

IMPACT REPORT



Celebrating
25 Years
of Advancing
Tenants' Access
to Justice

25TH
ANNIVERSARY



Advocacy Centre
for Tenants Ontario

Tenant Duty
Counsel Program

Land Acknowledgement

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) acknowledges that we live and work on the traditional territories of many Indigenous Nations, and that our work is part of an ongoing relationship with these lands and Peoples.

We acknowledge the sacred land that is the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations, the Michi Saagig, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, which is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. Our office in Toronto is located on lands covered by Treaty 13 and the Williams Treaties.

As settlers working in the legal, social work, and policy professions, we recognize that our work continues within a colonial legal framework that often upholds systems of oppression. We are mindful of the harmful impact of our respective professions in implementing policies that led to land dispossession, the denial of human rights, and the breakdown of communities and families.

We are committed to continuous learning, building relationships with Indigenous communities, and aligning our advocacy with the goals of Indigenous sovereignty and justice.

Acknowledgements

As we mark ACTO's 25th Anniversary, we would like to thank those who share in the success of our work. We are grateful to **Ontario's community legal clinic system** whose expertise and ongoing collaboration have strengthened our effort to advance the rights of tenants and low-income communities across Ontario.

We are equally grateful to the **tenants, academic researchers, advocacy groups and community organizations** that have shared their knowledge and contributed to the effectiveness of our work. The impact of ACTO's work is rooted in **collaboration**, and we look forward to continuing this important work together in the years ahead.

As we celebrate a quarter century of championing of tenants' rights, we honour and extend our **deepest gratitude to the current and former staff** whose dedication, leadership, and passionate advocacy have shaped ACTO's legacy.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support from Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), Trillium Foundation, Department of Justice Canada (DOJ) and the Law Foundation of Ontario (LFO) ensuring access to justice for low-income Ontarians.

2	Acknowledgements
4	Co-Chairs' Message
5	Co-Directors' Message
6	Who We Are
8	Law Reform
12	Shaping the Ontario Low-Income Energy Affordability Strategy
14	Tenant Duty Counsel Program (TDCP)
16	Landmark Legal Cases
18	Public Legal Education & Training
20	Your Way Forward (YWF)
22	Challenges
23	Looking Ahead



Co-Chairs' Message

As Chairs of ACTO's Board of Directors, we are honoured to recognize this important milestone as we celebrate **25 years** of advancing access to justice for low-income tenants across Ontario.

Over the past quarter century, ACTO has remained steadfast in fulfilling its mandate. Through legal representation, law reform, public legal education, and strategic advocacy, the organization has strengthened tenant protections, advanced the right to housing, and helped shape policies that improve the lives of thousands of Ontarians. This impact is the result of a clear vision, an unwavering commitment to justice, and the dedication of exceptional staff, volunteers, and housing advocates and tenants.

These achievements have not come without challenges. ACTO has navigated significant funding challenges, weakened housing laws, growing demand for services, and increasing barriers to access to justice at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Throughout it all, ACTO remained resilient, adapting to new realities while staying true to its mission and values.

On behalf of the Board, we extend our sincere gratitude to our Co-Directors and the entire management team for their thoughtful leadership, sound stewardship, and commitment to organizational excellence. Their guidance has ensured that ACTO continues to respond to emerging issues while building a strong and sustainable organization.

As we look ahead, the Board remains committed to supporting ACTO's mission, so that future generations of tenants continue to have a strong voice and access to safe and affordable housing.

Mairghread Knought
Co-Chair

Chantal Hayden
Co-Chair



Co-Directors' Message

As we mark ACTO's 25th anniversary, we are proud to reflect on the impact we have achieved together and grateful to everyone who has contributed to this remarkable journey.

For twenty-five years, ACTO has worked to advance access to justice and security of tenure for low-income tenants by providing legal advice and representation to tens of thousands of Ontarians each year who come to us for help. We have also committed to informing tenants of their housing rights through public legal education, working with trusted community partners and intermediaries whose reach extends across Ontario, to local neighbourhoods and communities.

Understanding that our mission cannot be achieved solely through the lens of the Courts and Tribunals, we support community organizations and legal clinics in building collective voice and action. In advocating for laws and policies that strengthen tenant rights across Ontario, we are able to echo the voices and

experiences of people with lived experience to decision makers from city hall to the United Nations. Overall, our work is rooted in the belief that housing is a human right and that lasting change requires both individual advocacy and systemic reform.

