

Years in Review

2024-2026

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic



Hamilton Community Legal Clinic

2024-2026: Years in Review

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic

Landmark Place

Suite 203, 100 Main Street East

Hamilton, Ontario

L8N 3W4

Contact Us

905-527-4572

www.HamiltonJustice.ca

Table of Contents

Introduction

Mission, Vision, Values	1
Board Members	2
Message from the Chair, Board of Directors	3
Message from the Co-Executive Directors	4
Financial Report 2024-2025	5
Financial Report 2025-2026	6

Clinic Services

Clinic Services Summary	8
Director of Legal Services.....	9
Mobile Employment Law Program Report	10
French Language Services	11
Frontline Staff.....	12-13
Housing Law.....	13-14
Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction	15-17
Social Assistance Law	17-18
Tenant Support Program	19-20
Workplace Safety and Insurance Board	21-22

Community Programs

Hamilton Legal Outreach	24
Social Work at Hamilton Community Legal Clinic	25
Together We Rise	25-26
Queer Justice Program	26-27
YEN:TENE	27

Mission

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic is a community based not for profit agency whose diverse team of caring professionals and volunteers provides legal services to low-income individuals and communities to promote access to justice and to improve quality of life. We do this through: summary advice and referral, representation, community development, law reform and public legal education.

Vision

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic will be recognized and valued as an important provider of poverty law services and advocate for social change.

Values

We are committed to the empowerment of individuals and the communities within Hamilton by upholding the following values as we engage in our mission: trust, respect and integrity; equity, diversity and inclusion; leadership, excellence and innovation.

Board Members

2024-2025

Anjali Upadhya-O'Brien	Kingsley Audu
Anabelle Ragsag	Kris Noakes
David Quezada	Lisa Feinberg
Holly Wootten	Patricia Suleiman
James Diemert	Simon Lebrun

2025-2026

Anjali Upadhya-O'Brien	James Diemert
Anabelle Ragsag	Kingsley Audu
Brett Book	Lisa Feinberg
David Quezada	Patricia Suleiman
Holly Wootten	Simon Lebrun

Message from the Chair & Board of Directors

As we look back on the work accomplished at the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic in the past year, we feel profound gratitude and a deep sense of pride in the Clinic team's commitment to serving our community. In a year of challenges and change, staff and volunteers have dedicated themselves to exploring and building new ways to deliver legal services and align Clinic work to our shared values, all while keeping the needs of the clients the central focus.

The Clinic is embodied by an incredible team demonstrating unwavering dedication to justice. Each day this team's commitment to anti-oppressive practice, especially the intersecting oppressions that are entrenched in the experience of poverty, shows through work that makes a tangible difference in the lives of our neighbours. We are proud of their passion and of the excellent work they do.

No one could do this work alone. We are deeply grateful for the organizations and individuals that work in Hamilton to connect more of our neighbours to the justice we all deserve. From formal partnerships to the community member who accompanies a friend to our door, our mission is only achievable through a network of individuals working toward justice that spans our whole community.

We're pleased to share a small glimpse of the Clinic team's efforts to protect access to justice and a sense of the collective dedication that drives that work through this annual report.

We continue our journey of learning and improvement, ensuring that we serve our community better each day and contribute to the work of building a more just Hamilton.

Board of Directors

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic

Simon Lebrun, Chair

Message from the Co-Executive Directors

The past year has been both challenging and productive for Hamilton Community Legal Clinic. As many of you know, we stepped into the roles of Interim Co-Executive Directors in January 2026. Throughout this period of transition, we worked diligently to ensure the Clinic's day-to-day operations continued without interruption.

We extend our sincere thanks to our Board of Directors, staff team, and general membership for your continued support. Your dedication, resilience and commitment have been instrumental in helping the Clinic navigate this transition and continue serving our community.

