



AGENCY SURVEYS: TORONTO NORTH LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW

In Fall 2020, TNLIP sought input from its members on the key issues facing newcomers in Toronto North. Based on input from almost 40 professionals and partners working in the region, TNLIP identified several themes which will inform our work 2021-2025. Themes are organized by TNLIP's pillar areas and directly reflect responses from partners completing the survey:

Settlement, Language, and Integration

Reflecting on regional trends, one settlement worker noted:

"In 2016 newcomers were making more general settlement questions: how to apply for OHIP, register children in schools, driving licenses and opening bank accounts. Now they need more information and support for job search, financial support options, and housing".

Respondents all point to an alarming pattern: in the last five years, settlement issues have increasingly become poverty issues. With limited income, housing, food, and employment are all chronic—rather than acute—needs. In their feedback, agencies highlighted several of these changes:

- **Housing:** Finding housing has become much harder for newcomers since 2016, with many staying in temporary housing or emergency shelters. Survey respondents emphasized that suitable and affordable housing is increasingly inaccessible.
- **System Navigation:** Accessing Toronto's welfare infrastructure requires knowledge of byzantine application processes and forms. With language and mobility already a barrier, newcomers often seek support in discovering and accessing social support.
- **Eligibility:** Refugee claimants, work-permit holders, and visitors are more frequent. Many federally funded agencies cannot officially work with these groups.

Recommendations:

- TNLIP might help mobilize agencies to lend support to housing justice initiatives already existing in the city
 - Cross-LIP collaboration to dialogue with city on newcomers in emergency shelter
- Share expertise on housing discrimination and eviction prevention across agencies (PD or e-news)
- Research best practices and latent solutions to housing that exist within member agencies
- Work with faith groups to formalize bridging process for "ineligible" clients
- Continue the good work of sharing information about programs and resources across agencies
- Continue developing tools/relationships to make referrals more effective

Health and Well Being

Although Canada is well known for supporting a universal health care system, many newcomers struggle to access timely and relevant care. Settlement agencies often play a crucial role in helping newcomers navigate the system, but often get stuck in eligibility requirements, wait times, and underfunded programs. When care is available, language and culture gaps often dampen its efficacy.

- **Mental Health:** All but one respondent mentioned increasing mental health needs for newcomers, specifically stress. Staff recognized higher needs and an increased willingness to address mental health issues. Even with several agencies initiating mental health programs over the last 5 years, *culturally appropriate* support seems to be lacking.
- **System Navigation:** For many, getting care through Ontario's health system is an administrative, linguistic, and geographic challenge. This is especially true for those seeking help on behalf of family members (seniors, children).
- **Culturally Appropriate Care:** Agencies repeatedly highlighted the significance of connecting newcomers with care that is in their language, understanding of cultural norms, and respects diverse needs. This is especially important for mental health care.

Recommendations:

- Facilitate the creation of newcomer advisory boards for large healthcare organizations in the region.
- Assess gaps and resources around senior's health and share with members.
- Create a learning platform for agencies who initiated mental health-related programs in the last 5 years. The group might:
 - Codify best practices for attracting funding and designing programs for all members.
 - Meet with mental health agencies to offer insight into working with newcomers.
- Offer professional development opportunities for Mental Health First Aid for frontline workers.

Employment and Labour Market Integration

Employment is often the first challenge articulated by newcomers accessing settlement services. Many TNLIP members provide employment-related services such as training, placement, networking, and accreditation support. However, many barriers remain both in connecting newcomers to the appropriate programs and creating the required service infrastructure. Agencies in the region identified the following needs:

- **Opportunities:** Jobs are increasingly fragile, offering contract, part-time, or temporary work for low pay. Entry level options are limited, especially for those without Canadian credentials or experience. Agencies want to do more networking with employers, but struggle to make connections.
- **Wrap-around Support:** Survey respondents called for holistic interventions that include mentorship, mental health resources, childcare, interpretation, and even wardrobe support. These were mostly centered around the training/hiring process. These interventions are especially important for people facing multiple barriers.
- **Skills:** Skill requirements continue to prevent newcomers from accessing employment. Language and technology skills are particularly important. This is especially salient for internationally trained professionals.

