

2025 AAISA Settlement & Integration Conference

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

FINAL PROGRAM

October 28-30, 2025

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

Thank you for joining us at #AAISA2025!



**Post-conference, access shared presentation slide
decks and photos!**

**Follow our
LinkedIn!**



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Instagram!**

Wi-Fi: Network – Wyndham Meetings | Password – wecare

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AAISA acknowledges that we are gathered on Treaty 6 territory – the traditional lands of diverse Indigenous Peoples, including the Nêhiyaw, Dene, Anishinaabe, Nakota Isga, and Niitsitapi peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples who have lived in and cared for these lands since time immemorial. We are grateful for the Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are with us today and those who have gone before us.

As we gather for this year's Settlement and Integration Conference to learn how to better support newcomers arriving to new lands, we must also recognize that our work in the immigration and settlement sector cannot be separated from the land on which we live and serve. The opportunities and systems that allow us to welcome newcomers exist within the context of colonization, broken treaties, and ongoing disruption of the ways of life of Indigenous Peoples on this land.

We recognize that we must do better to undo the harms of colonialism and white supremacy, and in doing so help us better serve the newcomer lives we touch. As a starting point, we seek opportunities to support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, while listening to, respecting and centering diverse Indigenous voices, and using our power to make space, in relationship, for Indigenous resurgence.

WELCOMING MESSAGE

Kathryn Friesen, Executive Director

On behalf of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, it is our great pleasure to welcome you to the 2025 AAISA Settlement and Integration Conference.

Our sector is strong, but we do not often have a chance to come together. This biannual gathering is a treasured opportunity for those working in the settlement and integration sector—across Alberta and beyond—to come together in community. It is a time to share knowledge, build relationships, and reaffirm our collective commitment to supporting newcomers in Canada.

This year's theme is **Navigating Change: Immigration Policy, Perceptions, and the Road Ahead**. As a sector, we've weathered rapid changes and shifting narratives, and this conference is designed to meet those head-on. We are proud to host a diverse group of frontline experts, specialists, academics, and thought leaders who will offer critical insights and perspectives to help us move forward with clarity and purpose.

Together, we can be creative, collaborative, and courageous—to name our shared values and strengthen knowledge and networks that will guide us on the road ahead. At the heart of our work is a deep belief in the value of newcomers and the understanding that they enrich our communities and deserve every opportunity to thrive.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all who made this conference possible: To Elder Janet Paskemin, for opening our gathering and grounding us on the land, reminding us of our Treaty responsibilities and the importance of building relationships between newcomers, Indigenous communities, and ourselves. To Amira Elghawaby and Debbie Douglas, for traveling from Ontario to help launch our conference with their powerful voices. To our incredible speakers, presenters, and moderators for shaping such a rich and thoughtful agenda. To our sponsors, listed in the conference program, for supporting our event, making it accessible to a more diverse audience. To the AAISA Board, for their unwavering support in forging ahead with this conference in uncertain times. To each of you, for taking time from your busy schedules to be here and contribute to these vital conversations. And to the remarkable AAISA staff—your dedication, talent, and commitment to our sector is inspirational and humbling.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We look forward to a meaningful and energizing conference together.

Warm regards,
Kathryn Friesen

WHAT TO EXPECT

At the AAISA Conference, Pt 1.

Welcome to the 2025 AAISA Conference – a day to connect, learn, and strengthen the settlement and integration sector in Alberta. Here's what you can look forward to:

Opening & Plenary Sessions

We'll begin our gathering with Elder Janet Paskemin, grounding us on the land and reflecting on our Treaty responsibilities and the importance of building relationships between newcomers, Indigenous communities, and each other.

Our plenary speakers will then set the stage with powerful insights:

- Amira Elghawaby, Canada's first Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia – a nationally recognized journalist, human-rights advocate, and policy leader advancing Canada's commitment to counter hate and strengthen social cohesion.
- Debbie Douglas, C.M., Executive Director of Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Member of the Order of Canada, whose decades of leadership have shaped immigrant and refugee rights, gender equity, and anti-racism practice across the country.

Concurrent Breakout Sessions & Workshops

Explore over 25 interactive breakout sessions across various thematic blocks including:

- Rural settlement
- Digital innovation
- Anti-racism
- Organizational wellness
- Newcomer well-being
- Indigenous connections
- Vulnerable newcomers (immigrant youth, seniors, disabilities)
- Newcomer employment
- And more!

