

PROVINCIAL ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE BRIEF

NOVEMBER 2021 – AUGUST 2022

PURPOSE

This brief is a compilation of experiences identified over the 2021/22 Provincial Engagement Initiative (PEI) participation term across three regional committees in Calgary, Edmonton, and Small Centres from November 2021 – August 2022. PEI discussions are anchored around local experiences and perspectives on shared provincial-level issues to ensure regional context is represented within the projects AAISA undertakes related to broader issues, gaps, and trends in Alberta. PEI meetings also foster opportunities for agencies to guide and support AAISA’s work in service of a provincial vision for newcomer settlement and integration. The vision for the Provincial Engagement Initiative is to *jointly build a cohesive, diverse, and welcoming settlement and integration ecosystem that actively meets the needs and supports the goals of every newcomer* (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, 2021).

The objectives of this brief are to further guide discussions of importance in PEI meetings, mobilize key knowledge with agencies/stakeholders, and contextualize recommendations and actions to support PEI agencies. This brief highlights trends with regards to service delivery and equity among vulnerable clients. Challenges with Ukrainian arrivals continue to be relevant as well, along with access to appropriate healthcare.

STANDING ISSUES: KEY TRENDS AND THEMES

VULNERABLE CLIENTS

Along with the richness of different backgrounds and ways of being that newcomers bring forth, there exist uncertain and intersecting vulnerabilities that can impact the settlement and integration outcomes (e.g., health, employment, etc.) for newcomers. These vulnerabilities continue to be amplified further throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Through discussions over this most recent participation term, the PEI has included the following groups in its working, but by no means exhaustive, definition of vulnerable clients:

- Women

- Seniors
- Individuals with low literacy
- Youth (ages 16-24)
- Individuals with cognitive and/or physical disabilities
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- Survivors of torture
- IRCC-ineligible clients
- Racialized newcomers
- Individuals with complex medical needs

The following subsections will highlight some of the unique vulnerabilities experienced by these clients in the context of different service areas within the settlement and integration sector as highlighted by PEI participants.

LANGUAGE

NOVEMBER 2021

In navigating the current pandemic wave, agencies placed a large amount of focus in following provincial health protocols and policies while working with clients to create accessible options for service access, according to their digital and language literacy levels.

Vaccine-hesitant clients were faced with COVID-19 vaccination policies which necessitated many agencies to devise strategies to be more inclusive to this group of vulnerable clients while following public health guidelines. Among newcomers, vaccine hesitancy may be embedded in the culture or experiences in the home country, potentially preceding migration (Tankwanchi et al., 2021). Agencies recognize the importance of delivering accurate information that is culturally sensitive, inclusive, and evidence based.

Many PEI agencies reported that online language classes have resulted in higher occupancy, particularly for women with children. This trend is purported to be a result of the lower childcare barriers associated with online classes, as this type of programming allows clients to stay at home with their children while concurrently accessing language services.

FEBRUARY 2022

As the province is reaching the end of COVID-19 health restrictions, agencies are left to make decisions about how to continue to meet the needs of their clients. Some agencies have chosen to continue to offer hybrid online and in-person language services, including the HyFlex model, to aid in client retention and class occupancy, which continues to be of concern as health restrictions phase out. IRCC has extended flexibility for occupancy and enrollment rates until March 2023, and as the public health and service delivery context continue to evolve, it will be essential to continue to monitor what methods language service delivery are most effective for clients and service-providers alike.

While online language classes have effectively reduced some barriers as indicated in the November meetings, many client vulnerabilities have persisted. Women have more flexibility to provide childcare at home with online classes, however, this poses its own set of challenges. Balancing home demands while taking online classes from home can create a difficult learning environment. To better support women, agencies are providing one on one check-ins in the form of counselling. Much attention was brought to clients who struggle with progressing in their language classes. Agencies are unsure if the cause is related to a learning disability or the stressors of the pandemic, adjusting in a new country, etc. As frontline staff, it can be difficult to identify English language learners with learning disabilities. For English language learners with learning disabilities (LD) to be academically successful, they require instruction that is simultaneously responsive to their disability, culture, and English language status (García, Tyler, 2010). EmployAbilities has offered to support agencies who are unsure of language learners with LD. Agencies are seeking support in finding learning disability assessments that are affordable and applicable to use. These conversations are continuing, in depth, in the AAISA Quarterly Language Sector Call (AQLSC) meetings.

