

Annual Report

2023 - 2024

OEA | Office of the
Employer Adviser

INDEX

Contents

Message to Stakeholders 3

OEA Mandate 5

Overview of Program and Activities 6

Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024 19

Appendix B: OEA Financial Report 2023 - 2024 25

Appendix C: OEA Organization Chart 26

Contact Us 28

Message to Stakeholders

I am pleased to present the Ontario Office of the Employer Adviser's Annual Report for this year. Throughout the past year, our team has demonstrated unwavering dedication in supporting Ontario's employers as they navigate the complexities of the workplace safety and insurance system. We reached employers through our webinar program, presentations to employer associations, and supported individual employers with their WSIB issues and OHSA unlawful reprisal issues. In a rapidly changing business landscape, we have remained committed to providing timely, expert advice and representation to small and medium-sized employers, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights are upheld. Our focus has not only been on resolving issues but also on building proactive strategies that enable employers to foster safer, more efficient workplaces. By delivering these services with professionalism and empathy, we continue to enhance the confidence and trust that employers place in our office.

This year's report reflects the significant strides we have made in improving access to our services, enhancing our outreach with social media and adapting to the evolving needs of the employer community. Looking ahead, we will focus on expanding regional networking initiatives to strengthen relationships across the province and create new opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, we are committed to reconnecting with stakeholders in person, fostering deeper partnerships and driving impactful discussions that address the evolving needs of Ontario's employers.

In closing, I extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated staff, partners, and stakeholders for their tireless work and commitment to our shared goals. As we look ahead, we remain focused on innovation and collaboration, ensuring that Ontario's employers are well-positioned to succeed while meeting their legal and safety obligations. Thank you for your continued trust and support as we work together to build a stronger, more resilient business environment in Ontario.

Jim Dimanis
OEA Chair

Dear Stakeholders,

Thank you for your ongoing support and opportunity for the Office of the Employer Adviser (OEA or agency) to be of service to you.

The last few years have allowed us to provide advice, representation, and education to thousands of Ontario employers. We reached employers through our webinar program, through presentations to employer associations, and supported individual employers with their WSIB issues and OHSA unlawful reprisal issues through advice and representation.

Historically and at present, raising awareness about how OEA services can help Ontario employers is a focus for the OEA. To address this, we offer webinar sessions to employers, we are growing our social media presence on LinkedIn, we are continuing presentations to employer associations, and we will be re-focusing our regional networking.

Finally, we look forward to connecting with employers throughout the province, employer associations, health and safety associations and system partners, in-person, virtually and via social media. We hope to see an increase in the advice and representation we provide in WSIB matters and OHSA unlawful reprisals and receive feedback about the responsiveness and accessibility of OEA services.

In closing, we wish to express our appreciation to the agency's stakeholders, whose ongoing support is critical to the OEA's success, and to staff, for their excellent work and dedication to serving the employers of Ontario.

Sincerely,

Susan Adams
OEA Director

OEA Mandate

The Office of the Employer Adviser is established by Section 176(2) of the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* (the WSIA), “to educate, advise and represent primarily those employers with fewer than 100 employees, in issues arising under the WSIA”.

The OEA mandate also includes section 50 of the Ontario *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), and its Regulation 33/12 to “educate, advise and represent in proceedings before the Ontario Labour Relations Board (the Board or OLRB) employers that have fewer than 50 employees”. This section of OHSA relates to worker allegations that they have been unfairly treated by their employer after raising a health and safety issue.

OEA VISION

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

OEA MISSION

The OEA’s mission is to be the premier organization for providing advice and education to Ontario employers regarding workplace safety and insurance 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 employees in the OHSA unlawful reprisal mandate.

Overview of Program and Activities

How the Program Works

The OEA helps Ontario employers manage workplace safety and insurance issues and meet their obligations under the Workplace Safety and Insurance (WSI) system in a timely and cost-effective manner. It is critical for employers to understand the complex WSI program, avoid errors and safeguard their workplaces and their workers; and OEA advisory services are available to help. Clients using OEA services receive timely access to accurate information, make better business decisions, operate safer workplaces and avoid appeals.

The agency is funded by employer premiums and administrative fees paid to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). No fees are payable by employers using OEA services, thus ensuring the ready availability of expert and confidential advice. This is especially important for small employers, since they typically do not have expert resources available in-house.

Experienced staff in the OEA Advice Centre provide just-in-time individualized advice and information to all Ontario employers who have WSI questions or concerns.

Representation cases focus on employers with fewer than 100 employees in disputes arising under the WSIA, at both the WSIB and at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal (WSIAT) (see Figure 5). At the WSIB operating level, representation services involve negotiation through telephone calls and correspondence. Oral hearing attendance and meetings, by video, phone or in person, occur at the two appeal levels, WSIB Appeals Division and WSIAT, and at return-to-work or work re-integration negotiations.

The agency's education mandate is met through several channels, with our webinar series as a current focus. Education also raises public awareness of the OEA's

services, so the agency is top of mind as an employer's solution of choice for workplace safety insurance issues.

Corporate staff support webinars, Ontario Public Service (OPS) finance and human resource processes, digital outreach, content development for the website and many related initiatives.

