



ALBERTA COURT OF JUSTICE

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2024-2027**

WHO WE ARE

An independent and effective court upholding the Rule of Law by providing fair, accessible and timely justice, respected and trusted by all Albertans.

HOW WE ACHIEVE THIS?

A Court that leads Canada in developing leading edge processes and technologically advanced applications to meet evolving challenges facing courts, the administration of justice and the needs of Albertans.

Remarks from the Chief Justice

On behalf of the Court's Strategic Planning Committee, I am pleased to present the Alberta Court of Justice's Strategic Plan 2024-2027.

The Alberta Court of Justice plays a fundamental role in the daily lives of Albertans. The Court maintains the Rule of Law by which and through which citizens can order their lives.

In an era of rapid change and increasing complexity, this strategic plan is our commitment to the Albertans we serve, and it will guide us toward a future of sustainable growth, innovation and meaningful impact.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the members of the Strategic Planning Committee who have been instrumental in this comprehensive roadmap.

Strategic Planning Committee:

1. The Honourable Deputy Chief Justice M. J. Durant, Chair
2. The Honourable Assistant Chief Justice A. B. Chrenek
3. The Honourable Assistant Chief Justice D. B. Higa
4. The Honourable Assistant Chief Justice R. A. Snider
5. The Honourable Justice D. G. Redman

Each goal and objective within this plan has been carefully crafted to uphold the fundamental principles of our justice system while embracing the opportunities for improvement and innovation. Let us remember that our work impacts the lives of countless individuals who turn to our courts for justice and resolution.

Together, we will build a court system that upholds the highest standards of justice, serves our community with excellence, and adapts to the evolving needs of our society.

Yours truly,



James A. Hunter
Chief Justice
Alberta Court of Justice

Introduction

The 2024-2027 Strategic Plan marks an important time for the Court. Proudly, this is the first plan as the Alberta Court of Justice. The Alberta Court of Justice more aptly describes the relationship between Albertans and the fairness, accessibility and justice expected from our Court.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic caused disruption and hardship for all. The Court successfully adapted and evolved its practices, as the Court was challenged to deliver court services in a continuously changing environment.

The Court will continue to adapt and evolve to ensure we address advances in technology, artificial intelligence, hybrid work environments, changing social-economic conditions and mental health and addiction challenges facing many who appear before the Court.

The Court will continue our leadership role in providing a culturally relevant, restorative and holistic justice system for individuals of Indigenous heritage.

The Alberta Court of Justice

The Alberta Court of Justice, formerly known as the Provincial Court of Alberta, was established on July 1, 1973. The Court of Justice is a statutory court of record exercising jurisdiction in five areas of law: Adult Criminal, Provincial Offences and Inquiries, Civil, Family (including Child Protection) and Youth Criminal.

The Court is the third branch of government entrusted with adjudicating disputes and enforcing the Rule of Law, independent of the Legislative and Executive branches.

The Court operates in 73 locations throughout the province and is the adjudicating forum for the majority of legal and judicial disputes in the province.

The Court is nationally recognized as a leader in innovation and has established several specialized courts to address areas of domestic violence, drug treatment, mental health and restorative justice for Indigenous individuals. Many of its Justices preside in specialized divisions.

All criminal matters commence in the Court of Justice and 97% of all criminal cases conclude in the Court.

The Court's civil jurisdiction has increased to \$100,000 to facilitate and promote greater access to justice for Albertans.

The province's 2021 Compensation Commission describes the Court as a "mature multijurisdictional Court" that "represents the face of justice for most Albertans."

Core Values

Accountable and Transparent

Values of accountability and transparency include propriety of the court process, reasons for the decision made, and neutrality of the decision maker. Justice must not just be done but must also be seen to be done.

Accessible

Accessibility recognizes that all Albertans regardless of background or circumstances can enter the legal process and use court resources to ensure they are heard, and a decision is made in a fair and impartial process. The ability to obtain accurate and complete information about the Court and judicial process, the law applicable to a particular case and the result of cases is also essential to accessibility.

