



**Office of the
Worker Adviser**

**Office of the Worker Adviser
Business Plan
2026-2027
to
2028-2029**

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Executive Summary

The Office of the Worker Adviser (OWA) provides free, confidential services to non-unionized workers and their survivors in Ontario, offering education, advice, and representation on workplace insurance claims and appeals under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* (WSIA), and on reprisal complaints under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA). Services are delivered through 14 offices across Ontario, a toll-free phone line, and the OWA website.

Over the past two years, the OWA has transformed its service delivery model through centralization and modernization, significantly reducing wait times and positioning the agency to offer same-day service by the first quarter of 2026–27.

Building on this success, OWA's strategic direction for the next three years focuses on maintaining responsiveness while improving the quality of casework and achieving timely resolution for the workers we represent.

This strategy emphasizes modernization, workforce development, and fair access. Digital innovation and process improvements will make services more accessible and efficient, while an integrated case management approach will strengthen oversight and support timely case progression. Investments in staff training and experiential learning will build capacity and resilience, ensuring continuous improvement and financial stewardship. At the same time, the OWA will advance access to justice by improving cultural literacy, language supports, and digital outreach to meet the unique needs of Ontario's workers.

Together, these initiatives reflect a vision of an organization that is responsive, accessible, and innovative—delivering timely, high-quality services and reinforcing the OWA's role as a trusted partner in Ontario's workplace health, safety, and insurance system.

Organizational Overview

The Office of the Worker Adviser (OWA) is an independent agency of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development (MLITSD) and our vision is to:

- Be a leader in education, advice, and representation, in workplace insurance and occupational health and safety reprisal matters.
- Provide a vital public service that contributes to the effective functioning of Ontario's workplace health, safety, and insurance system.
- Contribute to improving workplace health, safety, and insurance through community and system partnerships.

The OWA is led by a Chair, appointed through an Order in Council, who is accountable to the Minister in fulfilling its mandate. Its operations are managed by a director, supported by a management team and a General Counsel, with staff that includes lawyers, paralegals, administrative and corporate services professionals.

Workplace Safety and Insurance

Under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* (WSIA), the OWA is mandated to educate, advise, and represent non-unionized workers and their survivors on workplace insurance claims and appeals.

The OWA delivers services through 14 offices across Ontario, a toll-free phone line, and its website. Staff provide comprehensive support, including legal advice, client meetings, hearings, mediations, and representation throughout the appeals process.

Education is offered via printed materials, webinars, and presentations, and the OWA partners with community organizations for referrals and additional supports. Licensed legal professionals provide free, confidential advice on issues such as negative WSIB decisions or return-to-work meetings and refer clients to relevant programs when needed.

Representation is provided before the WSIB, WSIAT, and in related forums such as early dispute resolution meetings. Cases are reviewed to ensure a reasonable chance of success, with priority given to occupational cancers, severely disabled workers, and those in psychological or financial crisis. OWA emphasizes timely, effective advocacy through partnerships and alternative dispute resolution opportunities.

Occupational Health and Safety Reprisals

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), the OWA is mandated to educate, advise, and represent non-unionized workers who face reprisals—such as threats or negative actions by an employer—for exercising or attempting to enforce their health and safety rights.

OWA services are delivered across Ontario and are accessible through a toll-free phone line and the OWA website. Education is provided through responses to inquiries, printed and digital materials, and email resources to help workers understand their rights and available processes.

Advisory services include case reviews to determine eligibility for representation, expedited handling of priority issues, and referrals where appropriate. When sufficient evidence exists, OWA prepares and files applications with the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) and advocates for workers through consultations, mediations, hearings, and alternative dispute resolution processes.

Strategic Direction

Over the past two years, the Office of the Worker Adviser (OWA) has transformed its service delivery model by centralizing key functions such as client intake, administrative services, and case assignment. These changes have significantly reduced wait times, and OWA is on track to provide same-day service by the end of the first quarter of the 2026–27 fiscal year. The next phase of our strategy builds on this success, focusing on maintaining responsiveness while improving the quality of casework and achieving timely resolution for the workers we represent.

The coming three years will be defined by modernization and integration. The OWA will strengthen its centralized structure through digital innovation and process improvements that make services more accessible and efficient. This includes introducing secure online tools, streamlining administrative processes, and embedding a framework for proactive case management. These enhancements will allow us to identify barriers to case progression, improve the quality of submissions, and ensure that legal resources are used effectively to deliver better outcomes for clients.

Modernization alone is not enough—our strategy also invests in people. The OWA will expand learning and development opportunities to build staff capacity, support change management, and foster continuous improvement. By equipping our workforce with the skills and tools they need, we will sustain timely service delivery and uphold the highest standards of representation.

Finally, the OWA is committed to advancing access to justice to meet the unique needs of Ontario's workers. This means improving cultural literacy, language supports, and digital accessibility, while ensuring our communication channels are clear and user-friendly. We will also strengthen our digital presence to raise awareness of our services and reach more workers through targeted outreach.

Together, these initiatives represent more than operational improvements—they reflect a vision of an organization that is responsive, welcoming, and innovative. By combining technology, process integration, and workforce development, the OWA will deliver timely, high-quality services and reinforce its role as a trusted partner in Ontario's workplace health, safety, and insurance system.

Action Plan

The following chart outlines an overview of the actions that will be taken to achieve the OWA's business objectives.

It is noted that the tactics listed in the following chart are not all new; however, an ongoing improvement approach is being envisioned to meet the business plan strategic objectives.