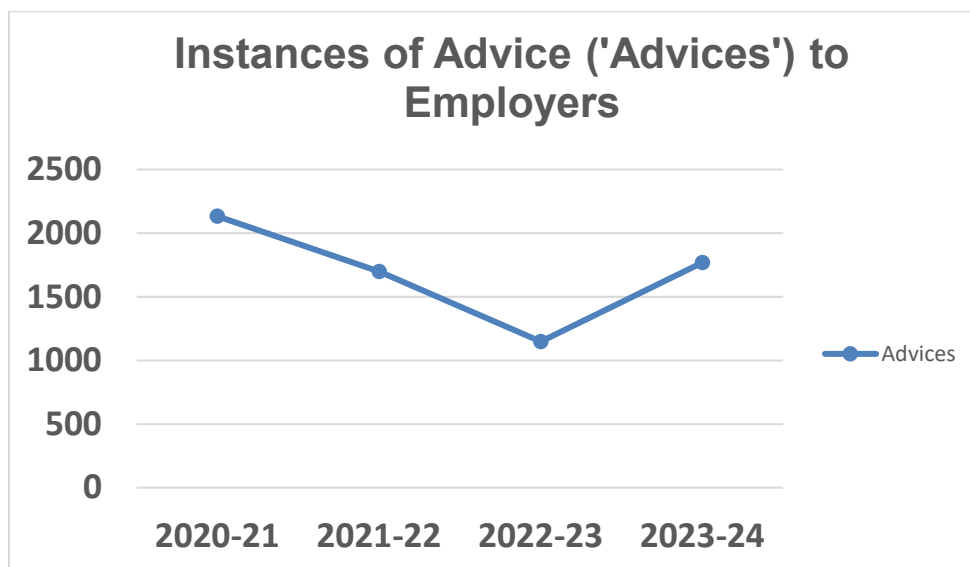
Advice Services

Intake Advisers in the agency's Advice Centre strive to respond to calls as soon as possible. Employers' calls range in time from a couple of minutes to hours, depending on the complexity of the issue(s) to discuss.

Fiscal 2023-24 saw an increase in the advice provided over the previous year: 1,769 this year, compared to 1,148 last fiscal year and 1,698 for 2021-22 year.

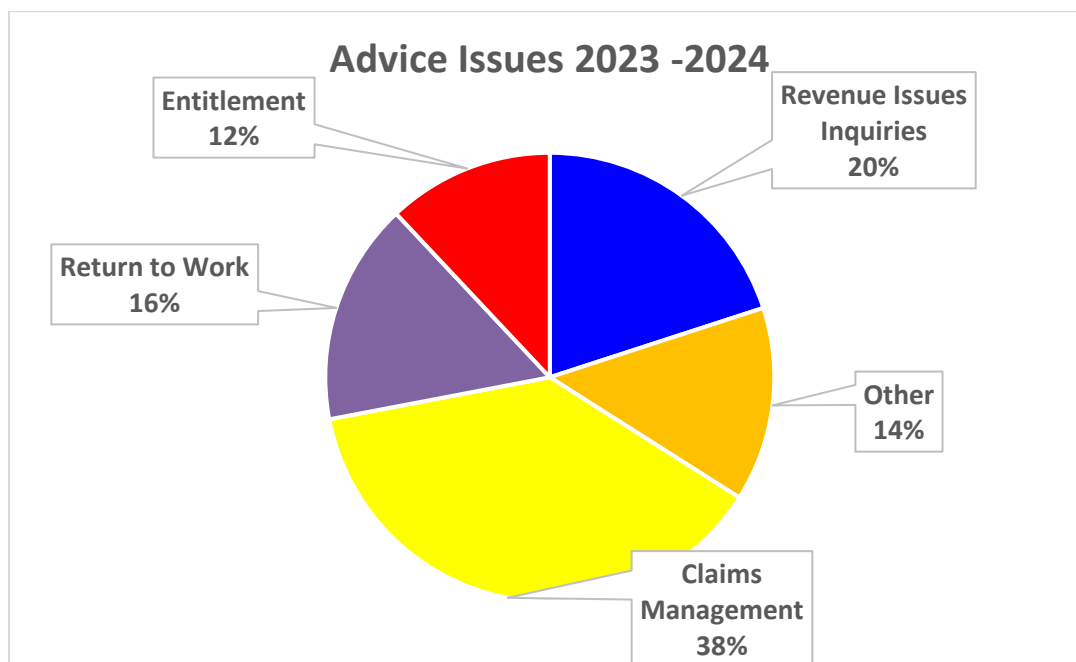
The OEA Advice Centre assists employers resolve disputes early in the WSIB process, providing information to support returning injured workers back to work safely, and providing employers with practical advice on claims and account matters. For instance, providing support to complete a WSIB form and in-depth assistance with a premium issue. The agency's trained Intake Advisers provide advice that is detailed, thorough and tailored to the business requirements of each employer. Our staff strive to answer employer calls when they occur, with the goal of minimizing 'telephone tag', and aligning to an employer's schedule, resulting in prompt and timely advice.

Figure 1



This year, the key issues for employers were Claims Management, at 38%, the same proportion as in 2022-23. Revenue represented 20% of all calls (also 20% in 2022-23). Return-to-Work questions were proportionally less frequent this year at 16% (20% in 2022-23) and so were entitlement questions at 12% (14% in 2022-23).

Figure 2



Representation Services, Workplace Safety and Insurance

The OEA's regionally located Employer Specialists provide representation to Ontario employers at all levels of the WSIB and at the WSIAT.

