

Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario: Learning from a Snapshot



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Executive Summary

Public legal education and information (PLEI) is increasingly being relied on to help people with legal problems understand their rights, take steps to resolve their problem, and navigate through the legal system. Recent research suggests that there is an overwhelming amount of legal information available, making it hard for people to access the information they need. Many voices in the justice sector are calling for greater coordination among PLEI providers as a way of improving access to justice.

As a first step in responding to these calls for action, Community Legal Education Ontario/Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario (CLEO) conducted this mapping initiative. Our objective was to get an overview of PLEI resources available in Ontario relating to the common legal problems of modest- and low-income people. Our review looked at PLEI resources through several lenses, including topic and subtopic, audience, format, language, intended use, and information provider. A key goal of this project was to identify opportunities for improved collaboration and coordination among PLEI providers in the province.

Our work was aided by a range of justice sector organizations that shared their time and expertise by participating as strategic research advisors for this project. The strategic research advisors became the first participants in the PLEI Cluster of the Action Group on Access to Justice (TAG). The PLEI Cluster held its inaugural meeting to discuss this draft report.

As our research got underway, we became aware that hundreds of ministries and offices at all levels of government, and a large number of smaller community-based organizations working at the front lines, are providing legal information of one sort or another – and producing these resources on an ongoing basis. Although we mapped almost 1,700 resources produced by 182 PLEI providers, we are aware that we did not catch all PLEI resources produced by all providers.

We conducted our research through an online scan so only PLEI resources that are posted online or promoted through the Internet are included. This included PLEI resources that don't reside on the web, but are mentioned online, such as materials produced in hard copy that can be ordered through websites.

We collected information on PLEI resources and entered the data into a multi-field database called the PLEI matrix. This version of the PLEI matrix contains resources found online between November 2013 and May 2014. We note that online information is highly fluid; resources are constantly being added and deleted, and this collection of data should be viewed as a snapshot.

Our mapping confirmed that there are a large number of PLEI resources available in Ontario on a wide range of topics, for a diversity of audiences, and intended for a variety of uses. Ontario government ministries, law-related associations, Legal Aid Ontario, CLEO, other community legal clinics, a significant number of women’s groups, and many others are producing PLEI and presenting it online. (Relatively few print resources seem to be available to order for free, despite a continued need for this.)

Drilling down, several subtopic areas include a large number of resources; those resources represent a wide range of information relating to audiences, formats, languages, and intended use. More work would need to be done, using a more focused lens, to assess overlaps and gaps.

This leads us to what we think is a key take-away from this research: the need for increased coordination among PLEI producers and providers. Our researchers were challenged to wade through the vast body of existing PLEI, and to categorize, in a consistent way, the resources they identified. Could this maze be similar to what users face when they try to sort through the legal information they encounter in their online searches?

The calls for better coordination among PLEI providers — made in this and other reports — sound obvious and easy to support, but identifying concrete steps for moving forward is less obvious. That said, we think that all major PLEI providers have a role to play in helping to support coordination.

Possible next steps based on this foundational research, and as suggested by the strategic research advisors through their participation in the PLEI Cluster of the Action Group on Access to Justice (TAG) include:

1. Creating and maintaining an accessible matrix

There was interest among participants in the PLEI Cluster in finding ways to transfer the information collected through this mapping research into a publicly accessible database that could be accessed by PLEI providers and easily updated. Options for moving forward with this include:

a. Working with data from this mapping research

One possibility is to transfer the data in the matrix into a database that is publicly accessible, or at least accessible to PLEI producers and providers. The objective would be to enable PLEI producers and providers to find out what PLEI already exists by topic and subtopic, format, audience, etc. Based on what they find out, PLEI providers could use or build on what already exists.

b. Building on “Your Legal Rights” website

Another option would be to devote resources to CLEO’s Your Legal Rights (YLR) website to enable it to play this function, for the same purpose. A large number of resources in the PLEI matrix already exist on YLR; indeed, YLR, which is updated regularly, includes PLEI produced subsequent to the mapping research.

c. Creating smaller shared databases as needed

There is also the possibility of building smaller shared databases on an as needed, more focused basis. If a PLEI producer had a particular purpose or question for which data from the matrix would be helpful, a shared database using only two or three topic or subtopic categories from the current matrix could be created. This selective approach may be more likely to generate concrete and useful information and analysis, and could be pulled together using less time, money and resources than a database built on the full matrix.

d. Building on the existing matrix to create profiles of the major PLEI producers

The information in the current matrix could be used to inform the creation of a high-level overview of the major PLEI producers in Ontario — something that does not currently exist and, given the plethora of PLEI and PLEI producers, may be a useful starting point for building better coordination.

2. Building on recommendations or themes identified through this research

As noted earlier, this research confirmed the existence of a large body of PLEI available online, produced by numerous organizations on a range of topics and subtopics, and available in many languages. Our strategic research advisors and the PLEI Cluster discussed several steps that could be taken to curate this information. This could create clearer pathways for people who are looking to find legal information that they can be confident is reliable and applies to their situation, and that they can understand and put to use. Options for moving forward with this include:

a. Committing to regular conversations on collaboration opportunities

An interest in improving coordination among PLEI producers and providers has been a theme in a number of recent reports. The purpose of having regular check-ins would be to share information about current and planned PLEI projects and discuss possible partnerships and collaboration.

b. Developing a common taxonomy and a common glossary (consistent terminology)

Researchers noted that the PLEI available online is presented to the public through a wide range of categorization schemes or taxonomies. A common taxonomy could play an important role in improving coordination in the PLEI sector and could make online PLEI easier to find.

c. Developing guidelines or best practices for PLEI, including an identification system for labelling “excellence”

Researchers also found that the PLEI available online may or may not follow best practices – practices, for example, for dating the PLEI and for stating the jurisdiction to which it applies. The idea of developing a set of guidelines for PLEI, perhaps accompanied by a “seal of excellence” for PLEI that follows those guidelines, could lead to higher-quality PLEI resources and an easier way for the public to identify reliable legal information.

d. Investigating opportunities for connecting with commonly-used search engines with the ultimate goal of helping to guide users to reliable sources of legal information

A query that came out of the PLEI Cluster was whether people who are searching for legal information using common search engines could be better directed to high-quality resources. For example, are there opportunities for working with the commonly-used search engines, such as Google, to find ways to direct people looking for legal information on a specific topic, such as eviction, to high-quality resources?

e. Conducting focussed research relating to the pathways to legal information taken by people with legal problems

Some of our strategic research advisors also expressed an interest in exploring ways to support clearer pathways to legal information. In order to move forward with our PLEI work, we have to better understand how people look for, find, and assess online PLEI.

In closing, we would like to thank, once again, the many people who assisted in this research, patiently and unwaveringly. We would also like to thank The Law Foundation of Ontario and the Department of Justice Canada for their support of CLEO’s Centre for Research and Innovation through which this research was conducted.



1. Introduction

Community Legal Education Ontario/Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario (CLEO) conducted this research to get an overview of public legal education and information (PLEI) resources available in Ontario.

PLEI is increasingly being relied on to help people with legal problems understand their rights, take steps to address their problems, and navigate through the legal system. Recent research suggests that there is an overwhelming amount of legal information available, making it hard for people to “access, navigate, or understand” the information they need.¹ Many voices in the justice sector are calling for greater coordination among PLEI providers as a way of improving access to justice.²

As a first step in responding to these calls for action, this project takes a look at what PLEI is available in Ontario and draws attention to areas where there may be duplication or overlap. Our review is primarily conducted through the lens of topics or subtopics relating to the common problems of modest- and low-income people in Ontario. Other characteristics of PLEI such as target audience, format, language, intended use, and information provider are also considered where they are of particular relevance or interest. A key goal of this project is to identify opportunities for improved collaboration and coordination among PLEI providers in the province.

CLEO is an independent, non-profit PLEI organization.³ Its mandate is to provide low-income and disadvantaged communities in Ontario with public legal education and information to help them understand and exercise their critical legal rights. CLEO also helps community-based organizations in Ontario improve their capacity to develop and deliver effective PLEI to their communities through a number of initiatives, including research, partnership building and knowledge sharing.

A key goal of this project is to identify opportunities for improved collaboration and coordination among PLEI providers in the province.

¹ Law Commission of Ontario, *Increasing Access to Family Justice through Comprehensive Entry Points and Inclusivity*, February 2013, at 59.

² See generally, Canadian Bar Association, *Reaching Equal Justice*, August 2013, Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters, *Access to Civil and Family Justice: A Roadmap for Change*, October 2013, Julie Macfarlane, *The National Self-Represented Litigants Project: Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Self-Represented Litigants*, May 2013, Community Legal Education Ontario, *Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario Communities: Formats and Delivery Channels*, August 2013.

³ CLEO receives core funding from Legal Aid Ontario and the Department of Justice Canada, and project funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario.

CLEO is grateful to the Law Foundation of Ontario and the Department of Justice Canada for funding CLEO's Centre for Research and Innovation, through which this research was conducted.

1.1 Overview of the report

This report is presented in six sections.

Section 1 discusses the goals of the project.

Section 2 discusses the methodology used to map PLEI resources.

Section 3 discusses themes or trends relating to PLEI in Ontario and identifies lenses for analysis.

Section 4 sets out the data that comprises the PLEI matrix.

Section 5 discusses the PLEI matrix in relation to the Section 3 themes.

Section 6 discusses conclusions and possible steps for the future.

1.2 Goals of the project

We undertook this research to provide PLEI providers, funders and other stakeholders with information and analysis to help them

- set priorities and develop PLEI resources,
- minimize the likelihood of duplication or overlap,
- identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination.



2. Methodology

2.1 Glossary of terms used in this report

Category	A classification or grouping of data with common characteristics.
Entry	An item typed into the database.
Instance	A version of a record. For example, a record that is available in English, French and Spanish has three instances, with each language version being one instance.
Label or Tag	The term or name that is assigned to data. For example, a resource that deals with suspensions from school is labelled or tagged in the matrix as “Education law”.
PLEI map	The information or data collected in this mapping project.
PLEI matrix (matrix)	A table that organizes the data in rows and columns by record and category.
Record	A group of entries that relate to a specific resource. For an example of a record, see “Record”, page 9.
Resource	The PLEI content located online.
Taxonomy	The terms or names used to classify the data.

We compiled an in-depth inventory of PLEI resources available in Ontario. The data we collected and categorized allows cross-referencing and analysis in multiple ways and we use the term “mapping” to describe this work.

2.2 Scope of data collection and mapping analysis

Public legal education and information (PLEI) helps people to understand and exercise their legal rights. This research focuses on PLEI that addresses common legal problems people might experience in their everyday lives, such as legal problems relating to housing, work, income security, family, consumer and debt. We also included selected law-related education resources for use in schools or for adult students interested in current legal issues.

In this project we compiled an in-depth inventory of PLEI resources available in Ontario. The data we collected and categorized allows cross-referencing and analysis in multiple ways and we use the term “mapping” to describe this work.

We started the project by mapping the PLEI resources produced by the major information providers in Ontario. We then turned to other PLEI providers – unlimited by a defined list – and, as we let ourselves be guided by what we found, were astounded by the number of legal, community and government agencies that provide information, as well as the amount of PLEI available.

Our scan primarily focused on PLEI produced by non-profit organizations, government, and law-related institutions such as the Law Society of Upper Canada and Legal Aid Ontario.⁴

We conducted our research through an online scan and only PLEI resources that are posted online or promoted through the Internet are included. This included PLEI resources that don't reside on the web, but are mentioned online, such as workshops⁵ and other in-person events, and resources produced in hard copy that can be ordered through websites.

2.2.1 What the matrix doesn't include

As a general rule, we did not include the following types of resources:

- reports – including most research reports and law reform materials – in which PLEI was only a minor component or purpose (this was not always clear, and researchers collecting data made the call)
- PLEI provided on a one-on-one basis, through telephone support lines or chat services
- private law websites that offer legal information to clients and prospective clients.⁶

As our work got underway, we became aware that hundreds of ministries and offices at all levels of government, and a large number of smaller community-based organizations working at the front lines, are providing legal information of one sort or another – and producing these resources on an ongoing basis.⁷

As a result, we found that it was virtually impossible to compile a complete map of the ever-changing and vast PLEI landscape. So, although we mapped almost 1,700

4 Information providers are discussed in more detail in Section 4.6, at page 45. A full list of information providers is provided in Appendix E.

5 For the most part, we did not map most of the numerous stand-alone PLEI workshops provided by many legal clinics and community organizations; our "Workshop" category includes ongoing workshop series or workshop-based PLEI training initiatives.

6 Most definitions of PLEI exclude resources and services provided by for-profit or private enterprises.

7 For example, an enormous body of PLEI relating to municipal issues exists and to include it would have produced an unwieldy amount of data.

resources provided by 182 providers, we realize that we did not catch all PLEI resources produced by PLEI providers. As a result, our analysis in this report does not rely on precise numbers but rather looks at the bigger picture and what it tells us.

2.3 Categorization scheme for data collection

We collected information that we entered into a database, creating 1,697 records. The main categories in the database are:

- Topic and subtopic
- Intended use
- Format
- Language
- Audience
- Information provider

We call this multi-field database the “matrix”. Each of the 1,697 records in the matrix has 11 category fields, many of which have multiple entries. For example, a resource from the Ontario Human Rights Commission is logged with the following data:

Record

Title: Disability and human rights

Producing organization: Ontario Human Rights Commission

URL: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/disability-and-human-rights-brochure>

Audience: People with disabilities, employers, landlords, tenants

Intended use: Basic information

Topic and subtopic: Human rights, Discrimination at work, Discrimination in housing, Discrimination in services and other areas, Mental health, Health and Disability, Other legal issues in disabilities

Format: Booklet (PDF), Online text (HTML), Video

Available to order in print: No

Languages: English, French, ASL

Date: 2011

As the example above shows, within each record more than one audience, intended use, subtopic, format, and language can be assigned.

We also noted the date of publication and the last time it was updated, if that information was available. It was not within the scope of this project to determine the accuracy or effectiveness of the resource.

Topics and subtopics with fewer than 10 resources were folded into an “Other” category. This fails to represent a number of legal topic areas, such as environmental law, that are gaining increased attention and are emerging areas for PLEI development. We expect that a PLEI snapshot conducted at the present time would identify many more PLEI resources.

This version of the matrix contains PLEI resources found through an online scan conducted between November 2013 and May 2014. We note that online information is highly fluid; resources are constantly being added and deleted, and this collection of data should be viewed as a snapshot.

Online information is highly fluid; resources are constantly being added and deleted, and this collection of data should be viewed as a snapshot.

2.4 The process

As a first step, we reviewed recent literature relating to PLEI and access to justice in Ontario. Reports and data from Statistics Canada were also reviewed.

We paid particular attention to developments and discussions relating to how people with legal problems are entering Ontario’s justice system – either formally or informally – and how PLEI may or may not be helping them as they try to address their problems. Although we looked at numerous reports, we refer to only the most relevant findings in this report.

We then turned to mapping resources. As a starting point, we mapped PLEI resources listed on Your Legal Rights (YLR),⁸ a website managed by CLEO with legal information and resources produced by hundreds of organizations in Ontario, and on settlement.org, a website managed by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) that provides information and tools to newcomers in Ontario. Both organizations provided us with data from their websites as of November, 2013, which we incorporated into the matrix.

⁸ At the time (2013), records for 820 PLEI resources out of 1,697 resources were logged through Your Legal Rights (YLR). This represents 48 percent of resources mapped in the matrix. To a certain degree, the difference in categorization schemes between YLR and the PLEI matrix accounts for the relatively high number of resources that weren’t found on YLR. For example, YLR may link to the home page of a website and list it as a single resource or record; the PLEI matrix researchers may have logged several pages of that website, coming up with four or five records for the single record on Your Legal Rights.

