



# **The Age of Wisdom:**

## **Giving Voice to Edmonton's Immigrant Seniors and Identifying Their Needs**

**Final Report**  
**October 20, 2015**



## Acknowledgements

The Project Advisory Committee for this Project included the following individuals:

Sheila Hallett, Executive Director, Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC)

Earl Bubis, Social Worker, Seniors Portfolio Team, Community Strategies and Development, City of Edmonton

Jennifer Fowler, Acting Director, Multicultural Relations, Community Strategies and Development, City of Edmonton

Rosalie Gelderman, Project Coordinator, Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC)

Sofia Yaqub, Executive Director, Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association (MWSSA)

Yvonne Chiu, Executive Director, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MCHB)

The Project Advisory Committee would like to acknowledge the following organizations that hosted focus groups: Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC), Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MCHB), Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association (MWSSA), and the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE).

We would also like to thank all the immigrant and refugee seniors and organizational representatives who shared their perspectives and contributed their time to this Project.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	6
Demographic Review, Environmental Scan, and Literature Review .....	6
1. Project Background and Objectives .....	10
1.1. Background .....	10
1.2. Objectives.....	10
2. Overview of the Project .....	11
3. Demographic and Profile Review .....	12
3.1. Objective .....	12
3.2. Findings.....	12
3.2.1. Source countries .....	13
3.2.2. Languages spoken.....	13
3.2.3. Parent and grandparent Super Visas .....	14
3.3. Observations .....	14
4. Environmental Scan of Services/Programs for IRS.....	15
4.1. Objective .....	15
4.2. Method .....	15
4.3. Findings.....	15
4.3.1. Number of organizations .....	15
4.3.2. Types of programs and services .....	16
4.4. Observations .....	17
4.4.1. Accuracy of information.....	17
4.4.2. No consolidated information source .....	18
5. Literature Review .....	19
5.1. Objective .....	19
5.2. Method .....	19
5.3. Observations .....	20
5.3.1. Very little research on IRS .....	20
5.3.2. Prominent topics in IRS research.....	21

5.3.3.	Lack of differentiation between immigrant and refugee seniors .....	22
5.3.4.	Intersecting barriers .....	22
5.4.	Findings.....	22
5.4.1.	Barriers to accessing programs and services.....	22
5.4.2.	Systemic issues affecting access to programs and services.....	24
5.4.3.	Promising and suggested practices for access improvement .....	27
6.	Data Collection.....	31
6.1.	Questions and Methods.....	31
6.2.	Focus Groups with IRS.....	31
6.2.1.	Participant selection .....	31
6.2.2.	Focus group process.....	32
6.2.3.	Profile of senior participants .....	32
6.3.	Focus Groups with Service Providers.....	33
6.3.1.	Participant selection and focus group process .....	33
6.4.	Interviews .....	33
6.5.	Data Analysis and Findings Development .....	33
6.6.	Data Collection Challenges .....	34
7.	Discussion of Findings .....	35
7.1.	Experiences of IRS.....	35
7.1.1.	Key challenges faced by IRS .....	35
7.1.2.	Impacts on IRS.....	37
7.2.	Barriers to Service Access and Provision.....	38
7.2.1.	Economic insecurity .....	38
7.2.2.	Access to transportation.....	41
7.2.3.	Difficulty assessing needs of IRS .....	42
7.2.4.	Lack of appropriate language programs.....	44
7.2.5.	Lack of programs and services tailored for IRS.....	46
7.2.6.	Lack of programs that provide help with navigating systems .....	47
7.2.7.	Need for an inclusive and welcoming environment .....	48
7.2.8.	Access to information about programs and services.....	49
7.2.9.	Additional systemic issues for service providers .....	50
7.2.10.	Conclusion .....	51

8. Considerations for Future Action.....	53
8.1. Guidelines for Program/Service Design and Delivery.....	53
8.2. Promising Practices for Provision of Services and Programs.....	55
8.3. Organizational/Policy Recommendations.....	56
8.3.1. Recommendations for service providers.....	56
8.3.2. Recommendations for funders.....	57
Appendix I - References.....	58
Appendix II - Environmental Scan.....	61
Sources consulted.....	61
Programs and Services for IRS.....	61
Appendix III Data Collection.....	68
Community Profiles.....	68
Interview Questions.....	69
Seniors' Focus Groups.....	70
Organizational Focus Groups.....	79
Appendix IV Considerations for Future Action.....	81
Community Support Workers and Cultural Broker's Competencies and Knowledge.....	81
Scan of Community Ambassadors Programs.....	81

## Executive Summary

---

Research shows that immigrant and refugee seniors (IRS) face unique challenges to their good health and well-being, including issues related to income security, housing, transportation, mental health and social isolation. IRS also have reduced access to appropriate seniors' programs and services because of language and other barriers. In January of 2015, Zenev and Associates was contracted by the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating to conduct a Needs Assessment, with funds provided by Age Friendly Edmonton. The purpose of the Needs Assessment was to (1) summarize the available demographics of the IRS population in Edmonton, review current literature on the needs of IRS, and information on existing programs and services for IRS in Edmonton (2) consult with IRS and service providers to determine how well existing programs and services meet the needs of IRS, and identify gaps (3) make recommendations for enhancing existing services. A Project Advisory group with members from stakeholder and service provider organizations guided all aspects of the project.