With your support, the Clinic has continued to deliver its core services, responding to more than 6,000 requests for assistance over the past year. We are also pleased that, over the past two years, we have expanded our housing services through the addition of the Tenant Support Program. In addition, we have welcomed a Queer Justice Coordinator to our team and reimaged our Social Work Program. These initiatives have strengthened our ability to respond to the evolving needs of our community and continue advancing the Clinic's mission.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to providing high-quality legal services, advocating for systemic change, and ensuring that our programs continue to meet the evolving needs of our community. We are grateful for the trust and support of our clients, community partners, Board, staff, and members. Together, we will continue working to advance access to justice and build a more equitable Hamilton for everyone.

Interim Co-Executive Directors

Lindsay Beckham and Michael Ollier

Financial Report 2024-2025

Statement of Operations and Funds Balance: Year ended March 31, 2025

Revenues	
Legal Aid Ontario	
Direct receipts	\$3,768,472
Indirect Receipts	\$215,293
Tenant Duty Counsel Program	\$71,359
Employment and Social Development Canada	\$10,358
Recovered from clients	\$15,021
City of Hamilton	\$319,925
Hamilton Community Foundation	\$170,580
Other income	\$34,593
	\$4,605,601
Expenses	
Salaries	\$3,211,659
Benefits	\$591,804
Professional dues	\$27,872
Travel	\$103,612
Communications	\$19,968
Accommodations	\$189,185
Equipment	\$14,220
Library	\$799
Supplies and services	\$38,398
Audit fees	\$8,001
Indirect payments	\$215,293
Legal disbursements	\$47,763
Project expenses	\$75,439
Amortization	\$24,791
	\$4,568,804
Excess of revenues over expenses	
(Expenses over revenues)	\$36,797
Return of funding to Legal Aid Ontario	\$33,351
Funds balance, beginning of year	\$194,463
Funds balance (deficit) end of year	\$197,909

Financial Report 2025-2026

Statement of Operations and Funds Balance: Year ended March 31, 2026

Revenues	
Legal Aid Ontario	
Direct receipts	\$3,760,094
Indirect Receipts	\$258,054
Tenant Duty Counsel Program	\$71,359
Recovered from clients	\$10,326
City of Hamilton	\$446,955
Hamilton Community Foundation	\$8,300
Law Foundation of Ontario	\$250,000
Other income	\$45,887
	\$4,850,975
Expenses	
Salaries	\$3,257,398
Benefits	\$644,569
Professional dues	\$26,800
Travel	\$13,461
Communications	\$30,351
Accommodations	\$179,767
Equipment	\$16,814
Library	\$1,869
Supplies and services	\$276,760
Audit fees	\$19,233
Indirect payments	\$258,054
Legal disbursements	\$36,179
Project expenses	\$38,068
	\$4,799,323
Excess of revenues over expenses	
(Expenses over revenues)	\$51,652
Transfer to Duty Counsel Fund	-
Transfer to Non-LAO Fund	-
Return of funding to Legal Aid Ontario	\$1,506
Return of funding to Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario	\$6,576
Funds balance, beginning of year	\$197,909
Funds balance (deficit) end of year	\$241,479

Clinic Programs

Clinic Services Summary

2024-2025



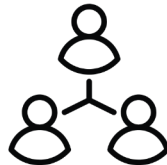
6,435

Summary
advice inquiries



12,874

Phone calls
answered



6,982

Referrals to
community
partners



32,672

Emails sent and
received



6,987

Total walk-ins

2025-2026



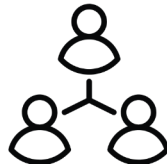
6,289

Summary
advice inquiries



11,926

Phone calls
answered



6,383

Referrals to
community
partners



37,582

Emails sent and
received



7,540

Total walk-ins

Overview of Legal Services

As the gap in income disparity and housing precarity expands, the volume and complexity of legal work at the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic has increased accordingly.

While community legal needs continue to remain diverse, the vast majority of Hamiltonians seek services from our office in matters related to housing, social assistance, employment and navigating worker's compensation claims.

Housing precarity due to increasing rents, threats of displacement through evictions, stagnation in the development and expansion of affordable housing projects and decreasing housing standards continue to threaten tenancies across the City of Hamilton. Safe, affordable and accessible housing has become more out of reach for many community members who face stagnant, and altogether insufficient, social assistance rates. More and more vulnerable community members are pushed into deeper poverty as governments at all levels fail to provide interventions that address societal pressures.