MAY 2022

As COVID-19 restrictions were eased, service providers adjusted accordingly to best meet their clients' needs. Most agencies-maintained flexibility in offering either a blended model of learning allowing students to experience both face-to-face learning and online. Research suggests that the combination of in-person and online learning models can prove to be effective, in comparison to strictly using one form or another (Singh, Steele, and Singh, 2021). Many agencies found that youth preferred in-person language classes, after nearly two years of digital learning. The pandemic forced many to isolate, and as youth are more susceptible to experience severe psychological distress (Rauschenberg et al., 2021), they are already at higher risk to develop mental health conditions, in comparison to adults (Loades et al., 2020). Through discussions and shared experiences in PEI meetings, the importance of in-person programming for youth was further emphasized. Returning to in-person classes enables youth to thrive socially and emotionally with their peers, producing an enhanced and engaged learning environment.

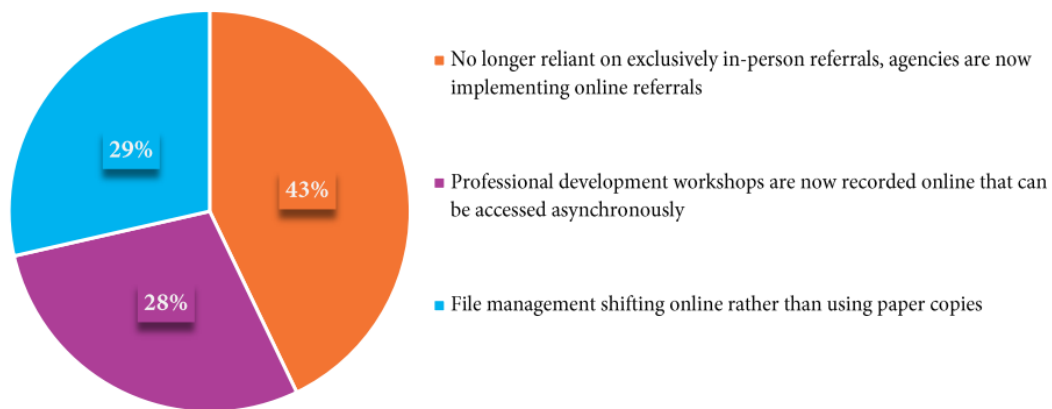
As highlighted in previous PEI meetings, agencies have been seeking support to provide proper and equitable learning environments for newcomers with complex needs. There have been professional development opportunities for staff, such as OCASI's course titled "Building Access and Equity for Newcomers with In/Visible Disabilities" and AAISA's course titled "Supporting Clients with Multiple Barriers to Learning", which will launch this September. This involves adaptable tasks and learning objectives to meet the learner's needs. By learning how to apply the principles of good task design with multi-barriered learners in mind, teachers will help students with complex needs experience a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

AUGUST 2022

Sustainable learning models have provided important insights about removing barriers for students and ensuring that classes are accessible. As shown in the pie chart below, agencies have recognized the sustainability of hybrid and flexible language courses (AAISA, 2022). These learning models ensure that students can access classes and actively participate. The past two years of the pandemic has allowed students and teachers to adapt to virtual programming.

HYBRID AND FLEXIBLE LANGUAGE COURSES

The best practices that have been adapted in response to programming in the virtual world include:



Digital literacy has reportedly increased for both newcomer clients and instructors. For example, virtual program delivery has resulted in a reduction in barriers to participate in language learning (e.g., finding affordable and accessible childcare, transportation cost, and geographic constraints). Additionally, there has been a push for [the continuation of flexible] program delivery (e.g., hybrid courses, flexible testing times, and providing asynchronous course work) (AAISA, 2022: Language).