## Demographic Review, Environmental Scan, and Literature Review

### Demographic review

A review of the literature and scan of the organizational websites and directories reveals a lack of information and research relating to the IRS population and services for them. Although there is good demographic information on seniors in general at the local, provincial and national levels and a considerable amount of data on immigrants in general, there is very little recent data specifically on IRS. The lack of reliable and current quantitative data has resulted in a considerable gap in knowledge about the extent of the issues faced by IRS in Edmonton. We do know that both the number of seniors as well as the number of immigrants to Canada is growing. The data indicates that immigrant seniors form a significant proportion of the total senior population. 2006 information shows that while 20% of the overall Canadian population were immigrants, 30% of seniors are immigrants. (Ng et. al., 2012).

### Environmental Scan

Website/directories for approximately 77 organizations were scanned for information about programs and services for IRS. 42 of these organizations serve specific ethnocultural, linguistic or faith based communities (including 8 that specifically serve seniors), 24 are senior serving organizations, and 11 serve immigrants and refugees.

From this scan, we found 18 organizations that provide programs and services for IRS. Of these 18, 9 are organizations that serve ethnocultural, linguistic or faith based communities, 6 are immigrant and refugee serving organizations, and only 3 are specifically senior serving organizations. The resulting list of programs and services is by no means exhaustive, but has

been used to paint an initial picture of the types of programs and services that are available to and accessed by IRS. These organizations and groups offer a range of programs and services related to education, recreation, language acquisition, health and wellness, immigration, elder abuse, and outreach services.

## **Literature Review**

Not surprisingly IRS present with complex needs for programs and services and face some correspondingly unique barriers to accessing these (Calgary, 2009; Ng et al., 2004). Existing research, although scant, shows that IRS have needs relating to social isolation, complex health issues and elder abuse, which are often corollary effects of poverty or financial precariousness.

According to the literature, barriers to accessing existing programs include language and cultural barriers, lack of information/access to information and transportation issues. Additionally, IRS will often refrain asking for help for fear of being a burden on their families.

There is a dearth of evaluative research on programs and services for IRS. However, some emerging data on promising practices indicates that linguistic and cultural considerations combined with an intersectional approach to service provision is better able to meet IRS needs. By intersectional we refer to the need to take into account economic status, health issues, gender and sexuality, and other factors which shape the well-being of IRS. Sensitivity to intra-group differences are important for those developing or promoting programs and services.

## **Findings from consultations with IRS and service providers**

The findings of this research study are consistent with the issues and concerns raised in the limited literature on IRS. This study provides important contextual understanding specific to the Edmonton area, and to the ethnocultural and linguistic communities engaged in this research. In focus groups and interviews with IRS and service providers, we learned that the needs of immigrant and refugee seniors are complex and that multiple needs often compound one another.

IRS identified that the main challenges they face in their daily lives are related to language, housing, and income. A lack of English language skills, limited or no income and precarious housing often combine, to one degree or another, to produce a number of impacts on seniors' lives. Seniors described feeling like a burden on their children and grandchildren which in turn contributes to a sense of loss of autonomy. This dependency contributes to their feeling isolated from the wider community. There was evidence to show that appropriate programs and services help to mitigate these challenges but IRS identified a number of barriers to their accessing supports. These include cost, transportation, linguistic or culturally inappropriate programs, and lack of information about programs and services.

## Considerations for Future Action

The findings from the environmental scan, literature review, and data collected were used to develop considerations for future action. These fall into three areas: guidelines for the provision of programs and services, promising practices for the provision of programs and services and organizational/policy recommendations for funders and service providers.

### Guidelines for Program/Service Design and Delivery

The following guidelines emerged from data provided by project participants and can be used to develop programs and services that better respond to the barriers IRS face in accessing services. The guidelines can be used both by mainstream seniors' organizations and by organizations that specifically target IRS.

