



OMBUDSPERSON
BRITISH COLUMBIA

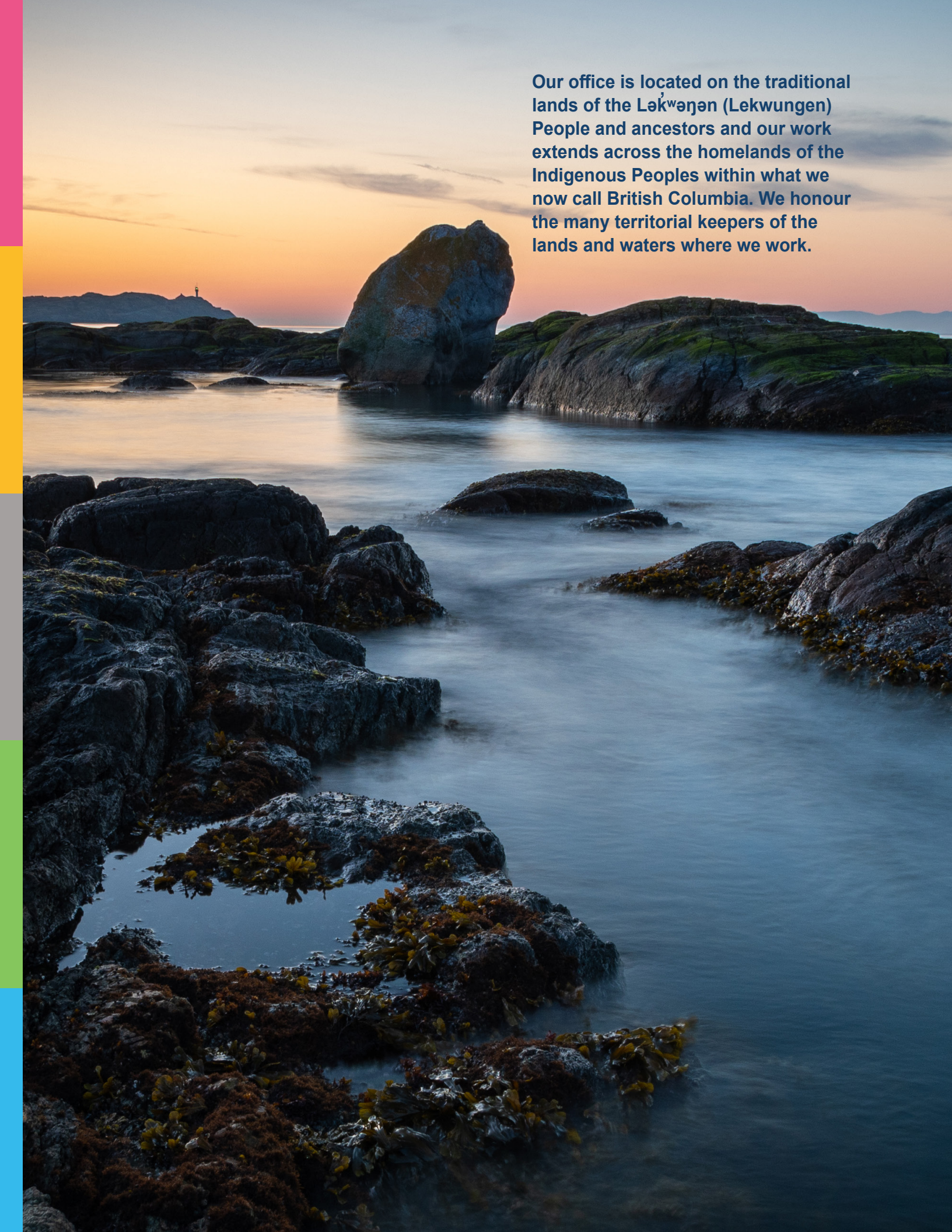
SERVICE PLAN

2026/27 • 2028/29

**Presented to the Select Standing Committee
on Finance and Government Services**

October 2025





Our office is located on the traditional lands of the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Lekwungen) People and ancestors and our work extends across the homelands of the Indigenous Peoples within what we now call British Columbia. We honour the many territorial keepers of the lands and waters where we work.

