



S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

British Columbia Poverty Reduction Strategy

British Columbia's population is highly diverse. Census 2016 indicates immigrants represent 28.3% of the province's population, an increase from 27.6% in 2011. This represents an immigrant population growth of 8.5%, which exceeds the overall population growth rate of 5.6%. As one of Canada's largest immigrant and refugee-serving agencies, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. puts forward the following recommendations for the development of an inclusive BC Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Ensure immigrants are included in the design and implementation of poverty reduction strategies.

Immigrants in British Columbia are more likely to live in poverty than non-immigrant; Census 2016 indicates the prevalence of low income¹ among immigrants in British Columbia was 19%, compared to 13% for non-immigrants. Among recent immigrants, the prevalence of low income was 31%.ⁱ Statistics Canada also indicates immigrants in Metro Vancouver are more likely than those in most other regions of Canada to experience chronic low income (i.e. have a family income under a low-income cut-off for five consecutive years or more). In 2012, 15.2% of Metro Vancouver's immigrants (age 25+ and had been in Canada for 5 to 20 years) experienced chronic low income, which is higher than the national rate of 12.3%.ⁱⁱ

Research has also found that immigrants with lower levels of income were more likely to report higher levels of stress.ⁱⁱⁱ They also tend to have lower levels of social and community support and are more likely to be isolated, which is a risk factor for poor health.^{iv}

Poverty reduction strategies and actions must take into account the needs and experiences of immigrants, particularly recent immigrants, refugees, families, women, children, and seniors. Furthermore, strategies need to recognize the complexity of poverty and intersections with immigration and settlement, and include actions related to housing and homelessness, health and well-being, family supports, employment and income, training and education, as well as community inclusion.

Invest in settlement services to support immigrants' economic and community integration.

The role of settlement services to support immigrants and refugees to navigate British Columbia's systems and resources as well as to achieve economic and community integration is essential to poverty reduction. The challenges experienced by immigrants in settlement, including lack of affordable housing, homelessness, unemployment and under-employment as well as language and cultural barriers, contribute to and intersect with issues of poverty, increases their vulnerability, and negatively impacts their settlement process. For example, research among immigrant and refugees in Vancouver has found that due to high transportation costs, they had problems moving around the city, which impacts their ability to make new connections and network.^v Families in poverty may end up living in neighbourhoods that are on the outskirts of the city and, due to high transportation costs, access to community resources and opportunities are hindered.^{vi}

The lack of meaningful employment is linked to low income and poverty. Many immigrants are under-employed in jobs that are lower in skill than the job they held prior to immigrating to Canada. Challenges with unemployment and under-employment are often related to foreign credential recognition and English language barriers, which need to be addressed to ensure immigrants achieve sustainable and meaningful employment.

¹ All references to prevalence of low income in this document is based on Low Income Measure, After Tax (LIM-AT) unless otherwise indicated.





Increase specialized services for vulnerable immigrant seniors.

Immigrant seniors can be highly vulnerable and are more likely to experience chronic low income; 31% of immigrant seniors across Canada experienced chronic low income in 2012.^{vii} Vulnerable immigrant seniors experience challenges such as English barriers, isolation, changing family relationships/dynamics during settlement that can increase their vulnerability, and poor health. They also experience barriers to accessing government and community information and services due to limited awareness as well as cultural and linguistic barriers. All these factors contribute to experiences of poverty.

Despite the significant number of vulnerable immigrant seniors in low income and poverty, there is a lack of services for this population group. Many immigrant seniors in British Columbia are naturalized citizens and, therefore, ineligible for federally-funded settlement services to support them to navigate government and community systems and to integrate into the community through addressing issues of social isolation and loneliness. However, provincially-funded settlement services currently prioritize those who are destined for the labour market, which typically does not include seniors. This is a prime opportunity for British Columbia to demonstrate leadership and invest in specialized services to support the province's highly vulnerable immigrant seniors.

Fund specialized services for vulnerable refugees.