1. Increase the availability of free programs for IRS whenever possible.
2. Ensure that facilities which provide programs and services to IRS are easily accessible and on a transit route.
3. Establish guidelines for collecting demographic information on member and participant profiles as well as information about program needs and interests.
4. Within each facility, create a welcoming, respectful and inclusive culture.
5. Support the provision of more senior-friendly English language programs that are appropriate for seniors.
6. Focus on providing recreational and other programs that will minimize language barriers to participation
7. Offer more programs targeted to specific IRS' ethnocultural/linguistic communities. IRS are most likely to attend programs that mitigate language barriers and provide a means of connecting with others in their own community.
8. Provide more educational programs that address the day-to-day challenges of IRS.
9. Offer a mix of structured and unstructured programs to respond to IRS' varying interests and abilities.
10. To promote and market programs, allocate resources to cultivate and maintain connections with community leaders.
11. Review promotional materials such as newsletters and program guides for appropriate language.

### Promising Practices for Provision of Services and Programs

The following are promising practices that respond to the needs and challenges identified in this project.

1. Expand the current community support worker/cultural broker programs for IRS within specific ethnocultural communities.
2. Design and implement ambassador programs that use the seniors-helping-seniors model and are targeted at specific ethnocultural/linguistic communities.



3. Develop a consolidated model for the provision of information about programs and services for IRS that is accessible to IRS caregivers/service providers.
4. Create a network of organizations that could share promising practices, successes and challenges of providing services to IRS in Edmonton.

### Organizational/Policy Recommendations

The following are recommendations for organizational and policy level changes for funders and service providers that would benefit IRS and address the findings that emerged in this project.

Recommendations for service providers include:

1. Advocate for the Alberta Seniors Benefit not to be linked to federal Old Age Security benefits so that IRS can benefit from this program.
2. Advocate for subsidies for low-cost transportation options for IRS.
3. Support the creation of translated materials that provide information to seniors, based on the major non-English languages spoken in Edmonton.
4. Support and Increase availability of interpreters service providers can access at low/no cost.
5. Advocate for an increase in affordable housing that meets the needs of IRS.
6. Implement a collaborative baseline study that provides demographic data to determine the scope of issues faced by IRS in Edmonton.
7. Consider developing staff recruitment and hiring strategies to reach out to different ethnocultural and immigrant communities.
8. Strengthen staff capacity to work with IRS with ongoing training for staff and service providers to better understand the needs and challenges faced by IRS and promising practices for addressing these needs.
9. Develop a repository of resources for service providers that include guidelines for design and delivery of programs and services for IRS.
10. Support the development of an IRS advocacy group and other mechanisms that IRS can participate in.
11. Consult with and include the voices of IRS in policy making processes that affect them.

Recommendations for funders include:

1. Increase the availability of funding for programs and services specifically for IRS.
2. Advocate and fund research and action to develop new and sustainable funding models. Allocate more funding for organizations that provide services for specific ethnocultural and linguistic communities.
3. Include mandated targets for service provision to IRS as a condition of funding to drive organizational commitment.
4. Fund development of affordable housing that meets the needs of IRS.
5. Support research projects that build on current research and provide further insight into the specific needs of IRS.

# 1. Project Background and Objectives

---

## 1.1. Background

Edmonton, together with many other cities in Canada and across the world, is trying to anticipate the challenges and opportunities associated with a rapidly aging population. In 2011, Age Friendly Edmonton (AFE), a collaborative initiative between the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC), Edmonton senior serving organizations and other stakeholders, developed an action plan to respond to these changing demographics and to the needs of seniors. The *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton Action Plan* (ESCC, 2011) is a framework that can be used to develop goals and actions that address challenges faced by seniors, support their well-being and promote age-friendly communities.

Research shows that immigrant and refugee seniors (IRS) in particular have had different life experiences and face unique challenges to their good health and well-being (City of Calgary, 2009, D'Elia, L.A. & ESCC, 2008). These include issues related to income security, housing, transportation, mental health and social isolation. IRS also have reduced access to appropriate seniors' programs and services because of language and other barriers. These challenges may be exacerbated by recent policy changes at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Examples of these are changes to the Alberta Seniors Benefit program, amendments to immigration policies such as the moratorium on the sponsorship of parents and grandparents, and changes to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). As demographics and external contexts constantly shift, it is essential that service providers have sufficient and current information about the experiences, needs and challenges of newcomer and immigrant seniors, and/or the capacity to address these needs.

## 1.2. Objectives

In January of 2015, Zenev and Associates was contracted by the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council to conduct a Needs Assessment, with funds provided by Age Friendly Edmonton. The purpose of the Needs Assessment was to:

- Provide an understanding of the size and characteristics of the IRS population in Edmonton.
- Review current literature on the needs of IRS, and information on existing programs and services for IRS in Edmonton.
- Consult with IRS, service providers and stakeholders to determine how well existing programs and services meet the needs of IRS, and identify any gaps that need to be addressed.
- Make recommendations for enhancing existing services.

## 2. Overview of the Project

---

The following table provides a summary of the Project phases, objectives and activities. A Project Advisory group with members from stakeholder and service provider organizations guided all aspects of the project.