In addition, we worked through an initial list of information providers identified in the Terms of Reference for the research,⁹ checking back and forth with the YLR and settlement.org websites. We also mapped the PLEI found on the websites of our strategic research advisors.¹⁰ We pulled information about the topic, information provider, language and format, and identified the audience and intended use, from the descriptions found on the providers' websites and, where necessary, by scanning resources.¹¹

Single records vary in the amount of content they represent. For example, a resource that is produced in more than one language is counted as a single record. In a few cases, a record identifies a project's suite of related products, such as fact sheets for clients, or various components of a manual for intermediaries.

2.4.1 The categorization process: What we learned along the way

We encountered a variety of challenges in pulling together this initial map of PLEI in Ontario – particularly with respect to the categorization and tagging of resources for purposes of the PLEI matrix.

Researchers scanned information rather than conducting an in-depth review of each resource. Sometimes it was not clear how best to label or classify a resource from the resource or the description on the website.

The difficulty in labelling information was exacerbated by the fluid nature of topics and subtopics reflected in many resources. Legal problems are often intersecting and overlapping – and this is carried over into the resources themselves.¹² It was often difficult to identify a primary topic or subtopic for categorization purposes, and to do so in a methodical and consistent way.

There are other categories where PLEI resources did not fit tidily into a single sub-category. This was the case when trying to define "Intended use"; sometimes researchers assigned multiple "intended uses" to resources.

9 See Appendix H for the Terms of Reference for this research.

10 See page 12 of this report for a list of our strategic research advisors.

11 It should be noted that a few resources were prepared by non-Ontario organizations but are presented on the websites of Ontario-based organizations due to their relevance for Ontarians.

12 This fluidity exists more in some topic areas than others. For example, a resource categorized under "Abuse and family violence" can also be found under "Assault and criminal harassment", "Criminal law", "Family law", and "Rights of victims".

As well, researchers found significant variation in the way organizations label, categorize and organize legal information on their websites, which made it extremely difficult to consistently categorize PLEI in the matrix.

After the researchers finished collecting the data we assessed the information in the matrix, grappled with the various classification systems, and developed approaches to working with the data. We are not alone in encountering various challenges with mapping legal services.¹³

2.5 Strategic research advisors

At the outset, we approached a range of justice sector organizations to act as strategic research advisors for our project, including:

- Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario
- Department of Justice Canada
- Law Commission of Ontario
- Law Foundation of Ontario
- Law Society of Upper Canada
- Legal Aid Ontario
- Ministry of the Attorney General
- Ontario Justice Education Network
- Pro Bono Law Ontario
- Social Justice Tribunals Ontario

Advisors were provided with a list of sources we planned to use to start our online scan of PLEI and were asked to let us know if there were any online sources that we missed. They were also asked for their input on the research plan and the approach to the project.

A key role of the strategic research advisors was to review and improve the draft report. To this end, a draft was circulated to the group in August 2015.

Researchers found significant variation in the way organizations label, categorize and organize legal information on their websites, which made it extremely difficult to consistently categorize PLEI in the matrix.

¹³ See Appendix G of this report for a brief summary of other mapping initiatives in Canada and other jurisdictions.

At the same time as CLEO was finalizing its draft report and contacting the strategic research advisors, the Action Group on Access to Justice (TAG) had considered the formation of a cluster on public legal education and information (the PLEI Cluster). CLEO's strategic research advisors were invited to participate in the first meeting of the PLEI Cluster in October 2015, with our draft report set as the primary item on the agenda.¹⁴ We consider it to be a success of this research project that the report has been a catalyst for the formation of the TAG PLEI Cluster.

Improvements and possible next steps suggested by the strategic research advisors and PLEI Cluster are reflected in this report.

¹⁴ A later, separate telephone meeting was held to receive input from Department of Justice staff, and a second meeting of the PLEI Cluster was convened in December 2015 to get input on the final draft of this report.



3. PLEI in Ontario – Lenses for analysis

This section of the paper introduces several current themes or trends relating to PLEI in Ontario.¹⁵ Each theme has been the focus of previous research and analysis, and we extract key findings from these reports to inform our high-level introductions. Later in the report, after presenting the mapping information (Section 4), these themes will provide the reference points for analysis.

3.1 PLEI Lens: Legal problems by topic

During the last decade, a number of reports have aimed to document the types of legal problems commonly experienced by Canadians.¹⁶ The reports consistently find that people in Canada frequently experience legal problems, that those problems often occur in clusters and that, for people who face multiple legal problems — including many people who are low income — resolving those problems is difficult.

The findings in a 2005 national study of the legal problems of low- and middle- income Canadians identified money/debt, consumer, employment and housing issues as the most frequently occurring problems, with family and relationship break-up following closely behind.¹⁷ A recent Canadian Forum on Civil Justice national survey echoes earlier findings that the most frequently occurring everyday legal problems reported by Canadians are consumer, debt and employment problems, followed closely by neighbour and family problems.¹⁸

According to a 2009 civil legal needs study conducted of low- and middle-income Ontarians, 35 percent of people surveyed experienced a civil legal problem or issue in the three-year span prior to the study.¹⁹ People mentioned a broad range of problems

15 This report does not look at all relevant lenses for PLEI. For example, we have not commented on trauma-informed work (the effect of trauma on learning; delivery of information to victims and their families) as well as other themes in PLEI-related research and work.

16 As noted earlier in this paper, this project does not attempt to research or document the legal needs of people in Ontario. Instead, we look at key reports that discuss legal need, and use those reports as a basis for looking at the coverage of existing PLEI.

17 Currie, Ab, *A National Survey of the Civil Justice Problems of Low and Moderate Income Canadians: Incidence and Patterns*, Department of Justice Canada, April 2005 at 7 – 8. An earlier report in BC had findings similar to these national surveys, identifying consumer, money/debt and employment as occurring most frequently, followed by housing and family law issues - see McEown, Carol, *Civil Legal Needs Research Report*, Law Foundation of British Columbia, March 2009 at 5.

18 Trevor Farrow, Nicole Aylwin, Ab Currie, David Northrup, Les Jacobs and Lisa Moore. “Everyday Legal Problems and the Cost of Justice in Canada” (Canadian Forum on Civil Justice, 2016). An earlier study in British Columbia had findings similar to these national surveys. It identified consumer, money/debt and employment as occurring most frequently, followed by housing and family law issues – see McEown, Carol, *Civil Legal Needs Research Report*, Law Foundation of British Columbia, March 2009, at 5.

19 The Ontario Civil Legal Needs Project Steering Committee, *Listening to Ontarians: Report of the Ontario Civil Legal Needs Project*, May 2010 at 20.

or issues that caused them or someone in their household to need legal assistance, including the following eight that topped the list of types of legal problem:

- Family relationship problems
- Wills and powers of attorney problems
- Real estate transactions
- Housing or land problems
- Employment problems
- Criminal problems
- Personal injury problems
- Money or debt problems

These numbers change for Ontarians in the lowest income category (those with household incomes of less than \$20,000), who reported family problems as the top problem, followed by criminal problems, disability-related issues and issues related to social assistance or welfare. When asked to predict their future civil legal needs, people in this income group believed that they were less likely to have a legal problem in the future with a will or power of attorney (11 percent compared to 17 percent of all respondents) or with real estate (5 percent compared to 12 percent of all respondents).²⁰

Research conducted in 2008 by Cohl and Thomson for the Law Foundation of Ontario looked at the “priority areas of need” for low-income linguistic minorities and persons living in rural or remote communities in Ontario.²¹ This extensive, in-depth research study received “quite consistent” feedback on those high-need areas of law:

- Consumer protection
- Criminal justice
- Employment
- Family and child protection
- Health care and mental health
- Housing
- Human rights
- Immigration and refugee status
- Income support
- Basic, general information about the legal system

²⁰ *Listening to Ontarians* at 33.

²¹ Cohl, Karen and Thomson, George, *Connecting Across Language and Distance: Linguistic and Rural Access to Legal Information and Services*, Law Foundation of Ontario, December 2008 at 41.

The areas of law that form the core of Ontario’s legal aid system – housing, social assistance, family, criminal, and immigration and refugee – are widely acknowledged as high-need areas. Legal problems within these areas affect people’s basic human rights, such as the right to decent living conditions, security of the person and family, and liberty. The research discussed above confirms the importance of these areas of law.²²

3.2 PLEI Lens: Making it easy for users to find

As indicated in the mapping data and by the large number of PLEI providers in Ontario, PLEI is playing a bigger role than ever in legal service delivery in Ontario. This includes triage systems with information and referral components and the development of a range of online PLEI, including legal information presented in steps, FAQs, authoring tools, online tours of courts, and other task-based initiatives to help guide users through a legal topic or process. In addition, there are a growing number of PLEI training initiatives designed to improve the capacity of intermediaries to provide legal information and referral to their clients or peers.

Despite the availability of a wide range of PLEI resources, recent research suggests that people don’t know how to put their hands on the information they need, and in fact are overwhelmed and confused by the plethora of online resources.²³ From a user’s perspective, information is just not readily available and people are unsure where to go for help.²⁴

The Law Commission of Ontario notes that the variety and amount of legal information available from different sources “speak[s] to the lack of integration and coordination required to make information easily accessible and seamless to the user”.²⁵

Others have made similar observations. The report of the Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters notes that there is an enormous amount of publicly available legal information in Canada. It calls for greater coordination and collaboration among justice system players to “avoid duplication of effort and to provide clear paths for the public to reliable information”.²⁶

Despite the availability of a wide range of PLEI resources, recent research suggests that people don’t know how to put their hands on the information they need, and in fact are overwhelmed and confused by the plethora of online resources.

22 These reports and discussions use different frames of reference and offer different lists of priority needs or problems, but there are some commonalities.

23 *Reaching Equal Justice* at 30

24 *Reaching Equal Justice* at 20.

25 *Increasing Access to Family Justice Through Comprehensive Entry Points and Inclusivity* at 59.

26 *Access to Civil and Family Justice: A Roadmap for Change* at 13.

Although many PLEI providers in Ontario already work in partnership in some areas, this research confirms that more needs to be done to improve coordination so that members of the public – “end users” – can easily find and identify reliable information.

3.3 PLEI Lens: Growing use of the Internet

The growing use of the Internet by people looking for information is another notable trend. What do we know about how closely this trend reflects the ways that people with legal problems access legal information? And what does our map tell us about whether people are able to access the information that they need?

We know that the Internet is an important access point for many people to find legal information, and that this is increasingly the case. Recent Statistics Canada reports indicate that, in 2012, 84 percent of households in Ontario had access to the Internet at home, compared with 79 percent in 2010.²⁷

Over two-thirds of the service providers who participated in CLEO’s 2013 research on formats and delivery channels for PLEI noted that the most significant change in how their clients accessed information in the previous year or two was an increased use of the Internet and online resources. Survey respondents gave the Internet a high overall usefulness rating, with over 90 percent assessing online formats as “useful” or “very useful”. Interestingly, when drilling down into the effectiveness of online formats, noticeably fewer service providers assessed online information as “very useful” for their clients (just under one-third) than for themselves (just over two-thirds).²⁸ We note that aspects of this research are undoubtedly dated, for example, the increasing use of mobile devices to access information online.²⁹

Despite this growing trend, Statistics Canada reports suggest that there is still a digital divide by age and household income. While 94.6 percent of households with household incomes of more than \$94,000 were Internet users, only 65.5 percent of households with household incomes of \$30,000 or less were

We know that the Internet is an important access point for many people to find legal information, and that this is increasingly the case.

27 Statistics Canada, *Canadian Internet Use and e-Commerce in Canada (Data from the 2012 Canadian Internet Use Survey)*, 2014, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2014003-eng.htm>

28 *Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario Communities: Formats and Delivery Channels* at 17–18.

29 In its 2015 report, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission noted a significant increase in cell phone use and access to the Internet through cell phones in Canadian households in the past five years. According to the report, households in the lowest quintile own and use cell phones (66.8 percent) more than they do home computers (64.4 percent) and more than they use Internet access at home (59.7 percent). See Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, *Communications Monitoring Report 2015: Canada’s Communications System: An Overview for Citizens, Consumers, and Creators*, October 22, 2015. <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/policymonitoring/2015/cmr2.htm>

Internet users. And individuals aged 16 to 44 years were far more likely to use the Internet than those 45 years or older.³⁰

The digital divide is also experienced on other fronts, including limited or no access to computers or an Internet connection, and as a result of barriers such as language, literacy or disability, or a lack of digital literacy skills needed to find, assess, understand and use legal information.³¹

In short, the take-up of the Internet as a way to reach an increasing number of people opens up an array of opportunities and challenges.³² At the same time, the growing reliance on online PLEI threatens to leave behind people in rural and remote communities and others who face barriers in accessing information online.³³

The growing reliance on online PLEI threatens to leave behind people in rural and remote communities and others who face barriers in accessing information online.

3.4 PLEI Lens: Recognizing the importance of “go-to” intermediaries

A recent theme in access to justice literature emphasizes the importance of “trusted intermediaries” in many communities; these workers or intermediaries are often the entry point to the justice system for people with legal problems. What, if anything, does the map tell us about whether the existing body of PLEI supports this role?

Trusted intermediaries are the “go-to” people in many communities. They include “organizations that focus on social services, services to people with

30 Statistics Canada. Table 358-0152, *Canadian Internet use survey, Internet use by age group and household income for Canada, provinces and census metropolitan areas (CMAs)*. <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=3580152&pattern=internet+by+household+income&tabMode=dataTable&srchLan=-1&p1=1&p2=-1#F1>

31 *Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario Communities: Formats and Delivery Channels*, pages 15-18. See also, generally, Roger Smith and Alan Paterson, *Face to Face Legal Services and Their Alternatives: Global Lessons from the Digital Revolution*, 2014, chapter 2, pages 4-7 <http://www.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Digital-Delivery-Paper-1.pdf> and Pleasance, Pascoe, Balmer, Nigel and Denvir, Catrina. *How People Understand and Interact with the Law*, Legal Education Foundation, 2015, chapter 7, pages 133-159. http://www.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/HPUIL_report.pdf

32 On a related note, effective online PLEI involves a new form of communication – a realization that perhaps was not as apparent ten years ago. PLEI providers are recognizing the importance of writing information specifically for online use (people read online text differently than print), structuring information so that it is easy to follow, and making sure links to resources or in-person services are appropriate and up-to-date. These are activities that may well merit their own professional training and the development of promising practices. Along with these new sets of skills, it will be important for PLEI providers to put into place new guidelines and evaluation measures for online PLEI.

33 Recently, researchers from Western University (London, Ontario) studying the digital divide in Canada used access to the Internet, level of online activity and use of social networking sites as indicators of digital literacy. A central finding of their investigation is that the digital divide continues to exist in Canada along a number of key demographic factors, including income, education, and recent immigration status. See M. Haight et al., *Revisiting the digital divide in Canada: the impact of demographic factors on access to the Internet, level of online activity, and social networking site usage*. *Information, Communication & Society* Volume 17, Issue 4, 2014 at 514-515.

disabilities, immigrant settlement, health care, education, advocacy, or a particular faith or ethno-cultural group. They also include agencies that serve the public generally, such as libraries, community centres, information and referral services and hotlines.”³⁴ Cohl and Thomson note that trusted intermediaries provide critical linkages that improve access to legal information and services.³⁵

This was echoed by frontline workers who were surveyed in CLEO’s 2013 report on formats and delivery channels. A comment from one survey respondent illustrates a point made by many:

“Make sure service providers are well informed. They are quite often the first point of contact for the individuals and families we serve and they/we need to be giving the best and most appropriate information.”³⁶

3.5 PLEI Lens: Helping people to navigate the legal system

In recent years, numerous studies have recognized the need to equip people with the tools and knowledge they need to identify a legal problem, understand their legal rights and take steps to resolve their legal problems, be it getting the right legal help in the early stages, or representing themselves in a tribunal or court if they do not have the services of a lawyer or paralegal.³⁷ Information from the mapping research gives us some sense of the PLEI materials produced for the purpose of helping people take steps in the legal process on their own.

