

# 2025 AAISA Settlement & Integration Conference

*Navigating Change: Immigration Policy,  
Perceptions, and the Road Ahead*

**PRELIMINARY PROGRAM**

*October 28-30, 2025*

*Wyndham Edmonton Hotel and Conference Centre,  
Edmonton, Alberta*

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*AAISA extends our heartfelt gratitude to the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) for their unwavering support as a Gold Member Sponsor of our upcoming conference. CCIS has been a cornerstone in Alberta's immigrant and refugee settlement landscape, offering a comprehensive range of services to newcomers since 1981.*

*Their dedication to empowering individuals through programs in employment, housing, community development, and more aligns perfectly with our mission to foster inclusive communities.*

*We are proud to partner with CCIS in this journey of integration and empowerment.*





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*Edmonton's Food Bank provides food to tens of thousands of people every month, working to ensure meals reach those in need. Through partnerships with community agencies, they help ensure everyone in the city of Edmonton has access to nutritious meals.*

*We're so grateful for their support as a Silver Sponsor for our upcoming conference!*



# 28

*Opening Ceremony*  
*8:30 AM - 10:15 AM*



Amira Elghawaby, previously a journalist and human rights advocate, was appointed as Canada's first ever Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia in January 2023. Over the past two years of her mandate, Ms. Elghawaby has provided strategic advice to the Government of Canada on legislation, policies, and programs impacting Canadian Muslim communities. She also worked closely with federal departments to address issues related to online hate, anti-racism, discrimination and community safety.

Additionally, Ms. Elghawaby has worked to raise public awareness on the challenges Islamophobia poses to our shared values, championing human rights, freedom of religion and inclusion on national and global platforms, including at the United Nations. This past spring, her Office published *The Canadian Guide to Understanding and Combatting Islamophobia*, the first of its kind to be launched by a national government.

Prior to Ms. Elghawaby's appointment, she was a contributing columnist at the *Toronto Star* and held roles in strategic communications and human rights at various national organizations, including at the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, at the National Council of Canadian Muslims, and in Canada's labour movement. Ms. Elghawaby is a founding board member of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network and has served two terms as a Commissioner on the Public Policy Forum's Canadian Commission on Democratic Expression. She also currently sits on the National Security Transparency Advisory Group.

This year, Ms. Elghawaby was awarded the King Charles Coronation Medal for her leadership.



# 28

*Opening Ceremony*  
*8:30 AM - 10:15 AM*



Debbie Douglas is the Executive Director of OCASI – the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Canada’s largest umbrella organization for agencies working with immigrants, refugees, and other migrant populations. Through her leadership at OCASI and in the broader non-profit sector, she has advanced an antiracist, intersectional approach that addresses equity and social justice with particular attention to race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and migration status. She is committed to building the sector’s capacity to create safe, welcoming, and transformative spaces while advocating for sustainable resources, pay and employment equity, and fair regularization programs for those with precarious immigration status.

Prior to leading OCASI, Ms. Douglas worked with community service organizations and public institutions on equitable employment opportunities, policy change, and capacity building for women, 2SLGBTQI+, Black, and racialized communities. Early in her career, she was a youth worker, a union leader, and later a leader in the violence against women movement, serving as a director of Shirley Samaroo House, Canada’s first shelter for abused immigrant women and children, and contributing to provincial initiatives on trafficking and violence against women.

Ms. Douglas is a respected policy advisor, having served on Ontario’s Expert Panels on Immigration and Income Security, the Immigration and Refugee Advisory Committee of Legal Aid Ontario, the National Settlement and Integration Council, and the City of Toronto’s Newcomer Leadership Table. She co-founded and remains active in the Colour of Poverty/Colour of Change, a coalition addressing racial and economic justice, and has long linked her political activism to her personal and professional life through groups such as Zami, the Black Women’s Collective, and Lesbians of Colour.

An activist, writer, and producer, Ms. Douglas has created groundbreaking works such as *AnOther Love Story* (Canada’s first docu-drama on women and AIDS) and *Tama Ba? Tama Na?* (on violence against women), and co-edited *Maka Juks: Writings by Queers of African Descent*. She has served on numerous boards including Toronto Community Housing Corporation and the Stephen Lewis Foundation, and previously held leadership roles with CERIS, Women’s College Hospital, and the Canadian Council for Refugees.

Her contributions have been recognized with numerous awards, including the YWCA Women of Distinction Award for Social Justice, the Race Relations Award from the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from COSTI Immigrant Services. In 2023, Ms. Douglas was appointed to the Order of Canada for her lifelong dedication to advancing equity and justice in Canada.



# PLENARY SPEAKERS

**28**

*10:15 AM-11:30 AM*

*Shaping the Narrative: Building Support for Immigration*

*2:15 PM-3:30 PM*

*Crossroads: Canada's Shifting Immigration Policies and Impact on Newcomers*

**29**

*9:00 AM-10:15 AM*

*Engaging Reconciliation in the Settlement Sector*

*2:15 PM-3:30 PM*

*Inclusive Practices and Working with Vulnerable Newcomers*

**30**

*9:00 AM-10:15 AM*

*The Francophone Integration Pathway in Alberta*

*AAISA Settlement Practitioner Certification Ceremony*

# 28

*Plenary #1*

*10:15 AM - 11:30 AM*



## Shaping the Narrative: Building Support for Immigration

This plenary will explore how we can effectively shape public narratives around immigration in ways that foster understanding, empathy, and social cohesion. As the Canadian public narrative around immigration grows increasingly politicized, there is an urgent need for cross-sector strategies to combat misinformation and fear. Panelists will explore how service providers, decision makers and community leaders can collaborate to combat harmful narratives, highlight newcomers' contributions and engage in public education efforts that affirm the value of immigration. Together, we'll highlight innovative and evidence-based approaches for shifting perception, challenging misinformation and promote informed public discourse to create a more welcoming Alberta for all.

