLSC's service model to offer clearly defined early intervention services and supports;
- Engage in collaborative initiatives to expand knowledge about and access to early intervention services and supports;
- Maximize use of technology, including the HRLSC website, to facilitate intake and provide early intervention supports, tools and resources for priority populations.

2. Provide leadership in Ontario's human rights system

The HRLSC's performance objectives during this planning period to advance the Centre as a leader in Ontario's human rights system, and, more specifically, the related goal of improving the HRLSC's capacity to use data, client feedback and evidence to inform decisions and service delivery, include:

- Create a robust data collection and reporting system;
- Establish client and community feedback and engagement processes regarding service delivery and accessibility;
- Put in place evidence-based benchmarks and quality assurance metrics to guide the delivery of anti-oppressive and trauma informed services for those most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.

As part of the HRLSC's strategic goals, the Centre seeks to strengthen its leadership role in human rights legal experiential education, truth and reconciliation and targeted litigation that is the best usage of the HRLSC's service capacity. Related strategic objectives in this planning period include:

- Collaborate with Indigenous communities to strengthen community engagement and culturally competent human rights legal services and supports to Indigenous communities in relation to navigating the HRTTO processes;
- Use the HRLSC's networks and data to inform, identify and carry out focused litigation for system impact, and to demonstrate the Centre's human rights expertise;
- Share data and work collaboratively with the OHRC and HRTTO to determine and respond to human rights trends, and enhance outcomes for the people of Ontario;
- Collaborate with community stakeholders to raise awareness of the HRLSC's HRTTO-related services and advance better understanding of Ontario's three pillar system; and
- Secure opportunities to expand the HRLSC's profile and partnerships in legal human rights education experiential learning.

3. Be An Employer of Choice

The HRLSC will strive to be an employer of choice over this planning period. Related goals and objectives include improving employee recruitment and retention, and establishing:

- a compensation philosophy and total compensation program, which includes salaries, benefits and entitlements;
- an employee development and recognition program which includes goal setting, performance reviews and professional development.

A related goal under this strategic priority is to enhance workplace health and wellbeing. Performance objectives in this respect will focus on putting in place an employee-driven wellness program that enables regular identification and advancement of wellness priorities and strategies.

4. Enhance organizational effectiveness and sustainability

As part of its efforts under this strategic priority, the HRLSC will seek to strengthen organizational infrastructure, including through the following performance objectives:

- Realign organizational structure to improve service delivery, performance management and employee engagement; and
- Modernize IT and HR policies, processes, systems and tools to promote organizational and employee effectiveness and improve service delivery.

The HRLSC will also be seeking to increase organizational funds and revenues and to diversify its revenue and funding sources. High level performance objectives related to this goal include:

- Establish diverse revenue generation options and strategies to secure funding from diverse governmental and non-governmental sources; and
- Implement a public relations strategy focused on media, government and community to build our profile and influence.

A third goal under this strategic priority is to strengthen the Board's governance capacity. Related performance objectives during this planning period will include:

- Review and update all Board governance frameworks, policies and procedures;
- Review and update all funding/accountability agreements to ensure clarity regarding roles and responsibilities.

11.2 Alignment with Ministry of the Attorney General Mandate Letter Directives

MAG's 2025-26 Annual Letter of Direction provides general directives for all provincial Agencies to comply with, as well as directives specific to the HRLSC. These are listed below, alongside the HRLSC plans to address these. *Note: Agency specific directions are itemized in bold font*, and government-wide commitments for board-governed provincial agencies are in regular black font.

MAG Annual Letter of Direction Directives	HRLSC Aligning Business Plans
<i>Data Collection, Analysis, Reporting</i> HRLSC should assess how it can better leverage client data to inform decision-making HRLSC should collect better data on clients served to inform future considerations regarding the implementation of mandatory income testing HRLSC should more consistently record information about applicants' circumstances, their discrimination claims and the reasons for providing or not providing a retainer for legal services in its client management system HRLSC should simplify eligibility criteria and conduct more comprehensive reporting on case assessment outcomes to improve the agency's transparency	HRLSC's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan includes the strategic goal of improving its capacity to use data, client feedback and evidence to inform decisions and service delivery. Related objectives and current initiatives include: • Create a robust data collection and reporting system: ○ Develop and introduce socio-demographic data collection for implementation; ○ Create organizational data collection and reporting framework and KPIs to monitor Strategic Plan progress. • Establish client and community feedback and engagement processes: ○ Develop new client evaluation and feedback surveys across full service continuum; ○ Explore additional ways of seeking ongoing community feedback and input on the work of the Centre. • Put in place evidence-based benchmarks and quality assurance metrics to guide the delivery of anti-oppressive and trauma informed services for those most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination: ○ Review and update organizational performance measures, KPIs, targets and benchmarks to reflect new strategic priorities; ○ Develop KPIs for the 5-year desired strategic plan outcome of "people have improved access to services and supports".

	As part of HRLSC's efforts to better serve those most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination, the HRLSC is also: • Undertaking data collection to identify "most marginalized" target population segments most vulnerable to discrimination; • Formulating KPIs related to tracking service provision to priority target populations. To further advance HRLSC-HRTO-OHRC three pillar collaboration, the HRLSC also has aims and plans to: • Share our data (through collaboratively forged HRLSC-HRTO, HRLSC-OHRC data sharing agreements), to support working collaboratively with the OHRC and HRTO to determine and respond to human rights trends, and enhance outcomes for the people of Ontario.
<i>Alignment of Mandate with Agency Goals and Strategies</i> The HRLSC is expected to continue to work on developing its new five-year Strategic Plan and share updates with the Ministry as needed HRLSC should establish or enhance the goals and strategies it has in place to support transparency of service delivery and eligibility HRLSC should conduct a study on its service delivery models to determine whether focusing resources on summary advice is the most impactful and cost-	HRLSC developed and launched its new 2024-2029 Strategic Plan "Realizing Human Rights Together, Empowering Access to Justice". HRLSC's Strategic Plan includes the strategic priority of enhancing organizational effectiveness and sustainability and the strategic objective of realigning its organizational structure to improve service delivery, performance management and employee engagement. Plans in this regard include reviewing, aligning and where necessary revising organizational structure, resources, and human capital plan in accordance with strategic priorities and compensation principles.