The housing landscape has changed dramatically over the past quarter century. Rising housing costs, increasing precarity, and eroding tenant rights have made ACTO's work more urgent than ever. This impact report that you are about to read demonstrates how we have been able to strengthen our services, expand our partnerships, and develop innovative approaches that respond to emerging challenges while remaining firmly grounded in the lived experiences of tenants and the communities we serve.

ACTO's impact has always been the result of collective effort.

We extend our deepest thanks to our dedicated staff, the community legal clinic network, Tenant Duty Counsel Program partners, pro bono lawyers, community organizations, funders, and, most importantly, the tenants whose courage, leadership, and advocacy continue to drive meaningful change.

As we look to the future, our commitment remains unwavering. We will continue to advance access to justice at the Landlord and Tenant Board and pursue systemic solutions to create a more just and equitable Ontario where everyone has access to safe, adequate, and affordable housing.

Douglas Kwan

Director of Advocacy
and Legal Services

Camelia Beyan

Director of Administration

WHO WE ARE

A photograph of a woman with curly hair and a young child in winter clothing. The woman is sitting on a dark wooden bench, leaning forward with her hands open, looking at the child. The child is standing, wearing a red jacket and a grey beanie, and reaching out towards the woman. They are in an urban setting with a modern apartment building in the background. The image is overlaid with a large, faint circular graphic.

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) is a non-profit organization and a specialty legal clinic founded in 2001.

As part of Ontario's network of 71 community legal clinics, ACTO's mandate is to advance the housing rights of low-income Ontarians including tenants, co-op members and people experiencing homelessness across the province.

ACTO is governed by a fourteen-member Board of Directors from across Ontario and employs a staff of 21. ACTO also manages the Tenant Duty Counsel Program, which supports 30 clinics providing legal advice and representation to tenants at the Landlord and Tenant Board.



What We Do

ACTO advances and protects the housing rights of low-income Ontarians through legal advocacy, law reform, public policy, education, and community engagement.

ACTO represents tenants in cases that could create broad legal and systemic change; advocates for stronger laws and policies that improve access to safe, affordable, and secure housing; and provides expert legal and policy advice to governments, community organizations and legal clinics across the province. Through strategic litigation, public legal education, research and coalition building, ACTO works to address the root causes of housing insecurity to build a fair, equitable, and rights-based housing system.



Why We Do It

Safe, affordable and secure housing is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a healthy society, economic stability and social inclusion. For most Ontarians, housing cost represents the largest single monthly expense, often taking 30% to 50% of their income. The ever-increasing housing costs combined with the erosion of tenant rights puts low-income Ontarians at risk of eviction, homelessness, discrimination and unsafe housing conditions.

Strengthening tenant protections, improving housing laws and promoting access to affordable housing remain the cornerstones of advancing the right to housing for low-income Ontarians.

Law Reform

Law reform is central to ACTO's mission of advancing safe, adequate, and affordable housing in Ontario.

Through evidence-based policy advocacy, coalition-building, and public legal education, ACTO works to shape legislation, regulations, and policies that reflect the needs and experiences of low-income tenants. This work helps strengthen tenant protections, improve security of tenure, promote access to adequate and affordable housing, and address systemic barriers that affect tenants across Ontario.

The following initiatives highlight some of the most significant law reform initiatives that have strengthened tenant protections and advanced the right to adequate housing over the past 25 years.



Winning the Right to Housing in Canada

In 2019, the federal government passed the *National Housing Strategy Act*, legally recognizing housing as a human right. This landmark legislation and accompanying funding commitment followed a decade of coordinated advocacy by a national coalition of community organizations, people with lived experience of homelessness, legal clinics, lawyers, and academics.

ACTO's position was that a legal challenge alone could not achieve meaningful change that would address the housing crisis. It also required a concurrent multi-pronged approach combining law reform, public legal education, and sustained grassroot mobilization. In 2008, ACTO formed the Right to Housing Coalition bringing together a broad spectrum of organizations and individuals to drive the advocacy campaign and the legal challenge.

In 2010, four individuals and a community organization challenged the federal and provincial

governments, arguing that their actions and inaction on housing violated their Charter rights to life, security, equality, and the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, family status and disability. Although the case was not successful, it generated significant national attention.

