



Putting Justice Within Reach

The Foundation for User-Focused Justice in Ontario

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Our mission

Every day, tens of thousands of Ontarians interact with the justice system. And our government believes that in order to serve them effectively, the justice system must adapt and evolve to meet their needs. So that is exactly what we are setting out to do.

Broken down by our short, medium, and longer term plans, this document outlines Ontario's vision and first steps toward a more modern, user-focused, adaptive system. The first wave will include moving old-fashioned, in-person court processes to online services. In the medium term, we will focus on our infrastructure and bring our courts into the 21st century, and in the long term we will leverage artificial intelligence and alternative dispute resolution models for the next generation of justice.

Ontario undoubtedly boasts one of the best legal systems in the world, but the reality is that as the digital world has grown around us, many of the processes that guide our legal system have remained stuck in another time.

Most other services we use now include paperless options by default, 24/7 online access, and technology that helps find solutions tailored to our situation. Yet, even the most routine interactions with the law, such as going through the jury screening process, or fighting a traffic ticket, can require people to take time away from their work and family to show up in person for matters that could be dealt with online.

The successes of initiatives like online filing for small claims and online child support orders clearly show that the system is ready for change. But more than that, the lessons learned from these early initiatives have shown us that the possibilities for this digital shift are endless. We are optimistic about these first steps but we know there is still so much more to be done.

So to you, the Ontarian who relies on the justice system for resolutions, we hope you begin to see a system that serves you. And to our partners within the justice system, we have heard you, and we know that you are ready to lead this work together to challenge the status quo, to transform and innovate, to build a system that adapts and evolves for the people of this province.

Our commitment to you – our mission – is the pursuit of progress. The document before you is the first step on this path. It is the foundation upon which we will build. We know this transformation will not happen overnight, but that will not diminish our resolve. With each next step, each pilot program, each process review, we will be guided by our commitment to drive change and advance the system. Always Forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yasir Naqvi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "Y" and a long, sweeping tail.

The Honourable Yasir Naqvi
Attorney General of Ontario

User-focused, digital justice services

Across Ontario, people access services and information, and work online every day. They expect that same convenience from their public services. The justice system has not kept up with the pace of technological change, and more often than not, people have to go in person to courthouses where they wait in lines to fill out cumbersome paper forms.

We know that whether it is through start-ups at MaRS or the Legal Innovation Zone at Ryerson, there is no place better positioned than Ontario to embrace a shift to digitized justice services. And we intend to leverage the expertise of our justice partners and Ontario's booming tech sector to develop and deliver user-centred digital services that are faster, easier to navigate, and less expensive.



1. Improving the jury process

We will create new digital tools for potential jurors to save people time and unnecessary trips to the courthouse.

Every year, approximately half a million Ontarians receive questionnaires to determine their eligibility for **jury duty**. Thousands of those respondents will then be asked to perform one of the most valuable contributions members of our society can make. We know being a juror can be time consuming and stressful, so we are making it easier and faster for people to go through the process.

We are **engaging with Ontarians** on ways to improve the experience for people who receive jury questionnaires and those who are selected and notified of their jury duty. By **introducing more digital options** in the fall of 2019, like completing questionnaires online and receiving summonses by email, we are looking to make it easier and more convenient for Ontarians to participate in the jury process.



2. Expanding online services for resolving traffic tickets and fines

We intend to create new digital tools to resolve traffic tickets and other provincial offences online, saving hundreds of thousands of Ontarians time and money, starting in spring 2018.

Provincial Offences Act (POA) matters are the public's most common contact with the justice system in Ontario. And many Ontarians are disappointed when they find that routine processes – like requesting a trial – are still paper-based and often have to be done in person. The fact is, thousands of Ontarians are dealing with POA matters every single day – and many interactions could and should be online. This fall we introduced legislation that would modernize the law and create new digital services that will be more convenient and user-friendly.

Starting in spring 2018, Ontarians will be able to go online to look up the status of millions of traffic tickets and charges, and request early resolution meetings at participating court locations, saving them time and money.



3. Improving the way accident benefit disputes are resolved

We will help accident victims and insurance companies resolve disputes more conveniently by creating a new online filing program for disputed accident benefit claims by spring 2018.

When Ontarians get injured in a car accident, they rely on the [Automobile Accident Benefits Service](#) to resolve their insurance claim disputes so they can focus on recovery. Currently, they have to send in paper-based claims or go to the Tribunal in person, which can be especially difficult if you have been the victim of a serious accident. We are helping people resolve their accident benefits disputes more conveniently through new online service delivery.

This week, we introduced [online filing for accident benefit disputes](#), with provincewide expansion planned by spring 2018. This new service will give Ontarians a simpler and quicker option to file their applications and submit documents.