We have seen a steady rise in requests for services related to unjust dismissals, reprisals and discrimination from non-unionized employment settings. This, coupled together with the pace of requests for Worker's Compensation claims, confirms that vulnerable communities continue to remain disproportionately susceptible to disadvantage in pursuing their legal rights, where employment is concerned.

Across all of our teams, we recognize the deep intersectionality of legal issues, where a legal issue in one area impacts a legal issue in another area of someone's life. In circumstances where the request for services cannot be fulfilled because the legal problem is outside the areas in which we practice, our frontline staff provide informed referrals, making sure clients are connected with the legal and social services they need. Maintaining knowledge of, and connection to, other agencies in Hamilton, and recent developments in law and policy at a municipal level, is an important way the clinic staff ensure that the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic provides a high level of locally focused service to the community.

Mobile Employment Law Program

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic's employment law services are offered through the Mobile Employment Law Program, servicing several legal clinics across the Southwest Region of Ontario. The Employment Law Program collaborates with caseworkers within the Clinic to provide comprehensive legal services to employees that are not unionized and are facing termination, harassment, discrimination, or retaliation. Our Employment Law Program routinely appears before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, Ontario Labour Relations Board and Small Claims Court.

2024-2025

The Employment Law Program facilitated 11 Public Legal Education sessions, through a mixture of in-person and online workshops across the City of Hamilton, with a particular focus on supporting the City's growing newcomer population. These workshops were done in collaboration with our trusted community partners, including the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council, Solidarity Place, the YWCA, and Mohawk College.

The Employment Law Program responded to 219 service requests, reflecting a mixture of summary legal advice, legal representation and limited retainer services, such as negotiating settlement offers, and writing demand letters for employees facing termination or reprisal.

2025-2026

In this past fiscal year, the Mobile Employment Law Program litigated a significant case of reprisal in the agricultural sector at the Ontario Labour Relations Board on behalf of a client. This case was particularly serious for the client because of a language barrier and the client's immigration concerns. In October, we were very pleased our client received the Ontario Labour Relations Board decision, finding in her favour and confirming she experienced retaliation by her employer after reporting harassment and violence at work. This is a significant win for not only the individual client, but all migrant workers in Ontario who face disproportionate barriers to enforcing their rights.

French Language Services Report

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic is a designated bilingual office, and sits on several committees aimed at strengthening and celebrating the diverse Francophone community. Appreciating the vibrancy of the growing Hamilton francophone community, the team has been involved in the promotion, organization and celebration of International Francophonie Day, Franco-Fest, Franco- Ontario Day, Black History Month Gala and National Francophone Immigration Week events as part of their ongoing outreach efforts.

2024-2025

As a co-chair of the Francophone Interagency Committee, the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic participated in the Interagency sub-committees across the City of Hamilton, with a principle focus on providing support and services on immigration matters. The outcome of this collaboration resulted in the Welcoming Communities project, and the Mohawk Sports Park project conducted in collaboration with the Francophone Immigration Network.

As a complement to the systemic community work, the French Language Services Program responded to 78 service requests across the city.

2025-2026

Through the French Language Services Program, the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic delivered Public Legal Education sessions focused on housing and accessing French language services within the province. These education sessions were developed with ongoing support of the Francophone Legal Clinic Network of Ontario and Legal Aid Ontario.

During this period, the French Language Services Program responded to over 62 service requests.

Frontline Staff Report

The frontline staff play an essential role in supporting our clients and facilitating the important work of the clinic. As the first point of contact for clients seeking assistance, frontline staff help clients navigate the clinic's services, respond to their inquiries, coordinate the intake process, assist with obtaining necessary information and documentation and provide ongoing administrative support to caseworkers. Their work is particularly important given the barriers many of our clients face when attempting to access legal services and navigate administrative and legal processes.

