

What are the settlement needs of immigrant seniors in Canada and what are the impacts of settlement services?

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What is this research about?

In 2016, 16.9% of the Canadian population are aged 65 and above. For the first time in Canadian history, there are now slightly more seniors than there are children aged 14 and under.

Recent immigrant seniors face a number of issues upon arrival in Canada, including chronic low income, lack of access to government income support programs, lack of understanding of either English or French, and difficulty accessing programs suited to their linguistic needs.

Our literature review reveals that there are relatively few academic articles published in the last 10 years focusing on the civic/social contributions of immigrant seniors in Canada and the services that they provide to their families and the community at large.

The purpose of this review was to explore the effectiveness of settlement services in facilitating positive settlement outcomes for recent Canadian immigrant seniors.

The overall trend in the literature highlights the lack of policies and programs that address the needs of newcomer seniors and limited research in this specific area. The paucity of programs and research is problematic because, even though newcomer seniors have a set of difficulties distinct from those of mainstream older Canadians and long-term immigrant seniors, these issues are not addressed in either academic research or policy documents.

We conclude that despite the rising population of both long-term and recent immigrant seniors in Canada, few specific settlement services address the needs of either group, especially recent immigrant seniors. We call for more research documenting both the experiences and needs of newcomer seniors in order to facilitate their social, economic, and cultural inclusion in Canadian society.

This research is part of a wider study on the settlement outcomes of Immigrant Women, Youth and Seniors, which is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

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What did researchers do?

The search for relevant literature covered both academic literature (e.g., journal databases such as Sociological Abstracts and Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly) and grey literature (e.g., CERIS website, and Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal websites). In total, 226 articles were reviewed for this report. Using a standardized abstracting template, articles were summarized according to four broad areas of settlement—economic, social, political, and ideational (belonging and identity). The scope of the literature is limited to English articles published in Canada.

What did researchers find?

Thirty percent of all immigrant seniors and over 50% of recent immigrant seniors live in chronic low-income compared to a rate of 2% among the Canadian-born seniors (Picot and Lu 2017:14).

Being racialized also constitutes a big factor for senior poverty. When it comes to language skills, our study finds that many newcomer seniors rely on their children for learning or communicating in English. Since the majority of recent immigrant seniors enter under the Family Reunification Program, they migrate to join adult children and grandchildren. However, settlement services for recent senior migrants in multigenerational living arrangements are virtually non-existent.

Because of their lack of language skills and the change of social environment, most senior newcomers experience social isolation.

However, they still make some efforts to be engaged in their communities

and they seem to gravitate around ethnic organizations and faith-based institutions.

Newcomer seniors' health is negatively impacted by their challenges in the settlement process. They are also at risk for abuse, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological and emotional abuse.

While they could benefit from services, many newcomer seniors have difficulty finding information and remain unaware of existing programs mainly because of language barriers.

How can you get involved?

This summary is based on the Knowledge synthesis phase of the research. Researchers are now completing primary research with key informants from the settlement sector and immigrant seniors. If you are interested in participating, kindly contact the Research Lead.

Recommendations

Our study highlights the importance of government income support to reduce chronic low income of recent seniors.

We also encourage the implementation of programs providing information on senior employment opportunities. Our recommendations also include the provision of housing support programs which would increase recent seniors' independence and a call for increased funding of both formal and informal ethnocultural social and community supports.

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