



Law Society of Alberta
2015 Annual Report

Law Society of Alberta Annual Report

Click to watch the 2015 Annual Report video, featuring Executive Director Don Thompson, QC, Deputy Executive Director & Director, Regulation Elizabeth Osler, and Director, Professionalism & Policy Cori Ghitter.

Who We Are and What We Do

The Law Society of Alberta regulates the legal profession of over 9,600 lawyers who practice law in the province, and promotes a high standard of legal services and professional conduct.

The Law Society believes a legal profession regulated in the public interest is fundamental to a free and democratic society, and that this is best achieved by way of an independent and independently regulated legal profession that

values diversity and access to legal services. Independent regulation in the public interest is essential to maintaining public confidence in legal services, promoting public awareness and understanding, and providing safeguards in the delivery of legal services to Albertans.

To achieve these ends, we focus our energy and resources on accomplishing our strategic goals, pursuing our mission and achieving our vision.



Mission

Serve the public interest by promoting a high standard of legal services and professional conduct through the governance and regulation of an independent legal profession.



Strategic Goals

Model Regulator: Regulate to protect the public interest by promoting excellence, high ethical standards, diversity, and equity within the legal profession.

Stakeholder Confidence: Maintaining the confidence of the public, lawyers, and other key stakeholders.

Governance and Culture: Create a responsive and innovative governance and management culture that positions the Law Society as a leader in the regulation of the legal profession.

Access to Justice and the Rule of Law: Promote and support access to justice and the rule of law for Albertans.



Vision

The Law Society of Alberta will be recognized as a model for protecting the public interest and preserving the fundamental principles of justice through an independently regulated and trusted legal profession.



Values

Integrity - honest and ethical behaviour.

Transparency - open and clear processes and communications.

Fairness - equitable treatment of people.

Competency - best practices, high standards and the pursuit of excellence.

Independence - an independent and independently regulated legal profession.

Respect - inclusion, diversity and equity in the profession and in the Law Society.

Meet Our Board

Meet our Board of Directors and Committee Volunteers

The Law Society is governed by a 24-member Board of Directors, also known as Benchers. Twenty are lawyers elected by Alberta lawyers, and four are public representatives appointed by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Our Board oversees the work of the Law Society by articulating and prioritizing strategic goals and focusing the Law Society's energy and resources on initiatives that help achieve our vision and mission.

The key responsibilities of our Board are governance and adjudication. Benchers bring a diversity of perspectives to their governance work, grounded by their everyday life.

Major committees, task forces and liaisons contribute countless volunteer hours to support the Law Society's core regulatory functions.



Meet Our Board



Meet Our Volunteer Committees



Read Our President's Message

Financials

The Law Society uses external auditors to produce non-consolidated financial statements annually. Our 2015 financial statements, as well as past statements, are on our website.