- Moderator: **Kathryn Friesen**, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- **Lisa de Gara**, Action for Healthy Communities
- **Dr. Kathryn Dennler**, World Education Services
- **Meghan Cunningham**, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies



# 28

*Plenary #2*  
*2:15 PM - 3:30 PM*



## **Crossroads: Canada's Shifting Immigration Policies and Impact on Newcomers**

Examine recent immigration shifts—such as Canada's updated immigration levels plan, changes to special humanitarian measures and increased border enforcement—which shape the newcomer experience and the work of newcomer service provider organizations. This session will also explore how changing dynamics in the U.S. administration influence Canada's immigration and border policies, particularly in relation to asylum seekers and cross-border movement. By exploring the impacts of evolving geo-political trends and policy shifts, we can strategize innovative responses to address the impacts of these developments and explore the most effective responses.

- Moderator: **Ashima Sumaru-Jurf**, Equity in Action
- **Jatin Shory**, Shory Law LLP
- **Orysia Boychuk**, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council
- **Dr. Jennifer Braun**, Concordia University

# 29

*Plenary #3*

*9:00 AM - 10:15 AM*



## Engaging Reconciliation in the Settlement Sector

This workshop draws on speaker experiences building bridges between newcomer and Indigenous communities. Speakers will share stories, frameworks, and actionable steps to help participants better understand their role in advancing reconciliation and belonging. Through interactive discussion and real-life examples, this session will explore the meaning and importance of reconciliation in the context of settlement work, how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action relate to newcomers and service providers, and practical ways to build relationships with Indigenous communities and integrate reconciliation into daily practice. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of historical context, inspiration for action, and tools to support reconciliation in their organizations and communities.

- Cheryl Whiskeyjack, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Omar Yaqub, Islamic Family



# 29

*Plenary #4*  
*2:15 PM - 3:30 PM*



## Inclusive Practices and Working with Vulnerable Newcomers

This session will focus on how the Alberta settlement sector can better support vulnerable newcomers – particularly refugees, displaced individuals, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQI+ and others from marginalized groups – through inclusive and intentional practices. We'll explore how service providers, policymakers, and community organizations can work together to promote equitable access to services, support community integration, and foster long-term success for those facing additional barriers. Panelists will share practical insights on addressing systemic challenges, implementing trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration to create more inclusive support systems for newcomers.

- Moderator: **Roxanne Felix-Mah**, Equity in Action
- **Tanvir Turin Chowdhury**, Cumming School of Medicine (University of Calgary)
- **Carolee Turner**, Centre for Newcomers
- **Boban Stojanovic**, Centre for Newcomers

# 30

*Plenary #5*

*9:00 AM - 10:15 AM*



## The Francophone Integration Pathway in Alberta

Francophone immigration is essential to maintaining the demographic weight of Francophones in Canada. Alberta consistently ranks among the top three provinces chosen by Francophone immigrants outside of Quebec. Strong collaboration among all stakeholders is necessary to provide appropriate settlement services, ensure successful integration, and support the retention of these newcomers. The “by and for” approach is key to meeting the specific needs of Francophones, as it builds trust and promotes cultural awareness. Cité des Rocheuses will present the results of a project aimed at raising awareness about the Francophone Integration Pathway (FIP). The Réseau en immigration francophone de l'Alberta (RIFA) will present how the FIP is being implemented on the ground and the range of services provided in Alberta. Key settlement actors serving the north and the south of the province, FRAP and CANAF, will provide insight into the settlement and integration services offered in these two regions.

- **Liana Kalognomou**, La Cité des Rocheuses
- **Amina Houfak Khoufak**, RIFA
- **Alphonse Ndem Ahola**, Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle
- **Esdras Ngenzi**, Centre d'Accueil des Nouveaux Arrivants Francophones



# BREAKOUT SESSIONS

**28**

*Block A - 11:45 AM-1:00 PM*

*Block B - 3:45 PM-5:00 PM*

**29**

*Block C - 11:45 AM-1:00 PM*

*Block D - 3:45 PM-5:00 PM*

**30**

*Block E - 10:45 AM-12:00 PM*

## **Mentorship in Action: Building Pathways for Success for Racialized Immigrant Youth**

This interactive session will explore the Mentorship and Resilience Project (MRP), a university-community partnership supporting racialized immigrant youth in Edmonton through bond and bridge mentorship frameworks. These approaches strengthen resilience, build relational networks, and improve career readiness. Participants will examine the MRP's design and implementation, gaining insights into how its equity-focused strategies can be adapted for schools, communities, and nonprofit programs. The session offers practical tools and real-world examples for mentoring professionals working with diverse youth populations. Ideal for those interested in inclusive, impactful mentorship models that address systemic barriers and support youth transitions to meaningful employment.

- **Cecilia Bukutu**, Concordia University of Edmonton
- **Viola Manokore**, NorQuest College
- **Michael Safo Ofori**, Concordia University of Edmonton





## **Connecting Newcomer Youth to Indigenous History and Culture: Insights from a Field Trip to the Treaty 7 Signing Site**

This presentation examines the transformative educational impact of a field trip to the Treaty 7 Signing Site on newcomer youth. In August 2024, 44 students in grades 7 to 12 visited Blackfoot Historical Park in Alberta, where Treaty 7 was signed between Indigenous chiefs and the Canadian government. The research findings underscore the significance of experiential learning in deepening students' understanding of Indigenous history and culture. The field trip provided a more profound impact than classroom instruction, fostering empathy, awareness and reconciliation. Furthermore, the students' sharing with their families created a ripple effect of cultural learning and understanding within newcomer communities.

