

Spring 2020 Stakeholder Update

May 13, 2020

APPEALS
COMMISSION
FOR ALBERTA WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Introduction

During the 2019-20 fiscal year, the Appeals Commission undertook several initiatives to engage with stakeholders and enhance the quality of service that we provide. In the summer of 2019, we were grateful to receive helpful feedback from stakeholders willing to share their time and opinions with us. The stakeholder feedback validated ongoing projects and launched new ones.

Many of these projects had a planned rollout date of late March or early April, 2020. With the emergence of COVID-19 during this time, there was by necessity an increased focus on maintaining our core operations. We also revised some of our project timelines, but we are pleased to report that we continue to take substantial steps to respond to stakeholder feedback and enhance the services provided by the Appeals Commission. These projects have added minimal (often zero) expenditure, thanks to our talented team.

In this document, we share with you:

- The Appeals Commission's response to COVID-19; and
- Other Appeals Commission updates that we think may be of value to our stakeholders, including:
 - Planned updates to our vision, mission and values,
 - Our progress in facilitating online form submission,
 - Updates on our plain language initiative, and
 - Upcoming amendments to our Rules, Forms and Practice Guidelines.

The Appeals Commission's Response to COVID-19

We are very proud to share that the Appeals Commission continues to operate and has done so without interruption throughout the COVID-19 situation, while making the health and safety of our clients and team our top priority. Our offices in Calgary and Edmonton are closed to the public, our entire team has transitioned to working remotely, and we have ensured ongoing client service by continuing to process appeals, conduct hearings, and issue decisions.

Naturally, some of our processes have changed as a result, and interestingly, many of these changes were works in progress even before the COVID-19 situation emerged. All submissions, forms and correspondence are now received by either email or fax. Hearings are conducted either by teleconference or on a documentary basis. Continuing to protect our clients' privacy is of utmost importance and we have put several new processes in place to ensure that we do so. We thank our stakeholders for their patience and flexibility during this time, and for their feedback that, on the whole, our alternate service model has resulted in positive experiences for them. We continue to seek opportunities to ensure that our remote way of working is as seamless as possible, and welcome your perspective as we continue to learn more about this new way of working.

None of this would be possible without our professional team of staff and adjudicators at the Commission. Our transition to an online work environment has been made possible by their dedication, adaptability, communication and optimism during these unprecedented times.

Updated Vision, Mission and Values

Over the course of the 2019 fiscal year, the Appeals Commission took steps to update its vision, mission and values. We decided this was an important project for two reasons:

- Our vision, mission and values were last updated more than 13 years ago; and
- Feedback from internal and external stakeholders was consistent that a greater emphasis on the clients that the Appeals Commission serves was required.

Our leadership team, with feedback and assistance from our committed team of adjudicators and staff, developed the following updated vision, mission and values. This new vision, mission and values will “officially” come into effect over the coming months, likely when we return to the office, but we wanted to take this opportunity to share it with you now. In addition, the Appeals Commission continues its commitment to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusivity.

Vision

We are committed to a fair, client-focused appeal experience.

Mission

In serving our clients we:

- Understand their needs
- Offer user friendly resources
- Guide them through the appeal process
- Create a safe and respectful place to be heard
- Provide clear, timely, independent and unbiased decisions

Values

Respect

We understand that every client and every appeal is different, and every client needs to be heard with an open mind.

We are committed to a culture that is collegial and professional, and a workplace that is free from harassment, violence and discrimination.

Service

We provide professional and friendly assistance along with accessible resources to help our clients navigate the appeal process.

We support each other professionally and personally, and we aim to create a healthy, inclusive workplace that recognizes excellence and encourages development.

Integrity

In all our interactions with clients and stakeholders, we aim to be impartial, diligent and ethical.

We demonstrate our values to our clients and stakeholders, and to our colleagues, by being consistent in our words and deeds, taking ownership, and seeking out learning opportunities.

Accountability

We are answerable to our clients and stakeholders for the efficiency of our processes, the clarity and timeliness of our decisions, the effectiveness of our communications, and the responsible use of our resources.

We recognize that we are all part of a larger process, and that in striving for excellence and serving our clients we all make contributions and are answerable to each other.

Online Form Submission

Through engagement conducted in the summer of 2019, we learned that 72% of respondents felt that the option to submit forms electronically would be helpful. As a result, a cross-functional team at the Appeals Commission immediately began work to enable the submission of forms through our website. Our next step is to conduct comprehensive testing in order to ensure that any issues with online submission are identified and resolved before the system launches. We expect that the option of online form submission will be added to our website sometime this summer. Please note that this will not replace existing methods for filing forms with the Appeals Commission. Stay tuned for more information.

Plain Language Initiative

Our summer 2019 engagement also told us that about half of the stakeholders who participated think our decisions are written in a way that can make them difficult for clients to understand. This aligns with anecdotal feedback we have received over the past year, and our ongoing efforts to make our decisions more clear and easy to read.

In 2019, we introduced a plain language initiative and we continue to make strides in making our decisions easier to read. Changes will mainly be apparent in the structure of our decisions: while they will contain the same level of analysis you have come to expect, they will be shorter and organized differently.

Plain language is a work in progress for the Appeals Commission and we look forward to your feedback as we continue to transition to this new style of writing.

Updates to Rules, Forms and Practice Guidelines

At the Appeals Commission, we continually review our processes to determine whether they can be updated or revised to better serve our clients. To that end, on June 1, 2020, we have scheduled an update to our Rules, Forms and Practice Guidelines. An overview of what you can expect is as follows:

Rules

- We are revising our rules on Reconsideration Applications to clarify who hears and decides the preliminary reviews of these types of applications.
- We are updating our Rules to allow for filing of our forms through our website. This includes new rules allowing for documents to be signed electronically and received at the Appeals Commission through our website. The new rules will also clarify when documents are considered received by the Appeals Commission.

Forms

- We are revising our forms to remove the need to identify gender or marital status.
- We are revising our forms to allow parties and participants to request reasonable accommodations to meet their needs during the appeal process.
- We are revising our Notice of Representation to be valid for two years from the date signed. We are also revising the Application for Extension of Time form, the Notice of Participation form, and the Reconsideration Application form to include information about representation.
- We are revising our Interim Relief forms to provide more detail on the type of evidence relevant to applications for interim relief.
- Note that all forms will also look a little bit different. They have been refreshed and made suitable for submission both by paper copy and through our website. They have also been revised to reflect that they can be submitted through our website.

Practice Guidelines

- We will update all of the Practice Guidelines affected by the above revisions to provide the appropriate guidance in respect of the changes to our processes.

If you have any questions about the information in this communication, please contact Michelle Lang, Manager of Stakeholder Services, at 780.412.8737 or michelle.lang@gov.ab.ca.