2024-2025

Frontline staff continued to adapt their practices to better respond to the needs of clients and improve the accessibility of our services. One significant change in the 2024-2025 year was having support staff request relevant documents directly from the Landlord and Tenant Board on behalf of clients, rather than relying on clients to obtain and provide those documents themselves.

This change reflects the clinic's recognition that certain administrative tasks can present significant barrier to some clients. Clients may have limited access to technology, lack the resources required to obtain documents, experience language or literacy barriers, or simply be unfamiliar with the legal system and unsure of what documents are being requested or how to obtain them.

By taking a more proactive role in obtaining these documents, frontline staff have helped reduce the administrative burden placed on clients while increasing efficiency. The change has also improved internal workflow by ensuring that caseworkers have access to relevant documentation earlier in the process and reducing the need for repeated follow-up with clients.

2025-2026

In a year marked by increased service demands, the frontline team successfully adapted to new challenges while maintaining a high standard of service. Throughout the past year, the key areas of work included coordinating and processing intake information, supporting the management of social work clients, obtaining essential documentation and coordinating rooms and other arrangements for client hearings.

The team also contributed to several operational improvements over the course of the year. Frontline staff assisted in developing and implementing new protocols for the management of paperless files and continued to refine processes associated with the Tenant Support Program. The team also successfully transitioned to a new telephone system while continuing to manage the clinic's day-to-day service demands. These changes required staff to learn and adapt to new systems while maintaining consistent service for clients.

Demand for the frontline service remained particularly high throughout the year. The clinic experienced record levels of email inquiries alongside a significant volume of telephone calls and in-person requests for assistance. Despite the increased demand, frontline staff continued to provide comprehensive and compassionate service for clients.

Housing Team Report

As one of the largest practice areas, the Housing Team at the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic has faced unprecedented demand for services, with the vast majority of service requests related to residential evictions, illegal lockouts, and property standards related concerns.

By far the primary reason for contacting the clinic has been a housing problem related to a tenancy. Many people in Hamilton struggle with both the affordability and availability of rental housing in Hamilton. Average rents far exceed the shelter portions provided by social assistance. The list of those waiting for social housing units to become vacant is long. Preserving tenancies is, therefore, our top priority in this environment. Dedicated staff appear at the Landlord Tenant Board on behalf of tenants and also provide Tenant Duty Counsel services. In

between appearances, they respond to tenant inquiries about a large range of issues from terminating tenancies to making their own claims against landlords.

Given the increasing volume and complexity of files, the Housing Team has developed innovative strategies to assist as many clients as possible, through the provision of limited scope retainers for motions and reviews of orders, drafting demand letters to proactively address conflicts between landlords and tenants, and, where representation is not possible, preparing tenants for their hearing by drafting legal submissions and negotiating settlements.

2024-2025

In 2024 the Housing Team secured a landmark win at the Divisional Court, successfully arguing for a broad and holistic approach to considering the difficult life circumstances of a tenant facing eviction. In the resulting decision, the Divisional Court reaffirmed that the Landlord Tenant Board must interpret the law in accordance with its tenant protective focus.

In tandem with its law reform focus through strategic litigation at the Divisional Court, the Housing Team provided over five Public Legal Education workshops in collaboration with our trusted community partners in the shelter and supportive housing sector. During this same period, the Housing Team responded to over 4,182 requests for legal services and provided limited scope retainer services to 1,089.

2025-2026

In 2025, the Housing Team argued another precedent setting case at the Divisional Court, fighting for the rights of a community member made homeless through an illegal lockout. At the conclusion of this case, the Divisional Court overturned the Landlord Tenant Board's decision to narrowly define who a landlord is, and ensuring future tenants are protected against landlords seeking to circumvent the law by hiring external agencies to evict them. During this time, the Housing Team responded to 3,678 requests for legal services, and increased its provision of limited scope retainers to 1,205.

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction Report

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) brings together community organizations, service providers, advocates and leaders from business and government sectors to address poverty, income equality, and barriers to economic opportunity in Hamilton. Through advocacy, research, public education, and community collaboration, HRPR works to advance policies and initiatives that promote greater income security and improve the well-being of Hamilton residents experiencing poverty.