Excellence

Justices and Justices of the Peace must make decisions based on a thorough understanding of the applicable law, the facts of each case and the complexities of society. Decisions must be reasoned and delivered in a thoughtful and understandable manner.

Effective and Efficient

A reliable justice system must be effective and efficient. It must balance the time required to properly obtain, present and weigh the evidence, consider the law and arguments, and avoid unreasonable delay created by inefficient processes and insufficient resources.

Equality before and under the Law, Equity, Fairness and Impartiality

Values of equality, equity, fairness and impartiality set the standards by which Justices and Justices of the Peace conduct themselves. In doing so the Court must embody the culture of respect in all interactions between members of the Court, support staff, justice stakeholders and all who appear before the Court.

Independent

Fundamentally, a Court must be truly independent. Judicial independence is a cornerstone of the Canadian judicial system. The judiciary must be separate and independent from the executive and legislative branches of government. It is a guarantee that every Justice and Justice of the Peace makes decisions free of influence and based solely on fact and law.

The Court must manage its legal and administrative processes without interference and influence from the executive and legislative branches. Additional aspects of this foundational principle are advanced through Judicial Council and the Judicial Compensation Commission process.

Innovative and Responsive

The Core Values of fairness, impartiality and due process do not change, but the manner in which court services are delivered must evolve. The Court must be aware of new and innovative processes and technologies that exist and incorporate them when appropriate.

Court Leadership

The Court is led by the Chief Justice, the Deputy Chief Justice and Assistant Chief Justices. The Chief Justice's mandate, supported by Chief and Council, is to:

- Preserve and protect judicial independence
- Provide strategic leadership
- Advocate for judicial, administrative and courtroom resources required for the effective operation of the Court
- Lead long-term planning and policy development
- Preserve, enhance and promote the Court's Core Values
- Ensure the Court delivers fair, accessible and timely justice
- Provide and promote continuing legal education programs and opportunities for Justices and Justices of the Peace
- Develop, administer and report on the Court's budget
- Direct and manage the Court's administrative staff
- Schedule and assign Justices and Justices of the Peace
- Address complaints in accordance with the *Court of Justice Act*, the *Judicature Act* and the *Justice of the Peace Act*



STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Access to Justice

The Court must enhance access to justice through excellence in caseload management, enhanced dispute resolution, improved processes and practices and the appropriate use of technology to ensure the timely, efficient and effective delivery of all services provided by the Court.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Support the ongoing work and mandate of the judicial caseload management committees of Chief and Council for Criminal, Civil and Family & Youth;
- Continue to support the ongoing work of the Court of Justice Access Committee;
- Develop and implement strategies and measures to improve caseload to prevent delay and improve lead times in all Court proceedings across the province;
- Develop and implement an enhanced, integrated provincial trial coordination/case scheduling system to ensure optimum use of courtroom and judicial resources;
- Establish achievable time-to-trial targets for Criminal, Civil, Family, Child Protection and Youth Justice Courts;
- Reduce “last-minute” trial collapses and trial adjournments in areas the Court can exercise control to minimize loss of court time and judicial resources;
- Incorporate technology and processes to implement effective virtual appearances for counsel, witnesses and other justice participants in procedural pre-trial processes, motions, dockets and where appropriate, matters involving viva voce evidence;
- Maintain and update a standard set of protocols and best practices for virtual court appearances;
- Ensure all court participants understand and comply with the *Criminal Rules of Court*;
- Develop civil claim procedures to enhance the Court’s legislative mandate to provide an expeditious and inexpensive forum for judicial resolution of disputes;
- Ensure that a well-qualified bench of French-speaking Justices and Justices of the Peace continue to be available for French language proceedings;
- Develop early intervention and alternative case resolution processes particularly in Family and Child Protection matters;
- Develop and implement strategies to improve Court services for self represented litigants;
- Develop and implement strategies to improve Court services for all participants;
- Develop and implement strategies that present alternative solutions to resolving matters in advance of commencing court proceedings;
- Work with Alberta Justice to ensure that there is effective and timely access to qualified interpreters for Court proceedings.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Indigenous Initiatives

