

OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYER ADVISER

BUSINESS PLAN

2025-2026

TO

2027-2028

Ontario 

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Business Plan 2025-2028

Executive Summary

The Office of the Employer Adviser (OEA) meets the needs of Ontario employers by providing legal advice, representation and education on issues relating to the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* (WSIA) and unlawful reprisal matters under section 50 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA).

OEA expert legal advice in a specialized subject area allows employers to focus their time and money on operating their businesses. The availability of expert, prepaid, confidential services is a benefit to smaller employers.

During the upcoming fiscal years, the agency will promote awareness among smaller business employers about how OEA province wide services can serve employers and pursue continuous improvement of our tools.

The OEA raises awareness of our professional legal services through live webinars, our website, e-mailed newsletters, presentations, engagement with stakeholder associations, local networking and social media.

Expert OEA staff and their dedication to excellent client service are the source of the agency's success. Ongoing training, mentoring and resources are essential to maintain expertise and stay current with new developments.

We look forward to serving the employer community and stakeholders during 2025-28 with expert and practical advice, grounded in excellent client service.

Mandate, Vision, and Mission

Mandate

Pursuant to section 176(2) of the WSIA the mandate of the Office of the Employer Adviser is to educate, advise and represent primarily those employers with fewer than 100 employees, in issues arising under the WSIA.

The OEA provides expert, timely, value-added legal advice, information, and representation before adjudicative tribunals on a full range of workplace safety and insurance issues to all employers participating in the workplace safety and insurance system.

The OEA is also responsible for advice, education, and representation services to Ontario employers with fewer than 50 employees on unlawful reprisal matters under section 50 of the OHSA.

Vision

An Ontario in which small and medium-sized businesses operate safe, fair, and high performing workplaces that contribute to a vibrant, competitive economy.

Mission

The OEA's mission is to be the premier organization providing education and legal advice to Ontario employers regarding workplace safety and insurance (WSI) matters and health and safety reprisal issues. Our representation work focuses on employers with fewer than 100 employees in the workplace safety and insurance mandate and fewer than 50 employers in the OHSA unlawful reprisal mandate.

Strategic Directions

1. Promote awareness about how OEA services can help smaller business employers.

The OEA shares information with Ontario employers, clients and stakeholders using webinars and presentations, our website, e-mailed newsletters and social media.

a) Webinars

In the current fiscal year, 2024-25, the OEA presented five (5) webinars in April 2024 that attracted 2,500 attendees. Last fiscal year, 2023-24, the agency presented ten (10) webinars in November-December 2023 and six (6) webinars in February-March 2024.

The webinars are offered in a series over the course of several weeks. An employer can choose to watch the whole series or dip into topics of interest. These live sessions focus on substantive issues affecting employers and include topics such as completing a Form 7, return to work, mental stress and the WSIB's new method to set premium rates. The content is approachable for individuals newly assigned to workers' compensation at their workplace and as reminders for individuals with some experience already. Participants may include a question in the chat, and an OEA specialist will reach out to discuss the question in the individual employer's circumstances.

Live webinars are scheduled and advertised using e-mailed newsletters, LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter).

Technology allows the OEA to maximize its resources to cost effectively and efficiently reach out to Ontario employers to share information about workplace safety and insurance responsibilities and occupational health and safety unlawful reprisals. These webinars promote awareness of OEA services.

b) Digital Tools and Social Media

The agency will continue work to grow our LinkedIn presence, improve readability and useability of our website and explore how Instagram can support reaching smaller employers. We will also explore connections between local networking projects and social media engagement.

These digital tools share useful information with our community and encourages employers to reach out to OEA with their questions.

c) Client Feedback

The OEA has successfully obtained client feedback following our webinars. Our next area of focus will expand the use of e-surveys after advice and case closures.

Feedback supports assessing interest in the webinars and the content. The questions asked by attendees during webinars is an opportunity for the team to engage directly with participants, building relationships and increasing our reputation as experts in the field. The questions also help our office better understand the area-specific needs of our clients to improve other services we offer. Attendee feedback offers an opportunity to suggest topics for future presentation; this information, combined with questions and presenter experience, help to revise the webinars and develop new topics.

2) Supporting Expert Staff

Education, advice and representation services depend on our dedicated, expert, and inclusive staff.

The OEA's ongoing in-house educational program is directed at maintaining a high level of knowledge about the workplace safety and insurance law, the system and changes in policy and procedures at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). The OEA provides team members with sufficient hours to meet their Law Society of Ontario (LSO) continuing professional development hours and keep updated on WSIB policy and related changes.