EMPLOYMENT

NOVEMBER 2021

As Alberta’s economy continues to navigate the effects from the COVID-19 pandemic, employment services remain to be a key need. According to the Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey Report (2021), Alberta agencies have stated that 26% of employment services programs continue to have a waitlist for reasons such as budget restraints and high demand of services. Although this percentage has decreased from last year’s sector survey report, waitlists are predicted to increase in the next year given the expected increase in newcomer admissions (AAISA, 2021). PEI agencies across the board are

still reporting that clients continue to face challenges and confusion in accessing government benefits, particularly regarding translation and interpretation. Furthermore, agencies are working closely with Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) to better connect clients with employment agencies, while providing support in accessing government assistance.

Other employment challenges raised throughout the term include:

- Clients with language barriers are experiencing difficulties in virtual interviews and prefer in-person supports for employment related services.
- Many women face childcare challenges with the return to in-person work. Some clients have expressed that they are not yet comfortable leaving their children in childcare due to COVID-19 concerns.

FEBRUARY 2022

This term presented additional challenges regarding the lack of engagement with employers to help create better employment opportunities for newcomers. Despite newcomers having a high level of skill and knowledge, more than 25% of university-educated immigrants gain employment in an occupation that does not match their skillset (Adey & Gagnon, 2007). To create better employment opportunities that match the newcomers' education and skillset, agencies are seeking ways to engage employers to build mutual understanding and share the unique skills that newcomers possess. This includes methods such as sharing tools to create inclusive workplaces, showing employers how they would benefit from workplaces that celebrate newcomers and other marginalized populations.

Although working remotely has been logistically challenging for agencies and their staff, it has also proven to be successful, specifically for International Medical Graduates (IMGs). As health restrictions were removed across the province, IMGs are able to have some flexibility in working remotely and attending programs and workshops online. Although most medical practice has to be online, the pandemic has proven that there is also opportunity for physicians to attend clients virtually. This may continue to play a key role in areas where there are shortages of doctors.

MAY 2022

The conversations regarding employment among PEI participants have encompassed how staff have been affected by returning back to the office after working from home. Staff have demonstrated some hesitations in returning back to working in-person due to the inconveniences of travelling to work, paying for parking, along with the looming risks of COVID-19. Many agencies have continued to adopt a hybrid model of service delivery, which has "proven to be beneficial towards many newcomer clients, alleviating some home demands and lessening many barriers to service access to the diverse needs of clients" (AAISA, 2021). Agencies feel that having a hybrid model provides staff with flexibility and still ensures that clients' needs are being met, while maintaining a sustainable model in-case their restrictions put back in place. In addition to exploring more flexible working structures,

many PEI participants reported that frontline staff are encouraged to take wellness and mental health days when needed, while also developing coping skills through professional development.

AUGUST 2022

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT – OPERATIONAL SAFETY

Agencies continue to support newcomers in gaining employment in their fields. While many newcomers seek employment related to their profession, they often find themselves working in factories, other forms of manual labour, and in other jobs of precarious nature, many without training on health and safety protocols. Due to the lack of English language skills coupled with limited access to job-specific knowledge around safety in the workplace, occupational safety is a concern for newcomers employed in this field of work. Fortunately, the Occupational Health and Safety Act requires that *employers* provide every employee who works with hazardous materials and procedures, with WHMIS training. All staff must be adequately trained on safety protocols when handling hazardous materials and procedures. Although it has been reported that some employers are not providing translated operational safety documents, it is the employer's role to ensure that their employees who work with hazardous products and materials, are trained in all safety procedures.

