

Urgent and emerging Newcomer Needs survey during the COVID-19 Emergency Toronto, Ontario – January 2021

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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 November-December, 2020. **54 surveys were completed by representatives of 36 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 twice before in [April](#) and [August](#), 2020.

If you have any questions about the Needs Assessment or services available in your area, please contact your Local Immigration Partnership:

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	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3	Other notable answers
Housing	Lack of affordable housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to pay rent from: low income, unemployment, an already unaffordable rental market • Unable to isolate as living space is too small and overcrowded • Some clients ineligible for financial supports; facing insecurity • One bedroom is also too expensive 	Problems with landlord <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to book viewings • Landlords unwilling to rent to newcomers in fear of COVID-19 • Little maintenance or repairs during the pandemic, newcomers struggle to advocate for themselves • Landlords unwilling to defer rent • Landlords finding excuses to evict 	Lack of suitable and safe housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding in houses makes physical distancing difficult; not enough space for all family needs • Shelters lack space for appropriate physical distancing • Not enough shelters or emergency housing available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of affordable and appropriate transitional housing • Fear of landlords in case anyone tests positive for COVID-19
Transport	Fear of using public transport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of fear of using public transport during the pandemic • COVID-19 fear stems from overcrowding on vehicles • Parents hesitant to travel on public transport with kids 	Affordability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transport and private transport is too expensive • Facing increased pressure, but unable to afford purchase of a personal vehicle, which adds stress • Some clients felt TTC was expensive before, but added strain now 	Added stress and mobility issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added stress from having to wait for public transport, spending more time in public places • OW and ODSP is not issuing transportation allowance as freely which affects clients' mobility 	
Healthcare	Limited doctors/healthcare available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased wait for some healthcare procedures, such as elective surgeries • No in-person routine appointments • Doctors not accepting new patients • Doctors facing a cap on how many IFHP covered patients they can see due to COVID-19 	Difficulty accessing healthcare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers facing translation and interpretation hurdles, increased challenges in accessing healthcare • Immigration status, no health cards cause health care access barriers • Some newcomers finding it difficult to navigate COVID-19 testing rules 	Virtual consultation difficulties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to navigate Telehealth for newcomers with language barriers • Longer wait times • Missing human touch when dealing with health issues, not accustomed to virtual consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions on client transportation to hospitals by family and case managers • Clients feeling increasingly stressed and uncomfortable with many restrictions
Women	Unsafe to be at home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased domestic violence, exacerbated by compounded stress, financial challenges, isolation • Sheltering in place with partner increases tension in relationship, family dynamic • Lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities means women find less pathways to leave unsafe situations 	Issues with tech/internet access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single mothers identified as a group facing particular financial strain • Special Priority Program doesn't always allow for sufficient time to collect housing application documents for those leaving an abusive situation 	Mental Health Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facing isolation and loneliness • Juggling at-home responsibilities increases anxiety, exhaustion, (esp. for single mothers balancing employment) • Supporting older family members and extended family disproportionately done by women • Women have little to no time for themselves to practice self-care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring for children who are in online schooling often means putting job-seeking/education pursuits on hold

Education	Access to Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to tech, and slower internet because of sharing WIFI and devices within the household • Some clients with learning disabilities are falling behind due to lack of individualized instruction and specialized tech tools geared to them • Online access issues for instructors 	Financial and Logistical Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited funding for training/ education for refugee Claimants • Classrooms are too big, and it is evident that having more teachers present would support students better online and in-person • Less micro-loans for Internationally Trained Professionals available 	Parents and Adults learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomer families unable to follow up on their children's virtual learning due to language and also digital proficiency barriers • Newcomers struggling to understand registration processes • When calling for help often only get an answering machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients expressed interest in pursuing skills training for jobs that are currently in demand in COVID
Youth	Unemployment and financial struggle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial stress from unavailability of youth-related jobs, lack of housing • Lack of quality jobs, unawareness of pathways to employment • Low income working youth at higher risk of contracting COVID due to nature of their work (frontline) 	Logistical and Tech challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facing challenges in adjusting to virtual learning environment • Lack of access to computer/laptop/ high speed internet • Difficult to participate in virtual work with improper tech 	Social and mental health issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression, mental health, addiction in digital world • Isolated, sense of loneliness increased, lacking space at home • Risk of abuse in quarantine with breakdowns in family relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opportunities for afterschool & weekend groups or jobs • CERB payments may be hurting job-seeking motivation
Employment	Job Precariousness and Lay-Offs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many have been or anticipate lay-offs • Uncertainty when 'call-backs' will be or have cut hours or delayed contracts • Clients only able to find part-time or precarious job opportunities, struggling to support their families • Clients seek work in their community, or not at all, due to fear of COVID • COVID opportunities are hard to find • Temporary, part time or cash work largely cancelled, especially difficult for those who worked multiple jobs 	Amplified Barriers to Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges newcomers face in finding work exacerbated during the pandemic (underemployed, missing Canadian experience, unrecognized foreign credentials, language, etc.) • Apprenticeship Programs/Student placement opportunities, EO Bridging & Internships unavailable • COVID prevents work due to lack of child care, workplace safety issues • What is available doesn't match skillset or qualifications 	Increased demand on SPO's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job-seeking is top priority for most clients SPO's serve • Lack of in-person hiring events make it difficult for clients with learning exceptionalities to access • Many offices on lockdown, hard for clients to get support finding employment in their field (accessing job developers and building resumes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of privacy in homes poses challenge for interviews • International students and people with work visas face problem of job, housing, and food security • Worsened power dynamic between full time and part time workers
Access to Services	Need for In-Person Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some services can only be provided in-person, and otherwise there are limited services available in person, such as daycare • Seniors face language barriers for seniors to access services 	Access to Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty accessing internet or computers, many newcomers relied on resource & information centres • Lack of access to tech makes attendance inconsistent or difficult 	Struggling to Trust Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to build client trust virtually • Lack of trust to provide documentation virtually • Some who are newer to Canada, and fear COVID-19 from needed in-person services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No available weekend services, social or employment