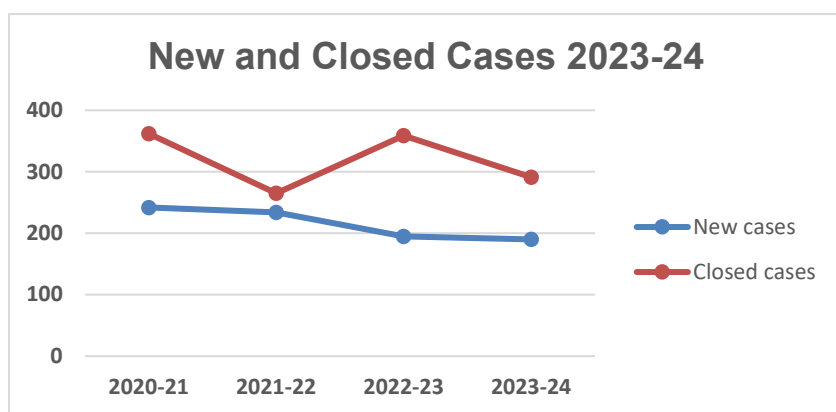
For instance, our involvement in return to work (RTW) plans and negotiations supports a solution that returns employees to the job in a timely and cost-effective manner. Similarly, agency staff work closely with the WSIB to facilitate the payment of premiums that are due and to ensure that employers pay their share in a sustainable way that complements their on-going business needs.

During 2023-24, there were 190 representation cases opened and 291 closed. This compares to 195 opened in 2022-2023 and 359 closed and 234 opened in 2021-22. This is an updated metric, reflecting milestones in the team's representation work.

Negotiations continue to be a preferred interim resolution step, since they usually offer a more timely, more efficient solution. In 2023-2024 the OEA resolved 74% of disputes without a hearing, compared to last year's 67% and 60% in 2021-22. Since OEA staff have no direct control over whether an employer and/or worker agrees to a negotiated settlement, the agency is pleased to contribute to the lessening of conflict within the WSI system through the resolution of issues without an associated hearing.

While these efforts often successfully conclude cases at the Board operating level, many cases do proceed to appeal. Also, some employers do not learn of the availability of the OEA's pre-paid services until their case has progressed to the appeal stage. In a system where most appeals are initiated by the injured person, OEA representation ensures that employers' perspectives are represented.

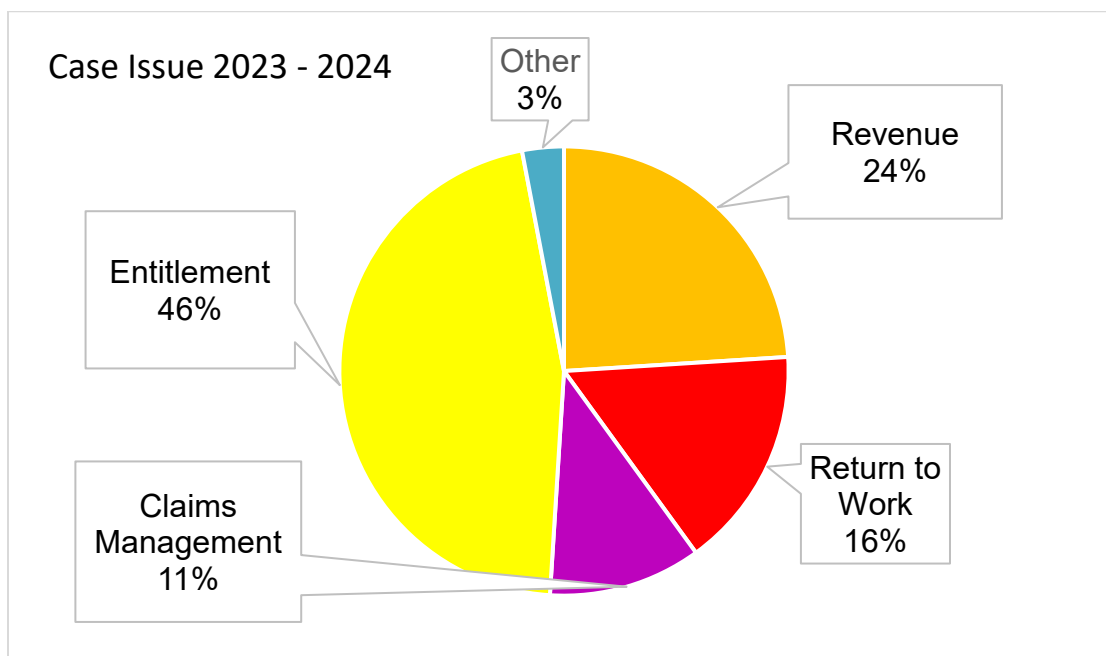
Figure 3



When employers contact the agency for representation, the focus is most often entitlement issues at the system's appeal levels, which comprised 46% of issues (41% in 2022-23). Revenue is in second place as the primary issue for 24% of employers

(also 24% last year). Return to Work 16% and Claims Management 11% are the remaining key areas of interest for representation.

Figure 4 Issues in Representation Cases



Representation Services, OHSA S. 50

The OEA also provides advice and representation services for Ontario employers facing Section 50 reprisal complaints under the Ontario *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

The OEA provided the following services to the employer community in 2023-2024:

- 71 information and advice calls
- 14 file representation cases

Representation cases are time sensitive due to the time limits at the OLRB process to respond to complaints. Cases that proceed to the OLRB start with a mediation and generally resolve at that stage. Settlements range from an employer providing a Letter of Employment to a (usually small) monetary payment. In most settled cases, the employer receives a full and final release of any and all claims arising from employment or the termination thereof.

- the distribution of client contact ranged across the province as follows, Northern 2%; Southwestern 33%; Eastern 18%; Central 47%

Education and Raising Awareness of OEA Services

The agency's education work raises awareness and understanding about the WSI system, OHSA s. 50 reprisals and the services that the OEA offers to employers, prepaid through WSIB insurance premiums.

The OEA's multi-channel approach makes information available to employers in a variety of formats that are relevant and accessible. The OEA shares updates, practical tips and information with Ontario employers and stakeholders about our areas of specialty using webinars, our website (www.employeradviser.ca), social media via LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) @askOEA, and e-mailed newsletters. The use of technology allows the OEA to maximize its resources to cost effectively and efficiently reach out to Ontario employers, share information about WSI responsibilities and raise awareness about how the OEA can help.

