

ALBERTA SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SECTOR SURVEY REPORT

2021



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AAISA would like to recognize and thank the team of staff who worked diligently to create this report, and the settlement and integration agencies across Alberta who took valuable time to participate in the survey.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

On behalf of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, we wish to respectfully acknowledge that we are situated on Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territories, the traditional lands of First Nations and Métis peoples.

We acknowledge the traditional homeland of the many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people whose elders have walked this land before us and those persons of whom we share this great land with today.

We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

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PREFACE

The past year was marked by a new set of challenges and opportunities for newcomer-serving agencies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and created new challenges for newcomers and agencies alike, it also necessitated unique adaptations that sparked innovation and new best practices in settlement and integration.

Early on, agencies expressed a variety of needs, including challenges with virtual language training, implications of newcomer employment due to closures, barriers to technology access, and digital literacy challenges with both staff and clients (AAISA, 2020). In the current context of COVID-19, agencies and newcomers continue to face uncertainty as restrictions are implemented due to the spread of new variants of the COVID-19 virus. Despite the many ongoing and intersecting complexities, the settlement and integration sector was able to arrange and meet the needs of newcomers through their connections and networks within their communities to alleviate some of the issues that newcomers were facing during this unprecedented time (Esses et al., 2021).

It is in this unique context of service delivery that AAISA conducted the *2021 Settlement and Integration Sector Survey*. This is AAISA's fourth annual *Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* report. The report is based on the *Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* conducted by AAISA in June 2021, which includes quantitative and qualitative data collected through open-ended survey questions, and supplemental references. The 2021 survey was completed by 60 settlement and integration agencies from across Alberta.

The survey aims to examine and understand the priorities, systems-level issues, and potential areas of improvement in the Albertan settlement and integration sector. AAISA will use the survey results to improve and develop services and programs that will ensure agencies have the tools to offer innovative, high-quality, and adaptable programs and services to newcomers in Alberta.

Please note that the survey is not considered to be representative of the Albertan settlement and integration sector. Percentage values in the report represent the percentage of survey respondents but are not reflective of the percentage of all newcomer-serving agencies across Alberta.

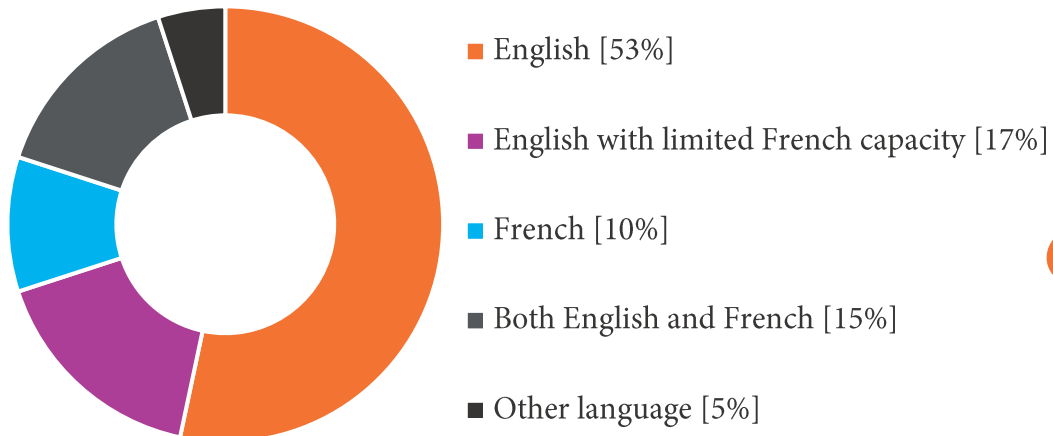
ALBERTA'S SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SECTOR AT A GLANCE

PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A total of 60 agencies responded to the *Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* conducted by AAISA in June 2021, of which 47 are AAISA members. These agencies provide services across Alberta, including 38% who provide itinerant and satellite services. Additionally, these agencies offer services across the province in over 70 languages.

52%
of agencies have a primary mandate to serve newcomers

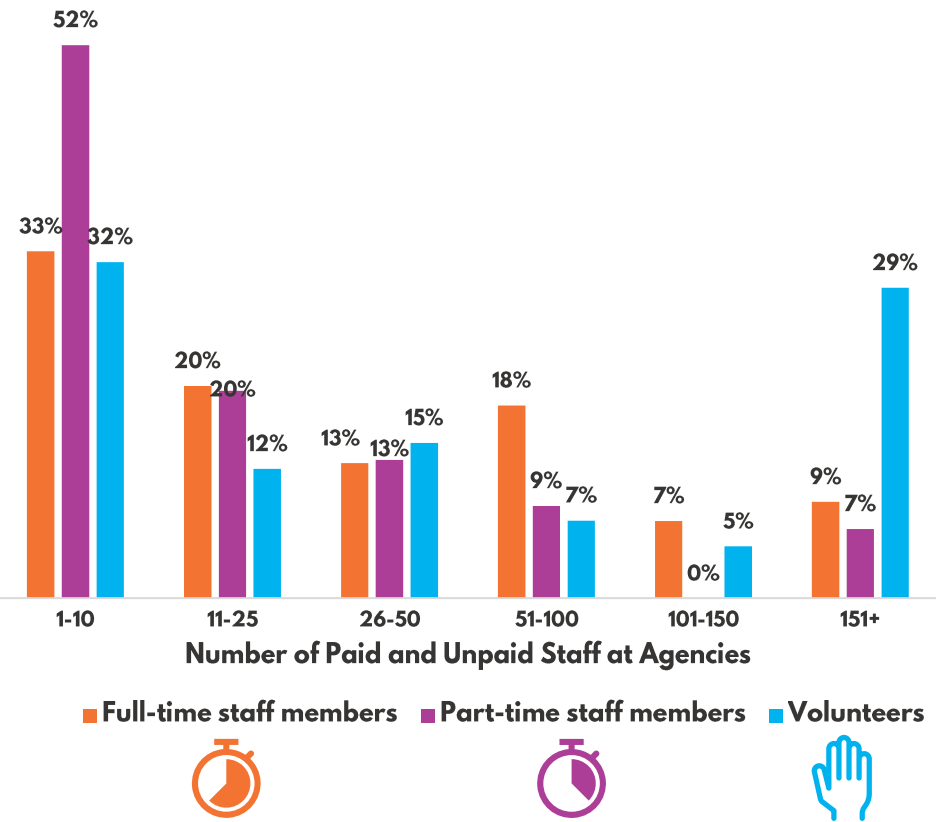
Official Languages of Service Delivery at Agencies