These sessions offer a balanced mix of practical tools and research-informed insights to support your work on the ground.

Networking Opportunities

Make meaningful connections with peers, partners, and sector leaders during our Networking Session on October 29, 2025, from 10:15–11:30 AM in the Atrium on the first floor of the venue.

This is a great chance to share ideas, spark collaborations, and meet others shaping the future of the sector.

Sponsor Presentations & Exhibits

Our sponsors play a key role in making this event possible.

- Visit sponsor booths throughout the day to explore tools, services, and opportunities.
- Attend short presentations during the networking session on October 29 to learn how sponsors are supporting the sector.

WHAT TO EXPECT

At the AAISA Conference, Pt. 2

Door Prizes & Giveaways

We are adding a little extra excitement to your conference experience! Door prize draws will take place during the Closing Keynote on the final day of the conference, from 12:00 to 12:30 p.m. in the Plenary Hall. Make sure to stick around until the end. Your name might be called!

No extra steps are required to enter. Each attendee's ticket number is automatically included in the draw. Prizes include Edmonton Oilers tickets, specialized Indigenous gift boxes, and more. Details about the draws will also be shared at registration and announced during sessions.

Community Giving – Food Donation Box Courtesy of Edmonton Food Bank

We're proud to partner with Edmonton Food Bank to support our local community.

- Bring a non-perishable food item to contribute.
- The donation box available at the registration area throughout all three conference days.

Art Installation “Faces of Domestic Violence:

A collaboration between Dr. Wendy Aujla (Athabasca University) and psychologist-artist Heidi Erisman, Faces of Domestic Violence transforms research on South Asian immigrant women's lived experiences of abuse into powerful watercolour storyboards. Through visual storytelling and participant quotes, the installation sheds light on the complex realities of domestic violence, help-seeking barriers, and resilience within cultural communities. This art installation will be displayed throughout the conference apart from the other poster presentations, adjacent to the Jubilee Room.

Content Warning: This art-based knowledge mobilization project explores themes of domestic violence, trauma, and survival. While it honours the resilience of victim-survivors and raises awareness, engaging with the content may be emotionally difficult for some.

Share Your Experience

Join the conversation and help showcase the sector's impact.

- Use #AAISA2025 on social media.
- Tag us on LinkedIn & Instagram (@aaisacommunications).
- Scan the QR codes placed throughout the venue to easily share your posts.

See our
LinkedIn!



See our
Instagram!

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Day 1 - October 28

Time	Session
7:30 – 8:30 AM	Registration/Breakfast
8:30 – 10:15 AM	Opening Ceremony
10:15 – 11:30 AM	Plenary - Shaping the Narrative: Building Support for Immigration
11:30 – 11:45 AM	Break/Poster Presentations
11:45 – 1:00 PM	Breakout Sessions - Block A • <i>Mentorship in Action: Building Pathways for Success for Racialized Immigrant Youth</i> • <i>Connecting Newcomer Youth to Indigenous History and Culture: Insights from a Field Trip to the Treaty 7 Signing Site</i> • <i>From Barriers to Bridges</i> • <i>Reviving Hujra in Alberta: A community-based model for men and family well-being among Afghan and Pashtun communities</i> • <i>Advancing Equity in Newcomer Services: Tools and Strategies for Change</i> • <i>Beyond the Numbers: Humanizing the Impact of Immigration Policies on Migrant Workers</i>
1:00 – 2:15 PM	Lunch
2:15 – 3:30 PM	Plenary - Crossroads: Canada's Shifting Immigration Policies and Impact on Newcomers
3:30 – 3:45 PM	Break/Poster Presentations
3:45 – 5:00 PM	Breakout Sessions - Block B • <i>Engagement, Connection, Integration: A Multi-faceted Approach to Rural Settlement</i> • <i>Bridging Gaps: Navigating Employment Challenges for Newcomers in Rural Alberta</i> • <i>Digital Transformation in a Gender-specific Environment</i> • <i>From Words to Wellness: CIWA's Culturally Responsive Supports for Senior Immigrant Women</i> • <i>Ready Together: Emergency Preparedness for Newcomer Communities</i> • <i>Engaging and Working With Newcomers</i> • <i>Gateway to Impact: Transforming Settlement Support Through Digital Collaboration</i> • <i>Tailored Attraction, Integration, and Retention Strategies for Northern Ecosystems (TAIGA RISE)</i>