effective way to deliver human rights legal services HRLSC should consider possibility of implementing financial eligibility criteria. If income eligibility criteria are introduced, HRLSC and/or MAG should investigate whether income verification processes should be implemented	The HRLSC is developing and introducing income and other socio-demographic data collection, analysis, and reporting, and has plans to enhance and more intentionally ensure service delivery to populations most marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.
<i>Accountable</i> Develop and report on outcome-focused performance measures to effectively monitor and measure performance Protect individual, business or organization data by actively managing data and cybersecurity and reporting Artificial Intelligence uses Report all high risks including effective mitigation plans Align hybrid work policies with the OPS and identify and assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint and find cost reductions: a) Collaborate with MOI to identify office space opportunities b) Align with the MBC Realty Directive and the OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS) Standards Develop and encourage diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace	The HRLSC's business plans include creating a robust data collection and reporting system and creating KPIs to monitor Strategic Plan progress. These include outcome KPIs. The HRLSC's plans also include reviewing and updating organizational performance measures, KPIs, targets and benchmarks to reflect new strategic priorities. The HRLSC's plan objectives include modernizing its IT and HR policies, processes, systems and tools including to secure and stabilize its IT infrastructure. To this end, the HRLSC will be developing an IT Strategy, and reviewing and updating its IT policies, also to align with its strategic plan, mandate and OPS directives. The HRLSC continues to prepare and review quarterly risk management plans. The HRLSC continues to implement and negotiate hybrid work policies including through collective bargaining, in alignment with OPS hybrid work policies. The HRLSC's plans include creating an employee-driven wellness program, re-establishing its Equity & Wellness Committee and developing and

	administering an Equity and Wellness Survey to inform future initiatives to promote an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace. The HRLSC continues to offer and plan annual staff training on a range of human rights and equity issues including but not limited to such topics as Indigenous and anti-Black racism, disability, gender and gender identity, trauma-informed service delivery etc.
<i>Sustainable</i> HRLSC and MAG should further investigate how to assist HRLSC with better attracting and retaining talent Strengthen public service delivery by optimizing organizational capacity and directing existing resources to priority areas. Use Public Resources efficiently and a) Operate within agency's financial allocations. b) Prudently and responsibly manage workforce size.	The HRLSC's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan identifies "Being an Employer of Choice" as one of four top strategic priorities. Related strategic goals and objectives include: • Improve employee recruitment and retention: ○ Establish a compensation philosophy and total compensation program; which includes salaries, benefits and entitlements; ○ Explore additional ways of seeking ongoing community feedback and input on the work of the Centre; ○ Establish an employee development and recognition program which includes goal setting, performance reviews and professional development. • Enhance workplace health and wellbeing: ○ Put in place an employee-driven wellness program that enables regular identification of wellness priorities and strategies. The HRLSC's Strategic Plan also includes the strategic priority of enhancing organizational effectiveness and sustainability and the strategic objective of realigning its organizational structure to improve service

	delivery, performance management and employee engagement. Plans in this regard include: ○ reviewing, aligning and where necessary revising organizational structure, resources, and human capital plans in accordance with strategic priorities and compensation principles. Finally, the HRLSC's business plans include the strategic goal of increasing organizational funds and revenues and diversifying revenue and funding sources, in order to address and mitigate the Center's ongoing sustainability challenges and its impact on compensation and its ability to attract and retain talent.
<i>Innovative</i> Simplify client/customer interactions. Expand and optimize digital service offerings. Improve client/customer satisfaction. Share data with Supply Ontario, when requested, regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision-making.	Responsive to client and stakeholder feedback, the HRLSC's plans include the strategic priority of improving access and service options for people across Ontario. Related objectives include: ● Maximize use of technology, including the HRLSC's website, to facilitate intake and provide early intervention supports, tools and resources for priority populations: ○ Initiate development of Guided Pathway online tool in partnership with CLEO to support applicants with HRTD complaint drafting; ○ Update website portal to provide access to referral partners and scheduling tool to submit intakes and schedule interviews for those who received notice of mediations and/or notice of hearing; ○ Identify other web based early intervention tools and resources.

	• Realign service model to offer clearly defined early intervention services and supports. • Engage in collaborative initiatives to expand knowledge about and access to early intervention services and supports. The HRLSC's plans also include enhancing the collection and use of client feedback data, including through the development and implementation of new client evaluation and feedback surveys across the full service continuum, including with the goal of monitoring and continuously seeking to improve client satisfaction and simplify client interactions. The HRLSC is also updating its existing electronic HR system including to help improve the reporting module to support better data-driven decision making and reporting, including in accordance with the new Agency and Appointment Directive.
<i>Migration to MAG JTS</i> In accordance with the 2020 TBS audit, the HRLSC is expected to continue to work with MAG's Justice Technology Services and Information Technology Services to migrate the HRLSC IT services to the OPS network to take advantage of shared infrastructure	The HRLSC has commenced the process to be onboarded to OPS's IT infrastructure by engaging in communication with Justice Technological Services (JTS) and Information Technology Standards (ITS). The first phase plan, currently underway, is to develop a holistic review of all the HRLSC IT requirements, and infrastructure and how they can be supported by JTS and ITS, targeting to complete a price estimate and a rough onboarding plan by the end of calendar year 2024. The HRLSC is expected to be fully onboarded onto the OPS network by the 25-26 fiscal year.

Section 12: Communication Plan

As part of the five-year Strategic Plan, a new organizational communications plan is being created. With revisions anticipated as an audit of the current plan continues, the HRLSC

will draw on and continuously improve and adapt its current flexible ongoing communications strategies which seek to provide the public with information about its services and activities as well as human-interest stories about human rights and discrimination.

Ongoing Communications Strategies

- Creating regular opportunities with mainstream, community, and in-house digital media to bring the HRLSC's clients' stories to the public's attention across the province;
- Consolidating relationships with partner organizations through regular, targeted, digital communications, with particular focus on groups supporting Francophone and Indigenous clients, to increase awareness of the HRLSC's legal support services and the HRTTO's processes;
- Increasing accessibility through the refurbishment of existing online resources and website and growth of new formats of digital content; and
- Promoting the rollout of new digital tools and promoting public trust in the security and ease of use of these tools.