Objective	Key Actions
Stabilize Centralized Structure	- Continue optimizing centralized intake and case assignment to maintain timely offers of service. - Centralize physical mail handling to improve efficiency and accessibility. - Enhance administrative capacity to support advisers with case-related tasks and enable timely case progression. - Introduce processes to review complex and slow-moving cases, identify barriers, and improve quality of submissions.
Enhance Digital Service Delivery	- Launch secure client portal to provide convenient access to services. - Implement e-signature capability to accelerate document processing. - Deploy a seamless scheduling system to reduce walk-ins and improve client experience.
Invest in Workforce Development	- Deliver targeted training programs to strengthen technical and legal expertise. - Create experiential learning opportunities to build confidence in new processes. - Continue knowledge sharing through case conferences, strategy guides, and focused learning sessions. - Implement peer support and mentoring programs to foster career development and resilience.

Objective	Key Actions
Improve Access to Justice	• Collect key data to understand client demographics and service gaps. • Train staff in cultural literacy and accommodation practices to ensure broad-based service delivery. • Review communication channels for clarity and accessibility; develop practical self-help tools.
Increase Public Awareness	• Implement digital media strategy to raise awareness about OWA and worker rights. • Implement OWA’s outreach plan to build new partnerships with vulnerable groups and system partners.
Demonstrate Financial Stewardship	• Monitor cost efficiencies from centralization and modernization initiatives. • Optimize resource allocation to ensure sustainability and impact.

Table 1 - Chart of objectives and key actions

Environmental Scan

The OWA operates in a dynamic environment shaped by both internal and external factors, as well as emerging trends that influence service delivery and organizational priorities.

Internally, recent centralization and modernization efforts have streamlined operations, but they also highlight the need to strengthen workforce capacity and address training gaps. Technology readiness is advancing, with initiatives such as a client portal and e-signature capabilities positioning OWA to deliver more efficient and accessible services. However, continued investment in staff development and digital infrastructure remains critical to sustaining these improvements.

Externally, economic pressures, the changing nature of work, and any policy updates at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board require OWA to adapt its services to evolving workplaces and compliance frameworks. Demographic shifts—such as increased immigration and an aging workforce—are reshaping client needs and expectations. At the same time, broader economic challenges are placing additional strain on injured workers, increasing the demand for timely and effective advocacy.

Emerging trends further underscore the importance of innovation. Clients increasingly expect digital service options, while advancements in AI and automation present opportunities to enhance case management and improve efficiency.

Together, these factors create both challenges and opportunities for the OWA. By leveraging modernization efforts, embracing technology, and responding to demographic and legislative shifts, the OWA can strengthen its role as a trusted advocate and ensure equitable access to justice for Ontario's workers.

Risk Identification, Impact and Mitigation

As part of our planning process and responsible use of resources, the OWA regularly reviews business risks, their impacts, and likelihood.

Risk Level Definitions

- **High Risk:** Critical to compliance, reputation, or service delivery; failure to act could have significant legal, financial, or operational consequences.
- **Medium Risk:** Important for modernization or best practices; delays have moderate impact but do not immediately threaten compliance or core operations.
- **Low Risk:** Already funded; minimal impact if delayed or not implemented

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Cybersecurity and Privacy Risks Increased digitalization (client portal, e-signatures) raises data security concerns.	High	• Adopt government-approved security protocols. • Conduct regular audits and penetration testing. • Train staff on privacy compliance.
Technology Implementation Delays Delays in launching client portal, e-signatures, or central mail system could affect modernization goals. Delays in Human Resource processes including approvals and hiring could slow down centralization and modernization initiatives.	Medium	• Develop phased implementation plan with clear milestones. • Engage vendor support and internal IT early. • Monitor progress and prioritize higher impact activities.
Staff Capacity and Change Fatigue Workforce may experience challenges adapting to new centralized processes and digital tools.	Medium	• Provide comprehensive training and change management support. • Offer experiential learning opportunities. • Maintain open communication and feedback channels.

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Public Awareness Campaign Underperformance Digital outreach may not achieve desired engagement or client growth.	Medium	• Monitor campaign analytics. • Adjust strategy based on performance data. • Leverage partnerships for broader reach.
Financial Constraints Budget limitations could restrict modernization initiatives or outreach campaigns.	Low	• Prioritize initiatives based on Return on Investment. • Leverage cost efficiencies from centralization. • Explore partnerships for shared resources.

Table 2 - Chart of risks and mitigations

Performance Measures

The 2025-2026 achievements are forecasted out based on data available from April 1, 2025 to November 30, 2025 and are subject to change based on year-end results and data quality reviews before publishing the annual report and next business plan.

Workplace Safety and Insurance

The OWA contributes to the timely resolution of disputes within the workplace insurance system through education, advisory, and representation services, and system partnerships. This supports workers and the social and economic well-being of the people of Ontario through orderly and effective dispute resolution in contentious cases.

The performance measures listed below reflect the OWA’s client journey and the different services we provide as part of education, advice, and representation.

#	Key Activity	2026-27 Commitment	Long-term Target
1	Number of New Requests A new request is the start of a client’s journey with the OWA whether by phone, email, or in-person and all clients receive general information about WSIB processes and OWA services.	Increase of 10% over previous fiscal year	10% increase annually
2	Wait times for Summary Advice Summary Advice is specific legal advice provided by a Worker Adviser to a client about their circumstances.	Meet or exceed target of 80%	Provide advice to clients in three business days in 80% of cases
3	Wait times for Offer to Review Case An offer to review a client’s case begins the process of the OWA requesting a copy of the client’s WSIB claim file(s).	Eliminate wait time	Stabilize new service delivery model to no longer require a waitlist

#	Key Activity	2026-27 Commitment	Long-term Target
4	Wait times for Case Review Case Reviews are conducted by Worker Advisers to determine whether to make an offer of representation to a client with their WSIB claim or appeal.	Meet or exceed target of 80%	Provide case reviews in 30 days in 80% of cases
5	Total Number of Written and Oral Submissions made to the WSIB and WSIAT Submissions are made to the WSIB and WSIAT on behalf of clients that provide legal, medical, and operational reasons why a WSIB decision should be reconsidered, or an appeal should be allowed.	Meet or exceed target of 1,000	1,000 submissions annually
6	Client Satisfaction Rate At the end of a client's journey with the OWA they receive a survey about their experience and satisfaction. This rate reports clients who were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the service(s) they received.	Meet or exceed target of 80%	80%
7	Employee Engagement Survey Rate In most years, the Ontario Public Service releases employee engagement surveys and pulse surveys. This rate reports OWA employees who completed these surveys.	Meet or exceed target of 75%	75%