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Day 2 - October 29

Time	Session
8:00 – 9:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00 – 10:15 AM	Plenary - Engaging Reconciliation in the Settlement Sector
10:15 – 11:30 AM	Networking Session
11:30 – 1:00 PM	Breakout Sessions - Block C • <i>Community Allyship: Addressing Anti-Immigration Sentiment</i> • <i>Advancing Equity Through Evidence: A Research-Led, Holistic, Culturally Competent GBV Support Model for Immigrant Women and Families</i> • <i>Pathways to Recovery and Resilience: Integrated Wraparound Case Management to Support Immigrant GBV Survivors and Seniors with Disabilities</i> • <i>#LandBack as Settle(ment) Work: Implications for Stakeholders</i> • <i>Applying for permanent residence in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds: from a pathway of "last resort" to the only realistic option</i> • <i>Digital Inclusion for Newcomers with Disabilities: Building Readiness in a Tech-Driven Era</i> • <i>Navigating the Complex World of Disabilities (Mental, Physical, Cognitive)</i>
1:00 – 2:15 PM	Lunch/Poster Presentations
2:15 – 3:30 PM	Plenary - Inclusive Practices and Working with Vulnerable Newcomers
3:30 – 3:45 PM	Break/Poster Presentations
3:45 – 5:00 PM	Breakout Sessions - Block D • <i>Empowering Newcomers Through AI and Digital Tools in Language Instruction</i> • <i>Programming Made Simple: For Newcomers with Limited Schooling</i> • <i>Labour Trafficking is Human Trafficking</i> • <i>IMPRESS Program: Building Evaluation Capacity and Data-Driven Programming in Canada's Settlement Sector</i> • <i>How to Become Settlement Practitioner Certified</i> • <i>SettleSMART: Transforming Newcomer Supports with Digital Innovation</i> • <i>Disrupting Inequities in Settlement for Black Newcomer Women</i>

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Day 3 - October 30

Time	Session
8:00 – 9:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00 – 10:15 AM	Plenary - The Francophone Integration Pathway in Alberta AAISA Settlement Practitioner Certification Ceremony
10:15 – 10:45 AM	Break/Poster Presentations
10:45 – 12:00 PM	Breakout Sessions - Block E • <i>Building Equitable Newcomer Crisis Help</i> • <i>A Tapestry of Care</i> • <i>Staying Well in Times of Challenging Public Perception on Immigration</i> • <i>Health and well-being among immigrant youth in Canada</i> • <i>Grassroots Accelerator Program: Sustainable Capacity Building Initiative</i> • <i>Empowering Newcomer Youth: Belonging, Leadership, and Voice through Inclusive Programming</i> • <i>From Classrooms to Communities: Engaging Youth, Empowering Futures</i> • <i>DEI or ACB: What Lies Beneath These Acronyms? A Transformation of Principles—or Their Evolution?</i>
12:00 – 12:30 PM	Closing Keynote - AAISA

HOTEL INFORMATION

Wyndham Edmonton Hotel and Conference Centre

HOTEL & VENUE INFORMATION

Venue: Wyndham Edmonton Hotel & Conference Centre

Address: 4440 Gateway Blvd, Edmonton, AB T6H 5C2

Front Desk: 780-437-6010

Check-in: 3:00 PM | Check-out: 11:00 AM

Parking: Complimentary surface parking lot

HOTEL AMENITIES

- Atrium Café: Open daily, 7:00 AM – 2:00 PM
- Hotel Lounge: Wednesday–Saturday, 4:00 PM – 10:30 PM
- Sushi Toshi Restaurant: 4:00 PM – 11:00 PM
- Fitness centre with running track
- Swimming pool, hot tub & sauna
- Complimentary Wi-Fi
- On-site ATM

ACCESSIBILITY/SAFETY

- Main Ballroom: Washrooms accessible (no stairs)
- Imperial Ballroom: Washrooms not wheelchair accessible
- Main Floor Washrooms: Accessible (no stairs)
- Elevators available between all meeting levels
- Quiet/Prayer Room: Jubilee Ballroom Office (available throughout the conference)
- Emergency/Safety: Muster point located in front of the building