Target Audiences

- Residents of Ontario;
- French speaking communities;
- Hard-to-reach populations and under-serviced and economically disadvantaged groups, such as youth, newcomers, precariously housed or unhoused, incarcerated populations, and linguistic minority communities;
- Members of Indigenous communities including (but not limited to): status and non-status individuals identifying as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit;
- Populations needing help to confront Islamophobia, antisemitism, anti-Black racism, transphobia and gender-based violence in *Code*-designated social areas;
- Ontario community-based service and advocacy organizations that support Code-designated communities, including front-line access points and legal clinics.

Key Messages

- The HRLSC provides high quality human rights legal advice and support across Ontario;

- The HRLSC can provide expert help to resolve human rights cases through early dispute resolution and settlements which include creative solutions to protect people living in Ontario from future discrimination;
- The HRLSC is accessible, low barrier help for people who have experienced discrimination and/or harassment and the HRLSC provides its services in diverse languages;
- Ontario's three-pillars human rights system provides an accessible, affordable process that offers opportunities for early mediated settlement and high-quality legal support services for adjudication of applications;
- The *Human Rights Code* protects Ontarians from discrimination and harassment; and
- Employers, service providers, and landlords need to uphold human rights responsibilities because discrimination continues to have a negative impact on Ontarians in their everyday lives in workplaces, accessing services, and searching for or maintaining housing.

Communications Products

Traditional Media

The HRLSC shares information related to its legal services and supports and how to navigate the HRTDO process and realize human rights protections from discrimination and harassment. To promote further public awareness of its successful legal representation of clients, the HRLSC seeks to maintain and enhance relationships with mainstream and specialty clinics, as well as language, cultural and community-specific media. The HRLSC plans to continue to provide information and data, as resources allow. As part of the new strategic plan, the HRLSC will be more proactive in its media outreach, to highlight case wins and increase public awareness of the Centre's services, especially early dispute resolution options.

Social Media

The HRLSC is working to improve its social media presence in English and French to provide bilingual public awareness and understanding of its services to address experiences of discrimination. The HRLSC seeks to leverage its French social media presence using networking and content designed to build connections and engagement with Francophone newcomer communities. These projects are ongoing.

The HRLSC is also responsive to the trend of increasingly visual and video-based content by utilizing its existing in-house tools and resources compliant with accessibility standards.

Website and Digital Tools

The HRLSC's website is a valuable tool for communicating with individuals, stakeholders, and the public. As part of the new strategic plan, enhancing access to its digital services will be a priority. The HRLSC also plans to update its website to increase functionality and accessibility. In addition, the HRLSC plans to enhance its existing digital tools to increase the speed and efficiency of legal services at intake.

Accessibility

Through its website, digital and printed materials, the HRLSC endeavours to produce and circulate resources that are WCAG 2.0 and WC3 compliant.³ These materials are audited and checked for compliance by staff as is required by relevant accessibility legislation.

Evaluation of Communications Products

The HRLSC will continue to utilize community and stakeholder consultations, as well as audience surveys, media metrics, campaign evaluations, post-event feedback, and client service reviews to ensure the highest standards of communications.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Inflation, Economic Stability and Housing

Within the Province's *2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review* (referred to later in this section as the 2024 Fall Statement), key points of interest for individuals across Ontario include:

1. The Bank of Canada continuing to ease the interest rate, which is projected to return to 2.0% by 2025;
2. The projection of the reduction in Ontario's Consumer Price Index to pre-COVID levels by 2025; and
3. The Province's commitment to building 1.5 million houses by 2031.

Whether or not Canada and Ontario remain on track to meet these goals will impact the HRLSC's work, given the budget impacts of inflation on the organization's financial

³ "WCAG" refers to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Version 2.0) and "WC3" stands for World Wide Web Consortium (WC3) which is the body that issues recommendations and drafts guidelines for international standards on web accessibility.

sustainability as impacts our service delivery capacity, as well as the financial impact including economic stability and vulnerability of potential rights-seeking individuals.

The economic strain and housing crisis continue to adversely impact Ontarians, and present unique human rights challenges that the HRLSC must be able to address in its service delivery, especially given disproportionate impacts on equity-denied, *Code*-protected groups (e.g. socio-economically marginalized racialized community members, women and people with disabilities), and intersecting underlying causal dynamics (for example, see the OHRC's March 14, 2023 Interim Report, *Poverty POV: What We Are Hearing*), highlighted among other things [five core issues](#) that are deepening and sustaining poverty and preventing people from exercising their rights to housing and mental health and addiction care, free of discrimination. These concerns intersect and may potentially breach the *Code* in their consequences as discrimination, for example, on the basis of race, disability, and receipt of social assistance, is exacerbated by lack of affordable and accessible housing, increased homelessness, and inadequate mental health and addiction services. The OHRC's Poverty Report also emphasizes the need for sociodemographic data collection.

The affordable housing crisis has only deepened in recent times, making housing increasingly inaccessible to people on disability pensions, Ontario Disability Support Program income support or social assistance.

Appendix B. HRTO case trends by decision type

Application	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Applications Received	3,425	3,751	4,231	4,577
Applications Reactivated	143	201	108	113
Cases Closed	3,045	3,027	2,582	3,299
Active Appeals at Fiscal Year End*	9,527	9,049	N/A	N/A
Case Processing Times (days)**	588	552	501	419

Notes: *Active appeals at fiscal year-end are newly reported for HRTO and this data is unavailable for previous fiscal years.

**Case Processing Time includes all cases closed in the time period regardless of the method of closure and due to recovery strategies implemented in 2202-2023, timelines have increased as older cases are being actioned.

Source: Tribunals Ontario 2022-2023 [Annual Report](#).