2024-2025

Throughout 2024-2025, HRPR continued to advance its work in the areas of income security, housing stability, and community engagement. A key focus was ensuring that people living on low incomes were informed of and able to access available supports. This included launching an outreach campaign for the new federal Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) to help people with disabilities understand and access the benefit, while continuing to advocate for increased Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates.

HRPR also contributed to broader conversations about income security and poverty reduction at both the local and national levels. In May 2024, HRPR co-organized the National Basic Income Forum in Ottawa, which brought together more than 300 hundred advocates, researchers, community members, and policymakers to discuss the role of basic income in addressing poverty and economic insecurity. HRPR also facilitated 21 community screenings across Canada and the United States of A Human Picture, a short documentary sharing the experiences of Hamilton residents who participated in Ontario's Basic Income Pilot. Locally, HRPR continued its efforts to promote the adoption of a living wage and recalculated Hamilton's living wage at \$21.30 per hour. In partnership with the City of Hamilton's Economic Development Department, HRPR engaged local employers in conversations about the importance of living wages and their role in supporting greater economic security within the community.

HRPR partnered with community organizations on National Housing Day events highlighting the challenges facing renters, the importance of tenant protections, and the continuing need for affordable housing in Hamilton. HRPR also strengthened its research and community education efforts through partnerships with academic institutions, contributing to research on income security and Ontario's employment services transformation.

Notably, in September 2024, HRPR and Hamilton Community Legal Clinic partnered with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and the City of Hamilton's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities to host a community forum on the CDB. The forum brought together people with lived experience, service providers, and advocates to review the proposed federal regulations and identify potential barriers to accessing the new benefit, including challenges associated with the Disability Tax Credit (DTC). The insights gathered helped inform HRPR's ongoing CDB outreach strategy, strengthened partnerships across the health, housing, and disability sectors, and laid the groundwork for a broader citywide campaign aimed at ensuring eligible Hamilton residents are aware of and able to access this new income support.

2025-2026

Building on its work from the previous year, in 2025-2026, HRPR expanded its public education, and community partnerships related the CDB and DTC and continued to advocate for adequate OW and ODSP rates and additionally, for stronger protections for residents of residential care facilities.

HRPR also worked to ensure that poverty and economic insecurity remained central to broader discussions about community safety and well-being in Hamilton. Through its involvement in Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-being Plan, HRPR helped highlight the connections between poverty, discrimination, inadequate income, housing instability, and community well-being. This work included co-hosting a community safety summit that brought together community members, organizations, and other stakeholders to discuss these interconnected issues and opportunities for collaborative action.

During this year, HRPR supported the release and promotion of Hamilton's updated 2025 living wage of \$22.60 per hour and contributed to broader international discussions on living wages, connecting Hamilton's local experience with conversations about fair compensation and economic security beyond the city.

The year also marked the important milestone of HRPR's 20th anniversary. In addition to reflecting on two decades of poverty-reduction work in Hamilton, HRPR continued to expand webinars and public education initiatives, beginning a process of governance renewal, and working with the Tamarack Institute on a national case study documenting HRPR's experience with collaborative systems change over the past two decades.

Social Assistance Team Report

The Social Assistance Team is the second largest practice area of the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, and covers a variety of social assistance denials, or reductions of assistance, from Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program, Employment Insurance, and Canada Pension Plan.

Our ODSP Disability Appeal program continues to be a very active and helpful component of our Clinic's legal services. Although assistance rates remain inadequate, qualifying for ODSP means a substantial increase in a household's monthly income. This is why the Clinic is dedicated to this area of law. Support staff help make sure appeal deadlines are met and legal staff prepare clients for hearings. The success rate in overturning denials remains very high.

It can be a challenge for people (and their doctors) to complete an initial application for ODSP. Often, we can help just by obtaining additional medical evidence and submitting it for review before the hearing. If the matter goes to a hearing at the Social Benefits Tribunal, people are prepared to address what is important. They, after all, are the experts on how their health impacts their abilities day to day.

