

Urgent and emerging Newcomer Needs survey during the COVID-19 Emergency Toronto, Ontario – August 2020

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This needs assessment provides a snapshot in time of urgent newcomer needs in Toronto during the COVID-19 pandemic. The information was collected with a survey that ran in July, 2020. **101 surveys were completed by representatives of 66 organizations located throughout the GTA.** Survey respondents were representatives of community service organizations (settlement, health, mental health, employment, etc) and school boards. They were asked to note specific emergent newcomer needs in the categories listed below. The answers are summarized in this document.

This information is a snapshot in time. The same survey was administered in April 2020. You can find it [here](#).

If you have any questions about this needs assessment, about services available in your area, please contact the Local Immigration Partnership in your area:

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	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3	Other notable answers
Housing	Housing Affordability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients struggling to pay rent • Low-income families need support to pay all or a portion of their rent arrears (seeking programming) • Families behind in their rent are concerned about facing evictions 	Problems with Landlord <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlords often unwilling to rent to recently arrived immigrants out of fear of Covid-19 • Inability to negotiate rent increases • Landlords asking tenants their health status • Newcomers cannot access eviction protection; fear of deportation or authority • Landlords not doing maintenance/repairs • COVID uncertainties causing stress between landlords and tenants 	Overcrowding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding in low income housing makes quarantine/ isolation difficult (this includes international students) • Shelters are full and newcomers in shelters are having difficulty finding housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of affordable housing - temporary housing (Airbnb, hotels) • Inability to access LGBTQ2S safe spaces, meet potential queer/trans-identified roommates or connecting to adult housing support
Healthcare	Limited Resources Available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers without family doctors struggle to access healthcare and resources • Longer wait times including for COVID-19 test results • Clients facing hurdles in finding places to self-isolate • Vision and dental care needs not being addressed 	Barriers of Access to Healthcare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person doctor visits were unavailable • Many doctors not accepting new patients due to COVID-19 • Language barriers in over the phone or virtual healthcare • Unavailability of LGBTQ affirming/ positive general healthcare (such as hormone therapy, gender affirming surgeries for trans newcomers in transition) 	Fearful of Contracting COVID-19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of contracting COVID-19 after accessing the ER or regular health services • Patients with pre-existing conditions are not able to see their regular doctors and access hospitals instead, which creates anxiety, uncertainty, and fear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interpreter availability for clients who are accessing healthcare services
Employment	Decline of Labour Market <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer job opportunities available, increased newcomer unemployment • Labour market needs have shifted; caused barriers of employment access in related field/education 	Layoffs & Access to Financial Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many newcomers were laid off, continue to be unemployed, or work reduced hours • CERB recipients concerned about the expiry of financial support • Newcomers who were in the process of job searching were not eligible for financial supports 	Fear of Returning to Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers seeking employment fear contracting COVID-19 in workspaces, especially as many available employment opportunities are precarious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exacerbated difficulty accessing employment for deaf newcomers • Less access to tools (e.g. computers) - closed libraries and services • Parents face financial strain caring for children instead of working
Education	Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of computer skills or language to support children learning at home • Supporting remote learning adds stress while working from home • Children struggling to learn in crowded homes 	Access to Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large families struggle to access digital devices and thus training • Lack of high-speed internet, equipment and funding to purchase technology • Need more avenues to access free or low-cost devices for clients 	Adult Learners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many ESL classes and other programs on hold or cancelled (e.g. PSW, Truck Driving) • Adult halting own learning to support children's remote learning • Unsure about CERB affect on OSAP • Inability to pursue assessment required for registering to certain programs (e.g. nursing practice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with extra learning needs find online classes not conducive to needs • Online learning is challenging for many deaf LINC learners • Limited access to school support staff to support youth mental health

<p>Access to Services</p>	<p>Lack of Access to Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued lack of technology (i.e. cell phone, computer, internet, etc.) for access to online services Lack of skills to effectively use technology to access online services and available resources 	<p>Usability of Online Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of in-depth, wrap-around support services online due to limited time or language barriers Many clients with complex needs prefer in-person services for comprehensive and hands-on support Language-based services are difficult to access online compared to in person 	<p>Service Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service Canada and Service Ontario are currently closed, which affects the settlement and immigration status of newcomers (e.g. SIN) New clients without pre-established relationships have trouble accessing online services and connecting virtually to staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isolated women without access to technology are unsure of types of services available Clients are worried about accessing in-person services via TTC or other public transportation
<p>Women</p>	<p>Unsafe to be at Home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender-based violence against women and children is exacerbated because of isolation and stress Decreased timely GBV service availability Unable to leave or enter shelters due to COVID-19 risk, decreased capacity Limited legal aid available 	<p>Mental wellbeing needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health issues (stress and anxiety) exacerbated by social isolation Pregnant mothers facing uncertainty of access to childbirth services (ex. Pre- and post-natal care, clothing, other supplies) Frustrated with increased family conflicts with spouse and children Stressed having multiple home and employment roles, as well as supporting remote learning, or job searching 	<p>Unable to Always Meet Personal Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worried about childcare accessibility for employment when the situation stabilizes Having to newly support older family members is an added strain Women finding less time to seek/access skills and language training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for culturally appropriate, language-specific resources
<p>Seniors</p>	<p>Social Isolation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling alone, increased isolation, may have no visitors or visitors aren't allowed (e.g. in seniors homes), lack of access to technology or skills to virtually connect to friends, family or other seniors Fear of going outside because of potential to catch COVID-19 Language barriers are increasing isolation Some fear no one will notice if anything happens to them 	<p>Inaccessibility has Increased</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deaf newcomer seniors are very isolated due to lack of ASL translation Lack of access to open services with accessibility features (ex. ramps/elevators) Challenges communicating their needs & lacking access to COVID-19 information Difficulty hearing workers, because of masks Mobility challenges due to fear of contracting COVID-19 Require additional support (ex. deliveries, home assistance, prescriptions) Online tools are difficult to navigate, less tech available, there is a maintained preference for telephones 	<p>Physical & Mental Health Decline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major health decline and mental health concerns exacerbated by feeling vulnerable and stressed Doctors prioritising other health needs and not visiting seniors at home anymore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued/worse food insecurity for seniors Increased risk of contracting COVID-19 if health workers are entering their homes Elder abuse exacerbated by stress, difficult to catch it