Refugees can be highly vulnerable and many live in poverty. In addition to low income and poverty, they can also experience barriers such as lack of stable housing, poor health, trauma and grief, social and physical isolation, English language barriers, precarious status, as well as lack of connections to community resources and supports. Refugees who have experienced trauma can have even greater difficulties leaving the cycle of poverty.^{viii}

There is an opportunity for British Columbia to fund specialized services to support vulnerable refugees. In fact, specialized programming is considered a best practice and can generate significant community impacts. For example, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.'s *Action, Commitment, Transformation (ACT) Program* provides early intervention supports that minimize vulnerable newcomers' use of social and other resources (such as social assistance and health expenses) down the road.

Expedite the building of affordable housing through higher levels of investment immediately.

Without stable and affordable housing, it is challenging to make progress on issues of poverty. Based on most recently available census data on immigration and housing², 19% of immigrant households in British Columbia are in core housing need, compared to 14% of non-immigrant households. Amongst recent immigrant households, 30% are in core housing need. The rate of immigrant households in core housing need is particularly pronounced in Metro Vancouver, where 21% of immigrant and 33% of recent immigrant households are in core housing need, compared to 15% of non-immigrant households.^{ix} Lack of affordable housing that is suitable for larger immigrant families, in combination with limited understanding of local housing economies and systems as well as language barriers, compounds the challenges of vulnerable immigrants and refugees in securing stable and affordable housing.

The need to build more affordable housing is immediate. The vacancy rate in British Columbia is declining while the cost of renting is increasing rapidly. The number of households on the BC Housing waitlist is also increasing, particularly in high growth communities such as Surrey and Tri-Cities. The BC Rental Housing Coalition estimates that over the next 10 years, an average of 7,000 rental units will be needed annually.^x The provincial government needs to make higher levels of investments into building more affordable housing immediately, and collaborate with non-profit housing operators and municipalities to expedite the process so that more affordable housing is available sooner.

² Based on 2011 National Household Survey/Census. Core Housing Need data is updated every five years using census data. Data from the 2016 Census with the immigration variable is expected to be released in 2018.



About S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

Founded in 1973, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. is one of the largest immigrant and refugee serving agencies in Canada with 20+ service locations across Metro Vancouver and Northern BC, as well as overseas in China, South Korea, and Taiwan. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. delivers a range of integrated services to more than 61,200 clients annually in the areas of settlement, language, employment, business, family and youth, counselling, early childhood development, affordable housing, seniors care, as well as community development.

¹ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016206.

² Picot, G. & Lu, Y. (2017). Chronic Low Income Among Immigrants in Canada and its Communities. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2017397-eng.htm>

³ Robert, A. & Gilkinson, T. (2012). Mental Health and Well-being of Recent Immigrants in Canada: Evidence from Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/mental-health.pdf>

⁴ Edmonton Multicultural Coalition. (n.d.). Immigrants' Access to Health Services. Retrieved from <http://www.emcoalition.ca/policies/health/>

⁵ Representative for Children and Youth & Vancouver Foundation. (2013). Fresh Voices Report 2013. Retrieved from <http://make-it-count.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/FreshVoices-Web-report-2013.pdf>

⁶ Chuang, S.S., Rasmi, S., & Friesen, C. (2010). Service Providers' Perspectives on the Pathways of Adjustment for Newcomer Children and Youth in Canada. In S.S. Chuang & R.P. Moreno (Eds.), *Immigrant Children: Change, Adaptation, and Cultural Transformation* (149-170). Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

⁷ Este, D. & Ngo, H.V. (2010). Resilience and Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in Canada. In S.S. Chuang & R.P. Moreno (Eds.), *Immigrant Children: Change, Adaptation, and Cultural Transformation* (27-49). Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

⁸ Picot, G. & Lu, Y. (2017). Chronic Low Income Among Immigrants in Canada and its Communities. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2017397-eng.htm>

⁹ Hiebert, D. (2011). Precarious Housing and Hidden Homelessness Among Refugee Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Employment and Social Development Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/research/kdp/immigrants/precarious.shtml>

¹⁰ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission. (n.d.). Housing Market Information Portal. Retrieved from <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmiportal>

¹¹ BC Rental Housing Coalition. (2017). BC Affordable Housing Plan. Retrieved from http://www.housingcentral.ca/SITES/HousingCentral/Affordable_Rental_Housing_Plan/HousingCentral/Affordable_Rental_Housing_Plan.aspx