- **Dinesh Koirala**, The Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth





## From Barriers to Bridges

Join AHC for an engaging café-style roundtable tailored for frontline staff and service agencies. This session explores barriers newcomers face in accessing mainstream mental health supports and highlights community-driven strategies that promote wellness. Through the interactive “From Barriers to Bridges” wall, participants will visually map challenges and co-create culturally responsive solutions. Facilitators will share proven practices to guide inclusive, strengths-based conversations. The event fosters shared learning, collaboration, and actionable steps to enhance service delivery—leading to stronger cultural competency, increased client trust, and improved mental health outcomes for individuals and communities through more intentional, effective engagement between clients and providers.

- Aureus Desmond, Action for Healthy Communities
- Javaid Hayat, Action for Healthy Communities

## Reviving Hujra in Alberta: A community-based model for men and family well-being among Afghan and Pashtun communities

The Pashtun diaspora in Alberta has grown significantly over recent years due to political and economic instability in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Central to Pashtun society is the Hujra, an Indigenous institution known for governance, peacebuilding, and social change. This study examines the implementation and effectiveness of the Hujra Night program, a culturally relevant initiative designed to respectfully engage Pashtun Canadian men in transformative learning and reflection on mental health, violence prevention, and family well-being. The findings highlight how the Hujra Night model effectively adapts traditional practices to new contexts like Alberta, offering a powerful framework for culturally responsive engagement with Afghan and Pashtun diasporic communities.

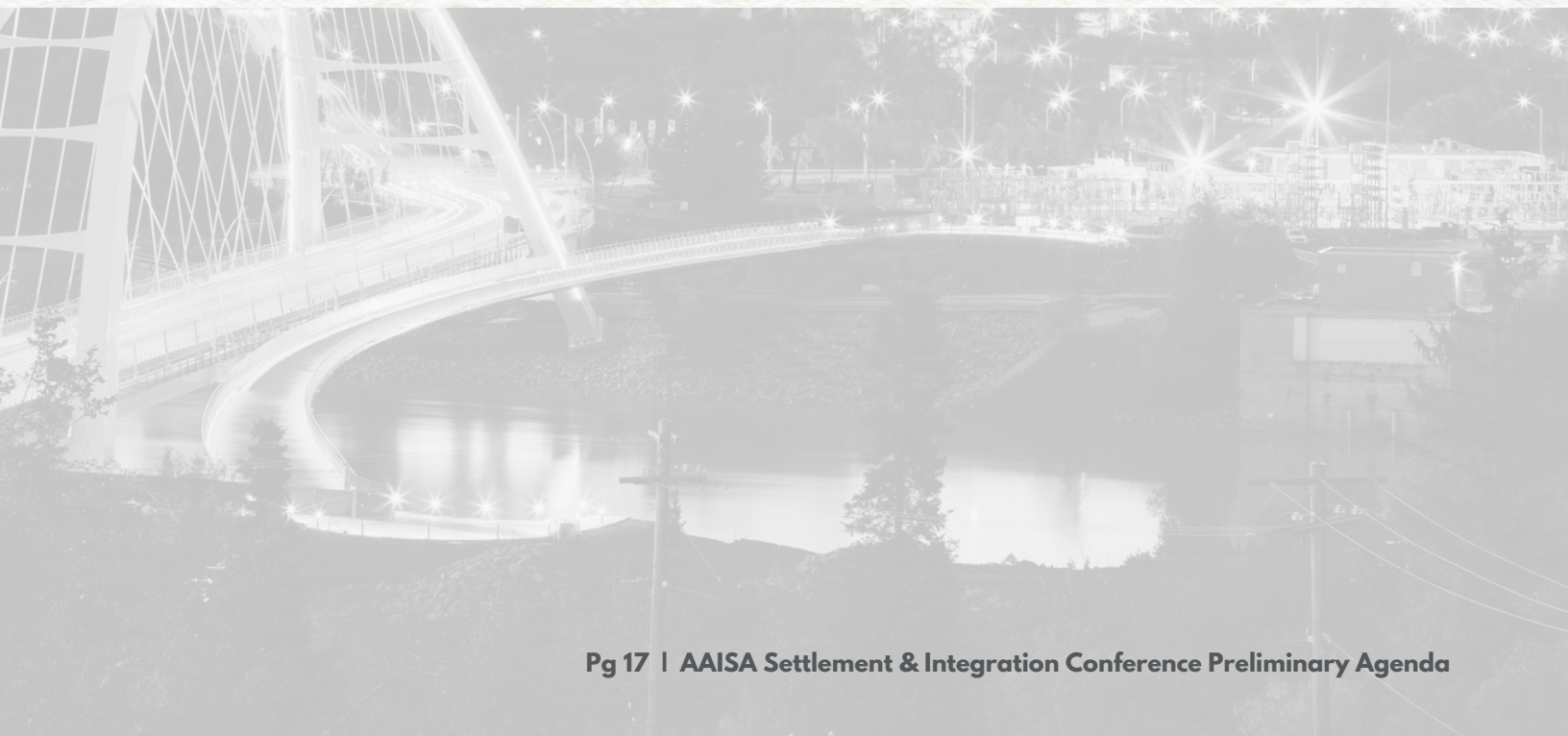
- Aamir Jamal, University of Calgary



## **Advancing Equity in Newcomer Services: Tools and Strategies for Change**

This hands-on workshop brings together educators, professionals in immigrant services, policymakers, and community collaborators to confront racism and structural barriers that hinder newcomer inclusion -especially for racialized individuals. A resource-rich Anti-racism Toolkit for combatting different forms of racism and promoting equity will be introduced at this session. Participants will draw on the toolkit, anti-racist approaches as well as shared stories and joint problem-solving strategies to: (1) uncover discriminatory practices in service delivery and organizational settings; (2) collaboratively design equity-driven solutions; and (3) begin outlining action plans with clear, measurable objectives. Participants will receive a toolkit of practical antiracism resources, equity-focused strategies and resources they can apply immediately, and opportunities to connect with others dedicated to fostering inclusive, culturally responsive environments throughout Canada's settlement and integration sector.

