



RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARTICLE DE RECHERCHE

Reducing the “Justice Gap” Through Data for Systemic Change: Using Multiple-Perspective Legal-Needs Surveys to Improve Person-Centered Justice

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Abstract

Recognizing the justice data deficit across Canada, we undertook a multi-faceted project to better understand access to justice (A2J) issues and legal needs of individuals and communities in Saskatchewan. This paper describes the 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey, a multiple perspective service provider legal-needs survey intended to complement user-centred surveys and designed to capture the experiences of justice system users via perceptions of service providers. Comprised of two online self-report questionnaires (Community Agency Survey and Lawyer Survey), data were collected from a provincially representative sample of community agencies ($n = 67$) and lawyers ($n = 272$). Results generally highlight respondents' perceptions of A2J issues and priority legal needs based on their experiences with the communities and clients they serve. Overall, a multiple perspective service provider approach affords greater insight into justice system gaps and serves as a viable model for future person-centered justice data collection projects, nationally and internationally.

Keywords: legal needs; legal-needs survey; access to justice; community agency perspectives; lawyer perspectives

Résumé

Reconnaissant le déficit de données sur la justice à travers le Canada, nous avons entrepris un projet à multiples facettes pour mieux comprendre les questions liées à l'accès à la justice et les besoins juridiques des individus et des communautés en Saskatchewan. Cet

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article décrit l'enquête Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey de 2021-2022, soit une enquête sur les besoins juridiques menée auprès de multiples fournisseurs de services juridiques qui était destinée à compléter les enquêtes axées sur les utilisateurs et à saisir les expériences des utilisateurs du système judiciaire par le biais des perceptions des fournisseurs de services. Composées de deux questionnaires d'auto-évaluation en ligne (Community Agency Survey et Lawyer Survey), les données ont été recueillies auprès d'un échantillon provincial représentatif d'organismes communautaires (n = 67) et d'avocats (n = 272). Les résultats mettent généralement en évidence les perceptions des répondants sur les enjeux d'accès à la justice et les besoins juridiques prioritaires en fonction de leurs expériences avec les communautés et les clients qu'ils desservent. Dans l'ensemble, une approche à perspectives multiples incluant des fournisseurs de services permet de mieux comprendre les lacunes du système de justice et sert de modèle viable pour les futurs projets de collecte de données sur la justice axée sur la personne, et ce, autant à l'échelle nationale qu'internationale.

Mots clés: besoins juridiques; enquête sur les besoins juridiques; accès à la justice; perspectives des organismes communautaires; perspectives des avocats

“The best ideas emerge when different perspectives meet” (Frans Johansson)

Introduction

In Canada, there is a need to enhance the evidentiary base for access-to-justice (A2J) issues, especially considering that current practices for collecting and analyzing justice data have been deficient. This poses a significant problem, as deficits in justice data impede the measurement and advancement of initiatives that could provide solutions to A2J issues. For instance, the Canadian Bar Association has highlighted the challenge between inadequate data and moving the dial on A2J issues, stating: “we are unable to give definitive answers to even the most basic inquiries about barriers to [accessing justice] and we lack the capacity to pull together the fragmented data available to us into anything close to resembling a complete picture of [A2J].”¹ Accordingly, several associations, reports, and fora have called upon justice stakeholders to address the justice data problem in Canada. This paper answers this call, contributing to provincially focused evidence on (met and unmet) legal needs.

Despite a deficit in justice data, provinces across Canada are beginning coordinated data-collection and research efforts to highlight the met and unmet legal needs of their residents and improve A2J initiatives. Indeed, attention to the importance of justice data, metrics, and evaluation, and the roles that these play in improving A2J, has led to an increased focus on data collection in the form of population-based statistics, user-experience surveys, and consultations. Considering many legal and non-legal service providers are

¹ Canadian Bar Association, *Access to Justice Metrics: A Discussion Paper* (Ottawa: Canadian Bar Association, 2013), 5.

collecting, or starting to collect, justice data, a key question emerges: Would a comprehensive data-collection project, undertaken at the provincial level, be a necessary step in identifying legal needs, support, processes, initiatives, and reforms (particularly in the family and civil justice sectors)? Although there are long-standing user-based justice data-collection efforts at the national level, inferences cannot necessarily be drawn at the provincial level.² For instance, while the latest national legal-needs surveys in Canada targeted residents in each of the ten provinces, Saskatchewan residents made up a small proportion of the total sample (e.g. representing 3.1% in Farrow and colleagues' 2016 study).³ Therefore, findings from national surveys are not detailed enough to inform policy and programming that are specific to the A2J issues and legal needs in any one province. Thus, to build upon national-level efforts, we designed a justice data-collection project that focused specifically on conducting a legal-needs assessment in the province of Saskatchewan that would allow a more representative sample, data exclusive to the provincial level, and diverse perspectives on A2J issues and legal needs that are specific to Saskatchewan.

Specifically, in 2020, the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law, Centre for Research, Evaluation, and Action Towards Equal Justice (CREATE Justice), and Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies (CFBSJS) partnered with the Law Society of Saskatchewan (LSS) to undertake a multifaceted project to develop a more cohesive picture of the A2J issues and legal needs of individuals and communities in Saskatchewan. Funded by a grant from the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, our goal was two-fold: first, to undertake an environmental scan of existing justice data that are being collected by various legal and non-legal organizations in the province, with the aim of supporting interagency data sharing;⁴ and, second, to undertake a provincial legal-needs assessment to better understand the legal needs and A2J gaps that exist within Saskatchewan. In accordance with the second component, the main objective was to compile foundational data concerning the A2J issues and legal needs of Saskatchewan residents from the perspective of those who provide justice-related support and services. The project, premised on the fact that multiple perspectives can lead to better information, was designed to capture the experiences of justice-system users in the province via the perspectives of community agencies and lawyers. As such, Saskatchewan's 2021–2022 Legal Needs Survey undertook both a Community Agency Survey and a Lawyer Survey. These surveys aimed to compliment user perspectives/

² Ab Currie, *The Legal Problems of Everyday Life: The Nature, Extent and Consequences of Justiciable Problems Experienced by Canadians* (Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada, 2009); Ab Currie, "A National Survey of the Civil Justice Problems of Low- and Moderate-Income Canadians: Incidence and Patterns," *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 13, no. 3 (2006): 217–42; Trevor C. W. Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems and the Cost of Justice in Canada: Overview Report* (Toronto: Canadian Forum on Civil Justice, 2016); Laura Savage and Susan McDonald, "Experiences of Serious Problems or Disputes in the Canadian Provinces, 2021," *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics* (2022), 1–28.

³ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*, 5; Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

⁴ Lisa Jewell et al., *Legal Data in Saskatchewan and Implications for a Justice Data Commons: Results from an Environmental Scan and Key Informant Interviews* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2022).

experiences concerning A2J issues and legal needs, sourced through national-level surveys.⁵ The Community Agency Survey recognized that people often seek out various services in the community (e.g. mental health, addictions, education, income) and, as front-line service providers, community agencies have knowledge of the met and unmet legal needs of the populations that they serve. Similarly, the Lawyer Survey allowed lawyers, as “justice-sector insiders,” to share their perspectives about areas of demand in their communities. Often immersed in not only their legal-practice specialties, but also their communities and geographic regions, lawyers offer a unique perspective as to what they experience in relation to met and unmet legal needs. Although it is important for A2J research to continue to adopt a user-centered approach to assess the met and unmet legal needs of individuals, in our case, complimenting user-focused data with a multiple-perspective service-provider approach allowed more diverse insight into the A2J issues and legal needs within communities. Through their professional and personal experience, service providers (i.e. community agencies and lawyers) are able to identify system-level opportunities for, or barriers to, bridging A2J gaps and may be positioned to mobilize change.

Two distinct, yet complementary, ideas formed the foundation of the current project: (1) multiple perspectives are needed to solve complex issues; and (2) data-informed decision-making will help justice stakeholders to better respond to the legal needs of individuals and communities in Saskatchewan. Additionally, the multiple-perspective approach to the project centered on the theoretical foundation and promise that reflective practice and action research have in “fostering a culture of innovation in the legal profession and the justice sector.”⁶ Our study was therefore designed to collect both lawyer and community agency representatives’ reflections on A2J issues and opportunities for change to improve justice-system user experience and inform actionable solutions.

The aim of this paper was to provide an overview of the design and administration of Saskatchewan’s 2021–2022 Legal Needs Survey, as well as highlight its key findings. The intention is to serve as a guide for the design and implementation of a multiple-perspective service-provider legal-needs assessment, as well as to inform future A2J initiatives based on the findings. Part I provides a review of current information on justice-related problems and legal-needs surveys, particularly within the Canadian context. Part II describes the methodology that was adopted for our 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey. Part III discusses the key findings that were contained in our final report. Finally, Part IV discusses reflections and recommendations in accordance with the project findings.

⁵ Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems.”

⁶ Michele Leering, “Enhancing the Legal Profession’s Capacity for Innovation: The Promise of Reflective Practice and Action Research for Increasing Access to Justice,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 34, no. 1 (2017): 191.

Part I: A Review of Current Information on Justice-Related Problems and Legal-Needs Surveys

Over the past 25 years, a consistent pattern has emerged from studies that have assessed legal needs across varying jurisdictions.⁷ That is, in many countries, a notable proportion of the population will, during their lifetime, experience a justice-related problem.⁸ Global estimates suggest that over one-third (36%) of the world's population have experienced at least one justice-related problem within a two-year period, with the extent of these problems varying across countries.⁹ In Canada, anywhere from 34 to 52 percent of Canadians have experienced at least one justice-related problem within a time span of two to three years.¹⁰ For instance, according to data from the Canadian Legal Problems Survey (CLPS), one-third (34%) of Canadians (in the provinces) reported having experienced at least one dispute or problem in the previous three years, of whom nearly one in five (18%) indicated that the issue was serious and not easy to fix.¹¹ While justice-related problems are pervasive, some types are more prevalent than others.¹² Recent data suggest that Canadians most frequently experience issues pertaining to consumerism, money and debt, housing, family, accessing public services, and employment. In the CLPS, the most common serious problems or disputes were related to neighborhood issues (21%), harassment (16%), poor or incorrect medical treatment (16%), discrimination (16%), and large purchases or services (15%).¹³ This suggests that some sectors of the justice system will witness greater use than others.

As with many problems that are experienced throughout the course of life, justice-related problems do not always occur in isolation, as one problem is likely to bring about or follow from another.¹⁴ Indeed, Canadian data highlight that 30 percent of people experienced two or more legal problems within a three-year period.¹⁵ According to the 2021 CLPS, among Canadians who experienced at least one serious problem or dispute within a three-year period, 43 percent had

⁷ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys and Access to Justice* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019).

⁸ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; Hazel Genn and Sarah Beinart, *Paths to Justice: What People Do and Think about Going to Law* (Hart Publishing, 1999) Portland, Oregon. World Justice Project, *Global Insights on Access to Justice 2019: Findings from the World Justice Project General Population Poll in 101 Countries* (Washington: World Justice Project, 2019).

⁹ World Justice Project, *Global Insights*; World Justice Project, *Measuring the Justice Gap: A People-Centered Assessment of Unmet Justice Needs Around the World* (Washington: World Justice Project, 2019).

¹⁰ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*; Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

¹¹ Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

¹² Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*.

¹³ Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

¹⁴ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*; Pascoe Pleasence et al., "Multiple Justiciable Problems: Common Clusters and Their Social and Demographic Indicators," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 1, no. 2 (2004): 301–29.

¹⁵ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*.

experienced two or more issues.¹⁶ Furthermore, while not everyone who has justice-related problems will experience social, economic, and health disadvantages, those with such disadvantages are disproportionately affected.¹⁷ In one Canadian study, it was found that disability status, as well as employment status and income level, were strong predictors of (certain) justice-related problems.¹⁸ Similar findings have been reported in the CLPS, as people with disabilities and lower household incomes are more likely to experience one or more serious problems or disputes.¹⁹ With respect to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, data suggest the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are more likely than non-Indigenous people to experience one or more legal problems or disputes.²⁰ Therefore, certain individuals may be in greater need of services and support as compared with others.²¹

Legal problems can also carry economic burden for the individual. According to data from the CLPS, 75 percent of Canadians who had experienced a serious problem or dispute in the previous three years reported that they were financially impacted as a result.²² Another study revealed that individuals spent, on average, \$6,100 to resolve justice-related problems, which equates to approximately \$7.7 billion spent on an annual basis by Canadians.²³ The economic burden further extends to the state, as justice-related problems may result in greater need of social assistance, employment insurance, or health care, which is estimated to cost social and health service sectors in Canada a combined total of \$800 million annually.²⁴ In addition to the financial costs, legal problems can bring about other hardships for the individual, including physical and psychological health issues, loss of income and employment, relationship breakdown, and substance-use issues, among others.²⁵ Therefore, the cost of justice-related problems is significant for individuals who are facing these issues, as well as the state.²⁶

Given the ubiquitous nature of justice-related problems, as well as the potential negative impact that they can have, individuals and communities have a variety of legal needs. However, when legal support is not available to help resolve justice-related problems, legal needs are oftentimes left unmet, which ultimately means that there is no A2J.²⁷ Several factors may serve as indicators of an unmet legal need, including the extent to which problems remain unresolved,

¹⁶ Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems.”