Over the following years, the Coalition held campaign rallies calling for a National Housing Strategy. ACTO organized an international symposium, provided public legal education workshops and advocated for 2 Federal bills calling for a National Housing Strategy. ACTO also made submissions before the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social rights about access to justice, the crisis of homelessness in Canada and the need for a National Housing Strategy. In their report, the UN Committee expressed alarm over the growing housing crisis in Canada and the lack of a national housing strategy.



In 2017, the Canadian government announced a National Housing Strategy, based on housing as a human right.

The Charter challenge and the coordinated advocacy elevated housing affordability as a national priority. It also helped restore a federal role in addressing housing affordability after decades of devolution of housing responsibility to provincial governments. Despite this landmark victory, the promise of housing affordability has yet to be realized.

The Push for Rent Control

Ontario introduced rent control in 1975 through the *Residential Premises Rent Review Act* to curb high inflation by limiting annual rent increases. In 1985, the province expanded protections by introducing vacancy control, which capped rent increases between tenancies.

In 1997, the *Tenant Protection Act* eliminated vacancy control, allowing landlords to raise rents by any amount once a tenant moved out. It also exempted units first occupied after November 1, 1991, from rent control, allowing rents in those units to increase annually by any amount. After years

of advocacy by ACTO and tenant groups, Ontario's 2017 *Fair Housing Plan* extended rent control to private rental units regardless of when they were first occupied. However, vacancy decontrol remained.

In 2018, rent control exemptions were reinstated for units first occupied after November 15, 2018. In response, ACTO established the [Fair Rent Ontario](#) coalition to advance stronger rent protections, including closing rent control loopholes and eliminating above-guideline rent increases (AGIs), through public education, organizing, and policy reform.



Challenging Renovictions Across Ontario

Renovictions occur when landlords evict tenants paying below-market rents under the guise of renovations, then re-rent the units at much higher market rates. Although Ontario law gives tenants the right to return to their homes at the same rent after renovations are completed, this protection is often ignored by landlords.

ACTO has been at the forefront of this issue since New Westminster, British Columbia, became the first municipality in Canada to adopt an anti-renoviction by-law in 2019. Building on that model, ACTO worked closely with Toronto City Councillors over several years culminating in the adoption of Toronto's Rental Renovation Licence By-law in 2024. In addition, ACTO has advocated for renoviction by-laws at municipalities across the province—including Hamilton, Ottawa, Sarnia, Chatham-Kent, London, and Kitchener through presentations to city councils, consultations with municipal staff, public legal education to tenant and community organizations.

As momentum for anti-renoviction bylaws has grown in both large and small municipalities, ACTO has championed strong protection measures such as mandatory tenant compensation, temporary rehousing, and the right to return, that has helped to prevent the displacement of low-income renters and protect Ontario's affordable rental housing stock.



Protecting Affordable Housing through Short-Term Rent Regulation

Toronto's short-term rentals (STR) by-law was introduced in response to concerns that corporate platforms such as Airbnb were removing housing from the long-term rental market to turn them into STRs. As STRs grew rapidly during the 2010s, housing advocates, tenant organizations and City officials raised concerns that entire homes and apartments were increasingly being used as tourist accommodations rather than housing for residents.

In response, a coalition called Fairbnb Canada was formed by tenant advocates, community organizations, labour unions and housing groups, including ACTO. Fairbnb Canada argued that stronger STR regulations were needed to protect affordable housing and the loss of long-term rental units. Through public legal education to residents and municipal advocacy on regulating this type of housing, ACTO helped build the case for the regulation of short-term rentals to protect affordable housing. In 2018, the Ontario Ministry of Finance recognized ACTO as a key stakeholder for municipalities developing home-sharing regulations.

The City of Toronto adopted its STR by-law in 2018, and it was later upheld on appeal, establishing an important precedent across Ontario. Since the landmark win, many municipalities have adopted STR by-laws and ACTO hosted a webinar for Fairbnb that featured its most recent [report](#) that found that STR costs Ontarians \$1.6 billion in additional rent between 2017 to 2024.

Making Suite Metering Fair for Tenants

For decades, Ontario tenants benefited from all-inclusive rents that covered utilities and other essential services. As utility costs rose, however, landlords increasingly shifted these expenses to tenants, reducing affordability and creating uncertainty.

