

Age of Wisdom Collective project
Giving Voice to Immigrant and Refugee Seniors

Knowledge Mobilizing Tools
First Edition, 2018

Understanding the Reality of Our Seniors of Immigrant, Refugee, and other Newcomer
backgrounds & Eligibility to Essential Services Tied to the Immigration Pathways

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Age of Wisdom Collective (AOW) project is a unique initiative grounded in the wisdom and strengths of the culturally diverse seniors with lived experience as Immigrant, Refugee and other Newcomer backgrounds. By drawing on the lived experience of these seniors, the Age of Wisdom project aims to inform and guide policy and practices for healthy ageing of all seniors in Canada.

This initiative was conceived through multiple informal conversations between seniors with lived experience as immigrant, refugee, and other newcomer backgrounds, various cultural communities, community members and leaders, and grass root senior service providers who have witnessed and worked tirelessly to mitigate enduring issues related to chronic poverty, discrimination, social isolation, and barriers to accessing essential services.

In 2015, under the Age Friendly Edmonton funding and support from the City of Edmonton, the Advisory Group was formed which included Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, City of Edmonton, The Shaama Centre (formerly named Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association), and Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative.

In Phase 1, Needs Assessment report, *The Age of Wisdom: Giving Voice to Edmonton's Immigrant Seniors and Identifying Their Needs* by Zenev and Associates, was commissioned by the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. The report based on literature reviews and community consultations identified a) commonly prevalent issues impacting seniors across ethnocultural communities in Edmonton, b) existing gaps in services and programs and c) recommendations on enhancing existing services for immigrant and refugee seniors.

In Phase 2, an Animator was hired to facilitate the creation and development of “Ambassadors (a core team of bilingual and bicultural seniors from various ethnocultural communities)”, and to hold additional community consultations to gain a deeper understanding of the reality of immigrant, refugee and other newcomer backgrounds seniors and their access to existing essential services.

The Knowledge Mobilizing Tools have been created to 1) make visible diverse seniors of immigrant, refugee, and other newcomer backgrounds and their contribution to our communities, 2) raise awareness on the knowledge gaps related to the essential services, and 3) invite dialogues with seniors, community members, decision-makers and service providers to create policies, programs, and practices that support healthy and inclusive ageing for seniors of immigrant, refugee and other newcomer backgrounds.

We thank all seniors who bravely shared their stories of strengths and challenges. The featured stories are composition stories with alias names. They are written and translated to English in ways to maintain the integrity of the original story and the tone in which these stories were shared by the seniors.

PREFACE

Making Visible the Strength and Challenges of Seniors of Immigrant, Refugee, and other Newcomer Backgrounds

Why make visible seniors of Immigrant, Refugee and other Newcomer backgrounds in our city?

When we see visible minority seniors or hear them speak with an accent, the common narrative running through our heads is that “they [immigrants] are all the same”, “they are a drain on our economy”, “they came to Canada to use social, health services and get income support”. Contrary to these common beliefs, there are rich diversity and strengths found within the “immigrant” seniors and they are not “all the same”.

Depending on the immigration pathways in which IRN seniors arrived in Canada, the reality of most seniors involve limited to no access to the essential services including income support and benefits, social programs, and healthcare. The language barrier, mobility/ health issues, along with a lack of knowledge on the existing services can often worsen the cycle of isolation, discrimination, and poverty. By making visible the different types of “immigrant” seniors and their unique strengths and service needs, together we can create a strong community.

The Vision behind Knowledge Mobilizing Tools?

While there have been many attempts made by service providers and the community members to minimize barriers for senior in accessing services, navigate the complexity of immigration policy, service eligibility requirements tied to seniors’ immigration pathways has been a challenge in providing appropriate support. The vision behind the Knowledge Mobilizing Tools is to 1) share knowledge and raise awareness on the diverse composition of seniors of Immigrant, Refugee, and other Newcomer backgrounds and their access to essential services to both community and the service providing sector, and 2) invite intersectoral and intercultural collaboration to better support our seniors.