It is an ongoing challenge for the OEA to remain 'front-of-mind' as a primary resource for Ontario employers about their workers' compensation issues. The key outreach and marketing goal for OEA is to increase awareness across all business sectors of our prepaid (free), expert, and confidential services and sustaining that awareness among our client community. During 2023-2024, 52% of client interactions were from a first time OEA user; and the OEA is proud to offered advice and representation to repeat clients and earn referrals within the business community.

Website, www.employeradviser.ca

The website ensures that employers have ready access to the information they need to meet their WSI responsibilities. Employers have options to reach out for assistance through a contact form on the website, our email address (askOEA@ontario.ca), and our toll free and local phone numbers.

Live Webinars

In 2023-2024, the OEA offered live webinars to the employer community. Our webinars cover such topics as completing a Form 7, return to work, claims management and mental stress. The webinars were presented in a series during November-December 2023 and February-April 2024, resulting in 16 webinars offered to employers during this fiscal year. Employers could choose to watch the whole series or dip into topics of interest. And, for the February-April 2024 series, we refreshed our content by creating a new webinar and consolidated two return to work webinars into one presentation.

The OEA's webinars are an effective and popular way to fulfill the OEA education mandate, directly providing relevant information to employers and aligning with the convenience of virtual meetings. This approach was positively received, attracting 13,624 registrants.

When participants answered the question "Did the information session help you understand the topic?", 89% rated the session a 4 or 5, on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 representing "completely". In addition, when asked "Overall, how would you rate the information session?", 87% of the participants who completed the survey rated it 4 or 5, with 5 representing the highest rating. OEA live webinars are scheduled and advertised using e-bulletins, LinkedIn and X (Twitter) @askOEA.

E-Bulletins

The OEA e-bulletins are sent periodically and to promote webinar series. The distribution list consists of email addresses obtained from the WSIB from employers who signed up for e-services, along with clients of the OEA and presentation/webinar participants. Employers can also sign up for e-bulletin subscriptions while visiting the OEA website.

LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter)

The agency is leveraging Twitter and LinkedIn to share updates and practical reminders in French and English. The OEA has approximately 2,500 followers on X (Twitter) and a growing following on LinkedIn. New posts are available several days a week and include updates on changes in WSIB policy, 'did you know' facts from the OEA website, notices for upcoming webinars and special items when the Board issues news releases on such things as premium changes for the upcoming year.

Employer Associations

The OEA management team actively participates in meetings and events of stakeholder organizations, including the Ontario Business Coalition, the Ontario Mining Association, and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

System Partners

The WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program (HSEP) provides employers with an opportunity to invest in health and safety culture while earning rebates on WSIB premiums. Employers registered in the program work with approved program providers to develop an action plan in different areas of focus. As part of our webinar series, the OEA offers a return-to-work information session with employer tools that meets the educational requirements of the Excellence Program. And, the OEA was recognized as a return-to-work subject matter expert by this WSIB team.

More generally, the OEA engages with the WSIB at all levels of the business: claims, revenue, appeals, policy consultations and stakeholder relations. The agency values and nurtures these connections. OEA staff also engage with the WSIAT on a regular basis, and our expert staff have appreciated the Tribunal's training and stakeholder sessions. The OEA also works with the Office of the Worker Adviser as opportunities arise.

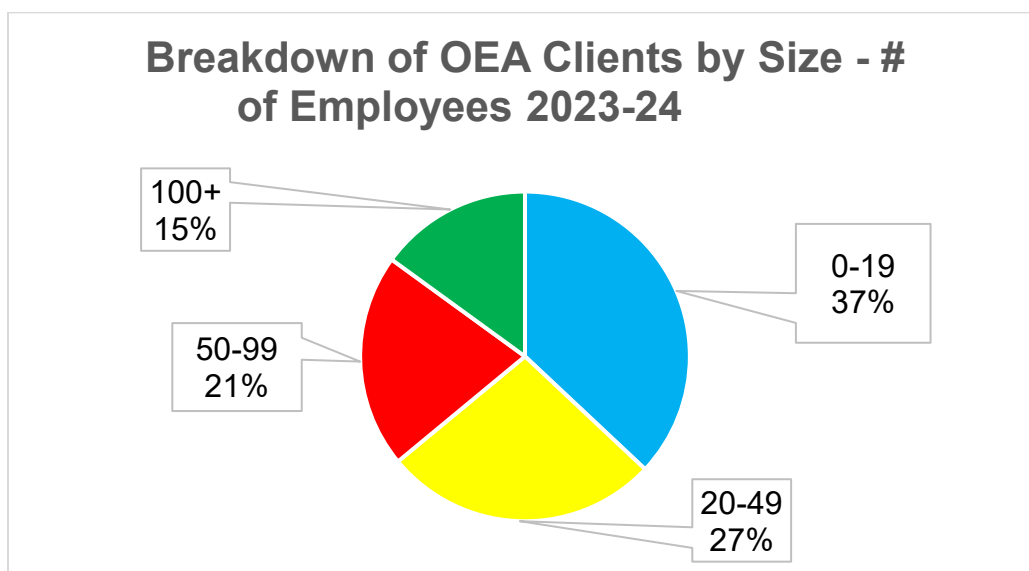
OEA Clients

Since the OEA's mandate is to serve primarily those employers with fewer than 100 workers, the merit review undertaken before the OEA represents an employer includes determining their size. It is not administratively viable to screen employers contacting the OEA Advice Centre in order to deny advice to those with more than 100 employees; and, providing advice to all Ontario employers is beneficial to the system overall.