In the early 2000s, suite metering (or smart metering) was promoted to encourage energy conservation and support environmental sustainability. However, its rapid expansion exposed gaps in tenant protections and led to unexpected utility costs.

ACTO played a leading role in establishing a fair and transparent regulatory framework. In 2009, following advocacy from tenant organizations, including ACTO, the Ontario Energy Board issued a Compliance Bulletin directing landlords to pause suite metering conversions until appropriate protections were in place. ACTO made detailed submissions to the Ontario Energy Board to ensure that housing affordability and tenant rights were central to the new framework, which was later incorporated into the *Residential Tenancies Act* in 2011.

ACTO also represented tenants in landmark suite metering litigation in 2010 and 2012, helping to clarify landlord and tenant rights. Today, ACTO continues its role through the **Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)**, advocating for policies that protect tenants as utility costs and climate-related housing challenges grow.

Advancing Tenant Rights in Multi-Tenant Housing

For decades, rooming houses now referred to as multi-tenant housing provided some of Toronto's most affordable rental housing. However, following municipal amalgamation, many of these homes remained legal in some neighbourhoods but prohibited in others, limiting access to affordable housing and leaving many tenants without the protections available in licensed multi-tenant housing.

In 2008, illegal rooming houses increased in the suburbs as a result of the cost of housing in the city. The city attempted to introduce a by-law to address these challenges by creating a new harmonized zoning by-law. In 2009, ACTO challenged Toronto's harmonized zoning by-law before the Ontario Municipal Board (predecessor to the Ontario Land Tribunal) arguing that there was no planning justification for treating rooming houses differently across the city. Over the next decade, ACTO combined strategic litigation with public education, community engagement, and advocacy before City Council and municipal committees to advance a city-wide solution.

In 2022, Toronto adopted a new regulatory and zoning framework permitting multi-tenant housing city-wide. Implemented in 2024, the framework introduced licensing, property standards, enforcement mechanisms, tenant supports, and measures to preserve affordability. ACTO's sustained advocacy helped remove longstanding barriers to affordable housing, extend protections to thousands of tenants, and recognize multi-tenant housing as a vital part of Toronto's housing system.



Shaping the Ontario Low-Income Energy Affordability Strategy

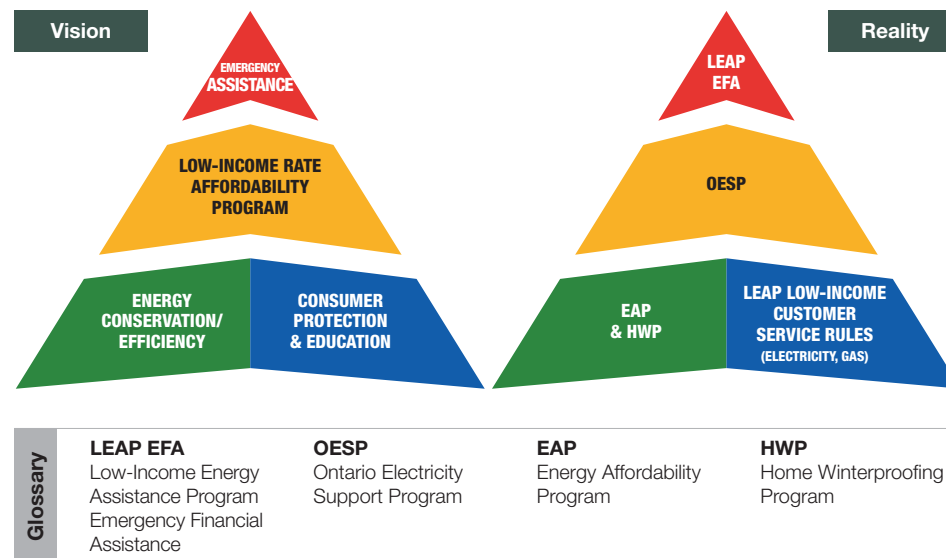
Established in 2004, the **Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)** is a joint initiative of the **Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)** and the **Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA)**. Created in response to rising energy prices and their disproportionate impact on low-income households, LIEN brought together tenant, anti-poverty, environmental, housing, and social service organizations to advocate for affordable energy as a basic necessity. Through coordinated research, public education, regulatory advocacy, and coalition building, LIEN developed a comprehensive vision for addressing energy poverty in Ontario.



