Law Society of Ontario | Barreau de l'Ontario

Tab 6

Next Steps for the Access to Innovation Program

Consultation Report

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Introduction

The Law Society is seeking feedback from lawyers, paralegals, legal organizations, and the public on whether to extend the Access to Innovation (A2I) program for an additional five-year term following the conclusion of its initial pilot mandate in November 2026.

This consultation report provides background on the A2I program, reviews its performance over the pilot period, and outlines considerations, benefits, and limitations associated with extending or ending the program. The purpose of this report is to support informed public input that will assist the Law Society in assessing whether, and how, the A2I program should continue.

Since its launch in 2021, the A2I program has served as a practical regulatory tool that allows the Law Society to observe, understand, and respond to technology-enabled legal service models in a structured and supervised manner. The program has provided the Law Society with early visibility into technologies that operate outside traditional licensing structures but nonetheless engage core public-protection concerns.

As legal service delivery becomes increasingly technology driven, including through the growing use of artificial intelligence, a structured and supervised environment can help reduce regulatory uncertainty while ensuring that innovation occurs subject to meaningful public-protection safeguards.

A2I at a glance

The Access to Innovation (A2I) program is a five-year regulatory sandbox[1] pilot program that allows innovators to operate technologies that provide legal services directly to the public while complying with risk-based public protection requirements established by the Law Society. It allows innovative service models to operate in Ontario under defined conditions while requiring public protections comparable to those expected of licensees.

Through individualized assessment and ongoing oversight, A2I enables the Law Society to observe emerging tools, technologies and service models, assess risks, and ensure appropriate safeguards are in place.

The A2I program is open to a broad range of innovators who are using technology to provide legal services to members of the public. Applicants' tools or programs must feature

[1] The "regulatory sandbox" model is a policy tool that regulators employ to engage with innovative service providers that do not fit well within the existing regulatory framework. First popularized in the financial services sector, regulatory sandboxes are "safe zones" in which potentially beneficial products, services, business models and delivery mechanisms can be test-run, subject to tailored operating conditions and regulatory supervision.

the innovative delivery of legal services via technology. Applications can be made by both licensee and non-licensee individuals, businesses and not-for-profit organizations.

Entering the A2I Sandbox

In order to enter the A2I sandbox, an applicant must demonstrate that robust public protections are in place. Not all applications are approved, and approval is only granted where the Law Society is satisfied that identified risks can be appropriately mitigated through a participation agreement and ongoing oversight. Over the past five years, as the number of applicants has increased, common criteria for application evaluation have been developed. While each application is unique, the Law Society assesses each one using these criteria to ensure there is sufficient public protection in place for each sandbox participant. A full list of the criteria applied is available at Appendix A.

Participation in the program

Approved participants are required to enter into a two-year participation agreement with the Law Society. The participation agreement:

1. authorizes the participant to provide the agreed upon services in Ontario for the duration of the agreement;
2. requires that the participant maintain the public protections that have been determined as necessary to operate in Ontario;
3. requires that the participant provide quarterly reports on all transactions that were handled through their application and any/all complaints they have received;
4. authorizes the Law Society to audit the participant if there are concerns about the operations of the participant; and
5. authorizes the Law Society to terminate the agreement if the participant is not complying with its obligations.

Ongoing permitting

Following two years in the A2I program, participants may be eligible to become a permitted service provider, provided that they continue to meet requirements set by the Law Society.

A2I by the numbers

The following provides an overview of statistics related to the A2I program

1. As of February 2026, there are 14 active participants in the A2I program. There is one additional approved applicant that has not yet been announced.
2. As of January 2026, 181,247 legal services in Ontario have been provided by participants in the A2I program.
3. There are currently 35 entities or individuals who have expressed interest in the program but have yet to submit an application.
4. 24 applications are currently being processed and are at different stages of evaluation.

Over the five years that the A2I program has been active there have been annual increases in the number of applications. This is set to continue as the number of applications made in the first two months of 2026 is equal to the amount received in 2025.

Background and program origins

In August 2018, the Law Society of Ontario established the Technology Task Force (the "Task Force") to develop a response to the rapid evolution in technologies.