The Court will work to provide a culturally relevant, restorative and holistic system of justice for Indigenous individuals including accused persons, offenders, victims, families, youth and children as well as those Indigenous communities impacted by the actions of those who find themselves before the Court.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Support the ongoing work and mandate of the Indigenous Justice Committee of Chief and Council;
- Support the implementation of the Court’s Indigenous Justice Strategy and the Responses contained therein including the work of the Access to Justice through an Indigenous Lens Committee;
- Work toward the preparation and adoption of a practice note regarding processes and procedures under *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Public Respect and Awareness

Enhance public understanding, and community awareness of the Court and its critical role in maintaining respect for the Rule of Law and the provision and delivery of judicial services to Albertans.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Continuously update the Court’s public website to ensure content is informative and user-friendly to the public and participants;
- Develop and implement Court processes that support clear communication of expectations and decisions to the public;
- Continue to work with the Alberta Branch of the Canadian Bar Association, the Indigenous Bar Association, the Law Society of Alberta and local Bar Associations to ensure that practitioners are fully informed of the Court’s initiatives;
- Work to achieve a diverse and inclusive environment that respects all Court staff and participants;
- Encourage judicial support for, and participation in, law conferences and relevant public and legal profession forums on law and justice matters;
- Continue to support school and other educational programs that foster knowledge of the role and independence of the Court and its Justices.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Judicial Education and other Judicial Supports

Enhance judicial education, training, and support to members of the Court to promote and embody a culture of professional development and continual improvement.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Continue to provide a robust, timely, fulsome and independent education program for the judiciary;
- In conjunction with the Alberta Provincial Justices' Association (APJA), Society of the Justices of the Peace (SJPA), the National Judicial Institute and other partners to continue to develop and promote opportunities for Justices and Justices of the Peace to participate in education and training projects and initiatives;
- Continue to update and review the Judicial Education Plans for Justices and Justices of the Peace as well as the new Justices and new Justices of the Peace Orientation Guides;
- Implement and support the mentoring policy for all newly appointed Justices and Justices of the Peace;
- Liaise with other Court committees to ensure the education needs in those areas are incorporated in education planning including access to justice; indigenous strategies; equity, diversity and inclusion; and technology changes and advancements in the training and use of Artificial Intelligence;
- In addition to the bi-annual conferences organized by the APJA, the Office of the Chief Justice will continue to develop and hold educational conferences for existing and newly appointed Justices and Justices of the Peace to enhance judicial education initiatives;
- Support the Internal Judicial Education website and ensure that the materials posted, including bench books, are updated on a regular basis;
- Continue ongoing training for Justices and Justices of the Peace on effective and efficient management of self represented litigants and disruptive and vexatious litigants;
- Assess the role of and the need for additional legal counsel and articling students to support the work of Justices, Justices of the Peace, and the Court as a whole, and assess the supports required for legal counsel;
- Continue to advocate for an appropriate level of Library Services to support the Court;
- Continue to provide a comprehensive internal communication plan to inform Justices and Justices of the Peace about matters of interest and concern.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Judicial Independence