¹⁷ Christine Coumarelos et al., *Legal Australia-Wide Survey: Legal Need in Australia*, vol. 7 (Sydney, NSW: Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales, 2012); Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Currie, “National Survey”; OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*; Pleasence et al., “Multiple Justiciable Problems”; Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems.”

¹⁸ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*.

¹⁹ Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems.”

²⁰ Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems”; Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*.

²¹ Currie.

²² Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems.”

²³ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*.

²⁴ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*.

²⁵ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems”; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*.

²⁶ Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*.

²⁷ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*.

the extent to which situations become worse because problems go unresolved, and problems are resolved but the resolution is perceived to be unfair.²⁸ Four Canadian national legal-needs surveys have collected data on one or more of these indicators.²⁹ According to the earliest study,³⁰ as many as 34 percent of justice-related problems were unresolved, unresolved problems had resulted in worsening situations in 46 percent of cases, and resolutions were perceived to have been unfair in 29 percent of cases. In a subsequent study,³¹ approximately 35 percent of all justice-related problems were unresolved (of which 12 percent reported that the situation had worsened) and, for those problems that were resolved, 44 percent of respondents perceived the outcome to be unfair. In a 2014 study,³² nearly one-third (30%) of respondents had justice-related problems that had not been resolved (of which 16% reported that the ongoing problems had become worse) and, for those with problems that had been resolved, 46 percent perceived the outcome to be unfair. In the latest national legal-needs survey, findings suggest that most serious problems or disputes remained unresolved, as only two in ten (21%) Canadians had resolved their issue(s).³³

Given the number of people in Canada³⁴ and across the globe³⁵ who have legal needs that are left unmet, this represents a major A2J problem. The development of a better understanding of people's legal needs and their experiences in navigating justice-related problems is the first step toward achieving A2J.³⁶ Traditionally, this has been achieved through legal-needs surveys. The OECD/Open Society Foundations report, *Legal Needs Surveys and Access to Justice*, provides an overview of previous legal-needs surveys and, more specifically, draws from the experiences of these surveys to offer a comprehensive guide for measuring legal needs across varying jurisdictions.³⁷ Though legal-needs surveys have a long history, their use has drastically increased in recent years as a considerable number of national and subnational surveys have been conducted in many places around the world.³⁸ Primarily focused on civil and family law, legal-needs surveys explore the nature of justice-related problems, pathways and obstacles to resolution for these problems, and the impact of these problems on individuals and communities. They are a tool to shed light on legal problems, drive policy reform and programming, monitor progress toward A2J, and help shape justice-system stakeholders' thinking around A2J issues and strategies for

²⁸ Currie, "National Survey."

²⁹ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Currie, "National Survey"; Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

³⁰ Currie, "National Survey."

³¹ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*.

³² Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*.

³³ Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

³⁴ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Currie, "National Survey"; Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; Savage and McDonald, "Serious Problems."

³⁵ World Justice Project, *Justice Gap*; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*.

³⁶ World Justice Project, *Global Insights*.

³⁷ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*.

³⁸ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*; World Justice, *Justice Gap*.

improving legal service delivery.³⁹ Since our project was undertaken, significant developments have occurred internationally to advance the understanding of legal needs⁴⁰ and how to ground A2J initiatives and legal-needs assessments in people-centered justice.⁴¹

As highlighted in the OECD/Open Society Foundations report, despite being part of the same tradition, the objectives and methodology of past legal-needs surveys vary considerably.⁴² Most legal-needs surveys have focused on nationally representative samples; however, some have focused on specific target populations⁴³ or involved oversampling of certain demographics.⁴⁴ There is also wide variation in the structure and design of legal-needs surveys.⁴⁵ Indeed, past surveys have varied according to sample size, topic, degree of detail and sophistication of questions, length, modes of administration, and units of measurement (e.g. individual-level versus community-level); thus, they provide varying lenses through which A2J issues and legal needs can be viewed. A commonality of past legal-needs surveys is that they have prioritized a user-centered approach, targeting the perspectives of those who have experienced justice-related problems.⁴⁶ In other words, A2J measurement has primarily centered on the user perspective and their experiences in navigating justice-related problems. We recognize that an emphasis on user-focused legal needs surveys has unfolded for good reason. The justice sector is often criticized for speaking to its own “justice system insiders” in its design. The current research somewhat departs from this trend, however, as the goal was to investigate A2J issues and legal needs within Saskatchewan from multiple perspectives (i.e. lawyers and community agencies) to serve as an alternative, yet complimentary, lens through which to view the A2J gaps that are experienced by individuals and communities (i.e. concurrently through public responses via CLPS). Ultimately, this added perspective may lead to a deeper understanding of the barriers that people face in accessing legal support and services.

Part II: Methodology and Sample for the 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey

The 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey was developed with consideration of the geographic and sociodemographic profile of the province. Located in Western Canada, Saskatchewan has a census (2021) population of 1.13 million (3%

³⁹ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*.

⁴⁰ Victoria Law Foundation, “Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS),” <https://puls.victoriawillfoundation.org.au/understand>.

⁴¹ OECD, *Recommendation of the Council on Access to Justice and People-Centred Justice Systems* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024); OECD, *OECD Framework and Good Practice Principles for People-Centred Justice* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021).

⁴² OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*.

⁴³ Currie, “National Survey.”

⁴⁴ Coumarelos et al., *Legal Australia-Wide Survey*.

⁴⁵ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*.

⁴⁶ OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys*.

of Canada's total population).⁴⁷ Although over half of the population reside in cities ($n = 17$) and towns ($n = 149$), Saskatchewan has numerous rural/remote communities and Indigenous Reserves across its 577,060 square kilometers of land. According to the 2021 Census, 63 percent of the population were of working age (fifteen to sixty-four years old), with 17.5 percent aged sixty-five and over; women accounted for 50.3 percent of the population; roughly 17 percent identified as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit; immigrants and non-permanent residents accounted for 13.9 percent of the total population; the median income was \$42,400, with 13 percent of the population meeting criteria for low income; and the employment rate was 59.9 percent.