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STRATEGIC PLAN: SUMMARY AND GOALS

Our rolling three-year service plans are coordinated with our five-year strategic plans. Fiscal year 2026/27 will mark the beginning of a new organizational strategic plan. Currently under development, this plan will guide our work over the coming years, providing a roadmap for our office as we navigate the challenges of delivering on our mandate in a complex and ever-changing world. The plan will reaffirm our commitment to seven core principles: fairness, accountability, impartiality, respect, integrity, service and reconciliation.

We anticipate the new strategic plan will focus on four key goals and associated strategies:

- deepening our connection with a diverse public
- enhancing and modernizing our services
- helping authorities prevent unfairness
- sustaining an engaged and inclusive workplace

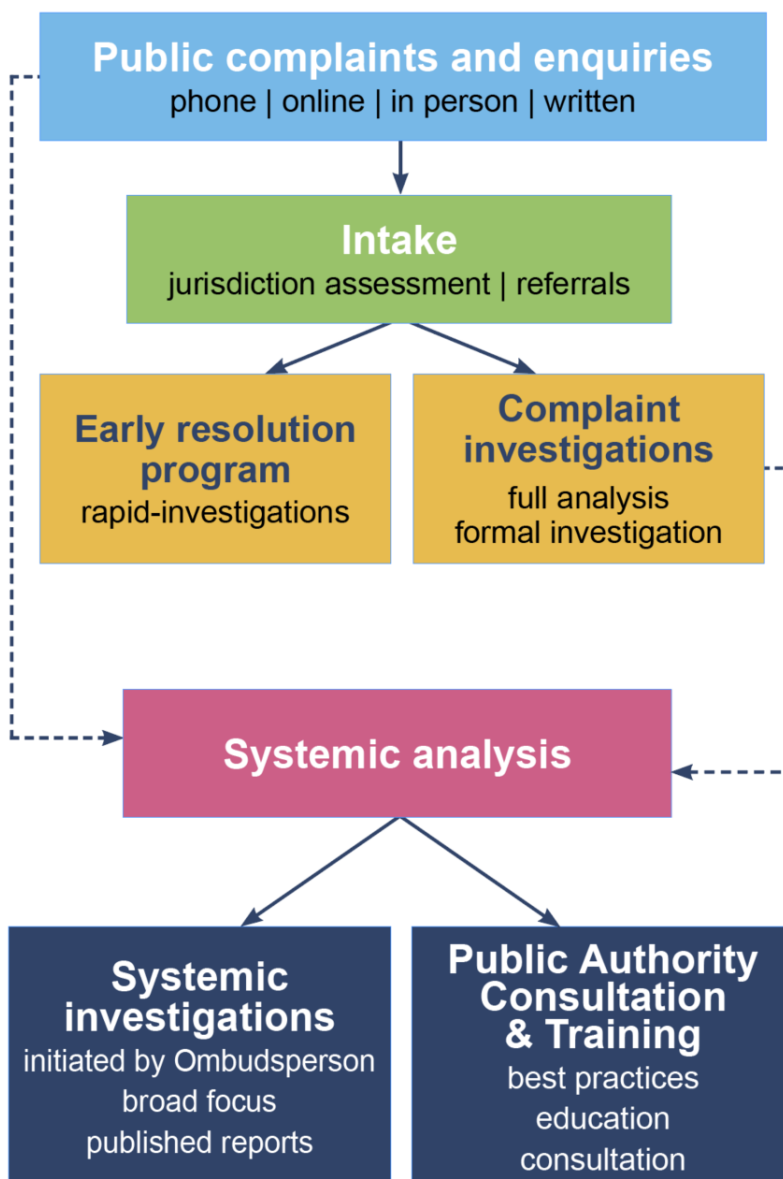
Within this broad strategic framework, our five targeted plans (see diagram below) identify specific activities that will enable us to meet our strategic goals.