Similarly, to meet the agency's section 50 obligations under the OHSA, staff will keep current about developments related to employers' duties and rights in reprisal situations through such methods as self-study, presentations to colleagues and updates from the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB).

Learning for our corporate services team includes digital awareness, plain language writing and accessibility to support the agency's strategic projects.

Stakeholder and System Partner Engagement

OEA management and staff attend system partner meetings throughout the year. The team also presents to stakeholder committees and attends appropriate outreach opportunities with employer associations. Examples of engagement with associations includes: The Ontario Business Coalition, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the Council of Ontario Construction Associations and the Ontario Mining Association.

The Office of the Employer Adviser is an effective, valued partner in the WSI system. The agency contributes to system improvement through strong relationships with stakeholders, the WSIB, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal (WSIAT) and the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD). The agency collaborates with health and safety associations for presentations to employers, for example, in 2024-25 there were several regional engagements with Workplace Safety Prevention Services (WSPS). The OEA also participates in system consultations, in this fiscal year, the OEA shared feedback with the WSIB through the Independent Living Policy Review, Phase 2 consultation and to the WSIAT during a consultation with its Advisory Group.

In November 2020, the final report was released of an operational review of the WSIB conducted by Linda Regner Dykeman and Sean Speer. The authors noted that “[s]takeholders rarely agree on Workplace Safety and Insurance Board-related matters but there is near universal recognition that the Office of Worker Adviser and Office of the Employer Adviser provide useful services to help non-unionized workers and small employers navigate WSIB adjudication, appeals and the broader occupational health and safety system.”

For s. 50 reprisal matters, the agency meets with interested employer groups and attends OLRB stakeholder sessions as scheduled. Details of our section 50 mandate are included in all OEA introductory presentations to employer groups.

Through our work with individual employers, education and outreach work we contribute to an accessible workplace safety and insurance system.

Overview of Programs

The OEA contributes to a prosperous, safe economy by supporting Ontario's smaller businesses with the specialized legal administrative and adjudicative WSIB system.

The OEA program:

- Supports employers with WSIB issues, allowing business owners to focus their time and money on growing their business
- Helps employers understand and meet their on-going obligations to their workers
- Raises awareness about workplace responsibilities
- Helps employers with OHSA section 50 worker reprisal applications at the Ontario Labour Relations Board

Advice for Employers

The OEA Advice Centre provides comprehensive legal advice to employers on all workplace safety and insurance system issues and general information for section 50 reprisal questions. Inquiries are received by phone and e-mail at askOEA@ontario.ca. Clients may also choose to call their local Employer Specialist for advice and assistance.

The OEA website, at www.employeradviser.ca, is a readily accessible means for employers to get answers to straightforward issues and includes a web form for employer specific questions.

Representation for Employers

The OEA represents employers with appeals at the WSIB and the WSIAT. The team also provides advice and representation to employers with fewer than 50 employees regarding section 50 unlawful reprisal applications.

Education of Employers

The OEA focuses on the education of Ontario employers about workplace safety and insurance and occupational health and safety section 50 unlawful reprisal matters through its website, webinars, social media, e-mailed newsletter, and regional presentations.

Risk Identification, Assessment and Mitigation

1) External Factors

Funding for the OEA is a legislated obligation of the WSIB under the WSIA and the office operates within the Ontario government's fiscal and human resource structures and the *Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006* (PSOA).

Our funding is provided by employers through their payment of premiums and administrative fees to the WSIB. This funding model means that the agency's legal services and education sessions are pre-paid; no fee is charged to employers at the time of advice and representation.

a) Video Conference Hearings and Webinars

System partners transitioned to virtual hearing options during Covid-19 and the use of video hearings and telephone hearings has continued in most cases.

The OEA's live webinars have successfully attracted audiences over the past few years. These live web sessions offer employers an opportunity to raise questions. Most questions are referred to specialist staff for conversations with employers to respond to their individual needs.

i) Mitigation

The agency will closely monitor its technology to ensure that staff have the capacity to professionally participate in video conference hearings and mediations offered by partner agencies and to present via MS Teams, Zoom, WebEx and other platforms.

b) Process Changes at WSIB and WSIAT

During the 2024-2025 fiscal year the WSIB and the WSIAT implemented process changes that were consulted on the prior year. OEA staff attended training sessions about these changes as available. The OEA's expert team will support smaller employers and stakeholders adapt to changes to the appeals system.