Table 3 - Summary of Workplace Safety and Insurance Measures

Number of New Requests

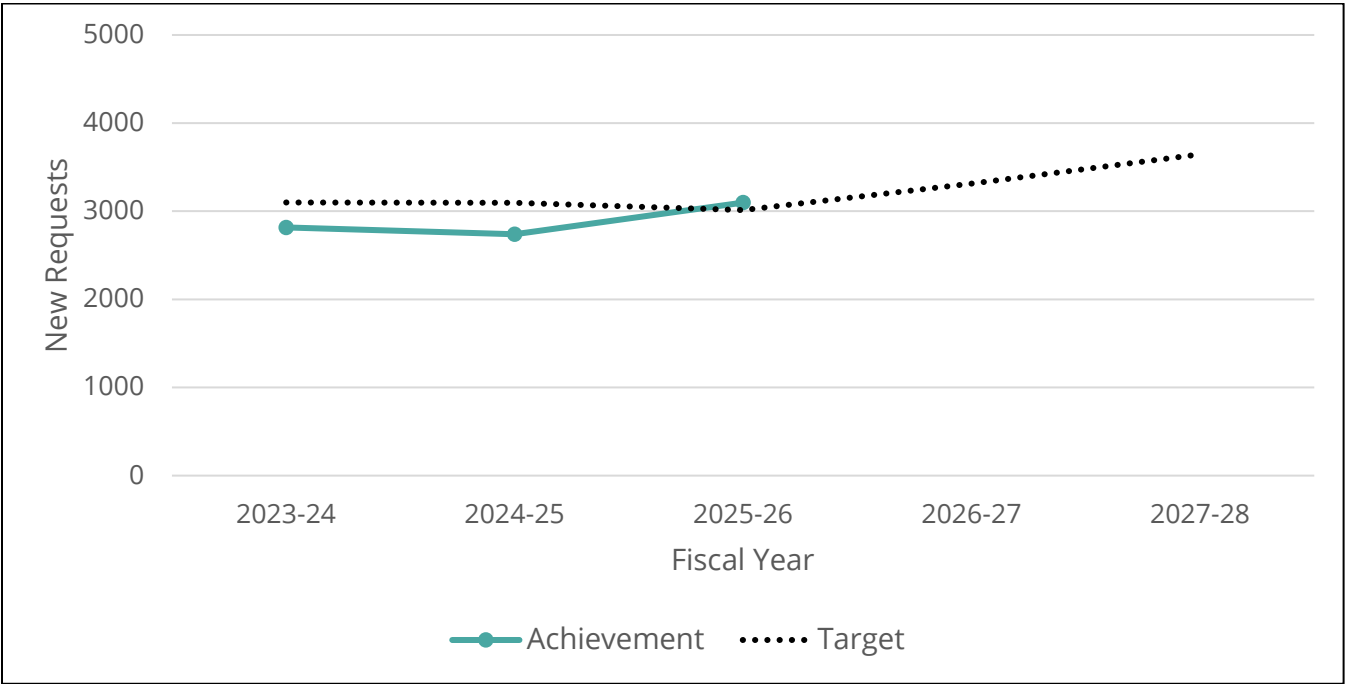


Figure 1 - Graph showing the number of new requests

Agency Contribution

The OWA contributes to the timely resolution of disputes within the workplace insurance system through education, advisory, and representation services, and system partnerships. This supports workers and the social and economic well-being of the people of Ontario through orderly and effective dispute resolution in contentious cases.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the total number of new requests the OWA received or expects to receive. This measure’s achievement depends on the success of community outreach and system partnerships to raise awareness of OWA services.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is to increase the number of new requests by 10%.
For 2025-2026, the OWA is forecasting to be slightly above the target over the previous fiscal year’s actuals.