How was the Knowledge Mobilizing Tools content produced?

The information presented in this 1st edition was drawn from the community wisdom via consultations with seniors of Immigrant, Refugee, and other Newcomer backgrounds, community members, health brokers from the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op, and generous insight from colleagues tied to essential services and the information on their official websites. We acknowledge that the information presented here is simplified and subject to change and revision. We welcome any questions or joint effort to refine this tool. Please contact Nuel Han, Project Animator, at nuelhanmchb@gmail.com. For detail and updated information on each service, please visit the official website of the corresponding services.

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Composite Stories Told by Our Seniors

Story of Aklilu

My name is Aklilu and I'm 68 years old. Eritrea is my hometown but only in my memory can I go there. I came to Canada through Super Visa a few years ago. I'm waiting for my asylum seeker application to be processed because going back to Eritrea is not safe.

Many years ago, before coming to Canada, I was a teacher in Ethiopia. I could not become a teacher in Eritrea because of the civil unrest and the mandatory national army service for all males. If you join the army, no money comes to the family. I taught in Ethiopia and lived there for 13 years and sent money to my family in Eritrea. It was not much but it helped them get by. My kids asked me why I didn't come home. It was hard for us to live together in Eritrea. If I returned to my family and the government found out they would put me to jail as a punishment for running away from serving the country. As a male, we have no career opportunity but to join the national army.

It took many years of saving to send my kids to Canada. They came through the asylum seeker application. I had to travel to Uganda and Egypt because there's no processing centre in Eritrea. Processing time was long but I couldn't quit. I wanted my kids to have a future without fear.

After they arrived in Canada, I hoped they would sponsor me to become a permanent resident. But they could only help me come on Super Visa. Super Visa is good but it is temporary. I need to update my application every two years. My children had to buy medical insurance for me.

I thought living in a country like Canada would help our family to come together. But I don't see my kids. All they do is work, day and night. They have no family time. Most of the time I am by myself. Every now and then, they give me an allowance. Even though it is little, it is better than nothing.

I asked a lady from the community to help me with my asylum-seeker application. She helped me collect documents and make sure that I don't miss deadlines or appointments. She taught me how to read in English and take a bus. I call her my child. She spends time with me and takes me out to see others like me. I don't know what I would do without her help.

I hope that my asylum seeker application is approved, so I will have my own money and my children do not have to spend money on me. I hope to have a place to call home so I could rest and have friends over for tea.

Story of Tansi

My name is Tansi. I am from India. My husband died a few years ago in India. My son sponsored me to come to Canada three years ago. I am very happy that our family is now together. Being a grandmother is a great joy to me.

My son and daughter-in-law both work to support the family. I stay home and take care of my granddaughter. I do not know English, so I need help with everything. I see how tired they are, I do not ask for anything. The only time I get out of the house is on the weekend when we all go out. When we are out shopping, the people are very friendly.

In India, I was a school teacher. I was very independent. I went everywhere.

After I retired, people in my village came to talk to me about their problems and ask for advice. They think that I have the experience and wisdom to help them solve problems. Sometimes, they brought me food to thank me. I was very busy helping out in the community. I was invited to ceremonies and treated with respect. Many of my students who are grown up brought their children to visit me. Most of the time, I was not alone. My favorite thing to do is to sit under a tree and tell stories to the children.

Here in Edmonton, I do not have friends and people do not know me. In the summer, I wanted to take my granddaughter out for a walk in the neighborhood. But I am scared I will get lost. If I get lost, I do not know what to do. If I ask for help, nobody will understand what I am saying. I am a stranger in a strange country. I am no longer a teacher, a respected woman in the community. Now my granddaughter is bigger, I think of taking her to ride on a bus. But I do not have money and I don't know how to take a bus. I am afraid of getting lost. So I just stay home. I love taking care of my granddaughter. She is a very good little girl.