The principle of judicial independence has three components: security of tenure, financial security and administrative independence. All three components are essential to a fair and impartial judiciary. Upholding these principles is of utmost importance to all strategic priorities of our Court as they represent the foundation upon which the principle of judicial independence rests.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Enhance our operations as the independent third branch of government with control over the administrative decisions that bear directly on the exercise of the judicial function;
- Continue to support the Alberta Provincial Justices' Association (APJA) and the Society of the Justices of the Peace (SJPA) in their efforts before their respective Compensation Commissions;
- Continue to foster a strong working relationship with the APJA and the SJPA, in particular to ensure the Court continues to control and deliver judicial education programs inherent to maintaining judicial independence;
- Together with the Minister of Justice, review and enhance the judicial appointments process to continue to attract highly qualified applicants and ensure that merit based judicial appointments occur on an expedited basis when a judicial vacancy occurs;
- Work with Alberta Justice to update the Judicial Complement Report as required by the Chief Justice, ensuring current workloads and needs of the Court are properly met;
- Continue to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Justice under the Memorandum of Understanding to address areas of mutual interest and concern;
- Achieve a financial structure where the Court is recognized as separate from Court of Justice Operations (CJO);
- Prepare annual Court operational budgets;
- Maintain and develop policies and procedures for Court administration in co-ordination with Court of Justice Operations and Court Technology Services that safeguard and enhance the principle of judicial independence;
- Annually review and update the Court's 3-year Strategic Plan;
- Prepare biennial reports of Court operations;
- Define areas of responsibility for management and administrative functions within the Court and achieve a reorganization of staff and functions where appropriate.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Technology and Infrastructure

The Court must ensure the availability and effective use of technology and infrastructure to maximize use of judicial resources; protect and preserve judicial information; ensure and enhance access to justice for Albertans; improve communications to all stakeholders; enhance and increase information relating to Court processes and procedures; optimize use of Court facilities; and ensure the security of Court facilities, Justices, Justices of the Peace and court staff.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Support the ongoing work and mandate of the Technology Committee;
- Continue to develop and implement judicial information security systems consistent with recognized information security and information management standards;
- Incorporate technology and processes to ensure and enhance effective virtual appearances;
- Continue to develop, implement, and expand the Digital Judicial Authorization system;
- Support the development and implementation of initiatives to assist, enhance, and support the Court's mission.
- Where appropriate enhance the Court's ability to conduct civil trials virtually or in a hybrid form through state-of-the-art technology, that allows for the sharing of documents and exhibits;
- Work towards e-filing and digitization of all court documents in the Civil Division;
- Upgrade and ensure continuous enhancement of court room technology, computer software and hardware;
- Explore how Artificial Intelligence may affect and impact Court processes;
- Work with Court Technology Services to ensure that the needs of the Court are promptly reflected in upgrades to infrastructure and services;
- Participate in capital projects planning with Alberta Justice, Alberta Infrastructure, Information Technology, and other Alberta courts;
- Work with facilities management and Alberta Justice to address and complete enhancements and upgrades to Court facilities;
- Work with Alberta Justice and Alberta Infrastructure to assess and build new court facilities;
- Work with Alberta Justice to ensure an appropriate level of court security in every location.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – The Role of Justices of the Peace

The role of the Justice of the Peace has evolved over time. They are a dedicated, knowledgeable group of individuals and the Court must use their legal skills and experience in more diverse ways to enhance the Court's ability to carry out its mandate.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Implement the recommendations of the Justice of the Peace report;
- Explore opportunities to have Justices of the Peace provide services to the full extent of their legislative authority;
- Continue to work with Alberta Justice to determine the Justice of the Peace complement required to respond to current and anticipated workloads and conditions;
- Together with the Minister of Justice, develop and implement a strategy to attract highly qualified lawyers to Justice of the Peace positions and ensure that merit based appointments occur on an expedited basis when vacancies arise;
- Work with Court of Justice Operations (CJO) to ensure sufficient resources are maintained to support the work of Justices of the Peace;
- Support the development and implementation of initiatives to deliver effective and accessible service to the public.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – Therapeutic and Specialized Courts

The Court will continue to respond to the needs and challenges arising from matters involving individuals from diverse language, cultural and ethnic backgrounds; children and families; self represented litigants; and individuals facing mental health challenges, addiction issues and domestic violence.

Achieving the Strategic Priorities

- Identify strategies to improve the effectiveness of services to participants who experience addiction and mental health challenges;
- Support the expansion and operation of Therapeutic and Specialized Courts;
- Support strategies to improve the expansion and effectiveness of Domestic Violence Courts;
- Work with Alberta Justice to determine the need and feasibility of establishing additional Therapeutic Courts;
- Support education for Justices presiding in Therapeutic and Specialized Courts to ensure awareness and implementation of recognized best practices