Until fairly recently, most PLEI was of an explanatory nature; it explained the law in relation to a legal problem, and indicated where people could go for legal help. In recent years, PLEI producers are developing more information that gives practical, process-related information to people who are taking one or more steps in the legal process on their own. In large part, this growth in “self-help” materials responds to the large number of people who are appearing in courts, particularly family courts, without legal representation.

34 *Connecting Across Language and Distance* at 44.

35 See generally, *Connecting Across Language and Distance*.

36 *Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario Communities* at 27.

37 See generally, *Reaching Equal Justice, Access to Civil and Family Justice: A Roadmap for Change*, *The National Self-Represented Litigants Project: Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Self-Represented Litigants*, and *Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario Communities: Formats and Delivery Channels*.

Those who end up in court or tribunal proceedings without legal representation often find themselves struggling to understand legal terminology, fill out forms, navigate through various processes, and present their case before a judge or adjudicator.³⁸ Not surprisingly, a number of unrepresented litigants feel dissatisfied with their experiences and believe that the outcome they achieved is unfair. According to the CBA,

“Unrepresented litigants’ perception that they do not receive fair outcomes is validated by empirical research. More than 200 US studies in a wide range of legal proceedings and matters have demonstrated that unrepresented parties lose significantly more often – and in a bigger way – than represented ones”.³⁹

The findings in the studies confirm that, for those who are representing themselves in a tribunal or court, there continues to be a need for resources to help them advocate for themselves.⁴⁰

For those who are representing themselves in a tribunal or court, there continues to be a need for resources to help them advocate for themselves.

3.6 PLEI Lens: Language

CLEO’s research reports on linguistic access and PLEI and the 2008 report commissioned by the Law Foundation of Ontario discuss the pressing need for PLEI in multiple languages, to respond to the needs of the many people in Ontario who do not speak either official language.⁴¹ Does the current body of PLEI reflect this need?

According to the 2011 Census, there are almost 300,000 Ontarians (or 2.3 percent of the population) with no knowledge of English or French.⁴² Use of language spoken most often at home provides a clearer picture of those who would benefit from resources in their preferred language: in Ontario, 14.4 percent of people speak a non-official language most often at home.⁴³

38 *The National Self-Represented Litigants Project: Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Self-Represented Litigants* at 9 and 68.

39 *Reaching Equal Justice* at 43.

40 Further study is needed to ascertain the extent to which legal information resources intended to help people who are appearing before a court or tribunal prepare legal documents and advocate for themselves are effective absent additional legal assistance and advice. See CLEO’s *Evolving Legal Services Research Project*, <http://www.plelearningexchange.ca/research/research-evolving-legal-services-research-project/>

41 See generally, CLEO’s *Linguistic Access Report, 2005* and *Connecting Across Language and Distance*.

42 Statistics Canada. 2012. *Visual Census. 2011 Census*. Ottawa. Released October 24, 2012. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/vc-rv/index.cfm?Lang=ENG&TOPIC_ID=4&GEOCODE=35

43 Statistics Canada. 2012. *Focus on Geography Series, 2011 Census*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-310-XWE2011004. Ottawa, Ontario. Analytical products, 2011 Census

As discussed in the report by Cohl and Thomson, people who don't speak English or French experience unique challenges to accessing and understanding legal information, leaving many immigrants unfamiliar with the legal system and unaware of their legal rights and responsibilities.⁴⁴

3.7 PLEI Lens: Other needs

Distance

We would be remiss in failing to note another recurring theme in PLEI and access to justice research: the barriers faced by people in rural and remote communities in accessing legal information and legal services. For people in the many rural communities in Ontario that still lack high-speed Internet, the provision of online PLEI misses the point; they are likely to turn to trusted intermediaries, or to pick up print materials in strategic locations, to get information and help.⁴⁵

This research did not include a lens that would shed light on the existence of PLEI for people who face barriers due to location or distance. Such a study is a complex undertaking and would have had to be conducted in partnership with rural and remote community members and stakeholders, activities that were beyond the scope of this project.

Literacy

According to Community Literacy of Ontario, 16 percent of Ontarians have difficulty with even the most basic written materials and another 26 percent can read, but not well enough to meet the demands of today's society.⁴⁶

The mapping results do not respond specifically to the question of whether PLEI materials available in Ontario are easy to understand for people with basic literacy levels. An assessment of this would require a separate study designed to look at the many factors that affect readability, including clear language, clear design, and accessibility features such as the option to customize screen font sizes or have alternate formats available.

⁴⁴ See *Connecting Across Language and Distance* at 15.

⁴⁵ See generally, *Connecting Across Language and Distance* and *Public legal Education and Information for Communities in Ontario: Formats and Delivery Channels*.

⁴⁶ <http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/literacy-in-ontario-2/literacy-in-ontario/>

There is no question that the justice system demands high levels of literacy: its written laws, rules, forms, and procedures create serious barriers for many people who must navigate the system.⁴⁷ In her 2013 report, Dr. Julie Macfarlane finds that basic literacy skills aren't enough for people who try to navigate the court system – they need a level of literacy and skills to make it possible to understand forms and procedural steps that were designed for people working in the justice system.⁴⁸

The justice system demands high levels of literacy: its written laws, rules, forms, and procedures create serious barriers for many people who must navigate the system.

⁴⁷ The Legal Services Society of BC contracted with Decoda Literary Solutions in 2012 to review all of their PLEI materials. The report stated: "The skills identified as essential for learning, work, and life are: reading, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking, computer use, and continuous learning. A client applying for legal aid and winding their way through the justice system needs considerable proficiency in all of these skills." (from PLEI Resources Accessibility Initiative, May 2012) at 18.

⁴⁸ See generally, *National Self-Represented Litigants Project*.



4. The matrix: What we found

4.1 Topics and subtopics

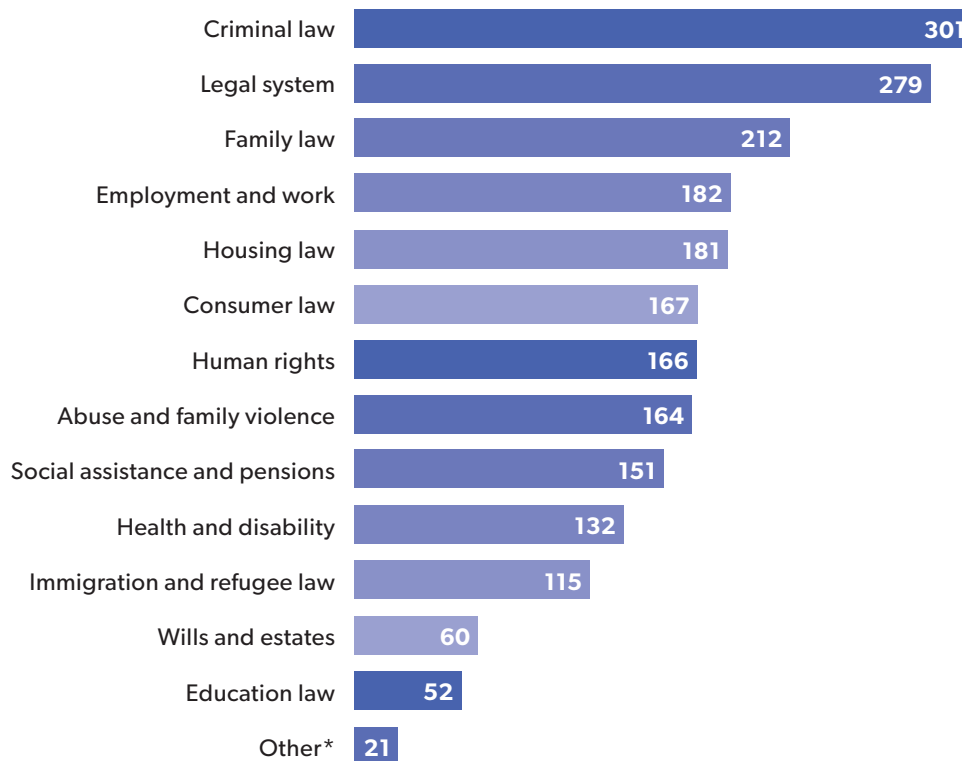
As mentioned previously, researchers used the taxonomy from CLEO's Your Legal Rights website as a starting point, and added to the list as the mapping progressed.

The usual taxonomy for online PLEI is based on content-focused legal topics and subtopics.⁴⁹ In identifying a taxonomy of topics and subtopics, the researchers sought to reflect the categories PLEI producers were already using rather than invent new ones, although some new subtopics were added in response to the nature of the materials.

Figure 1 below describes the distribution of topics covered by the resources.

PLEI topics

Figure 1: Number of records tagged by PLEI topic



* The "Other" category contains topics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes "Media and Internet", "Transgender", and "Environmental law".

⁴⁹ See Appendix A for a list of topics presented alphabetically, with subtopics included.

As mentioned in Section 2 above, each record can be assigned to more than one topic category. For example, a resource assigned to the “Family law” topic category can also be assigned to “Abuse and Family Violence” and to the subtopic “Divorce and separation”. This fluidity is found across many topic and subtopic entries and in some areas of law is particularly pronounced.

The numbers of resources included in a particular topic are affected by factors that include:

- **The breadth of the topic.** For example, the topic of “Criminal law” has a number of large and quite clearly defined areas such as particular offences, the rights of Aboriginal people, offenders, and victims, and the youth criminal justice system. Other areas of law, for example, “Wills and estates”, are narrower.
- **The complexity of the topic.** For example, “Family law” is seen to be complex, with problems that may last for many years (especially when children are involved), so there are many issues to write about.

Some of the resources in the matrix that are identified by topic have no subtopic assigned to them. This is the case, for example, when a resource provides a very broad overview of the topic – it might be a webinar on employment and work, or a pamphlet on human rights.

The topic areas have been organized into subtopics. Reviewing the topic together with its subtopic yields more detailed information about what is available within the current body of PLEI.

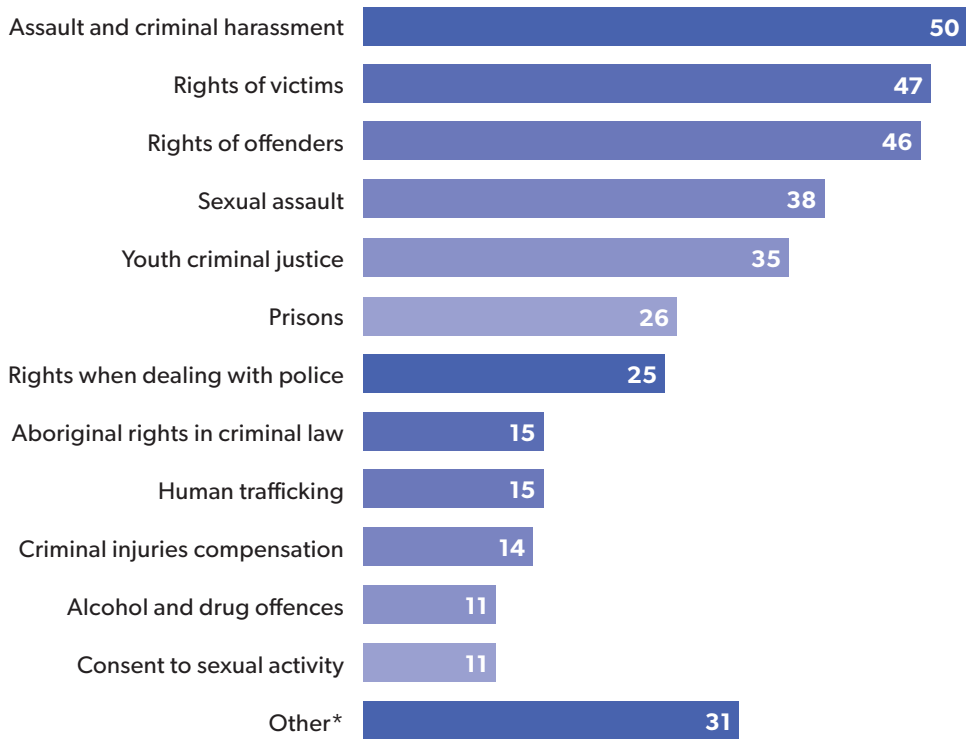
This section presents the distribution of subtopics within each of the topics.

4.1.1 Criminal law

“Criminal law” is the largest topic in the matrix, with 301 entries. The following figure shows the number of records tagged in criminal law subtopics.

Criminal law

Figure 2: Number of records tagged in criminal law subtopics



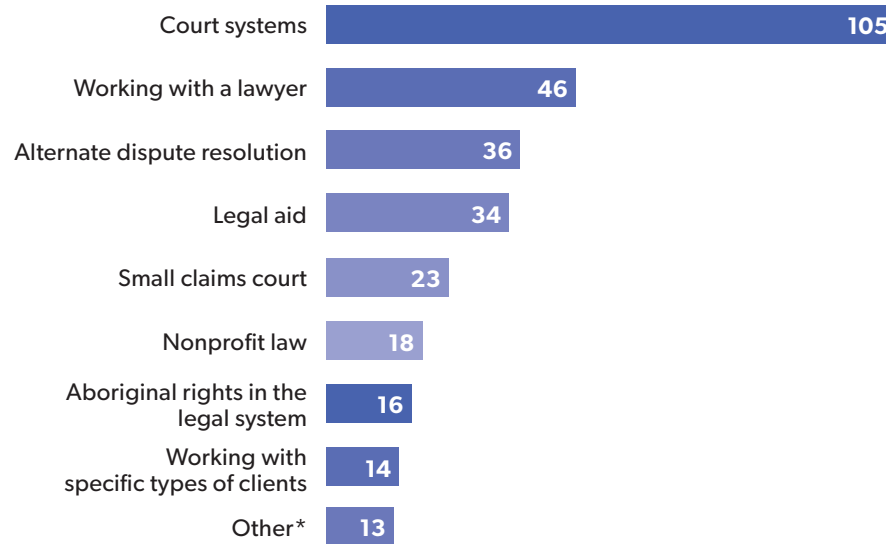
* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Rights of accused”, “Prostitution”, “Pardons”, “Firearms”, “Bullying”, “Motor vehicle offences” and “Sexual harassment”.

4.1.2 Legal system

“Legal system” has the second highest number of topic entries in the matrix, with a total of 279 resources.⁵⁰ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in legal system subtopics.⁵¹

Legal system

Figure 3: **Number of records tagged in legal system subtopics**



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Ombudsman”, “Elections”, “Administrative Tribunals”, and “Commercial law”.

50 The subtopic “Court systems” includes information about Canada’s and Ontario’s court systems, administrative tribunals, court forms, information about preparing and filing documents, information about court procedures and guides to criminal court, youth criminal court and family court.

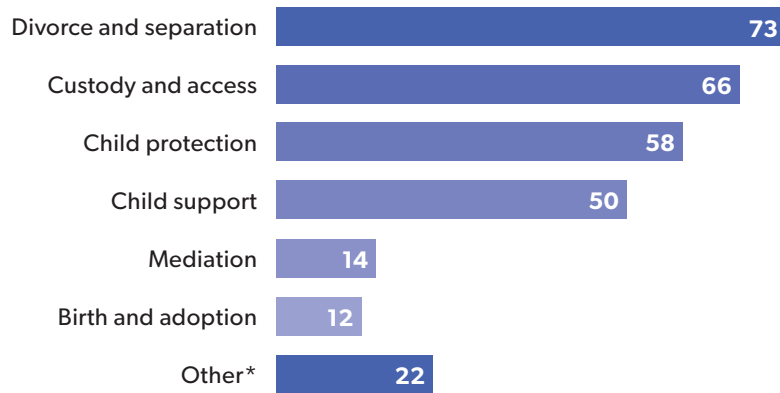
51 For a closer look at how resources under the subtopic “Working with a lawyer” are organized by audience, intended use and format, see Case study #4 in Appendix F.