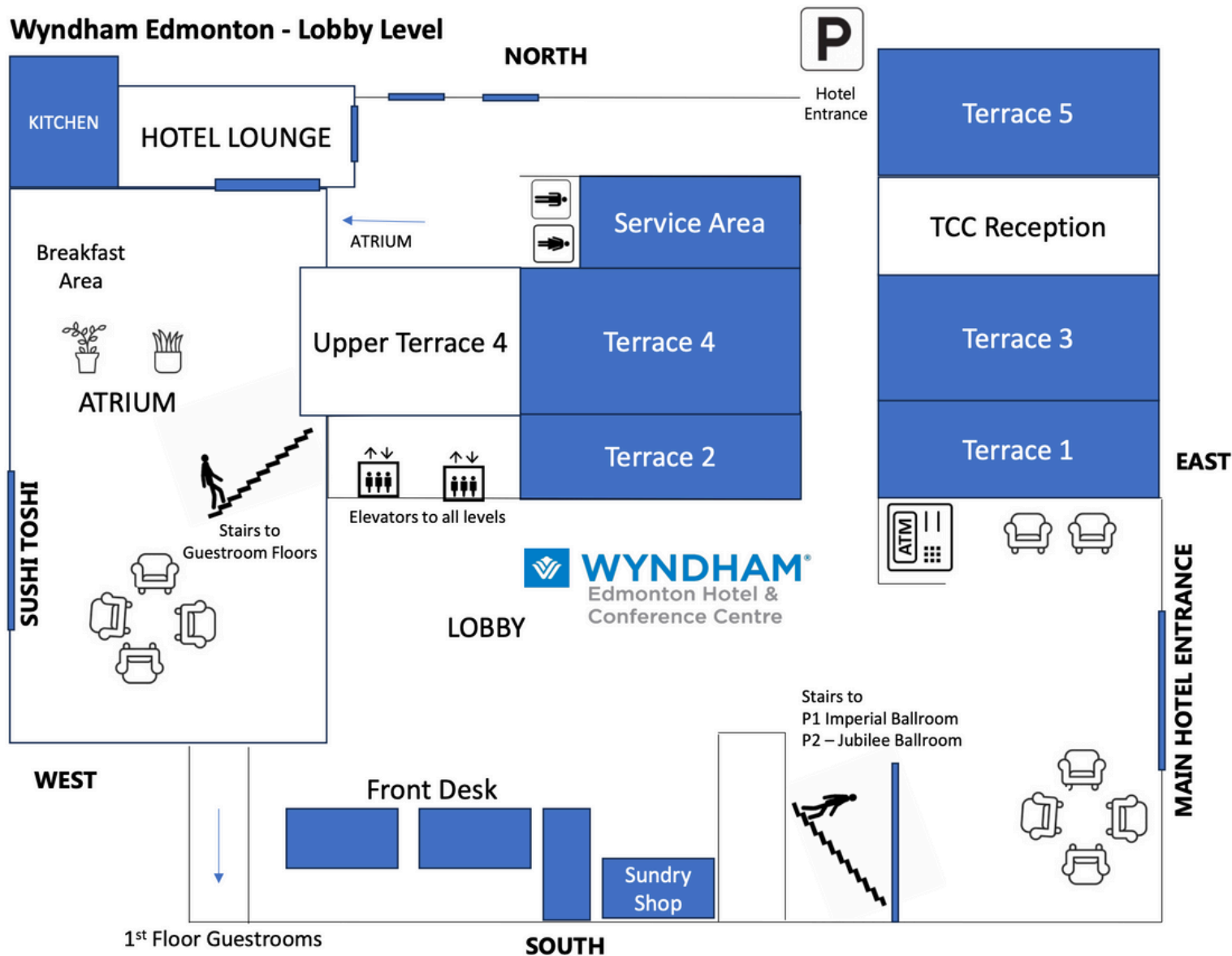
CONFERENCE LOGISTICS

- Plenary Sessions & Lunches: Jubilee Ballroom (Level P2)
- Breakout Sessions: Terraces 1–5 (Lobby Level)
- Refer to the hotel maps included in your program for room locations
- All meals will be served in the Jubilee Ballroom