Survey Design

The 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey comprised a Community Agency Survey and a Lawyer Survey, both of which were online self-report questionnaires (hosted on SurveyMonkey) that were designed to examine respondents' perceptions of the A2J issues and priority legal needs based on their experiences with the communities and clients that they serve. The surveys consisted of a combination of open- and closed-ended questions. They were also informed by several sources, including previous research into justice-related problems, legal needs, and A2J (see Part I); existing legal-needs surveys that assess user-centered experiences; ongoing legal-needs research and A2J initiatives in other Canadian provinces;⁴⁸ and regular and reflexive consultations with subject-matter experts.

Both surveys followed a similar structure and were divided into five sections that explored: (a) respondents' general perceptions of justice-related problems and legal needs in their communities, with a focus on how people attempt to resolve justice-related problems and the A2J barriers that may be encountered in the process of doing so; (b) legal services, support, and/or areas of law that are in demand but not adequately offered in respondents' communities, including barriers to accessing those services, support, and/or areas of law and strategies for increasing access in the future; (c) demographic/social groups who have unmet legal needs, including barriers faced by these groups in accessing necessary legal support within their communities and strategies for increasing their access in the future; (d) legal needs most frequently experienced by clients, including the legal support that clients require in order to manage their justice-related problems; and (e) respondents' demographic characteristics.

Notably, there were slight differences between the two surveys to accommodate the unique perspectives offered by community agency representatives and lawyers. For instance, the Community Agency Survey focused on identifying legal support/services that were in demand in the community but not adequately offered, whereas the Lawyer Survey focused on identifying areas of law that were needed, as community agency representatives were more likely to

⁴⁷ Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, *2021 Census of Population* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2022).

⁴⁸ Alberta Law Foundation, *Bridging the Gaps Survey* (Calgary: Alberta Law Foundation, 2023), <https://albertalawfoundation.org/our-work/bridging-the-gaps/>.

be aware of the types of legal support/services needed by clients than the specific areas of law. Relatedly, the Lawyer Survey explored the areas of law to which social groups with unmet legal needs required better access, while this line of questioning was not included in the Community Agency Survey. Finally, the Lawyer Survey asked for personal respondent demographic characteristics that were related to age, gender, and ethnicity, whereas the Community Agency Survey focused on identifying the types of services that respondents’ agencies provided.

Sampling Strategy

Community Agency Survey

The sampling frame for the Community Agency Survey was developed with the intention of ensuring that agencies from across Saskatchewan would be invited to complete the survey. Accordingly, we first took a geographic-based sampling approach by using the 2016 Census⁴⁹ to identify all “cities” and “towns” in Saskatchewan with a population size of 4,000 or greater, as communities of this size tend to act as “service hubs.” By using this approach, eighteen communities distributed across the northern, central, and southern regions of the province were identified, including two census metropolitan areas (>200,000 people); two mid-sized cities (between 20,000 and 40,000 people); eleven small cities (between 5,000 and <20,000 people); and three towns (between 4,000 and <5,000 people). To ensure adequate representation of the Far North, three additional communities (between 1,000 and <4,000 people) were included in the sampling frame, bringing the total number of communities sampled to twenty-one.

Next, organizations were identified within each community that provided services in the following domains: mental health and addictions; alternative measures and extrajudicial sanctions; family services; counseling and programming; immigration and newcomer support; and LGBTQ2S+ support. Two resources were primarily used to identify relevant community agencies: (1) the *CLASSIC Rehabilitative Alternatives to Incarceration: Handbook of Community and Government Programs in Saskatchewan*⁵⁰ and (2) a previously developed inventory of legal and non-legal service providers in Saskatchewan. A handful of community agencies ($n = 9$) were also identified through a web search of relevant agencies and consultations with subject-matter experts. In total, 179 unique community agencies were initially selected into the sampling frame.

Finally, each of the 179 agencies was contacted by phone to introduce the study, determine each organization’s interest in participating in the study, and obtain an email address to which the formal survey invitation could be sent. At the conclusion of this process, eighty-nine agencies agreed to receive the formal

⁴⁹ Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, *Saskatchewan Population Report: 2016 Census of Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2017).

⁵⁰ Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC), *2019-2020 Rehabilitative Alternatives to Incarceration: A Handbook of Community & Government Programs in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Indigenous Law Centre, 2020).

survey invitation. Approximately two-thirds of the agencies ($n = 60$) provided the Executive Director's (or other designated individual's) email address, while one-third ($n = 29$) provided the agency's email address and stated that they would forward the survey to the Executive Director (or designate) upon receipt. It is important to note most agencies that were successfully contacted agreed to receive the survey invitation, with only twenty-five agencies explicitly declining the invitation to participate in the survey. Other reasons why permission was not obtained included nonresponse to the initial phone call ($n = 41$), identification of duplicate organizations following communication attempts ($n = 16$), and agencies that were no longer in service ($n = 7$). An excellent response rate (55%) was obtained by sampling community agencies via this method—approximately forty-nine responses were received from the eighty-nine agencies that were formally invited to participate in the survey.

Lawyer Survey

Two primary sampling strategies were used to recruit lawyers to participate in the Lawyer Survey. First, lawyers were invited to participate through an advertisement that was included in the LSS weekly newsletter, which was sent to subscribers of their listserv over a three-week period. At the time at which the advertisements were circulated, there were 2,865 listserv subscribers. The survey was also advertised through additional LSS communication channels (e.g. social media accounts, websites, additional newsletter) and was shared through a mass email communication to the LSS's Designated Firm Representatives. Due to the low response rate (3%; $n = 82$) that stemmed from these communication attempts through the LSS, a second sampling strategy was implemented. Specifically, the LSS Find Legal Assistance Directory (i.e. an online directory of lawyers in Saskatchewan) was mined for all email addresses that had been made publicly available. Email addresses were obtained for 745 LSS members who were actively practicing law. Personalized survey invitations were then directly sent to each of these individuals. This sampling strategy proved to be more effective and had a 23.6 percent response rate ($n = 176$).

Supplementary Sampling Strategies

In addition to the abovementioned approaches, supplementary sampling strategies were also used to further expand the reach of the Community Agency Survey and Lawyer Survey. This resulted in additional responses from eighteen community agency representatives and ninety-six lawyers (making up the remainder of the total samples). For instance, the survey links were distributed through email communications, presentations, newsletters, social media posts, and pilot survey invitations. Because it is not known whom the surveys may have reached, nor is it clear how many individuals were made aware of the survey through these sampling strategies, a response rate cannot be calculated.

