

BUILDING BRIDGES:

**A Landlord's Handbook for
Cultivating a Supportive
Environment for Newcomer
Tenants**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

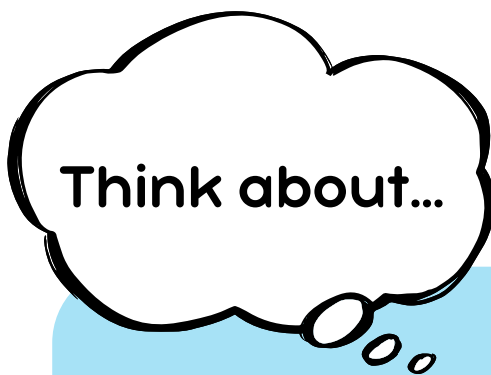
INTRODUCTION.....	4
UNDERSTANDING NEWCOMER PERSPECTIVES.....	5
BARRIERS NEWCOMERS FACE.....	6
AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING.....	8
AFFORDABILITY OF HOUSING.....	8
LANDLORD RESPONSIBILITES.....	8
Landlord Responsiveness.....	8
CONCLUSION.....	10
REFERENCES.....	10

The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) is a non-profit umbrella organization representing agencies that provide resettlement, settlement, and integration services to newcomers in the province of Alberta. Since 1980, we have been working to build the sector’s capacity to better serve newcomers by fostering collaboration, professionalization, and member-driven research and policy work.



INTRODUCTION

Navigating the landscape of affordable and accessible housing in rural Alberta can be a complex endeavor, particularly for newcomers seeking to establish their homes in these areas. Despite the ongoing promotion of migration and immigration to rural parts of Alberta, there exists a significant gap in understanding the challenges faced by individuals and families in securing suitable and sustainable housing, particularly in rural Alberta. **This handbook is designed to provide landlords and property managers in rural Alberta with valuable insights into the unique obstacles that newcomers often encounter when seeking housing and ways to help newcomers settle in their new homes.**



**A newcomer's journey involves a life-changing series of events:
leaving family & friends behind**

- **Adapting to a new climate, culture, and language**
- **Having to rebuild a social network**
- **Sometimes facing racism and discrimination**

Building a new social network in a close-knit rural community takes on added significance, as newcomers navigate the intricacies of local life. Unfortunately, some may encounter instances of discrimination, emphasizing the importance of fostering inclusivity within the rural housing landscape.

UNDERSTANDING NEWCOMER PERSPECTIVES

Recognizing the undeniable social and economic advantages that immigration presents upon both newcomers to Canada and the local population, the Government of Alberta actively promotes **immigration to rural areas**. This strategic **initiative** not only aims to address **labour gaps** and foster rural settlement but also underscores the vital need for **newcomer retention** in these regions.

Without a concerted effort to retain newcomers, rural towns may miss out on the transformative benefits of integrating newcomers into their economies and communities.

As landlords in rural Alberta, your active involvement in cultivating a welcoming community is paramount. Beyond providing housing, your commitment plays a crucial role in ensuring the enduring **success** of **newcomers** within your community. This guide is designed to deepen your understanding of the distinctive **challenges** faced by newcomers, empowering you to **actively contribute to their seamless integration**. By doing so, you not only enhance the vitality of your community but also become an integral part of **driving local economic prosperity**.