4.1.3 Family law

“Family law” ranks third in the list of topics, with 212 entries.⁵² The following figure shows the number of records tagged in family law subtopics.⁵³

Family law

Figure 4: **Number of records tagged in family law subtopics**



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Spousal support”, “Division of property”, and “Marriage and common-law relationships”.

52 There are 12 entries among the family law subtopics that deal with Aboriginal rights in family law.

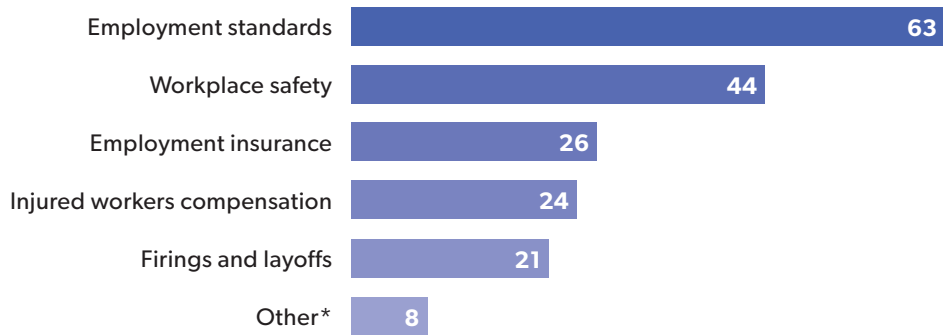
53 For a closer look at two family law subtopics, “Divorce and separation” and “Child support”, see Case studies #1 and #2 in Appendix F.

4.1.4 Employment and work

In fourth place, “Employment and work” has 182 topic entries.⁵⁴ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in employment and work subtopics.

Employment and work

Figure 5: Number of records tagged in employment and work subtopics



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Pay equity” and “Parental, pregnancy and other leaves”.

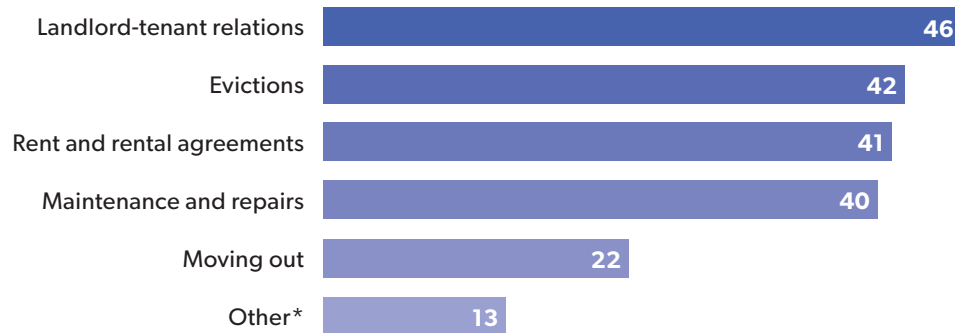
54 The subtopic “Employment standards” includes information about the Employment Standards Act, including specific resources on vacation, hours worked, holiday pay, etc., as well as information on employment rights for domestic workers and seasonal and temporary workers.

4.1.5 Housing law

“Housing law” ranks fifth in the topic areas, with 181 entries identified in the matrix.⁵⁵ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in housing law subtopics.

Housing law

Figure 6: Number of records tagged in housing law subtopics



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Tenant organizing”, “Owning a home”, and “Other legal issues in housing”. The subtopic “Owning a home” yields only four entries, encompassing two resource entries on condominiums, and one each on mortgages and foreclosure. It is likely that a fair amount of information on these topics is available through the websites of real estate boards, realtors, and private bar lawyers. As mentioned previously, we didn’t canvass such websites.

55 The subtopic “Landlord-tenant relations” includes information on the Residential Tenancies Act, guides outlining landlords’ rights and responsibilities, and guides and tip sheets for tenants about a range of topics such as communicating with landlords, filing documents with the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) and appearing before the LTB.

4.1.6 Consumer law

Ranked sixth with 167 resource topic entries is “Consumer law”.⁵⁶ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in consumer law subtopics.⁵⁷

Consumer law

Figure 7: Number of records tagged in consumer law subtopics



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Home repairs and renovations”, “Door-to-door sales”, “Phone and mail”, “Private career colleges”, “Bankruptcy”, “Travel”, “Energy contracts”, and “Intellectual property and copyright”.

⁵⁶ Consumer law subtopics are particularly fluid; one subtopic can often merge into another. For example, resources about “Door-to-door sales” are presented within their own subtopic, but they can also be included in the subtopics of “Contracts” or “Purchases”.

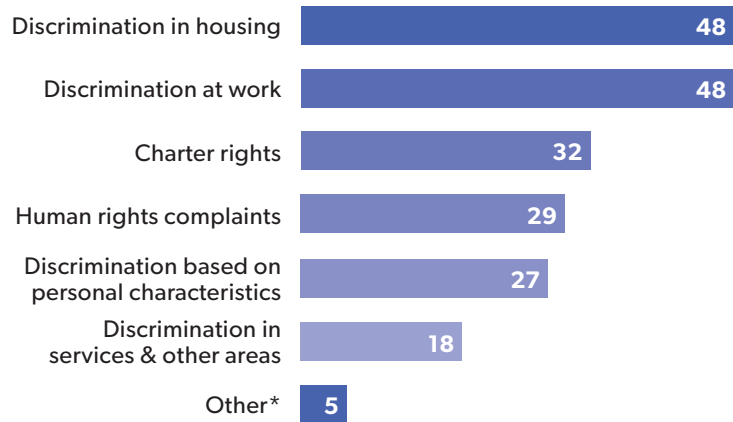
⁵⁷ For a closer look at cell phone contracts for youth, see Case study #3 in Appendix F.

4.1.7 Human rights

“Human rights” ranks in seventh place, with 166 entries.⁵⁸ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in human rights law subtopics.

Human rights

Figure 8: Number of records tagged in human rights subtopics



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “International human rights”.

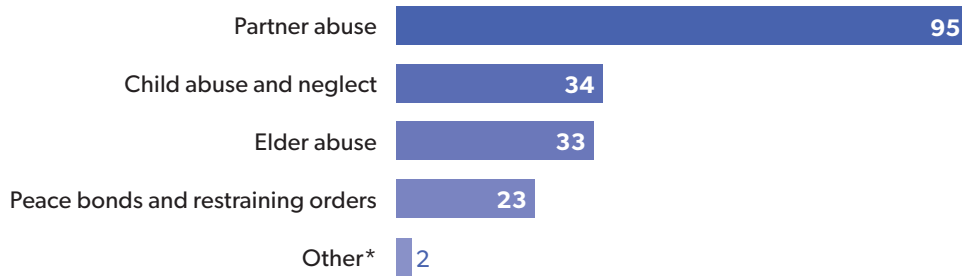
58 There is significant overlap in the human rights subtopics “Discrimination and work” and “Discrimination in housing” with PLEI on discrimination in topics “Employment and work” and “Housing law”, respectively. As a general rule, where resources deal entirely with discrimination, they appear under “Human rights”; where resources cover a range of information on employment or housing, including information on discrimination, they appear under “Employment and work” or “Housing law”.

4.1.8 Abuse and family violence

“Abuse and family violence” comes in eighth place with 164 entries. The following figure shows the number of records tagged in abuse and family violence subtopics.

Abuse and family violence

Figure 9: Number of records tagged in abuse and family violence subtopics



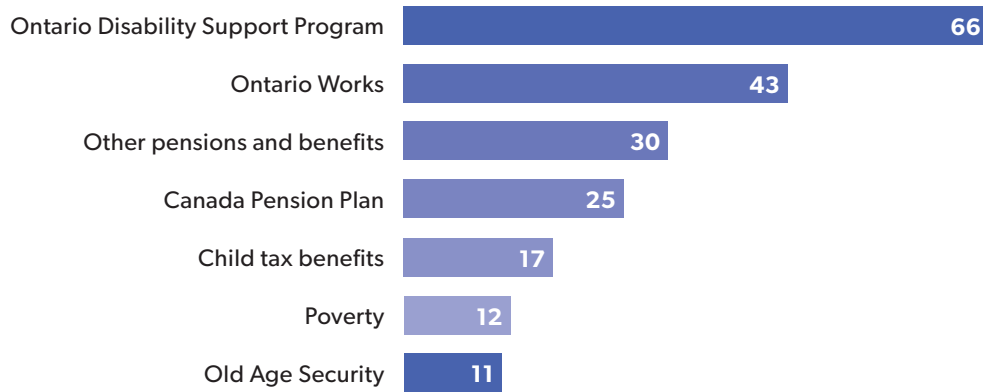
*The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Abuse of people with disabilities”.

4.1.9 Social assistance and pensions

The topic of “Social assistance and pensions” ranks ninth, with 151 entries.⁵⁹ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in social assistance and pensions subtopics.

Social assistance and pensions

Figure 10: Number of records tagged in social assistance and pensions subtopics



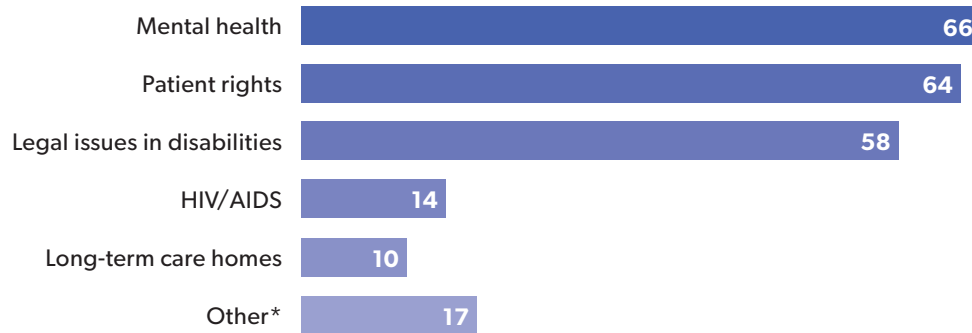
⁵⁹ The subtopic of “Other pensions and benefits” includes information about GST/HST credits, tax credits, EI family supplement, and the Registered Disability Savings Plan. Resources in the subtopic of “Poverty” include information about homelessness and self-advocacy, as well as fact sheets on women and poverty.

4.1.10 Health and disability

The topic of “Health and disability” ranks tenth in the distribution of topics, with 132 entries.⁶⁰ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in health and disability subtopics.

Health and disability

Figure 11: Number of records tagged in health and disability subtopics



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Home care”, “Legal issues in health”, and “OHIP and other health insurance”.

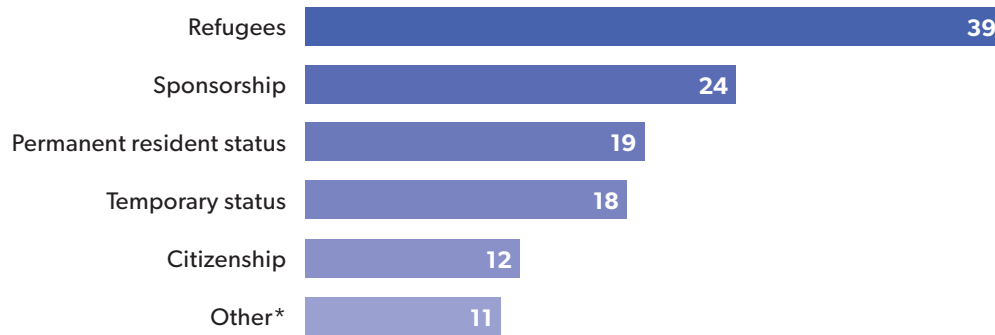
⁶⁰ The subtopic of “Legal issues in disabilities” includes information about accessibility, discrimination, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder, and HIV/AIDS.

4.1.11 Immigration and refugee law

With 115 entries, “Immigration and refugee law” is in eleventh place in the distribution of resources by topic. The following figure shows the number of records tagged in immigration and refugee law subtopics.

Immigration and refugee law

Figure 12: Number of records tagged in immigration and refugee law subtopics



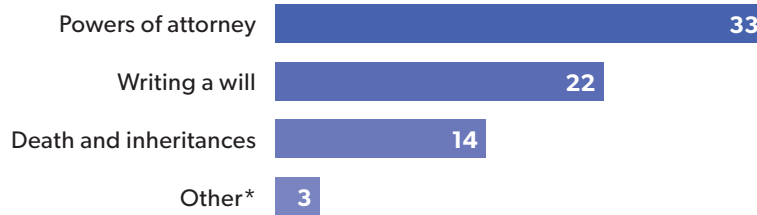
* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “People without status” and “Detention”.

4.1.12 Wills and estates

In the distribution of resources across topics, “Wills and estates” is in twelfth place with 60 resources. The following figure shows the number of records tagged in wills and estates subtopics.

Wills and estates

Figure 13: **Number of records tagged in wills and estates subtopics**



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Advance care plans” and “Aboriginal rights in wills and estates”.

4.1.13 Education law

“Education law” ranks thirteenth on the list of topics with 52 topic entries.⁶¹ The following figure shows the number of records tagged in education law subtopics.

Education law

Figure 14: Number of records tagged in education law subtopics



* The “Other” category contains subtopics that have fewer than 10 records each. This includes “Registration and attendance”.

61 The subtopic of “Suspensions, expulsions and discipline” includes information on bullying.

4.2 Intended use

PLEI resources were also categorized according to intended use. Establishing the intended use of materials was sometimes problematic, as the resources did not always state their intended use. In a few cases, researchers made inferences based on content and context. The “Intended use” categories are: “Basic information”, “Legal rights”, “Self-help”, “Learn and teach”, and “Law reform”. Definitions are provided below.

Figure 15 summarizes the number of tags assigned to categories of intended use. Note that a single resource may have multiple intended uses.

Figure 15: Number of tags by intended use category

Intended use	Number	Percent
Basic information	932	48%
Legal rights	567	29%
Self-help	231	12%
Learn and teach	191	10%
Law reform	6	<1%
Other	3	<1%
Total	1,930	100%

- **Basic information** resources are short resources that identify an issue and often provide a referral.
- **Legal rights** resources can be defined as resources that explain substantive rights or court structure and process so that people can understand their legal rights and the options available to avoid or resolve a problem, or to find appropriate assistance.
- **Self-help** resources provide information on steps someone could take to resolve an issue on their own. This term is also meant to capture resources for the unrepresented party who is appearing in any court hearing or tribunal.
- **Learn and teach** includes training materials and workshops for community workers as well as for the public.
- **Law reform** resources are those with a significant PLEI component that are designed to support campaigns, awareness raising activities and community development.⁶²

62 It seems likely that many resources are used for this purpose, but not exclusively so.

4.3 Format

In looking at “Format”, it is important to remember that all of the mapping was done through an online scan, so organizations providing print-only resources, workshops or other in-person events are underrepresented.

Figure 16 shows the number of tags by format.⁶³

Figure 16: **Number of tags by format category**

Format	Number	Percent	Available to order in hard copy ⁶⁴
Online text (HTML)	823	40%	2
Booklet (PDF)	589	28%	164
Webinar	127	6%	n/a
Video	120	6%	n/a
Fact sheet (PDF)	111	5%	15
Manual/Kit (HTML or PDF)	99	5%	22
Blog/Zine (HTML or PDF)	51	2%	3
Bookmark/Other (PDF)	42	2%	17
Newsletter (HTML or PDF)	39	2%	0
Audio	33	2%	n/a
Workshop/ Other in-person event	18	1%	n/a
Form (HTML or PDF)	6	<1%	0
App	3	<1%	n/a
Total	2,061	100%	

⁶³ See Appendix C for an alphabetical list of these formats.

⁶⁴ Although online information can be printed, this is often not an option for people with limited or no access to the Internet.

Text clearly continues to dominate, with online text in HTML and PDF, including booklets, fact sheets, blogs, newsletters and manuals, accounting for 1,760 entries (or 85 percent of all format entries).

The webinar format has 127 entries (6 percent of all entries), even though it is only within the last decade that the format has become an established one. Most webinars mapped through this initiative were held to train community or legal workers.

The manual or kit format comes in at 100 entries (5 percent of all entries).