Procedures

Both the Community Agency Survey and the Lawyer Survey were pilot-tested by a small number of representatives from the target population of each survey to ensure the functionality of the survey and clarity of the survey questions. No major issues were identified with either survey and responses from the Community Agency Survey ($n = 2$) and Lawyer Survey ($n = 14$) pilot tests were included in the final sample. Following best practices for online survey administration (i.e. the Tailored Design Method⁵¹), prospective participants were invited to complete the survey through a series of direct, personalized, and strategically timed email invitations. Specifically, prospective participants received an initial invitation for the survey, followed by two unique reminder emails (each of which was spaced two weeks apart). Each message provided participants with pertinent information about the study, including a link to the survey. Upon accessing the survey on SurveyMonkey, participants were first presented with the consent form for the study. After reviewing the consent form, participants were able to complete the survey, which took approximately ten to fifteen minutes for the Community Agency Survey and fifteen to twenty minutes for the Lawyer Survey. Participants’ free and informed consent was implied through the completion and submission of the survey.

Data Analysis

Data from the Community Agency Survey and Lawyer Survey were analyzed separately, but similar procedures were used to analyze both datasets. First, data were extracted from SurveyMonkey and transferred to the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 28. Once data were transferred to SPSS, two trained research assistants cleaned the data. All closed-ended survey questions were analyzed in SPSS by using descriptive statistical techniques, such as calculating relative frequencies (i.e. prevalence rates) and measures of central tendency (i.e. means and standard deviations) to identify the response items that were most frequently endorsed by participants. Where applicable, unknown/missing data were accounted for in analyses (i.e. analyses were based on the total sample, irrespective of unknown/missing data on the survey item).

All open-ended survey questions were analyzed by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006⁵²), which involves systematically identifying and categorizing thematic patterns that have been identified in the text-based data. Specifically, text-based responses to each open-ended survey question were transferred from SPSS to a Microsoft Word document. Responses were then reviewed to develop a coding scheme that categorized the major themes that had been identified across participants’ answers. The coding scheme was then used to systematically analyze responses according to the relevant theme(s).

⁵¹ Don A. Dillman, Jolene D. Smyth, and Leah Melani Christian, *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

⁵² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

Throughout this process, several passes were made through the data to confirm the coding scheme, organize major themes, and categorize participants' responses.

Respondent Characteristics

Community Agency Survey

The Community Agency Survey was completed by sixty-seven representatives of community agencies, of whom fifty-nine indicated the type of services that their organization provided. The most-reported services were within the domains of mental health and addictions (22%), justice (17%), child, youth, and family (10%), housing (5%), and education (5%). Of the sixty respondents who indicated the type of legal service that they provided, many community agencies provided referrals to legal (50%) and non-legal (47%) service providers, advocacy (33%), legal information (23%), mediation (22%), document preparation and form filling (17%), dispute resolution (12%), legal workshops (10%), and self-help kits (8%). Finally, of the fifty-two respondents who indicated the geographic location(s) that they served, 40 percent delivered services in northern Saskatchewan.

Lawyer Survey

A total of 272 practicing and non-practicing lawyers completed the Lawyer Survey. Among the 217 respondents who indicated the type of organization that they worked for, the majority were employed by a law firm (67%), followed by the provincial government (13%), Legal Aid (3%), and in-house counsel (3%). Of the 261 respondents who indicated the area of law in which they practiced, over thirty different legal specialties were selected. The most-reported areas of law respondents provided services that included wills and estates (44%), real estate (38%), family (38%), corporate/commercial (37%), criminal (30%), debtor/creditor (26%), administrative/boards/tribunals (26%), employment/labor (24%), guardianship/incapacity (23%), and small claims (21%). Among the 220 respondents who indicated the types of legal services that they provided, the most common were legal advice (77%), legal representation (68%), assistance with litigation (53%), legal information (52%), assistance with negotiation (51%), document preparation and form filling (43%), advocacy (43%), dispute resolution (33%), and mediation (29%). Of the 213 respondents who indicated the geographic location(s) that they served, under one-third (29%) provided services in northern Saskatchewan. In terms of respondents' personal demographic characteristics, the mean age of the sample was forty-eight years ($SD = 13.03$); 52 percent identified as men and 41 percent as women; and 77 percent identified as White, with the remainder identifying as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit (7%), Other (3%), South Asian (2%), Black (2%), Chinese (1%), Arab (1%), and Southeast Asian (1%).

Part III: Results from the 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey

This section provides a description of some of the major findings from both the Community Agency Survey and the Lawyer Survey, discussed according to each thematic section of the surveys. However, due to space constraints, not all findings are presented. For more information on the results from both surveys, see the Saskatchewan Legal Needs report.⁵³

Community Agency Survey

General Perceptions of Justice-Related Problems and Legal Needs

Reflecting upon their community and the work that they do, representatives of community agencies were likely to agree (42%) or strongly agree (34%) that almost everyone will face a justice-related problem in their lifetime. Despite this understanding, many respondents strongly agreed (54%) or agreed (36%) that the legal system is difficult to navigate for those who are looking for legal support for their justice-related problem. Furthermore, one-third of the sample (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed that people who are experiencing a justice-related problem are better off if they address it through the formal legal system (approximately 19% agreed and 21% disagreed). Related to this point, one-third (33%) of the sample further agreed that most justice-related problems could be resolved outside of the formal legal system (27% neither agreed nor disagreed). Many respondents strongly agreed (49%) or agreed (34%) that people are less likely to take action to resolve a justice-related problem if it is too costly (e.g. financial, time, energy).

Respondents also strongly agreed (46%) or agreed (28%) that the eligibility criteria for free, subsidized, or low-cost legal services (e.g. Legal Aid) are too restrictive. Further, it was generally perceived that the communities in which respondents operated did not offer adequate legal support and services. Specifically, many participants disagreed (52%) or strongly disagreed (33%) that there were an adequate number of services available to support the legal needs of their community. Related to this point, many disagreed (61%) or strongly disagreed (27%) that people are aware of legal support in their community. It was also believed that community services were not providing optimal support to help address individuals’ legal needs. In this case, most participants agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (18%) that a significant barrier to addressing individuals’ legal needs is the unintegrated (or disconnected) nature of services available in the community. Many also disagreed (42%) that legal service providers deliver services in a culturally appropriate manner (28% neither agreed nor disagreed).