ALBERTA'S SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SECTOR

AT A GLANCE

Paid and Unpaid Staff at Agencies



Programs and Services Offered by Agencies

General Settlement Services		Community Services	
Information and orientation	63%	Community and social connections	58%
Needs and assessment referral	57%	Health supports, including mental health	35%
Digital literacy	47%	Housing	20%
Employment	47%	Community spaces and fitness	18%
Interpretation and translation	45%	Clothing support	15%
Immigration application support	23%		

Language Services		Family Services	
Language training	53%	Children and youth	48%
Numeracy and adult literacy	23%	Domestic violence support	30%
Language assessment	15%	Settlement Workers in School (SWIS)	30%

Capacity Building Services	
Intercultural training	40%
Capacity building of other agencies	25%

AAISA AT A GLANCE

AAISA is a regionally and nationally recognized leader in the settlement and integration sector. As an umbrella organization, **AAISA represents over 53 agencies** that work with newcomers across the province's settlement and integration sector.

AAISA's primary goals are to represent the voice of the Alberta settlement and integration sector to government stakeholders, act as a knowledge hub through professional development, conduct pertinent research, and engage members and non-members through various methods to support

newcomers' settlement and integration in Alberta.

The data gathered from the *Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* supports AAISA's mandate to build sector capacity by informing the development of future services and programs to ensure that agencies are equipped with the tools to provide innovative, high-quality, and responsive programs and services to newcomers in Alberta. The data will also support AAISA's advocacy efforts to strengthen the settlement and integration sector in Alberta.

AAISA provides the settlement and integration sector support with...



Professional Development



Sector Advocacy



Sector Engagement
& Collaboration



Research & Policy
Development



ENGAGEMENT, RESEARCH & POLICY

The Engagement, Research, and Policy (ERP) department positions AAISA to better understand sector needs and priorities. Through strategic engagement and high-quality research and policy development, ERP provides AAISA with a better understanding of the current needs, challenges, and experiences newcomers and the agencies that serve them.

77%

of respondents either **agreed/strongly agreed** that AAISA’s engagement initiatives supported **information sharing**.

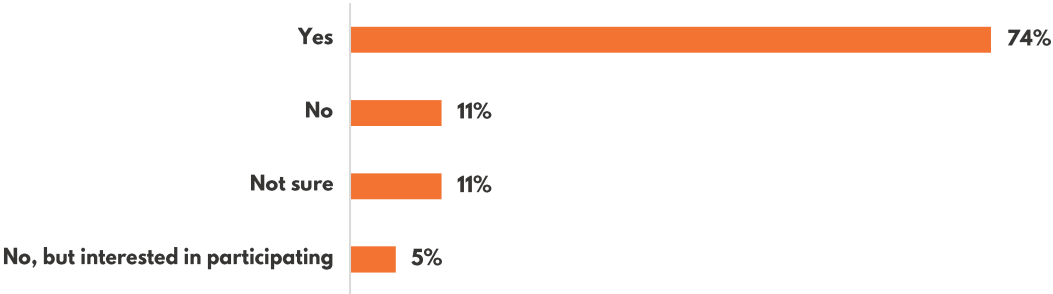
54%

of respondents either **agreed/strongly agreed** that AAISA’s engagement initiatives supported **coordination of services**.

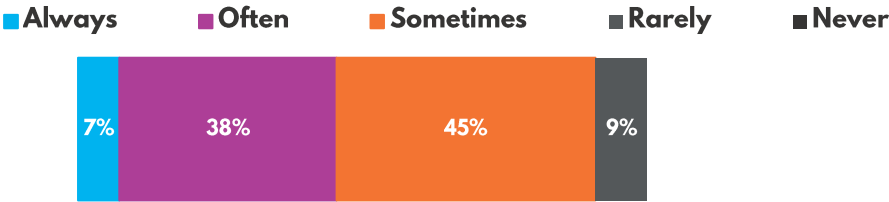
48%

of respondents either **agreed/strongly agreed** that AAISA’s engagement initiatives increased **collaboration among agencies**.

