

# *Addressing the Needs of Immigrant Older Adults: Navigating Disability, Housing, & Transportation*

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Q1: What are your impressions about **disability** in relation to immigrant older adults based on viewing this exhibit?

## *Lived Experience Participants*

- **19 immigrant older adults age 60 or older**
- **10 residing in Quebec, 9 in British Columbia**
- **Places of origin included: Afghanistan, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Korea, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Trinidad & Tobago.**
- **Immigration circumstances and category varied**
- **Time of immigration to Canada varied from 1966 through 2008**



## **Introduction: Exploring *The Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants***

In December 2018, a diverse group of 25 Metro Vancouver stakeholders attended a Disability, Housing, and Transportation Forum hosted by the Vancouver Lived Experiences research team. A photovoice exhibit entitled *The Lived Experience of Aging Immigrants* (also available [online](#)) was used to facilitate discussion on the topics of disability, housing, and transportation in relation to the lives of immigrant older adults.

The Lived Experiences exhibit provided a snapshot of how issues related to disability, housing, and transportation impact the lives of immigrant older adults and their support networks. Forum participants noted the overlapping nature of these themes and the tendency for policy and service provision to frame them as separate experiences.

This brief applies the knowledge from the forum to identify issues and recommendations for service providers and policy makers who influence older immigrants' experiences related to disability, housing, and transportation.

Target audiences for this brief include policy and decision makers in the disability, housing, and transportation sectors. Service providers and frontline workers may also use this brief to inform their work with older immigrants of various backgrounds, abilities, and identities.

# Background

## Contextualizing older immigrants locally and nationally

Metro Vancouver is ethnoculturally diverse with immigration acting as a key driver of population growth. Changing immigration patterns across Canada and Metro Vancouver require policy and services that meet our diverse populations' evolving needs.

British Columbia has the second highest immigrant population of all Canadian provinces and territories. According to Census 2016 data, 40.8% of Metro Vancouverites are immigrants. Of these, nearly a quarter were aged 65+.

Partnerships between local, provincial, and federal governments and the immigrant serving organizations promote integration and social cohesion for immigrants of all ages. While broad-based social services have the necessary resources, immigrant-serving organizations can provide access to them because of their greater knowledge of immigrant communities and the trust this engenders.

Conversations with service providers and other local stakeholders at the Metro Vancouver *Lived Experiences* forum on disability, housing, and transportation revealed promising strategies and areas for improvement in the integration of older immigrants.

A lack of affordable and accessible housing stock throughout the Lower Mainland presents challenges that can be exacerbated if immigrant older adults are living with a disability and/or limited in their access to reliable and safe transportation. Their access is complicated by lack of familiarity with services as new immigrants and/or language barriers.

With a vibrant immigrant population, Metro Vancouver has the potential to provide older immigrants with the accessible and supportive infrastructure necessary to participate and thrive in their community.

**In 2016, 21.5% of the total Immigrant population of Metro Vancouver was aged 65 or older.**

(New To BC, 2018)

**Barriers to integration:**

- Learning English
- Lifestyle changes
- Financial constraints
- Racism & discrimination
- Accessible and appropriate housing



The exhibit and discussions between stakeholders examined diverse experiences and identities of older immigrants who varied in their access to safe, appropriate, and accessible housing and transportation. Similarly, their access to support depended on the availability of family and friends in the community and service outreach to their ethnic groups, which varied considerably.

Together the forum themes and individual context of the research participants' stories highlighted the need for revised strategies in creating welcoming and inclusive communities for older immigrants.

# Forum & Stakeholder Discussions

**Forum participants and sector stakeholders identified a number of distinct and overlapping impressions of disability, housing, and transportation in relation to the needs of immigrant older adults**

## **Disability:**

Forum discussions on disability highlighted the siloed understandings of and service provision for disability, aging, and immigrants. As a result, forum attendees concluded that older immigrants with disabilities experience a fragmented continuum of resources, services, and care. In addition, challenges faced by immigrant older adults living with disabilities, and their support networks, were noted to stem from a lack of understanding or bias about how the population navigates disability.

For example, service providers assuming a baseline level of family support for immigrant older adults living with a disability may not account for the geographic distance that prevents hands-on support from family. Living with a disability was identified as a potential barrier to older immigrants connecting with their community, or a challenge in the maintenance of community connections.

### **Divine's Dilemma:**

Divine is a single older immigrant from the Philippines. When she became disabled by an accident and illness, she was supported by friends and a family doctor. The only accessible housing available from B.C. Housing was too far from these supports, given the limited transportation options. So she remains in a low rent suite where she struggles with stairs and does not have guaranteed rent stability.



*The diverse immigration experiences of exhibit participants and the common structural barriers they faced.*

## **Housing:**

Discussions on the housing needs of immigrant older adults highlighted how the lack of affordable and accessible housing in the Lower Mainland creates barriers to older immigrants navigating and settling into a sustainable community. Although this problem is especially prevalent in British Columbia, housing security and affordability can present challenges for older immigrants across the country. Forum participants noted that housing service providers may lack understanding of older immigrants and the variety of contexts they may be situated in.

Again, biases or assumptions about how immigrant older adults and their families or perceived support networks are able to navigate the housing system may create additional barriers or challenges (e.g., the exclusion of sponsored immigrants from BC Housing's rental subsidies for older adults). Access to housing supports was noted by forum attendees as a multi-faceted challenge, connected to language barriers, cultural barriers and assumptions, and high-risk concerns for housing insecurity and homelessness.