4. Making it easier to support kids

We have created a new service to [set up or update child support online](#), without ever having to go to court.

Going to court for family matters can be difficult. People worry it will be a complicated, intimidating and costly process during what is already a stressful family event. A recent report suggested that about 60 per cent of people choose to represent themselves in their family matter.

To make life easier for parents, we have introduced an innovative online service to set up and update their child support agreements without going to court – the first of its kind in Canada. If the parents meet the requirements, it is an **\$80 option** for each parent. This means that they save money on legal fees, avoid filling out paper forms and traveling to the courthouse.



5. Online filing of divorce applications

By spring 2018, we will develop online filing for joint divorce to make things a little easier for those already going through a stressful time.

Divorce is often one of the most difficult events in a person's life. Struggling to navigate a complicated and costly process only adds to people's stress at an already uncertain time in their life.

As a first step, starting in April 2018, Ontarians will be able to file joint divorce applications online. This will reduce the time it takes to finalize a divorce, even when parties are self-represented, by reducing trips to the courthouse and automating the exchange of information. This first service offering will allow us to plan expansion to other types of family law filings.



6. Filing court documents online

We are building on and expanding online filing for small claims and civil court documents.

Going to court to file papers for small claims or civil cases can be costly and time consuming. In 2015 we introduced provincewide online filing for small claims in order to help users of “the people’s court” resolve their disputes quickly and conveniently. By expanding online filing to civil courts across the province, we recreated this improved user experience in another high-volume and document-heavy court process. These two digital services are making it easier for Ontarians to initiate and resolve their small claims or civil disputes.

Online filing for small claims:

We have made small claims more accessible to all Ontarians across the province, with an online service that lets them submit most small claims court forms online, pay court fees securely by credit card or debit, and receive court-issued documents by email. Since the service launched, Ontarians have filed about 60, 000 small claims online, saving time and avoiding long line ups at the courthouse.

Online filing for civil claims:

Earlier this year, we launched a pilot service for initiating civil claims online at six locations across the province – Brampton, Ottawa, Newmarket, London, Sudbury and Toronto. Building on the success of these early locations, we have **expanded the service provincewide** to allow all Ontarians to file civil claims online, 24/7, from any location. In May 2018, we will enhance the service again by introducing the ability to file additional documents in a civil case, including defences. This new service, and other opportunities for online filing, will have significant benefits for people who work within the justice system, allowing them to work more effectively using electronic information.

Courts that operate in the 21st century

Ontario's legal professionals are talented, experienced and knowledgeable, but the tools and systems they work with in courts and throughout the broader justice system are often outdated and inefficient. From judges, prosecutors, police, court and correctional staff who have to manually share information, to lawyers who carry boxes full of documents to and from court every day, the system is paper-based and antiquated.

Our mission is to bring our courts into the 21st century and change the way people and legal professionals interact with the courts. By introducing modern technology and developing data systems that allow information to be shared with the click of a button, we are reducing waste and inefficiency, and are transforming the courts to focus on the user.



1. Transforming the justice system with seamless information sharing

We will work with all partners – courts, police, Crowns, staff and the public – to automate information sharing to save everyone time, paper, and money.

Throughout the justice system, the many players involved have different ways of handling information. An application used in one part of the system may not be compatible with the software used elsewhere, and in many cases, information is still paper-based. These inconsistencies make sharing information within the justice system and with the public a challenge. We see this as an opportunity to use technology more effectively, to enhance data sharing across the justice sector, and reduce paperwork to improve the flow of critical information for legal professionals and the public.

We know that simply digitizing existing processes is not the answer. We must foster connectivity and integration among all justice partners to reduce delays, improve access to justice, and ensure the system can adapt to a digital future. For example, we are working with the Court of Appeal to develop a comprehensive modernization strategy and introduce digital tools to facilitate information sharing between legal professionals, litigants and the Court. This will

include online filing, electronic scheduling, and data and records management for the highest court in Ontario.

Working towards an electronic court:

Over the next few years, we will develop and deliver a state-of-the-art digital service to move courtrooms into the 21st century. This service will give the judge, lawyers, and the litigants in a case access to all the relevant case information and documentation in one place, online. So instead of each party bringing their own boxes of the exact same information to court for a hearing, everyone will have a single, secure, quick point of access for all court documents. It will enable people to edit and interact with documents, and store them for future use, reducing the need for millions of paper documents and unnecessary trips to the courthouse. We will pilot this secure digital platform starting in spring 2018.

Scheduling Crown Operations Prepared Electronically (SCOPE):

We are well on our way to electronic data sharing in systems across the criminal justice system. In 2013, we introduced SCOPE, a digital information system that allows Crowns and police to share information about criminal cases. By the end of 2017, two thirds of the Ontario Crown Attorneys' criminal caseload will be supported by this new technology.