Appendix C. Research on discrimination trends by social area

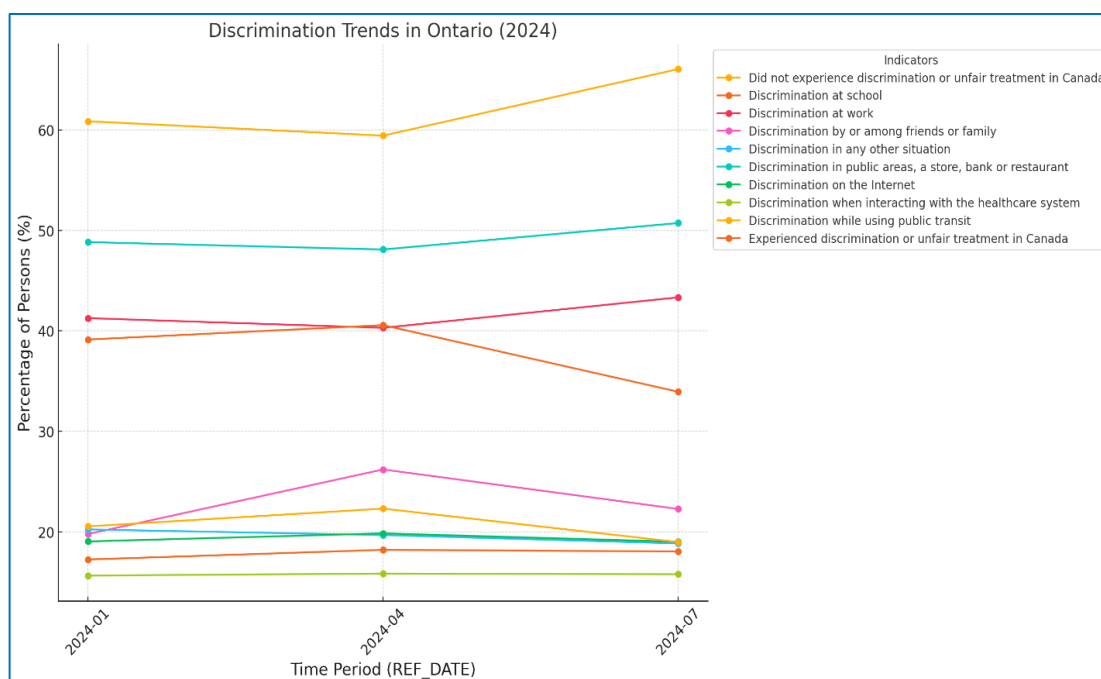
A recent (2024-11-19) Statistics Canada [analysis](#) on *Discrimination and unfair treatment* compared the experiences of discrimination over the past 5 years (as of second quarter of 2024 — April, May and June) for 13,141 survey respondents and found that:

- 40.5% of Ontarians surveyed answered that they had experienced discrimination in their employment in the past 5 years. This compares with 58% of HRLSC calls in 2023-2024 in which employment was cited.
- For indicators that specifically related to various services, goods and facilities – which, in aggregate, were cited in 25% of calls to the HRLSC in 2023-2024 - the Statistics Canada data for Ontario respondents found:
 - 18.2% of those surveyed noted facing discrimination at school;
 - 16.2% of those surveyed noted facing discrimination when interacting with the healthcare system; and
 - 22.1% of those surveyed noted facing discrimination while using transit.
 - 48.1% of survey respondents noted experiencing discrimination in public areas, stores or banks. This is difficult to compare with *Code* social areas, since these exclude general public areas (which fall outside the jurisdiction of human rights statutes) and banks, which fall within federal jurisdiction (Source: Statistics Canada, 2024-11-19. [Discrimination and unfair treatment by gender and province](#)).

Discrimination in Ontario by area of occurrence, 2024

Source: Statistics Canada, 2024-11-19, Table 45-10-0100-01. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/4510010001-eng>

As a note, housing, contracts and membership in unions or professional memberships were not explicitly listed as areas for which survey respondents could provide answers.



However, smaller studies conducted by organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR) (*[Sorry, it's rented. "Measuring Discrimination Against Newcomers in Toronto's Rental Housing Market"](#)*, 2022) and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (*[SHUT OUT – Discrimination in the Rental Housing Market](#)*, 2023) both point to several trends. Discrimination for individuals seeking rental housing appeared to most frequently occur at the early stages of securing a unit such as requesting viewings or following initial meetings with a landlord.⁴ Key constituencies with the most frequent experiences of such discrimination included “individuals with disabilities, racialized individuals, immigrants and refugees, women and female-led single parent families, older adults and Indigenous people. In terms of prohibited grounds, the CCHR notes that in its small study, among prospective renters 53% of racialized newcomer parents experienced

⁴ With respect to discrimination at early (pre-application) stages, the CCHR notes that “discrimination against a would-be tenant can occur at any point in the process of securing rental housing,” (pg. 40) inclusive of discrimination before an application is even submitted. Housing provider practices such as inferring racialized identity over the phone (based on accent) then abruptly declaring that a unit is unavailable, inferring racialized identity via email (based on name) then not responding to email inquiries, asking prospective tenants intrusive family-related questions, mentioning (illegally) that a deposit greater than first and last month’s rent is required – all of these actions, and more, constitute pre-application discrimination.

moderate to severe discrimination in phone calls to housing providers. Additionally, racialized male newcomer callers experienced the most discrimination, with 66% of callers experiencing mild to severe discrimination. For individuals already renting housing, discrimination primarily occurred when requesting accommodation for disabilities.

As noted earlier, provincially, a significant number of individuals with disabilities, along with individuals identifying as racialized and in particular Indigenous people, noted facing discrimination in healthcare environments.