Agencies Participating in AAISA's Initiatives, Committees or Working Groups



Level of Engagement to AAISA Communication

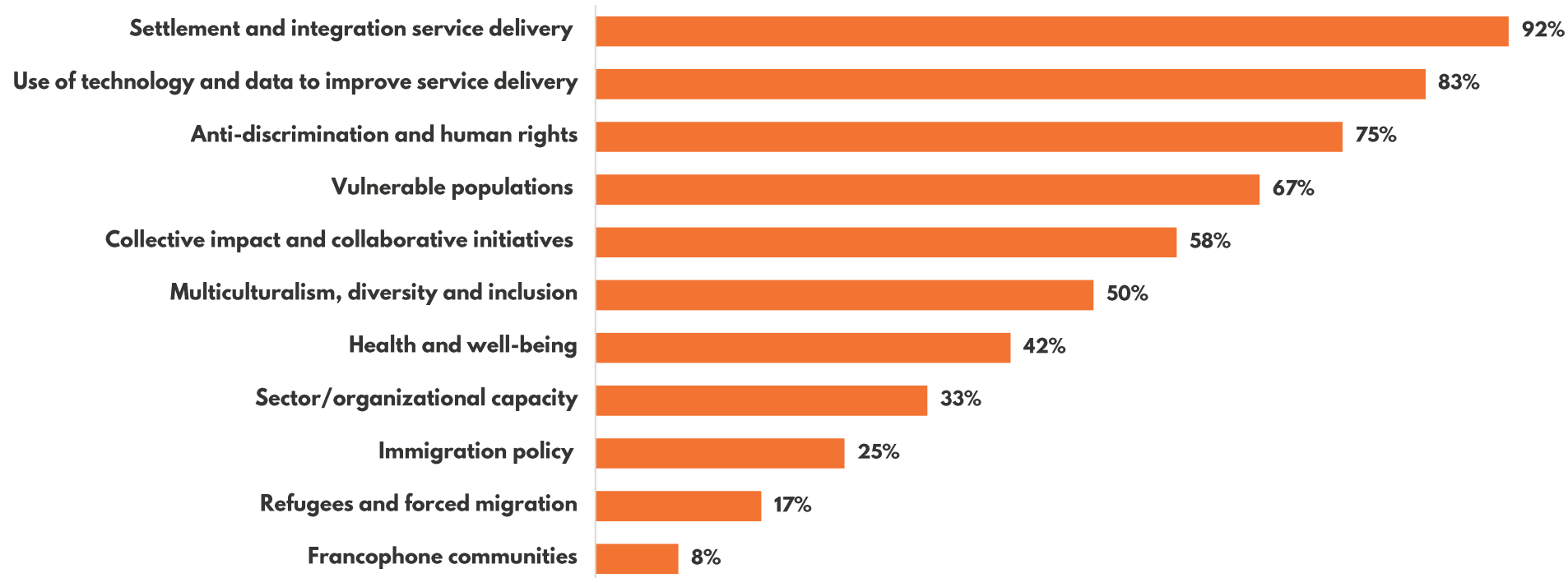


Note: Communication refers to communication material produced by AAISA including meeting notes, reports and briefs, and AAISA’s Toolkit resources.

ENGAGEMENT, RESEARCH & POLICY

To better understand the needs of agencies, and to guide prioritization of projects and activities at AAISA, respondents were asked to rank a few research and policy development topics in order of importance according to their agency's needs.

Research and Policy Development Needs



ENGAGEMENT, RESEARCH & POLICY

SUGGESTED ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AS INDICATED BY THE NEEDS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Collaboration & Information Sharing

Respondents highlighted the need for more collaboration and information sharing across the different agencies in Alberta through provincial and regional meetings.

Advocacy

AAISA will continue advocating for the sector to build a strong voice and unifying the settlement and integration sector in Alberta.



Engagement

Respondents highlighted the need for AAISA to provide support on how to engage more newcomers to access settlement services, and for AAISA to provide more resources on how to have greater engagement with underserved communities.

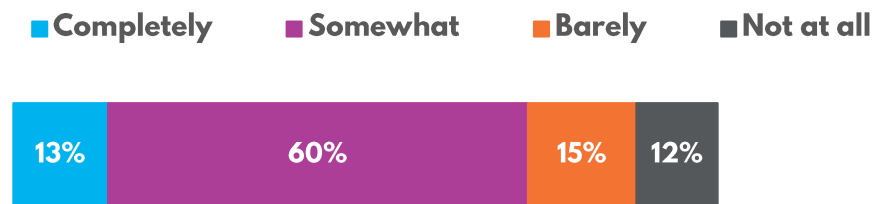
French Resources and Francophone Service Providers

Throughout the survey, respondents noted the need to have stronger engagement with the Francophone service providers along with increasing the number of French resources.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATION

AAISA offers a spectrum of specialized professional development courses and learning opportunities through multiple formats for settlement practitioners and career counsellors. AAISA's professional development services are specifically designed to enhance the on-the-job competencies needed to effectively support the settlement and integration of newcomers. Therefore, the development of AAISA courses strive to be well aligned with the learning needs identified by the sector and supported through evidence-based practices.

To what level have the delivered AAISA courses in the past year met your staff's professional development needs?



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATION

ACCESS TO CERTIFICATION

In regard to accessing certification, agencies indicated that the biggest barrier to accessing certification was a lack of awareness on how to seek certification. A large percentage of agencies indicated “other barriers” which include the following challenges:

- Accessibility of courses offered in French
- Limited organizational capacity to take professional development courses largely due to the pandemic and the priorities that now exist as a result
- The amount of time given to complete the courses is not sufficient

Barriers When Accessing Certification

Not sure how to seek certification	22%
The length and complexity of the certification application and process	19%
Frequency of courses are not enough	15%
Practitioners are not aware of the certification program	15%
Not experiencing any barriers	15%
Have not applied due to lack of seats or spaces available per course	11%
Have applied but meeting training hour requirements is difficult	9%
Other barriers*	43%

**Note: Other barriers was an open-comment option provided to respondents. Several respondents selected “other barriers” to indicate that this question was not applicable to their agency which could explain the large discrepancy.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Although AAISA provides a number of professional development courses for settlement and integration agencies, there is a need to provide these courses more widely across Alberta. Respondents were asked to highlight how AAISA could improve to meet their agency needs. The following themes are presented below.