My son and daughter-in-law are good to me. But they work so hard. I don't want to make them feel bad about me. They are doing their very best. I always pretend to be happy. Some days, I am lonely and sad. I wish I had a friend to talk to, to visit or to have tea with. May be the friend could show me how to take the bus and we can go to a few places with my granddaughter. Before I came to Canada, I heard many good things about Canada. They said Canada is a beautiful, clean and safe country to live in. I want to learn about Edmonton and the people in our community. I want to share my experience. I am not sure if I can do this.

Story of Seema

My name is Seema, I came to Canada with my husband about three years ago because our only daughter's marriage broke down. She was alone here and very depressed. She arranged for us to come here on Super Visa. In the beginning we were happy because we felt that we will be near our only child and will be able to provide her some support and live peacefully. We came to Edmonton in July 2014 and we stayed here for one year, then we had to go back to Pakistan because our passports were about to expire. The rule is that super visa is given only until the expiry of the passport and one would have to go back to their country of origin to renew the passport. At that time there was no online facility for the passports renewal from Pakistan. This meant we had to buy airfare back to Pakistan to renew our passports. When we came back to Canada in Nov 2015, our daughter re-applied for medical insurance for us and it costs more than \$2,000 for one year. The insurance only covers some emergency expenses. Visit to a doctor and the cost of lab and medicine are covered only after \$1,000 deductible. There is no dental coverage. So I don't visit a doctor unless it is an emergency. I depend on a doctor from my community to give me free consultation. I had an acute dental problem. A local organization helped me to find a dentist who agreed to charge a small fee and someone from the organization paid for my medicine. I am retired and I get a small pension back home which amounts to almost nothing in Canadian dollars. My daughter pays for everything. She is working full time and upgrading her English so she can take a course and find a better paying job. After every two years, we will need to go out of Canada according to the super visa and re-enter. This will cost plane tickets and I have to get my medical done again and pay for it in Pakistan.

My husband fell down in winter and the doctor advised him to go for physiotherapy but he did not go as it is very expensive for us. We cannot go to the doctor for medical checkups as our insurance does not cover medicines. If we go to any doctor, he will charge up front for the visit. We do not get senior benefits or low-cost seniors bus tickets. I want to work and take care of my expenses but I am not entitled to work here. My daughter is struggling hard and bearing all expenses. She is my only daughter. I have applied for Permanent Residency but it is on a lottery base and I do not know when we will be able to get it. We cannot afford to participate in recreational activities. We cannot study, train or upgrade ourselves because of the cost. How can we ask money from our daughter if she herself is struggling! It is an undue hardship on her too.

It is hard emotionally on the family too. People who come on super visa face many problems. If the family is settled here then super visa is not a big issue. Actual problems arise when children are struggling in Canada and parents are alone back home. This makes it difficult for the family. I don't want to be a burden on the government. I want to work and contribute and be with my daughter and support her emotionally. I am not allowed to work here with a super visa.

Story of Maria

I am Maria from Bosnia. I am 76 years old. I was sponsored to come to Canada by my only daughter eight years ago. My daughter came to Edmonton as a refugee. At that time, I wanted her to be free. After she left, I was very sad and lonely.

I am very happy to come and to live in Edmonton. This is a safe place and the people are friendly. We don't have to worry about where to hide so we won't be killed. Being with my daughter is a blessing. After I was here for 3 months, I received \$140 monthly senior benefits from the province of Alberta. But four or five years ago, I was very sad when this senior benefit was cut. A Health Broker tried to help me by asking the government of Alberta not to cut the benefits of those who are receiving the benefit. But the government did not agree. So I am left with no income.

My daughter got married a year after I came to Edmonton. I live with her and her husband. Her husband has very bad Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome because of what he experienced of the Bosnia War. He got a job but the stress was so bad that he cannot work. My daughter and I were also diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome because of the war in Bosnia. Hers was not as bad so she was able to work. She is the only one who has a job in the family. I do not know English and my health is not good so I could not work. We live on her salary and we are happy to be together. She works long hours. So I spend most of the time alone.