Appendix D. Research on trends by prohibited grounds of discrimination

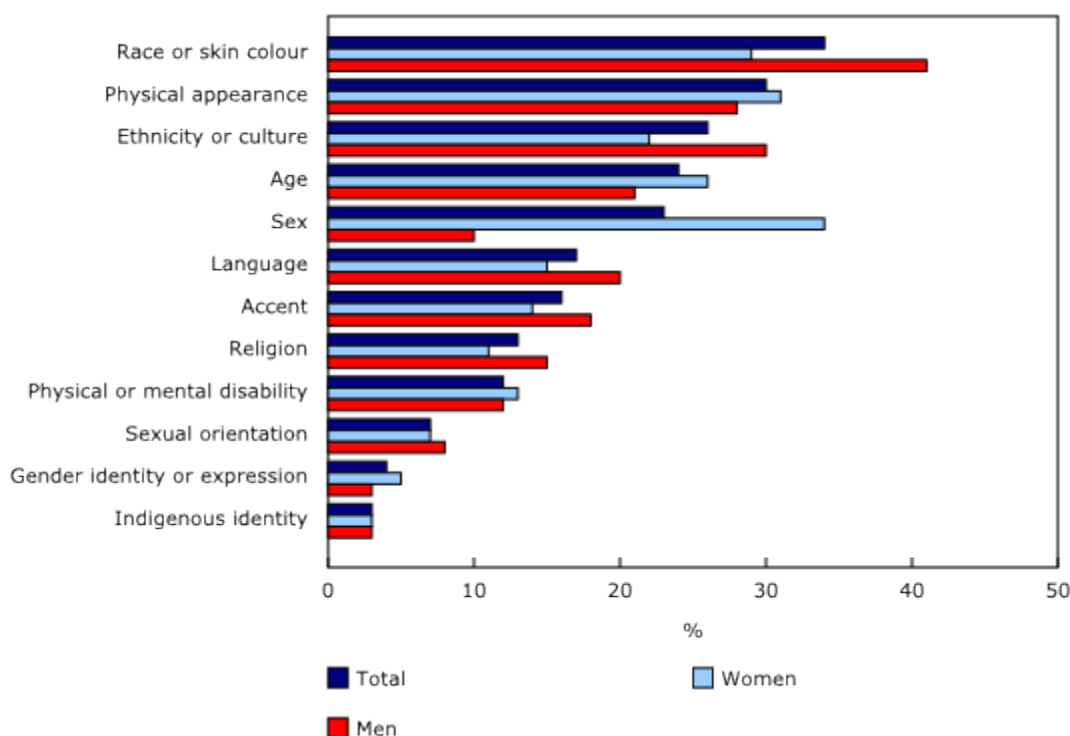
The HRTO released data on prohibited grounds of discrimination cited in HRTO complaints (applications) from 2019 to 2023 in Tribunal Ontario's 2022-2023 Annual Report as follows:

Grounds*	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Disability	55%	56%	59%	53%
Reprisal	28%	26%	26%	28%
Race	25%	24%	26%	25%
Colour	18%	16%	18%	18%
Age	14%	11%	12%	14%
Ethnic Origin	16%	16%	17%	18%
Place of Origin	12%	11%	13%	14%
Family Status	12%	10%	11%	12%
Ancestry	11%	11%	13%	13%
Sex, Pregnancy and Sexual Harassment	16%	15%	16%	18%
Sexual Solicitation or Advances	4%	4%	4%	5%
Sexual Orientation	5%	4%	4%	4%
Gender Identity	8%	5%	6%	5%
Gender Expression	5%	3%	3%	3%
Creed	13%	12%	6%	8%
Marital Status	6%	6%	6%	6%
Association	7%	7%	7%	5%
Citizenship	5%	5%	5%	5%
Record of Offences	2%	2%	2%	2%
Receipt of Public Assistance	2%	2%	1%	2%
No Grounds	0%	1%	1%	2%

Note: *Some applications allege discrimination on more than one ground, so the total may exceed 100%.

Using pooled data from six waves of the [Canadian Social Survey](#), a new comprehensive Statistics Canada study⁵ on discrimination provides the following data on perceived reasons for discrimination reported by Canada-wide survey respondents broken down by sex, over the 2021-2024 period (per graph below):

Discrimination in the five years prior to the survey, perceived reason for discrimination, by sex and total population, Canada, 2021 to 2024



This study found that one in three people (36%) aged 15 years and older living in Canada reported experiencing some form of discrimination or unfair treatment in the five years prior to the latest wave of the Canadian Social Survey. The study furthermore found that racialized people, especially Canadian-born Black people, are more likely to face discrimination.⁶

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2024-05-16, Half of racialized people have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240516/dq240516b-eng.htm>.

⁶ "Consistent with [previous findings](#), reports of discrimination were more common among the Canadian-born racialized population (57%) than among racialized people who recently immigrated to Canada (48%) or who immigrated more than 10 years ago (49%). This difference was most pronounced among Black Canadians, with Canadian-born Black people being significantly more likely to report having experienced discrimination (71%) than either recent (51%) or established (59%) Black immigrants... Specifically, discrimination based on race or skin colour was the leading perceived reason for discrimination against racialized people (66%). This was followed by discrimination due to ethnicity or culture (49%), accent (28%), and language (27%)." (Statistics Canada, 2024-05-16, Half of racialized people have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240516/dq240516b-eng.htm>).

This same study also found that discrimination is also more common among other historically marginalized groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ populations, Indigenous people, people with a disability, and women. For example, study findings indicate:

- 2SLGBTQ+ populations were nearly twice as likely as the non-2SLGBTQ+ population to face some form of discrimination or unfair treatment in the five years prior to the survey (61% versus 32%), primarily due to their sexual orientation, physical appearance, and sex;
- 46% of First Nations people living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit reported experiences of discrimination, compared with 33% of non-Indigenous people. The reasons for these experiences were largely perceived to be due to Indigenous identity and physical appearance. Indigenous people (23%) were also nearly twice as likely to be discriminated against due to a physical or mental disability compared with the non-Indigenous population (12%);
- 44% of people with a disability reported experiences of discrimination, compared with 32% of people without a disability. The most frequently cited perceived reasons for discrimination against people with a disability were due to physical or mental disability, physical appearance, and age;
- 37% of women reported experiences of discrimination, compared with 30% of men. Women were more often discriminated against because of their sex or age, while for men, discrimination was more often on the basis of their race or skin colour, ethnicity or culture, language, accent, or religion.

