



# Research Snapshot

## Saskatchewan Access to Legal Information Data Collection Pilot Project 1.0

### What is this about?

Legal information has been identified as one of the critical components of access to justice. To look more closely at the role of Saskatchewan public libraries in providing legal information to members of the public, this project collected information about library demographics and requests for legal information.

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers conducted two online surveys with libraries across Saskatchewan. One survey collected library demographic information (such as population served, number of daily visits, etc.) and the other survey collected information about requests for legal information.

Twenty-seven libraries completed the demographic survey, which asked about hours of operation, hours worked by library staff, population of area served, number of in-person visits, and print collection size. This survey was completed from April to August 2017.

Twenty-five libraries took part in the legal information request survey, which was carried out between April and September 2017. These libraries do not necessarily correspond with those that completed the demographic information survey.

### What did the researchers find?

The library demographics survey showed the following:

- The libraries serve diverse populations, with in-person visits ranging from 1-75 people; print collections across Saskatchewan libraries range from 1 to 17,500; weekly hours ranged from 8 – 56 hours a week; and the number of hours worked by staff also varied.

The requests for legal information survey found that there was a total of 46 requests for legal information at the 25 libraries from April to September 2017. Requests were addressed in less than 30 minutes, covered a wide range of legal topics, and most requests led to referrals to additional resources.

### What do you need to know?

Public libraries are a valuable source of legal information. Library staff can guide patrons to resources on a wide range of legal topics (such as family law, criminal law, tax law, immigration, etc.) and can make referrals to other helpful resources. Saskatchewan libraries serve a diverse population and libraries vary in their number of daily in-person visits, print collection size, and hours of operation. Library staff should be supported and trained in assisting the public with finding legal information.



**Time to address requests:** Each request was addressed in 30 minutes or less, with 21 (45.7% of the total requests) being addressed in 5 minutes or less. Approximately 35% of requests were addressed within 6 to 15 minutes, and approximately 20% were addressed within 16 to 30 minutes.

**Topics of requests:** Requests for legal information were made for a wide range of topics:

- Approximately 20% of requests for legal information were for family law-related topics, with most patrons being interested in child custody and support information. There was also one request each for divorce information, resources like therapy or training, and age requirements for children to be left unsupervised at the library.
- 15% of requests were for criminal and 15% tax law topics.
- Approximately 17% of requests were for other information, such as directions to legal support services, passport issues, and transfer ownership.
- Other information was also requested, including building codes, finding legislation, government agencies, health, immigration/refugee, and renting.

**Next steps following requests:** More than two thirds of requests resulted in a referral. The most common referral was to government agencies (19.6%) and the Public Legal Education Association (PLEA – 15.2%). About 15% of referrals were to other sources, including the Canadian Legal Information Institute website, a website to do taxes, and websites mentioned in the PLEA pamphlet. Four referrals were to other libraries: two of those were referrals to college or university libraries; the third one was to another public library; and the fourth was to a courthouse/law society library.

## About the researchers:

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.

The Social Sciences Research Laboratories (SSRL) is a network of nine research laboratories, which assists faculty, staff and students undertaking research in the social sciences by providing access to research infrastructure and research space and providing access to research supports in specific social science research methodologies.

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# How can you use this?

This research can be used to inform strategies to better equip library staff to help library patrons with their requests for legal information. For example, it may be a good idea to provide librarians with more training on how to provide family, criminal, and tax law information.