

SUPPORT NETWORK FOR RURAL NEWCOMERS

MEETING #5

SEPTEMBER 2023



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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

The fifth meeting was held on September 14, 2023. The agenda included discussions related to the follow-up actions stemming from the Rural Renewal Summit held in July, as well as the subsequent accompanying documents. Additionally, there was a focus on the upcoming professional development courses designed for this project. A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to address the escalating challenge of a lack of affordable and available housing in rural Alberta. Attendees engaged in a collaborative examination of this housing crisis to create a mind map aimed at identifying potential solutions and strategies to tackle this challenge.

KEY THEMES

RURAL RENEWAL SUMMIT

The Rural Renewal Summit had 59 attendees, many of those were participants from the *Rural Support Network*. The purpose of the summit was to bring Rural Renewal Stream and Rural Entrepreneur Stream-designated communities together to discuss challenges and opportunities with the processes and outcomes of the immigration streams. AAISA created a [“What we Heard”](#) report, summarizing the key findings of the summit. The report highlights the common processes that Rural Renewal and Rural Entrepreneur designates employ during their newcomer nomination process, the benefits, and drawbacks of using the immigration stream for their municipality, challenges newcomers face when settling in rural municipalities, among other important insights.

AAISA is also working on a “Backgrounder” to provide more in-depth context regarding the Rural Renewal Stream, what an applicant’s journey may look like, and the role municipalities typically play for the Rural Renewal Stream.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

A key component of this project is the creation of professional development courses catered to your needs to better support newcomers in your rural communities. The courses were designed based off feedback in earlier meetings and the interviews with a handful of communities last year. There are two remaining professional development courses (listed below) remaining for this project. To register, and for more information, please visit the professional development [website](#).

Course Title	Format	Registration Deadline	Course Date	Registration Link
Understanding the Settlement Sector and Services	Webinar, Online Facilitated	September 26, 2023	October 3, 2023	Click here
Outreach and Community Connections	Course, Online Facilitated	October 13, 2023	October 23- October 27	Click here

CHALLENGES

During the roundtable discussion, participants engaged in a thorough examination of the challenges associated with the housing crisis in rural Alberta. The primary objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted issues contributing to this crisis, along with strategies to mitigate some of these barriers. Throughout the roundtable, attendees actively shared their unique insights and experiences, highlighting a diverse range of challenges such as ways to engage community members, setting up community programs, among other insights.

HOUSING

Affordable and available housing has become an increasing challenge throughout Alberta, with rural areas facing unique difficulties. External factors and policies actively promote migration and immigration to rural parts of Alberta, despite the insufficient infrastructure and services required for successful newcomer integration. This has created a gap in understanding homelessness in rural Alberta, as many individuals and families' experiences remain underreported. [*Hidden homelessness*](#) characterizes those who 'couch surf,' 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.

Participants in the *Support Network* collaborated on a mind map (Figure 1) identifying factors that influence housing availability and affordability in rural Alberta. *Support Network* participants voiced the prejudice some newcomers face from landlords, when trying to obtain housing. It may be prejudice about the individual newcomers' background, prejudice about renting to a large immigrant family, among other discriminatory practices. Practitioners often struggle supporting these families, as it cannot be proven that there were discriminatory practices at play when declining an immigrant/immigrant family. It was also noted that while there may be available land to develop housing in rural communities, there is a lack of housing development. It was noted that it was most challenging to attract developers in rural parts of Alberta.