DISCRIMINATION

In many cases, newcomers are unable to secure employment because they lack Canadian work experience, leading them to seek entry-level work or precarious employment. Although the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination on multiple grounds, the laws don't prevent discriminatory practices from occurring. There is a knowledge gap for the steps that newcomers or settlement workers can take to report discrimination. If a newcomer is discriminated against in the workplace or hindered from gaining employment, the newcomer is unlikely to have the resources and time to address this systemic discrimination (Wayland, 2006).

SETTLEMENT

NOVEMBER 2021

PEI participants continue to report an increased need for mental health supports, which has been heightened due to the ongoing pandemic. Mia and Griffiths (2020) note a study where 44% of immigrants reported increased concern for their social ties and 43% of immigrant men reported worries in meeting their financial obligations, while Canadian-born folks reported 30% and 27%, respectively. Evidently, newcomers face additional challenges of living and settling in a new country, let alone during a global pandemic. Furthermore, COVID-19 related hate and xenophobia have spiked, often targeting newcomers and refugees (The

United Nations, 2020). To support mental health needs, PEI agencies have noted that while counselling sessions may be offered online, clients with low language have extreme difficulties navigating digital technology to access virtual mental health supports, a recurring theme across digital supports for newcomers. Efforts to address mental health concerns include:

- Establishing connections with other agencies to support clients with their needs; subsequently making the proper referrals.
- Agencies translating COVID-19 information has proven helpful, to ensure that clients remain aware of the pandemic protocols and policies.
- Information sessions designed for Afghan refugees in Pashto, Farsi, and Dari to provide accurate vaccine information.
- Success in hosting collaborative community vaccination events and initiatives in sharing translated vaccination information in more diverse languages.

FEBRUARY 2022

This term has emphasized the continued demand for mental health supports and equitable access to healthcare throughout the phases of the pandemic. There are various factors that contribute to the inequity in accessing healthcare for newcomers. Some barriers that have been identified include:

- Lack of knowledge
- Cultural stigma, beliefs, and values
- Cost
- Language barriers
- Long waitlists and wait times

The Canadian healthcare system provides healthcare to all Canadian residents, including immigrants. Healthcare services include treatment and preventative services such as mental health, immunization, sexual health, emergency care, etc. (Oppong, 2019). The most profound challenge for refugees that was highlighted in a 2012 study (Caulford and D'Andrade), was that they experience a sixty-five percent rejection rate, and their Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) was often rejected. Refugees are still finding the same issues of rejection due to healthcare providers' lack of knowledge and resources. Agencies have been pushed to find external resources and contacts to provide healthcare for their clients. Some agencies have started to use secondary supports such as mobile health care clinics, which have proven to be successful in serving newcomers who were not able to access adequate healthcare. Mobile health clinics are particularly valuable in small centres, where there is a known shortage of doctors.

Accessing mental health supports often poses its own unique challenges across Canadian society. In accessing mental health services many newcomers face additional barriers pertaining to finances and language learnings. According to Thomson, et. al (2015), additional barriers to accessing and utilizing mental health services for newcomers include:

- Related to the uptake of existing health information
- Immigrant settlement process
- Availability of appropriate services

A key trend highlighted in this term was the shortage of physicians in Alberta, particularly in small centres. To assist this challenge, AIMGA is now serving IMGs provincially and nationally, with a focus on the PNT region.

MAY 2022

Agencies continue to face challenges with the lack of accessible and appropriate mental health services for their clients. This is an ongoing trend that AAISA will continue to advocate for in the sector. Along with the continued request for mental health supports, this PEI term has highlighted additional challenges in settlement services such as:

- Housing and Ukrainian arrivals
- Volunteer engagement and retention
- Newcomer parenting in Canada

Housing availability has remained a challenge this term and will presumably intensify as Ukrainian arrivals arrive to Alberta. To mitigate this issue the Government of Alberta has designated AAISA and Catholic Social Services (CSS) to streamline housing options for Ukrainians that will reduce pressure on other government systems (www.alberta.ca). Trends with Ukrainian arrivals will be further discussed in the “Other Emerging Themes and Trends” section below.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

PEI participants also highlighted that there has been a significant decrease in volunteer engagement and retention amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteers have always played an integral role in the successful integration of newcomers into Canadian society (Behnia 2012). According to Behnia (2012), many organizations match newcomers with volunteers who can offer emotional and practical support- aiding in job search, resume writing, learning about Canadian culture, expanding networks, and enhancing their ability to access community services. COVID-19 had put a halt to volunteers, and it has since been a challenge to recruit and retain volunteers for newcomer social supports.