Wi-Fi: Network – Wyndham Meetings | Password – wecare

HOTEL MAP

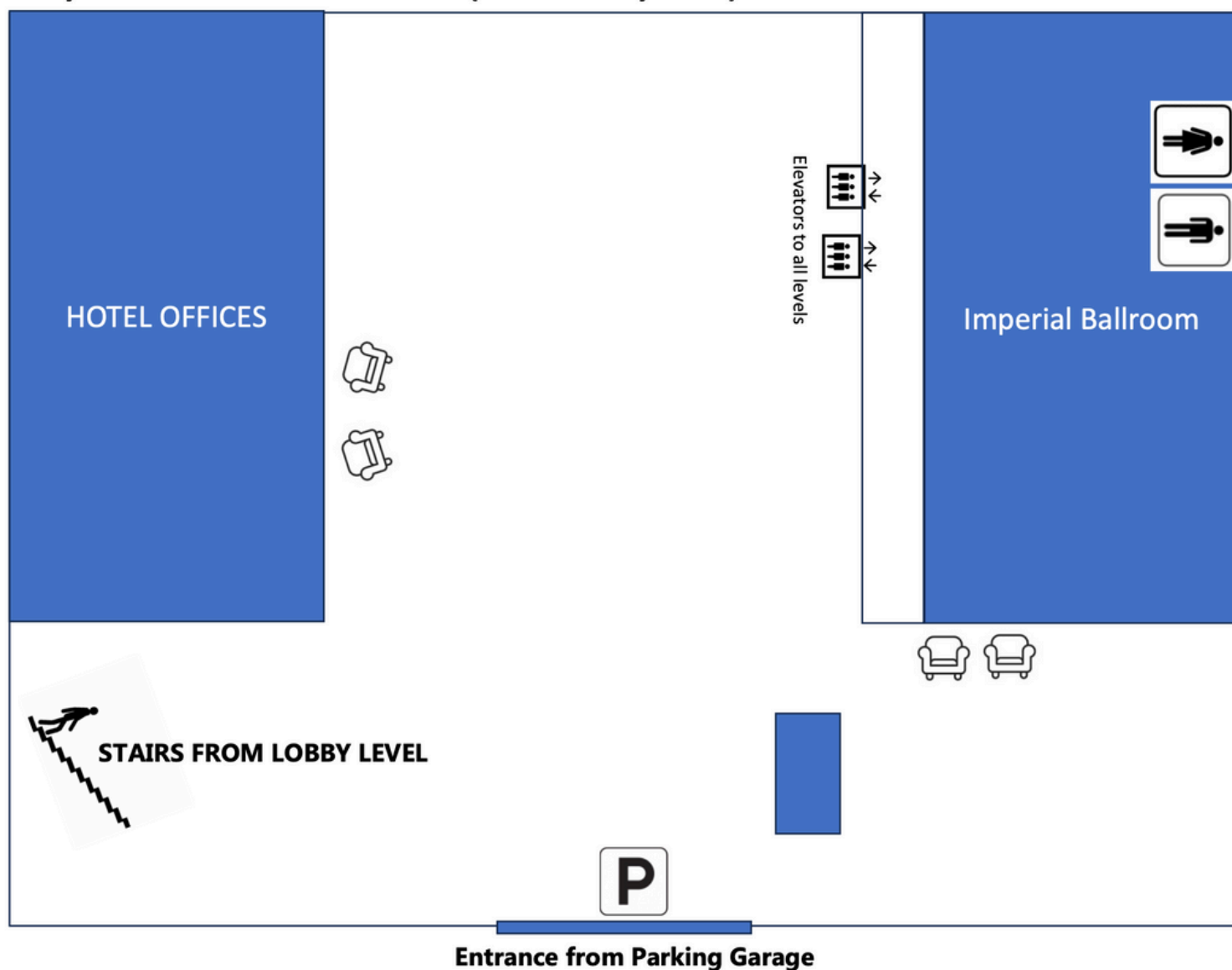
Lobby



HOTEL MAP

Level P1

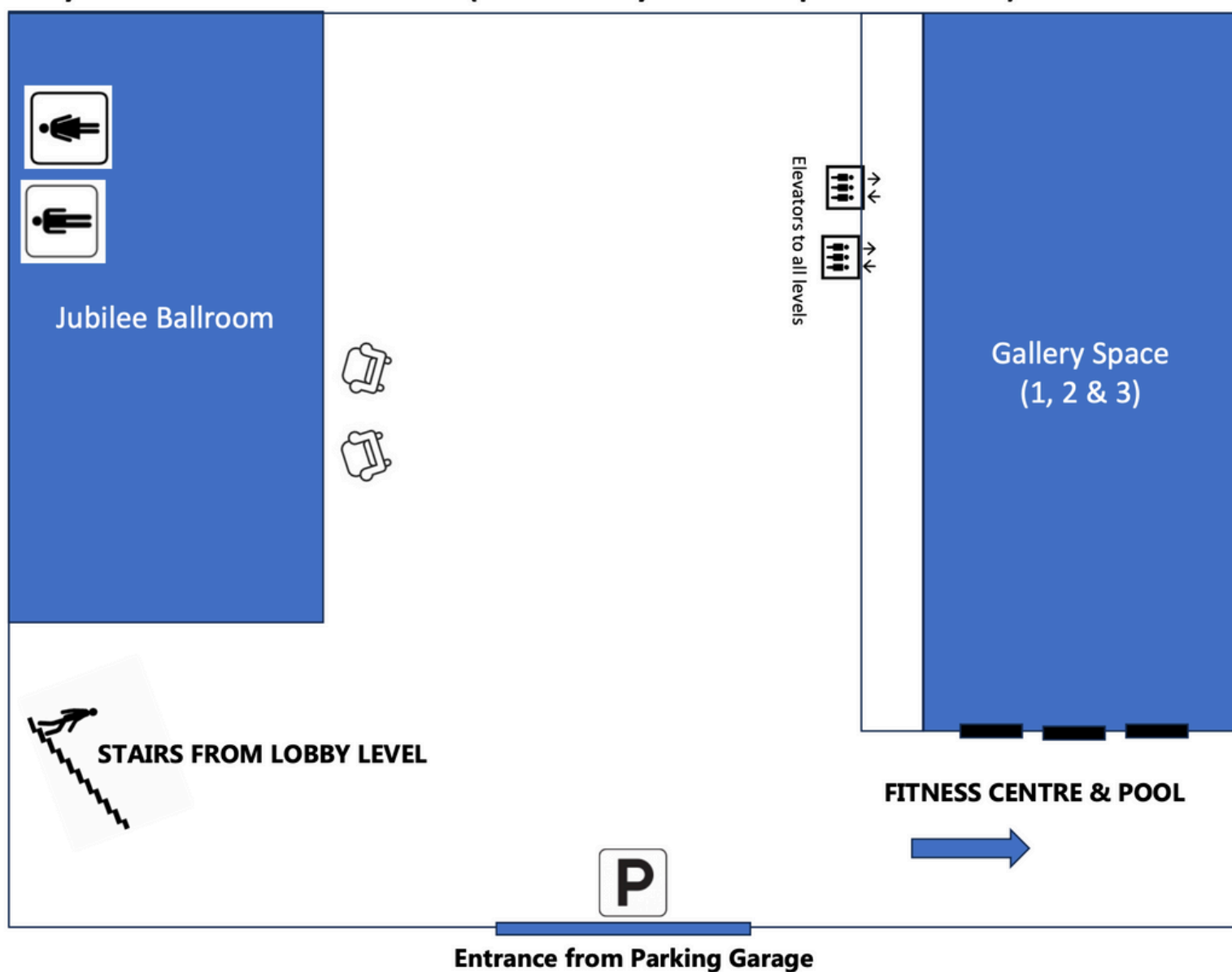
Wyndham Edmonton – Level P1 (Below Lobby Level)



HOTEL MAP

Level P2

Wyndham Edmonton – Level P2 (Below Lobby Level & Imperial Ballroom)



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



**Our Community
Our Future**

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.



OUR COMMUNITY. OUR FUTURE.



CALGARY CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION SOCIETY

**We empower newcomers to successfully settle
and thrive in Calgary and Southern Alberta.**

Join our **community wherever you are!**



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www.ccisab.ca

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



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 2025 conference!



**CORPORATE &
CONTINUING
EDUCATION**

NAIT's Continuing Education department, in partnership with the Government of Alberta, offers the Accelerated Trades Entry (ATE) Program, a pre-apprenticeship training opportunity designed to help newcomers to Canada gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to start a rewarding career in Alberta's skilled trades.

We're so grateful for their support as a Silver Sponsor for our 2025 conference!

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EDMONTON OILERS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Free Play for Kids is a community-driven, inclusive program that offers barrier-free access to sports, recreation, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for over 4,500 youth and families across Edmonton. One of our programs is Welcome to Play, that supports children, youth, and parents in the early stages of resettlement in Edmonton. The program offers free activities, field trips, and diverse staff and mentors that reflect the families backgrounds. It gives kids and parents a chance to play, make friends, and feel comfortable participating in community life in Canada.