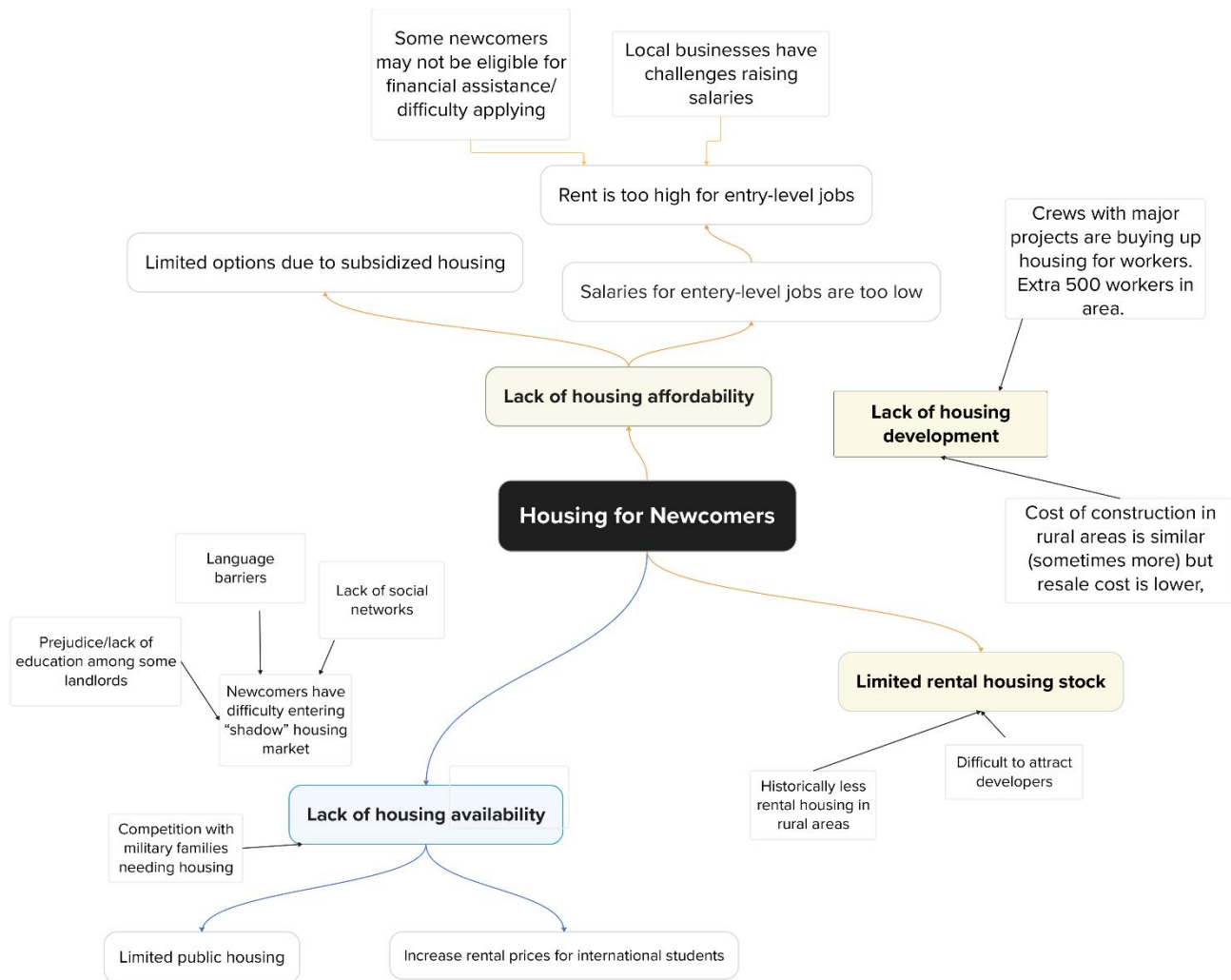


Figure 1. Summary mind map created from the discussion during the *Support Network* meeting hosted on September 14th, 2023, focused on identifying input factors impacting housing in rural Alberta.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Volunteer programs have proven to be highly effective in aiding newcomers as they navigate and settle into rural communities. These programs enlist community members to serve as ambassadors for their town. Their role is to showcase the community's amenities, such as parks and available services, which newcomers may not be aware of. In addition to these introductory programs, there are other initiatives that offer translation services, assistance with essential documents, and more.

The discussion ultimately underscored the idea that community members can make a significant difference by assisting newcomers in their communities. This includes accompanying them to doctor appointments, providing guidance on local bylaws and cultural norms, and helping them navigate the town efficiently. By offering their support, community volunteers play a vital role in making the transition to a new town smoother for those who are settling in. Some municipalities have formal volunteer programs, while others are seeking to build such programs.

NEXT STEPS

AAISA is still encouraging *Support Network* participants to use the [Newcomer Welcome Package Template](#) and share feedback with AAISA. AAISA is also encouraging participants to register for the remaining professional development courses for the project. These courses are designed specifically for *Support Network* participants who do not have previous settlement sector experience.

The next meeting will take place on November 16, 2023.