2. Using technology to reduce delays and increase access to justice

We have implemented secure video between jails and courts and outside legal counsel to improve flow, save money, and increase access to justice for accused people. We will continue to expand this service to other institutions across the province.

Access to justice is the most central and relevant challenge facing the legal community today. People's confidence in the criminal justice system has been greatly impacted by long delays and barriers faced by vulnerable populations. We have a duty and an opportunity to use technology to address these issues and build a system that

works for everyone, regardless of their financial means, ethnicity, or geography.

In 2016, we started two secure video pilots at the South West Detention Centre to facilitate remote court appearances and remote access to defence counsel for people in custody. In 2017, we expanded these services to the Monteith Correctional Centre and the Ottawa Carleton Detention Centre. The latest version of this technology now enables document sharing, and work is underway to implement these services at the Toronto South Detention Centre in the near future.

Remote Court Appearances:

The pace of our justice system is too slow, certain cases take too long to resolve, and we have to use technology to improve the flow of the criminal justice system and reduce delay. When appropriate, this technology will enable accused persons to participate in a **full range of pre-trial appearances by video** without the time or cost of having to be transported to appear in person.

Remote Defence Access:

In order to increase access to justice, we are providing an opportunity for accused people to discuss their case with defence counsel by video from a correctional institution instead of having to be transported to courthouses. We know that vulnerable populations, including Indigenous people, those from racialized communities, and people with histories of poverty, homelessness and addictions or complex mental health needs are overrepresented in our correctional institutions. Many are there because they do not have access to supports. This service will **increase access to defence counsel** for all accused people, and it will benefit vulnerable populations the most.



3. Helping users stay connected in our courts

We will make sure each of the 74 courts across the province is equipped with Wi-Fi by 2019.

It seems hard to believe that in 2017 there are institutions without access to Wi-Fi. But that is the case in Ontario's courts – and one of the best illustrators of the monumental task ahead of us to get to a modern legal system. Outdated technology and paper-based processes make it harder for people to navigate their legal matters

and for lawyers to do their jobs effectively. That is why we are bringing court technology up to speed with the expectations of the public – a first but critical step to making the justice system work for all.

Catching up with the times means allowing people to wirelessly access the internet from a variety of mobile devices while they are at court. Starting in fall 2017, we are installing Wi-Fi in courts across the province to allow the public and legal professionals to conduct research, communicate about their legal matters, or simply stay connected. Courthouses are often old historic buildings that require infrastructure changes to install Wi-Fi, so rollout will be targeted and incremental. By 2019, we will complete Wi-Fi rollout to 74 courthouses in Ontario.


The road to modernization

Ontario is developing and delivering user-focused digital services, modernizing the courts, and using innovative technologies to transform the justice system.


Pilot: Scheduling Crown Operations Prepared Electronically
NOVEMBER 2013


Provincewide: Daily Court Lists
APRIL 2014


Pilot: Online filing for small claims
AUGUST 2014


Public Consultation: ODR for POA
FEBRUARY 2015


Provincewide: Online filing for small claims
APRIL 2015


Expert table: ODR for POA
FALL 2015


Pilots at Ottawa Carleton Detention Centre: Video appearances and Remote defence access through video
AUGUST 2017


Pilots at Monteith Correctional Centre: Video appearances and Remote defence access through video
APRIL 2017


Pilot: Civil claims online
APRIL 2017


Pilot at South West Detention Centre: Video appearances
DECEMBER 2016


Pilot at South West Detention Centre: Remote defence access through video
AUGUST 2016


Provincewide: Online child support service
APRIL 2016


Launch: AI Legal Challenge
SEPTEMBER 2017


Pilot: Wi-Fi at St. Catharines courthouse
OCTOBER 2017


Pilot: Online filing for Automobile Accident Benefits Service
NOVEMBER 2017


Legislation introduction: ODR for POA
NOVEMBER 2017


Provincewide: Civil claims online
NOVEMBER 2017



Consultation: Digital tools to improve the jury process
NOV-DEC 2017


Municipalities needs assessment: ODR for POA
SPRING 2018


Pilot: Online look up of traffic tickets
SPRING 2018


Pilot: Working with electronic documents
SPRING 2018


Pilot: Online filing for joint divorce
APRIL 2018


Evaluation of proof of concept: ODR for LTB
MARCH 2018


Expansion to Toronto South Detention Centre: Video appearances and Remote defence access through video
EARLY 2018


Provincewide: Online filing for Automobile Accident Benefits Service
SPRING 2018


Winner selection: AI Legal Challenge
SPRING 2018


Expansion: Civil claims online
MAY 2018


Provincewide: Wi-Fi at all 74 base courts
EARLY 2019


Pilot: Digital tools to improve the jury process
SEPTEMBER 2019


Provincewide: Scheduling Crown Operations Prepared Electronically
FALL 2019

Next generation of justice

As we work to bring the justice system up to speed for today's standards, we cannot lose sight of the future. Our duty is to build a justice system that works for the people it serves, which means making sure it can adapt to the rapidly evolving digital world. To get there, we are leveraging Ontario's position as a leader in innovation to explore emerging technologies, from using chatbots to connect people to the right information, to investing in machine learning.