Recommendations:

- Consider creating a *service roadmap* detailing available supports from local agencies at each stage of the employment process (education, preparing, networking, interviews, working, and advancement). This will help newcomers and frontline staff navigate the system (for wraparound) and may reveal system gaps.
- TNLIP might convene meetings of representatives of both agencies and employers.
- TNLIP may seek out and share success stories of the employment process and dissect what went well.
- Consider establishing a forum for youth to share their job seeking experiences.

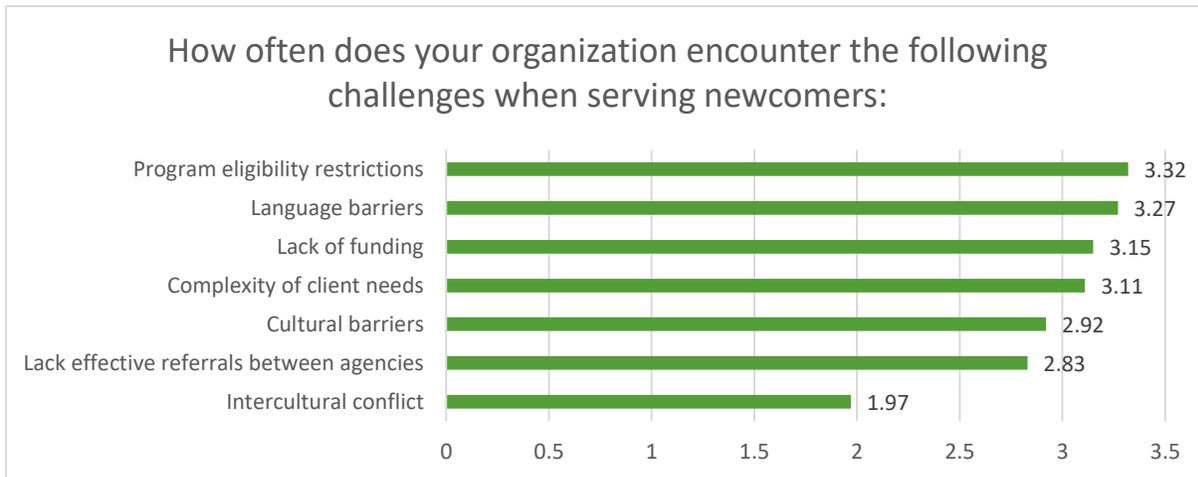
GENERAL FEEDBACK

Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership (TNLIP) is a multi-sectoral planning table which brings together a diverse array of stakeholders to coordinate and streamline the settlement and integration of newcomers in North York. TNLIP is led and staffed by a consortium of partner agencies in the region: JVS Toronto, Working Women Community Centre and TNO – The Neighborhood Organization.

TNLIP has three strategic pillars:

- Employment & Labour Market Integration
- Settlement, Language & Integration
- Health & Wellbeing

As part of the 2021-2025 strategic planning process, TNLIP solicited feedback from member agencies on the gaps, trends, and service priorities in their areas of work. This report summarizes responses from 37 professionals representing 28 agencies working in the region. The following sections summarize partner responses to requests for feedback:



Program Changes

- **Mental Health:** Six agencies reported starting some kind of mental health service.
- **Technology:** Online programs and technology focused programs are on the rise.
- **Endings:** Some projects have ended due to funding. Several of these seem to be recreation focused.

Other Suggestions:

- **Host Community:** Respondents emphasized that settlement involved both newcomers and the host community. Involving representatives from the existing community might be key to improving integration.
- **System Change:** Most frontline workers feel that justice is a salient concern. TNLIP may be able to coordinate or resource advocacy efforts.

SETTLEMENT, LANGUAGE, AND INTEGRATION



How are newcomer settlement needs different than in 2016? What's new, and what has declined in importance?

- **Housing:** More than half of respondents noted that finding housing has become much harder for newcomers since 2016.
- **No Change:** Most agencies reported that the same issues of language, employment, and education have remained consistent over time.

What settlement-related supports for newcomers are missing or insufficient in your community?

- **Housing:** Subsidies, information, and professional help are all lacking
- **Child Care:** Several respondents noted a lack of childcare supports (esp. for parents of at-risk youth)
- **System Navigation:** Existing supports are hard to discover and access. Supports themselves are underfunded, especially mental health and food banks.