Thanks to the Health Broker who connected me with other seniors. These seniors visit me and they bring food. She gives me a free bus pass so I can go out. She connected me with a psychologist. I have senior medical insurance that pays 70 percent of my medicine. I have to pay the other 30 percent. So the Health Broker talked to a Pharmacist who agreed that I do not have to pay the 30 percent. This saves me a lot of money. I am very thankful to the Health Broker and to people in Edmonton who are very good to me.

Seven months ago, my daughter lost her job because her boss closed his business. Without her salary, we are now living on her \$2,000 per month employment insurance. After paying the condo mortgage, there is very little money left for living expenses.

I have to wait 15 months before I can apply for Old Age Security. With Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Alberta Senior Benefit, I should be able to live a little better life. I can pay for my expenses so my daughter does not have to. Now I can only wait for the time to come.

Story of Jose

My name is Jose. I came to Canada as a permanent resident when I was 39 years old with my family from Mexico. I have 5 children. My dream is to make a good home for my family and a better future for my children. I did not know English but I did not have time to go to English classes. I had to work to support my family. I was lucky to find a job in construction doing hard labour. I get by with little English by learning the names of the tools in English and some easy sentences. My wife stayed home to take care of our children. I did not make a lot of money but we get by. We are very happy to be in Edmonton. Our life here is better than our life in Mexico. People in Edmonton are very good to us. They help us a lot.

Now my children are all grown up and have their own family. I have three grandchildren. I don't know how our family could have the life we have now if we stayed in Mexico. I retired two years ago when I was 65 years old. I wanted to work a few more years to save some money but it is too hard for my body to do hard labor. Now, my wife and I live in a small rented apartment closed to our children. To help our children, we babysit our grandchildren. I receive Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Alberta Seniors Benefits and a small Canada Pension. My wife is only 62 years old. So she does not have any income now. She has to wait three years before she can apply for all senior benefits that I have. Our apartment is very small but the rent and utilities keep going up every year. We are very careful with our money. After paying the rent, utility and food, we still have very little money left. So I want to make a little extra money, but I do not know what to do that is easy on my body. One day, I saw a man going through the garbage pulling out bottles to sell to bottle depot. So I decided to do that. I tell my wife I am going out for a walk. I then go through garbage collecting bottles and selling them to a bottle depot closed by. I am very ashamed to do this but I do not know other ways to make extra money. I walked around the neighborhood not too close to our apartment. I hope no one know me. I don't want to embarrass my wife and my children. But I am afraid some day they may find out. I wish I could do something different now.

Definitions of Immigrant, Refugee and other Newcomer Backgrounds Senior Populations

Immigrant seniors (obtained Canadian Permanent Resident status):

- Those who immigrated earlier in life and aged in Canada i.e. naturalized citizen.
- Those who have been sponsored by their children or family members.

Refugee seniors (obtained Canadian Permanent Resident status):

- Those who are sponsored by government and receive one year of income support, harmonized at the level of Alberta's income support. These seniors would be required to pay back the federal government transportation loan plus interest.
- Those who are "privately sponsored" by family members, a group of 5 community members (e.g. faith groups, etc.).
- Those who have "blended support" – half a year by government and half a year by "private sponsors".

Refugee Claimant seniors

- Is a sub category of refugee immigration pathway, referred to as "asylum seeker".
- Waiting for their refugee status application to be processed.

¹*Newcomer seniors*

- Seniors who arrived in Canada on the Super Visa. This is visitor visa that is renewable up to maximum of 10 years, but must re-apply for extension every two year. Some seniors entering Canada under Super Visa often come as a caretaker to grandchildren while their children remain in Canada under Temporary Foreign Workers or Permanent Resident or a Canadian Citizen.
- Seniors who arrive in Canada to visit their family on a short term (6 months or less).

¹ For Age of Wisdom Collective project, Newcomer seniors are referred to as visitors to Canada who does not have a Permanent Resident status in Canada

Statistics on the Immigration Trend of Seniors

The following graphs depict a) the Immigration Trend, from 2007 to 2017, on Admissions of Permanent Residents to City of Edmonton per Immigration Pathway Category by Age Grouping 55+, and b) Temporary Resident Visa (i.e. Super Visa) Applications Approved by 55+ Age Grouping from year 2011 to 2017 (Jan - Jun) Canada wide.