Increase the types of professional development programming offered

Increase the number of seats and the frequency of programs

Offer professional development programs in French

Provide participants with greater flexibility

This can include offering programs during the weekend, hybrid format (in-person and virtual) when permissible, and a clear bridge for staff that have no post-secondary education to obtain a recognized post-secondary credentials.

Offer programs based on sector needs

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATION

To better support professional development, the following table outlines topics agencies wish AAISA could explore in the future to suit agency needs.

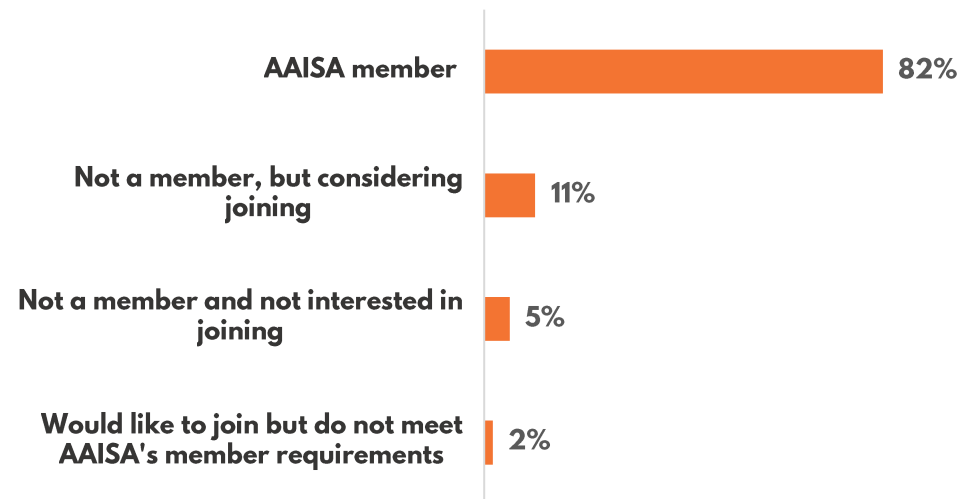
Topics to Support Agency Needs: Professional Development and Certification Programming

Mental health of newcomers and/or staff	72%
Intersectionality and working with multi-barriered clients	68%
Digital literacy of newcomers	60%
Cultural competency and diversity and inclusion	58%
Online service delivery	56%
Self-care and stress management	49%
General workplace courses (i.e., project management, leadership)	47%
Language provision training	25%
Pre-service certificate courses	16%

MEMBERSHIP

As a membership driven organization, AAISA highly values performance feedback. The following section aims to examine AAISA's impact in the sector and explore the sector's perception of AAISA membership and how it can be improved.

Respondent Profile



Respondents that are not AAISA members indicated the following barriers preventing them from becoming an AAISA member:

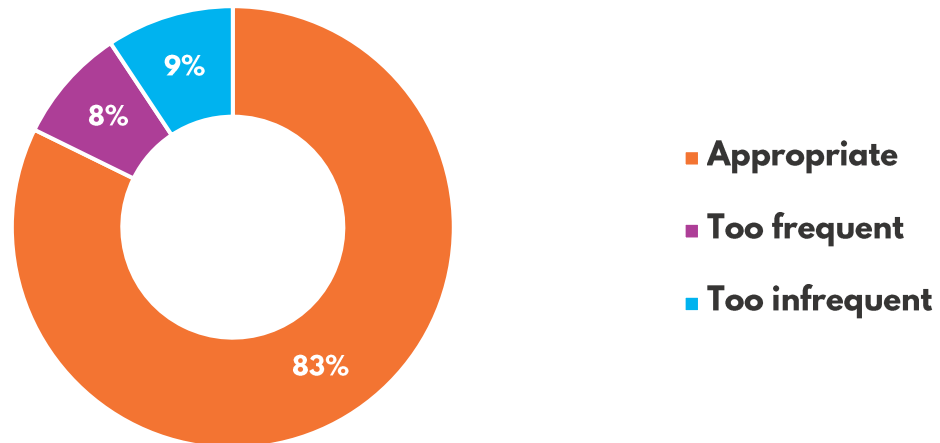
- Limited funding capacity
- Limited organizational capacity

78%
of respondents indicated they are very satisfied or satisfied with their AAISA membership.

MEMBERSHIP

As the Umbrella for Alberta's settlement and integration sector, AAISA engages in a variety of communication activities, including dissemination of a biweekly newsletter, regular correspondence of emergent sector news, Engagement, Research & Policy communication, membership notices, and Professional Development and Certification communication. The following outlines the level of satisfaction with AAISA's general level of communication.

Frequency of AAISA Communication



HIGH-LEVEL TRENDS: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES IN THE SECTOR

In the current context of COVID-19, agencies across the settlement and integration sector have had to drastically alter the way they operate and provide services. While vaccines are now widely available across the province, new variants of the virus are emerging quickly and continue to cause uncertainty. This uncertainty is seen in the results of the *2021 Annual Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* which illustrate the reality faced by agencies in Alberta and how they plan to serve their clients while experiencing new challenges and opportunities.