- **Maroro Zinyemba**, NorQuest College
- **Hellen Juma**, NorQuest College
- **Nicole Stewart**, NorQuest College





## **Beyond the Numbers: Humanizing the Impact of Immigration Policies on Migrant Workers**

This session will delve into the human impact of Canada's shifting immigration policies on migrant workers, highlighting the challenges they face—from exploitation and legal precarity to social stigma. Panelists will include from grassroots organization, agencies working in tourism-driven region, urban and rural communities. Together, they will explore the resilience of migrant workers, the systemic gaps exacerbated by policy changes, and the frontline efforts supporting them. Through lived experiences and practical recommendations, this session aims to amplify migrant voices, raise awareness and advocate for more compassionate, inclusive immigration practices.

- **Jessica Juen**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- **Alejandra Gil**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- **Harry Dominguez Barbosa**, Brooks & County Immigration Services
- **Namneet Singh**, Jasper Employment and Education Centre
- **Cynthia Palmera**, Migrante Alberta





## **Engagement, Connection, Integration: A Multi-faceted Approach to Rural Settlement**

This presentation highlights three innovative approaches to supporting rural communities in attracting, settling, and retaining newcomers. It will explore the READI program, which focuses on employer engagement; the WARM project, which brings together diverse community stakeholders; and the Community Readiness project, which supports the integration of international students in rural post-secondary institutions. Each initiative will share best practices, key lessons learned, and future directions, offering a holistic view of how to foster welcoming, inclusive rural communities and workplaces. Together, these models demonstrate collaborative and community-based strategies for successful newcomer integration in rural settings.

- Soheila Homayed, Rural Development Network
- Elaine Flores, Rural Development Network
- Zyna Taylor, Lethbridge Family Services

## **Bridging Gaps: Navigating Employment Challenges for Newcomers in Rural Alberta**

Rural Alberta is home to a growing number of newcomers with varying skill and language levels. Yet, many newcomers continue to face challenges in securing meaningful employment. This presentation delves into the real-world challenges they face, scarce job opportunities, cultural isolation, and the stigma surrounding mental health, while also highlighting stories of strength and perseverance. At the heart of the solution is the Rural Mentorship for Integration Program, which pairs newcomers with volunteer mentors to help them navigate employment, build connections, and thrive. Through compassion and collective effort, we can help create rural communities where everyone has the chance to thrive.

- Rodas Massey, Brooks and County Immigration Services
- Maricar Bernardo, Brooks and County Immigration Services



## Digital Transformation in a Gender-specific Environment

Digital transformation is rapidly reshaping industries, including the nonprofit sector. This session explores ways of supporting newcomers through digital change by addressing key challenges like digital literacy gaps, resistance to change, and the need for ongoing learning. It highlights practical strategies such as offering tailored services and fostering innovation and adaptability—critical in resource-limited, high-impact nonprofit settings. Leadership plays a central role in guiding and empowering newcomers through this shift. The panel discussion features four perspectives: leadership (vision, strategy, funding), services (day-to-day realities), data (evidence and quality), and a newcomer voice to share lived experience and authentic impact.

- Punam Dalal, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Eva Szasz-Redmond, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Nathalie Reyes, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Ketaki Wani, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association





## **From Words to Wellness: CIWA's Culturally Responsive Supports for Senior Immigrant Women**

This presentation showcases CIWA's culturally responsive approach to supporting senior immigrant women through two initiatives: a tailored language program and a grassroots inclusion effort. The Senior Language Support Program addresses cognitive, emotional, and practical needs, helping women acquire essential English skills and navigate Canadian systems. Grandma's Kitchen, a long-standing initiative, promotes social inclusion and well-being through storytelling, art, cultural sharing, and intergenerational connection. Both programs affirm cultural identity and reduce isolation. Attendees will explore replicable strategies, success stories, and practical tools to design community-based, culturally grounded programs that support integration, learning, and well-being among immigrant seniors.

- **Sofia Oprinoiu**, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- **Rosemary Scholten**, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- **Zaina Fatima Hazari**, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

## **Ready Together: Emergency Preparedness for Newcomer Communities**

Newcomer-serving agencies are essential pillars of support, helping individuals and families navigate life in a new country. As emergency events become more frequent in Canada, it's increasingly important that newcomers are equipped with the knowledge and tools to stay safe. This session is designed to empower agency staff with confidence and knowledge to integrate emergency preparedness into their programs and services. Through a blend of storytelling, facts, and hands-on tips, we'll explore common risks and hazards in Alberta, and how to best support newcomers in ensuring their own emergency preparedness.

- **Amanda Sobierajski**, Alberta Emergency Management Agency (Government of Alberta)



## Engaging and Working With Newcomers

This presentation is related to a project started by the Edmonton Newcomer Centre called Cultural Advantage. This project looks at taking the lived experience of both newcomers and employers and creating intercultural competency learnings designed to enable Alberta employers to grow and thrive, on the strength of their diverse, engaged workforces. The aim is to achieve this by creating interculturally robust work environments that allow workers to feel more stable, happy, and fulfilled. It includes elements like how to engage with newcomers, improving communication, inclusive hiring, and strategies for long-term employee retention.

- Julie Rea McCrea, Edmonton Newcomer Centre

## Gateway to Impact: Transforming Settlement Support Through Digital Collaboration

As immigration policy and service demands continue to evolve, digital transformation has become critical for effective settlement support. Immigrant Services Calgary scaled Gateway from a pilot to a city-wide designated NAARS provider using a structured change management approach. Powered by Salesforce, Gateway streamlines client intake, triage, personalized planning, and targeted referrals across 90+ partners. Gateway functions as a collaborative infrastructure enabling real-time data, tracking client journeys, supporting cross-sector coordination, and driving continuous improvement. This session offers practical insights for leaders managing complex change and showcases how aligning people, process, and purpose can transform innovation into a sustainable, scalable service model.