A defining moment in LIEN's work was ACTO's successful legal challenge in *Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario v. Ontario Energy Board*, 2007, before the Ontario Divisional Court. It established the Ontario Energy Board's statutory responsibility to set "just and reasonable rates" including the authority to consider affordability and establish programs to support vulnerable consumers. This landmark decision established an important legal precedent: a consumer's ability to pay is a legitimate consideration in energy regulation, and protecting low-income households is an essential part of the OEB's public interest mandate.

The sustained advocacy of LIEN and its partners directly influenced Ontario's Low-Income Energy Assistance Strategy, which led to the creation of the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP), the Energy Affordability Program (EAP) & Home Winterproofing Program (HWP), the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program Emergency Financial Assistance (LEAP EFA) and enhanced consumer protections for low-income households.

LIEN'S Energy Affordability Strategy



Program Highlights

LEAP offers emergency financial assistance to households facing utility arrears and the risk of disconnection. Each year, LEAP assists approximately:



8,500+

Electricity customers with energy financial assistance to avoid utility disconnection



5,000+

Natural gas customers with emergency grants

Today, the OESP provides ongoing monthly electricity bill credits to:



225,000+

Low-income households receive monthly support through the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)



These programs have provided emergency assistance to thousands of Ontarians and transformed Ontario's approach to energy affordability by recognizing that access to essential utility services is fundamental to housing stability, health and economic security.



Tenant Duty Counsel Program

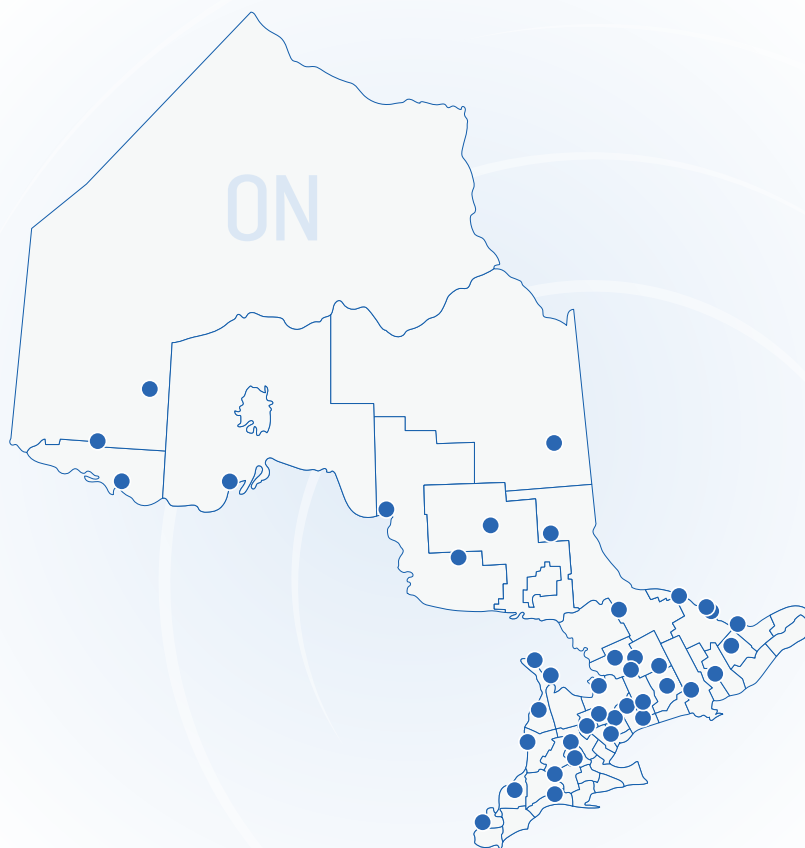
The Tenant Duty Counsel Program (TDCP) is Ontario's largest coordinated housing law service for tenants appearing before the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB).

Managed by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) and delivered through a network of 31 community legal clinics across the province including ACTO, the program helps ensure that low-income tenants have access to legal services regardless of where they live.



Duty Counsel lawyers and paralegals provide free legal advice, summary legal representation, negotiation with landlords, and assistance navigating LTB processes. They help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities, prepare for hearings, negotiate settlements, present evidence, and access available clinic and social services in their community.