Wait times for Summary Advice

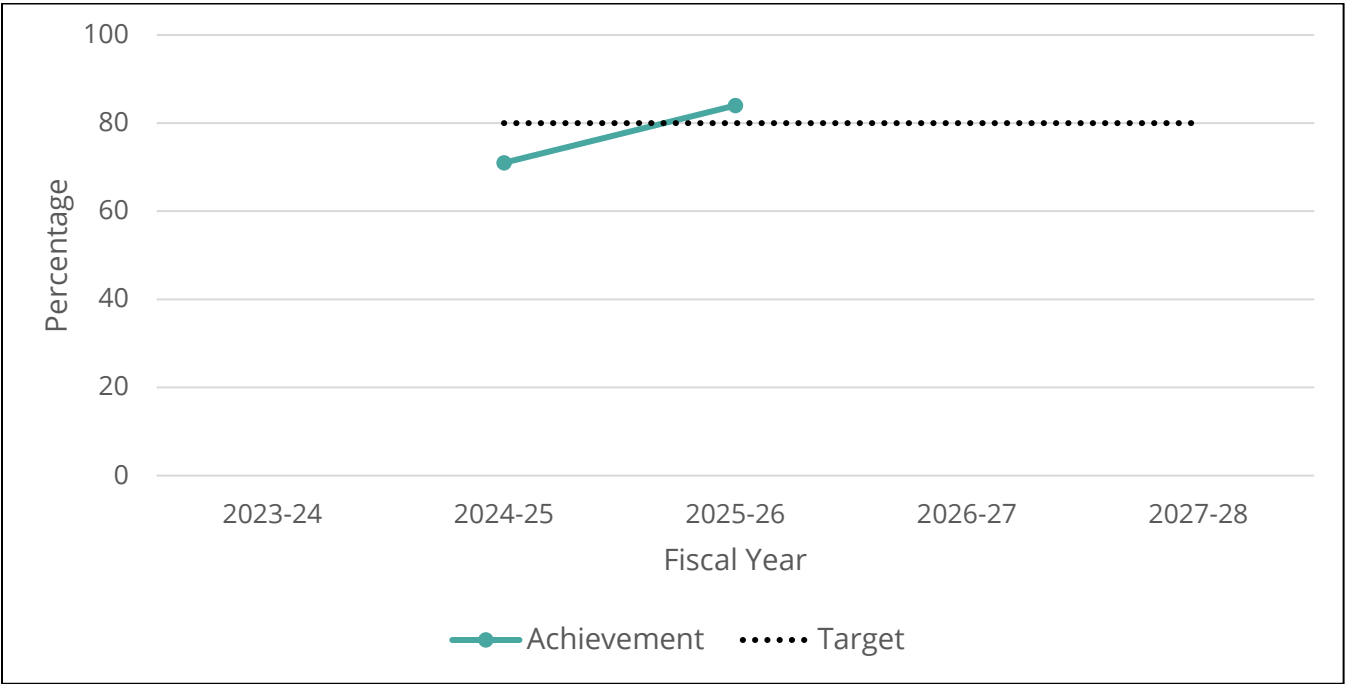


Figure 2 - Graph showing wait times for summary advice

Agency Contribution

The OWA provides free, confidential, and professional legal advice to Ontario workers who have received a negative decision from the WSIB, have an imminent meeting including return to work, or would benefit from speaking to a Worker Adviser about their circumstances.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the timelines for staff to provide clients with summary advice.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is to complete 80% of the summary advice within three business days.

For 2025-2026, the OWA is currently at an average of two days to complete a summary advice and 84% of clients receiving summary advice in three business days.

Wait times for Offer to Review Case

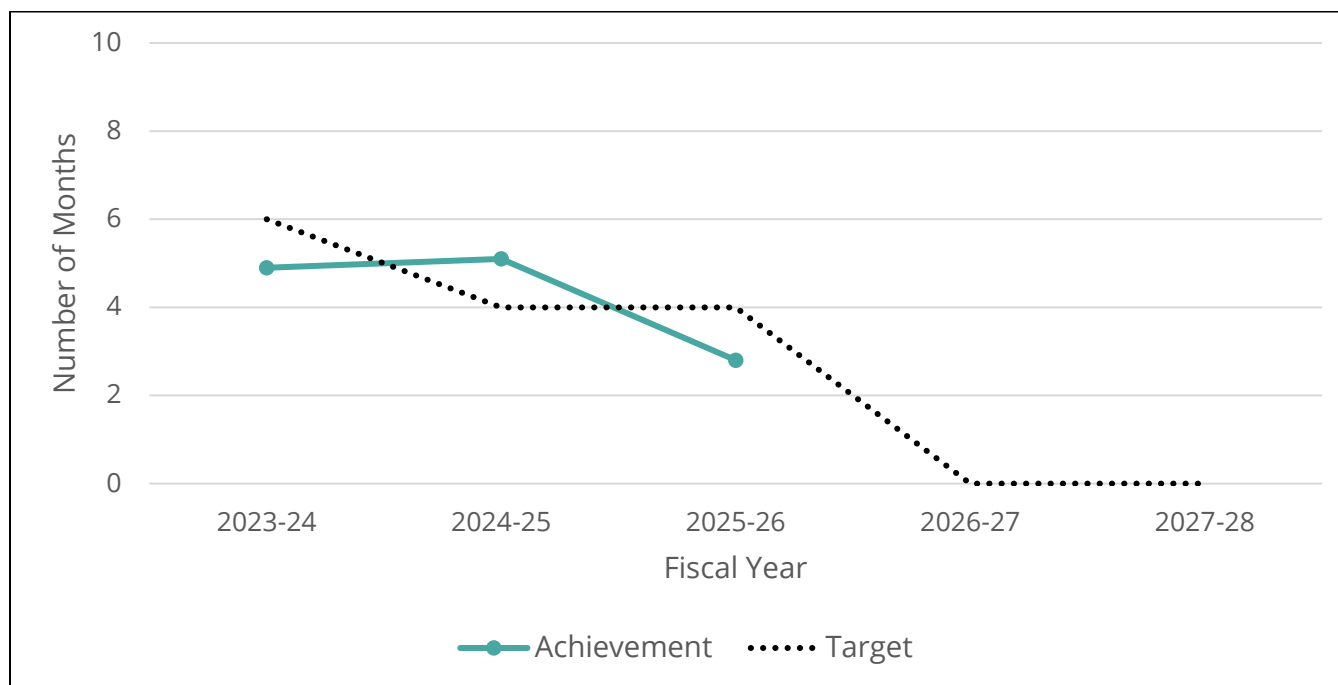


Figure 3 - Graph showing wait times for offer to review case

Agency Contribution

The OWA supports workers by offering representation services on denied claims where there is a reasonable chance of success.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the timelines for the OWA to make an offer to review a client's case.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is to eliminate the wait times for an offer to review case and provide active offers of service to clients.

For 2025-2026, the OWA has steadily decreased the wait times with a current average of 2.8 months.