Apps are new to the PLEI space and are represented by only 3 records in this snapshot. We note that since the time of our scan more apps that include a PLEI component may have become available.

Most striking is the number of resources that cannot be ordered in hard copy. The majority of resources – 1,474 – were not available to order in hard copy. Resources from 223 records could be ordered in hard copy and of those, 184 were free and the other 39 were available at a cost per copy.⁶⁵

Most striking is the number of resources that cannot be ordered in hard copy. The majority of resources – 1,474 – were not available to order in hard copy.

4.4 Language

Use of language spoken most often at home provides a picture of those who may benefit from resources in their preferred language.⁶⁶

As is shown in Figure 17 on the next page, 55 percent of records are in English only, 34 percent are in English and French, and 10 percent are in other languages.

⁶⁵ Although many organizations and government agencies may distribute PLEI in print at community events and through workshops or other promotional activities, it wasn't easy to find out if hard copies were available from most. Researchers found no standard conventions for ordering print materials online: some sites had ordering information in the introductory or concluding text of the resource itself; others had ordering information in the "About" page of their website; others, still, in the "Contact" page. A few had online order forms.

⁶⁶ As discussed earlier in this report, 14.4 percent of Ontarians speak a non-official language most often at home.

Figure 17: **Distribution of records by languages**

Language	Number	Percent
Records in English and/or French		
English only	935	55%
English and French only	585	34%
French only	14	1%
Subtotal	1,534	90%
Records in other languages		
English and French and other	129	8%
English and other	32	2%
Other only	2	<1%
Subtotal	163	10%
Total	1,697	100%

The mapping found 163 records in the database in languages other than English or French. It is important to remember that in these instances, a record will almost always include more than one language.

Figure 18 on the next page plots the major topic areas by language where there were more than 10 resources in total in the language.

Figure 18: Number of entries by major topic and by language⁶⁷

	Total	Legal system	Family law	Human rights	Abuse and family violence	Criminal law	Housing law	Immigration and refugee	Employment and work	Health and disability	Social assistance and pensions	Consumer law	Education law	Wills and estates
Chinese	154	22	23	16	21	18	12	14	12	5	6	3	2	
Spanish	152	25	19	17	23	16	12	16	14	3	2	2	2	1
Tamil	127	22	16	15	20	12	8	11	12	5	2	2	2	
Urdu	126	25	19	14	22	10	9	12	7	4	2	1	1	
Arabic	111	23	18	15	8	12	10	12	4	3	2	2	2	
Punjabi	99	18	13	12	19	7	6	8	2	5	5	2	2	
Russian	77	18	13	9	4	6	6	10	3	3	2	1	2	
Tagalog	64	14	2	13	3	4	6	8	5	3	2	2	1	1
Somali	63	9	17	7	6	8	4	4	5	1			2	
Gujarati	42	13		8	1	2	4	7	2	2	2	1		
Farsi	42	6	16	2	2	5	4	2	1	1	1		2	
Vietnamese	34	1	2	4	1	9	5	3	3	2	2	2		
Korean	29	3	10		3	2	4	2	1	1	1		2	
Portuguese	21	1	2	1	2	4	4		1	2	1	1	1	1
Italian	19	1	2	1	2	4	4		1	1	1	1		1
ASL	14	3	1	5		2	1				2			
Hindi	13		1		1	2	2		5		1		1	
Other (22 languages)	73	6	6	7	4	13	11	2	9	7	5	2		1
Total	1,260	210	180	146	142	136	112	111	87	48	39	22	22	5
	100%	17%	14%	12%	11%	11%	9%	9%	7%	4%	3%	2%	2%	<1%

67 The "Other" category includes languages with fewer than 10 resources in each language.

We identified 39 languages other than English and French, resulting in 1,260 entries across the 163 records that are shown in Figure 17. As mentioned earlier, records can be assigned to more than one topic and language category. This suggests that many resources have versions in multiple languages.

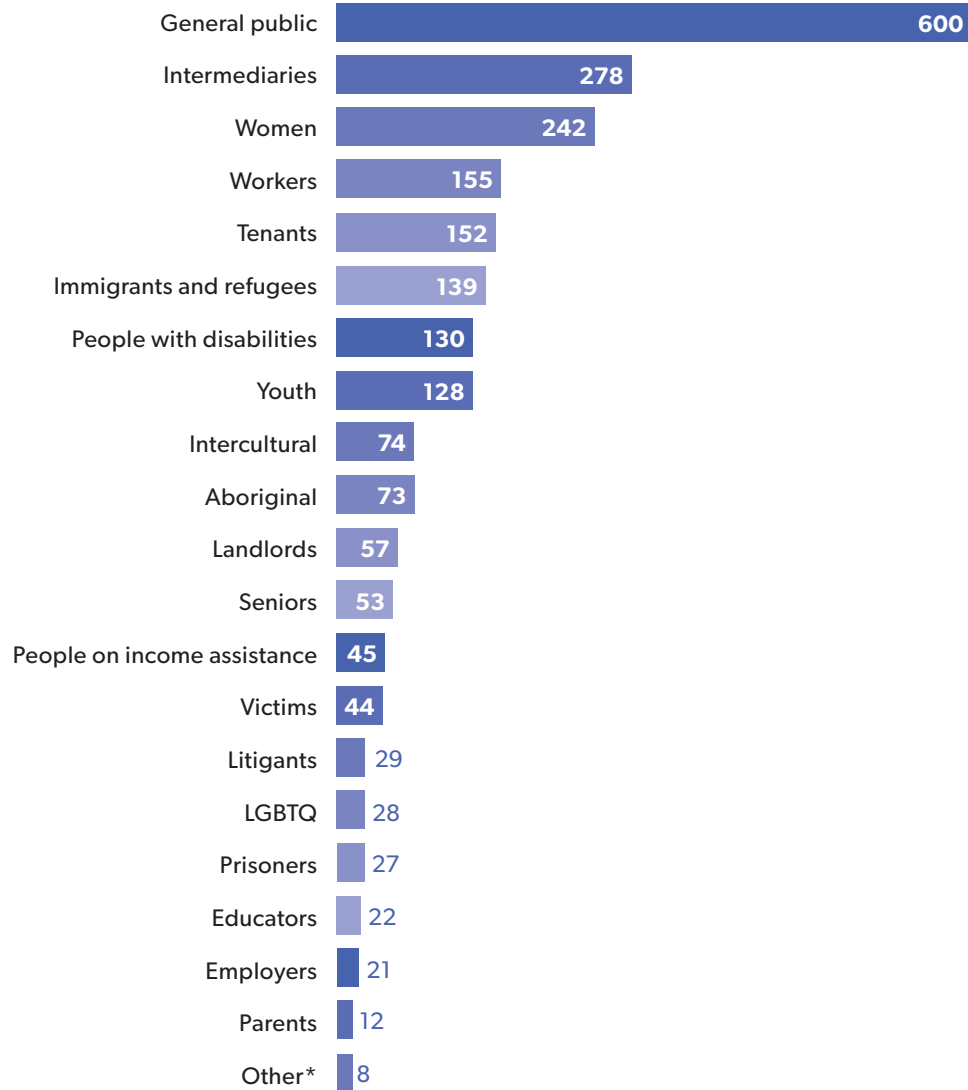
We note that five topic areas – “Legal system”, “Family law”, “Human rights”, “Abuse and family violence”, and “Criminal law” – account for 65 percent of all entries for languages other than English and French. A number of topic areas, including “Social assistance and pensions”, “Consumer law” and “Education law”, have only one or two entries in most languages on the table, suggesting that resources in languages other than English and French in those topic areas is limited.

4.5 Audience

PLEI resources were also categorized by audience. The PLEI matrix includes 26 audience categories. Records were allowed to have more than one audience, for a total of 2,317 audience tags.⁶⁸

Audience

Figure 19: **Number of tags by audience category**



* The "Other" category contains audience groups with fewer than 10 records. This includes "Sex trade workers", "Live-in caregivers", "Grandparents", and "People who are homeless".

68 See Appendix D for an alphabetical list of audiences.

Researchers found it difficult to assign audiences for a number of PLEI resources in the matrix. The “General public” audience category was used for materials that provided overview information or information of interest to a broad audience. Researchers also used their discretion to add “General public” to PLEI resources that were tagged for particular audiences where, in their assessment, those resources might be useful to a broader audience.

There are only 29 entries assigned to the audience category “Litigants”. The term “litigant” refers to unrepresented or self-representing litigants who appear in a civil dispute before the court. Again, we found “Litigants” to be a difficult audience to identify in the online scan of PLEI and speculate that this group is under-represented in the matrix.

4.6 Information providers

For the purpose of analysis, information providers have been grouped into six categories:

- Legal clinics
- Community groups
- Government, courts, and tribunals
- Law-related institutions (for example, Legal Aid Ontario, Law Society of Upper Canada, Pro Bono Law Ontario)
- Media (for example, The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star)
- Trade and industry (for example, labour unions, Canadian Home Builders Association)

The figure below shows the 1,697 records across the types of information providers.

Figure 20: **Distribution of records by information provider**

Information Provider Category	Total
Legal clinics	479
Community groups	464
Government, courts, and tribunals	460
Law-related institutions	263
Media	10
Trade and industry	21
Total	1,697

There is little difference in the number of records logged for the top three types of information provider. With the highest number of entries, “Legal clinics” produced resources relating to 479 records (28 percent). They are closely followed by “Community groups” with 464 records (27 percent) and “Government, courts, and tribunals” with 460 records (27 percent).

“Law-related institutions” are also significant information providers with resources relating to 263 records (15 percent). “Trade and industry” was logged with 21 records (just over 1 percent) and “Media” with 10 records (fewer than 1 percent).



5. Observations and analysis

In this section, we review the information extracted through the mapping research in the context of the public legal education and information (PLEI) themes and trends discussed in Section 3.

5.1 PLEI Lens: Legal problems by topic

Reviewing the resources in the matrix by legal topic, it appears that most of the high-need topics discussed in Section 3 are covered fairly well⁶⁹ (Figure 21).

Figure 21: **Number of tags by topic category and number of subtopic categories**

High-need topic	Number of tags by topic category	Number of subtopic categories in high-need topic category
Criminal law	301	19
Legal system	279	12
Family law	212	9
Employment and work	182	7
Housing law	181	8
Consumer law	167	18
Human rights	166	7
Social assistance and pensions	151	7
Health and disability	132	8

⁶⁹ Neighbour problems, mentioned as a common legal problem in the 2016 report by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice, is largely an area of municipal law; our research did not include PLEI relating to municipal law. The 2009 Ontario Civil Legal Needs Report also included wills and powers of attorney, real estate transactions, personal injury, and small or personal business issues on its list of common legal problems experienced by Ontarians. We note that wills and powers of attorney is a narrower topic than the other categories in this figure; we mapped 60 resources in this category (called "Wills and estates" in the matrix). As noted earlier, private lawyers' websites – not captured in this mapping research – often provide legal information on some of the legal topics noted in the Ontario civil legal needs study, such as real estate, personal injury and family law.

We note that a large number of resources – represented by over 100 entries in each of these high-need legal topic areas – are available in Ontario. An assessment of duplication or potential overlap might start with topic areas with a high number of records and a relatively low number of subtopics. For example, in the topic “Employment and work”, out of seven subtopic categories, the one with the most records – “Employment standards” (63 records) – covers a broad range of information. The subtopic with the second highest number of records – “Workplace safety (44 records) – is a narrower subtopic and might warrant a closer look to see whether duplication exists.

Looking across all subtopic categories through this lens, areas with a high number of records are of interest.⁷⁰ The figure below provides a list of subtopic categories in the matrix that contain 50 or more records:

Figure 22: **Number of records by subtopic categories with 50 or more records**

Subtopic categories with 50 or more records	
Court systems	105
Partner abuse	95
Divorce and separation	73
Custody and access	66
Mental health	66
Ontario Disability Support Program	66
Patient rights	64
Child protection	58
Legal issues in disabilities	58
Assault and criminal harassment	50
Child support	50

Assessing duplication or overlap in PLEI resources requires a more focused and in-depth review of PLEI resources than this high-level mapping exercise allows. To give us a sense of what might be involved – and how the mapping information might be used – we conducted four sample case studies using hypothetical scenarios, included as Appendix F.

⁷⁰ We note that the large number of resources in a topic area or subtopic area does not necessarily indicate overlap or duplication.

5.2 PLEI Lens: Making it easy for users to find

As noted earlier, we've mapped six broad categories of legal information providers in Ontario.

Figure 23: Number of information providers by category and number of records by provider

Information Provider Category	Number of information providers in each category	Number of records by information provider category
Legal clinics ⁷¹	75	479
Community groups	68	464
Government, courts, and tribunals	22	460
Law-related institutions ⁷²	11	263
Media	3	10
Trade and industry ⁷³	3	21
Total	182	1,697

We note that the two top information provider categories, “Legal clinics” and “Community groups”, produced over half of the resources found in the PLEI matrix. While PLEI produced by government, courts, and tribunals and law-related institutions is often intended for use by broader audiences, PLEI produced by clinics and other frontline community organizations usually aims to address the unique needs of the geographic, ethno-racial, linguistic, differently abled or other communities they serve. These organizations have an understanding of the distinct interests of their intended audience, and they develop PLEI resources and programs with those interests and needs in mind, and often as part of a larger approach or strategy.

Returning to the matrix, we can examine records by topic and type of information provider to get a sense of which type of PLEI providers are most active in which areas of law. The figure below provides an example using “Family law”, “Housing law” and “Consumer law”.

⁷¹ Includes community legal clinics and some Student Legal Aid Services Societies.

⁷² For example, Legal Aid Ontario, Law Society of Upper Canada, ProBono Ontario.

⁷³ For example, labour unions, Canadian Home Builders Association.

Figure 24: Number of tags by information provider category and by legal topic

Information Provider Category	Family law	Housing law	Consumer law
Legal clinics	39	93	25
Community groups	112	37	61
Government, courts, and tribunals	56	46	70
Law-related institutions	5	4	3
Trade and industry	0	0	0
Media	0	1	0
Total	212	181	159

The task of those who produce PLEI is not to stop doing it, or even to merge our work into a more “general” (and usually less useful) consolidation, but rather to approach coordination from the point of view of users: ensuring that people can find legal information that addresses their needs.

We can see from the table that most resources in the “Family law” topic category have been produced by community groups. This includes a range of women’s organizations, settlement agencies and others. In the “Housing law” topic area, legal clinics have produced the most resources – by quite a wide margin – and in the “Consumer law” topic category, government, court and tribunals are the top producers.⁷⁴

The large number of PLEI providers, and the relatively large number of resources in some subtopic areas, does tell us that users looking for PLEI online will encounter a large number of resources produced by many different organizations. This is in line with the many recent research studies that report on the challenges faced by people looking for legal information: they encounter an overwhelming amount of information, and find it difficult to identify what is relevant and reliable.

Without question, this high level of PLEI activity calls for greater collaboration and coordination among PLEI providers. The task of those who produce PLEI is not to stop doing it, or even to merge our work into a more “general” (and usually less useful) consolidation, but rather to approach coordination from the point of view of users: ensuring that people can find legal information that addresses their needs, quickly and easily, and that they can be confident that it is trustworthy.

⁷⁴ Most of the consumer law resources tagged in the matrix come from Ontario ministries.

Legal information providers – and the audiences they serve – can only benefit from an awareness of other information providers working in the area, and the topics and audiences for whom they’re writing; this is a critical starting point for developing linkages, collaboration and coordination.

5.3 PLEI Lens: Growing use of the Internet

“Distribution of Resources by Format” (Figure 16, page 39) paints a picture that, no doubt, bears little resemblance to the resource distribution by format of 20 years ago. The PLEI matrix now holds resources across 13 different format categories from webinars to videos to various forms of online text.

We did not identify how many websites were designed to be responsive to the needs of the growing number of people who access information through their mobile phones. We did note that “Apps” had the smallest number of entries (3 entries), all of which were assigned to youth as a primary audience. This is a possible area for further exploration as more apps are developed to help people connect with legal information and referral.