These graphs were created using the raw data given by Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada, reflecting information as of June 2017. The data for Super Visa Approvals was given by Citizenship Immigration Canada – Edmonton branch, reflecting information as of August 14, 2017.

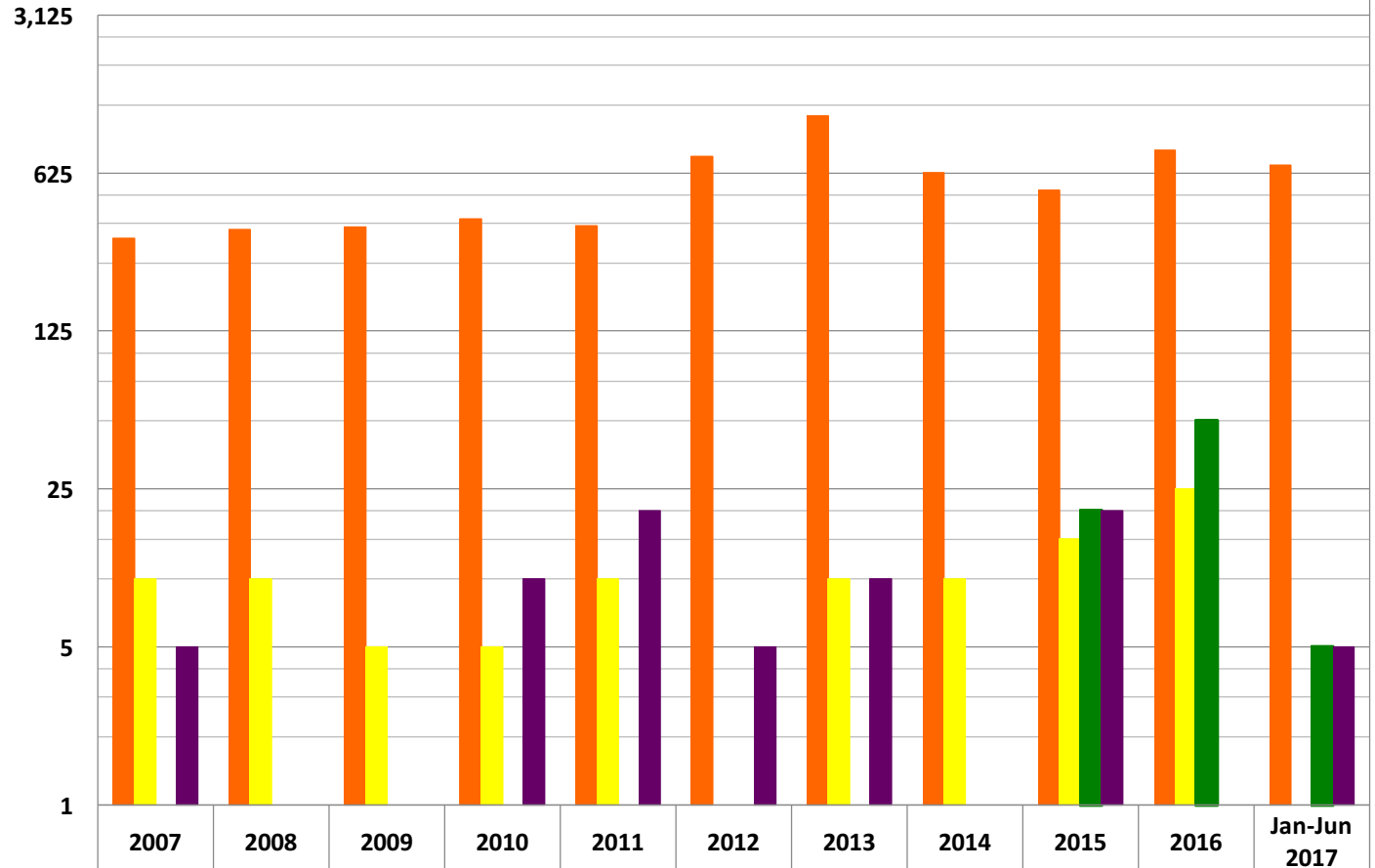
The raw data received from the Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada showed any values between 0 and 5 as “-” to prevent individuals from being identified. All other values are rounded to the closest multiple of 5 for the same reason. As a result of rounding, data may not accurately reflect the addition of various values.