By providing assistance on the day of a hearing and through pre-hearing services where available, the program helps tenants participate more effectively in legal proceedings. Beyond supporting individual tenants, the TDCP also provides training and practice support to Duty Counsel across Ontario.



Tenant Duty Counsel Training

TDCP's annual province-wide training has long been a cornerstone of professional development, knowledge exchange, and service excellence. Bringing together TDC staff from across Ontario, these trainings strengthen the program's collective capacity to support tenants at risk of losing their housing, while ensuring staff remain informed of evolving legal, procedural, and policy developments that directly affect service delivery.

TDCP Trainings & Participants

between 2002-2026



16,261

Average number of clients/year



1,821

Total training participants



34

Training sessions

Landmark Legal Cases

Strategic litigation is a cornerstone of ACTO's work to advance tenant rights

The cases highlighted here represent only a selection of ACTO's litigation over the past 25 years. They were chosen because they illustrate the breadth of ACTO's work and their lasting impact on tenants' rights and access to justice.



2006

HUMAN RIGHTS MATTER

TRANCHEMONTAGNE v. ONTARIO, 2006 SCC 14

ACTO successfully intervened in this landmark Supreme Court case, which confirmed that administrative tribunals must apply the Ontario Human Rights Code in their decision making process. This means the Landlord and Tenant Board must consider claims of discrimination and accommodate people protected by the Human Rights Code, including tenants with disabilities, families with children, and other protected groups. The decision strengthened tenants' ability to have their human rights recognized and protected without having to start a separate legal proceeding.

2010

DISCRIMINATORY ZONING BY-LAWS

ACTO v. KITCHENER CITY, 2010, OMBD NO. 666

In 2005, the City of Kitchener passed a zoning by-law restricting housing development in the Cedar Hill neighbourhood prohibiting new or replacement social housing. ACTO, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services, and community partners successfully challenged the by-law before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), arguing it discriminated against disabled and marginalized people who are disproportionately low-income. The OMB found that the by-law raised serious human rights concerns by effectively targeting people with disabilities and social assistance recipients. It ruled that municipalities must consider the Ontario Human Rights Code when creating zoning by-laws. The decision also protected affordable and supportive housing stock.

2016

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

JUHASZ v. HYMAS, 2016 ONSC 1650

This successful Divisional Court case established an important precedent affirming tenants' right to privacy. ACTO represented a tenant who was evicted after refusing to allow her landlord's real estate agent to photograph her apartment for a sales listing. The Court held that the *Residential Tenancies Act* permits landlords to enter a rental unit only for the purposes expressly authorized by the legislation, and that taking photographs for marketing a property is not one of them. The decision confirmed that tenants have a legally protected privacy interest in their homes and landlords cannot take photographs of the tenant's unit without their consent or permitted by the lease.

2019

STANDARD OF REVIEW

CANADA v. VAVILOV, 2019 SCC 65 AND BELL CANADA v. CANADA, 2019 SCC 66

ACTO successfully intervened alongside a coalition of legal clinics and public interest organizations in these landmark Supreme Court cases to promote fairness, transparency, and accountability in administrative decision-making, including at the Landlord and Tenant Board. The Court held that tribunals must issue decisions that are well-reasoned, clearly explain their conclusions, consider the evidence, apply the law correctly, and address the parties' key arguments. Decisions that fail to meet these standards may be overturned. The rulings established a clearer, more consistent framework for reviewing tribunal decisions and strengthened tenants' ability to challenge decisions that are unreasonable, inadequately explained, or legally incorrect.

Working alongside legal clinics and community partners, ACTO has challenged systemic barriers, clarified the law, and strengthened legal protections for tenants before courts and regulatory bodies. ACTO uses strategic litigation to advance and protect the legal rights of low-income tenants and address the systemic barriers they face.

By representing tenants and intervening in important cases, ACTO helps courts and tribunals consider how laws, policies and practices affect tenants beyond an individual dispute. This work can clarify tenants' rights, challenge discriminatory or unlawful practices, strengthen protections against eviction, and improve access to affordable housing by establishing legal precedents that benefit thousands of tenants.