## **Transportation:**

Attendees framed transportation as an essential connector for older immigrants, a population for whom public transportation is especially crucial. Additionally, this theme overlapped with the others as transportation needs intersect clearly with disability and housing concerns of immigrant older adults. Accessibility, awareness, and safety concerns were underscored as barriers to safe and optimized transit use. Forum participants felt the promotion of safe and inclusive transit should consider the language/literacy levels of transport users (and non-users).

# *Recommendations for Policy & Practice*

**Current service and policy silos impact immigrant older adults' access to and connection with community. Participants underscored a community-led approach where collaboration and collective impact are crucial.**

## **Overlapping Recommendations:**

- Listen to and incorporate the voices of persons with lived experiences (e.g., active consultation with service users and providers) into solution planning
- Encourage cultural understanding through training and education to service providers/frontline staff
- Promote more research to provide informed empirical evidence of population needs/service gaps
- Increase access to translation services across sectors
- Support innovative 'Aging in Place' strategies/infrastructure to help older immigrants live happily, and healthily in the community
- Similarly, support integrated planning processes that promote cross sector and intergovernmental collaboration
- Build upon and strengthen pre-existing community resources to connect people more sustainably

## **Disability Specific Actions:**

- Integrate cultural navigation into pre-existing healthcare roles such as case managers
- Assess systemic barriers to service use for older immigrants living with disabilities

## **Housing Specific Actions:**

- Explore role of innovative housing options within immigrant communities (e.g., multigenerational co-housing models)
- Increase attention to supports for housing insecurity/risk of homelessness among immigrant older adults
- Emphasize outreach and visibility of housing system literacy and navigation in the local context
- Streamline pathways for accessing safe and reliable housing
- Promote housing policy that incentivizes affordable and accessible housing design and management

## **Transportation Specific Actions:**

- Increase lobbying and advocacy across levels of government to demonstrate community-based transportation needs
- Evaluate the user-friendliness of current transportation options

*Areas for continued growth:  
Language/translation services,  
cultural awareness training, and  
applying an intersectional lens*



# *Considerations for Policy and Practice: Applying intersectional and culturally aware lenses*

Immigrant older adults represent diverse and complex experiences and identities, accordingly alternative policy and practice approaches should adapt to meet varying individual and community needs.

Applying an intersectional lens requires you to consider three main components:

(1) **social identities** are based on the groups or communities we belong to (e.g., race, class, gender, or orientation)- people often belong to more than one of these groups impacting their social location in an interactive way;

(2) **systems of oppression** reflect the larger forces and structures operating within society that create inequalities and reinforce exclusion;

(3) **the ways in which social identities and systems of oppression interact:** this means that individual experiences are shaped by the ways that their social identities intersect with each other AND with interacting systems of oppression.

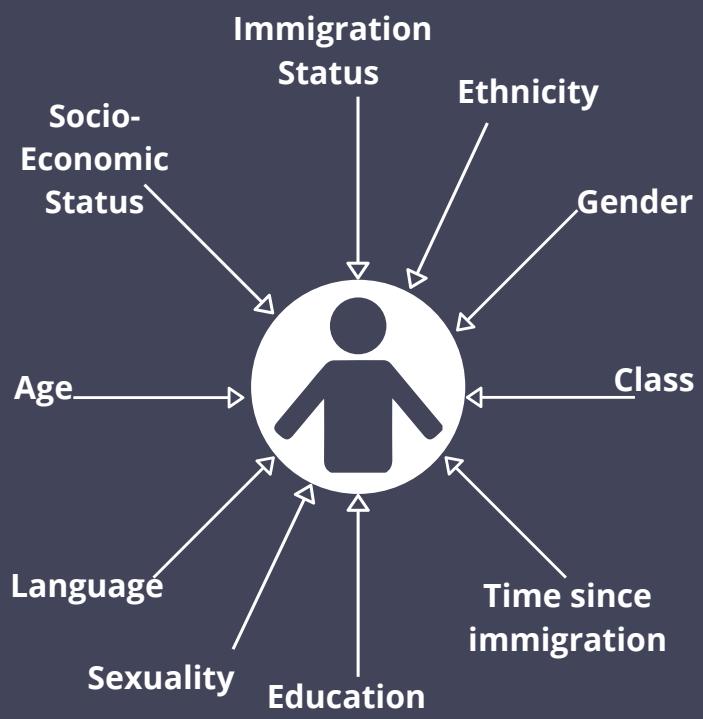
## How to work intersectionally?

- Consider the social locations of the population you work with
- Evaluate your own position as a service provider/policy-maker (i.e., your own identities, privileges, or positions of power)
- - Examine the conditions that impact these social locations (e.g., social, political, economic, or cultural)

## Cultural awareness in practice:

- Consider language needs
- Increase your understanding of who is in your community
- Consult with and engage members of your community
- Consider how the Canadian model may vary from an immigrant's country of origin
- Work with partner organizations that have built relationships and rapport to understand the local context

## Intersecting Identities & Locations



# Appendices & Tools

**Explore these sources for more information on intersectionality in policy and practice.**

**1. OHRC Intersectional approach:** <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/intersectional-approach-discrimination-addressing-multiple-grounds-human-rights-claims/applying-intersectional-approach>

**2. AAUP Intersectionality & Why it's Important:**

<https://www.aau.org/article/what-intersectionality-and-why-it-important#.XrmmzRNKgWo>

**3. Opportunity Agenda 10 Tips for Intersectionality Practice:**

<https://www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/ten-tips-putting-intersectionality-practice>

**4. AMSSA Intersectionality in BC:**

[https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/InfoSheet41\\_Intersectionality\\_Sept2017.pdf](https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/InfoSheet41_Intersectionality_Sept2017.pdf)

**5. Rainbow Health Ontario Intersectionality Workshop:**

<http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Intersectionality/Practical-tools-intersectional-workshops.pdf>

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