We're so grateful for their support as a Silver Sponsor for our 2025 conference!



Thank you to our member and partner spotlights!



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.



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

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

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

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

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

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.

- Suzana Dumo, 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



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

Terrace 3

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Block C - Breakout Session #3
11:45 AM - 1:00 PM



#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.

- **Ana Patenaude**, Integrated Measurement for Performance, Review, and Enhanced Settlement Services Program, YMCA of the National Capital Region
- **Rinila Haridas**, 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



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

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

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.

- **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

DEI or ACB: What Lies Beneath These Acronyms? A Transformation of Principles—or Their Evolution?

This timely roundtable discussion will explore the shifting language and enduring values of the work of sector leaders, allies, advocates and practitioners committed to equity and inclusion in the face of terms like DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) evolving and reappearing as ACB (Acceptance, Community and Belonging) and against the backdrop of anti-immigration pushback. This interactive roundtable creates space for practitioners to honestly name the challenges they face and collectively strategize responses that center equity, foster genuine belonging for those we serve and sustain our advocacy work. Participants will share experiences from the frontlines, exchange strategies for holding the line on the settlement sector's core values and explore avenues to effectively counter misinformation while maintaining compassionate, evidence-based approaches to settlement work. Drawing on the diverse experiences of practitioners across Alberta, discussions will highlight practical approaches to sustaining settlement organizations during this critical period, building sector solidarity and developing advocacy strategies that resonate with diverse audiences.

- **Ricardo Morales**, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society



POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Poster presentations will be hosted in the main conference room, the Jubilee Ballroom, all three days of the conference (October 28-30, 2025)

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



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



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



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





Content Warning: *This art-based knowledge mobilization project explores themes of domestic violence, trauma, and survival. While it honours the resilience of victim-survivors and raises awareness, engaging with the content may be emotionally difficult for some.*

“Faces of Domestic Violence”: An Arts-Based Knowledge Mobilization Project

Faces of Domestic Violence is an art-based knowledge mobilization project that bridges academic research with visual storytelling. This collaboration between sociologist Dr. Wendy Aujla and Psychologist-Artist Heidi Erisman transforms grounded theory findings into powerful water colour paintings depicting the lived realities of South Asian Immigrant women affected by domestic violence.

Building on Dr. Wendy Aujla’s Master’s thesis, “Voicing Challenges: South Asian Women Speak Out About their Experiences of Domestic Violence and Access to Services,” the project gives form to narratives that speak of individual vulnerabilities, structural barriers, and cultural pressures. These stories reveal how power dynamics and power imbalances are perpetuated through abuse by not only intimate partners, but also by in-laws and extended family. The project also raises awareness about the revictimization and mistreatment by both formal and informal sources of support, including service providers and community members.

Visual storyboards—accompanied by direct quotes from participants interviewed in the research study. Alongside a short video presentation (1-2 minutes), the exhibit shares powerful stories of pain, survival, resistance, and strength as seven women navigate complex help-seeking challenges. The full collection includes nine storyboards: one provides an overview of the project, seven illustrate the lived experience of the South Asian immigrant women who participated in the study, and one additional piece honours South Asian women murdered due to domestic violence, emphasizing the urgent need for prevention.

By creating emotionally safe spaces for dialogue, this project has helped challenge silence and stigma around reporting domestic violence in cultural communities. It has encouraged survivors to reach out for help and prompted service providers to reflect on practices that may further harm vulnerable women. Since its inception in 2014, Faces of Domestic Violence has been featured in over 25 exhibitions and presentations across Canada, including at universities, community, and public forums. Though the research is now a decade old, the issues it surfaces—systemic racism, cultural pressures, immigration-related vulnerabilities, and service gaps—remain critically relevant today. This project demonstrates how art can amplify marginalized voices, evoke empathy, and foster accountability across systems and communities. Through this collaboration, research is not only shared—it is felt.

- **Dr. Wendy Aujla**, Athabasca University
- **Heidi Erisman**, Registered Psychologist and Fine Artist



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THANK YOU

From AAISA

Thank you for joining us! We're so glad you could be part of the 2025 AAISA Conference. Your presence, participation, and shared learning make this event meaningful and inspiring. Thank you for everything you do to strengthen Alberta's settlement and integration sector.

We look forward to seeing you again next year!



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