2021

PURCHASER'S OWN USE

PE REAL ESTATE
SOLUTIONS INC. v.
KELLY, 2021 ONSC 4661

ACTO successfully represented tenants in this landmark case, which confirmed that tenants cannot be punished for exercising their legal rights. The Court ruled that tenants who receive an eviction notice because a landlord is selling the property have the right to stay in their home until the Landlord and Tenant Board makes a decision on the application. Landlords cannot sue tenants for financial losses caused by waiting for that hearing. The decision protects tenants from being pressured into moving out early and ensures they can challenge an eviction without fear of retaliation or financial consequences.

2022

PRESERVING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

WHITE v. UPPER
THAMES CONSERVATION
AUTHORITY, 2022
ONCA 146

ACTO successfully intervened in this Court of Appeal case, which strengthened tenants' right to remain in their homes. The Court ruled that landlords cannot include lease terms that take away rights guaranteed by the *Residential Tenancies Act*, even if a tenant agreed to them when signing the lease. In this case, a clause preventing tenants from living in their homes year-round was declared invalid. The decision confirmed that tenants cannot sign away basic legal protections and that landlords cannot use lease agreements to reduce rights guaranteed by law, providing stronger and more consistent protection for tenants across Ontario.

2023

BAD-FAITH EVICTION

ELKINS v. VAN
WISSEN, 2023
ONCA 789

ACTO successfully represented the tenants in this Court of Appeal case, which strengthened protections against bad faith evictions. The Court ruled that when a landlord claims they or a buyer needs a rental unit for personal use, the Landlord and Tenant Board must carefully examine all the evidence—not just what the landlord said when the eviction notice was given. It must also consider whether the buyer genuinely intended to move in. The decision makes it harder to misuse “own-use” evictions to force tenants out and gives tenants a better chance of obtaining compensation when an eviction is in bad faith.

2026

TENANCY RIGHTS OF SURVIVOR SPOUSES

BROWNE v. HENLEY
CRESCENT, 2026
ONSC 455

ACTO successfully represented a survivor of gender-based violence in this landmark Divisional Court case, which strengthened housing protections for survivors and their children. The Court ruled that when a tenant leaves the home, their spouse who remains in the home does not lose the right to stay simply because they were not named on the lease. Here, a former allegedly abusive partner cannot end the survivor's tenancy by giving notice to the landlord after leaving. The court held that losing a home outweighs a landlord's financial interest in re-renting at a higher rate. The decision helps prevent survivors from becoming homeless, protects them from financial hardship, and allows them to remain safely in their homes while rebuilding their lives.

Public Legal Education & Training

Public legal education is essential to ensuring tenants understand their rights, navigate the housing legal system, and meaningfully participate in their legal proceedings.

By providing clear, accurate, accessible legal education and information materials, tenants are empowered to identify legal issues, make informed decisions, and advocate for themselves.



Training legal professionals is also an essential part of ACTO's mandate. By sharing expertise in housing law and best practices, ACTO helps build the capacity of legal professionals across Ontario to provide high-quality legal services, respond to emerging legal issues, and advance consistent, rights-based advocacy for low-income tenants. Over the past two decades, ACTO helped build legal knowledge and expertise of housing law. ACTO also provides training on tenant rights to tenant organizations, service providers, and community partners through webinars, workshops, and conferences.

In addition, ACTO has also prepared submissions, briefing notes, consultation papers, policy reports, and legislative analyses to inform governments, regulators, tribunals, and municipalities. These resources ensure tenant perspectives shape housing law and policy, and translate complex legal issues into practical guidance, while supporting evidence-based law reform and systemic advocacy.

Knowledge Sharing and Public Education



57

Blog
articles



48

Policy submissions
and reports



17

Tenant tip sheets
and guides

Building Capacity Across the Sector



86

Regional trainings
delivered to legal
clinic staff



291

Public legal education initiatives delivered through
workshops and trainings for stakeholders,
including students and community agencies





Your Way Forward

The Your Way Forward (YWF) project is a collaborative initiative that brings together nine Ontario community legal clinics to improve access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

Funded by the Department of Justice Canada, the project was established to research gaps in housing legal services and provide holistic, trauma-informed legal support that responds to the complex legal, social, and economic challenges faced by survivors.



The research
participants included:

168

Survey respondents

80

Survivors interviewed

54

Key stakeholders from 14 regions

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) leads the housing law component of the collaborative, providing specialized legal advice and representation, case management, and limited counselling for tenants experiencing housing issues related to Gender-Based Violence. The service is provided by an interdisciplinary team that combines legal services with social work supports working toward long-term safety and stability of survivors.