Mental Health	Exacerbations on Mental Illness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of motivation, confidence due to stress from uncertainty and anxiety • Increased depression, feelings of helpless & hopelessness, loneliness, isolation, frustration, withdrawal, and sadness: in need of social connections • Some family relationships are strained • Anxiety from impossible job search, and worried about income loss. Or lacking a healthy work-life balance • COVID fatigue; some never leave their houses 	Barriers to Service Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many face barriers of access to MH services (cultural, language, etc.) • Need for more mindfulness, stress and anxiety-related workshops • Some require frequent wellbeing check-ins from service providers • Staff need more direction and guidelines to support newcomers • Virtual does not equate in-person community connections & support • Not enough crisis services available 	Acute Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute issues increasing (cases of suicide and opioid overdose) • Issues exacerbated by overlapping external stressors (school, work, childcare, finances, family health, fear of the unknown, etc.) • Fear and isolation, loneliness and grief from losing family and friends to COVID-19 locally and abroad • Many struggle with caring for ill family members alone • Resilience from clients lowered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homesick, cannot visit family in home country, or deal with personal matters • Legal issues have been delayed, postponing these causes anxiety
Food Security	Access to Food Banks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many expressed concerns travelling to food banks and prefer grocery cards • Isolated people without car access or travel options struggle to access food • Food banks have limited resources, but more demand • Food chains are lacking a supply of culturally appropriate food • Some neighbourhoods lack food banks 	Financial Barriers to Food Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job loss, less income for food • Food prices rising, nutritious food is becoming less of a spending option • Social assistance like OW is still not sufficient for food access • International students without much income support from overseas family struggle to access food 	Service Provider - Food Referrals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many newcomers are unaware of food bank services • Agencies have recognized an increase in food bank referrals • Meal programs have drastically increased for services • Services recognize this is a huge need, but other priorities prevent additional service creation 	
Seniors	Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking social support and community engagement • Less visits from family, nowhere to safely congregate in winter • Men specifically not participating • Many seniors losing their friends and loved ones to COVID • Fear of contracting virus and of being alone during lockdowns 	Virtual Service Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often cannot access virtual services because of access or digital fluency • Some seniors have great difficulty joining online workshops and choosing not to join is sometimes easier than learning the new skill • Not enough programming available in this time, in need of face to face services 	Untended Health Conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find it difficult to stay active, participate in physical activity • Difficult to access food, medicine, other needs • Rely heavily on social services or family for access to their essential needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting for senior housing, need to move out from living with family who aren't treating them well

Other	Unique Cost Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding for start ups, small business loan programs • Loans available to small businesses difficult to access (language or system navigation barriers) • Lack of work from home resources available (such as Wi-Fi or data) • Increased electricity costs – people seeking electricity support programs 	Digital Access/Technology Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families lacking tech access; digital training is necessary especially for clients who have disabilities for more privacy, more independence • Some newcomer clients with learning differences struggle with memory, attention challenges, and information processing barriers, full virtual sessions not always effective • Clients with visual difficulties find the constant screen time difficult 	System Support Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language barriers largely preventing understanding of COVID service structures • During winter, physical activities are limited for newcomers • Clients with dependents cannot engage in programming due to a lack of child care options • Lack of support in the school system for those with additional barriers 	Uncertainty & Delay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers whose family members contract COVID unclear about instructions • Slow processing of documentation for immigration (i.e. expired work permits), lingering citizenship exam/process, renewals, sponsorship
What is the greatest need in the newcomer community you serve which cannot be met by your organization at the present time?	The most commonly listed needs were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to food services & financial supports 2. Access to technology, digital literacy, wi-fi for clients 3. Affordable housing 4. Employment for newcomers in their fields, skills training for current labour market trends and needs 5. Services for newcomers with non-traditional immigration status 6. Language supports for clients who cannot access virtual services/documentation/medical interpretation 7. Mass education about mental health supports, many newcomers are really drained 8. Increased understanding of immigration process, especially once the country begins accepting newcomers again 			