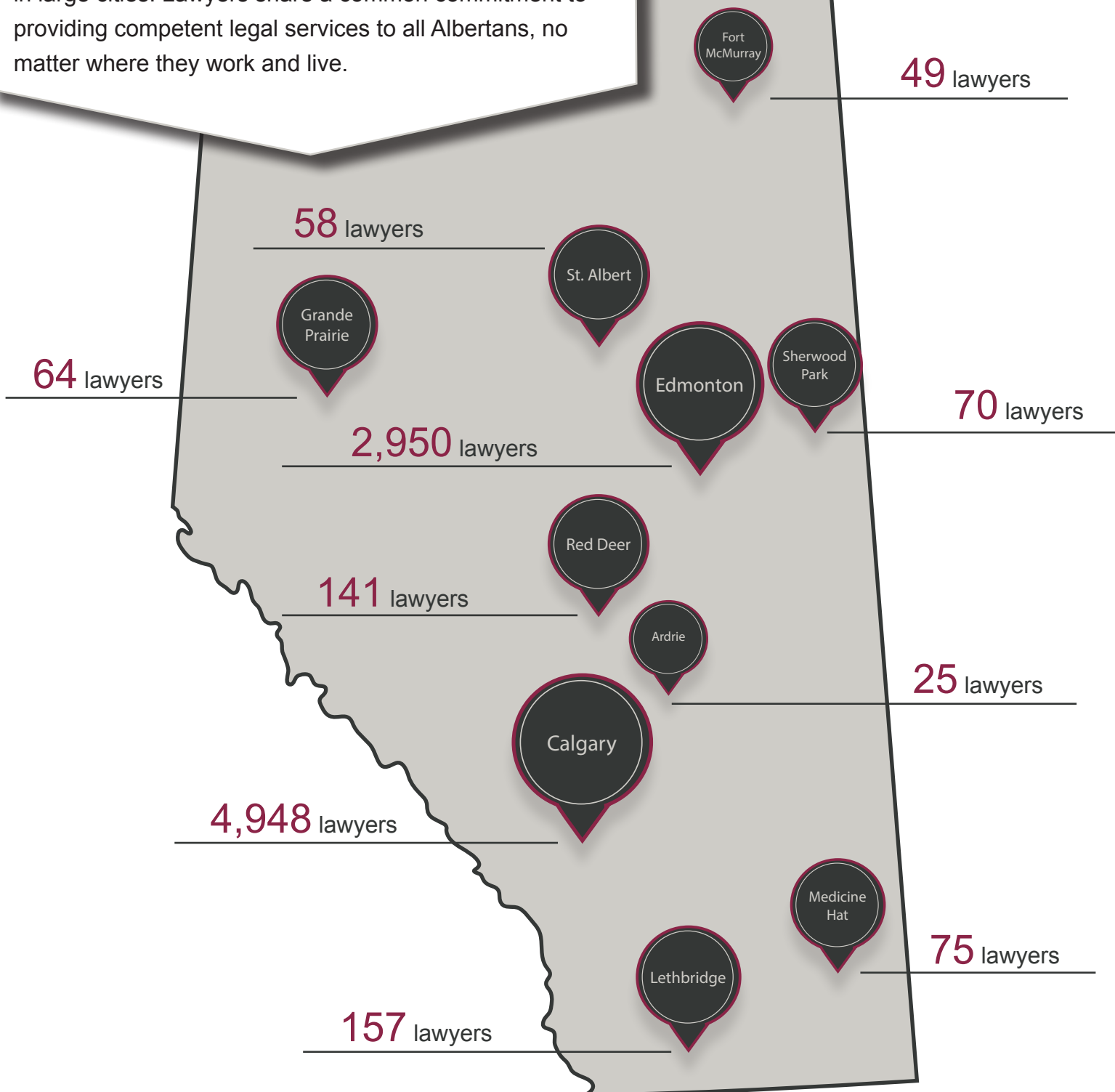


View The Law Society Financials

Where Alberta Lawyers Work

Alberta Map

Lawyers live and work in communities across Alberta - from sole practitioners in small towns and on reserves, to in-house lawyers serving corporations and government in large cities. Lawyers share a common commitment to providing competent legal services to all Albertans, no matter where they work and live.



Our History



Meeting of the Members, January 6, 1938. Click to enlarge.

Follow the timeline to see some of the major benchmarks in the Law Society's history over the last 100 years. Click on the dates to discover more details.

1907

The Law Society of Alberta is formed

1932

An important first step towards legal aid takes place



1972

Finding a lawyer becomes a little easier

1976

The Professional Code of Conduct is adopted



The History of the Law Society



1920

The Alberta Bar only has three female members



1960

The Law Society hires its first Secretary

1955

The number of Benchers increases significantly

1984

Government appointed public representative added to the B



1985

More women begin joining the bar

1997

The first Equity Ombudsperson position is approved

2009

New professional development standards are implemented



2011



A new trust safety program is approved

Society of Alberta Timeline

1987

The Alberta Lawyers Insurance Association is created



2007

Access to justice is increased for people of limited means



2003

Major strides are made in national mobility

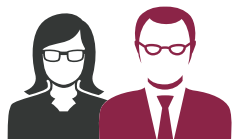
2015

Technology advancements and changes to our adjudication process headlined a busy year



Membership

The Law Society has a membership of over 9,600 lawyers and growing, from all corners of the province.



9,678

Active Lawyers

Alberta has 9,678 active and practicing lawyers, 61% male, 39% female; which is 245 lawyers more than we had in 2014. 68% of lawyers are in private practice. In 2015, 119 lawyers applied to transfer into Alberta from other provinces. There were also 2,104 inactive lawyers, roughly the same as the number of inactive lawyers in the previous year (2,162).



68%

Work in Firms

55% of Alberta lawyers work in firms of 2 or more lawyers, while 13% of lawyers are sole practitioners. Corporate in-house lawyers make up 16%, government lawyers 11% and other/inactive/not practicing, 5%.

The net increase in the number of lawyers in the province has remained relatively consistent at about 240 per year. Each year articling students are called to the bar, and lawyers moving to Alberta increase the number of lawyers in Alberta, balanced by attrition from the profession through retirement, going inactive for reasons such as parental leave, teaching, continuing education or leaving for other endeavours.



455

New Students

In 2015, 455 new articling students were called to the bar, down slightly from the 474 called in 2014, but up from the 418 new students called in 2013. This year's group of new lawyers was made up of 235 males and 220 females.

36% of students articulated at firms of between 2-10 lawyers, while 30% of students articulated with large firms with over 40 lawyers. Only 12% of students articulated with sole practitioners.

Alberta continues to attract applicants from around the world, with the largest number of students coming from United Kingdom, Australian, American and Nigerian law schools. The National Committee on Accreditation evaluates the credentials of these students to ensure they meet Canadian standards.

As part of striving to become a modern, proactive regulator, the Law Society is committed to helping lawyers achieve the highest ethical and professional standards. We know the majority of concerns with lawyers stem from practice management and client management issues, so we've begun building a library of helpful resources lawyers can access to help them avoid issues that could otherwise lead to costly discipline measures. These resources include access to the support offered by our Practice Advisors, practice start-up kits, Solonet, the Responsible Lawyer visit program, Practice Review, Trust Safety services and more.

When the Law Society receives a complaint, we first attempt to resolve the issue informally using mediation. Should a complaint appear to have merit, it may be formally investigated or referred to a Conduct Committee for formal action. Any issue that poses imminent risk to the public is addressed on a priority basis.

Discipline Standards

2015 was the first official year of evaluating our conduct processes against the recently implemented National Discipline Standards. We are proud of the progress we've made, including proactively addressing our inventory of aging complaints, and accomplishing an almost one-to-one new complaint to closed complaint ratio. Click to read more about the new National Discipline Standards.



Informal Complaints

In 2015, we received 1,784 new informal complaints, with the largest portion stemming from practice management and communication issues.



Formal Complaints

In 2015, the Law Society received 325 new formal complaints.



Discipline Outcomes in 2015

In 2015, the Law Society conducted 32 discipline hearings; five lawyers were disbarred, four were suspended, one resigned in the face of discipline (s.32), four resigned - deemed disbarment (s.61), 15 were reprimanded, two received costs and fines and one was found not guilty.