On the graph titled “Admissions of Permanent Residents based on the Immigration Category and 55+ Age Grouping from year 2007 to June 2017 to the City of Edmonton”, any values between 0 and 5 is indicated as “0” or “5”. However, in the Temporary Resident Visa graph, a hyphen is used to indicate the same.

The values presented on the graphs reflect tallied numbers from the raw data given by the Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada (IRCC), specific to age grouping 55 to 100. The raw data has been tallied and graphed by Project Animator to depict the immigration trend. The raw data is available upon request.

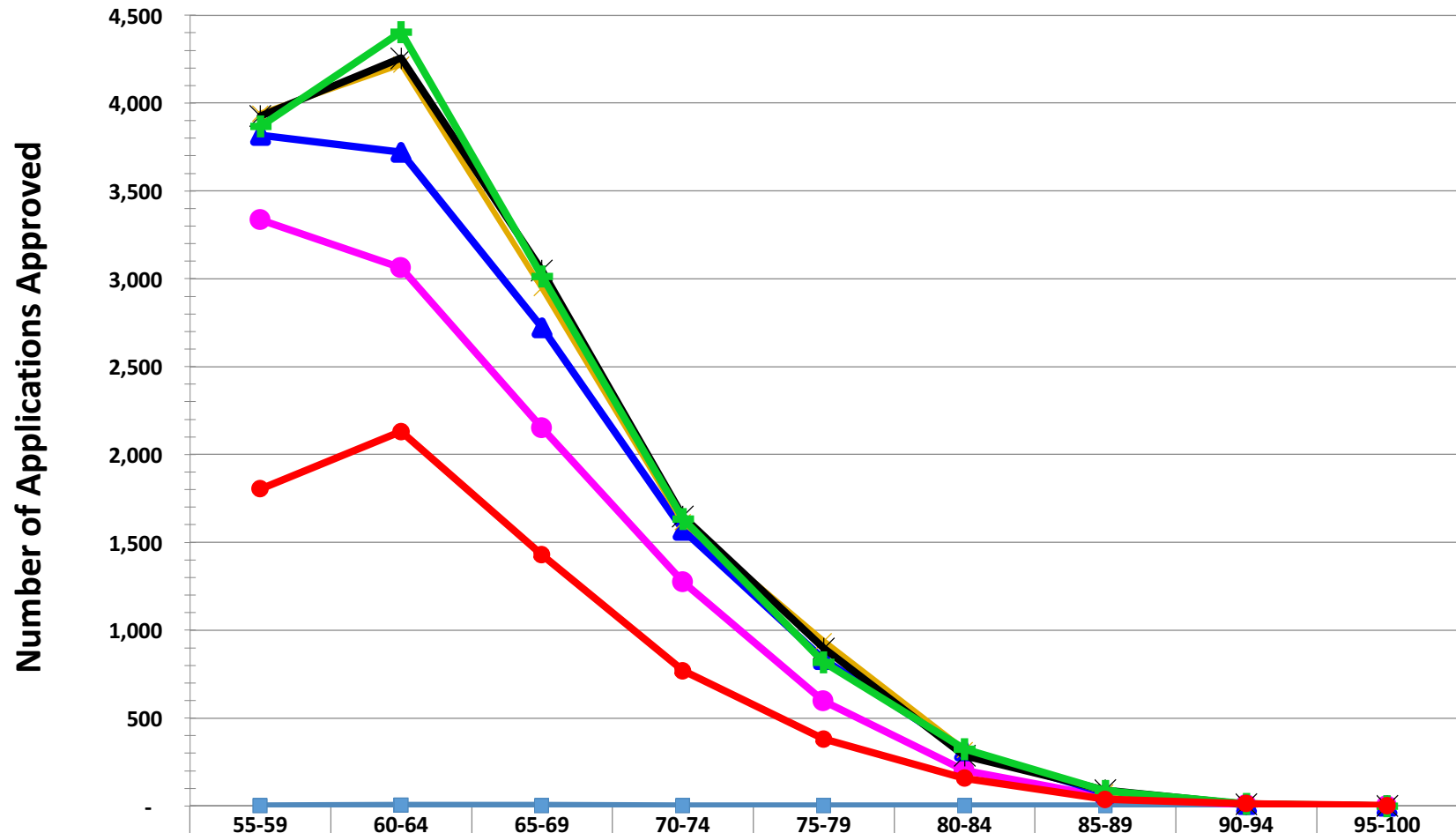
**Admissions of Permanent Residents based on the Immigration Category and 55+ Age Grouping
from year 2007 to June 2017 to the City of Edmonton**