Another Canada-wide Statistics Canada study⁷ revealed the following insights regarding reported experiences of discrimination for the following rights-seeking groups:

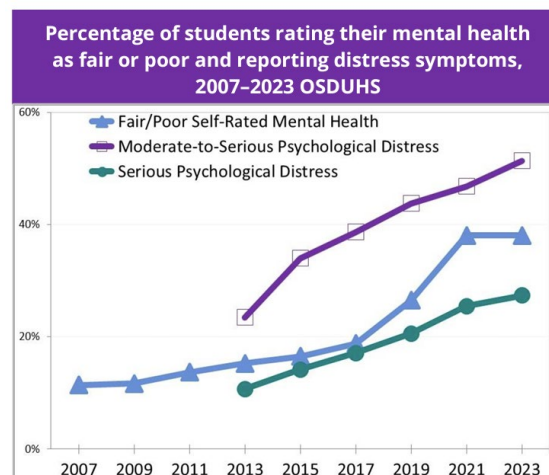
- 44% of individuals with disabilities in total, with 43.2% experiencing discrimination at work;
- 67.3% of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in total, with 37% reporting discrimination at school;
- 47.8% of individuals that identify as Indigenous (which in this survey did not include individuals living on reserves), with 33.7% reporting discrimination in healthcare settings;
- 53.3% of individuals that identify as visible minorities in total, with 25.1% experiencing discrimination while on public transit;
- 45% of immigrants in total, with 44% reporting discrimination at work; and

⁷ Statistics Canada, 2024-11-20, Discrimination and unfair treatment by gender and other selected sociodemographic characteristics. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=4510010101>.

- Over 50% of each of the above sociodemographic groups reported experiencing discrimination in public areas, a store, bank or restaurant.

Many Canadians with disabilities reported having unmet workplace accommodation needs in one study,⁸ while another study found that “two in five of those living alone with more severe disabilities are living in poverty” and “two in five of those living above the poverty line still cannot afford all required aids, medication, and healthcare services”, further underlying the mutually exacerbating impact of poverty on disability and accommodation.⁹

While disability rates increased from 2017 to 2022 for all disability types, the largest increase occurred in mental health-related disabilities, with Ontario youth in particular experiencing “a worrying decline” in overall mental health and ability to cope, as evidenced in the following recently released 2023 CAMH survey findings of 10,145 Ontario students in grades 7 to 12 in 46 school boards across Ontario (per graph below):¹⁰



⁸According to findings from a recent [study](#) looking at the years 2017 and 2022 and using CSD data, more than one-third of employed Canadians with disabilities needed a workplace accommodation (35.4%) or had an unmet need (35.4%) in 2022. Source: “Changes in workplace accommodations among employed Canadians with disabilities, 2017 to 2022”, by [Christoph Schimmele](#), [Sung-Hee Jeon](#) and [Rubab Arim](#). Release date: August 28, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202400800004-eng>. See also Stats Canada. “More Canadians with disabilities in the workforce, but unmet accommodation needs among barriers to equity”. October 9, 2024, 11:00 a.m. (EDT) <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/7142-more-canadians-disabilities-workforce-unmet-accommodation-needs-among-barriers-equity>.

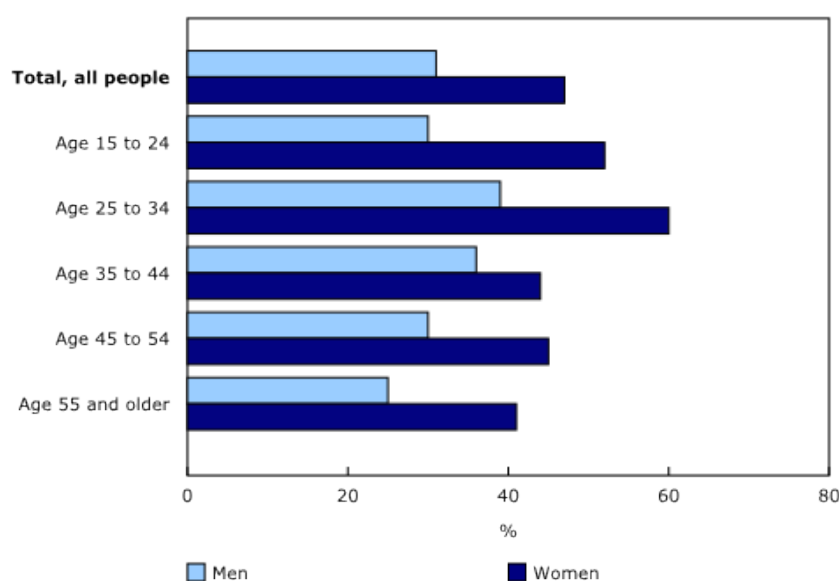
⁹ “A demographic, employment and income profile of persons with disabilities aged 15 years and over in Canada, 2022” by [Benoît-Paul Hébert](#), [Christina Kevins](#), [Amirabbas Mofidi](#), [Stuart Morris](#), [Diana Simionescu](#), and [Madison Thicke](#). Release date: May 28, 2024. [More information](#).

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/ontario-youth-experiencing-increasing-levels-of-psychological-distress-and-inability-to-cope>

Such trends among youth will very likely impact the future composition of human rights claims in Ontario, with likely increasing demands on HRLSC services and supports, particularly for young people entering the workforce.

One study found that 43.4% of women in Ontario in Q3 of 2024 reported experiencing discrimination at work.¹¹ Sexual harassment in the workplace in particular continues to be a pronounced problem, as revealed in another Statistics Canada Report which found that nearly 1 in 2 women and roughly 3 in 10 men reported having experienced harassment or sexual assault in the workplace (per graph below).¹²

Proportion of employees who reported ever experiencing workplace harassment or sexual assault in the workplace, by gender and age group, Canada, %



Women aged 25 to 34 (60%) reported the highest rates of sexual harassment or assault in the workplace, mostly in the form of “inappropriate sexualized behaviours”, with persons self-identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual reporting higher rates than their heterosexual peers. Another study found that some 70% of trans youth in Canada report experiencing sexual harassment.¹³

¹¹ Statistics Canada. Discrimination and unfair treatment by gender and province. Release date: 2024-11-19. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=4510010001>.

¹² Source: Statistics Canada's [Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics](#), in collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. [Gender Results Framework](#): A new data table on workplace harassment. Released: 2024-02-12.

