

# **SUPPORT NETWORK FOR RURAL NEWCOMERS**

**MEETING #7**

**JANUARY 2024**



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## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

AAISA acknowledges Treaty 7 territory—the traditional and ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy: Kainai, Piikani and Siksika as well as the Tsuu T'ina Nation and Stoney Nakoda First Nation. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

## INTRODUCTION

This seventh meeting of the Support Network for Rural Newcomers to Alberta took place on January 11th, 2024, marking the conclusion of the project's formal meetings and deliverables. A central aspect of this meeting was the introduction of the landlord and employers tools designed to support relationships with newcomers in their rural municipalities. To enhance engagement, this tool has been divided into two distinct documents, each tailored to resonate with landlords and employers who interact with newcomers in rural Alberta. These resources, now available on [AAISA's Toolkit](#), are titled 'Creating a Welcoming Workplace: A Guide for Employers with Newcomer Employees' and 'Building Bridges: A Landlord's Handbook for Cultivating a Supportive Environment for Newcomer Tenants.'

As the last official meeting of this project, AAISA received feedback from participants that on-going, quarterly meetings would be beneficial to maintain the momentum of these informal partnerships with new participants continuing to join the *Support Network*. AAISA is examining internal capacity and will continue hosting quarterly meetings for the *Support Network*, enabling rural settlement workers, community service providers, and municipal agents to share challenges, collaborate and co-create best practices to serve newcomers.

## UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

This section offers insights on the resources that were highlighted in the meeting that took place on January 11, 2024. These resources include AAISA's internal tools, as well as external tools and opportunities aimed at enhancing the capacity to address the needs of newcomers in rural Alberta.

## LOCAL / ZONAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP

### Panel Discussion

AAISA will be hosting a panel discussion, with three panelists who are part of a Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) and/or a [Réseau en immigration francophone de l'Alberta \(RIFA\)](#). A Local Immigration Partnership is the structure through which [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\)](#) can support the creation of community-based partnerships around the unique needs of newcomers<sup>1</sup>. This community-based partnership LIPs and RIFs are comprised of a diverse range of partners that usually include (but are not limited to): municipalities or other levels of government, settlement service providers, employers, local Chambers of Commerce, school boards, cultural and faith-based organizations, and other local partners who are interested and committed to immigration and the settlement of newcomers in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> (About LIPdata.ca), <https://lipdata.ca/about/>

The panel discussion will be followed up with resources for the Rural Support Network Project. Firstly, AAISA will upload the recording of the LIP/ZIP/RIF Panel Discussion on AAISA's website or toolkit, as a webinar. This will allow participants who were not able to attend the live panel session, to access the recorded discussion, providing an opportunity to benefit from the shared knowledge. Additionally, following the panel discussion, AAISA will create a tool encompassing the main themes that were shared in the panel discussion, along with resources and actionable items. This tool will serve as a comprehensive reference for participants, offering practical insights to aid their efforts in assisting newcomers in settling in rural Alberta.

## **OVERVIEW OF TOOLS**

AAISA has created a total of four tools for the Rural Support Network participants, catered to their unique challenges and needs, that were voiced in previous meetings.

### **[Newcomer Welcome Package Template](#)**

Through this project, this first tool was created to have a document readily available for rural practitioners (be it Economic Development officers, FCSS Managers, Library Coordinators, school principals). The template is designed similarly to a 'fill in the blank', where practitioners fill in the relevant information about their community. Practitioners may also add and remove any parts of the template that are not useful or relevant to their area.

### **[Rural Renewal Summit: What We Heard Report](#)**

AAISA hosted the Rural Renewal Summit to bring communities in rural Alberta who are a designated Rural Renewal Stream community, along with others who were interested in the provincial governments' immigration stream. This report highlights the key findings of the summit, and challenges and opportunities of the stream.

### **[Employer Engagement Tool](#)**

This guide, titled, "Creating Welcoming Workplace: A Guide for Employers with Newcomer Employees" is designed to empower employers in rural Alberta with tools and resources to help their newcomer employees succeed. Participants of the Rural Support Network have been asked to share the Employer Engagement tool with their networks and employers in their communities.

### **[Landlord Engagement Tool](#)**

This guide, titled, "Building Bridges: A Landlord's Handbook for Cultivating a Supportive Environment for Newcomer Tenants" is designed to support landlords increase their understanding towards the barriers newcomers face when accessing housing in rural Alberta. Participants are encouraged to also share this guide to known landlords or property managers in their area.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

Through the roundtable discussion, a few challenges were noted in January's meeting.

### INTEGRATING NEWCOMERS INTO COMMUNITY

Newcomers continue to face barriers and challenges integrating in their rural communities. Medical services are usually only available in English; newcomers with a language barrier face challenges with accessing a translator or feeling comfortable with the privacy of their health matters with a translator present. Alberta Health Services (AHS) offers on-demand over-the-phone [professional medical interpretation in](#) 240 languages, available 24/7. Over 400 sites at AHS have access to this medical interpretation service. If an AHS site does not have access, they can complete the *telephone interpretation request form*.

The current housing crisis in Alberta is slowing down and preventing the process of integrating newcomers to rural Alberta. There is a trend of spousal visas being denied [extensions](#), creating further hardships for newcomer families with the ongoing housing crisis here. This causes a ripple effect for families who are forced to leave their spouse in Canada - lowering retention rates for newcomers in rural Alberta. Practitioners noted the importance of informing newcomers about the realities of living in Rural Alberta, especially for candidates of the Rural Renewal Stream.

There are unique challenges for newcomer medical professionals, wishing to practice medicine in Alberta. The [Alberta International Medical Graduates Association \(AIMGA\)](#) aims to help International Medical Graduates (IMGs) across Canada to integrate into the Canadian healthcare system. Many internationally educated nurses (IENs) arrive to Canada with significant barriers to integrate themselves in the Canadian healthcare system, due to the Canadian licensure procedure. According to the Government of Alberta, internationally educated RNs should begin the nursing [registration process](#) before arrival to Alberta.

### FRAUDULENT PRACTICES

Immigration fraud was a topic of concern this meeting. In particular, there have been circumstances where employers unfortunately exploit immigrant employees -sometimes charging them for a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), when hiring a Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW). An LMIA is used to determine if hiring a TFW will have a net positive or negative impact on the Canadian labour market. Employers who go through this process to hire TFWs must meet the requirements of the LMIA, follow [Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations \(IRPR\)](#), and comply if and when the IRPR conducts an inspection. Through the Rural Renewal Stream and other interactions with employers who hire newcomers, **it is important to hold employers accountable, as there has been cases of employers charging newcomers upwards of \$10,000 for an LMIA, which is against the law.**

## NEXT STEPS

AAISA has applied for funding through the [Settlement Integration and Language Projects](#) grant, to continue the Rural Support Network. AAISA plans to continue to host these quarterly meetings and encourages the addition of new members across small communities in rural Alberta.