Wait times for Case Review

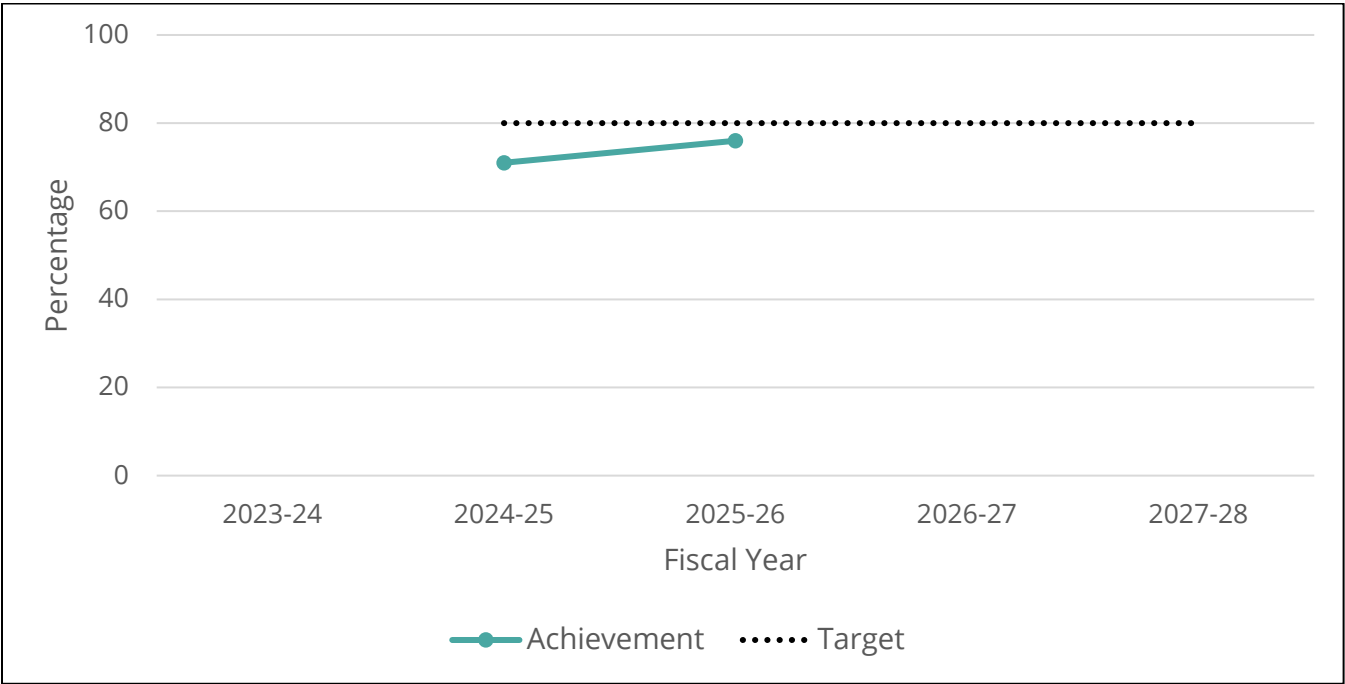


Figure 4 - Graph showing wait times to complete a comprehensive case review

Agency Contribution

The OWA supports workers by offering representation services on denied claims where there is a reasonable chance of success.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the percentage of cases where a comprehensive case review within 30 days of the OWA receiving the client’s WSIB claim file(s).

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2025-2026 commitment is 80% of cases where a Worker Adviser completed a case review in 30 days.
For 2025-2026, the OWA is currently at an average of 24 days to complete a case review with 76% of clients having their cases reviewed within 30 days.

Total Number of Written and Oral Submissions made to the WSIB and WSIAT

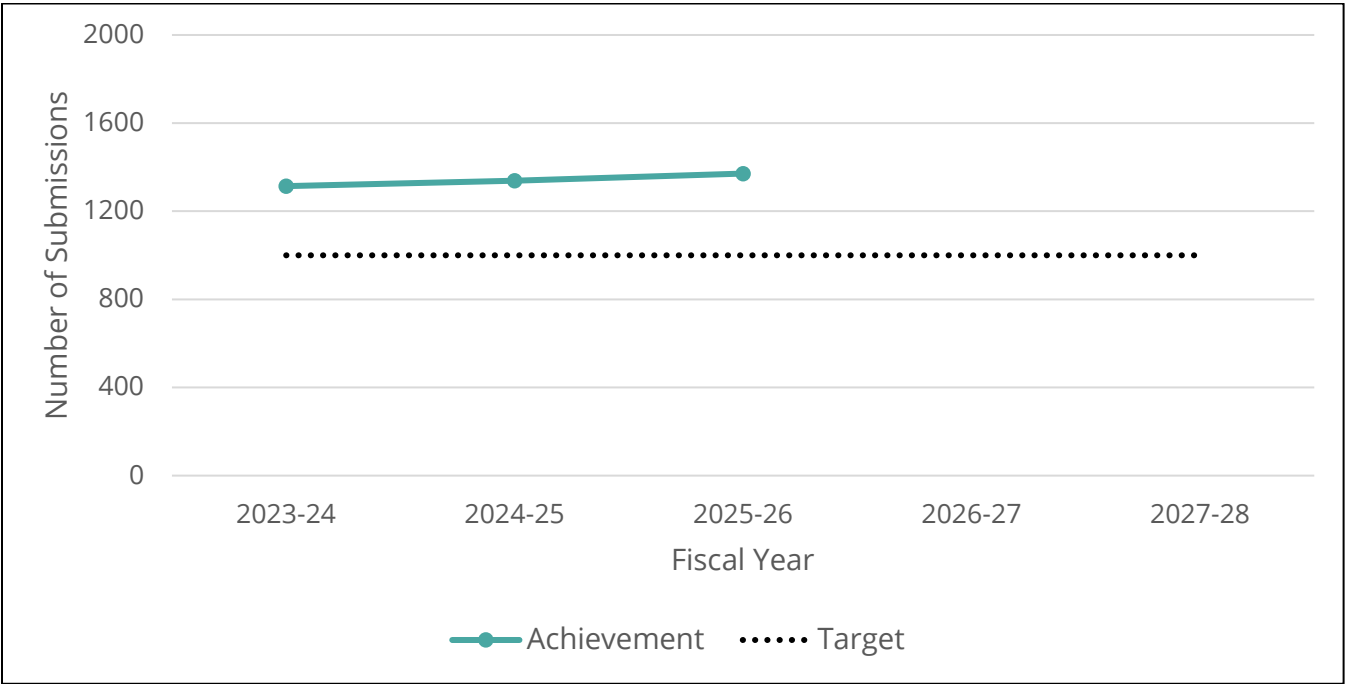


Figure 5 - Graph showing total number of submissions

Agency Contribution

The OWA contributes to the timely resolution of disputes within the workplace insurance system. This supports workers and the social and economic well-being of the people of Ontario through orderly and effective dispute resolution in contentious cases.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the OWA’s number of written and oral submissions at both the WSIB and WSIAT.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is at least 1,000 submissions.