Canada has seen a **major drop in immigration levels due to the pandemic** and the travel restrictions that were put in place to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In 2020, approximately 184 370 new permanent residents were welcomed into Canada – the lowest level of immigration to Canada since 1998 (CIC, 2021). In 2020, Alberta welcomed 22 960 new Permanent Residents (PRs) into the province – almost half the number of new PRs in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2021). However, despite these recent drops in PR admissions, with Canada’s commitment to welcome refugees from Afghanistan and its plan to re-establish its immigration levels hindered by

the pandemic, immigration levels are likely to continue increasing in the foreseeable future. With the likely rise of immigration levels that are to be expected, **organizational capacity of newcomer-serving agencies continues to be of the utmost importance.**

This year, the survey was designed to understand the impact COVID-19 on agencies and their newcomer clients. The results show that agencies have been dealing with the challenges that the COVID-19 crisis has imposed on their organizations’ operations, their staff, and the newcomer clients they serve. The following section will highlight challenges and opportunities for the future as illustrated by the results of the 2021 annual *Settlement and Integration Sector Survey*.

The results show that agencies have been dealing with the challenges that the COVID-19 crisis has imposed on their organizations’ operations, their staff, and the newcomer clients they serve.

DEMAND FOR SERVICES AMIDST BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

To gain a better understanding of the programs that require more support, AAISA asked respondents to indicate the types of programs that currently have waitlists, with **the top three being language training (35%), employment programs (26%), and health programs (17%)**. Compared to the *2020 Annual Settlement and Integration Sector Survey*, the programming where waitlists were most prominent were language training (63%), employment services (52%), and language assessment (44%).

The large gap between the 2020 data and 2021 regarding waitlists in language training and employment programs is likely due to the **dramatic and rapid shift that agencies have had to make in transitioning to new technology to support remote work and program delivery** (AAISA, 2021). Transitioning to remote work requires strategic planning and adaptation for staff and clients alike. Given the current environment with an expected increase in the number of newcomer admissions, waitlists for programs are predicted to continue to increase in the next year.

Programs that Have Waitlists

Language training	35%
Employment services	26%
Health (including mental health supports)	17%
Children and youth	13%
Community and social connections	13%
Digital literacy	11%
Information and orientation	11%
Needs assessment and referral	11%
Conversation circles	9%
Housing	9%

DEMAND FOR SERVICES AMIDST BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

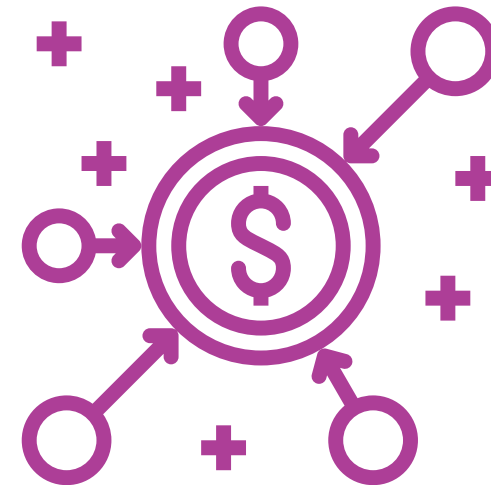
Respondents were also asked to specify the reasons for program waitlists:

Reasons for Program Waitlists

Budget restraints	44%
High demand due to services not being provided elsewhere	41%
COVID-19 and social distancing requirements	39%
Budget cutbacks	17%

These findings are similar to the *2020 Annual Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* and other similar research across Canada, marking the unique challenges that agencies are continuing to experience during the pandemic. **Organizational budgets continue to be a concern for newcomer-serving agencies as they try to adapt to the changing environment along with providing support to their newcomer clients.** This finding is supported by a national survey conducted by the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) which indicated that 56% of settlement and integration agencies across the

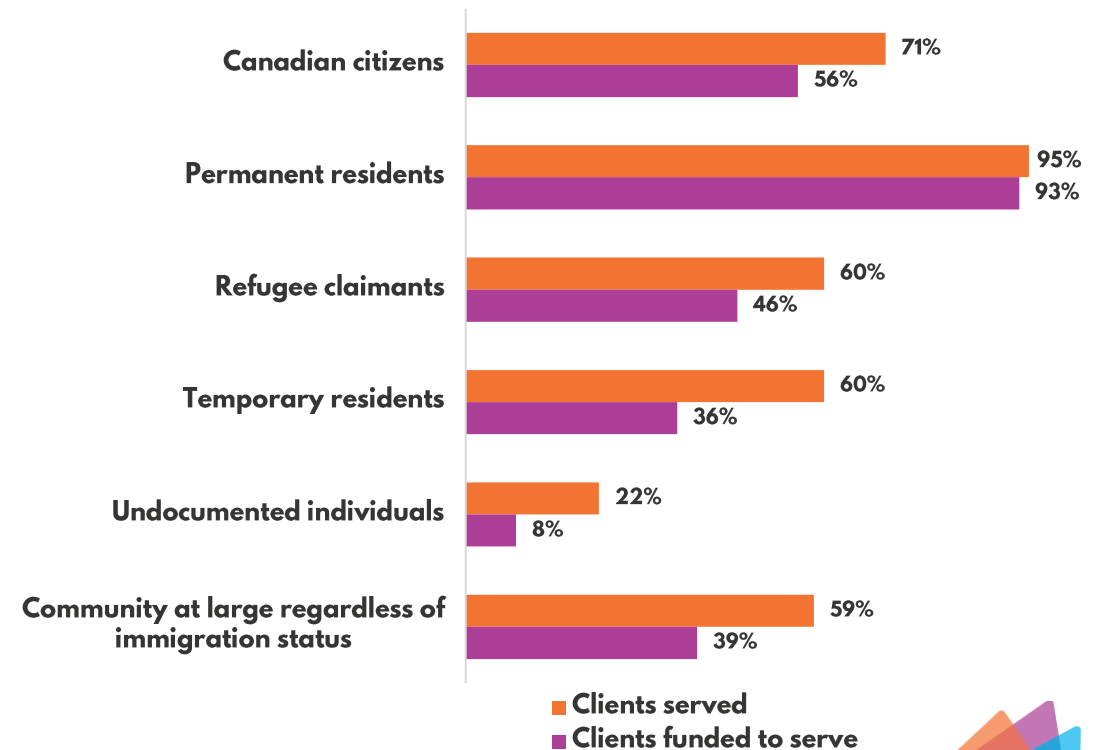
country strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that **securing long-term funding is a challenge for their organization as a result of current funding models** (ACS, 2021a). Canada's funding models for settlement and integration is "considered unique, utilizing fee-for-service contracts" that have "inconsistencies with the ability of these services to meet the correct nature of the demand" (ACS, 2021b, p.35).