ACTO also led a research project to better understand the housing experiences of survivors of gender-based violence and identify the barriers they face in securing and maintaining safe housing. Drawing on the experiences of survivors, frontline service providers, and legal professionals, the research examined the intersection of housing

instability, poverty, discrimination, and violence. The findings, published in [The Journey to Housing Stability for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence](#), documented the systemic obstacles survivors encounter within Ontario's housing and legal systems and highlighted gaps in existing supports. The report also provides evidence-based recommendations for legislative reform, policy development, service coordination, and housing practices to improve access to safe, affordable, and stable housing for survivors.

By combining direct client services, collaborative learning, research, public education, and law reform, the Your Way Forward project demonstrates how coordinated, rights-based legal services can better support survivors while driving broader systemic change across Ontario.

Program Highlights



2,400

Training participants



37

Organizations participated in case consultations



19

Trainings



15

National & provincial conferences



6

Publications

Members of the Your Way Forward Collaborative

1

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)

2

Legal Assistance of Windsor (LAW)

3

Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY)

4

Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic (EOLC)

5

Community Legal Assistance Sarnia (CLAS)

6

Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC)

7

Northumberland Community Legal Centre (NCLC)

8

Peterborough Community Legal Centre (PCLC)

9

Durham Community Legal Clinic (DCLC)

National Conferences

During its first four fiscal years (2022–2026), ACTO's YWF team has presented in notable national conferences. They include:

Press Conference at Queen's Park asking the government to declare Intimate Partner Violence an epidemic.



Action Committee on Access to Justice's Inaugural National Conference - Advancing People-Centred Justice in Canada: Data Sharing and Knowledge Building.





Challenges

Over the past **25 years**, ACTO has achieved significant milestones, yet tenants across Ontario continue to face systemic barriers that undermine housing security and access to justice.

The shift to virtual hearings has created significant barriers for low-income tenants who lack reliable internet, technology, or digital literacy, particularly tenants facing language, disability or mental health challenges. The digital platform has also reduced the effectiveness of ACTO's Tenant Duty Counsel Program. Province-wide scheduling now requires legal workers to navigate multiple virtual hearing rooms, limiting the number of tenants assisted. Correspondingly, Tribunals Ontario's mediation rate fell from 13.5% in 2018–2019 to 6% in 2023–2024, limiting opportunities for tenants to negotiate early resolution to their legal issues, find practical solutions that preserve tenancies and avoid lengthy adversarial hearings.

Recent amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act, including Bills 184 and 60, have weakened procedural protections while accelerating evictions. ACTO worked

with tenant organizations, legal clinics, municipalities, and community partners to oppose these reforms through legal analysis, public education, coalition-building, media engagement, and government submissions. Although the proposal under Bill 60 to eliminate security of tenure was withdrawn, the Bill's other harmful changes were enacted, reinforcing the need for continued advocacy.

Skyrocketing rents, declining affordability, and the financialization of rental housing continue to displace tenants, increase homelessness and reduce Ontario's affordable housing stock. Corporate landlords increasingly rely on tenant turnover and rent increases to maximize profits by displacing low-income tenants. These trends disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples, seniors, newcomers, racialized communities, and survivors of gender-based violence, underscoring the need to protect housing as a human right.



Looking Ahead

The consequences of the erosion of tenant rights and the housing affordability crisis extend far beyond tenants and their families, placing greater pressure on health care, social services and the justice system while deepening socio-economic inequality.

Responding to these challenges demands cross-sectoral, coordinated organizing and perseverance. Progress is rarely linear, and hard-won protections can be weakened or lost. In the face of setbacks, we must remain focused on the principle that everyone deserves a safe, secure and affordable place to call home.

Tenants, people with lived experience, legal clinics, community organizations, housing advocates, researchers and service providers must work across traditional boundaries. By building cross-sector coalitions around shared

goals, we can amplify community voices, confront systemic inequities and advance lasting solutions.

No single intervention will resolve the housing crisis. Meaningful change requires an integrated, multi-pronged approach that combines legal services, strategic litigation, law reform, public legal education, research and advocacy. Together, these tools can protect individual tenancies, strengthen tenant rights and improve legislation, policies and systems that shape housing justice.

“

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead (1901-1978)

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Advocacy Centre
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