

# ACCESS TO SERVICES

## CONVERSATION STARTER



The purpose of this “conversation starter” is to provide VIP stakeholders with some key facts and information on the topic of newcomers’ access to services. The information, from current databases and research studies, provides a starting point for further conversation.

### Key Facts

#### Accessibility of Services

- In 2013/2014, 63,679 clients used settlement information and orientation services and 21,284 clients used English language training services available across British Columbia (BC report, 2014).
- Under the new criteria for receiving settlement services determined by CIC, Canadian citizens and non-permanent residents are not eligible. Only permanent residents are eligible to receive settlement services funded by CIC (Funding Guidelines: British Columbia, CIC 2013).
- Federal funding for settlement services in B.C. has increased from \$39.5 million in 2005 to \$95.4 million in 2013 (CIC Summit Presentation: Settlement Programs in British Columbia and the Yukon).
- Between April and August 2014, 2,180 immigrants between the ages of 25 and 44 years old received language assessment services. The numbers were lower for immigrants aged 15 to 24 years old (246) and those between 45 to 64 years old (1,278).
- The majority of students enrolled in English language classes were referred to the programs by family and friends, followed by community centres, government publications and websites (Western ESL iCare, CIC, 2014).

#### Educational Opportunities

- Twenty-five percent of K to Grade 12 students in the Vancouver public school system are designated ESL. Six out of ten of those students indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home (Vancouver School Board Diversity Statistics, 2014).
- The federal government repatriated funding for settlement and ESL training in 2014. As a result of these changes, BC’s Ministry of Advanced Education lost more than \$22 million in federal funding. Additionally, base operat-

ing grants to BC Public Post-Secondary institutions were significantly reduced. CIC, together with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, has provided \$17.2 million in transitional funding (BC government press release, September 2014).

- Long “wait lists” are a barrier to newcomers accessing language training (Language Instruction Support and Training Network, 2014).

#### Housing

- The Immigrant and Refugee Housing Study found that 90 percent of respondents reported having some form of housing. Sixty five percent rent their housing, 30.6 percent own their homes, and 3 percent checked “other” as a housing arrangement. The remaining 7.5 percent of the study’s participants reported living in temporary or unstable living conditions.
- The study also revealed that 49.5 percent of immigrants experienced difficulty accessing housing options. Immigrants (56 percent) and refugee claimants (76 percent) mentioned language as a major barrier to finding housing. Thirty-nine percent of immigrants and 34 percent of refugees also cited family size as a barrier to securing housing (The Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants, Hiebert, Addario, and Sherrell. 2005).

#### Vulnerable Population Groups

##### Refugees

- A 2014 Immigrant Services Society of BC report indicated that of the 2,744 government-assisted refugees who arrived in B.C. between 2010 and 2013, 2,495 settled in Metro Vancouver. Only 11.7% of those who settled in Metro Vancouver remained in the City of Vancouver. The lack of affordable housing contributed to the decreasing number of government-assisted refugees settling in the city.
- Another revelation of the study was the improvement in

refugee access to health care. Based on the amendments to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) in 2012, only government-assisted refugees can receive full health care coverage. This care includes hospital services, doctor and nurse services, laboratory, ambulance, prescribed medication and vaccines, and limited vision and dental care services. However, a recent Supreme Court ruling allows refugee claimants to be eligible to receive health services. This change allows children less than 19 years of age and pregnant women to receive full health coverage, excluding supplemental health benefits (Refugee Newcomers in Metro Vancouver, Immigrant Services Society of BC, May 2014; CBC News, November 2014).

- Poverty is another factor that increases a population's vulnerability. According to the 2011 Child Poverty Report Card, the BC child poverty rate was highest among families that immigrated to Canada between 2001 and 2006 at 49.6%. The rate was lower for families that have resided in Canada longer (Data specific to immigrant families was not included in the 2014 Child Poverty Report Card).

### Gaps and Challenges

- Communication is a major barrier for non-English speaking newcomers when it comes to accessing services. For example, intercultural communication has been identified as one of the most important elements for public health promotion and outreach to diverse population groups (Taking the Long View of Integration Services, SPARC BC, 2009).
- Newcomers lack awareness and understanding of Canadian social support systems or resources that are available in their community. This is mainly due to newcomers' lack

of social and support networks that help newcomers access community resources (A Study of Iranian Immigrants' Experiences of Accessing Canadian Health Care Services: A Grounded Theory, Dastjerdi, Olson, and Ogilvie, 2012).

- The city's social services and programs need to recognize the diverse needs of immigrants and refugees from different cultural backgrounds and experiences (Recent Latin Americans in Vancouver: Unyielding Diverse Needs versus Insufficient Services, Aranzazu Recalde. 2002).
- There is a lack of culturally appropriate information about services and programs available for newcomers. For example, information about services should be made available in multiple languages (Taking the Long View of Integration Services, SPARC BC, 2009; Immigrant Mental Health Policy Brief, Nazilla Khanlou, 2009).
- Immigrants reported positive experience with community agencies. However, they found their experiences accessing government agencies frustrating due to the procedural processes they had to follow and paperwork they needed to fill out (Taking the Long View of Integration Services, SPARC BC, 2009).
- There is a lack of a coordinated and collaborative effort by schools to support English as a second language (ESL) (Immigrant Families: Educating Children, Kanoute and Lafortune).