DEMAND FOR SERVICES AMIDST BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Funding gaps exist across the province as agencies serve more clients than they are funded to serve (see figure on this page)– a trend that has continued from *AAISA's 2020 Annual Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* results. The survey results indicated that there are **funding gaps for all client categories, including the community at large**. The largest gap exists with temporary residents, the community at large regardless of immigration status, followed by refugee claimants. Taking this into account, IRCC-funded settlement services are provided to immigrants and refugees with permanent residence status (House of Commons, 2019). Temporary residents (international students and Temporary Foreign Workers), refugee claimants, and individuals that have obtained their citizenship do not have access to these services (House of Commons, 2019). While IRCC-funded settlement and integration services comprise the majority of programming available to Albertan newcomers, agencies continue to devise funding strategies to meet the needs of all newcomer and community needs. **Agencies have adapted their funding sources** though provincial and municipal government contributions, community foundations, private sector funding, and self-generated funding through social enterprises (Esses et al., 2021).

Client Categories Served by Settlement and Integration Agencies Versus Clients they are Funded to Serve



DEMAND FOR SERVICES AMIDST BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Another trend that continues to exist is **high demand for services** – a consistent trend that exists nationally. In this survey, **41% of respondents indicated a high demand for services not being provided elsewhere as a reason for their programs and services** (see table on page 16). Nationally, 43% of newcomer-serving agencies have experienced an increase in high demand for service delivery at their organization (ACS, 2021a).

An increase in demand can be attributed to a direct result from the pandemic as newcomer populations are seeking community and integration supports, especially newcomers who experience multiple barriers to integration, such as women, older people, racialized communities, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ2+ individuals (IRCC, 2021).

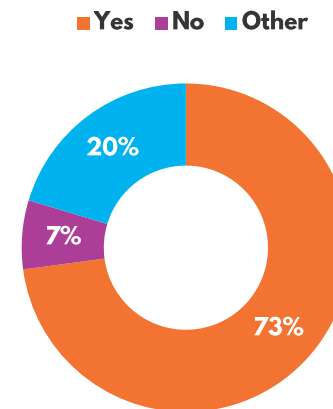
Many immigrants and refugees rely on frontline essential service employment positions – working conditions that are more vulnerable to COVID-19 restrictions such as loss of employment and income, and the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus. An increase in demand can be attributed to a direct result from the pandemic as newcomer populations are seeking community and integration supports, especially newcomers who experience multiple barriers to integration, such as women, older people, racialized communities, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ2+ individuals (IRCC, 2021). Additionally, due to the rise of racist incidents, particularly anti-Asian racism and Islamophobia, including general racism against immigrants, many SPOs have been known to field complaints and provide support to victims, including staff, about how to deal with these incidents (Esses et al., 2021).

A CONTINUATION OF VIRTUAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Virtual service delivery and remote work have been a theme for much of society since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and has necessitated newcomer-serving agencies to adapt and innovate on how they provide services. The prevalence of remote work is supported by the findings of *2021 Annual Alberta Settlement and Integration Sector Survey*, as **agencies across the province plan to have their employees working remotely in the foreseeable future** (see figure below). Additionally, **73% of agencies indicated that they plan to continue to provide services through hybrid delivery models to their newcomer clients**. Moving towards hybrid-models of providing services has proved to be beneficial towards many newcomer clients alleviating some home demands by catering to the diverse needs of clients, and by providing flexibility in working structures for employees.

“***We plan to return to in-person services but continue to offer remote services to those clients who cannot access in-person services. We have found that for those who face transportation or childcare issues, the virtual services have opened a new door. We will serve the needs of the client in a way that best suits their individual needs.***”

The Future of Remote Work: Agencies Planning to Continue Virtual Service Delivery for the Foreseeable Future



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO VIRTUAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Virtual delivery of programs and services are not short of challenges and barriers. **While virtual programming brings a suite of unique challenges, there are logistical barriers associated with these programming models as it highlights, and often exacerbates, the pre-existing vulnerabilities of newcomers.** These challenges and barriers of virtual service delivery highlighted in the survey include the following:

- **Coordination and communication issues are amplified.** Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, there is a barrier to access services for newcomers who have low or no English ability, clients with literacy challenges, and clients with low or no digital literacy. Some programs that require in-person interaction cannot be offered online which can limit the learning experience for newcomers.