Finally, representatives of community agencies reported that people who are faced with a justice-related problem can sometimes or rarely obtain effective legal representation (52% and 30%, respectively), obtain effective legal information (60% and 27%, respectively), as well as obtain effective legal advice (54% and 28%, respectively). Respondents further suggested those who are faced with a

⁵³ Bryce Stoliker et al., *A Legal Needs Survey in the Province of Saskatchewan: Perspectives of Lawyers and Legal and Non-Legal Service Providers* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2023).

justice-related problem are sometimes (48%) or rarely (37%) able to access legal support in a timely manner to resolve their legal issue and are sometimes (42%) or rarely (24%) able to resolve these problems as a result of seeking out legal support.

Legal Needs

Representatives of community agencies highlighted the types of justice-related problems that their clients most often have, with the top five being those related to criminal matters (64%), family (relationship breakdown) (61%), social assistance (49%), housing (46%), money or debt (36%), and family (other) (36%). On the one hand, when asked about the types of legal support that clients most often need to manage their justice-related problems, it was suggested that they require access to: (1) legal information and education; (2) affordable legal services and support; (3) legal consultation, representation, guidance, and support; and (4) adequate language, interpretation, and cultural services. On the other hand, when asked about the types of non-legal support that clients most often need to manage their justice-related problems, it was indicated that they require access to: (1) social services and community support (including referrals); (2) general information, consultation, and guidance; and (3) cultural services.

Legal Services/Support

Representatives of community agencies highlighted the types of legal services that are most in demand but not adequately offered in their community, with the top five including legal advice (67%), legal representation (57%), legal information (52%), advocacy (48%), and mediation (42%). The most common reasons why it is difficult for individuals to access the legal support that they need include having limited financial resources for legal representation/accessing legal support (70%); having limited personal resources to support attendance at legal appointments (66%); having limited understanding of the formal justice system (63%); cultural barriers (63%); and having limited knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities (61%). Relatedly, several ideas were suggested to make legal services and support more accessible to those with justice-related problems in their community, such as: (1) enhancing resources/practices to offer free, subsidized, or low-cost legal consultation, representation, guidance, and support; (2) increasing public knowledge; (3) developing dedicated services/support to assist clients through the legal system/process; (4) integrating social and legal services; and (5) increasing access to cultural support (including language/translation services).

Demographic Groups Served

Reflecting upon their community and the work that they do, representatives of community agencies outlined demographic groups that often need legal support but are not being adequately served. The top five demographic groups that are underserved include low-income earners (60%), persons with mental illness (52%), unemployed/economically inactive persons (52%), Indigenous Peoples

(51%), and homeless persons (49%). With respect to factors that make it difficult for underserved demographic groups to access the legal support that they require, the five most-commonly reported challenges include: having limited financial resources for legal representation/accessing legal support (64%); having limited understanding of the formal justice system (61%); cultural barriers (58%); having limited personal resources to support attendance at legal appointments (55%); and having limited awareness of legal rights and responsibilities (54%). Several ideas were suggested to make the legal support that is needed by underserved demographic groups more accessible, including: (1) enhancing resources/practices to offer free, subsidized, or low-cost legal consultation, representation, guidance, and support; (2) increasing public knowledge; (3) developing dedicated services/support to assist clients through the legal system/process; (4) increasing community engagement; and (5) increasing access to cultural support (including language/translation services).

Lawyer Survey

General Perceptions of Justice-Related Problems and Legal Needs

Reflecting upon their community and the work that they do, just over one-third of lawyers (34%) neither agreed nor disagreed that people who are experiencing a justice-related problem are better off if they address it through the formal legal system (roughly 24% agreed and 26% disagreed). Many lawyers further agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (16%) that most justice-related problems could be resolved outside of the formal legal system (17% neither agreed nor disagreed and 21% disagreed). Nearly all of the respondents strongly agreed (45%) or agreed (41%) that people are less likely to take action to resolve justice-related problems that have higher costs (e.g. financial, time, energy). In line with this notion, many lawyers also strongly agreed (39%) or agreed (28%) that the eligibility criteria for free, subsidized, or low-cost legal services (e.g. Legal Aid) are too restrictive. Notably, most participants disagreed (43%) or strongly disagreed (28%) that there are an adequate number of services available to support the legal needs of their community.

Lawyers were most likely to disagree (52%) or strongly disagree (16%) that people are aware of the legal support that is available in the community that may assist in resolving a justice-related problem. Many also agreed (38%) and strongly agreed (15%) that a significant barrier to addressing individuals' legal needs is the unintegrated nature of services that are available in the community (20% neither agreed nor disagreed). While many lawyers disagreed (31%) and strongly disagreed (11%) that there are an adequate number of legal service providers (e.g. lawyers and supporting legal assistants) who are practicing in areas of law of which their community is in need, 27% also agreed with this statement (15% neither agreed nor disagreed). In addition, many participants disagreed (26%) that legal service providers deliver services in a culturally appropriate manner; however, approximately 20 percent agreed with this statement and 24 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Finally, lawyers reported that people who are faced with a justice-related problem are able to sometimes or often obtain effective legal advice (48% and

30%, respectively), obtain effective legal information (46% and 32%, respectively), and obtain effective legal representation (49% and 24%, respectively). Respondents further suggested that those who are faced with a justice-related problem are sometimes (50%) or often (26%) able to resolve these problems as a result of seeking legal support. It was also believed that those who are faced with a justice-related problem are able to sometimes (49%), rarely (19%), or often (18%) access legal support in a timely manner to resolve their legal issue.

Areas of Law

Lawyers were asked to identify up to three areas of law that are in demand but not adequately offered in their community, with the most endorsed being family (43%), criminal (32%), immigration/refugee (20%), housing/residential tenancies (20%), and Aboriginal/Indigenous (13%). Lawyers were further asked to select one area of law that they believed was most in demand in their community, with the most endorsed being family law (27%). Based on this response, participants were asked follow-up questions about barriers to accessing family law and potential solutions for increasing accessibility. It was perceived that services in family law are not adequately offered because free or government-subsidized services are not available in this area of law (69%), this area of law and the related legal procedures are complex (53%), and legal service providers lack the capacity to meet the demand for services in this area of law (37%). To establish or expand services in family law, lawyers suggested that there should be an increased availability of free or government-subsidized services (69%), additional resources that are dedicated to service provision (46%), and increased utilization of alternative billing arrangements (38%). Furthermore, it was perceived that factors that are making it difficult to access services and support in family law include the limited financial resources for legal representation and other expenses associated with accessing legal support (80%), delays/time lags (e.g. waitlists) in this area of law (51%), and the complexity of the area of law and related legal procedures (49%). To make family law more accessible to those with legal needs in this area, lawyers suggested greater access to low-cost or free full-scope (70%) and limited-scope (61%) legal representation, as well as greater utilization of alternative dispute-resolution models (57%).