¹³ Cited in Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres report, “Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion and confronting transphobia and homophobia: OCRCC responds”, published Sept 21, 2023,

Appendix E. Labour Market Data

In its 2024 Fall Statement, the Province projects employment growth by 1.4% in 2024, by 2.9% in 2025, 4.36% in 2026, and 5.61% in 2027 as compared to 2023 (starting at 7,915,000 people employed). Additionally, the Fall Statement places current unemployment at 6.9% as of September of 2024.¹⁴ While the Fall Statement notes that this is under the historical average, Statistics Canada notes in its analysis of *Labour Force Characteristics by Visible Minority Group* that among racialized groups, unemployment rates were much higher.

Statistics Canada notes in its analysis of *Labour Force Characteristics by Visible Minority Group* that among racialized groups, unemployment rates were:

- 9.4% across all visible minority communities
- over 13% for individuals identifying as Black;
- over 11% for individuals identifying as Arab;
- over 9.5% for individuals identifying as South Asian.

A similar study conducted in 2023¹⁵, looking at unemployment for individuals identifying as Indigenous (First Nation, Métis or Inuit) found:

- an average unemployment rate of 9.4% among individuals identifying as Indigenous; and
- 13.2% for individuals identifying as members of a First Nation that were living off of reserves.

From a gender and age lens, Statistics Canada provides some additional insights. While youth unemployment ages 15 to 24 skewed higher for men than women, within the age group of 25 to 29 unemployment rates evened out to 8% for both men and women.

Key priorities for the Province (under its 2024 Fall Statement) include supporting improvements to health care service and encouraging young workers to enter skilled trades. Each of these priorities relates to social areas under Ontario's *Human Rights Code*.

https://sexualassaultsupport.ca/supporting-2slgbtqgia-inclusion-and-confronting-transphobia-and-homophobia-ocrcc-responses/#_ftn18

¹⁴ Province of Ontario. *2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Building Ontario for You*. "Chapter 2: Economic Performance and Outlook." Release date: 2024-10-30.
<https://budget.ontario.ca/2024/fallstatement/chapter-2.html#s-6>

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. "Labour force characteristics by detailed Indigenous group, three-month moving averages, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality." Release date: 2024-12-06.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410040101>

In particular, effective worker recruitment strategies in healthcare and skilled trades requires strong human rights protections.

The Provincial focus upon providing improved healthcare supports to “vulnerable populations,” and of increasing recruitment of medical personnel to the province -- including efforts to remove barriers to practice for foreign-trained doctors -- could generate employment-related human rights issues in the medical field. With medical service environments already containing high levels of daily harassment and abuse towards staff (both by members of the public, and internally from other employees and managers), ensuring a safe environment where respect and dignity for individuals are protected will be key to ensuring retention of vital workers.

Within the age group for survey takers aged 30 to 34, the disparity in unemployment shifted to 8.5% unemployment for women compared to 7.8% for men.¹⁶ Following these age groups, unemployment falls below the provincial rate of 6%. These findings are of interest to the HRLSC for two reasons:

- The large number of younger women (aged 15 to 29) that are employed and potentially at risk of facing *Code*-related discrimination or harassment at younger ages; and
- The higher rate of unemployment for women between the ages of 30 and 34 roughly aligning with the average child-rearing age in Ontario, which stands at 32.3.¹⁷

Appendix F. Hate Crime Data

Hate crime data, though varying in part because of the varying propensity of different demographic groups to self-report, also informs current discriminatory trends as discrimination and hate have been found in studies to be mutually reinforcing, with hate crimes often being the most extreme manifestation of underlying discriminatory attitudes.¹⁸ Reports of hate crimes are up across all of Canada, with Ontario reporting

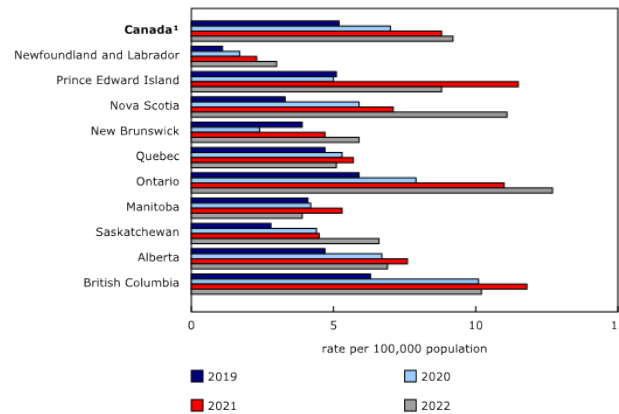
¹⁶ Statistics Canada. “Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality (x 1,000).” Release date: 2024-12-06. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410001701>

¹⁷ Statistics Canada. “Mean age of mother at time of delivery (live births).” Release date: 2024-09-25. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310041701>.

¹⁸ Baldwin, J. (2017, January 25). Culture, Prejudice, Racism, and Discrimination. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication. Retrieved 1 Dec. 2024, from <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-164>.

the greatest numbers in 2023, both in absolute terms, and relative to population, with some 2,424 police-reported hate crime incidents in Ontario in 2023 (up 25% from 1,950 reported incidents the year before).

Police-reported hate crimes, by province, 2019 to 2022, rate per 100,000 population



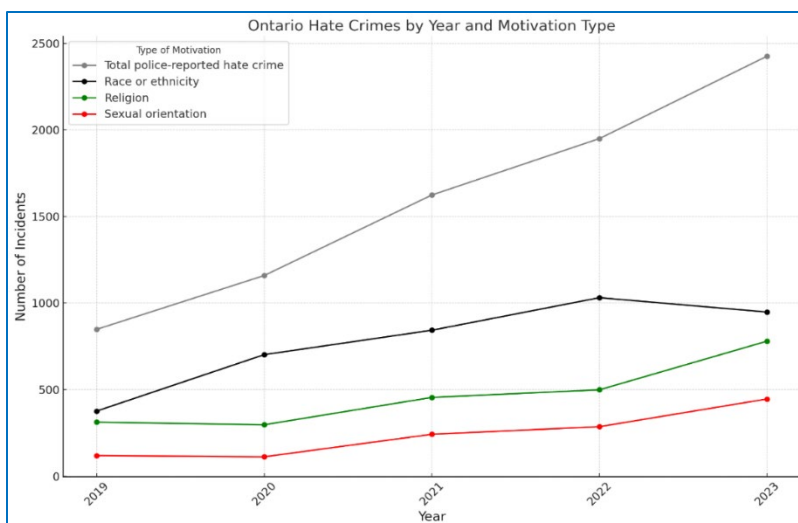
Source: Statistics Canada. 2024-03-13. Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240313/cg-b002-png-eng.htm>.