Looking to the future, we are capitalizing on advancements in innovative technologies like online dispute resolution (ODR) and artificial intelligence (AI) to design a justice system that will be relevant to Ontarians today and in the years to come.



1. Using technology to resolve disputes out of court

We will work with our partners to provide low or no cost online alternatives to resolve disputes without needing to go to a courthouse.

People today are already using online dispute resolution to resolve consumer claims on eBay and Amazon from the comfort of their homes, without the added cost or formality of legal action. And increasingly, people want to resolve simple disputes through intuitive online systems that guide them to reach agreements quickly. Online dispute resolution creates a secure digital space for people to resolve certain legal problems with clear processes and communication in a way that reduces conflict. This can include providing legal information about options to solve a problem, including access to third party mediation or escalation to formal court processes where required.

ODR for Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) disputes:

Planning is underway to build an **online dispute resolution platform to help approximately 160, 000 tenants and landlords each year** avoid and resolve disputes without the need for formal legal processes. The first phase of this initiative includes developing a prototype to research and test how the LTB can provide the right online negotiation and mediation tools and processes so people can

resolve disputes as they arise, and when it is convenient, without the need to travel and appear in person at a LTB hearing. Over the next few years, the LTB will look to implement the online platform and may seek to expand to other types of disputes that can be resolved securely and efficiently using an ODR model.

ODR for Provincial Offences:

In 2016, Ontarians who got traffic tickets or similar tickets under the Provincial Offences Act, made about 450, 000 trips to municipal court offices to resolve their dispute or attend trial, which meant an estimated \$47 million in lost wages. We are committed to working with municipalities to bring ODR to the provincial offences courts to allow people to engage in early resolution meetings with prosecutors and reach agreements online. We have introduced legislation that would, if passed, enable municipalities to take advantage of this technology. We are already working with municipalities to determine how ODR might work for provincial offences and identify possible technology solutions that work for them. The **new ODR service could allow the 1.5 million people who receive Provincial Offences tickets each year to resolve their matters right from their computers or smart phones.**



2. Partnering with start-ups to accelerate innovation

We are partnering with and investing in Ontario's booming tech sector to find innovative solutions and foster disruptive technology like AI to increase access to justice, reduce costs and build a system that is ready to adapt to a changing future.

From Google maps, to online banking and social networking, artificial intelligence is already built into everyday apps that make our lives easier and the services we use more intuitive. We believe **disruptive technology can also enhance access to justice, save time and reduce costs** for people and businesses, and improve the quality of our services. We also believe artificial intelligence and other intuitive applications will help us connect to users, customize solutions to their needs, and revolutionize the online experience in the justice system. And while AI will not replace lawyers, our hope is

that it will free up the time many lawyers spend doing administrative tasks and allow them to focus on the complex legal issues they are trained for.

For the past two years, the Ontario government has partnered with Ryerson's [Legal Innovation Zone](#) (LIZ) to challenge start-ups to find solutions for increasing access to justice. Through this partnership we have provided \$100,000 in funding to help businesses scale up.

This year, in partnership with LIZ, we are [challenging the legal tech community](#) across Canada to use AI for solutions that help lawyers and consumers, or increase access to justice. Their innovations will not only enhance the user experience today, they will build a stronger more flexible justice system that can adapt to the evolving digital world.

Looking ahead

Change is already happening – and more change is certainly on the way. New online options are already available, and new services will continue to be launched. The best parts of Ontario’s justice sector must be preserved – its integrity, its people and its commitment to equality and fairness. At the same time, the system can and must engage in transformational change that makes use of the most current technologies. It is part of the justice system’s ongoing mission to ensure that justice services remain within reach of all those who need them.

At the heart of the challenge ahead is the need to find new solutions to old problems, to change the way we do things. And we know that solutions will not come from simply adopting new technologies, although that is a good start.

To be truly innovative we must be open to new ideas, we must challenge the status quo and step outside our comfort zone. And there has never been a better opportunity to do so. Leveraging Ontario’s leading tech sector and our justice partners’ expertise, the ideas we foster today can become the state-of-the-art digital solutions of the future that will break down barriers, and open doors for people to resolve their legal issues faster and easier.

We know there is a long way to go. This plan is the first of many steps to bring our justice system up to speed. But we are confident these initiatives will build a strong foundation for future evolution. And we are committed to continually improving and adapting, to delivering a justice system that works for the people it serves.