NEWCOMER PARENTING IN CANADA

The PEI meeting in May highlighted an interesting settlement topic. Newcomer families bring their own cultures, beliefs, and values when they immigrate to Canada. Furthermore, child-rearing practices are not universal and are culture and family specific. According to Alaazi (2020), Canadian media appears to stereotype, pathologize, and demonise [immigrant] families. This in turn, can frame different parenting practices as being inferior to Canadian parenting. It is important for agencies to disseminate knowledge about Canadian child-rearing laws in a culturally sensitive way.

AUGUST 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated the fact that many newcomers do not have equal capacity to access accurate medical information and resources (Fang et al., 2021). As the sector recognizes the difficulties in accessing culturally appropriate healthcare including mental health supports for newcomers, agencies have emphasized that their mental health supports are open to newcomers across Alberta, which can be offered online or via telephone. To better serve newcomers across the province, it is important for the sector to continue to share services and resources while collaborating to meet the needs of their clients.

UKRANIAN NEWCOMERS

As Alberta continues to support Ukrainian arrivals, challenges with housing and healthcare continue to arise. Canada has a “geographic imbalance” of immigrant destinations, where the majority of newcomers live in large urban cities, and small centres are underrepresented. In the 2016 census, 61% of newcomers living in Canada resided in Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal. IRCC is encouraging immigrants to go to smaller centres across the country (Fang et al., 2021). According to Fang (2021), small centres in particular, benefit from having newcomers in their communities due to the greater labour and skills shortages as a result of an aging population. Although housing is more affordable in small centres (compared to urban zones), discussions from the PEI meetings have indicated that there is a lack of housing *availability* rather than *affordability*. Additionally, small centres have been experiencing unique challenges, culminating from a number of different factors. Besides rural centres’ aging population, the younger population desires to move out of their rural communities and into major urban centres. This phenomenon is widely known as ‘brain drain’; where the youth who migrate out are frequently the highly educated and trained, whereas those who stay, are those with relatively lower skills, education, or income (Sano et al., 2020). Younger people often leave to pursue a post-secondary education, indicating that there is a lack of social and educational services to retain young people, and therefore, newcomers. The

combination of these trends results in a decline of housing costs, but this does not imply that housing is readily available. The main challenges for small communities to develop affordable housing are a lack of capacity, resources, supports, and funding.

UTILIZING DATA AND TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY

NOVEMBER 2021

The pandemic required the mobilization of tools and services to a digital world, which has made clear that digital literacy is essential for service delivery, as well as for clients to access services in language, employment, and settlement. As agencies have mobilized resources and continued to pivot service delivery strategies, these practices should be leveraged beyond the duration of the pandemic to promote the long-term sustainability of programs and services. PEI agencies continue to discuss learnings from hybrid and online programming, while continuing to track emerging needs (e.g., mental health) and collaborating with other service providers (e.g., school boards, healthcare, etc.) regarding service delivery that is in line with changing COVID-19 policies (e.g., vaccination and mask requirements for accessing services).

In previous PEI terms, it was noted that a major barrier to accessing online classes and online support was the lack of a digital device. If clients did have a device in the home, they often had to share that device with other family members, making it difficult to access the resources they needed. Agencies have since identified that sourcing and loaning technology (e.g., devices and stable internet) for clients has proven to be helpful. As clients can be supported and connected more quickly online during the pandemic, this result has been effective.

PEI agencies indicated that the Hybrid Flexible (HyFlex) model was a successful delivery method in supporting client retention and occupancy in language classes. In the HyFlex model, class material and course delivery are designed for both in-person and remote learning, which are often offered simultaneously. Key challenges and advantages of HyFlex delivery were highlighted during this period.