Following extensive study, the Task Force prepared a report recommending the creation of a regulatory sandbox for innovative legal technology services (ITLS) and the establishment of a means to authorize ongoing delivery of services by providers who had successfully completed a two year period in the sandbox.[2] The report set out four reasons why a sandbox would benefit the public and fall within the Law Society's regulatory mandate:

a. Access to justice
b. Public protection
c. Informing regulatory development
d. Encouraging innovation among licensees

In April 2021, Convocation approved the Task Force's recommendation and the A2I program was formally launched in November 2021.

Similar activities in other jurisdictions

Ontario is not the only jurisdiction in North America to adopt the regulatory sandbox model. The Law Societies of BC, Alberta, Manitoba and Nova Scotia have regulatory sandboxes, and the Barreau du Québec is in the late stages of approving its own regulatory sandbox. While the mandates of the sandboxes are varied, all of them recognize that this model can provide public safeguards for otherwise unregulated legal services.

A number of U.S. jurisdictions have also adopted regulatory sandboxes, including: Utah, Arizona, Washington State, Indiana, and Minnesota.

Program performance and outcomes (five-year review)

When the A2I pilot was introduced, the Law Society established four objectives for the A2I program:

1. Expand public access to innovative technology-enabled legal services
2. Protect the public through flexible, risk-based safeguards

[2] Technology Task Force Report to Convocation, April 22, 2021

3. Collect information to inform regulatory decision-making
4. Support responsible development of innovative service models

After nearly five years of operation, the following metrics can be used to evaluate the A2I pilot's success in achieving these objectives:

1. 181,247 legal services safely delivered

Participants have provided more than 181,000 services to Ontarians since 2021, demonstrating strong public demand and broad market uptake, consistent with the program's first objective.

This demonstrates expanded public access to ITLS tools. The volume of services processed has also contributed to the success of the program in collecting information to support informed regulatory policy making in the future, consistent with the program's third objective.

2. High levels of customer satisfaction

Out of the over 181,000 services to Ontarians, only 16 harm related complaints were received. Each was resolved either without harm or loss to the complainant, or with the service provider compensating the complainant.

This shows that the program's approach to protecting the public from risk and fostering responsible development of ITLS tools has been successful, consistent with the program's second objective.

3. Strong coverage in underserved regions

Although 50% of Ontarians live outside the GTA and Ottawa, they received 70% of A2I participant services, indicating meaningful improvements in accessing justice services for remote communities.

This demonstrates how the program has helped expand public access to legal services in more remote areas, consistent with the program's first objective.

4. Affordable legal support

The average cost of A2I-delivered services is $101, which represents a considerable savings as compared to comparable legal services offered by a legal professional. These lower cost legal services help to expand access for members of the public who cannot afford traditional legal services.

5. A growing pipeline of innovators

Over the five years that the A2I program has been active, there have been yearly increases in the number of applications. This trend has continued through the first two

months of 2026, as the number of applications made to date is equal to the total number received in all of 2025. This growth shows that interest in the A2I program is growing among innovators. A2I has become the primary entry point for responsible Business to Consumer (B2C) legal tech in Ontario, showing that the fourth objective for responsible development of ITLS services is being also being met. Furthermore, a broader set of service providers will increase public access to ITLS services.

At the present time, sixteen service providers are operating within the A2I sandbox. Twenty-four other potential service providers have submitted applications to join the A2I program which are currently under review by the Law Society, while thirty-five additional entities have expressed interest.

When assessed against the four objectives that were established for the A2I pilot, it is clear that the program has made substantial progress, to the benefit of the Ontario public. Going forward, the Law Society must decide whether this progress demonstrates that these objectives have been met completely, or whether there is still room for improvement through the continuation of the A2I program.

Limits of available evidence

While available data indicate that A2I participants have delivered a large volume of services with very few reported harm-related complaints, these metrics do not capture all potential risks associated with ITLS services. Complaint data may not reflect future consequences, undiscovered errors, or instances where users do not recognize that harm has occurred. In addition, different categories of legal problems involve differing levels of complexity and risk, and outcomes over longer time horizons cannot yet be fully assessed. For these reasons, the evidence gathered to date may be informative but not determinative.

Discussion

The positive performance of A2I during the pilot period does not, on its own, resolve broader questions about how ITLS should be regulated over the long term. Rather, it demonstrates that a structured, supervised approach can allow innovation to occur while risks are identified and managed. The question now before the Law Society is whether extending this framework remains an appropriate regulatory response in light of continued technological change and remaining areas of uncertainty.