During the year, 26% of all advice was provided to employers with 100 plus employees and 15% of OEA clients provided with representation services had more than 100 employees. These rates are consistent with prior years.

Figure 5 provides the breakdown of all OEA clients by numbers of employees for 2023-24.

Figure 5



An industry sector view of OEA clients in Figure 6 is based on WSIB classifications. The construction industry continues to be the agency's largest client group at 44% and reflects the significant impact of Board policies on this sector.

Figure 6

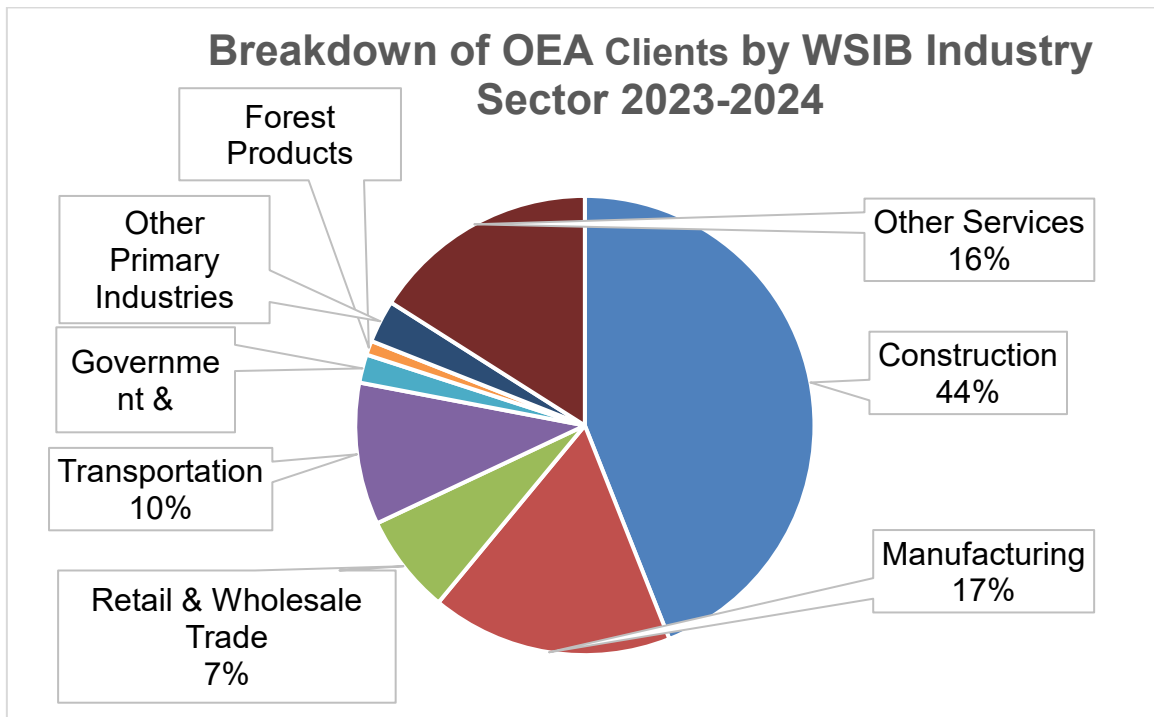
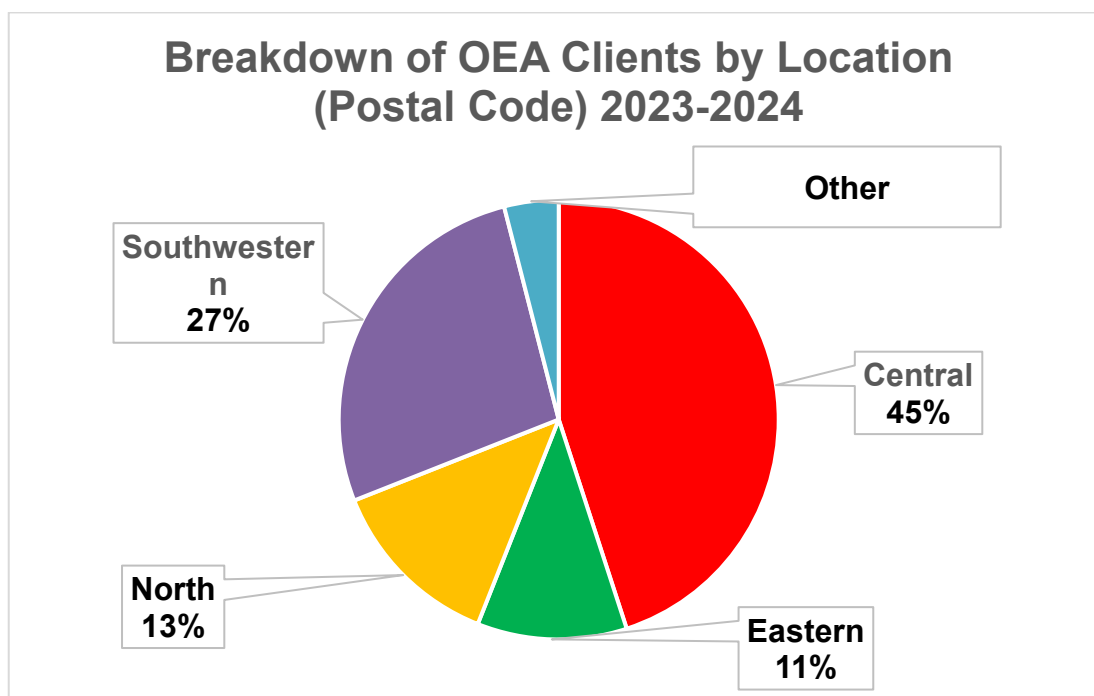


Figure 7 provides the breakdown of the regional distribution of OEA clients for 2023-2024. The distribution is similar to last year. Employer Specialists are located around the province to provide representation services to employers in their local area.