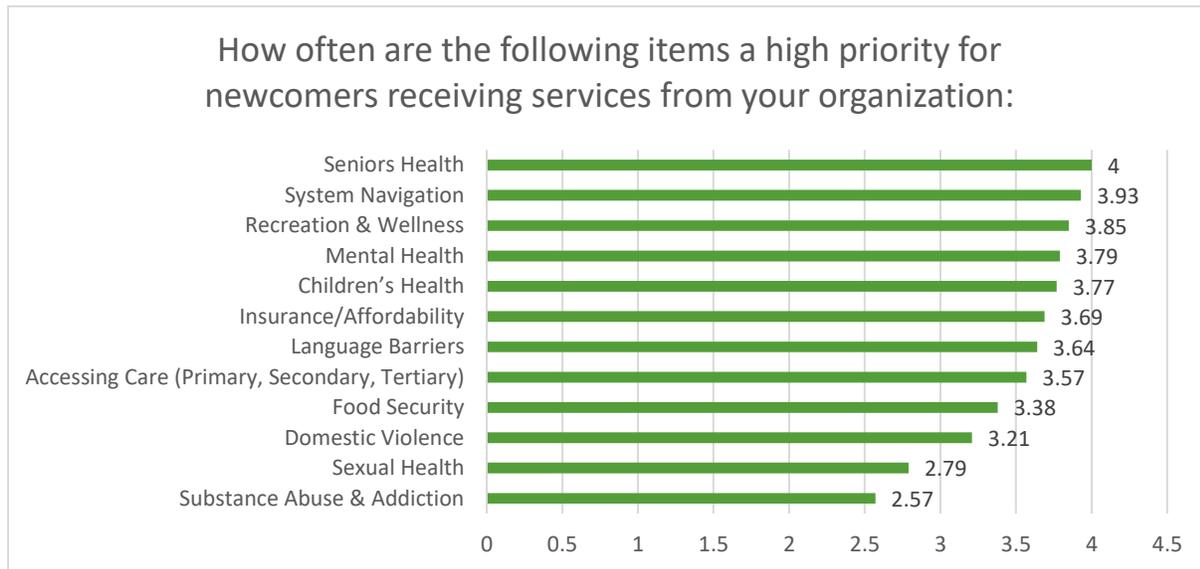
What is the most pressing settlement-related issue for newcomers that you work with? Please elaborate.

- **Finance:** Settlement is increasingly a poverty problem, and families lack the resources to thrive. This includes both access to employment and other social supports
- **Housing:** Accessing permanent, adequate housing is a high priority.
- **Employment:** Gaining stable, sufficient employment is a key challenge.

What demographic changes are you seeing/anticipating in your service? Are there any new groups that you are serving?

- **Youth:** Students and other young people are increasingly seeking settlement support.
- **Working Poor:** Several respondents noted that families with stable employment are increasingly seeking support.
- **Refugee Claimants:** A growing group with large barriers to accessing most settlement infrastructure.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



How are newcomer health needs different than in 2016? What's new, and what has declined in importance?

- **Mental Health:** All but one respondent mentioned increasing mental health needs for newcomers, specifically stress. Staff recognized higher needs and an increased willingness to address mental health issues.
- **Pandemic:** The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates existing health inequalities and isolation.

What health-related supports for newcomers are missing or insufficient in your community?

- **Culturally Relevant Support:** Staff noted a lack of linguistically and culturally-appropriate supports such as hotlines, support groups, and counselling. This is especially important for mental health.
- **Mental Health:** Whether general or culturally specific, newcomers face a dearth of resources when seeking mental health support. One respondent noted this as especially hard for those without diagnoses.
- **System Navigation:** Wait times, eligibility requirements, and lack of knowledge all act as barriers to accessing care.