Hate crimes continue to be most frequently based on race or ethnicity, followed by religion (primarily based on antisemitism followed by Islamophobia), with religion and sexual orientation being the two fastest-growing forms of hate crime in Ontario. Indigenous, Black, Muslim, Jewish and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities have been among the most targeted groups of hate crimes in recent years. Noting such trends, the Province of Ontario has undertaken several anti-hate initiatives to address this.¹⁹

Police-reported hate crime, by type of motivation, Ontario 2019-2023

Leading hate scholar, Dr. Barbara Perry, defines hate crimes and incidents related to hate broadly as “acts of violence and intimidation usually directed toward already stigmatized and marginalized groups” that are connected to “mechanism[s] of power, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize a given social order” (Perry, 2001).

¹⁹ See for instance Ontario’s October 21, 2024 announcement that it is investing \$12.75 million this year to help address the rise of hate incidents and keep communities safe across the province (<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005213/ontario-strengthening-supports-to-combat-hate-and-create-safer-communities>). This Anti-Hate Security Prevention Grant program follows upon the Province’s announcement in early December 2023 that it is investing an extra \$20.5 million in the province’s anti-hate security and prevention grant - with the additional funding primarily earmarked for Muslim and Jewish communities. “The rise in anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, and other acts of hate we have seen in recent weeks is completely unacceptable and has no place in Ontario,” Michael Ford, Ontario’s Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, said in a release (“As hate crimes rise, provinces fund programs to stem the tide”. (2024). *Municipal World*, 134(2), 10-12).



Ontario number of police-reported hate crimes, by type of motivation, % change by year 2019-2023

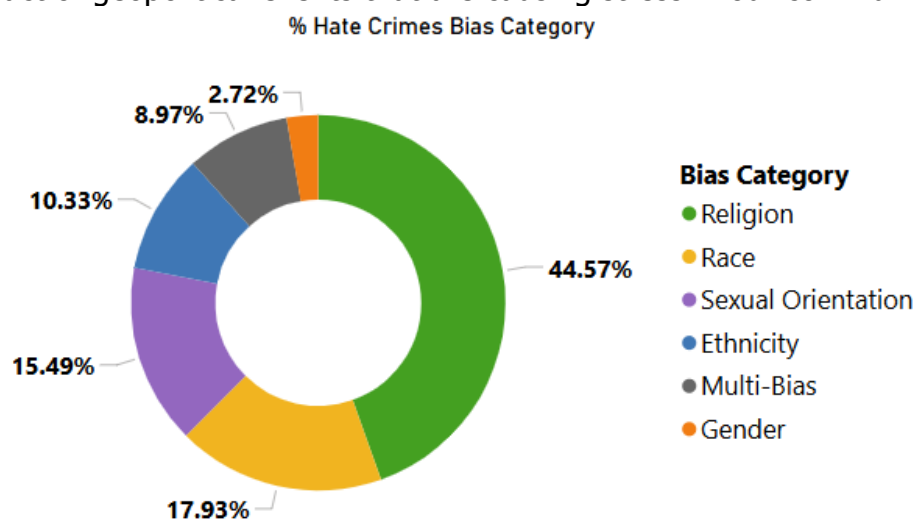
Type of motivation	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total police-reported hate crime	848	1,159 (+36.67%)	1,624 (+40.12%)	1,950 (+20.07%)	2,426 (+24.41%)
Race or ethnicity	376	702 (+86.7%)	843 (+20.09%)	1,031 (+22.3%)	948 (-8.05%)
Religion	312	297 (-4.81%)	455 (+53.2%)	499 (+9.67%)	780 (+56.31%)
Sexual orientation	119	112 (-5.88%)	242 (+116.07%)	286 (+18.18%)	446 (+55.94%)

Source for above graph and table: Statistics Canada. 2024-07-25. "Police-reported hate crime, by type of motivation, selected regions and Canada (selected police services)". <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3510006601>

A Statistics Canada report released in July 2024 found that the total number of hate crimes reported in Ontario increased by 24% in 2023 as compared to the previous year (2,426 in 2023 from 1,950 in 2022).²⁰ Hate-crimes relating to religion in Ontario increased the most year over year, by 56% in the same time period (780 in 2023 versus 499 in 2022).

²⁰ Statistics Canada. "Police-reported hate crime, by type of motivation, selected regions and Canada (selected police services)." Release date: 2024-07-25. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3510006601>.

Toronto has experienced a significant surge in hate crimes in particular, up 93% in early 2024 compared to the previous year, with incidents targeting Jewish communities accounting for nearly half of the cases, followed by crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals, Black, and Muslim communities. Alluding to the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict since October 7th, Chief Myron Demkiw commented: “As a city we continue to experience the impact of geopolitical events that are causing stress in our communities”.



Source: Toronto Police Service Hate Crime Data Dashboard, 2024

In addition, data collected by the Toronto Police Service and released in *Hate Crimes Overview* in 2023 showed that 86% or 186 cases related to religious hate, with a majority (71%) of reported hate crimes happening in locations that relate to social grounds covered under the *Code*. Similarly, the Ottawa Police Service found more than half of reported hate instances (23 out of a total of 43 cases) related to creed or national identity. The majority of creed-related cases in Ottawa and Toronto related to antisemitism, followed by Islamophobia and related origin, ancestry and ethnicity-based cases (such as anti-Arab hate).

In addition to data relating to antisemitism and Islamophobia, recent media coverage points to the potential growth in targeting of East Indian diasporic communities, in particular, Sikh and Hindu faith-communities as well as intragroup strife. As noted in recent British Columbia human rights jurisprudence and as described by the OHRC in its recent OHRC’s Policy position on caste-based discrimination, intersectional issues of race, ancestry, place and ethnic origin, creed and family status may manifest as casteism discrimination and be linked to hate activities. The HRLSC will continue to monitor for the growth in discrimination and harassment based on ancestry, creed, ethnicity and place of origin, given the growth of incidents of hate in Ontario.