Figure 7



Client Satisfaction

Client satisfaction is assessed for both the Advice Centre and Representation services.

Feedback on advice provided by the Advice Centre is a 98% client satisfaction rate, as measured through random telephone surveys. Clients willing to recommend the services of the OEA to other employers is also 98%.

The client satisfaction feedback surveys for representation services indicated that 94% of employers were satisfied with their OEA representation, 98% also said that they would recommend agency services to others. Both continue to be higher than the

target level of 90% and indicate a client community that is appreciative of the work done on their behalf by agency staff.

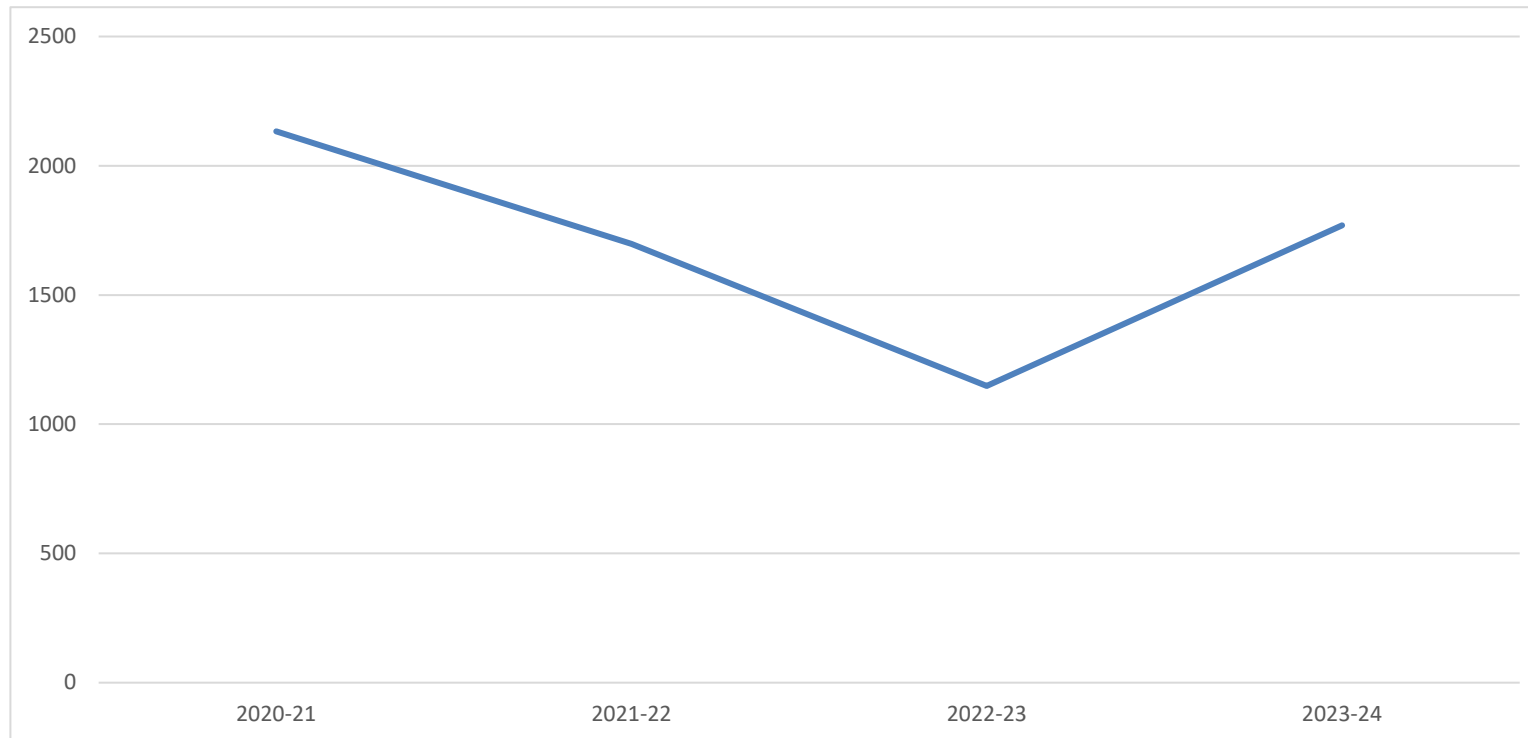
The current client satisfaction metrics are based on e-mail surveys and telephone surveys using responses from a cross-section of Intake Advisers and Employer Specialists. Employers represented in a case are only eligible to be surveyed once a file is closed.

The OEA is proud it can annually report this high level of satisfaction and is very pleased that clients value the services that are being provided. Customer satisfaction and client service is of the utmost importance to the OEA.

Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024

KEY ACTIVITY: ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION SERVICES

PERFORMANCE MEASURE FOR 2023-24 -- ADVICE PROVIDED TO EMPLOYERS



Number Of Advice
Provided

2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
2133	1698	1148	1769

Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024

What does the graph show?

Advice numbers increased compared to last fiscal year and were supported in 2021-22 and 2023-24 through interactions arising from the agency's successful webinar series. Advice numbers capture the different topics raised by clients during interactions to track in more detail the key issues to employers.

Agency Contribution

The OEA provides advice and information to employers about their WSI questions and issues and supports employers with their questions about s. 50 OHSA reprisal matters. This program helps employers navigate the WSI system.

2023-24 Commitment

The agency achieved its goal to increase advice services by 5-10% compared to 2022-23.