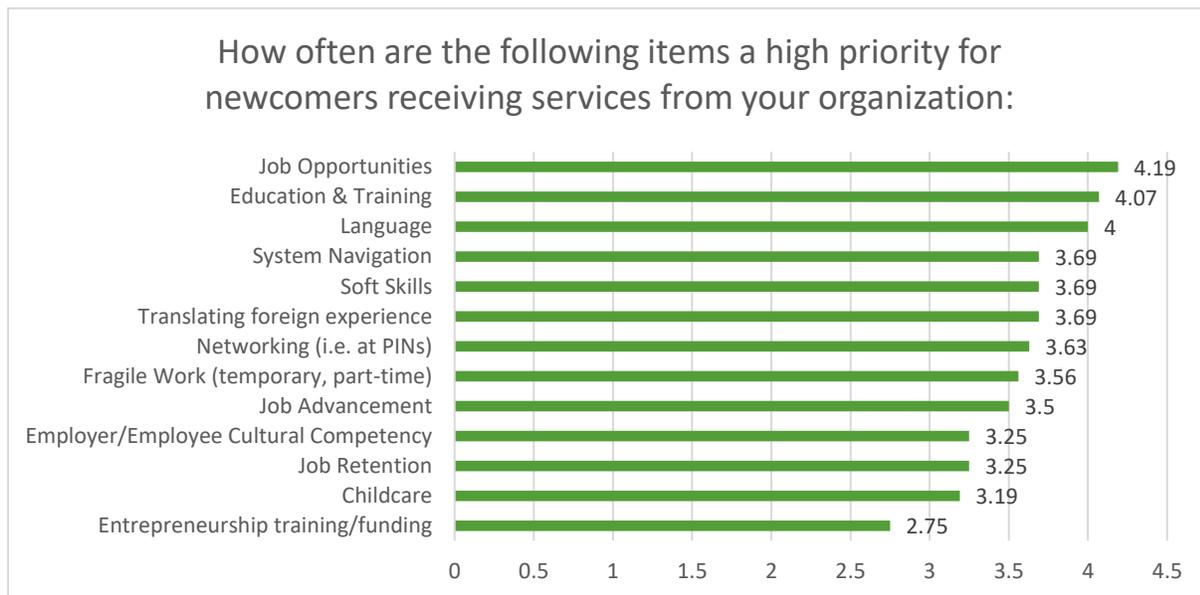
What is the most pressing health-related issue for newcomers that you work with? Please elaborate.

- **Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Support:** This is critical, especially because unaddressed, it leads to involvement with CAS or the criminal justice system.
- **Wait Times:** For those not yet eligible for OHIP, accessing healthcare is extremely challenging.

What demographic changes are you seeing/anticipating in your service? Are there any new groups that you are serving?

- **Vulnerable Groups:** Seniors, children, and those experiencing intimate partner violence have increased
- **Transience:** National groups generally come in waves, such as the Syrian, Brazilian, or Roma communities. These groups generally emerge with high needs and then settle.

EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION



How are newcomer employment needs different than in 2016? What's new, and what has declined in importance?

- **Computer/Tech Skills:** Tech skills are a much higher, unexpected, requirement for employment.
- **Opportunity:** Compared to 2016, there are fewer entry-level 'survival' jobs available for newcomers.
- **Skills:** Translating skills from abroad and developing Canadian skills is increasingly difficult.

What employment-related supports for newcomers are missing or insufficient in your community?

- **Wraparound:** Respondents called for holistic interventions for the hiring/training process (e.x. childcare, mentorship, interpretation, and wardrobe support). These were noted as especially important for women.
- **Mental Health:** Respondents highlighted that the current system has little to offer in terms of support for the psychological aspects of the employment search.
- **Employer Engagement:** Partnerships, subsidies, diversity training, and networks are lacking in services.

What is the most pressing employment-related issue for newcomers that you work with? Please elaborate.

- **Skills/Accreditation:** Many newcomers cannot find meaningful employment because employers often do not accept international experience. Apprenticeship transition programs are one way through this.
- **Fragile work:** Many newcomers are in temporary or part-time roles for which they are over-qualified.
- **Finding Jobs:** Newcomers feel pressure to find jobs immediately despite lacking a network or certification.

What demographic changes are you seeing/anticipating in your service? Are there any new groups that you are serving?

- **Non-IRCC:** Refugee claimants, work-permit holders, and visitors are more frequent.
- **Youth:** Several agencies reported serving younger people (16-35), including international students.
- **Internationally Trained Professionals:** Many agencies work with newcomers with professional training, especially in healthcare. Language and accreditation are key barriers for newcomers