- Abdallah Abushammala, Immigrant Services Calgary
- Amy He, Immigrant Services Calgary
- Wissam Shalaby, Immigrant Services Calgary
- Zohaib Ajaz Faridi, Immigrant Services Calgary



## **Tailored Attraction, Integration, and Retention Strategies for Northern Ecosystems (TAIGA RISE)**

Northern communities in Canada face unique challenges in attracting and retaining newcomers due to population decline, labor shortages, and limited settlement infrastructure. Tailored Attraction, Integration, and Retention Strategies for Northern Ecosystems (TAIGA RISE) is an innovative project funded by IRCC. Through a community-based approach, the project develops culturally responsive tools to support newcomers in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. By engaging local communities and Indigenous leaders, TAIGA RISE strengthens regional capacity and fosters inclusive, sustainable integration strategies that empower both newcomers and established residents.

- **Hamed Kazemzadeh**, Centre for Immigrant Research, The Immigrant Education Society
- **Nova Zeraati**, Centre for Immigrant Research, The Immigrant Education Society
- **Amanda Ong**, Centre for Immigrant Research, The Immigrant Education Society





## **Bridging Borders: Conversations That Matter**

This workshop explores immigration through the lens of meaningful dialogue, inviting participants to engage in open, respectful, and transformative conversations. Rooted in communication theory and practice, the session equips attendees with tools to navigate complex narratives, challenge assumptions, and build empathy. By fostering inclusive dialogue, we aim to shift perspectives and strengthen community understanding of immigration's human impact. Key Takeaways: 1. Learn how to frame and facilitate productive conversations on immigration. 2. Develop skills to recognize and challenge communication barriers and biases. 3. Gain tools to foster empathy, inclusion, and mutual respect in diverse discussions.

- Denise Young, Tiger's Eye Advisory Group

## **Community Allyship: Addressing Anti-Immigration Sentiment**

We'll explore our multi-pronged approach to countering racism and anti-immigrant attitudes in Medicine Hat. This includes partnering with local law enforcement to document hate-motivated incidents and integrating police and security services into our "Thrive Together" welcoming campaign. We are also moving beyond service delivery to engage in active advocacy for those we serve. By mobilizing community members and organizations, we map and amplify local anti-racism initiatives and work to address anti-immigration sentiment at the neighbourhood level, fostering safer, more inclusive communities from the ground up.

- Sadiki Bamperineza, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- Harry Dominguez Barbosa, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- Sherrisa Celis, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society



## **Advancing Equity Through Evidence: A Research-Led, Holistic, Culturally Competent GBV Support Model for Immigrant Women and Families**

This interactive workshop introduces a promising practice model developed by the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) to address Gender-Based Violence (GBV) among immigrant, refugee, and newcomer women. Grounded in research and lived experience, the model is evidence-based, holistic, and culturally competent. It fills critical service gaps through accessible in-person and online support. Participants will explore best practices, share insights, and discuss systemic change. The session also invites feedback on the model's digital adaptability across regions, aiming to promote inclusive, trauma-informed, and sustainable GBV responses in diverse communities through co-learning and collaborative dialogue.

- Shamsa Mistry, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Ivana Calina, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

## **Pathways to Recovery and Resilience: Integrated Wraparound Case Management to Support Immigrant GBV Survivors and Seniors with Disabilities**

The presentation will explore key vulnerabilities within the immigrant experience, with a particular emphasis on addressing GBV. It will highlight a comprehensive approach to supporting vulnerable women on their journey toward healing, drawing on direct experience in working with GBV survivors. Topics include empowering interventions, the complex impact of GBV on mental health, trauma-informed care practices, and community-driven initiatives that promote resilience. The presentation will also examine the critical need for tailored wraparound case management strategies for seniors with disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among professionals, caregivers, and community stakeholders to foster the well-being of this population. The discussion will focus on wraparound case management, success stories, ongoing challenges, and emphasize the value of interdisciplinary partnerships between healthcare providers, social workers, and community.

- Shamaila Akram, Centre for Newcomers
- Trina Rahimi, Centre for Newcomers
- Chris Vitale, Centre for Newcomers



## **#LandBack as Settle(ment) Work: Implications for Stakeholders**

This presentation examines the core sentiments of the #LandBack movement on Turtle Island, and how it represents holistic efforts to reintegrate the original spirit and intent of treaties into relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. Together, (and utilizing an anti-oppressive and decolonized lens), participants will explore the roles and responsibilities leaders and frontline practitioners in the settlement sector (as well as newcomers to Canada) all have in work that advances truth, social justice, and reconciliation on these territories.

- **Alexandru Caldararu**, NorQuest College
- **Wanda Chell**, NorQuest College





## **Applying for permanent residence in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds: from a pathway of "last resort" to the only realistic option**

The Canadian immigration law and policy have been shifting towards the deliberate reduction of temporary residents and permanent residents to be admitted into Canada. As the regular programs and pathways to obtain permanent residence (PR) are becoming more restricted and even unattainable, PR applications on humanitarian and compassionate (H&C) grounds are turning into the ONLY viable option for numerous foreign nationals already in Canada. This session will offer a comprehensive overview of H&C applications: eligibility and prohibitions, document requirements, application process, assessment factors used by the governmental decision-makers. Critically, the presentation will focus on how to build strong and persuasive H&C cases through the supporting documentary evidence, and how non-legal service-providers to newcomers can assist their clients to prepare compelling and well-substantiated applications.