In 2024, the WSIB's rate framework was fully implemented for most Schedule 1 employers. Employers are gradually asking more questions about their premium rate calculations, including class/subclass rates and the potential effects of claims costs on their business's rate calculation. Employers have also reached out with questions about the WSIB's audit program. The OEA team is here to help.

i) Mitigation

During the fiscal year, the team will experience the new appeals processes and timelines, assess implications for Ontario's smaller employers and provide feedback to partner agencies as opportunities arise. Stakeholder sessions continue to be valuable opportunities to learn about the experiences of others with the new processes, ask questions and share feedback. For the rate framework, the team seeks opportunities for internal discussions about examples and external opportunities for training, for instance, through public presentations by the WSIB's actuary team.

2) Internal Factors

The OEA has a highly skilled and dedicated team who provide the best possible advice and representation to employers. OEA staff located around the province helps meet our commitment to provide the highest level of customer service.

a) Potential OEA Staff Retirements

The agency benefits from the skills and expertise of our experienced staff. This current fiscal year, several retirements and departures occurred. Recruitment was delayed by process requirements which extends vacancy timing; there will be an intensive period of workforce renewal during Q4 2024-25 and into the next planning period.

When retirements occur, we expect a substantial increase in required payouts, which could put financial pressure on our budget.

i) Mitigation

Recruitment and onboarding are the key mitigation factors, supported by training and mentoring for newer staff. The team will also seek out opportunities to share and retain knowledge prior to retirements.

b) Digital Delivery and Customer Service

i) E-Access to Files from System Partners

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the OEA started to receive e-file access from the WSIB. This led to an agency investment in new software and training to support staff transition to review and prepare PDF files electronically. As part of appeals process changes, WSIAT announced plans to expand its use of e-files. The OEA will continue to support staff adapt and excel using electronic files, for instance, during 2024-25, there were two (2) dedicated sessions at which team members presented to colleagues their tips and approaches for working with e-files.

ii) Digital Tools

Digitally based client feedback surveys, search engine optimization, and social media and website content are tools that help the OEA raise awareness of its services using modern, effective means. We will leverage OPS digital learning tools and resources and seek outside assistance as needed to support our projects and development in this area.

Performance Measures and Annual Targets

Our goal for the coming years is to increase the advice and representation services provided to Ontario employers.

Performance measures:

- Advice and information provided to employers
 - For 2025-28, increase advice provided by 10% during the 3-year planning period
- Representation work through Opened and Closed cases
 - For 2025-28, increase opened representation cases by 10% during the 3-year planning period

During 2025-28 we will continue to raise awareness of our services.

Performance measures:

- Webinar series offered to employers, offer 1-2 series per fiscal year
- Content developed for clients and stakeholders
 - Post new content bi-weekly, on average, on social media
 - E-bulletin one (1) or more times per year

OEA staff are expert, client focused and inclusive

- Training sessions for Law Society of Ontario (LSO) licensed staff to meet Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements set by the LSO
- Support staff training

The OEA is an effective, valued system partner. We contribute to an accessible system and system improvement through strong relationships with stakeholders and system partners.

- Stakeholder and system partner meetings
- Presentation requests and collaboration

Providing Ontario employers with pre-paid (free), confidential, and expert services and education about the WSIB and Section 50 unlawful reprisal, supports small businesses and contributes to a prosperous, stable economy.

Communication Plan

The OEA's communication plan for 2025-28 focusses on alerting clients and stakeholders to changing policies and priorities in the WSIB system and promoting awareness of the OEA's pre-paid services. The goal is to offer services to more employers during a fiscal year.

The OEA is a significant provider of information and education about WSIB matters including changes to policies and procedures. To reach as many employers as possible, the OEA uses its website, social media (LinkedIn, X - formerly Twitter), webinars, e-mailed newsletters, and occasionally in-person regional presentations. The agency's following on LinkedIn has grown steadily in 2024-25 with an increase of 25% to 242 followers on November 30, 2024; in the same time frame, the agency has posted content 68 times, including webinar notices. Webinars are a cost-effective component of the OEA's education and information sharing strategy. Adapting content to attract registrants will be ongoing.

In 2025-26, the agency will continue the shift to client feedback e-survey methods by offering opportunities to share comments upon advice and case closure. The agency welcomes qualitative feedback from clients as an indicator of value provided to employers and stakeholders.

The agency measures the effectiveness of its communications through the number of attendees for agency webinar sessions, presentations and statistics for employer advice and information.