Our Clinic also works with people who have been denied Ontario Works benefits, as well as helping with a wide range of issues that can arise while a person is receiving social assistance.

As the affordability crisis mounts, legal issues impacting a community member's social assistance pose a health and safety to risk and may lead to further legal issues in other areas of law, such as housing. In response to the increasing demand for services, the Social Assistance Team continues to refine their Ontario Disability Support Program Self-Help Project, which provides comprehensive legal assistance during an appeal of assistance denial, and representation for those facing claims over overpayments, or debts owed, to the government.

2024-2025

The Social Assistance Team responded to over 1,044 requests for legal services and attained an 85% success rate in overturning denials of assistance under the Ontario Disability Support Program through their innovative Self-Help Program.

2025-2026

The Social Assistance Team responded to over 1,417 requests for legal services, representing a 36.8% increase in requests related to denials of Ontario Disability Support Program applications.

Tenant Support Program

The Tenant Support Program (TSP) established in 2024, is a City of Hamilton initiative aimed at preventing evictions, protecting tenant rights, and helping tenants maintain stable housing. Through its partnership with the City of Hamilton, ACORN and the Housing Help Centre, the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic provides legal advice and representation to tenants who require assistance protecting their tenancies and enforcing their rights. This includes supporting tenants facing evictions, including N12 (landlord's own use) and N13 (renovation and demolition) applications, above guideline rent increases (AGIs) and maintenance and repair concerns.

Housing problems are often interconnected with broader issues of affordability, income security, and access to justice. TSP aims to provide support through early intervention, legal advocacy, tenant education, and collaboration among community partners. Through these initiatives, the program seeks to prevent unnecessary displacement and ensure that tenants have meaningful access to the information and supports they need to protect their homes.

2024-2025

The 2024-2025 year marked the early development of the TSP, with a focus on establishing the program's foundations and identifying how it could best respond to the needs of Hamiltonians. During this period, the TSP worked to develop strategies for community legal outreach, build relationships with community partners, and define the scope of the program. The team participated alongside Hamilton Community Legal Clinic's housing team at community events, contributed to the City of Hamilton's tenant "Know Your Rights" materials and supported work related to the development and implementation of the City's renoviction bylaw. Internally, the program also developed detailed merits assessment processes to better identify tenants; legal needs and determine how the TSP could provide effective and targeted assistance. This foundational work helped establish the program's role within the community and laid the groundwork for its continued growth in the following fiscal year.

2025-2026

Building on the foundation established in its first year, the TSP significantly expanded its service and impact in 2025-2026. Through summary legal advice and increased representation before the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB), the TSP helped prevent displacement, preserve long-term tenancies, challenge unlawful or excessive rent increases, and ensure that tenants' rights under the Residential Tenancies Act were protected. The program also continued to support the implementation of Hamilton's renoviction bylaw, providing tenants with practical guidance on the new protections and what they mean for tenants facing displacement.

Public Legal Education (PLE) was another significant area of growth. In 2025, the TSP delivered 18 PLE seminars addressing issues including tenants' rights, maintenance and repairs, and AGI applications. These sessions reached a large number of Hamilton residents and provided tenants with accessible information and practical tools to understand their rights, navigate the LTB processes and identify the legal remedies available to them.

The program's impact was also reflected in its 2025 client satisfaction survey, in which 82.6% of participants reported being satisfied with the services they received. Survey results further demonstrated that the TSP's reach among tenants experiencing heightened barriers to housing stability, including people with disabilities, seniors, newcomers, and other vulnerable community members. Together, this program increased representation, public legal education, and community-based supports have strengthened access to justice while contributing to the preservation of affordable housing and housing stability across Hamilton and aims to increase its reach in the upcoming year.

Workers Compensation and Insurance Board Team Report

Worker's Compensation became a significant part of Clinic practice in Hamilton, almost as soon as the Clinics first appeared. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) exists to minimize the impact of career-ending injuries and assist those with lesser injuries return to work, if necessary, with appropriate modifications. We help the people for whom that process has not served them well. The awards, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars, can lift people out of poverty. Yet the lengthy time required to obtain such a result is itself a hardship.