Long-term Target

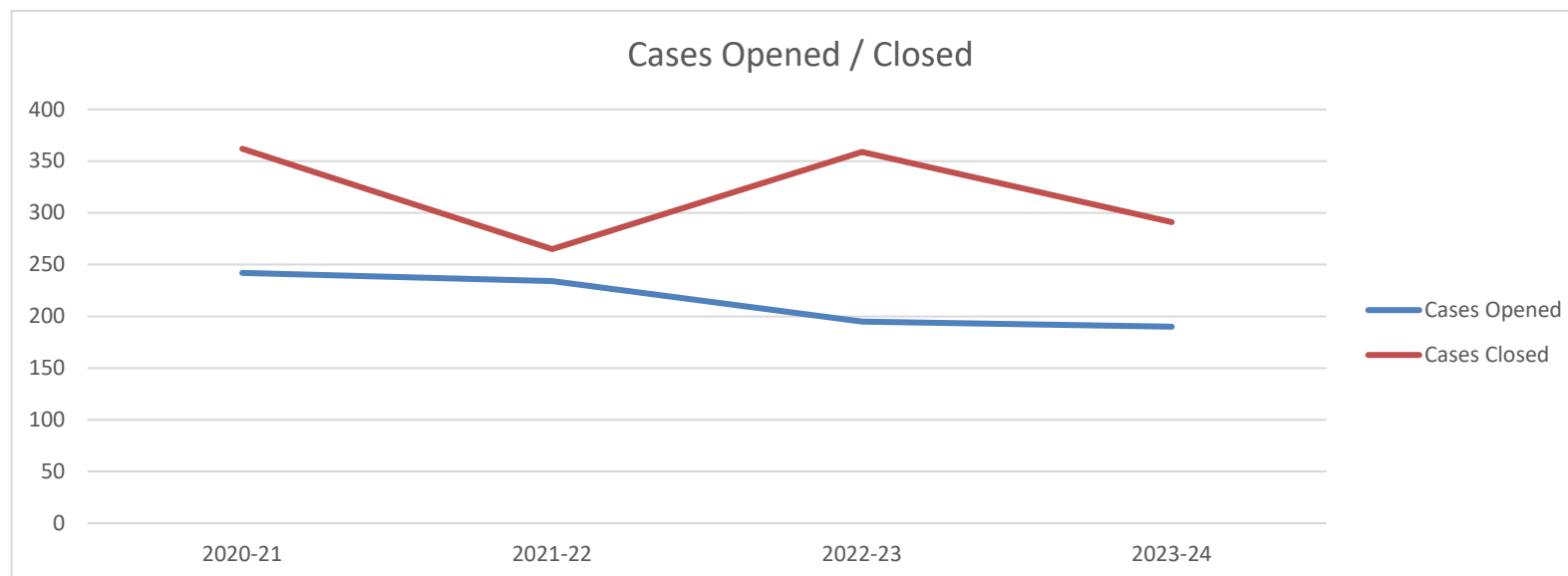
The long-term target is to return to pre-pandemic advice numbers.

Proposed for Publication	Internal Use Only	☒ Existing Measure	New Measure
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Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024

Key Activity: Advice and Representation Services

Performance measure for 2023-24 – Opened and Closed Representation Cases



	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Cases Opened	242	234	195	190
Cases Closed	362	265	359	291

Agency Contribution

The agency's expert, specialist staff provide representation before administrative tribunals in WSIB matters and OHSA unlawful reprisals.

Employers value the services in specialized areas of law, our services are pre-paid through WSIB premiums, and enable small-mid sized business owners to focus their time and energy on their business.

Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024

What Does the Graph Show?

Representation cases opened decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of the Rate Framework, the WSIB's new complex actuarial calculation to determine Schedule 1 employer premium rates.

2023-24 Commitment

Opened cases remained steady in 2023-24 compared to our 2022-23 experience and did not increase, not meeting the target of a 5-10% increase.

Long-term Target

The long-term target is to return to pre-pandemic representation numbers.

Proposed for Publication	Internal Use Only	☒ Existing Measure	New Measure
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Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024

KEY ACTIVITIES: EDUCATION AND INFORMATION TO EMPLOYERS

PERFORMANCE MEASURE FOR 2023 -24: WEBINAR SESSION REGISTRATION



Appendix A: OEA Performance Measures 2023-2024

Agency Contribution

The OEA is a key source of information for employers about WSIB matters, including claims issues, registering a business with WSIB and premium rates, and OHSA unlawful reprisals.

The agency has developed and presented a series of webinar sessions that are presented live to share information with employers, raise awareness of responsibilities and draw attention to OEA services.

What does the graph show?

Webinars are a successful approach to provide information about WSIB matters and OHSA unlawful reprisal issues to employers and to raise awareness of OEA services. The webinars consistently draw an audience of Ontario employers. Sessions are presented by the agency’s expert, specialized staff.

2023-24 Commitments

The agency met the commitment to offer two (2) series of webinars. There was a fall 2023 series and a winter 2024 series. The winter series extended into the next fiscal year, completing in April 2024. During the year, the agency also revised webinar content.

Long-Term Target

The long-term target is to offer two (2) webinar series each year, with updates in response to feedback and questions. Note that some years will focus on updating the content, resulting in fewer webinars offered during that year.