We also mapped resources according to whether they are available to order in print and found that the majority of resources (represented by 1,473 records or 87 percent of records) were not available to order in hard copy.⁷⁵ The number of print materials that can be ordered varies across topic area. We found 46 family law resources that could be ordered in hard copy out of a total of 212 family law resources (22 percent). When we looked at consumer law, we found 7 resources available in hard copy out of 159 consumer law resources (4 percent).

So, while there is a growing variety and number of online resources, there may also be fewer delivery channels for legal information that is not accessed through the Internet. This development is in line with the increasing use of the Internet.⁷⁶

However, given that many people – including those who are marginalized by income and remote location – are unable to access computers or high-speed Internet, this finding suggests that, despite the high number of PLEI resources, PLEI providers may not be meeting

Despite the high number of PLEI resources, PLEI providers may not be meeting the needs of people who are on the “other side” of the digital divide. For those people, print resources and help from “go-to” workers may still be necessary.

⁷⁵ See Figure 16 in Section 4.3 of this report.

⁷⁶ See Section 3.3 of this report for a discussion.

the needs of people who are on the “other side” of the digital divide. For those people, print resources and help from “go-to” workers may still be necessary – strategically placed, at “places people already go to” and “through people and services they trust”.⁷⁷

Finally, we offer an anecdotal observation gleaned from our research: we observed a wide range in the quality of and approaches to online legal information.⁷⁸ The development and recognition of guidelines or best practices – relating, for example, to giving the jurisdiction to which the PLEI applies and the date of production or “legal review date” – jump out as obvious steps forward.

5.4 PLEI Lens: Recognizing the importance of “go-to” intermediaries

As set out in Figure 20 (page 46) after “General public” (600 entries, or 26 percent of all audience entries), the largest audience group in the PLEI matrix is “Intermediaries” (278 entries, or 12 percent of all entries).

When we take a closer look, we see that resources for intermediaries are not distributed equally across all topic areas. In “Consumer law” 6 records out of 159 were assigned to intermediaries (or 4 percent of records). When we look at “Abuse and family violence”, we find 41 records out of 164 were tagged for intermediaries (or 25 percent of records). Given the vulnerability of the target audience for information on this topic and the potential risks involved in seeking help, this is an area where a trusted intermediary may be of paramount importance.

We find that information for this audience in all “Intended use” categories – “Basic information”, “Legal rights”, “Self-help”, “Learn and teach”, and “Law Reform” – reflects an awareness of the importance of equipping trusted intermediaries with information they may need. At the same time, we know from previous research⁷⁹ that trusted intermediaries often don’t know where to find the legal information and services their clients need.

Further investigation is needed to get a sense of the full range of resources available for intermediaries, and to assess whether key pieces are missing and delivery channels for this information are adequate.

The development and recognition of guidelines or best practices – relating, for example, to giving the jurisdiction to which the PLEI applies and the date of production or “legal review date” – jump out as obvious steps forward.

⁷⁷ *Connecting Across Language and Distance* at 38

⁷⁸ Writing for print is different than writing for the web: online text needs to be “chunked” and information organized through a system of navigational links; accessibility, information architecture, density of information and a myriad of other factors must be considered in order for online information to be accessible, clear and user-friendly. Among the 1,697 records mapped, we found a wide range of approaches to online information: some appeared to be designed and written for the web; others did not.

⁷⁹ *Public Legal Education and Information in Ontario Communities: Formats and Delivery Channels* at 27.

5.5 PLEI Lens: Helping people to navigate the legal system

Dissecting information by audience, researchers mapped 29 resources as having “Litigants” as a primary audience. Out of a total of 2,317 audience entries, this is a very low number and, like other questions raised by this research, could be its own mini-study.

The category “Self-help” appears under “Intended use” 231 times (12 percent). This reflects the fairly broad lens we used for classifying resources as “Self-help”. We designated resources for this purpose if they included information on steps people can take to resolve an issue early on as well as resources for unrepresented litigants. This represents the reality that self-help is not an all or nothing endeavour: many people take one or more steps in a legal process on their own; some get help from community workers, or friends and family, at some point in dealing with their legal problem; people often seek professional assistance with more complicated steps.

Our high-level review of the matrix revealed a range of resources in the “Self-help” category, including hybrid materials combining legal rights information and how-to tips, detailed guides to procedural information, and manuals for advocates.

We developed a case study in which we engaged with this category of records.⁸⁰ We reviewed data in the subtopic area “Separation and divorce”, based on a hypothetical group of law students who want to develop a step-by-step divorce kit for people applying for their own uncontested divorce. We did not find such a resource in the matrix. Apart from that, we did not review the data for resources for people appearing in court or for people who want to apply for their own uncontested divorce.

As noted previously in this report,⁸¹ the need for practical information for people who are representing themselves in tribunal or court processes is well documented. Unfortunately, the information revealed by the matrix is not of sufficient depth to tell us how well this need is being met. A more in-depth review of resources available for the purpose of self-help could usefully consider whether people who are representing themselves are able to access clear, practical, step-by-step information.

A more in-depth review of resources available for the purpose of self-help could usefully consider whether people who are representing themselves are able to access clear, practical, step-by-step information.

⁸⁰ See Appendix F of this report.

⁸¹ See Section 3.5 of this report.

5.6 PLEI Lens: Language

We mapped 163 records available in non-official languages; this number represents 10 percent of the total number of records mapped.⁸² We identified 39 languages other than English and French, resulting in 1,260 entries within the 163 records.⁸³ We know, then, that there are a significant number of resources available in numerous languages in Ontario.

When we looked at major topic area by language, we elicit more specific and, therefore, probably more useful information. PLEI in non-official languages is available in many of the legal topics identified as priority areas,⁸⁴ but some high-need legal topics – such as consumer law – have few records in non-official languages, including languages that represent large population groups in Ontario. There may be an explanation for this gap; ethno-racial and linguistic minority communities are diverse and their legal information needs may vary.

We note that PLEI providers and other stakeholders can use the following websites as starting points for an overview of PLEI available in Ontario in languages other than English and French: Settlement.org, Your Legal Rights, Family Law Education for Women, and Justice Ontario.

PLEI in non-official languages is available in many of the legal topics identified as priority areas, but some high-need legal topics – such as consumer law – have few records in non-official languages, including languages that represent large population groups in Ontario.

5.7 PLEI Lens: Other needs

Distance

As noted in Section 3, access to legal information by rural and remote communities is not addressed in the PLEI matrix – such a map would have to be compiled in partnership with rural and remote community members and stakeholders.

However, as discussed earlier in this report, there is a growing collection of resources and information available only through the Internet. This is a worrisome trend for people on the other side of the digital divide – namely, many marginalized groups and, of note, people in rural and remote areas where Internet connectivity is spotty or nonexistent and high-speed Internet connections are not yet commonplace.

⁸² See Figure 17 in Section 4.4 of this report.

⁸³ See Figure 18 in Section 4.4 of this report.

⁸⁴ See Section 3.1 of this report.

Literacy

The mapping research did not undertake to categorize or review resources based on their literacy level, but a review of records categorized by “Intended use” may be useful in this regard. PLEI resources categorized as “Basic information” were short (one- or two-page) resources that identify an issue and often provide a referral; of all categories, these records have the potential of being accessible for people with basic literacy skills.

This “Basic information” category of the matrix holds the highest number of tags under “Intended use” (932 or 48 percent); however, as discussed in Section 3, this doesn’t tell us whether a resource is easy to read and understand.



6. Key findings and next steps

6.1 Key findings

The goals of this study were to provide public legal education and information (PLEI) providers, funders and other stakeholders in Ontario with information to help them:

- set priorities and develop PLEI resources,
- minimize the likelihood of duplication or overlap,
- identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination.

With respect to the first two goals, the data from the mapping research provides a range of information. Our research confirms that there are a large number of PLEI resources available in Ontario, produced by numerous PLEI providers. Not surprisingly, those resources cover topics in areas of law that have been identified as priority areas in relevant research reports.

Drilling down, several subtopic areas include a large number of resources; those resources represent a wide range of information about audiences, formats, languages, and intended use. More work would need to be done, using a more focused lens, to assess overlaps and gaps.

This was a central theme that emerged from the research: the existence of a large number of PLEI resources, on a wide range of topics, for a diversity of audiences, and intended for a variety of uses. Ontario Government ministries, law-related associations, Legal Aid Ontario, CLEO, other community legal clinics, a significant number of women's groups, and many others are producing PLEI and presenting it online. (Relatively few print resources seem to be available to order for free, despite a continued need for this.)

This leads us to what we think is a key take-away from our research: the need for increased collaboration and coordination among PLEI producers and providers. As discussed above, our researchers were challenged to wade through the vast body of existing PLEI, and to categorize, in a consistent way, the resources they identified. Could this maze be similar to what users face when they try to sort through the legal information they encounter in their online searches?

We also recognize that better coordination among legal information providers is but one piece in a broader access to justice strategy; it is not a silver bullet

This was a central theme that emerged from the research: the existence of a large number of PLEI resources, on a wide range of topics, for a diversity of audiences, and intended for a variety of uses.

for addressing the challenges facing the justice system. A broader access to justice strategy requires the involvement of numerous legal and non-legal organizations with whom people intersect in their interactions with the justice system, including justice system institutions, such as courts and police services, and direct community service organizations, such as shelters and settlement services. Better collaboration among legal information providers – while important – is just one piece of the larger imperative of creating a more accessible justice system.

6.2 What's next?

This report paints a broad overview of the PLEI landscape in Ontario – a snapshot in time – and lays the foundation for further work. The calls for better collaboration and coordination among PLEI providers – made in this and other reports – sound obvious and easy to support, but identifying concrete steps for moving forward is less obvious.

In “What's next”, we outline some possible next steps based on or triggered by this foundational research, and as suggested by the strategic research advisors through their participation in the PLEI Cluster of the Action Group on Access to Justice (TAG). As the author of the report, CLEO offers its view of steps that warrant take-up in the near future.

1. Creating and maintaining an accessible matrix

There was interest among participants in the PLEI Cluster in finding ways to transfer the information collected through this research into a publicly accessible, easy-to-use database that could be accessed by PLEI providers. Three options for moving forward with this are discussed below.

a. Working with data from this mapping research

One possibility is to transfer the data in the matrix into a database that is publicly accessible, or at least accessible to PLEI producers and providers. The objective would be to enable PLEI producers and providers to find out what PLEI already exists by topic and subtopic, format, audience, etc. Based on what they find out, PLEI providers could use or build on what already exists.

Better collaboration among legal information providers – while important – is just one piece of the larger imperative of creating a more accessible justice system.

Creating an accessible database would involve:

- finding the right software (flexible, easy to use and build on)
- customizing the software
- hiring a librarian to help develop a taxonomy for the shared PLEI database
- updating select data in the current matrix and transferring it to the new database
- creating a website or portal page for the database

On an ongoing basis, it would require a part-time data manager to maintain and update the database, support users, and monitor usage and collect statistics.

In light of the resources that would be required, the question of how this activity would improve or benefit the work of PLEI producers and providers would need to be fully considered before undertaking such a project.

b. Building on CLEO’s Your Legal Rights website

Another option would be to devote resources to CLEO’s Your Legal Rights (YLR) website to enable it to play this function, for the same purpose. A large number of resources in the PLEI matrix already exist on YLR; indeed, YLR, which is updated regularly, includes PLEI produced subsequent to the mapping research.

However, YLR does not capture information with respect to all of the fields in the matrix, and does not have a search feature that allows for the range of cross-referencing that PLEI producers and stakeholders might expect. Adding this function and objective to YLR would represent an expansion and would require additional resources; as above, the “whys” and practical uses of such a function would need to be fleshed out beforehand.

Building on YLR would involve figuring out what to update and transfer from the matrix, hiring a librarian to help develop a taxonomy that works with the existing topic, subtopic, audience, and format categories on YLR, and redesigning the search function so that users can pull out the kind of data they need.

On an ongoing basis, resources would need to be allocated to YLR to update and maintain the data and provide support to users.

c. Creating smaller shared databases as needed

There is also the possibility of building smaller shared databases on an as needed, more focused basis. If a PLEI producer had a particular purpose or question for

which data from the matrix would be helpful, a shared database using only two or three topic or subtopic categories from the current matrix could be created. This selective approach may be more likely to generate concrete and useful information and analysis, and could be pulled together using less time, money and resources than a database built on the full matrix.

Should two or three topic or subtopic areas be identified, the same work but on a smaller scale would be involved to set up the database.

d. Building on the existing matrix to create profiles of the major PLEI producers

The information in the current matrix could be used to inform the creation of a high-level overview of the major PLEI producers in Ontario – something that does not currently exist and, given the plethora of PLEI and PLEI producers, may be a useful starting point for building better coordination.

An overview or environmental scan would involve creating profiles of the major PLEI producers, including an overview of the main topics addressed in each producer’s suite of PLEI resources, the purpose of their PLEI services and resources, and any communities and partners with whom they work. Profiles would be built using data from the matrix and would include interviews with PLEI producers.⁸⁵

Using interviews and possibly small group discussions, this “lay of the land” would explore questions such as:

- What do each of the major Ontario PLEI producers see as their role in PLEI and the purpose of their PLEI work? How is it distinct from the role and purpose of other PLEI producers?
- Who are the main audiences that each PLEI producer aims to reach with their PLEI? What do they expect their audiences to “do” with the PLEI?
- What partners do they work with in identifying, developing, and presenting their PLEI?
- What are their thoughts on how major PLEI producers could better coordinate their activities?

CLEO recommends moving forward with this “next step”. It would serve as an important foundational piece – with a manageable (limited) scope – for moving towards better coordination.

⁸⁵ Ontario’s major PLEI producers are currently participating in the PLEI Cluster of TAG, so the foundation for this work already exists.

2. Building on recommendations or themes identified through this research

As noted earlier, this research confirmed the existence of a large body of PLEI available online, produced by numerous organizations on a range of topics and subtopics, and available in many languages. Our strategic research advisors and the PLEI Cluster discussed several steps that could be taken to curate this information, to create clearer pathways for people who are looking to find legal information that they can be confident is reliable and applies to their situation, and that they can understand and put to use.

Options for moving forward with this include:

a. Committing to regular conversations on collaboration opportunities

An interest in improving collaboration and coordination among PLEI producers and providers has been a theme in a number of recent reports and also came up in discussions of the PLEI Cluster. The purpose of having regular check-ins would be to share information about current and planned PLEI projects and discuss possible partnerships and collaboration.

This would require a commitment on the part of PLEI providers to sharing information in a proactive and timely manner and a willingness to check in with other PLEI producers before getting too far along in the development of new PLEI initiatives. The PLEI Cluster would be a good starting point for these coordination efforts that would ideally become a more expanded and inclusive body.

CLEO notes that, with the PLEI Cluster, these conversations have already begun in Ontario, and recommends the continuation of these discussions.

b. Developing a common taxonomy and, possibly, a common glossary (consistent terminology)

Researchers noted that the PLEI available online is presented to the public through a wide range of categorization schemes or taxonomies. A common taxonomy could play an important role in improving collaboration and coordination in the PLEI sector and could make online PLEI easier to find. The idea of a glossary defining terms in the taxonomy is also important to ensure a common understanding and consistent use of taxonomy terms by PLEI providers.

Our strategic research advisors and the PLEI Cluster discussed several steps that could be taken to curate this information, to create clearer pathways for people who are looking to find legal information that they can be confident is reliable and applies to their situation, and that they can understand and put to use.

This would involve hiring a librarian to look at the matrix and come up with suggestions for a common taxonomy, as well as glossary definitions. Such a classification system would grow and change over time and would require regular review and updating.