Social Groups Served

Lawyers were asked to identify up to three social groups that needed legal support but are not being adequately served in their community, with the most endorsed being low-income earners (42%), Indigenous Peoples (23%), persons with mental illness (22%), unemployed/economically inactive persons (21%), and immigrants/newcomers/refugees (17%). Again, lawyers were further asked to select one social group that they believed was most in need of legal support in their community, with the most endorsed being low-income earners (25%). Based on this response, participants were asked follow-up questions about barriers to accessing services and support for low-income earners and

potential solutions for increasing accessibility. Foremost, lawyers suggested that the areas of law of which low-income earners are most in need included family (79%), criminal (58%), housing/residential tenancies (31%), debtor/creditor (28%), and government income (18%). However, it was believed that legal service providers are not able to adequately offer support to low-income earners because free or government-subsidized services are not available to provide legal support to this group (84%), as well as a lack of capacity among legal service providers to meet this group’s legal needs (27%). In addition, factors that make it difficult for low-income earners to access the legal support that they require included limited financial resources for legal representation and other expenses associated with accessing legal support (81%), limited personal resources (e.g. childcare, transportation) to support attendance at legal appointments (42%), and restrictions in eligibility for legal support (36%). With respect to increasing the accessibility of legal support for low-income earners, it was suggested that there should be greater access to low-cost or free full-scope (70%) and limited-scope (61%) legal representation, as well as additional funding for legal and advocacy support networks (51%). Further, to better provide low-income earners in the areas of law that they need, lawyers suggested increasing availability of free or government-subsidized services in the area(s) of law that they need (79%), additional resourcing that is dedicated to service provision in the area(s) of law that this group needs (64%), and increased utilization of alternative billing arrangements (e.g. flat fees, co-pay systems) in the needed area(s) of law (37%).

Legal Needs

Lawyers were asked to highlight the types of justice-related problems that their clients most often have, with the top five relating to family matters (both relationship breakdown (32%) and other (27%)), criminal matters (26%), contract disputes (20%), and wills and power of attorney (19%). With respect to the types of legal support that lawyers’ clients most often need in order to manage justice-related problems, the following themes were identified: (1) access to adequate legal representation; (2) access to adequate legal information, navigation, advice, and advocacy; (3) increased access to resources that support the procurement of legal consultation, representation, guidance, and support; (4) increased access to free, subsidized, or low-cost legal representation; (5) access to non-legal support; and (6) multifaceted support.

Part IV: Reflections and Recommendations in Accordance with Survey Findings

In this section, we provide key reflections and recommendations that are grounded in the findings from our multiple-perspective service-provider legal-needs survey within the context of Saskatchewan’s sociodemographic profile and A2J landscape, as well as drawing connections to broader A2J research. Our multiple-perspective approach allows the opportunity to determine whether justice-system stakeholders share similar perceptions concerning peoples’

pathways (and obstacles) to justice and whether these perceptions align with the experiences of users as determined through existing legal-needs surveys. Drawing upon multiple perspectives therefore contributes to a more fulsome understanding of justice-system gaps above and beyond any singular viewpoint. Accordingly, our survey confirmed and strengthened existing findings and recommendations, coinciding with themes that were identified a decade ago nationally⁵⁴ and locally.⁵⁵

We set forth to address the question: Would a comprehensive data-collection project, undertaken at the provincial level, be a necessary step in identifying legal needs, support, processes, initiatives, and reforms? While much has occurred to address the justice data deficit in Saskatchewan, and across Canada, to develop a more complete picture of A2J barriers and opportunities, continued efforts are needed to enhance justice data collection and sharing; implement individual and collective evaluations of A2J initiatives; and mobilize action on data insights. Most notably, this study compiled foundational data to provide initial insight into A2J issues and priority legal needs/support in the province of Saskatchewan, drawing from the perspectives of service providers (i.e. community agency representatives and lawyers). Future work is needed to examine justice-sector processes, initiatives, and reforms to monitor progress toward A2J solutions. With that said, our project (i.e. methodological approach and findings) may serve as a model for future justice data-collection projects, as well as inform justice-sector improvements at the provincial level (and Canada more broadly). Indeed, Alberta and Manitoba researchers are actively using our research to inform the next stages of their A2J projects. Locally, CREATE Justice has collaborated with Saskatchewan A2J Network members to advance coordinated data collection and program evaluation through the implementation of an A2J Measurement Framework⁵⁶ and findings from this study. We are also implementing findings from a complimentary Legal Data Scan study⁵⁷ to support interagency data-sharing A2J measurement.

Drawing from study findings, there is a need to *improve early-integrated public legal information and service delivery*. People not knowing where or how to get legal support is an ongoing issue provincially and nationally,⁵⁸ reinforcing the importance of improving outreach strategies (e.g. through public legal education) to help individuals who are less inclined to take action to resolve their justice-related problems. Both community agencies and lawyers indicated that a significant barrier to addressing individuals' legal needs is the unintegrated nature of services in communities. Considering this finding, numerous collaborative efforts are underway to increase public awareness of legal support. For example,

⁵⁴ Canadian Bar Association, *Access to Justice Metrics*.

⁵⁵ Rochelle Blocka and Miles Waghray, *The Dean's Forum on Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice: Progress Report* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan College of Law, 2015).

⁵⁶ Clair McCashin, Alex Santos, and Desiree Steele, *On Civil and Family Justice Metrics: Towards a Framework for Saskatchewan: A Follow Up Report and Summary Notes* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan College of Law, 2018).

⁵⁷ Jewell et al., *Legal Data*.