Key service delivery challenges this period included:

- Lack of electronic devices for language classes, as household members often share technology.

- Low attendance rates for in-person activities attributed to vaccine mandates for clients who are vaccine-hesitant or on the contrary, concerned about COVID-19 exposure.
- Low digital literacy, language, and transportation barriers impede clients' abilities to get vaccinated.
- Client engagement has been difficult to measure, particularly for online classes.

These challenges were addressed through strategies such as:

- HyFlex and blended program delivery has supported overall class occupancy.
- Agencies were able to loan electronic devices for students in need.
- Maintaining in-person classes for clients who are unvaccinated by following physical distancing and COVID-19 protocols.

MAY 2022

PEI participants have experienced the pandemic and how it has exacerbated the digital divide for the past two years. The digital divide limits opportunities for people who do not have access to technological infrastructure – internet, tech devices, etc. (Lai and Widmar, 2020). Small Centre PEI participants reported that newcomers in small centres are particularly impacted by the digital divide due to the lack of internet infrastructure and devices. As technology and technological devices grew more readily available during the past two years of the pandemic, along with programs and services taking on a hybrid model, the impacts of the digital divide have been lessened for vulnerable newcomers and there are now flexible supports and strategies available to meet clients' needs.

OTHER EMERGING THEMES AND TRENDS

NOVEMBER 2021

As newcomers continue to face discrimination and xenophobia exacerbated by the pandemic, PEI agencies noted the importance of Professional Development for staff in topics of racism, diversity, and inclusion. Practices to address these topics include:

- Agencies provide tailored training of cultural sensitivity in libraries, schools with SWIS programs, food banks, etc.
- Resources through ALIS Alberta and Centre for Race and Culture.
- Community programs that address racism and enhance community connectivity.

FEBRUARY 2022

This term, intentional focus was placed on human rights in serving the senior population, as well as clients with disabilities or complex needs. A strong emphasis on anti-discrimination



practices has begun this term as well. Clients face multifaceted barriers in accessing services, particularly clients with complex needs, which includes the elderly population.

SENIORS

Social isolation is a universal struggle that many seniors experience, however this is amplified in immigrant and refugee seniors (Johnson et. al., 2019). On top of language learning, seniors are expected to adapt to the ever-changing technology to access services in Alberta. According to Johnson et. al. (2019), there are five themes that relate to social isolation: loss, living arrangements, dependency, barriers, and family conflict. Luckily, agencies host volunteer-run programs that teach immigrant seniors how to navigate novel technologies to better integrate into society. Agencies also host socialization groups where seniors can interact and learn about their multicultural group, while receiving social supports to integrate into their communities. It is important to note a gap in programming for the elderly, that once seniors become naturalized citizens, they are no longer eligible for IRCC-funded settlement services.

CLIENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Agencies have stressed the demand to focus on clients with disabilities and complex needs, paired with the need for equitable access to services. Agencies provide services such as specific LINC classes that cater to the needs of clients with disabilities. Clients are also provided with accommodations to set up the clients for success in their classes. An additional challenge that agencies face is accessing affordable assessments.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE IN SMALL CENTRES

A doctor shortage is a key challenge for Canadian healthcare infrastructure; yet many qualified doctors are still not considered to aid this problem (Chew, et. al., 2010). To aid the doctor shortage in rural Alberta, the Government of Alberta is beginning a new initiative to bring more doctors to rural communities in our province. The Rural Education Supplement and Integrated Doctor Experience (RESIDE) program will provide \$2 million to 20 new family physicians in each of the next three years. The physicians will practise in 15 identified rural or remote communities of need.

MAY 2022

This period of PEI meetings marked the beginning of Ukrainian arrivals in Alberta. While the arrival of Ukrainians amplified existing vulnerabilities in the sector, it has also highlighted the power of community engagement in helping newcomers settle in Alberta.

