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About the Access to Innovation (A2I) program

- A2I allows approved providers of innovative technological legal services (ITLS) to serve the public while complying with Ontario legislation regarding the delivery of legal services.
- Approved participants have demonstrated during the application evaluation process that they are able to provide a sufficient quality of service while mitigating risks of harm to consumers. Factors considered during evaluation include:
 - source of legal knowledge/logic present in the application (almost invariably a named licensee)
 - robust policies to protect consumer privacy
 - cyber security measures that meet independent international standards
 - robust complaints process.
- Once approved, an A2I participant can provide services in Ontario for a defined time period. During that period, participants are required to submit data on a quarterly basis — or more frequently, if deemed necessary by the Law Society — regarding the performance of their operations and any complaints received. Complaints and issues that appear in the reported data which raise concerns about operations may lead to further inquiries by the Law Society. Additionally, all participants may be subject to random audits of their operations.
- A2I participants that meet expectations during their operating period may receive permits from the Law Society to continue providing legal services in Ontario on an ongoing basis.

The need for the A2I program

- Despite concerted efforts across the justice system, legal assistance remains inaccessible for many people. Research shows that Canadians do not seek professional assistance for more than 80 per cent of their legal issues. A legal problem can affect a person's physical, mental, social and financial well-being.
- Innovative technological legal services (ITLS) can increase access to effective legal assistance. Through websites, apps and software, ITLS providers can help people understand, navigate and address their legal issues.
- The A2I program responds to regulatory issues that innovators and consumers have faced in developing and using innovative technological legal services. For ITLS providers, A2I provides greater certainty about the rules and standards that will apply to them. For consumers, A2I provides options and confidence that the services they receive are effective and safe.
- While the A2I program is not restricted solely to licensees, many strong innovative technological legal services ideas do come from lawyers and paralegals. The A2I program opens the door for legal professionals to develop and deliver these types of services themselves without fear of reprisal.

Direct-to-consumer legal tech services are breaking the rules with respect delivery of legal services in Ontario, though some of the providers may be unaware of this fact. Lawyers and paralegals are aware of the rules and may be hesitant to develop or launch a product or service which could result in reprisals from the Law Society as regulator which may impact their career. The A2I program removes this risk.

Benefits of the A2I program

- **Facilitating access to justice:** By safely removing and adjusting regulatory barriers, the A2I program encourages the development and operation of innovative technological legal services (ITLS) that can make legal services more accessible and affordable, and reach consumers in new ways, especially in areas of high unmet legal need.
- **Protecting the public:** By carefully assessing and supervising ITLS providers the A2I program helps consumers feel confident in the services they choose to use, are protected from risks of incompetent or unethical services and have recourse available, if necessary.
- **Spurring innovation:** By reducing regulatory uncertainty, the A2I program gives ITLS providers the confidence that they can grow sustainable operations and continue developing innovative legal solutions for Ontarians. By establishing operating criteria and parameters, the A2I program can also help give ITLS providers targets for the features and protections they need to build into their service models, which furthers the responsible development of innovative tools.
- **Supporting regulatory re-evaluation:** By gathering detailed performance information about ITLS operations, the A2I program will help inform decision-making about the appropriate means/methods to include ITLS within the scope of the Law Society's regulatory framework for the longer term.
- **Educating legal professionals and the public:** By highlighting new and innovative ways of providing legal services, the A2I program helps legal professionals understand the opportunities and challenges associated with ITLS and helps members of the public identify new opportunities to access legal help. Legal professionals can observe consumer interest in these new service models and can enhance their work by using, adapting to, or developing their own ITLS tools.

How to become an A2I participant

The Access to Innovation (A2I) program is open to any legal innovator with an idea for the innovative delivery of legal services via technology. Innovative technological legal services (ITLS) providers can apply to join A2I at any point. This rolling admission offers participants the flexibility to apply at whatever stage in their development works best for them.

[Apply now](#) by completing a Stage 1 application form and emailing it to acesstoinnovation@LSO.ca.

Part of the funding for the Access to Innovation (A2I) program was generously provided by a grant from [The Law Foundation of Ontario](#). Through granting and collaboration, the Foundation invests in knowledge and services that help people understand the law and use it to improve their lives. The Law Society is grateful for its support.

The Law Society regulates [lawyers and paralegals](#) in Ontario in the public interest. The Law Society has a mandate to protect the public interest, to maintain and to advance the cause of justice and the rule of law, to facilitate access to justice for the people of Ontario and to act in a timely, open and efficient manner.

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