“*Working from home limits the ability to connect with clients and colleagues in person which is difficult for both clients to communicate effectively and the staff to communicate and provide the services in its full capacity.*”

- **Loss of in-person connection.** There are limitations to teaching and learning a new language virtually as language is often best taught face-to-face. The lack of in-person program and service delivery can have an impact on community engagement which plays a strong role in building networks, connections, and social capital for newcomers. Other issues that arise include the staff mental health due to the pandemic, and organizational coordination and communication due to limited communication.

“*Relationship building opportunities with participants. In person allows us to connect with folks and have them get familiar with the learning space, making it easier to seek additional supports.*”

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO VIRTUAL SERVICE DELIVERY

- Digital literacy of newcomer clients and limited access to technology. Many clients with low digital literacy need additional support to navigate remote services. This is compounded with barriers to accessing technology hardware such as laptops and internet access. Additionally, some respondents indicated that their clients may not always have the right environment at home to learn.

“*When remote services are required, the low language and computer skills of many of our clients is a barrier. As well, they often only have their phones to use.*”

“*Significant challenges of online service delivery include: Instructor/student fatigue with online learning; limitations of students with respect to Wi-Fi, computers and quiet spaces at home; conducting valid assessments online; learning efficiency especially for literacy students and difficulty managing online learning platforms; and full awareness of instructors on how well our students are progressing.*”

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 PERSIST

The vast and intersecting implications of the COVID-19 pandemic persist as agencies continue to adapt to the changing COVID-19 environment and the uncertainty tied with it. Although the implications have continued to put pressure on agencies, it has also provided an opportunity for agencies to innovate and collaborate with one another. However, some of the underlying issues that were present at the onset of the pandemic continue to exist for newcomer clients.

- **There are health and safety concerns of newcomer clients that prevent them from benefitting from in-person programs and services.** Respondents indicated that their newcomer clients have experienced unique challenges such as social isolation, fear, and anxiety of the COVID-19 virus. As a result, these issues are limiting their motivation and progress as newcomer clients are not reaching out for supports available. For newcomers who do not have a large network and those who speak languages spoken by few others in their community, attending language classes and other programs is one of the few opportunities to make connections and friends (Esses et al., 2021).

Other issues that impact the health and safety of newcomers include family violence which has been exacerbated due to isolation requirements, mental health concerns, and limited physical recreation.

“*There are concerns of children and youth feeling isolated, and the need for physical recreation.*”

“*There is an increase in clients facing family violence which is exacerbated by isolation requirements and mental health concerns.*”

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 PERSIST

There are also **organizational challenges** for agencies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Organizational capacity limits and supports for staff working remotely.** Respondents indicated that they are having difficulties with increased workload, additional responsibilities, and new skill sets required to work remotely.

“*There are challenges with coordination and communication with staff. My workload has increased significantly in the past year due to supports we have been providing in the community. However, this has been beneficial to clients and created opportunities and partnerships which we are very pleased with.*”

- **A decline in revenue and funding.** Some respondents indicated that they are experiencing funding issues resulting in the discontinuation of some of their programs while others are experiencing staff layoffs.

“*We are having issues with a lack of funding. We have a long waiting list of clients that we can't provide services to due to short staffing.*”

A WAY FORWARD: OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SECTOR

The *2021 Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* provides AAISA, governments, and other stakeholders with a broad overview of the settlement and integration landscape in Alberta. It provides AAISA with a better understanding of the needs of the settlement and integration sector, and areas of improvement including recommendations to better support and strengthen settlement and integration agencies. To have a clear look at what AAISA and funders can do to prepare newcomer-serving agencies for the future, the following section outlines some recommendations based on feedback from respondents in the survey.

How AAISA Can Provide Support

Lead, facilitate, and advocate for the sector.

An increase in professional development resources to support settlement and integration agency staff members.

Provide members with opportunities to coordinate, connect, and collaborate with another.

How Funders Can Provide Support

Stable and long-term funding for administrative and operational costs.

Flexible funding to support newcomers changing needs and organizational priorities.

HOW AAISA CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT

As the Umbrella for the newcomer-serving sector in Alberta, AAISA will provide support to agencies to support them through these challenges and needs. Respondents to the *2021 Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* were asked the type of support they need to overcome these challenges. The themes identified from the survey results align with AAISA's *2020-2025 Strategic Plan* and will ensure that AAISA continues to provide responsive tools and resources that align with the needs of the sector. AAISA is well on its way to implement these recommendations.

1

Lead, facilitate, and advocate for the sector.

AAISA is committed to strengthening and supporting the diverse settlement and integration sector by helping shape, influence, and advocate for policies that promote the overall effectiveness of agencies across Alberta. To continue advocating and providing timely and relevant information for the settlement and integration sector, the survey respondents provide a glimpse of the needs and issues that AAISA should focus on in the next fiscal year.

Survey respondents indicated that they could benefit from continued research and policy development on:

- Sector wide challenges
- Best practices as shared by other agencies
- Training development
- Information on IRCC programs
- Impacts and opportunities regarding virtual learning

These same areas will position AAISA to better influence government policy at all levels and as a leader and representative of the newcomer services community.

“

Continue to advocate on behalf of service providers to IRCC and Provincial government to maintain their level of support and flexibility they have provided so far. There will be a transition period when this virus slows down, resistance from staff to come back fully can be seriously time consuming.

”



HOW AAISA CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT

2

An increase in professional development resources to support settlement and integration agency staff members.