<p>Mental Health</p>	<p>Exacerbations on Mental Illness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased depression and anxiety • Increased MH needs due to isolation, burnout, and coping with drastic changes • Still facing issues of trauma, and PTSD • Re-traumatization due to isolation and family support • Increased isolation, anxiety, dysphoria for LGBTQIA+ young people 	<p>Life Stressors Affecting Mental Wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escalated family conflicts • Online fatigue • Juggling work and life at home • Not enough family support • Feeling insecure about making enough money to support self/family, and/or having to rely on government financial support • Uncomfortable home situations (eg. overcrowded spaces, navigating pandemic with housemates, gender-based violence, challenging spousal relationships) • Unable to access COVID-19 info: barriers in language, newcomers who have disabilities • Fear of contracting COVID-19 • Completing immigration applications with longer process times or unable to complete requirements (e.g. medical, police check) • Feeling isolated and lonely • Feelings of uncertainty of the future, worried about economy, health effects, etc. 	<p>Challenges Accessing Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who are feeling helpless are lacking needed in-person services • Mental health services inaccessible for deaf newcomers • Newcomers without status cannot access supports • Youth unsure how to ask for help • Lack of translation services in MH • Stigma prevents conversation to recognise need and willingness to access services • Lack of privacy at home to access virtual MH supports • Increased demand for counselling and medication • Lack of time to attend services • With TPH having been redeployed, MH supports for agencies reduced • Crisis lines lacking translation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need tech equipment, internet, or a phone to access services. Some newcomers are lacking these resources • Abuse is more hidden as everyone is at home • Challenges are being faced by clients as well as colleagues in the service sector
<p>Food Security</p>	<p>Low Income, Food Insecurity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many newcomers lost their jobs and financial supports inadequate to pay for basic needs including food • Cost of food has increased 	<p>Use of Food Banks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers are more likely to use food banks due to loss of income, food banks were overwhelmed, had lessened resources • Some facing food insecurity did not access food banks for fear of contracting COVID-19 • Lack of available food banks in suburbs 	<p>Lack of Culturally Appropriate Food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members cautious of accessing community food programs because of the lack of available halal food 	
<p>Transportation</p>	<p>Fear of Using Public Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riders lacking access to masks or gloves to use on public transportation • Afraid to travel during the pandemic using public transportation, fellow travellers not social distancing or taking precautions 	<p>Difficulty accessing public transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources available for newcomers facing language barriers • People with mobility issues had a difficult time using public transportation as waiting times were long, there were not enough vehicles on the road, and there were limits for how many people can be in a vehicle 		

<p>Youth</p>	<p>Social Isolation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth expressed feelings of social isolation due to not being able to interact with friends or the community Youth living in unfavourable family situations reported feeling stressed/isolated, unable to leave due to fears of COVID Lack of routine also resulting in inability to connect with peers and the community Unable to participate in summer/youth camps Dissatisfied & disengaged with distance learning 	<p>Unemployment Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many youth were laid off and were unable to find employment No summer jobs available, also feeling reluctant to go out and physically find work International students concerned about applying for work permits and being able to work to pay for their studies International students' parents also lost jobs in their home countries and cannot continue paying for their education 	<p>Mental Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGBTQIA+ youth living in unsafe homes; leading to mental health stress and anxiety Social isolation from peers, little to no physical exercise, stress from unfavorable home environments leads to deteriorating mental health Lack of physical and social outlets increase feelings of social isolation, depression, and stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deaf youth feeling increasingly isolated and needing access to technology to ensure ongoing support Youth mentioned facing anxiety about post-secondary education and availability of suitable programs
<p>Other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many services and processes are delayed because clients cannot be seen in person Tax clinics are still a need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some newcomers are returning to their country of origin because they are unable to support themselves in Canada due to COVID-19 job loss There are a lot of requests for donations for necessary items (strollers, cribs etc...) because income is being used for rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reopening is difficult for agencies who may have a difficult time obtaining PPE, or clients are apprehensive about coming into the physical office 	
<p>The greatest need in the newcomer community you serve which cannot be met by your organization at the present time?</p>	<p>Access to Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to computers, laptops, tablets, as well as internet access needed Support for clients learning digital literacy 	<p>Income, Housing, and Basics of Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for Affordable housing Financial support needed for those who cannot access CERB and OW Access to childcare Support needed for isolated seniors 	<p>Other Services and Concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in immigration process, for sponsoring family members Limited by funder - unable to serve clients with certain status (refugee claimant, non-status, student) 	