Number of Admissions of Permanent Residents



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Jan-Jun 2017
■ Sponsored Parent or Grandparent	320	350	360	390	365	740	1,115	625	525	785	675
■ Government-Assisted Refugee	10	10	5	5	10	0	10	10	15	25	0
■ Privately Sponsored Refugee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	50	5
■ Protected Person in Canada	5	0	0	10	20	5	10	0	20	0	5

Temporary Resident Visa (i.e. Super Visa) Applications Approved by 55+ Age Grouping from year 2011 to 2017 (Jan - Jun) Canada wide



	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94	95-100
2011	1	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	3,334	3,063	2,149	1,273	597	202	50	6	1
2013	3,817	3,719	2,721	1,571	833	315	73	9	-
2014	3,942	4,219	2,947	1,617	939	319	79	10	-
2015	3,927	4,256	3,047	1,647	897	286	91	10	1
2016	3,867	4,405	3,014	1,633	817	323	87	13	1
2017 (Jan-Jun)	1,804	2,130	1,429	770	380	158	37	14	2

Eligibility to Essential Services Tied to Immigration Pathways

Immigrant seniors (obtained Canadian Permanent Resident status):

- Those who immigrated earlier in life and aged in Canada i.e. naturalized citizen.
- Those who have been sponsored by their children or family members.

Healthcare Benefits/ Insurance

AB Healthcare	Yes
AB Adult Health Benefit	Variable**
AB Blue Cross Insurance	Yes+
Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)	No
Private Health Insurance	Yes

+ Application submitted by the sponsor

** Variable, meaning Yes if breakdown in sponsorship has occurred

Social Services/ Programs

Housing (Subsidized)	Variable**
City of Edmonton Transit Services (Subsidized pass for Ride Transit Program)	Yes*
English Learning Classes	Variable per class
City of Edmonton Recreation Facilities (Subsidized pass)	Yes*
Employment	Yes

*If meet criteria (e.g. low income)

** Variable, meaning Yes if breakdown in sponsorship has occurred

Income Supports

Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (Retirement and Disability)	Yes, if contributed into the plan
Old Age Security Pension (OAS) (includes Guaranteed Income Supplement, Allowance & Allowance for the Survivor)	Yes^
Alberta Seniors Benefits (Monthly Benefit) Note: a senior must be eligible for and be receiving OAS to be eligible for Alberta Seniors Benefit	Yes^

Special Needs Assistance for Seniors	Yes^
Dental and Optical Assistance for Seniors	Yes^
Alberta Income Supports	Variable**

^If meet criteria (i.e. age, legal status, income)

*** Variable, meaning Yes if breakdown in sponsorship has occurred*

Refugee Seniors (obtained Canadian Permanent Resident status):

- Those who are sponsored by government and receive one year of income support, harmonized at the level of Alberta’s income support. (These seniors would be required to pay back the federal government transportation loan plus interest)
- Those who are “privately sponsored” by family members, a group of 5 community members (e.g. faith groups, etc.).
- Those who have “blended support” – half a year by government and half a year by “private sponsors”.