HOW WE DO OUR WORK

Ombudsperson Act operations

We carry out our statutory mandate under the *Ombudsperson Act* through an integrated, team-based approach to receiving and investigating complaints and enquiries from the public, conducting individual complaint investigations into complaints about more than 1,000 provincial and local BC public bodies (including, where appropriate, early resolution), systemic investigations and public reporting, and voluntary consultation and training with public bodies.



Public Interest Disclosure Act operations

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act* (PIDA) mandates the Ombudsperson to provide advice to current and former employees of specific public bodies who may have experienced or witnessed wrongdoing in the workplace and to receive and investigate disclosures of wrongdoing. Disclosers are protected from reprisal and our office has the sole mandate to investigate allegations of reprisal. These functions – providing advice, conducting intake and assessment of new disclosures, conducting and reporting on investigations – are carried out by a specialized team.

In December 2024, the seven-phase implementation of PIDA to public sector bodies, announced in 2021, was completed. Over 320,000 current public employees now have disclosure rights under PIDA. The Act is currently being reviewed by a special legislative committee.

Preventative Ombudship

The Public Authority Consultation and Training team provides voluntary proactive fairness consultation and training to public bodies that are subject to the *Ombudsperson Act* and to PIDA.

Corporate shared services

The Office of the Ombudsperson provides support to four Offices of the Legislature through a cost-effective Corporate Shared Services model. These shared support services include finance, human resources, facilities and IT services.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT: UNDERSTANDING OUR IMPACT

In our [2021/26 Strategic Plan](#), we committed to developing outcome-based performance measures that aim to assess the broad impact of our services and identify key areas for improvement.

As a result of this work, we continue to transition, where possible, from output performance measures to outcome-based measures. Through surveys and other impact-focused evaluation processes in development, we are gaining a deeper understanding of how we are meeting our strategic and operational goals and making meaningful improvements to our service delivery.

These outcome-focused measures are informed by the [2019 Venice Principles](#) and the [2020 United Nations Resolution](#), which outline elements fundamental to effective Ombuds work: independence; impartiality, objectivity and fairness; and transparency. These are aligned with the core principles set out in our current Strategic Plan. For example, the questions we have asked in our surveys measure perceptions of our independence, transparency and impartiality and as such, offer insight into how closely our work aligns with these core principles.

We began this transition to outcome measurement through the development of surveys. To date we have a set of three target-audience surveys: the general public, public body employees and people who have made complaints to our office.

These surveys are carried out on a rotating basis. We completed one of these surveys each year for the three fiscal years from 2021/22 through 2023/24. These initial surveys established baseline measures and targets for improvement. In 2024/25, we carried out the first triennial follow-up survey and will continue as follows:

Survey	Baselines completed	Follow up completed/ scheduled
General public	2021/22	2024/25 (complete)
Public bodies	2022/23	2025/26 (in progress)
Users of our service	2023/24	2026/27 (scheduled)

General public survey

In 2021/22, we surveyed the general public about awareness and understanding of our role, as well as perceptions of our office. We repeated this survey in 2024/25 and reported the outcome in our annual report. The results show that our efforts are moving awareness in the right direction, but there's more we can do to make sure people in British Columbia – particularly those most affected by unfair decisions – know where to turn for help. We determined:

- 33% now know where to go if they are treated unfairly (compared to 31% in 2022)
- 74% are aware of our office (compared to 73% in 2022)
- familiarity with what we do rose from 14% in 2022 to 18% in 2025
- likelihood of using our office increased from 71% in 2022 to 76% in 2025

Public bodies survey

In 2022/23, we surveyed representatives from public bodies on key questions related to awareness of our office and our work. The results are detailed in our [2022/23 Annual Report](#) and [2025/26-2026/27](#) service plan. Overall, authority perceptions of our office are positive. The survey demonstrated the value of our [Public Authority Consultation and Training](#) services, as those who had taken our training were more likely to have a positive perception of our office.