Throughout 2024-2025, the WSIB team continued to provide legal assistance and representation to injured workers while also engaging in systemic advocacy, community organizing and public legal education.

The WSIB team continued its involvement with the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Group (ONIWG), serving as general counsel and plans to continue supporting the ongoing efforts of the group throughout the next fiscal year. The team had important opportunities to contribute to systemic advocacy for injured workers, including participation in the Labour-Injured Workers Advisory Committee (LIWAC) and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal (WSIAT) Advisory Group.

At the local level, the team focused on rebuilding its relationship with the Hamilton and District Injured Workers' Group following challenges experienced in 2023. The team further contributed to province-wide systemic advocacy through its participation in the Ontario Clinics' Workers' Compensation Network. The WSIB team played a significant role in preparing submissions to the WSIB regarding proposed policy changes to its Serious Injury Program.

Alongside its systemic advocacy, the WSIB team continued to provide direct legal services to injured workers at all levels of the appeal process. In the 2024-2025 year, the WSIB team responded to 74 service requests and in 2025-2026 the Team responded to 86 service requests. Through casework, legal advocacy, and representation,

the team achieved several positive outcomes for clients over the course of the year. For example, the restoration of full Workers' Benefits for an individual who was denied benefits in 2009, resulted in \$668,315 in arrears along with an increase of \$3,159 in monthly benefits. Additionally, the WSIB team successfully acquired recognition of an injured worker's Multiple Chemical Sensitivities as being work-related. The injured worker got \$154,827 in arrears while the litigation is ongoing. This individual advocacy remains an important part of the Clinic's work in ensuring that injured workers are able to understand their rights and meaningfully participate in a complex administrative system.

Public legal education and community engagement remained an important component of the WSIB team's work. On behalf of ONIWG, the team participated in three of four LIWAC meetings and two of three WSIAT Advisory Group meetings during the reporting period. The team also delivered educational sessions aimed at increasing knowledge of workplace safety and insurance rights and processes. This included a general WSIB education session in partnership with the Hamilton Public Library and an additional session with the Hamilton and District Injured Workers' Group. Further educational programming on non-economic loss (NEL) assessments was provided to groups at the Hamilton Public Library, the Ontario Clinics' Workers' Compensation Network, and the Eastern Region Study Group.

Community Programs

Hamilton Legal Outreach

During the first half of the fiscal year of 2024-2025, the HLO team continued to support clients at our eleven satellite sites in the community – with particular emphasis on strengthening outreach with community partners who offer case management or social work supports. From March 2025 onwards, the HLO team paused its outreach efforts in order to support the revisioning and restructuring of the outreach project, as it approached its nine year anniversary. As this restructuring process is underway, the team has continued to work with their trusted community partners to manage supporting clients through legal issues in the areas of housing, and social assistance, while effectively bridging them with resources available within the community to address legal needs outside the folds of our mandate.

At its peak, the HLO project serviced eleven sites on a reoccurring basis and offered a mixture of ongoing legal education, summary legal advice, legal representation and, where appropriate, referrals to community agencies. In addition to these sites, the HLO project undertook a law reform research project which included a jurisdictional review of services supplied by the criminal justice system in Hamilton and measured the effectiveness of engagement with these services by members of our community who live with complex mental health and addictions disability-related needs. This project was conducted in partnership with Legal Aid Ontario, and trusted community partners that serve the unhoused population in our City.

Social Work Program

The Social Work Program underwent a significant restructuring in 2025-2026 following the winding down of the HLO project, and refocused on integrating social work services in closer alignment with its caseworkers. The program has been instrumental in supporting clients with non-legal matters related to housing and social assistance, with a strong emphasis on systems navigation support. Reimagining the Social Work Program has led to strong collaboration between the Social Worker and community legal workers/lawyers. The clinic's Social Worker has supported clients with Ontario Disability Support Program self-reports and worked with staff lawyers to review applications before submission. As a result, five clients were quickly approved for ODSP.