⁵⁸ Stoliker et al., *Legal Needs Survey*, 127.

the “Saskatchewan Access to Legal Information Project” improves early-integrated legal information by training library staff on detecting legal issues and referrals.⁵⁹ The Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan also conducted a project to enhance the content and delivery of legal information resources to Indigenous Peoples and communities in the province. Indeed, community agencies and lawyers identified need for early-integrated legal advice and representation. Currently, the “Saskatchewan Legal Coaching and Unbundling Pilot Project”⁶⁰ helps to minimize legal costs and self-representation. Also, the “Saskatchewan Limited Licensing Pilot” is a new approach to legal regulation that enables people without a law degree to assist consumers in a limited scope.⁶¹ The need for such initiatives was reinforced in survey findings, which called for more entry points, support for early resolution and information, government-funded community resources, and public information sessions on the legal system.⁶²

Another priority is to *engage the legal profession in a culture shift towards improving A2J*. By adopting a “reflective practice” and “action research” approach, this study promotes a culture shift among justice stakeholders. Specifically, our approach and findings emphasize the need for greater collaboration amongst legal (and non-legal) service providers to effectively identify and act upon system-level opportunities to bridge A2J gaps for justice users, which may include enhanced information sharing as well as the development (or improvement) of integrative programs, policies, and practices. We asked community agencies and lawyers to reflect on the justice-system gaps experienced by users, culminating in diverse viewpoints on A2J issues and legal needs (and potential solutions) that converged and diverged across several topics. For example, some differences and similarities in *perceptions* between community agencies and lawyers emerged. Unlike representatives of community agencies, lawyers generally believed that people who are faced with a justice-related problem can obtain the legal advice, information, and representation that they need, as well as address their problems in a timely manner and satisfactorily resolve them. Yet, both groups agreed on several matters, including the fact that people are not aware of legal support (and communities do not offer adequate legal support), people are less likely to address problems if it is too costly (and eligibility for free, subsidized, or low-cost services is too restrictive), that most problems could be addressed outside of the formal legal system, and that the legal system is too difficult to navigate. Multiple perspectives are therefore critical to exploring challenges that are specific to certain groups, as well as pinpointing where diverse groups hold parallel (and divergent) views. Numerous

⁵⁹ Beth Bilson, Brea Lowenberger, and Graham Sharp, “Reducing the ‘Justice Gap’ through Access to Legal Information: Establishing Access to Justice Entry Points at Public Libraries,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 34, no. 2 (2017): 99–128.

⁶⁰ CREATE Justice and College of Law, *Saskatchewan Legal Coaching and Unbundling Pilot Project* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2019).

⁶¹ Law Society of Saskatchewan, *The Limited Licensing Pilot* (Regina: Law Society of Saskatchewan, 2022).

⁶² Stoliker et al., *Legal Needs Survey*, 63, 58, 54, 55.

initiatives in Saskatchewan are already engaging lawyers (alongside community agencies and users) in a culture shift to improve A2J. The “Saskatchewan Legal Coaching and Unbundling Pilot Project,” for example, invited feedback from lawyers, consumers, the regulator, and judges.

The geography and sociodemographic profile of Saskatchewan are important to consider as they relate to A2J issues. For instance, while we found that some community agencies and lawyers help people across the province (including northern Saskatchewan), most social and legal services are in “hub” centers (i.e. cities and towns). Therefore, a major A2J issue in Saskatchewan includes geographical barriers. Additionally, while many community agencies and lawyers provide services to multiple communities, resources are limited, which precludes the provision of a full service. Any A2J initiatives will need to consider geography, potentially enhancing mobile or virtual services, although challenges to virtual services include Internet connectivity and the affordability of technology, particularly for rural and remote residents. Considerations of family and criminal law, as well as low-income earners and economically inactive persons, were identified as high-priority areas by community agencies and lawyers, suggesting the importance of expanding legal and non-legal services to meet the needs in these areas. Notably, given Saskatchewan’s population composition, increasing Indigenous-focused support and services is paramount.

Despite drawing from the perspectives of service providers, our results generally align with past user-centered legal-needs surveys. For instance, similarly to national legal-needs surveys,⁶³ community agencies and lawyers indicated that common justice-related problems included family matters, social assistance, housing, and money or debt. Furthermore, our results concur with past Canadian studies⁶⁴ which suggested that certain social and demographic groups may be disproportionately affected by A2J issues and have legal needs, including low-income earners, unemployed/economically inactive persons, homeless persons, Indigenous Peoples, and immigrants/newcomers/refugees. Interestingly, in addition to problems related to social assistance, which aligns with previous Canadian studies,⁶⁵ our findings suggest that this group also experience issues related to family, criminal, and housing matters. Furthermore, similarly to past studies,⁶⁶ current findings suggested that not only are legal problems costly for the individual, but legal needs may also be unmet (in Saskatchewan), as there was consensus that legal support and services are not sufficiently available in communities. Taken together, the findings from our study strengthen the perspectives and experiences of users that were gathered from past research, drawing attention to common and ongoing A2J issues.

⁶³ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Currie, “National Survey”; Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*; World Justice Project, *Justice Gap*.

⁶⁴ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Currie, “National Survey.”

⁶⁵ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*.

⁶⁶ Currie, *Legal Problems of Everyday Life*; Currie, “National Survey”; Farrow et al., *Everyday Legal Problems*; Savage and McDonald, “Serious Problems”; World Justice Project, *Global Insights*.

In the future, emphasis should be placed on both user and service-provider perspectives to effectively bridge the A2J gap. For instance, including the views of those who provide services to individuals who are experiencing justice-related problems may highlight connections between user needs and service-provider support, and therefore help to inform policy change and the initiation of strategies/programming to improve A2J. Although there have been (local) studies on service-provider perspectives concerning legal needs and justice-system gaps,⁶⁷ knowledge is still limited in this regard. A service-provider perspective can be especially helpful when complimented by user-centered information, such as the CLPS, as it would elucidate both individual needs as well as potential avenues for service-provider support.

Conclusion

This paper provided an overview of findings from the 2021–2022 Saskatchewan Legal Needs Survey. Our study reinforced a person-centered justice orientation by employing a novel approach (i.e. a multiple-perspective service-provider legal-needs survey) to capture a comprehensive picture of justice-system gaps for users. We asked community agencies and lawyers to reflect on the A2J barriers that were experienced by their clients and/or communities to better understand the (justice) needs of the people whom they are meant to serve. The intention was to leverage insights from those who are directly or indirectly involved in the justice sector to provide an alternative, yet complimentary, vantage point from which to see people’s pathways (or obstacles) to justice—with the goal of pinpointing areas for improvement (at the institutional and service levels) to meet the A2J needs of people who are seeking legal and non-legal services to address their justice-related problems, although a key limitation to a service-provider approach (versus a user-centered focus) is that service providers may only see a limited scope of need (e.g. individuals may not seek service providers for help when they experience certain justice-related problems) and, therefore, perspectives are limited to the experiences of only those who seek formal legal and non-legal services. In any case, our data emphasize the need for increased public awareness and availability of legal information, education, support, and services. Data also emphasize the need to increase accessibility by removing common barriers to resolving justice-related problems (e.g. cost of services, disconnected nature of social services).

⁶⁷ Blocka and Waghray, *Dean’s Forum*.

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