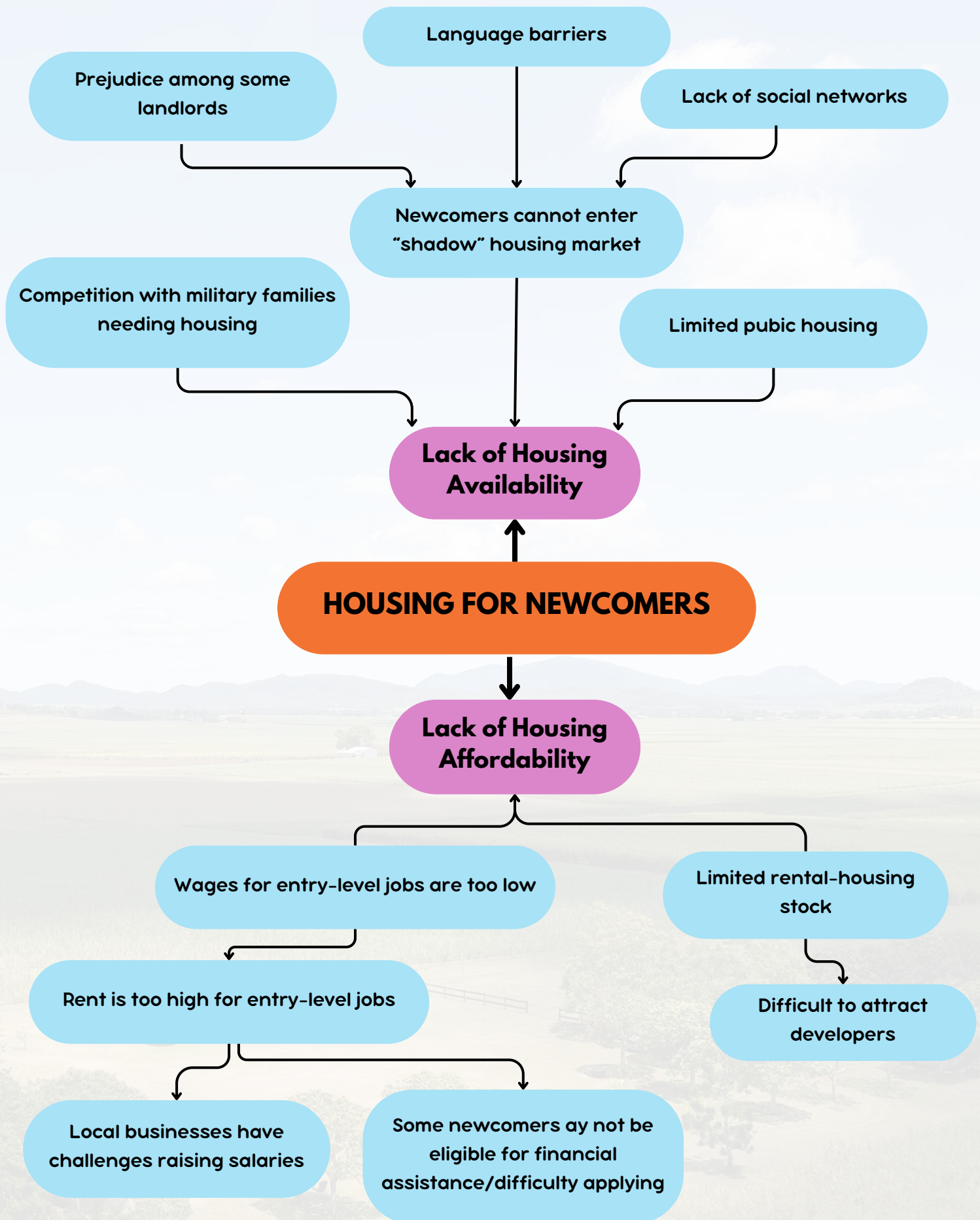
BARRIERS NEWCOMERS FACE

While, for the most part, immigrants choose to move to Canada of their own volition, this decision carries significant weight and marks a life-changing process. Relocating to Canada involves evident challenges, including **language barriers, cultural shock, acclimatization to new weather conditions, and feelings of loneliness**. Additionally, there are less overt obstacles such as **discrimination, poverty, and unique challenges faced by specific groups like children, women, and individuals with disabilities**. Affordability and availability of housing have emerged as pressing concerns, with rural areas facing distinctive difficulties. The influx of individuals, including Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs), has not been met with sufficient infrastructure and services, leading to a **hidden homelessness phenomenon** characterized by **'couch surfing,' unsafe living conditions, and overcrowded housing** (*Waegemakers Schiff, Schiff, & Turner, 2016*). Despite lower housing prices in rural Alberta compared to urban centers, newcomers, especially TFWs, often find themselves unable to purchase homes, compelling them to **navigate a challenging rental market with limited options**.

One significant hurdle identified by practitioners in rural Alberta is the **prejudice that some newcomers may face from landlords during the housing application process**. This prejudice may manifest as **bias** against an individual's **background**, reservations about **renting to larger immigrant families**, and other discriminatory practices. Practitioners have noted the difficulty in addressing such situations, as discriminatory practices are often challenging to prove when declining an immigrant or immigrant family. This section aims to raise awareness among landlords about the importance of fostering an inclusive environment that **welcomes all tenants, regardless of their background**.

The two overarching themes regarding newcomers accessing housing are: the lack of housing availability and lack of housing affordability.

The figure below was created with the help of rural practitioners of the Support Network for Rural Newcomers to Alberta Project.



AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING

As shown in the above figure, the shortage of available housing is influenced by various factors, contributing to the housing deficit. While the lack of housing availability impacts all Albertans, **newcomers** encounter additional **barriers** that diminish their prospects of securing housing in **rural Alberta**. A key advantage of residing in rural Alberta lies in the strong sense of community and social connections shared among its members. Without these **social ties**, newcomers are immediately confronted with the challenge of not having connections with neighbors or friends who might, for instance, be renting out a room in their home.

Moreover, newcomers often arrive with English as a second or third language, leading to **language** and **cultural barriers** with Canadian-born residents. This can unfortunately result in **prejudice** against newcomers as they strive to integrate into a new and foreign country. In many overseas families, it's customary to live intergenerationally, often with parents, in-laws, siblings, and more. However, since this is not the cultural norm in Canada, many immigrants face prejudice and encounter challenges in securing **housing**, especially if they have **large families**.

AFFORDABILITY OF HOUSING

Newcomers often arrive in rural Alberta, to cover the **labour shortages**, which often pay **minimum wage**. The **rental and housing market prices are too high for these entry-level jobs**, leaving newcomers with limited options. This is where we may see this “**hidden homelessness**” where folks may ‘**couch surf**’ or live in **unsafe** or **overcrowded housing**. Additionally, Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) often confront **precarious housing and employment situations** due to their immigration status and the unstable nature of their low-income work. TFW’s and other classes of immigrants often cannot afford to purchase a home in rural Alberta, despite the housing prices being significantly cheaper than urban centres. Newcomers are forced into the bleak rental market, where there are limited options, and barriers to accessing affordable housing.

LANDLORD RESPONSIBILITIES

Landlords play a crucial role in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for newcomers. Understanding and fulfilling certain responsibilities can contribute to a positive experience for both landlords and tenants. Key landlord responsibilities may include:

1. **Non-Discrimination:** Landlords have a legal obligation to treat all tenants fairly, without discrimination. Discriminating potential tenants on the basis of race, nationality, religion, or family size is prohibited.
2. **Reasonable Accommodations:** Landlords should be aware of their legal obligation to make reasonable accommodations for tenants with special needs or disabilities. Providing accessible housing where possible ensures that all tenants can enjoy a safe and comfortable living environment.
3. **Clear and Timely Communication:** Landlords should provide clear information about rental agreements, expectations, and any changes in policies. Clear communication helps build trust and ensures a positive living experience for all tenants.
4. **Legal Compliance:** Landlords must comply with provincial and local housing laws. This includes providing tenants with legally sound lease agreements, handling security deposits appropriately, and following the correct procedures in case of eviction.

Landlord Responsiveness

Being responsive to tenants' needs is a key aspect of successful property management. Landlord responsiveness positively impacts the experiences of all tenants, including newcomers. Newcomers arrive to Alberta, hoping for a better life while filling economic and labour gaps. Below are some essential aspects of landlord responsiveness:

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognizing and respecting cultural differences is crucial. Landlords should be culturally sensitive in their interactions with tenants, understanding diverse needs and adapting a respective approach.

- **Accessibility:** Recognizing and respecting cultural differences is crucial. Landlords should be culturally sensitive in their interactions with tenants, understanding diverse needs and adapting a respective approach.
- **Community Engagement:** It would be helpful for landlords to actively engage with community members and neighbours to encourage community engagement and integration with the new tenants
- **Emergency Response:** Given the extreme weather conditions that exist in Alberta, it is important to have a clear and efficient emergency response plan. A response plan can include:
 - A list of local emergency contacts -police, fire and medical services, relevant utility companies
 - Evacuation procedures for different types of emergencies such as extreme weather events or fires
 - Designate or share local assembly points/ muster points
 - Share emergency shelter information, if this is applicable or available in your town
 - Educate tenants on power outage preparedness, including the availability of backup power sources (i.e. generators), location of emergency lighting, etc.



CONCLUSION

This guide aims to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by newcomers in rural Alberta and encourages landlords to play a pivotal role in creating a welcoming and inclusive housing environment. Understanding the perspectives of newcomers is the first step towards creating an environment where everyone can thrive. In addressing the availability and affordability of housing, landlords have the power to make a positive impact on the lives of newcomers. By recognizing the unique needs of tenants, especially those arriving from different countries, landlords can contribute significantly to the successful integration of newcomers into the community. As guardians of the places newcomers call home, landlords have the opportunity to shape a sense of belonging, security, and community for their tenants.

Thank you for taking the time to explore this guide. Your commitment to understanding and addressing the needs of newcomers contributes to the rich tapestry of our diverse communities. As we work together to create supportive housing environments, we strengthen the foundation upon which our communities thrive.

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