For 2025-2026, the OWA is forecasting to exceed the target and be slightly above the previous year’s count.

Client Satisfaction Rate

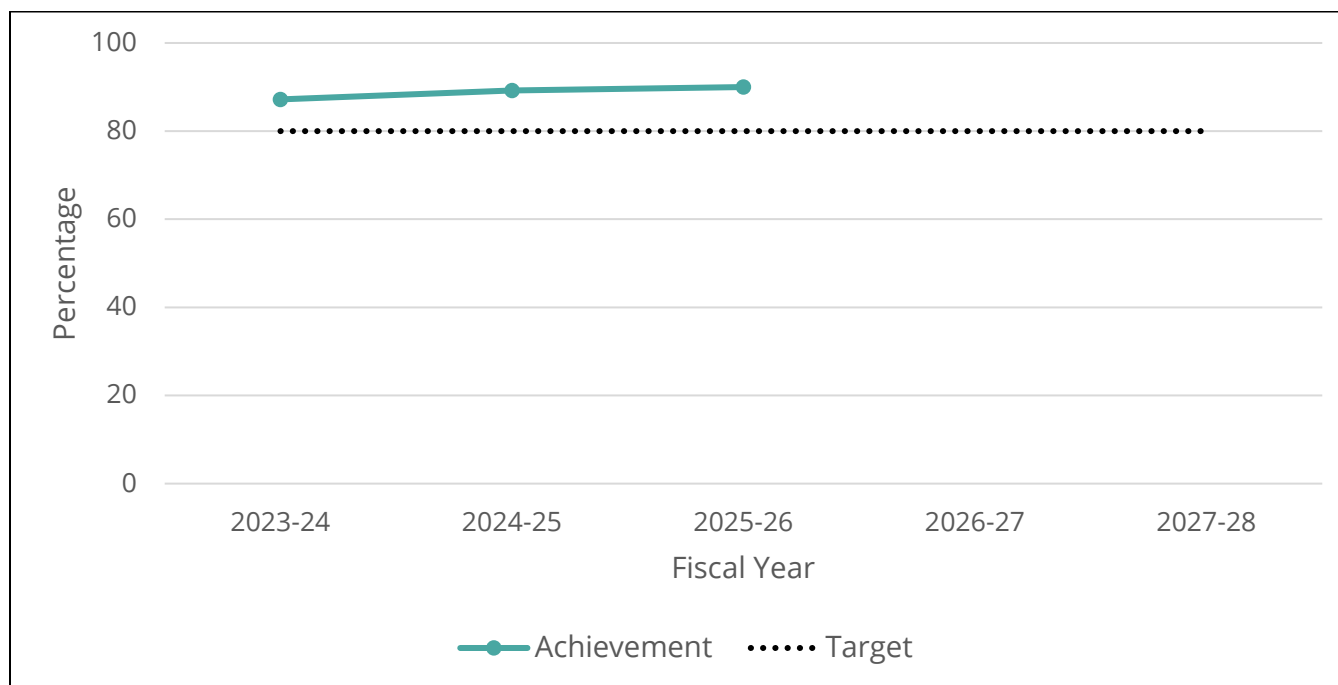


Figure 6 - Graph showing client satisfaction rate

Agency Contribution

The OWA takes pride in the quality of service it provides to clients and continues to incorporate feedback to improve service delivery, enhance learning and development for staff, and highlight other areas of improvement.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the percentage of survey respondents who indicated that they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the service that they received.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is for 80 percent of respondents to indicate that they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the service that they received.

For 2025-2026, the OWA is forecasting to meet or exceed its target. A new client satisfaction survey has been developed for the start of 2026.