CLEO recommends moving forward with this activity.

c. Developing guidelines or best practices for PLEI, including an identification system for labelling “excellence”

Researchers also found that the PLEI available online may or may not follow recommended practices – practices, for example, for dating the PLEI and for stating the jurisdiction to which it applies. The idea of developing a set of guidelines for PLEI, perhaps accompanied by a “seal of excellence” for PLEI that follows those guidelines, could lead to higher-quality PLEI resources and an easier way for the public to identify reliable legal information.

This would involve developing a set of better legal information practices for PLEI. Guidelines for those best practices would need to be developed collaboratively, by the range of Ontario organizations that produce and provide PLEI as a significant part of their work. Better information practices relate, in part, to frequency of monitoring and updating of resources for legal accuracy; presenting information on applicable jurisdiction on materials; and the accessibility of the language, design, and format. There are starting points for this work, including CLEO’s “Better Legal Information Handbook” and its “PLE Toolbox”.

The development of such guidelines could be accompanied by a program to support the designation of a “seal of excellence” that would appear on PLEI that follows the guidelines.

Further investigation would be required to determine how the “seal of excellence” designation might be applied and how it might be rolled out across the province, including how to ensure buy-in and promote ongoing awareness and compliance. In its initial version, the possibility for supporting self-designation, based on self-reporting against a checklist, holds some appeal. There are existing tools, such as a computer-based “grade reading level” test, that could assist.

The idea of developing a set of guidelines for PLEI, perhaps accompanied by a “seal of excellence” for PLEI that follows those guidelines, could lead to higher-quality PLEI resources and an easier way for the public to identify reliable legal information.

It will be important, of course, to ensure that a program of best practices and “seal of excellence” supports, rather than increases the burden on, PLEI producers, particularly smaller producers who may be creating materials for their particular community.

CLEO recommends moving forward with these activities, starting with the development of best practices and followed by the development of a “seal of excellence” program.

d. Investigating opportunities for connecting with commonly-used search engines with the ultimate goal of helping to guide users to reliable sources of legal information.

Some of our strategic research advisors wondered whether people who are searching for legal information using common search engines could be better directed to high-quality resources. For example, are there opportunities for working with the commonly-used search engine companies, such as Google, to find ways to direct people looking for legal information on a specific topic, such as eviction, to resources based on their search query or search history? This kind of feature already exists on certain e-commerce sites where a search for a book, for example, will pull up content of related interest (i.e., “You may also like these titles”).

This would involve further investigation to see what possibilities exist and what might be involved in implementing such an approach with jurisdiction-specific legal information.

e. Conducting focussed research relating to the pathways to legal information taken by people with legal problems

Some of our strategic research advisors also expressed an interest in exploring ways to support clearer pathways to legal information. In order to move forward with our PLEI work, we have to better understand how people look for, find, and assess online PLEI. This sounds like a manageable undertaking but, in fact, people’s needs for legal information – their needs and personal capabilities – are highly varied, as are the ways that they seek information or help in response to their needs.

Improving legal information pathways will require numerous improvements on multiple fronts. Some of the research reports cited in this report lay a groundwork on which to build. Additional analysis that investigates

Are there opportunities for working with the commonly-used search engine companies to find ways to direct people looking for legal information on a specific topic, such as eviction, to resources based on their search query or search history?

pathways from the point of view of users – for example, by developing user personas – may hold some promise in terms of offering concrete improvements. As well, developing consistent guidelines for PLEI and improving collaboration and coordination are important next steps to clearer legal information pathways for members of the public.

In closing, we would like to thank, once again, the many people who assisted in this research, patiently and unwaveringly. We would also like to thank The Law Foundation of Ontario and the Department of Justice Canada for their support of CLEO’s Centre for Research and Innovation, through which this research was conducted.



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Abuse and family violence

- Abuse of people with disabilities
- Child abuse and neglect
- Elder abuse
- Partner abuse
- Peace bonds and restraining orders

Consumer law

- Bankruptcy
- Collection agencies
- Consumer complaints
- Contracts
- Credit and debt
- Door-to-door sales
- Energy contracts
- Home repairs and renovations
- Identity theft
- Intellectual property and copyright
- Motor vehicle sales and repairs
- Payday loans
- Phone and mail
- Prepaid services
- Private career colleges
- Purchases
- Scams and Fraud
- Travel

Criminal law

- Aboriginal rights in criminal law
- Alcohol and drug offences
- Assault and criminal harassment
- Bullying
- Consent to sexual activity
- Criminal injuries compensation
- Firearms
- Human trafficking
- Motor vehicle offences
- Pardons

- Prisons
- Prostitution
- Rights of accused
- Rights of offenders
- Rights of victims
- Rights when dealing with police
- Sexual assault
- Sexual harassment
- Youth criminal justice

Education law

- Children with special needs
- Registration and attendance
- Suspensions, expulsion and discipline

Employment and work

- Employment insurance
- Employment standards
- Firings and layoffs
- Injured workers compensation
- Parental, pregnancy and other leaves
- Pay equity
- Workplace safety

Environmental law

- Environmental protection

Family law

- Birth and adoption
- Child protection
- Child support
- Custody and access
- Divorce and separation
- Division of property
- Marriage and common-law relationships
- Mediation
- Spousal support

Health and disability

- HIV/AIDS
- Home care
- Legal issues in disabilities
- Legal issues in health
- Long-term care homes
- Mental health
- OHIP and other health insurance
- Patient rights

Housing law

- Evictions
- Landlord-tenant relations
- Maintenance and repairs
- Moving out
- Owning a home
- Rent and rental agreements
- Tenant organizing
- Other legal issues in housing

Human rights

- Charter rights
- Discrimination based on personal characteristics
- Discrimination at work
- Discrimination in housing
- Discrimination in services and other areas
- Human rights complaints
- International human rights

Immigration and refugee law

- Citizenship
- Detention
- People without status
- Permanent resident status
- Refugees
- Sponsorship
- Temporary Status

Legal system

- Aboriginal rights in the legal system
- Administrative tribunals
- Alternative dispute resolution
- Commercial law
- Court systems
- Elections
- Legal aid
- Non-profit law
- Ombudsman
- Small claims court
- Working with a lawyer
- Working with specific types of clients

Media and Internet

Social assistance and pensions

- Child tax benefits
- Old Age Security
- Ontario Disability Support Program
- Ontario Works
- Other pensions and benefits
- Pension Plan
- Poverty

Transgender

Wills and estates

- Aboriginal rights in wills and estates
- Advance care plans
- Death and inheritances
- Powers of attorney
- Writing a will



Basic information resources are short resources that identify an issue and often provide a referral.

Legal rights resources explain substantive rights or court structure and process so that people can understand their legal rights and the options available to avoid or resolve a problem, or to find appropriate assistance.

Self-help resources provide information on steps someone could take to resolve an issue on their own. This term is also meant to capture resources for the unrepresented party who is appearing in any court hearing or tribunal.

Learn and teach includes training materials and workshops for community workers as well as for the public.

Law reform resources are those with a significant PLEI component that are designed to support campaigns, awareness raising activities and community development.



App
Audio
Blog/Zine (HTML or PDF)
Booklet (PDF)
Bookmark/Other (PDF)
Fact sheet (PDF)
Form (HTML or PDF)
Manual/Kit (HTML or PDF)
Newsletter (HTML or PDF)
Online text (HTML)
Video
Webinar
Workshop/ Other in-person event



Aboriginal
Children and youth
Educators
Employers
General public
Grandparents
Immigrants and refugees
Intercultural (people from diverse cultural backgrounds,
but who are not immigrants and refugees)
Intermediaries
Landlords
LGBTQ
Litigants
Live-in caregivers
Parents
People on income assistance
People with disabilities
People who are homeless
Prisoners
Seniors
Sex trade workers
Tenants
Victims
Women
Workers
Youth



Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto (ALST)
Act to End Violence Against Women
ADR Institute of Canada
Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)
Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE)
Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario (AJEFO)
Algoma Community Legal Clinic Inc.
ARCH Disability Law Centre
Autism Ontario
BC Civil Liberties Association
BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
BC Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons (OCTIP)
BOOST - Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)
Canada Revenue Agency
Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
Canadian Bar Association
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)
Canadian Centre for Child Protection
Canadian Centre for Elder Law (CCEL)
Canadian Centre for International Justice (CCIJ)
Canadian Civil Liberties Association
Canadian Council of Muslim Women
Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA)
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Canadian Home Builders Association
Canadian Human Rights Commission
Canadian Judicial Council
Canadian Legal Information Institute (CanLII)
Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE)
Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime
Canadian Superior Courts Judges Association
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)
CCR - Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés/Canadian Council for Refugees
Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System
Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA)
Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta
Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare

CFT French Legal Aid Services
Chatham Kent Legal Clinic
Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)
Citizen Advocacy
City of Toronto
Clicklaw
Clinique Juridique Communautaire Grand-Nord Community Legal Clinic
Clinique juridique populaire de Prescott et Russell Inc.
Community Advocacy & Legal Centre
Community and Legal Aid Services Programme (CLASP)
Community Law School (Sarnia-Lambton) Inc.
Community Legal Assistance Sarnia
Community Legal Clinic - Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk
Community Legal Clinic - Simcoe, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes
Community Legal Clinic of York Region
Community Legal Education Ontario/Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario (CLEO)
Community Legal Services of Niagara South
Community Legal Services - Ottawa
Community Living Ontario
Connect Legal
Connecting Communities Project
Consent and Capacity Board
Consolidated Credit Counselling Services of Canada
Consumer Measures Committee
Department of Justice Canada
Disability Claims Advocacy Clinic
Downsview Community Legal Services
Downtown Legal Services
Durham Community Legal Clinic
East Toronto Community Legal Services
Égale Canada
Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic
Elliot Lake & North Shore Community Legal Clinic
Family Law Education for Women (FLEW)
FCJ Refugee Centre
Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations
Flemingdon Community Legal Services
Government of Canada - Gouvernement du Canada
Government of Ontario
Grey-Bruce Community Legal Clinic
HALCO - HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario

Halton Community Legal Services
Hamilton Community Legal Clinic/Clinique juridique communautaire de Hamilton
Health Canada
Human Rights Legal Support Centre
Huron-Perth Community Legal Clinic
Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC)
Industrial Accident Victims' Group of Ontario
Jane-Finch.com
Jane Finch Community Legal Services
Justice for Children and Youth
Keewaytinok Native Legal Services
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services
Kingston Community Legal Clinic
Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic
Lake Country Community Legal Clinic
Lanark Leeds & Grenville Legal Clinic
Landlord and Tenant Board
Landlord's Self-Help Centre
Law Commission of Ontario
Law Foundation of Ontario
Law Society of Upper Canada
Legal Aid Ontario – Aide juridique Ontario (LAO)
Legal Assistance of Windsor
Legal Clinic of Guelph and Wellington County
LGBTQ Parenting Network
Luke's Place
Manitoulin Legal Clinic
Mental Health Works
Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC)
Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Mississauga Community Legal Services
Neighbourhood Legal Services
Neighbourhood Legal Services (London and Middlesex) Inc
Niagara North Community Legal Assistance
Nipissing Community Legal Clinic
Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services Corporation
North Peel & Dufferin Community Legal Services
North Shore Legal
Northumberland Community Legal Centre
Northwest Community Legal Clinic
Ontario Bar Association (OBA)
Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)

Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)
Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Ontario Ministry of Consumer Services
Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment
Ontario Ministry of Labour
Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General
Ontario Native Women's Association
Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN)
Ottawa Immigration & Refugee Law Office
Parkdale Community Legal Services
Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse
People for Education
People's Law School
Peterborough Community Legal Centre
Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN)
Pro Bono Law Ontario
Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office (PPAO)
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)
R.E.N.T. Waterloo
Reena
Renfrew County Legal Clinic
Rexdale Community Legal Clinic
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
Rural Legal Services
School Advocacy Hamilton
Service Canada
settlement.org (OCASI)
Sexual Assault Care Centre, The Scarborough Hospital
SmartSAVER
Social Action and Advocacy Committee
Social Justice Tribunals Ontario
Social Rights Advocacy (co-produced info with CERA)
South Ottawa Community Legal Services & Community Legal Services Ottawa
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
South Etobicoke Community Legal Services
South Ottawa Community Legal Services
Springtide Resources
Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Legal Clinic
Sudbury Community Legal Clinic/La Clinique juridique communautaire de Sudbury
Sylvia Rivera Law Project
The Globe and Mail

The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada
Timmins-Temiskaming Community Legal Clinic
Toronto Star
Toronto Workers' Health & Safety Legal Clinic
Unison Health & Community Services
University of Ottawa Refugee Assistance Project (UORAP)
Vanier Community Service Center
Waterloo Region Community Legal Services
West Coast Prison Justice Society
West End Legal Services of Ottawa
West Scarborough Community Legal Services
West Toronto Community Legal Services
Willowdale Community Legal Services
Windsor-Essex Bilingual Legal Clinic
Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)
Workers Action Centre
WorkSmartOntario
York Region District School Board
YWCA Cambridge



We conducted this research to gather data about public legal education and information (PLEI) that is available in Ontario. This type of data can be used by PLEI producers as a starting point for their PLEI planning work, encouraging better coordination and minimizing duplication.

A solid plan for the development of PLEI begins by identifying the topic, need and intended audience for a resource or activity. Before deciding that a similar resource exists that can be used or adapted – or, alternatively, that there is a gap – producers will need to review the existing, similar resources to explore whether their audience’s needs will be met by them, in their current or adapted form. Those questions include:

- Does it cover the key topics that the audience needs to know?
- Is it legally accurate?
- Is it written (or presented) in a language that the audience understands, and at an appropriate reading (understandability) level?
- Does it give local, up-to-date referral information to appropriate legal and social services?
- Will the audience be able to access it, online or in print, at a library or local organization?

Below, we set out examples of how the PLEI data that we collected in this research could be a starting point for this analysis. As noted elsewhere in this report, the PLEI data itself quickly becomes out of date and would need to be reviewed before conducting an analysis.

Case study #1

Fact situation: A student legal clinic would like to develop an uncontested divorce kit for clients who contact the clinic with questions about how to do their own divorce.⁸⁶

The students begin their search of the matrix in the “Separation and divorce” subtopic. Their scan pulls up a total of 73 records, summarized by “Audience”, “Intended use” and “Format” in the table on the following page.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ This example assumes that law students, supervised by a lawyer, will conduct a triage to ensure that an uncontested divorce kit is an appropriate tool for the client.

⁸⁷ It is helpful to keep in mind that each record may have been categorized more than once under “Intended Use”, “Format” and “Audience”.

Separation and divorce (73 records) (in descending order)					
Audience	No. of records	Intended use	No. of records	Format	No. of records
General public	38	Legal rights	39	Online text (HTML)	40
Women	31	Basic information	31	Booklet (PDF)	34
Intercultural	11	Self-help	4	Video	9
Intermediaries	10	Learn and teach	1	Audio	8
Aboriginal	6			Webinar	5
Youth	4			Manual/Kit (HTML or PDF)	3
Immigrants and refugees	3			Blog/Zine (HTML or PDF)	1
				Bookmark/Other (PDF)	1
Parents	3			Factsheet (PDF)	1
Seniors	1			Form (HTML or PDF)	1
				Newsletter (HTML or PDF)	1

The students would like their kit to combine legal rights information and step-by-step instructions. If they filter “Separation and divorce” for records categorized by “Legal rights” or “Self-help”, they pull up 43 records.

A quick scan shows that a number of records categorized in “Legal rights” (on matters relating to property division, custody, child and spousal support, and mediation) aren’t likely to be useful for an uncontested or simple application for divorce. The remaining records can be quickly reviewed, leaving the students with a shortlist that they can peruse for relevant PLEI with legal rights information.

If students are looking for resources to help develop self-help components of a kit, they find four resources categorized under “Self-help”: two relating to parenting arrangements, which will not be useful, and two relating to procedures in Family Court in Ontario.

The students don't find a step-by-step kit that focuses specifically on uncontested divorce⁸⁸. Depending on the needs of their clients, the students may choose to link to the two resources about procedures in family court, or with permission, adapt information from these sites for their uncontested divorce kit.

