

Research Snapshot

2021-2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey Findings: Housing Law

What is this about?

The newly released 2021-2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey provides a wealth of information regarding perceptions of legal needs from both community-based organizations and lawyers. Housing law, including disputes that fall within the Office of Residential Tenancies (ORT), was identified as one of the top three areas of law wherein community members are most in need of legal services by both groups. Right now, many organizations, such as government, courts, pro bono groups, and legal education groups, are all collecting data specific to their efforts. By taking a broader look at the met and unmet legal needs across the province and the barriers and facilitators to accessing justice, we can learn how individual groups are making an impact in Saskatchewan and how they can increase their impact.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers surveyed both lawyers and representatives of community-based organizations that provide legal and/or non-legal supports and services to assess their perceptions of access to justice issues and priority legal needs of individuals and communities in Saskatchewan. Two online surveys were distributed to participants. One survey was tailored to community-based organizations, and the other was tailored to lawyers. The Community Agency Survey was completed by 67 representatives from community agencies, and the Lawyer Survey was completed by 272 lawyers.

What did the researchers find?

Many representatives from community-based organizations listed social assistance (49%) and housing (46%) as one of the most common types of justice-related problems experienced by their clients. Lawyers believed services in housing law are not adequately offered because there is low profit for legal service providers in this area of law (63%), there is a lack of interest in providing services in this area of law among legal service providers (53%), and free or government-subsidized services are not available in this area of law (42%).

What do you need to know?

Lawyers listed housing law and interactions with the ORT board as the third most area of law wherein community members are in need of legal services in Saskatchewan. Likewise, representatives of community-based organizations also listed housing law and interactions with the ORT board as the third most area of law wherein community members are in need of legal services in Saskatchewan. A majority of community-based organizations and lawyers identified that legal needs within this area could be better met with both access to information and increased collaboration across legal and non-legal service providers. This suggests that relevant stakeholders can work together to bridge gaps in knowledge and understanding across lawyers and legally adjacent groups that work within this area of law.

The lawyers surveyed identified factors that make it difficult for their clients to access services and supports in housing/residential tenancies law, including:

- limited financial resources for legal representation and other expenses associated with accessing legal support (58%),
- lack of understanding of the formal justice system (47%), and
- cultural barriers (47%).

To establish or expand services in housing/residential tenancies law, lawyers suggested there should be increased availability of free or government-subsidized services in this area of law (63%), improved collaboration between legal and non-legal service providers in this area of law (53%), as well as allowing non-legal service providers to practice in this area of law with a limited license (47%). Further insight into the respondents' perceptions, including direct quotes, are available in the [2021-2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey](#).

About the researchers:

This work is the result of a joint research project between CREATE Justice, College of Law and the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies (CFBSJS) at the University of Saskatchewan. CREATE Justice is a centre for research, evaluation and action on the topic of access to justice in the areas of access to legal services, dispute resolution, and systemic justice. CREATE Justice was established at the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan in 2016. Researchers at the CFBSJS work to bridge the gaps between academics and criminal justice professionals in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. CFBSJS conducts research to help with program development, evaluation, and analysis across various parts of the criminal justice system, including policing, courts, and corrections.

Citation:

Stoliker, Bryce, Jewell, Lisa, Heavin, Heather & Lowenberger, Brea, "A Legal Needs Survey in the Province of Saskatchewan: Perspectives of Lawyers and Legal and Non-Legal Service Providers" (2023) at xiii, 82-83, 84, and 85 (lawyer perspectives); vi-vii, and 42 (community perspectives). [Link to the report](#).

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How can you use this?

This data has a variety of applications for community organizations, lawyers, and academics. One suggestion for this data is using it to build on data related to housing accessibility and ORT hearings already collected by community-based organizations throughout Saskatchewan, such as CLASSIC (Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City), the Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan (PBLs), and the Public Legal Education Association (PLEA). Having data on the types of legal needs that people experience and the paths they choose when accessing justice can help clinics reach their targeted demographic. In combination with the organizations' administrative data, clinics could shift resource allocation as needed to better bring services and information to the people currently using their services and reach people who would benefit from their services who are not currently accessing them.