While the survey also showed that public officials believe we have work to do to improve the timeliness of our investigations, it made clear that our integrity and our professional, thorough and respectful service are strengths. Public bodies were clear that what matters most to them is our approachability.

We are repeating this survey in 2025/26 and results will be published in that year's annual report.

Users of our service survey

In 2023/24, we conducted an online survey among people who had made a complaint to our office under the *Ombudsperson Act* and whose files were closed within the survey period. The details of this survey can be found in our [2023/24 Annual Report](#).

Of 1,008 closed files, we received 197 valid responses, a 19.5 per cent response rate, which is statistically relevant for drawing a general picture of user satisfaction with our service. Two-thirds of the people who we invited to complete the survey had their files closed at intake, and the balance went to investigations.

The questions in the survey were focused on our service, not complaint outcomes. We did not link any survey results back to the person's file. We also asked some socio-demographic questions to help us better understand who we are serving.

The results showed that there are many areas where we are providing good service to complainants. We are explaining our process and possible outcomes, and we are seen to be accessible, professional and treat people with respect and fairness. At the same time, we have an opportunity to improve complainants' perceptions of our independence and impartiality. Often, people contact our office wanting us to advocate for them. The survey showed us how important it is to inform those who complain to us about our impartial role throughout our process and to demonstrate that impartiality in all our communications.

We also heard that users of our service want us to improve our timeliness. Based on our complaint data, we know that we triage and quickly address urgent complaints. At the same time, we are not always able to respond to non-urgent complaints as quickly as we, and those who complain to us, would like. The survey results reiterate themes that we are working to address and have informed our strategic priorities for fiscal year 2025/26. However, while we focus on continuous improvement initiatives that are feasible to implement within our existing resource capacity, increasing fiscal constraints on public bodies that result in reductions in the quality and timeliness of their service delivery leads to more complaints about those services. This has a direct impact on our ability to deliver timely service as we see complaints to our office rise proportionally. If this trend continues, without additional resources, we anticipate delays that will result in lower satisfaction with our services as well.

Peer review

Surveying is our initial approach to outcome measurement. We wish to expand our assessment of our impact beyond surveying and had planned on doing so through peer review – a process first developed by European ombudsperson offices. However, due to the challenging fiscal environment and our need to prioritize essential services, we have indefinitely delayed the peer review outlined in our previous Service Plan. We will continue to identify reliable, useful and cost-effective methods to measure and assess outcomes for our office and may return to peer review at a later date.

2025/26 PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Deepen our connection with the public

In 2024/25, we focused on building our sustainable community outreach strategy, guided by community input and research. We connected with key audiences at events such as Inclusion BC's *Everybody Belongs!* conference and the Housing Central Conference. We sought input from community-serving organizations to improve the accessibility of our complaint checker, brochures, website, and other public-facing resources.

That work is continuing into 2025/26 with the implementation of our outreach plan, aimed at building meaningful, long-term relationships with community-serving organizations. This work is focused on providing information about our office's work and mandate, so organizations know when and how to refer clients to us. Our goal is to ensure more people – especially those who face barriers to public services – are aware of our office and know how to access our services when they need them.

As awareness of our office continues to grow, we expect to see more people turning to us for help. This is a positive development – it means we are reaching those who need us most, and that trust in our services is increasing. At the same time, it also underscores the importance of ensuring we have the capacity to respond effectively, so that the people who come to us continue to receive the support they need in a timely manner.

We will continue to strengthen connections with community-serving organizations, expand accessible public communications, and provide ongoing training to staff – including on trauma-informed investigations practice and writing – to ensure our services are inclusive, responsive and trusted.