Why A2I should be renewed

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, are developing rapidly and are expected to further transform legal service delivery over the next five years. While A2I has taken a cautious and protective approach to novel technologies to date, continued program flexibility may be necessary to understand and respond to evolving risk profiles.

Extending A2I would allow the Law Society to:

- Continue to monitor technological developments as they occur;
- More rapidly identify emerging consumer risks; and
- Build an evidence base to support future regulatory decisions.

Without A2I Ontarians would be left to navigate emerging legal technologies without oversight, and the Law Society would lose visibility into this new sector for legal services.

Extending A2I will ensure Ontario continues to lead responsibly, protect the public, and continue to acquire the necessary information for potential regulatory decisions in the future.

The changing legal technology landscape

The direct-to-consumer legal technology market has grown significantly over the past five years, from approximately 20 identifiable providers to more than 60. This growth includes services operating both within and outside the A2I framework.

Technology-enabled legal services continue to evolve quickly, increasing consumer reliance on online tools and raising new regulatory questions regarding accuracy, accountability, data protection, and transparency.

A2I currently captures or is assessing approximately two-thirds of known providers in this segment, giving the Law Society visibility into market developments that would otherwise occur without regulatory engagement.

Generative AI and the changing risk landscape

The rapid rise of generative AI is creating a new set of risks and opportunities in the legal services market. Although generative AI has not yet resulted in many direct-to-consumer legal tools, members of the public are already using general purpose AI products to address their legal service needs, and the risks of doing so, which include inaccuracies and hallucinations, are well known.

A2I has taken a cautious approach with generative AI driven applicants and does not approve any applicant whose model involves delivering AI-generated legal content to consumers without human review. This approach is warranted given the risks and the potential for AI driven misinformation. If the program is extended, A2I will continue to monitor the development of this technology and may in future modify its approach, but only when this does not increase risk to the public. Being able to take this flexible approach to addressing these fast-changing developments is a key benefit of the A2I program.

Why A2I is essential for navigating AI

Artificial intelligence is evolving quickly, from generative systems that can produce legal content to emerging agentic AI, which can execute complex tasks autonomously with minimal human oversight. These technologies have the potential to reshape legal service delivery in ways that traditional regulatory tools cannot anticipate or manage.

Extending A2I is essential for three reasons:

1. It is the Law Society's only operational framework for oversight of AI-enabled legal services. A2I provides a structured, evidence-driven environment where new technologies can be examined, tested, and guided before they reach broad public use.
2. It enables early detection and mitigation of AI-related risks. Without A2I, the Law Society would have no mechanism to evaluate how AI systems generate legal content, what safeguards are in place, and whether consumers are adequately protected.
3. It positions Ontario to proactively shape the future rather than react to it. The next five years will determine how AI becomes embedded in the legal services market. With A2I, the Law Society can ensure that innovation proceeds in a way that aligns with its public protection mandate.

As AI advancements accelerate, from generative to agentic systems and ultimately to future technologies like quantum enhanced computing, the regulatory questions will become more complex. Ending A2I would leave the Law Society without the visibility, tools, or evidence needed to navigate these emerging challenges.

In short, while A2I was established as a pilot, it has evolved into the Law Society's primary mechanism for engaging with AI-driven legal services in a structured and supervised manner.

A. Benefits to extending the program

The mandate for the A2I program expires in November 2026. When the A2I program was established as a five-year pilot project, the intention was to provide the Law Society with sufficient time to assess the capabilities of ITLS providers, evaluate consumer interest, and gather evidence to inform longer-term and broader regulatory decision-making. While the Law Society has collected valuable data during the pilot period, only recently has a meaningful body of evidence begun to emerge that can support informed regulatory conclusions. This is due to a slower-than-anticipated initial uptake of the program.

Any future regulatory decisions will also need to take into account the rapid emergence and adoption of generative AI, which is expected to significantly reshape the legal technology landscape. To date, no participants in the A2I program rely primarily on generative AI; however, it is anticipated that applications incorporating generative AI will emerge in the coming years. Observing how such technologies operate will be important to making long term regulatory decisions. Extending the pilot for an additional five years would allow the Law Society to fully assess these developments and ensure that any future regulatory decisions are grounded in a robust and mature evidence base.

B. Considerations and potential consequences of terminating the program

If the A2I program is not extended or replaced with an alternative framework, there would be a number of potential implications for both the public and the Law Society's ability to fulfil its mandate.