- **Anna Kuranicheva**, Immigration lawyer at Edmonton Community Legal Centre





## **Digital Inclusion for Newcomers with Disabilities: Building Readiness in a Tech-Driven Era**

As technology becomes more embedded in daily life, it is vital to ensure that all newcomers, including those with diverse abilities, are digitally prepared to navigate learning, work, and community engagement. This session explores the intersection of accessibility, inclusion, and digital literacy within Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs.

- **Yuanliang Zhu**, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- **Heather Mack**, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

## **Navigating the Complex World of Disabilities (Mental, Physical, Cognitive)**

This session will be presented in an interactive and teaching format and will explore the complex challenges of disabilities for Government Assisted Refugees within the Canadian Context. We will look at the challenges of navigating government systems as well as clients challenges with technology. This will be followed by a step-by-step process for working with clients with disabilities.

- **Marren Pluchinski**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- **Binita Pandey**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society



## **Empowering Newcomers Through AI and Digital Tools in Language Instruction**

This presentation explores how AI and digital tools can transform language instruction for newcomers, supporting both language development and digital literacy. Participants will discover how AI-powered language learning apps and interactive digital platforms create engaging, personalized learning experiences. The session offers practical strategies for integrating these technologies into curriculum while aligning with learner-centered pedagogy. Educators will reflect on successful implementations where digital tools improved learner engagement, retention, and outcomes. By embracing AI and digital innovation, instructors can better support newcomers in navigating digital transformation and preparing for further education and participation in a tech-driven society.

- Elina Stop, NorQuest College

## **Programming Made Simple: For Newcomers with Limited Schooling**

The presentation will explore key vulnerabilities within the immigrant experience, with a particular emphasis on addressing GBV. It will highlight a comprehensive approach to supporting vulnerable women on their journey toward healing, drawing on direct experience in working with GBV survivors. Topics include empowering interventions, the complex impact of GBV on mental health, trauma-informed care practices, and community-driven initiatives that promote resilience. The presentation will also examine the critical need for tailored wraparound case management strategies for seniors with disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among professionals, caregivers, and community stakeholders to foster the well-being of this population. The discussion will focus on wraparound case management, success stories, ongoing challenges, and emphasize the value of interdisciplinary partnerships between healthcare providers, social workers, and community.

- Himan Iman, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Afra Shirazi, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association



## Labour Trafficking is Human Trafficking

Did you know that labour trafficking is happening within Alberta? Immigration and newcomer status presents unique challenges in its intersection with human trafficking. Having increased vulnerabilities and risk factors as newcomers, the ability to identify and interrupt exploitation is crucial in maintaining safety and wellbeing. This presentation will discuss labour trafficking within the province, who may be impacted, signs and indicators, settlement challenges, and how ACT Alberta can support.

- **Kevin Sun**, ACT Alberta Education Specialist
- **Michelle Trudeau**, ACT Alberta Victim Response Supervisor





## **IMPRESS Program: Building Evaluation Capacity and Data-Driven Programming in Canada's Settlement Sector**

Looking for better ways to collect meaningful data, analyze it efficiently, and improve your programs? The YMCA-led, IRCC-funded 'IMPRESS' program is designed to help SPOs shift from assumptions to evidence, equipping the sector with tools and insights to strengthen outcomes for newcomers. The program features an online platform with customizable, multilingual surveys and easy, automated analytics that make interpreting results effortless. With automated reports, visual dashboards, SPOs will be able to identify strengths, uncover gaps, and demonstrate impact with confidence. Join us to explore real examples, experience platform features, and see how 'IMPRESS' can help transform data into strategy across the settlement sector.

- **Farah Khattab**, Integrated Measurement for Performance, Review, and Enhanced Settlement Services Program, YMCA of the National Capital Region
- **Noha Zaher**, Integrated Measurement for Performance, Review, and Enhanced Settlement Services Program, YMCA of the National Capital Region
- **Andrew Dawson**, Integrated Measurement for Performance, Review, and Enhanced Settlement Services Program, YMCA of the National Capital Region
- **Daniela Ciliberti**, Integrated Measurement for Performance, Review, and Enhanced Settlement Services Program, YMCA of the National Capital Region
- **Ana Patenaude**, Integrated Measurement for Performance, Review, and Enhanced Settlement Services Program, YMCA of the National Capital Region





## How to Become Settlement Practitioner Certified

AAISA offers the only settlement practitioner certification program in Canada and aims to strengthen the skills and recognize the professional expertise of settlement practitioners in Alberta. This workshop will highlight the advantages of certification, discuss levels 2 and 3 certification, and walk participants through the steps and requirements on how to obtain certification. With representatives from AAISA's professional development team and from the Professional Training and Certification Committee, we can answer all related to certification to become certified!

- **Laura Fryer**, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- **Elaine Malinis**, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- **Amy Trang Mai**, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies





## **SettleSMART: Transforming Newcomer Supports with Digital Innovation**

Advanced digital technology in the settlement sector has the potential to transform how newcomers access essential information and support. However, there is a significant gap in the timely and accurate delivery of services. To address this, SettleSMART: Supporting Messaging and Assistance Resource Technology is an innovative project funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Using a mixed-method approach, the project will pilot AI-driven tools, including a 24/7 ChatBot and a moderated peer-to-peer GroupChat platform, to enhance access to settlement resources and build the digital capacity of Service Provider Organizations across Alberta.

- Nova Zeraati, The Immigrant Education Society
- Hamed Kazemzadeh, The Immigrant Education Society
- Amanda Ong, The Immigrant Education Society

## **Disrupting Inequities in Settlement for Black Newcomer Women**

This presentation focuses on the Africa Centre's Disrupting Inequities in Settlement for Black Newcomer Women project, funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada. The initiative addresses systemic barriers limiting Black newcomer women's economic security and prosperity, emphasizing equitable access to employment, housing, and settlement services. Utilizing a community-driven approach, the project engages Black immigrant women and girls, cultural navigators, community leaders, policymakers, and settlement agencies to collaboratively identify gaps, share lived experiences, and recommend systemic changes. By pairing fellows with settlement agencies, the project creates opportunities for firsthand insights to inform policy, enhance service delivery, and advance equity within the settlement sector. The ultimate goal is to ensure Black newcomer women can access opportunities that reflect their skills, education, and aspirations, while driving systemic change for long-term impact.