Canadians have been committed to helping Ukrainians to arrive in Canada and materializing the required settlement supports for Ukrainians and their families (www.canada.ca). The Government of Canada has allocated funds for Ukrainian families to receive transitional financial assistance that will help them meet essential needs such as transportation, long-term housing, and job searing. Ukrainians who are in Canada and have a valid work permit, study permit, temporary resident permit, or are a visitor under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) are eligible to receive this financial assistance. This specific benefit will consist of a one-time payment of \$3,000 per adult and \$1,500 per child (www.canada.ca).

PEI participants shared that there has been an outpour of support from community members for Ukrainian arrivals across the province. Individuals and organizations are offering donations, accommodations, etc. to support Ukrainians as they settle in Canada.

Canada's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been both encouraging and unique when compared to other groups needing protection (Dennler, 2022), which creates opportunities for learning and potential actions. Dennler (2022) urges the Canadian government to expand CUAET to apply to other humanitarian emergencies, as this offers a chance for Canada to welcome refugees while addressing logistical barriers that can often impede refugee resettlement. For example, under CUAET, Ukrainians do not need to complete their medical exams overseas, a task that refugees are obliged to undertake which takes time for the government to process their applications. Dennler (2022) highlights that "CUAET can be leveraged to secure public buy-in for a broader iteration of the program...while the Canadian government is seeking to increase annual immigration, we should see refugees as an important part of that plan". The government's response to the Ukrainian crisis has opened the door for improved responses for other humanitarian crises. The PEI committees offer the space and dedication to advocate for the settlement and integration sector in this regard, encompassing all its vulnerabilities. The discussions in PEI serve to elevate perspectives and ultimately affect systems-level challenges.

AUGUST 2022

As settlement agencies have expanded their programming to support the resettlement of Ukrainian newcomers in Alberta, the Government of Alberta has allocated a number of grants to create services and initiatives to help newcomers settle and integrate in Alberta. Additionally, AAISA is administering the dissemination of funding to support agencies who are supporting Ukrainians in Alberta, through the *Ukrainian Settlement Support Grant*. This grant is aimed to complement established settlement programming to better support Ukrainians seeking refuge in Alberta. This will give agencies the opportunity to create or adjust programs to meet the needs of Ukrainian newcomers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the rapid changes in the settlement and integration sector during this PEI period, the challenges faced by agencies encompass several domains. Consequently, the recommendations outlined reflect and encompass various topical areas identified from the discussions and will require further review. The areas identified include the following: mental health supports for newcomer clients, the provision of adequate and equitable learning environments for newcomers with diverse learning contexts, preparing newcomers to safely integrate into the labour market, and the continuation of newcomer serving agencies to collaborate and share best practices with sector agencies across the province.

PROVIDE TANGIBLE AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORTS FOR NEWCOMER CLIENTS.

The discussions revealed the continued need to support newcomers with health care supports that encompass access to mental health supports and resources. Settlement workers play a pivotal role in supporting the mental health of newcomers during their resettlement journey. The resettlement process for many newcomers serves as a recovery period for those newcomers who have experienced trauma during their migration journey. As a result, a newcomer's access to health care and mental health supports also impact their resettlement experience and may determine how they recover from their trauma. Additionally, access to culturally appropriate supports can also present challenges for newcomer serving agencies. While there are no simple solutions to these challenges, agencies will want to ensure:

- Staff are equipped with knowledge about the healthcare system.
- Staff can accommodate newcomers with resources that are available in multiple languages.
- Staff are aware of culturally appropriate resources to accommodate newcomers.
- Connect newcomers to social supports that provide opportunities for social interaction.
- Connect with other social and community service providers to expand newcomer's social network supports.

THE PROVISION OF ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR NEWCOMERS WITH DIVERSE LEARNING CONTEXTS.