1. The public would be left exposed to unregulated legal services

The direct-to-consumer legal technology market is expanding rapidly, including tools powered by generative AI. Without A2I, Ontario consumers would increasingly rely on unregulated services with no mechanism for ensuring accuracy, privacy, or security. This would leave consumers vulnerable to incorrect legal information, privacy breaches, potentially misleading marketing claims, and inadequate means of dealing with complaints.

2. The Law Society would lose its ability to oversee this market

A2I is currently the Law Society's only method to evaluate legal technology service providers, establish public protection requirements, and gather the evidence needed for future regulatory decisions. If the program ends without being replaced by an alternative, this oversight capacity would disappear.

3. The risks associated with AI generated legal content would grow

Generative AI tools are already being used by the public for legal tasks, yet the technology is still prone to errors and hallucinations. A2I is currently the only system that allows the Law Society to evaluate and set standards for these tools. Without it, AI driven legal advice, some of it inaccurate or entirely fabricated, will reach consumers.

4. Ontario would fall behind other jurisdictions

While multiple Canadian and U.S. regulators are maintaining their own sandbox or innovation frameworks, ending A2I would signal that Ontario is stepping away from innovation leadership. This could place the Law Society at a competitive disadvantage and undermine its influence over the future direction of legal technology regulation.

5. **The Law Society would face reputational and policy risks**

A complete withdrawal from this space could suggest that the Law Society is choosing not to regulate a fast-growing segment of the legal services market, despite clear evidence that the public is already using these tools. This may create ambiguity about the Law Society's jurisdiction, invite criticism about consumer protection gaps, and could even affect confidence in future pilot projects.

6. **The opportunity to shape safer, more responsible innovation would be lost**

A2I's structured oversight, iterative review process, and ongoing monitoring have already ensured providers have strong cybersecurity practices, good privacy protections, and quality legal content. Ending the program would eliminate the Law Society's ability to shape industry behaviour; effectively leaving the market to chart its own path of development.

C. Considerations and potential consequences of continuing the program

While the A2I program has delivered measurable benefits, some licensees and licensee associations have raised concerns about the program, which must be considered in any discussion about continuing the program. These concerns are summarized as follows:

1. The Law Society's regulatory mandate should not be extended beyond human-delivered legal services

Some licensees have questioned whether it is appropriate for the Law Society to regulate or look to regulate ITLS that are not delivered by lawyers or paralegals. This concern reflects a view that existing regulatory frameworks were designed around human judgment, professional accountability, and ethical obligations, and that extending regulatory oversight to ITLS tools risks blurring the distinction between regulated licensees and unlicensed service providers. Critics argue that continued operation of A2I may be seen as implicitly redefining the scope of the Law Society's role without broader regulatory reform or legislative direction.

2. The boundary between legal services and "law-related" services may remain unclear

The A2I program adopts an intentionally inclusive approach when assessing applicants, prioritizing early observation and risk assessment over definitive classification at the point of entry. As a result, some participants may ultimately be found to offer services that are law-related but do not constitute the provision of legal services requiring ongoing regulation by the Law Society. In such instances, the participant would not be eligible for an ongoing permit upon exiting the program. While this outcome is consistent with the program's exploratory design, it has raised concerns among some stakeholders that the distinction between regulated legal services and adjacent offerings is insufficiently clear, and that extending A2I may prolong uncertainty around the scope of regulated activity.

3. Participation in A2I may be perceived as conferring regulatory endorsement

While approval for admission to the program is open to any applicant that meets the standards rather than being limited to select groups of service providers in specific areas of law, some licensees have expressed concern that participation in the A2I program may be perceived by consumers as an endorsement of a certain provider or product by the Law Society, rather than a time-limited authorization subject to conditions and ongoing oversight. While participants are encouraged to include their participation in the program in marketing materials so that members of the public can make an informed purchase decision for a quality product, some stakeholders believe that this too amounts to a further endorsement by the Law Society. Critics argue that extending the program without further clarifying public-facing communications could create confusion about the nature and limits of Law Society approval, particularly in comparison to traditional licensure.

4. Participation in A2I is voluntary

Because participation in the A2I program is voluntary, there is a concern that it may not discourage technology-enabled legal service providers from operating in Ontario without regulatory oversight. Further, the voluntariness of the program may affect the completeness of the evidence gathered through the program. At the same time, the voluntary nature of participation reflects the pilot and exploratory design of A2I, allowing the Law Society to engage constructively with willing participants while assessing risks and regulatory needs in a rapidly evolving market. Addressing concerns related to voluntary participation may require clearer expectations, stronger incentives for participation, or consideration of different approaches over time.