System Partners

OEA messaging

The primary message for OEA communications is that the OEA provides ‘free, confidential and expert’ legal services for Ontario’s smaller employers about workers’ compensation claims and accounts issues, and OHSA reprisal matters.

OEA marketing and outreach strive to increase client awareness and promote services. Broadening our marketing and outreach to raise awareness with new client groups remains the most significant challenge for the OEA. Successful outreach is much appreciated by employers newly aware of the agency’s pre-paid services, made possible through the employers’ WSIB premiums and administrative fees.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The agency does not have artificial intelligence (AI) use cases to report at this time.

Resources to Meet Goals and Objectives

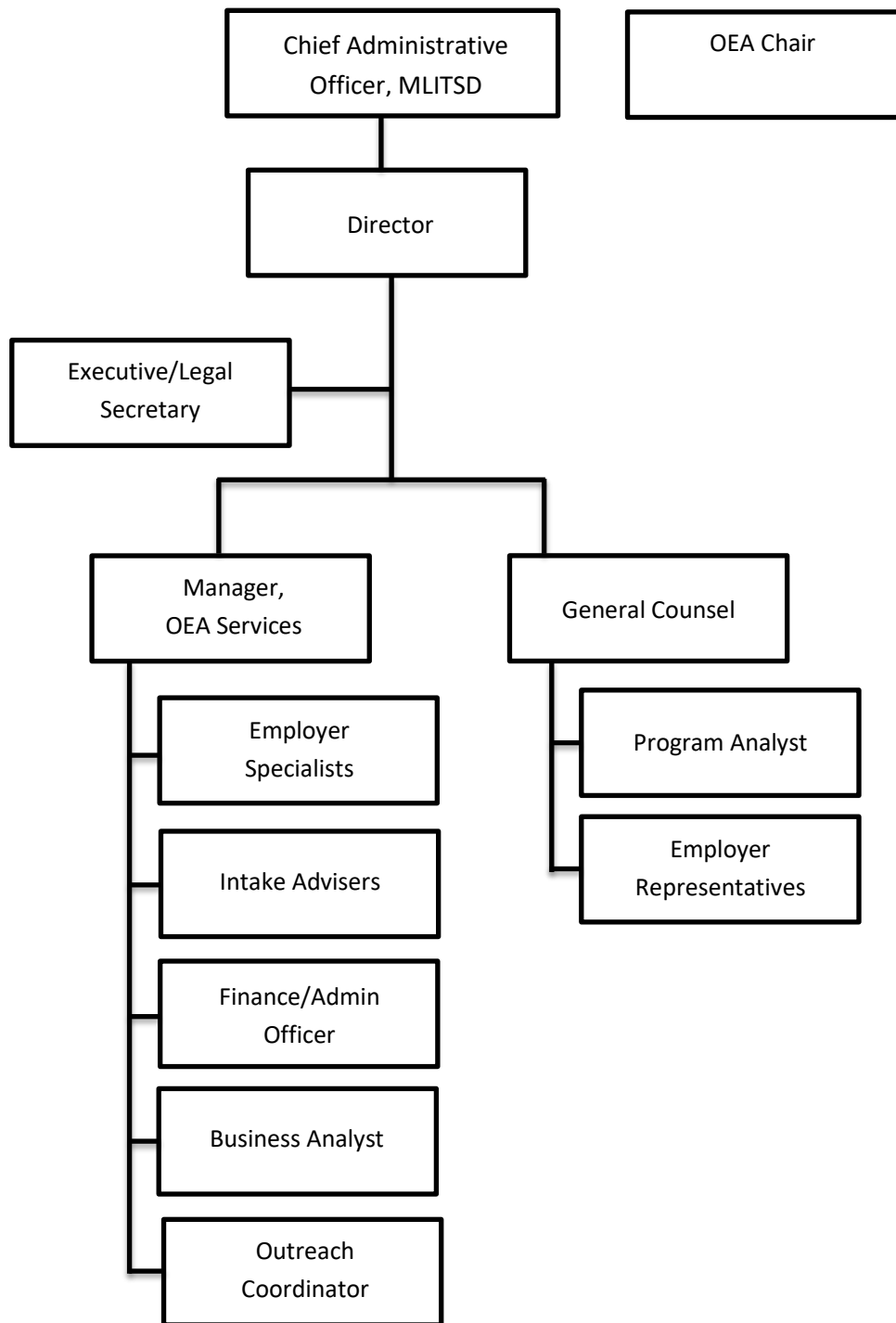
Agency financing may be under pressure to address retirement costs as they occur. Recruitment, onboarding, training and mentoring new team members is rewarding and takes time.