Employee Engagement Survey Rate

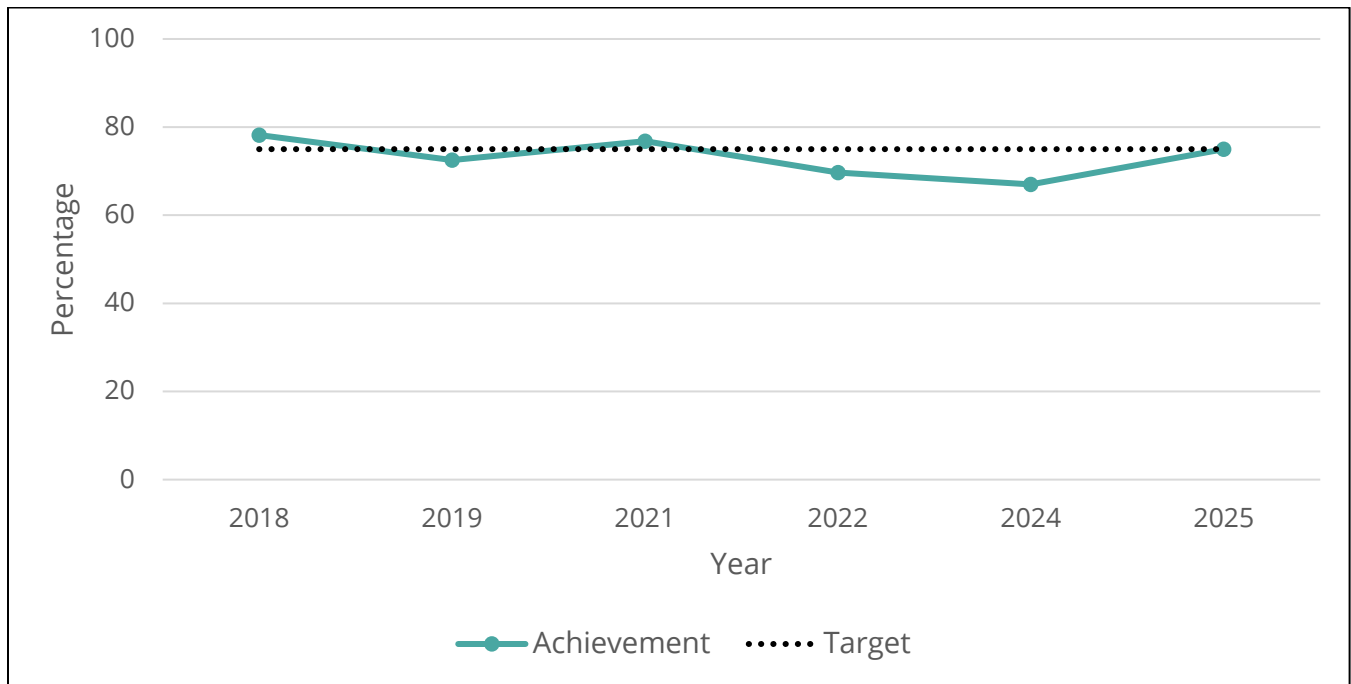


Figure 7 - Graph showing employee engagement survey rate

Agency Contribution

OWA staff need clear guidance, ongoing professional development, and collaborative tools to deliver high-quality services in complex and often contentious cases. The OWA is committed to providing the resources, training, and organizational support necessary to foster an engaged workforce that champions fairness, efficiency, and excellence in dispute resolution. By equipping employees with the tools and confidence to meet client needs, we strengthen both service delivery and the integrity of the system.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the overall average score given by OWA employees across OPS' workplace culture indicators, based on responses to the 2025 OPS-wide employee engagement pulse survey.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is to maintain or exceed a 75% employee engagement score across key workplace culture indicators.

For 2025, the OWA is reviewing feedback received through the survey to increase workforce engagement, specifically, focusing on career development opportunities, and support continuous learning.

Occupational Health and Safety Reprisals

The OWA contributes to the timely resolution of disputes within the occupational health and safety system through education, advisory, and representation services including establishing claims before the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB).

The performance measures listed below reflect the OWA’s commitment to growing our reprisals mandate and resolving cases prior to a formal hearing before the OLRB.

#	Key Activity	2026-27 Commitment	Long-term Target
8	Number of New Requests A new request is the start of a client’s journey with the OWA whether by phone, email, or in-person and all clients receive general information about OLRB processes and OWA services. This is a new measure added in the 2026-2029 business plan.	Increase of 10% over previous fiscal year	10% increase annually
9	Early and Alternative Dispute Resolution Rate Early and alternative dispute resolution is the process of settling OLRB claims prior to a hearing and contributes to the timely resolution of disputes and effective use of resources.	Meet or exceed target of 80%	80%

Table 4 - Summary of Occupational Health and Safety Reprisals Measures

Total Number of New Requests

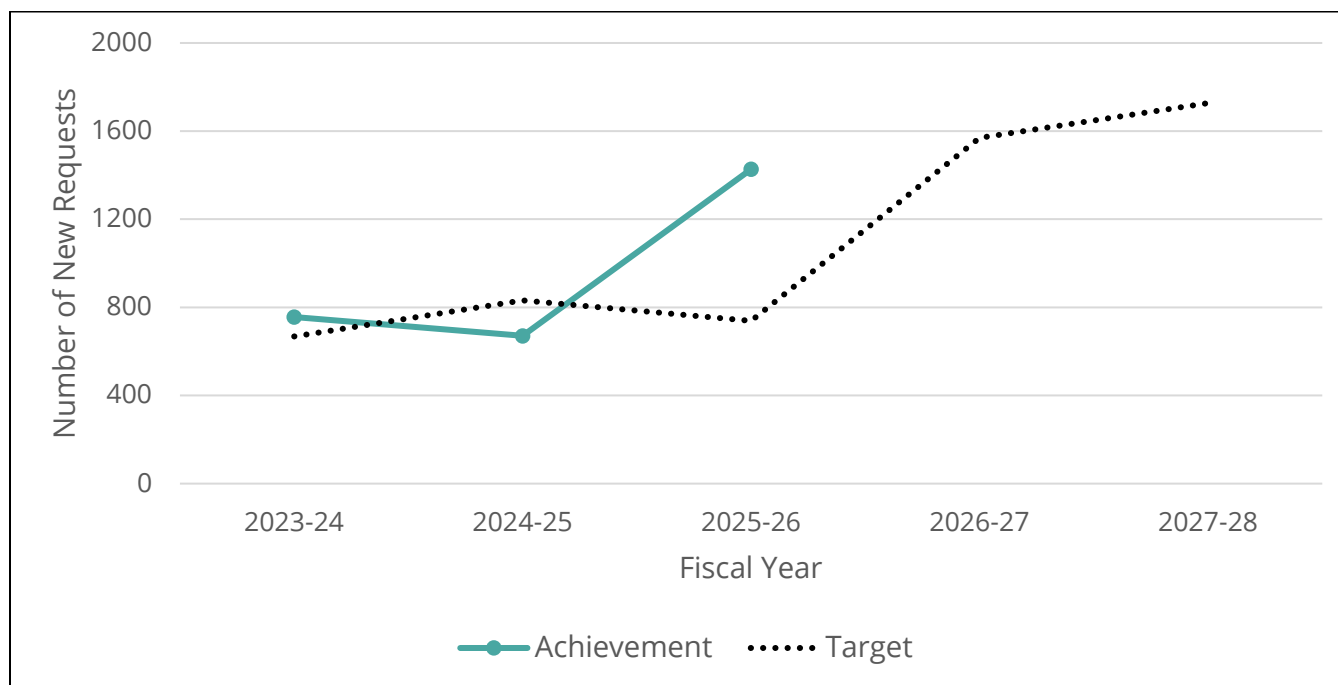


Figure 8 - Graph showing the number of new requests

Agency Contribution

The OWA contributes to the timely resolution of disputes within the occupational health and safety system through education, advisory, and representation services.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the number of new requests received in each fiscal year where clients have indicated an occupational health and safety reprisal concern.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is to increase the number of new requests by 10% through community outreach and system partnerships.