2. Enhance and modernize our services

Public bodies are experiencing notable strain in their ability to adequately and fairly serve the public in unprecedented times of global uncertainty. They are receiving high volumes of complaints and face significant delays in their processes. This is having a direct impact on our office - we are experiencing a rise in the number of people contacting us for information and to complain about public services, as well as an increase in the complexity of complaints. We are also seeing an increase in the number of people who come to us in distress or who exhibit challenging behaviour. While our ability to manage these external changes is limited with existing resources, we are maximizing our efforts to respond effectively as outlined below:

- **Addressing timeliness of our services:** Timeliness is a key priority. We are reviewing our workflows to help us streamline our intake process, reducing unnecessary steps, and supporting staff in providing timely responses. Similarly, we have been working to identify common issues in complaints we do not investigate so that we can respond to those who complain to us more quickly.

- **Responding to challenging behaviour from members of the public:** We have updated key policies that guide staff in responding to challenging and unsafe behaviour, including threats. These policies - developed using a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+), an equity-focused approach, and associated training sessions - allow us to provide consistent, trauma-informed service to the public while also ensuring the wellbeing of our staff. At the same time, we have instituted technological responses to address challenging behaviour that can limit the access of other members of the public to our services.
- **Identifying and addressing case complexity:** We now systematically compile detailed case information when we complete an investigation to identify whether the investigation meets our complexity criteria, and if so, the factors that contributed to its complexity (e.g. complaints involving multiple public bodies, jurisdictions or issues). This is allowing us to develop a baseline measure of complexity in our work, identify trends, and develop strategies to respond.
- **Monitoring artificial intelligence (AI) use in administrative decision making:** Public bodies are increasingly utilizing AI to deliver services, including decisions, that we can receive complaints about under the *Ombudsperson Act*. As we begin the early stages of building our expertise in digital fairness, we will aim to make meaningful proactive recommendations about the use of AI by public bodies in the years to come, ideally, before investments in AI are made. In addition, we will ensure our investigative teams are well-equipped to reactively investigate decisions made or facilitated by AI as its prevalence increases across the broader public sector.

3. Expand our investigative impact on fairness in public services

When we identify a fairness concern in an investigation, we focus on identifying practical and fair settlements. This year, we have settled more than one-third of complaints investigated – achieving individual and systemic resolutions of the issues people bring to us. We continue to find opportunities to better communicate with public bodies, with people who use our services, and with the public about the impact of the work we do.

This year we released our public report, *No Benefit, Period: How a flawed audit and unjust legislation left people scrambling to repay the BC Emergency Benefit for Workers*. This report, our second about this COVID-era benefit administered by the Ministry of Finance, found that some workers were unjustly excluded from eligibility for the benefit program. Unfortunately, the ministry did not accept our recommendations to address this unfair exclusion. Nonetheless, the report holds important lessons for public bodies designing programs in urgent situations – emphasizing the value in recognizing and addressing unintended consequences that may occur in delivering programs more quickly.

We continue to engage with students, families, educators, school administrators and the Ministry of Education and Child Care as we conduct a systemic investigation examining student inclusion in BC's K-12 public schools that we announced publicly in early 2025. We have already heard from hundreds of people across the province through two questionnaires (one for families impacted by classroom exclusion of their child; and the second, for school

district employees, including teachers and educational assistants) and our outreach to community-serving organizations, subject matter experts, and academics. We plan to report publicly on the outcome of our investigation in the 2026/27 fiscal year.

4. Help authorities prevent unfairness before complaints arise

We continue to provide virtual and in person Fairness in Practice workshops to public employees throughout BC. In Spring 2025, we also held a widely attended Fairness Day event in Vancouver that included a workshop and open house for public employees. We continue to update our resources on administrative fairness to ensure accessibility and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. In Spring 2025, we released nine revised Fairness Fact Sheets on topics such as making fair decisions and reducing bias in decision-making. We also released two general information sheets on what to expect from an Ombudsperson investigation and the office's early resolution process. We are also working to update our online self-paced introductory course, Fairness 101, available to public sector employees.