Case study #2

Fact situation: A community organization serving Hispanic women would like to find a fact sheet with tips on how to get an order for child support enforced. They plan to hand out the fact sheets at community events, drop-in centres, and other locations women in their community frequent. The organization runs on a shoestring budget, but is determined to find the money, or volunteers, to get this critical legal information translated if they can't find it in Spanish.

Looking in the subtopic "Child support" reveals 50 records, presented by "Audience", "Intended use" and "Format" in the table below.

Subtopic: Child support (50 records) (in descending order)					
Audience	No. of records	Intended use	No. of records	Format	No. of records
General public	32	Basic information	36	Online text (HTML)	33
Women	12	Legal rights	20	Booklet (PDF)	18
Intercultural	6	Self-help	11	Audio	2
Aboriginal	3			Blog/Zine (HTML or PDF)	2
Intermediaries	3			Manual/Kit (HTML or PDF)	2
Youth	3			Video	2
Immigrants and refugees	1			Bookmark/Other (PDF)	1
People on income assistance	1			Form (HTML or PDF)	1
				Newsletter (HTML or PDF)	1
				Webinar	1

⁸⁸ Do-it-yourself divorce kits for Ontario can be purchased, and the Law Society of Upper Canada has a divorce guide on its website in the "For Lawyers" section.

The women’s centre starts its search by filtering for a wide audience, including “General public”, “Women”, “Immigrants and refugees” and “Intercultural”. They are looking for resources that discuss enforcement in whole or part and want to get an idea of what’s available. They pull up 13 records.

Now that they have an overview of what’s available, the women’s group can filter out information that is not on their specific topic – enforcement – or doesn’t apply to their client community, and check to see if information in any of the remaining records is available in Spanish. The list now has two titles:

- Child Support (Family Law Education for Women – FLEW)
- Child Support Payments (Justice Ontario)

Looking at formats, they find that both resources are available as “Online text”. They also discover that the FLEW resource can be ordered in print free of charge so they don’t have to find the money to produce fact sheets in Spanish for the women they serve.

Case study #3

Fact situation: A school guidance counsellor has noticed that many students are stressed out about their cell phone bills and often don’t understand the contracts they’ve signed. She wants to find a resource that has been designed with youth in mind, and that is in a format that students in the school will be likely to access. In her mind, this means getting information to students through their mobile phones.

Subtopic: Contracts (23 records) (in descending order)					
Audience	No. of records	Intended use	No. of records	Format	No. of records
General public	21	Basic information		Online text (HTML)	8
People on income assistance	4	Legal rights	9	Webinar	7
Intermediaries	2	Learn and teach	6	Booklet (PDF)	3
Seniors	2			Factsheet (PDF)	2
Tenants	2			Newsletter (HTML or PDF)	2
				Video	2
				Manual/Kit (HTML or PDF)	1

A quick search through the 23 records of the Consumer law subtopic “Contracts” brings up two records about phone contracts, both by Community Law School, Sarnia-Lambton Inc:

Cell Phone Contracts: Friend or Foe?

Hot Topics in Consumer Protection: Cell Phone Contracts

The first is a web-based resource and is viewable on a mobile phone, but the language, visuals and layout aren’t particularly youth-friendly.

The second is a webinar intended for service providers that was recorded in 2010 before the new changes to the Act came into effect. It is now archived on the Your Legal Rights website.

Neither resource is appropriate for high school students. The student counsellor may want to collaborate with a PLEI producer to create a new resource for her students that is youth-centred in language, design and format.

Case study #4

Fact situation: To encourage potential clients to become informed before they retain a lawyer, an office of a provincial lawyers’ group is interested in producing information for the general public about how to find and work with a lawyer. The piece would be available on the group’s website.

Using the matrix, the group turns to the “Legal system” topic and looks at records in two subtopics: “Working with a lawyer” and “Legal Aid”. Their scan pulls up a total of 80 records, summarized by “Audience”, “Intended use” and “Format” in the two tables on the following pages.

Subtopics: Working with a lawyer (46 records) and Legal Aid (34 records)

(in descending order)

Audience	No. of records	Intended use	No. of records	Format	No. of records
General public	24	Basic Information	36	Online text (HTML)	32
Women	13	Legal rights	27	Booklet (PDF)	24
Immigrants and refugees	7	Self-help	8	Video	14
Intermediaries	7	Learn and teach	2	Audio	7
Aboriginal	4			Factsheet (PDF)	7
Tenants, landlords	3			Manual/Kit (HTML or PDF)	4
People with disabilities	2			Bookmark/Other (PDF)	1
Youth	2			Webinar	1
Intercultural	1				
Litigants	1				
Sex trade workers	1				

Legal Aid (34 records)					
Audience	No. of records	Intended use	No. of records	Format	No. of records
General public	15	Basic information	31	Online text (HTML)	31
Women	7	Legal rights	3	Booklet (PDF)	10
Immigrants and refugees	8	Learn and teach	2	Factsheet (PDF)	2
Tenants, landlords	4	Self-help	1	Video	2
Aboriginal	2 percent			Audio	1
People with disabilities	2			Webinar	1
Charitable organizations	1			Workshop/ Other in-person events	1
Intercultural	1				
Intermediaries	1				
Litigants	1				
People on income assistance	1				
Youth	1				

Searching “Working with a lawyer” and “Legal Aid” for “Basic information” (resources that identify an issue and often provide a referral) and “General public” produces 26 entries, which fall into three broad categories (with overlaps): finding a lawyer (13 records), understanding what a lawyer can do for you (9 records), and preparing for your meeting with a lawyer (3 records).

Depending on the needs of their target audience, the group may be able to link to existing resources, or contact one of the producing organizations for permission to adapt a resource on the list.

If a subset of the lawyer’s group is trying to reach people who do not understand English or French, for example, by filtering for “Immigrants and refugees” instead of “General public”, they pull up 8 records, representing resources in a range of languages, including Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Gujarati, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog/Filipino, Tamil, and Urdu.



We looked at six recent mapping initiatives, five from Canada and one from Queensland, Australia, to get a sense of the approach these projects took to mapping services or resources and the use of their completed maps.

Coordinating community legal information and publications: A discussion paper for Queensland legal assistance services

December 2015

Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services Inc.

This discussion paper addresses funders' concerns that there is unnecessary duplication of information and publications by legal assistance services (Legal Aid, community legal centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services) in Queensland, Australia.

The paper discusses coordination efforts between the legal service organizations in the region, including the use of the Community Legal Education and Reform (CLEAR) database to help minimize duplication. The CLEAR database resides on the National Association of Community Legal Clinics website⁸⁹ and its purpose (as described on the website) is to "showcase community legal education and law reform projects undertaken by Australian Community Legal Centres and other nonprofit legal services".

The CLEAR database has PLEI organized by:

- 1) Project Type
 - Community Development
 - Community Legal Education Law Reform
- 2) Area of law
- 3) Audience
- 4) Method of Delivery

The public can access the database of resources and PLEI producers can log into a password-protected portal and upload new resources or update their listings.

The discussion paper concludes with a range of recommendations for improving coordination of publications and information, including developing and sharing a best practice guide for the development and maintenance of community legal information, continuing to support the CLEAR database, and ensuring that legal assistance services record all of their publications in the CLEAR database.

⁸⁹ http://www.naclc.org.au/cle_database.php

Public Legal Education and Information Resources in BC: Update 2014

May 2014

Patricia Byrne

Prepared for Legal Service Society/ Legal Research Fund of the Law Foundation of British Columbia

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of PLEI resources on civil law topics currently available in British Columbia. The research updates information presented in the 2009 report “Clicklaw and Beyond: Public Legal Education and Information Materials in BC” (summary follows on page 87) and looks at whether the gaps/overlaps and recommendations of the 2009 report apply to the current situation of PLEI in BC.

Conclusions of the report include:

- there has been an overall increase in the amount of PLEI resources on Clicklaw, especially in family law
- resources are now available in a greater number of languages and formats
- there have been no major developments in legal needs between 2009 and 2014, with the exception of an increase in self-represented litigants (SRLs); the report notes a need for more resources for SRLs along with user guidance, either in-person or through a technology interface
- five topic areas contained in the Clicklaw resource inventory require attention, including debt, family law for self-represented litigants, consumer law, accidents and injuries, and seniors

Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project (ALSMP): An Overview of Findings from the Eleven Judicial Districts

July, 2011

Mary Stratton, PhD

Canadian Forum on Civil Justice

The Alberta Legal Services Mapping Project (ALSMP) was a large mapping initiative that looked at legal services across the province. The original questionnaire included questions about PLEI produced by service providers, but the questionnaire was time-consuming to complete and researchers had a hard time getting people to finish them, so the PLEI-related questions were dropped.

Researchers logged information on “1810 discrete services plus every location across Alberta where that service can be accessed. Of these services, 704 provide some form of legal information and/or assistance. The remainder offer health and social services of relevance to dealing with legal problems.”

The ALSMP report does list major PLEI providers in the province and identifies two areas that are generally perceived as having insufficient PLEI:

1. PLEI about legal processes and
2. PLEI in languages other than English

The report also lists twelve substantive areas of law where “participants repeatedly perceived a lack of PLEI”⁹⁰. The author notes: “Further PLEI-specific research is needed to understand whether it is availability, content or a lack of awareness of availability that are at the root of participant perception.”

The section on “PLEI Providers” concludes with a short list of recommendations. First on the list is the recommendation to create “One united, Internet-based, easily navigable and searchable catalogue of all existing PLEI with links to these resources which are kept up to date.”

The ALSMP database was developed as a prototype. The intention was to transfer the information into a format that was easy to share with other organizations and stakeholders. At the time of our review, the URL provided for the database, <http://albertalegalservices.ca/admin/>, was not available.

The report notes that significant resources were invested in compiling the ALSMP database. At the time the report was released, permanent sharing and maintenance of the database information was described as “a beyond-project goal set by the Advisory Committee representing many justice stakeholders.”

Mapping the Gap: A summary of legal resources for women in British Columbia

March 2010

Shahnaz Rahman

West Coast LEAF

The author of this report notes that there is anecdotal evidence that “a patchwork of legal resources” exists in BC created by various advocacy groups; West Coast Leaf embarked on this mapping project to find and share these resources.

⁹⁰ These twelve areas are: Aboriginal law, Adult guardianship, Children and youth, Common-law relationships, Criminal records, Disability law, Employment standards (specifically temporary foreign workers and migrant workers), Financial matters (debt, bankruptcy, consolidation and credit agreements), Immigration, Power of Attorney, Social benefits, and Wills and estates

The organization developed a 23-question survey that was sent out to 119 organizations in BC. A number of gaps in legal information for women were identified by survey respondents.⁹¹

The report notes that this mapping initiative has helped West Coast LEAF build strong relationships with legal advocates and organizations that serve women, and has helped link legal information providers with other PLEI programs and services such as the Courthouse Library Click Law initiative, People’s Law School, and the Legal Services Society website.

Appendix 1 of the report lists organizations that produce materials along with titles of select publications. Appendix 2 lists organizations providing legal support, legal information and legal advocacy in BC.

Clicklaw and Beyond: Public Legal Education and Information Materials in BC

May 2009 (updated in 2014; summary above)
Gayla Reid with Drew Jackson and Carol McEown
Law Foundation of BC

The report presents an overview of resources identified for inclusion in Clicklaw, a website in BC with PLEI from over 25 contributor organizations. It then compares Clicklaw resources with other PLEI sites and relevant legal needs studies, and considers resources on Clicklaw in terms of format and resource type. The paper concludes with an identification of gaps and suggestions for moving forward.

Over half (57 percent) of resources on Clicklaw are contributed by the BC PLEI Network, and the rest come from community groups and various BC and federal government ministries. Comparison of Clicklaw with other PLEI sites shows a strong emphasis on family law, but relatively weak emphasis on civil areas such as consumer law and health law.

The report concludes by identifying gaps and notes there are “only minor instances of overlaps”. Recommendations for next steps include developing a coordinated response to user needs, focus on skill-sharing among PLEI network members, improving online formats and broadening understanding of user response to formats and sharing evaluation outcomes.

⁹¹ These included more user-friendly legal guides, resources for same-sex couples, resources in languages other than English and French for immigrant and refugee women, accurate information rights and options for indigenous women, resources addressing the issue of custody/access being used to continue abuse, and difficulties faced by women in rural and remote areas.

Alberta Self-Represented Litigants Mapping Project

January 12, 2007

Mary Stratton, Research Director, Canadian Forum on Civil Justice

This project was designed to document the range of government and non-government services and supports available to self-represented litigants (SRLs) in Alberta.

Information collected through this project was organized into “searchable electronic templates” to facilitate the sharing of information among organizations providing services, support and referrals to SRLs.

The researchers working on this initiative experienced a number of challenges mapping services for SRLs, including:

- service names could be misleading and the information provided by referral directories was often insufficient to determine what services were offered
- some organizations offered clear information about service mandate and criteria; others did not
- large organizations offering multiple services posed particular difficulties; information was often dense, difficult to navigate and unravel, and incomplete regarding eligibility, access and other service details
- some inconsistencies stemmed from differing perceptions about the terms used in the ICF (Information Collection Forms) used by the researchers. The ICFs attempted to provide definitions of legal terminology and explanations in language plain enough to be understood by researchers, social support services and legal service providers but a “general concern about what counted as general basic information, legal information, legal advice and legal representation still affected the way service representatives answered the ICF questions”.

The report notes: “That the highly educated and articulate mapping researchers found the search for information on SRL services so challenging must be considered a major finding concerning the availability and accessibility of current services for SRLs.”

A primary finding of this initiative is that both service providers and SRLs need a clear and accurate understanding of the legal services currently available. A key strategy to address this is to share the mapping project databases created through the project. However, the report cautions that before using the databases 1) they must be carefully reviewed for accuracy and completeness and 2) a permanent method to house, share and regularly update the data must be found.



CLEO’s Centre is commissioning research that would provide an overview of public legal education and information (PLEI) resources available for people and community organizations in Ontario, along with an identification of gaps and overlaps that emerge from the overview. The purpose of the research is to provide PLEI organizations and funders, and related stakeholders, with information that is an important precursor to setting priorities or developing resources for PLEI, and would minimize the likelihood of duplication or overlap. The research would be modelled on the research prepared in British Columbia in 2009, “Clicklaw and Beyond: Public Legal Education and Information Materials in BC”.

The research would involve the following components:

- List of legal topics on which people often seek information or education
- Review of substantive legal information on these topics provided through the Your Legal Rights site
- Review of substantive legal information on these topics provided through other major PLEI sources (including CLEO, MAG/ Justice Ontario, the Law Society of Upper Canada, community legal clinics, Canadian and Ontario Bar Association, the Department of Justice Canada (vis-à-vis information applicable in Ontario), Legal Aid Ontario, Connecting Communities projects, other significant PLEI providers and recipients of PLEI project funding in Ontario)
- Analysis of PLEI content, compared with recent, relevant studies, surveys, and needs assessments, to be provided by CLEO’s ED/ researcher (scope TBD)
Note: This is a proxy for a more full-scale needs assessment relating to PLEI
- Analysis of PLEI content based on information provider, purpose and intended use of information, and target audience (scope TBD – different from BC study)
- Identification of gaps and overlaps (scope TBD)
- Discussion of opportunities for development of content, new formats, etc. (scope TBD; could include recommendations as to promising practices in developing PLEI, etc.)

The research would be conducted primarily through an online scan of the information sources listed above, and a review of the recent studies and needs assessments identified by CLEO and Centre staff. It is expected that the researcher would be in ongoing communication with CLEO and Centre staff (perhaps through a once-a-week phone call). To the extent possible, the researcher will consult with or seek feedback

through the PLE Learning Exchange as the research develops. CLEO will disseminate the report broadly through the PLE Learning Exchange, social media, and other channels.

It is expected that the research would require between 30 to 40 days to complete, and would take place over two to four months (depending on the availability of the researcher). It is expected that the researcher would prepare and submit a work plan for carrying out the research prior to its commencement.

December 31, 2012