Feedback and questions for comment

The Law Society invites feedback from the professions, stakeholders, and the public about the A2I program.

All feedback received will be reviewed by the Law Society to assist in developing a recommended direction on the future of the A2I program. Specific questions that would assist the A2I program review include:

1. Should the A2I program be extended or ended?
    a) Please explain why.

2. If you believe the program should continue:
    a) For how long?
        i) 5 years
        ii) More than 5 years
        iii) Be made permanent
    b) What changes, if any, would you recommend to the scope or activities of A2I?

3. Are there risks associated with the A2I program or technology-enabled legal services generally that you believe are not adequately addressed by the current framework? If so, please describe them.

4. Do you have any other feedback about the A2I program? Please be as detailed as possible.

The Committee seeks input by August 28, 2026. Any feedback received will be shared with Law Society staff and Benchers and may be made public.

Appendix A

Evaluating A2I applicants

The following requirements are starting points for evaluating each A2I applicant:

1. Product quality

The product must be fit for the purpose it is represented to serve. To establish this, each participant must warrant that their product is:

a. market ready;
b. accurate with respect to applicable law;
c. fit for the purpose that it is offered to serve; and
d. that, once approved, the participant will keep their product up to date with respect to changes in the law.

While not determinative, the involvement of a licensee in the establishment of the product is a strong indicator of the legal quality.

2. Cybersecurity

Participants are required to meet industry standards for data security and intrusion protection. Further, within two years they are required to demonstrate compliance with a recognized international cybersecurity standard.

3. User data privacy

Prior to approval, participants are required to establish, or amend their privacy policy to provide that:

a. They will not disclose user data to third parties except as required and with reasonable protections.
b. They will not sell user data.
c. They will notify the Law Society of any data breach involving personal information which it is required to report to a federal or provincial privacy commissioner within 72 hours of such reporting.
d. They will clearly advise users what user information is collected and what it will be used for.
e. They will ensure their application is compliant with Canadian privacy legislation and requirements.

4. Terms and conditions of application

Participants must:

a. not disclaim all liabilities to users;
b. not require users to indemnify the participant against 3rd party claims;
c. not require users to waive rights to participate in class actions;
d. not claim the right to unilaterally alter the terms and conditions without notifying the users; and
e. if requiring users to agree to arbitration to settle disputes, include the right to have arbitration conducted remotely so as to remove potential geographic barriers.

Participants' terms and conditions of application use are reviewed by A2I staff prior to approval. If other issues analogous to, or in addition to, those identified above are found they must be resolved to the Law Society's satisfaction prior to approval.

5. Complaints. Participants are required to:
   a. maintain a reasonable complaints process and inform users of how to engage with that process;
   b. designate at least one officer or employee as responsible for handling complaints;
   c. make all reasonable efforts to remediate and resolve complaints and to take steps to prevent future similar complaints; and
   d. track all complaints received and report to the Law Society on a quarterly basis.

   Participants are required to notify the Law Society as soon as is practical and within 5 days of any complaints alleging fraud, willful or criminal misconduct, gross negligence or malicious or dishonest acts or omissions by the participant.

6. Insurance. Participants are required to maintain a minimum of
   a. $1million general liability insurance;
   b. $1million errors and omissions insurance; and
   c. $500,000 cybersecurity insurance.

   Participants are required to add the Law Society as an additional insured on any liability insurance policies and deliver certificates of insurance to A2I staff to confirm compliance.

7. Business Continuity: Each participant is required to submit business continuity and disaster recovery plans.

8. Marketing and advertising: A2I staff review participant site content to confirm that it is representing the product/service honestly including:
    - It does not “oversell” or “overstate” the product/service to be delivered.
    - It could not lead a reasonable person to conclude that the product/service is being delivered, in whole or in part, by human licensees when it is not.

9. User identification: The participant must have a process for identifying users that is consistent with Law Society’s requirements for licensees.

10. Payment processes. The participant must have appropriate processes for receiving payments from users.

11. Referral fees If the participant is accepting or paying referral fees to or from licensees such payments must not violate licensees’ obligations under the *Rules of Professional Conduct* and the *Paralegal Rules of Conduct*.