The OEA’s work with digital tools during these fiscal years will inform the resources needed to raise awareness of services and enhance supports for small business employers.

Number of Employees

As of the third quarter in 2024-25, the OEA is assigned 28.0 Full time equivalent (FTE) positions by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration Training and Skills Development (MLITSD), a reduction from 29.6.

The OEA will ensure it is aligned with Ontario Public Service (OPS) direction and guidelines on in-office attendance.



Appendix A: Financial Resources

Standard Account	2025-26 Preliminary Planning Base	2026-27 Preliminary Planning Base	2027-28 Preliminary Planning Base
Salaries & Wages	2,753,600	2,753,600	2,753,600
Benefits	734,200	734,200	734,200
Total SWB	3,487,800	3,487,800	3,487,800
ODOE: Transportation & Communication	148,700	148,700	148,700
Services	292,900	292,900	292,900
Supplies & Equipment	89,800	89,800	89,800
Total ODOE	531,400	531,400	531,400
Grand Total	4,019,200	4,019,200	4,019,200

Appendix B: Performance Measures

Key Activity: Advice and Representation Services

C1

Performance measure for 2025-26 -- Advice provided to employers



Agency Contribution

Intake Advisers are an Employer's key first contact at the OEA. The Team supports employers as they navigate the workplace safety and insurance system and is also a referral function for the agency's representation services. Representation staff also provide advice through their ongoing client relationships. Employers access our services through phone, email, or website contact page.

What does the graph show?

Agency advice statistics capture the number of different topics raised by clients during interactions to track the key issues to employers.

When offered, the OEA's webinars contribute to advice offered to employers because attendee questions are referred to staff as a meet and greet opportunity with individualized legal advice.

The agency presented webinars in 2023-24 and during April 2024. Current year statistics reflect April 1 to November 30, 2024.

2025-28 Commitments

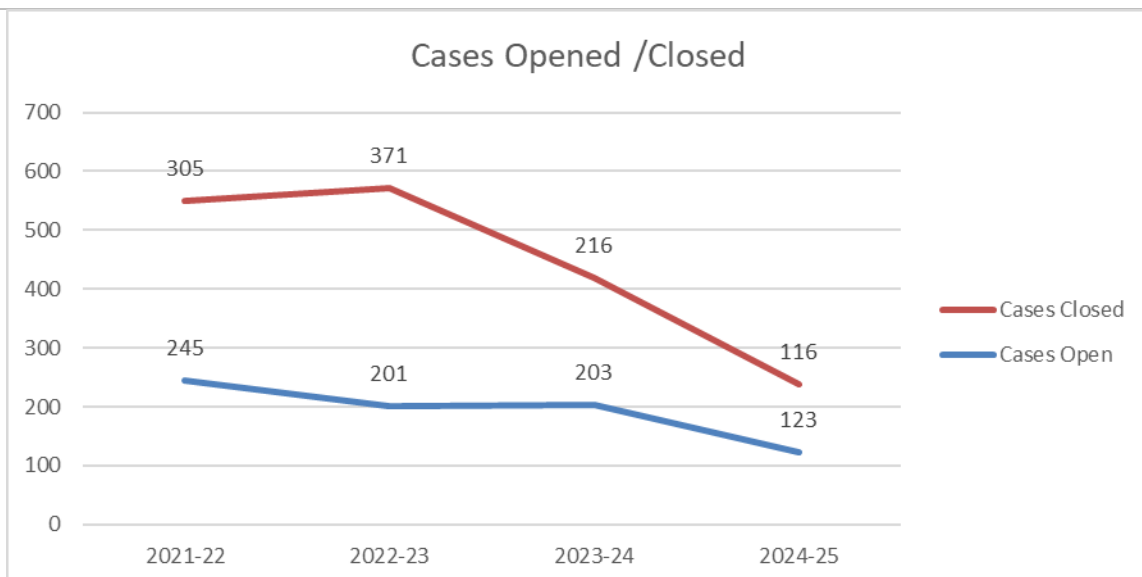
Our 2025-28 goal is to increase advice services by 10% during the 3-year planning period.

This is an existing measure.

Appendix B: Performance Measures, continued

Key Activity: Advice and Representation Services C2

Performance measure for 2025-26 – Opened and Closed Cases



Agency Contribution

The agency's expert and specialist legal team provide representation before the WSIB, the WSIAT and the OLRB.