- Halima Mohamud, Africa Centre
- Olubusola Onasile, Africa Centre



# 30

*Block E - Breakout Session #1*  
*10:45 AM - 12:00 PM*



## Building Equitable Newcomer Crisis Help

BENCH aims to create an effective crisis response for newcomers in Calgary. This collaborative project draws from the strengths of its partner agencies to create a coordinated response for newcomers in crisis. The project's success stems from a collaborative approach: support between counsellors at different agencies, extensive training in crisis intervention models, meaningful supervision, leveraging language resources, deepening cross-cultural practice in crisis work, and building capacity within our partner agencies. The project will share its model of service, learnings from the pilot phase, success factors, and emerging best practices based on research and evaluation.

- **Jill Edgington Kirby**, The Immigrant Education Society
- **Aqsa Iqbal**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- **Elizabeth Garcia Hinestroza**, Centre for Newcomers

## A Tapestry of Care

The TAPESTRY project engages with ethnocultural communities within a dynamic process of shared learning for mental health. The project aims to reduce stigma and build community capacity to respond to mental health crisis. But the project recognizes a deeper need to make change in the mental health system: to promote a more diverse system of care that would better suit the communities' needs. In the time spent with six diverse ethnocultural groups, the project listened to their perspectives and learned about aspects of the current mental health system that create barriers to participation. Presenters highlight the two-way learning within engagement and share the themes that emerged in the dialogue with communities, as well as how they utilized this feedback in working with partners to improve service delivery.

- **Jill Edgington Kirby**, The Immigrant Education Society
- **Aqsa Iqbal**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society



# 30

*Block E - Breakout Session #2*  
*10:45 AM - 12:00 PM*



## **Staying Well in Times of Challenging Public Perception on Immigration**

Providing settlement services can be challenging as needs are always changing and resources tend to be limited. In recent years, stress has increased as a result of public and political hostility towards immigration support. Staying well emotionally, socially, and physically helps us to build resilience and navigate these pressures more effectively while staying active in civic life, advocating for fair policies, and sharing the advantages of our beautiful diversity. This session is designed to make space to name the challenges and focus on strategies that will help carry us forward together.

- **Kari McCluskey**, Resilia Community Wellness Centre
- **Abdikheir Ahmed**, Resilia Community Wellness Centre





## Health and well-being among immigrant youth in Canada

This presentation will share results of a study on the 2017-2018 data of the Canadian Community Health Survey with a focus on immigrant youth. Addressed will be the impact and, through interactions, its complexity between two or more social determinants of health and well being such as sex, age, cultural/racial background, household income, and immigration status and wellbeing measures such as health, mental health, anxiety disorder, sleep difficulties, food security, and social provisions. Prevalence of health and mental health of youth will be shared, as well as implications on program and policy development will be discussed.

- Dora Tam, University of Calgary
- Ewa Rambally, University of Calgary

## Grassroots Accelerator Program: Sustainable Capacity Building Initiative

Learn about the new Grassroots Accelerator Program (GAP), a PNT-wide initiative focused on building the capacity of grassroot organizations who serve newcomers, especially those that are led by and serve different equity deserving groups. GAP is a program with two components; one where we bring Grassroots together to create a collective that allows these organizations to support one another and address systemic barriers together. The second component comprises of funding a select number of grassroots to build their individual organizational capacity. With an overall sentiment that good things take time and great things take capacity, and the GAP is here to support.

- Laura Fryer, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- Tanisi Pooran, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- Crystal Guzmán, Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies



## **Empowering Newcomer Youth: Belonging, Leadership, and Voice through Inclusive Programming**

This interactive roundtable explores three inclusive AHC programs designed to empower racialized newcomer youth: the GELL STEM program for girls, anti-racism digital storytelling with BIPOC youth, and inclusive soccer/sports initiatives. Each was created in response to systemic barriers in education, representation, and belonging. Through discussion, multimedia, and activities, participants will unpack how culturally responsive, intersectional approaches can foster leadership, resilience, and connection. Attendees will engage with youth-led stories, explore program outcomes, and gain practical tools to co-create safe, empowering spaces that center newcomer voices, build skills, and challenge inequities in meaningful, community-driven ways.

- **Aisulu Abdykadyrova**, Action for Healthy Communities
- **Kevwe Dabor**, Action for Healthy Communities
- **Omar Al-abdullah**, Action for Healthy Communities
- **Abigail Gallimore**, Action for Healthy Communities

## **From Classrooms to Communities: Engaging Youth, Empowering Futures**

Care for Newcomers' High School Outreach initiative connects newcomer youth with meaningful volunteer opportunities through partnerships with schools and community organizations. By aligning volunteer hours with academic credit, the program boosts student engagement while supporting personal growth and community connection. Youth gain confidence and real-world experience, and through cultural presentations and public outreach, they help foster greater understanding and inclusion. This session highlights how strategic outreach empowers youth and builds stronger, more connected communities.