Many agencies continue to provide virtual program delivery to newcomers and staff are working from home. However, **agencies indicated that they require support to train their staff to continue their work virtually.** Due to capacity issues experienced by agencies, some respondents indicated that they could benefit from AAISA to provide:

- Training in technology and digital literacy supports
- Digital device procurement support
- Support with digitizing content for training employees
- Increase professional development courses
- Standardization of remote working protocols

The above recommendations align with AAISA's strategic priority to advance the professionalization of Alberta's settlement and integration sector through training, certification, and championing employment standards.

3

Provide members with opportunities to coordinate, connect, and collaborate with one another.

A recurring theme was the need to **connect agencies provincially by connecting the sector and enhancing communication channels between agencies.** Agencies mentioned the benefit from the online sessions mediated by AAISA and that they will benefit from AAISA bringing together agencies to share knowledge and experiences.

It was also mentioned that AAISA could support agencies by connecting them to organizations outside of the settlement and integration sector. AAISA could also be a leader in bringing agencies together to stand against hate and violence directed at newcomer populations and racialized people.

HOW FUNDERS CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT

Funders play an important role in strengthening and providing sustainable funding for settlement and integration agencies to provide high quality **programs and services to newcomers**. The *2021 Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* asked respondents to indicate how funders can help alleviate and support their agency through the challenges that they are facing right now. A number of respondents indicated that **funders could adapt and continue to provide them with funding mechanisms that have been utilized throughout the pandemic**.

1 Stable and long-term funding for administrative and operational costs.

When restrictions were put in place at the onset of COVID-19, many settlement and integration agencies were ordered to work from home and provide virtual program and service delivery. As a result, many agencies experienced additional financial pressures, including extra costs to support their employees to work from home and provide programs and services virtually. Respondents highlighted the need **to invest more in organizational costs to offset the cost of this transition to remote work and services**. Moreover, with many respondents indicating that they would continue to provide virtual programming and work remotely (see pie chart on page 19) to respond to the changing needs of newcomer clients, funding to support this capacity is integral (ACS, 2021). This continuing shift will require **more funding to provide to the changing needs of newcomer clients and to adequately support employees for professional development opportunities and to lessen their workload to decrease employee burnout**.

HOW FUNDERS CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT

Several areas and issues are identified from survey respondents to support the strength and sustainability of settlement and integration agencies by providing funding to:

- Support the rise in demand for services
- Expand French language services
- Adapt service delivery
- Provide instructional aide programs
- Provide opportunities for professional development
- Purchase technology equipment for clients

“ A lot of the management of the pandemic has rested on support services of organizations without any recognition that this costs money otherwise deemed as 'overhead'. Technology has become a direct delivery cost which includes the support of IT for both clients at home accessing programs and for employees. This is still not seen as a direct cost and continues to count as the small amount of overhead most funders allocate. ”

HOW FUNDERS CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT

2

Flexible funding to support newcomers changing needs and organizational priorities.

Funding that limits settlement and integration agencies in who they can serve and the types of programs they invest in can sometimes be a disadvantage. Funding specific areas can be beneficial in reaching goals for a specific program or to reach a specific population, however, it can also limit agencies to have an impact elsewhere that requires immediate attention (see figure on page 17). Although respondents are appreciative of the funding they have received and the flexibility they have been given due to the pandemic, funding agreements have often limited their impact and potential to reach beyond their funding agreements. As such, respondents of the *2021 Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* indicated an **increased need for funding flexibility to support programming that can nimbly respond to shifting client and community needs.**

“

Provide some leeway in allowing us to serve people, not just certain categories of people. For example, the contract may be for Permanent Residents, but about 80% of the people served are Permanent Residents and the other 20% can be unclassified or from other categories. Communities are not that classified. Programs that serve communities should not be that rigid either.

”

“

Flexibility in funding to meet real time needs of the people we serve.

”

CONCLUSION

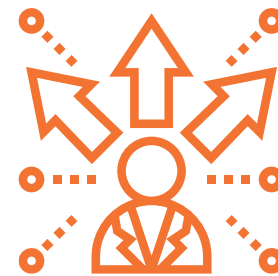
Settlement and integration agencies throughout Canada have spent the last year responding to the needs of newcomer communities in innovative ways to connect with clients in an unfamiliar and uncertain environment.

In response to a significant impact of COVID-19 on newcomer communities across Alberta, settlement and integration agencies rose to the challenge and devised novel strategies to continue to meet client needs.

The pandemic greatly disrupted agencies planned work, increased demand on their services, and has required agencies to shift their strategies, programs and services, and communication. These organizational changes have presented agency and client-based challenges which include challenges with providing virtual services, digital literacy of clients, and limited access to technology. While agencies work in this new environment to fill the gaps in service delivery to newcomers, they also report limited funding is hampering their capacity, and their ability to meet demand and the changing needs of newcomer clients. However, there have also been opportunities including innovative service delivery models, more public attention on the needs of

newcomers, and open collaboration between the settlement and integration sector and other stakeholders.

Although *2021 Settlement and Integration Sector Survey* provides AAISA with a small sample of real experiences of agencies across Alberta, the data is consistent with big picture trends and other survey data across the Canadian settlement and integration sector. Moreover, this report provides both AAISA and all levels of government with important understanding of the needs and realities of agencies during these unprecedented times. Through this insight, AAISA will continue to tailor programming and supports for newcomer-serving agencies to ultimately ensure the meaningful settlement and integration of every newcomer to Alberta.



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