Employers value the case specific, individualized services in specialized areas of law; our services are pre-paid through WSIB premiums and administrative fees.

What Does the Graph Show?

Representation cases decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic. The OEA continued to serve clients by resolving cases before the WSIB, WSIAT and OLRB.

Year to date in 2024-25, the agency has opened 123 cases and closed 116. Case timelines from open to closed depends on issues and appeals.

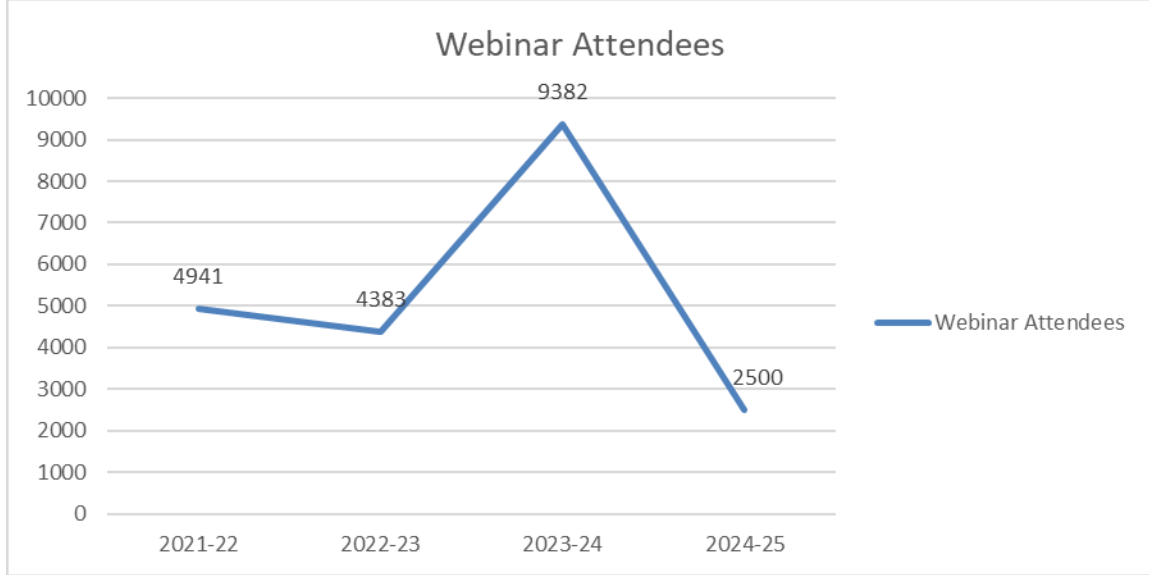
Year to date statistics reflect April 1 to November 30, 2024.

2025-26 Commitment

Our 2025-28 goal is to increase advice services by 10% during the 3-year planning period.

This is an existing measure.

Appendix B: Performance Measures, continued

Key Activities: Education and Information to Employers		C3										
Performance measure for 2025-26: Number of Webinar Sessions offered to Ontario Employers												
<div><div><div><div><div><div></div><div>Webinar Attendees</div></div></div><div><table><tr><th>Fiscal Year</th><th>Webinar Attendees</th></tr><tr><td>2021-22</td><td>4941</td></tr><tr><td>2022-23</td><td>4383</td></tr><tr><td>2023-24</td><td>9382</td></tr><tr><td>2024-25</td><td>2500</td></tr></table></div><div><p>Agency Contribution</p><p>The OEA is a key source of information for employers about WSIB matters, from claims issues to registration and premium rates.</p><p>The agency has developed and presented a series of webinars to share information with employers, raise awareness of responsibilities and draw attention to OEA services.</p></div></div></div></div>			Fiscal Year	Webinar Attendees	2021-22	4941	2022-23	4383	2023-24	9382	2024-25	2500
Fiscal Year	Webinar Attendees											
2021-22	4941											
2022-23	4383											
2023-24	9382											
2024-25	2500											

What does the graph show?

Webinar sessions were a successful approach during recent years. Sessions are presented by the agency's expert, specialized staff.

The current year statistics reflect webinars conducted in April 2024.

During 2023-24 there were 9,382 attendees. During April 2024, there were 2,500 attendees.

2025-26 Commitments

The commitment for 2025-26 is to offer 1-2 series of webinars.

Long-term Target

The long-term target continues at offering 1-2 webinar series each fiscal year. Pauses are planned periodically to focus on content development and updates in response to employer feedback. For the OEA's team, 1-2 series per fiscal year is a significant project.

This is an existing measure.