

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**March 21, 2025**

Frances Morrison Central Library & Dr. Freda Ahenakew Libraries to Temporarily Close

Today, Saskatoon Public Library (SPL) announced temporary closures of the Frances Morrison Central and Dr. Freda Ahenakew libraries. Effective Saturday, March 22, these libraries will remain closed until Sunday, April 13, 2025. Starting Monday, April 14, we will reopen for holds pickups, with plans to resume regular service on Monday, April 21, 2025.

After SPL reduced hours at four locations last spring due to a lack of available community support services and the increases in the need for these supports, the erosion of services for our most vulnerable residents has continued. This has coincided with a dramatic increase in our city's population who are experiencing homelessness and a rapid worsening of our community's opioid poisoning crisis, making it difficult for SPL to continue providing safe and effective library services at these locations. So far in 2025, we have responded to at least 48 overdoses or drug poisonings—nearly double the number from the same period in 2024. We have also seen a significant rise in challenging public behaviour and the escalation of violent patron behaviour.

Public libraries are vital community resources, but they cannot fill the void left by the deterioration and lack of critical social and health services. We rely on healthcare and social service professionals, as well as first responders, to effectively support individuals in crisis.

Our Safe Use & Conduct Bylaw, prohibits, among other things, the use of drugs and alcohol, sleeping, weapons and harassment. With the increasing volume of prohibited items and behaviours in the community, these issues are increasingly coming into libraries, and SPL is struggling to ensure the Bylaw is enforced. Addressing the increasing number of medical emergencies and violent incidents in the library is beyond our capacity. Our employees face the challenging task of referring people to community services that are often unavailable or overcapacity due to a lack of resources. Currently, all the community supports we rely on are stretched beyond their capabilities.

"The decision to pause library services is painful, as our commitment to serving the community and meeting their needs is at the heart of what we do. We aim to create an inclusive environment for all residents of Saskatoon. However, we cannot serve as a refuge for people with nowhere else to go, who need support with addictions and who are experiencing medical emergencies," said Carol Shepstone, Director of Libraries & CEO at SPL. "We deeply value the support from our community and our many dedicated partners, who we know are struggling as well, as we collectively navigate through this difficult time for our community," she added.

During this closure, SPL will make plans to refocus on library services and continue working diligently to enhance safety measures and provide additional training and wellness support to employees who have continued to serve the community to the best of their abilities during these challenging times.

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