Providing an adequate and equitable language learning environment for newcomers with diverse learning contexts continues to be a longstanding challenge for the sector. Agencies are encouraged to consider the following to ensure that newcomers with diverse learning contexts are accommodated:

- Provide differentiated activities such as using the same text but differentiating the activity according to level or ability (AMSSA, 2019).
- Adapting and modifying assessments.
- Trauma-informed practice.
- Provide training for teachers on ways to identify students different learning needs.
- Creating accessible physical and virtual spaces.

PREPARE NEWCOMERS TO SAFELY INTEGRATE INTO THE LABOUR MARKET.

Reflective of the discussions in this PEI period, newcomers first jobs are often characterized by precarity wherein employers may not always accommodate newcomers with adequate training to safely perform their duties. Consequently, newcomers are faced with increased likelihood to face workplace injuries. To ensure that newcomers have knowledge on workplace safety, agencies can accommodate newcomers through the following:

- Systematic approach to ensure that newcomers are equipped with the knowledge required to work in precarious work environments. The onus cannot be on newcomers to request various programming as some may not be aware of the various health and safety protocols.
- Provide access to employment programs at early LINC/CLB levels as many newcomers enter the labour market at the onset of their resettlement journey.
- Provide diverse sources of programming that include in-person training as opposed to online to ensure newcomer clients that have low digital literacy are accommodated.
- Avoid assumptions that information resources may be offered by other stakeholders (i.e., government job readiness programs, employers).
- Support newcomers in voicing their rights for a healthy and safe work environment.

COLLABORATE WITH SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES AND RESOURCES.

With the constant changes to newcomer admission levels and corresponding processes, agencies, umbrellas, and funders will be presented with challenges and opportunities to adapt to an evolving newcomer landscape. How this looks is still unfolding, however there is ample and meaningful work already done, or in the works, in anticipation of this shift not limited to:

- The increase of admissions to Canada with the Ukrainian War and the Afghan Civil War highlights the need for continued advocacy and collaboration with government systems who serve newcomers, examining factors such as:
 - Will influxes of newcomers impact the quality of services and programs being offered? How can this be mitigated?
 - Where will newcomers settle now, and will admission levels recover evenly across Canada? What is the capacity for small centres? And do they have the resources?
- Exchanges of information and strategic awareness throughout Alberta's settlement and integration sector and all levels of government, with a goal that we remain responsive and informed by the developing landscape and act in service of better outcomes for newcomers. Various strategies and recommendations with these types of work include:
 - Increasing knowledge and uptake of newcomer services.
 - Developing capacity in the community to support the unique needs of newcomers.
 - Adapting to evolving newcomer needs, while also reaching diverse clients in varying regions.
 - Strengthening connections and outcomes between newcomers and employers within the labour market (Kanbour et al., 2021).
 - Supporting frontline staff and providing professional development and sharing best practices between organizations.

CONCLUSION

This PEI period reflected a mix of various developments along with challenges faced by settlement service providers. The formalizing of service delivery models learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing work to support Afghan refugees, and efforts to support Ukrainian nationals across the province have been at the forefront of agencies agendas. Consequently, the period covered in this brief has encompassed some recurring themes in terms of accessing adequate health care for newcomers, ongoing challenges with precarious employment, and a strong need for collaborative and wraparound service delivery. Gaps in settlement have been addressed and some have been actioned as items for AAISA to undertake in terms of outreach, and resource-building, to improve service delivery and capacity in the sector. As Ukrainians continue to arrive to Alberta, it is important to address successes and limitations with government funding and responses, and how this affects all vulnerable populations seeking safe haven. Through the insight provided during this period



of PEI meetings, AAISA will continue to create resources, supports, and professional development for newcomer-serving agencies to ensure that agencies are best-equipped to encounter challenges.

As always, AAISA will continue to facilitate a collaborative space where settlement and integration agencies can work together to prioritize information-sharing, elevate regional perspectives, and define innovative approaches positively affecting systems-level challenges. The information gathered above will serve as a guide to the collective approach being used to achieve the greater vision underscoring all the work of the PEI committees.

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