As part of this transformation, the Social Work Program has renewed or established 13 community partnerships, creating more efficient and accessible referral pathways for clients. These partnerships include connections with Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Parliament offices, Service Canada's referral program, Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program, as well as Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. This expanded network represents a significant achievement for the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and, most importantly, has enhanced the level of support available to clients.

Together We Rise— Black Justice Program

Since October 2024, the Bilingual Black Justice Coordinator has focused on building trust, increasing access to legal services, and strengthening partnerships with organizations that serve Black communities in Hamilton. These include the Immigrants Working Centre (IWC), the Hamilton Anti-Racism Resource Centre (HARRC), the Refugee Law Office, and the YWCA.

In the first six months of the project the Coordinator participated in 14 outreach events and 16 advocacy events, reaching over 5,600 people and has continued this work throughout the years. The Coordinator participated in the development and facilitation of widely celebrated Black History Month events in both 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 fiscal years: Black Voices at the Farmers' Market and an in-house event for clinic staff. Both were successful and

well received. An important marker of this project is its ability to be responsive. In late 2024, the Coordinator supported the community's call to action, following the killing of Erixon Kabera, a father, friend, and community organizer. The Coordinator joined Black leaders in their calls for action, established contact with the family, and helped raise funds for legal support. On an individual casework basis, the Coordinator assists Arabic-speaking clients with interpretation services at the Clinic, and facilitates newcomer families with connections to community supports and frequent follow ups to ensure their ongoing needs are met. Looking ahead, the focus will be on expanding services to Francophone Black communities and offering legal education workshops tailored to their needs in collaboration with French language services providers.

Queer Justice Project

The Queer Justice Project has continued to host monthly Trans ID Clinics, facilitate positive space training, provide public legal education, and address the growing hate movements targeting 2SLGBTQ+ people. Thanks to a grant from the Hamilton Community Foundation, in August 2025 a new QJP Coordinator role began. This dedicated full-time position has facilitated QJPs growth over the past year to strengthen community engagement, public legal education, and legal rights support. With the addition of the QJP Coordinator, the Queer Justice Project has been able to provide increasing support to queer and trans clients in a variety of legal matters including housing, human rights, immigration and intimate partner violence law.

2024-2025

This year saw a notable rise in demand for the Trans ID Clinic and general inquiries on a variety of different legal topics. Many of these questions coming from international community members reaching out and seeking assistance due to increasingly difficult situations abroad.

To encourage growth and resilience in our own neighbourhoods and beyond, the QJP connected with local partners and community members by attending events including Hamilton Pride, providing positive space trainings with a focus on Two-Spirit identity and history, and engaging with partners in the areas of healthcare and education.

2025-2026

This year the Hamilton Trans ID Clinic increased capacity, serving about 70 clients, recruiting and training 13 new volunteers, and providing more than \$4,500 in financial help to about 40 people changing their legal name or gender marker. The QJP also built new community partnerships, including with the new YWCA Safety + Support Hub and local immigration lawyers to provide immigration law advice to survivors of intimate partner violence. From January to March 2026, six survivors received immigration advice through this partnership.

YEN:TENE Indigenous Justice Program

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic participated in a number of Indigenous circles over the course of the year. These include – Sisters in Spirit Hamilton, PAANG (Professional Aboriginal Advocacy Networking Group), Circle of Beads (City of Hamilton Urban Indigenous Consultation Circle), Two Spirit Two Heart – Indigenous Queer Circle and Regional Indigenous Justice Coordinators Circle.

Through participation in the Circle of Beads, YEN:TENE has assisted with the hiring Indigenous Directors at both St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton and within the City of Hamilton. Both of these positions intend to assist in addressing and organizing against systemic racism and discrimination within these institutions. YEN:TNE has also been influential in the development of the Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation Workers position within the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS), following a tragic case of a young Indigenous youth who was murdered while in their care.

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic

Landmark Place

Suite 203, 100 Main Street East

Hamilton, Ontario

L8N 3W4

Contact Us

905-527-4572

www.HamiltonJustice.ca



Hamilton Community Legal Clinic
Clinique juridique communautaire de Hamilton