Healthcare Benefits/ Insurance

AB Healthcare	Yes+
AB Adult Health Benefit	Variable** for privately sponsored; No for government sponsored
AB Blue Cross Insurance	Yes+
Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)	Yes
Private Health Insurance	Yes

+ Eligible once sponsorship is over

** Variable, meaning Yes if breakdown in sponsorship has occurred

Social Services/ Programs

Housing (Subsidized)	Variable** for privately sponsored; Yes* for government sponsored
City of Edmonton Transit Services (Subsidized pass for Ride Transit Program)	Yes*
English Learning Classes	Variable per class
City of Edmonton Recreation Facilities (Subsidized pass)	Yes*
Employment	Yes

*If meet criteria (e.g. low income)

Income Supports

Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (Retirement and Disability)	Yes, if contributed into the plan+
Old Age Security Pension (OAS)	Yes+

(includes Guaranteed Income Supplement, Allowance & Allowance for the Survivor)	
Alberta Seniors Benefits (Monthly Benefit) Note: a senior must be eligible for and be receiving OAS to be eligible for Alberta Seniors Benefit	No
Special Needs Assistance for Seniors	Yes*
Dental and Optical Assistance for Seniors	Yes*
Alberta Income Supports	Variable** for privately sponsored; No for government sponsored

+ If meet criteria (i.e. age, legal status, income)

** Variable, meaning Yes if breakdown in sponsorship has occurred

Refugee Claimant Seniors

- Refugee Claimant s a sub category of refugee immigration pathway, referred to as “asylum seeker”.
- Waiting for their refugee status application to be processed.

Healthcare Benefits/ Insurance

AB Healthcare	No
AB Adult Health Benefit	No
AB Blue Cross Insurance	No
Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)	Yes
Private Health Insurance	Yes

Social Services/ Programs

Housing (Subsidized)	No
City of Edmonton Transit Services (Subsidized pass for Ride Transit Program)	No
English Learning Classes	Variable per class
City of Edmonton Recreation Facilities (Subsidized pass)	No
Employment	No

Income Supports

Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (Retirement and Disability)	No
Old Age Security Pension (OAS) (includes Guaranteed Income Supplement, Allowance & Allowance for the Survivor)	No
Alberta Seniors Benefits (Monthly Benefit) Note: a senior must be eligible for and be receiving OAS to be eligible for Alberta Seniors Benefit	No
Special Needs Assistance for Seniors	No
Dental and Optical Assistance for Seniors	No
Alberta Income Supports	No

²**Newcomer seniors**

- Seniors who arrived in Canada on the Super Visa. This is a visitor visa that is renewable up to a maximum of 10 years, but must re-apply for extension every two years. Some seniors entering Canada under Super Visa often come as a caretaker to grandchildren while their children remain in Canada under Temporary Foreign Workers or Permanent Resident or a Canadian Citizen.
- Seniors who arrive in Canada to visit their family on a short term (6 months or less).

Healthcare Benefits/ Insurance

AB Healthcare	No
AB Adult Health Benefit	No
AB Blue Cross Insurance	No
Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)	No
Private Health Insurance	Yes

Social Services/ Programs

Housing (Subsidized)	No
City of Edmonton Transit Services (Subsidized pass)	No
English Learning Classes	Variable per class
City of Edmonton Recreation Facilities (Subsidized pass for Ride Transit Program)	No
Employment	No

Income Supports

Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (Retirement and Disability)	No
Old Age Security Pension (OAS) (includes Guaranteed Income Supplement, Allowance & Allowance for the Survivor)	No
AB Seniors Benefits (Financial, Dental & Optical, Special Needs)	No
Alberta Income Supports	No

² *In Age of Wisdom Collective project, Newcomer seniors are referred to as visitors to Canada who do not have a Permanent Resident status in Canada*