We continue to consult with public bodies throughout the public sector on the administrative fairness of their program design, policies, and procedures. For example, since April, we have reviewed an organization's appeals bylaw, answered questions about the decision-making process for grants administered by a public body, and reviewed a bylaw enforcement policy for a local government.

In September 2025, we released a consultation draft updating our 2012 best practice guide to assist local governments in complying with their legal obligations to hold open meetings and to only hold closed meetings in limited circumstances and following a set process. The guide will be finalized later this year following consultation.

In addition, we continue to provide proactive support to public bodies covered by the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* (PIDA). In May 2025, we held a webinar for designated officers and chief executives to ask questions about PIDA and their roles under the legislation. Planning is also well underway for our annual PIDA Day conference in November 2025 that attracts senior public sector officials, investigators, academics and others interested in public sector integrity from across the practice.

Our work consulting with the Nisga'a Lisims Government on administrative fairness within their government's complaint processes and their *Administrative Decisions Review Act* has continued. The Ombudsperson will present a final report of this work at the Nisga'a Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a in November 2025.

The hiring of a Digital Fairness Specialist later this year will position our office to proactively address new and complex fairness issues that arise through the use of artificial intelligence in administrative decision making by public bodies. This will encompass proactive work with public authorities to ensure fairness is built into artificial intelligence systems delivering public programs as well as reactive investigations into complaints about decisions made or facilitated by such systems.

5. Support implementation of whistleblower protections across the broader public sector

In August, our office publicly released four reports that represent our submission to the Special Committee to Review the Public Interest Disclosure Act, which was appointed in February 2025. The committee is conducting a review of the Act and its first five years of operation.

These four reports are:

- [*Supporting implementation and providing guidance: How the Ombudsperson assisted public bodies to meet their responsibilities under the Public Interest Disclosure Act \(PIDA Special Report No. 2\)*](#)
- [*Awareness and trust: Insights from chief executives and employees of public bodies covered under the Public Interest Disclosure Act \(PIDA Special Report No. 3\)*](#)
- [*Operational review: Five years of operating under the Public Interest Disclosure Act \(PIDA Special Report No. 4\)*](#)
- [*Proposed amendments: Lessons from the first five years of the Public Interest Disclosure Act \(PIDA Special Report No. 5\)*](#)

These reports draw on our unique experience as the office responsible for receiving and investigating disclosures of wrongdoing in the BC public sector. Together, they provide legislators with case examples, insights, and 38 proposed amendments to strengthen the Act – so that the important protections it provides work not just on paper, but in practice. Taken together, the amendments represent a significant call for change but not a wholesale retooling. They represent practical and principled improvements based on our experience.

With the seven-phase roll-out of PIDA announced by the government in 2021 to about 200 public sector organizations now complete, we continue to focus on the core work of providing advice, receiving, assessing, and investigating disclosures of wrongdoing and reprisal complaints, as well as responding to implementation questions from public bodies. As PIDA now covers more than 320,000 public sector employees and countless former public sector employees, we have seen a significant increase in the number of employees contacting our office.

6. Advance and support reconciliation

We are well into implementing [Phase 2 of our Indigenous Communities Services Plan](#). The goals and strategies in this plan continue to represent a long-term commitment to meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and communities; we remain committed to upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the work we do across our office.

We continue to prioritize building awareness about our office amongst Indigenous people, while focusing on fostering long-lasting relationships with Indigenous leaders, communities, and organizations. In this work, we take a distinctions-based approach acknowledging the

distinct rights, diverse cultures, practices, and protocols of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. We have embedded this distinctions-based approach in our policy and practice as we nurture existing relationships and build new ones.