For 2025–2026, the OWA has experienced a substantial increase in new requests and projects that the volume will exceed twice that of the previous year.

Early and Alternative Dispute Resolution (EDR/ADR)

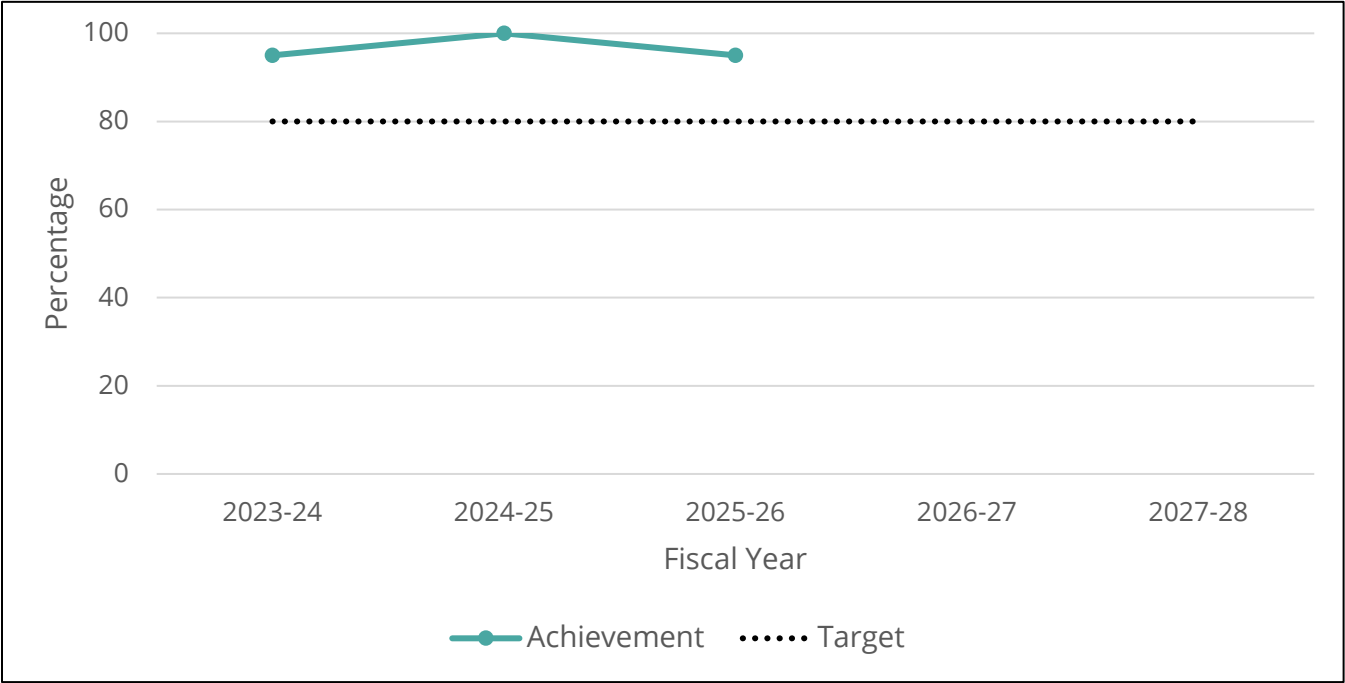


Figure 9 - Graph showing the rate of cases resolved by early and alternative dispute resolution

Agency Contribution

The OWA contributes to the timely resolution of disputes within the occupational health and safety system. This supports workers and the social and economic well-being of the people of Ontario through orderly and effective dispute resolution in contentious cases.

What does the graph show?

This graph shows the percentage of cases that were resolved through settlements and prior to an OLRB hearing.

2026-2027 Commitment

The 2026-2027 commitment is to resolve at least 80% of cases through early and alternative dispute resolution processes.

For 2025-2026, the OWA is forecasting to exceed the 80% target.

Program Resources

Human Resources

The OWA is assigned 82.0 Full time equivalent (FTE) positions by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration Training and Skills Development (MLITSD).

Three-year Budget

Standard Account	2026-27 Preliminary Planning Base	2027-28 Preliminary Planning Base	2028-29 Preliminary Planning Base
Salaries & Wages	8,996.5	8,996.5	8,996.5
Benefits	1,883.7	1,883.7	1,883.7
Total Salaries, Wages and Benefits	10,880.2	10,880.2	10,880.2
Other Direct Operating Expense (ODOE):			
Transportation & Communication	296.0	296.0	296.0
Services	878.6	878.6	878.6
Supplies & Equipment	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total ODOE	1,274.6	1,274.6	1,274.6
Subtotal	12,154.8	12,154.8	12,154.8
Transfer Payments	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lease	795.6	795.6	795.6
Grand Total	12,950.4	12,950.4	12,950.4

Table 5 - Multi Year Preliminary Base

Inventory of Uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In compliance with section 6.3 of the Responsible Use of AI Directive (December 1, 2024), the OWA does not currently use artificial intelligence in developing, delivering, or making decisions for any agency-specific policy, program, or service.

Looking ahead, the OWA will continue to explore opportunities to integrate AI, advanced analytics, and data-driven solutions to enhance case processing efficiency, improve decision-making, and deliver faster, more accurate services for Ontario's workers.