Proposed for Publication	Internal Use Only	☒ Existing Measure	New Measure
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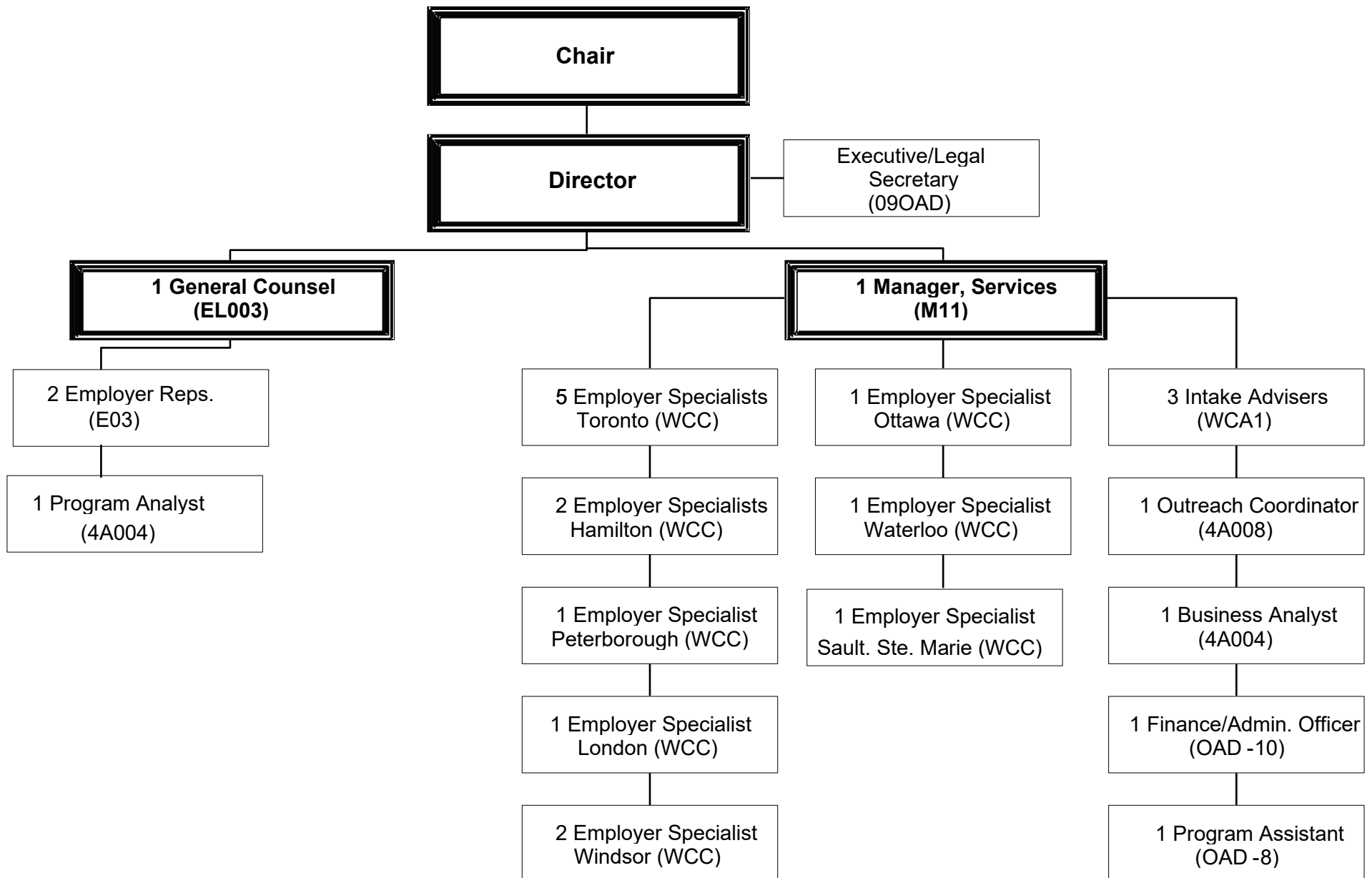
Appendix B: OEA Financial Report 2023 - 2024

All Figures in \$000.0 thousand (except “% of Variance” column)

Account	Expenditure Estimates	In-year Board Approvals	Year-end Budget	Year-end Actuals	Variance	% Variance
Salaries & Wages	2,753.6	(0.91)	2,744.5	2,720.4	24.1	1.0%
Benefits	734.20	(50.0)	684.2	704.2	(20.0)	-2.9%
ODOE:			-			
Transportation & Communication	148.7	(100.0)	48.7	35.1	13.6	28.0%
Services (Including Lease)	292.9	(150.0)	142.9	128.3	14.6	10.2%
Supplies & Equipment	89.8	(20.0)	69.8	17.0	52.8	75.7%
Total ODOE	531.4	(270.0)	261.4.6	180.3	81.1	31.0%
Grand Total	4,019.2	(329.1)	3,690.1	3,604.9	85.2	2.4%

Reporting of Appointee Remuneration		
Appointee	Total Annual Remuneration	Per Diem Remuneration Rate
Dimitrios (Jim) Dimanis, Chair	\$1,462.50	\$225

Appendix C: OEA Organization Chart



Appendix C: OEA Organization Chart

Chair

- Director

Director

- 1 General Counsel (EL003)
- 1 Manager, Services (M11)
- 1 Executive / Legal Secretary (09OAD)

General Counsel

- 2 Employer Representatives (E03)
- 1 Program Analyst (4A004)

Manager, Services

- 5 Employer Specialists – Toronto (WCC)
- 2 Employer Specialists – Hamilton (WCC)
- 1 Employer Specialists – Peterborough (WCC)
- 1 Employer Specialists – London (WCC)
- 2 Employer Specialists – Windsor (WCC)
- 1 Employer Specialists – Ottawa (WCC)
- 1 Employer Specialists – Waterloo (WCC)
- 1 Employer Specialists – Sault. Ste. Marie (WCC)
- 3 Intake Advisers (WCA1)
- 1 Outreach Coordinator (4A008)
- 1 Business Analyst (4A004)
- 1 Finance / Admin Officer (OAD-10)
- 1 Program Assistant (OAD-8)

Contact Us

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