With growing awareness of our office, we have continued to see increased numbers of complaints from Indigenous people about the services they receive from the hundreds of public bodies under our jurisdiction. This has provided more opportunities for our office to propose meaningful improvements to public services impacting Indigenous Peoples. To ensure we provide good service to Indigenous people who contact us, we continue to work on providing welcoming, accessible and culturally safe services through policy and practice direction and staff training.

Finally, we are in the early stages of engagement with Indigenous governing bodies on how the provisions of the *Ombudsperson Act* can be better aligned with the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

7. Be an inclusive, supportive and engaged workplace

This year, we have focused on strategies intended to support employee retention across the organization. To this end, we have continued to implement activities identified in our annual Workforce Plan and based on results from regular internal engagement and a biennial staff survey issued centrally by BC Stats. We are supporting ongoing learning and capacity-building sessions for our supervisory staff. These staff play a critical role in building and sustaining a strong, respectful, and healthy office culture, and we want to ensure they are well-equipped and supported to carry out their work.

In addition, we are continuing to implement priority actions from our [Accessibility Plan](#) to make our workspace accessible to, and inclusive of, staff living with disabilities. Using a GBA+ lens, we have revised administrative policies and practices to support employee wellbeing and safety when dealing with challenging behaviour from service users including individuals who are in crisis or who are persistent and high-conflict in a way that can make responding difficult.

This fall, through BC Stats, we will be completing our next employee engagement survey to assist the new Ombudsperson in identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement in further building an engaged, supportive, and inclusive workplace.

2026/27 PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES

In 2026/27, a new Ombudsperson will approve the office's next Strategic Plan that will set our direction for the coming years.

We anticipate complaint trends will reflect the current emphasis on fiscal restraint in government. We have seen in the past that such fiscal challenges result in more complaints to our office, as frontline services become less available, programs that people relied on to meet their needs are limited, and public bodies' complaints processes are delayed or unable to respond to concerns.

The complexity of many of the complaints our office receives increases the demands on staff who assess and investigate complaints. Many of our complaints are about matters of critical importance to the public, including health care, education, housing and income supports. These complaints are particularly challenging to investigate because they involve entrenched or systemic unfairness or high conflict situations.

Our staff must respond to increasingly challenging behaviour from service users in a way that is equitable, accessible and fair to everyone who needs to contact our office. We have seen more people contacting our office in crisis or experiencing mental health challenges. While we are equipping staff with the tools and resources to do this work, we do not expect the conditions that lead to increasingly challenging behaviours, and increased complexity in complaints, will change in the near term. To the contrary, with anticipated expenditure restraint in government services and continuing affordability challenges for many people in British Columbia, we expect growth in overall demand for our services coupled with a growth in the time and resources we will need to devote to responding to each complaint.

In the face of this uncertainty, we will maintain an unwavering focus on delivering on our mandate under both the *Ombudsperson Act* and *Public Interest Disclosure Act*. It is essential that we remain available and accessible to anyone in British Columbia who needs us. By continuing to provide robust and effective oversight of public bodies, our investigations identify areas where fiscal restraints are having a particularly negative impact on the public or are leading to individual or systemic unfairness.

To meet these challenges, our priorities will include:

- completing the third phase of our targeted outreach plan and continuing to build relationships with Indigenous governing organizations and communities
- honing our capacity to respond to increasingly complex complaints, while ensuring timely service delivery and operational effectiveness and efficiency
- building our expertise in digital fairness
- evaluating and revising our three-year Accessibility Plan

2027/28 AND 2028/29 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In years two and three of our new Strategic Plan, we will evaluate initiatives undertaken in the first year, and building on this foundation, identify and implement further improvements and changes to our work to meet our strategic objectives. We will continue our cycle of surveys of the general public, people who use our services, and public bodies, which will assist us in measuring our impact over the longer term. In addition, we will plan for phase three of the Indigenous Communities Services Plan and implement the goals and priorities in our updated Accessibility Plan.



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