- **Karen Hackenbrook**, Care for Newcomers Society
- **Ola Zein**, Care for Newcomers Society
- **Blerta Llupi**, Care for Newcomers Society



# 30

*Block E - Breakout Session #5*  
*10:45 AM - 12:00 PM*



## Reciprocity as a Practice of Systemic Belonging

This roundtable explores how reciprocity can transform institutional practices in post-secondary and community-serving contexts. Drawing from the Faculty of Social Work's Reciprocity Project, it examines how academia, immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations, non-profits, private industry, and government can co-create equitable systems that advance belonging and inclusion. Participants will engage in dialogue on collective responsibility, ethical practice, and trust-based relationships for systemic impact—particularly as they relate to immigrant, racialized, and newcomer communities. This session presents the Reciprocity Project as a model for embedding reciprocal practices within post-secondary institutions, in collaboration with community. Rooted in equity, inclusion, and decolonization, the project challenges institutional hierarchies by engaging internal and external partners in shared leadership and mutual accountability. Through cross-sectoral work—including with newcomer-focused organizations—we are working to realign institutional culture with a collective purpose grounded in community-defined needs, shared benefit, and systemic transformation. Participants will discuss the evolving role of institutions as facilitators—not just providers—of knowledge, and how reciprocal relationships can inform ethical governance, collaborative research, and socially responsive education. Lessons learned include the challenges of shifting power, navigating sectoral tensions, and operationalizing principles such as humility, allyship, and cultural stewardship. This session invites dialogue among scholars, service providers, and community leaders on how reciprocity can become a foundation for building inclusive and just systems—especially for immigrant and newcomer populations.

- Rochelle Deloria, University of Calgary
- Inara Nanji, University of Calgary

## Co-Creation and Cultural Accountability: Designing for Racial Equity in Non-Profit Education

This interactive workshop shares a case study of the Non-Profit Leadership Program (NPL), a hybrid, culturally responsive leadership development initiative designed by two racialized women within the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work. Co-created with grassroots and mid-sized organizations serving immigrant, racialized, and refugee communities, the NPL offers a living model of community-led learning rooted in care, reciprocity, and accountability. Participants will explore how co-design, mentorship, and participant-centred approaches supported racialized professionals—many working in newcomer-serving roles—to build leadership capacity while staying connected to community identities and ways of knowing. Facilitators will share tools, tensions, and lessons learned while working across institutional and community lines, including how we navigated insider/outsider positions as racialized women in academia. Interactive components will include: Exercise: "What would your ideal leadership program look like?" Reflective prompts on positionality and responsibility. This session is designed for practitioners, educators, and researchers reimagining professional development as a site for equity and transformation—particularly within newcomer- and immigrant-serving contexts. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for embedding cultural responsiveness into curriculum design, feedback loops, and mentorship practices, while interrogating how institutions can support, not extract from, community-based leadership knowledge.

- Inara Nanji, University of Calgary
- Rochelle Deloria, University of Calgary



# POSTER PRESENTATIONS

*Poster presentations will be hosted in a designated area all three days of the conference  
(October 28-30, 2025)*



# 28-30

*Poster Presentation #1*



## **Innovative Approaches to Equity and Overcoming Barriers for Racialized Youth**

This poster examines how the Mentorship and Resilience Project (MRP) in Edmonton addresses systemic racism through culturally responsive mentorship and structured training in equity, cultural competency, and resilience. MRP fosters youth development by equipping Racialized youth with tools to navigate and overcome systemic barriers. Drawing on participant experiences, mentor feedback, and program outcomes, this study explores how mentorship disrupts cycles of exclusion. Key findings highlight the transformative potential of culturally aligned mentorship in advancing equity and resilience among marginalized youth.

- **Cecilia Bukutu**, Concordia University of Edmonton
- **Viola Manokore**, NorQuest College
- **Michael Safo Ofori**, Concordia University of Edmonton





# 28-30

*Poster Presentation #2*



## **Mentorship as a Catalyst: Building Social Capital for Black Immigrant Youth**

Black immigrant youth often face systemic barriers and limited access to professional networks. This poster explores how the Mentorship and Resilience Project (MRP), a university-community initiative in Edmonton, enables these youth to build and activate social capital through a culturally responsive mentorship approach. Using bond mentorship for emotional support and bridge mentorship for career connections, MRP helps participants expand networks and gain industry insights. Key components—such as mentor-mentee matching and professional development workshops—support youth career readiness. Findings illustrate how this mentorship approach strengthens social capital as a pathway to academic achievement and workforce inclusion.

- **Cecilia Bukutu**, Concordia University of Edmonton
- **Viola Manokore**, NorQuest College
- **Michael Safo Ofori**, Concordia University of Edmonton





# 28-30

*Poster Presentation #3*



## **Supporting Newcomer Pregnant Women and Young Families: Insights from a 2025 Community Needs Assessment**

This poster presents findings from a 2025 Community Needs Assessment led by Newcomer Knowledge Hub, an Immigrant Services Calgary's initiative established in collaboration with the University of Calgary's School of Social Work. The study aimed at identifying key barriers faced by newcomer pregnant women and families with young children using data from surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Key challenges included service fragmentation, language barriers, childcare inaccessibility, and financial strain. The poster visually synthesizes these insights and offers recommendations for integrated, culturally responsive service improvements. ISC's Gateway model is featured as an innovative approach informing policy, practice, and collaboration to better support newcomer families.

- Zohaib Ajaz Faridi, Immigrant Services Calgary
- Wissam Shalaby, Immigrant Services Calgary





# 28-30

*Poster Presentation #4*



## **Training the Future Generation of Settlement Workers: Lessons Learned from Social Work Field Education**

This poster will share lessons learned in preparing students for practice through practicum education in the Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) partnership project. The goal of this project, funded by a SSHRC Partnership Grant, is to integrate research and practice in the preparation of the next generation of social workers by developing partnered research training initiatives, both within academia and across the public and not-for-profit sectors, that enhance student and trainee research practice knowledge and applied skill development. Implications for training and mentoring the future generation of settlement workers will be shared drawing from lessons learned in Alberta and Quebec.

- Dr. Julie Drolet, University of Calgary
- Kamal Khatiwada, University of Calgary