Phases	Objective	Activities
Demographic Review	Identify size and characteristics of IRS population in Edmonton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of available demographic information on IRS in Edmonton</li> </ul>
Environmental Scan of Services and Programs for IRS	Map existing services and supports in Edmonton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of service provider directories and service provider organizational websites</li> </ul>
Literature Review	Review current knowledge about needs of IRS, and gaps in services and supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification and review of academic literature and relevant publications</li> </ul>
Presentation of Findings (1)	Report findings of project to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of findings of demographic survey, literature review and environmental scan to Project Advisory Group</li> </ul>
Data Collection and Analysis	Create a picture of how services and supports are experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups with IRS and service providers</li> <li>• Interviews with stakeholders</li> </ul>
Development of Key Findings	Identify strengths and gaps in existing programs and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data from focus groups and interviews</li> <li>• Development of key themes, summary of findings and recommendations for action</li> </ul>
Project Report	Document project activities and findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of final project report</li> </ul>
Presentation of Findings (2)	Report findings and key recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of key findings and recommendations for action to Project Advisory Group, project participants and stakeholders</li> </ul>

## 3. Demographic and Profile Review

---

### 3.1. Objective

The objective of this phase of the project was to identify the size and characteristics of the IRS population in Edmonton, and to respond to the following questions:

1. How can we identify and describe IRS in Edmonton? What demographic information is available specifically on immigrants, refugees, and seniors here on visitor visas?
2. What do we know about the specific characteristics of IRS (e.g. immigration status, country of birth, length of time in Canada, age, sexual orientation, gender, race/ethnicity/visible minority status, family status, income, employment status, English language skills, literacy levels, mode of housing)?
3. What are the gaps in the demographic information about IRS?

### 3.2. Findings

The demographic review on the numbers of IRS in Edmonton revealed that although there is good demographic information on seniors in general at the local, provincial and national levels and a considerable amount of data on immigrants in general, there is very little recent data specifically on IRS. The abandonment of the long form census in 2010 has made it more difficult to obtain the detailed data that is necessary to assess needs and plan programs and services. In addition, there is even less data available on seniors who are here as visitors. The information presented in this section is based on the most recently available data on IRS.

The data indicates that immigrant seniors form a significant proportion of the total senior population. 2006 information shows that while 20% of the overall Canadian population were immigrants, 30% of seniors are immigrants. (2012 Ng et. al.).

#### Terms

##### Immigrant seniors

Immigrants are defined in the 2006 Census as persons who are landed immigrants (now referred to as permanent residents) in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, immigrant seniors include those who are 65 years and older who were not born in Canada and/or did not have Canadian citizenship at birth (Ng et.al, 2010).

##### Refugee seniors

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution, as well as those at risk of torture or cruel and unusual treatment or punishment. Some seniors may have originally arrived in Canada as refugees.

##### Super Visas

Currently, most visitors to Canada may visit for up to six months when they first enter Canada. If they wish to stay longer, they have to apply for an extension and pay a new fee. The parent and grandparent Super Visa allows eligible parents and grandparents to visit family in Canada for up to two years without the need to renew their status. The Super Visa allows multiple entries for up to ten years.

The proportion of immigrants and visible minorities within aging cohorts was quite substantial. For people between 65 and 74 years of age, 29.8% were immigrants and 10.3% were visible minorities. Among those 75 years of age and older, 29.8% were immigrants, and 7.5% were visible minorities (2012 Ng et. al.).

Most immigrant seniors came to Canada at a relatively young age and have been living in Canada for several decades. Recently arrived immigrant seniors are more likely to have low incomes than long-term immigrant seniors and much less likely to live alone than long-term immigrants and Canadian-born seniors (Lai, 2010). Immigrant seniors are slightly less likely (22%) to have post-secondary education than Canadian-born seniors (24%).

### 3.2.1. Source countries

The home countries of immigrating seniors are changing. The following table identifies the source countries of immigrant seniors in Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2006):

Prior to 2001:	From 2001 to 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% from Europe</li> <li>• 36% from Asia and the Middle East</li> <li>• 3% from the U.S.</li> <li>• 3% from Africa</li> <li>• 2.5% from South America</li> <li>• 2.4% from Bermuda</li> <li>(Remaining from other countries)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 73% from Asia and the Middle East</li> <li>• 12% from Europe</li> <li>• 4% from Africa</li> <li>• 3% from Oceania and other</li> <li>• 3% from the Caribbean and Bermuda</li> <li>• 2% from Central America</li> </ul>

### 3.2.2. Languages spoken

The most recent data reveals that almost 6,000 (or 7% of) seniors in Edmonton do not speak English or French (Statistics Canada, 2011). This group of seniors speak the following languages:

Language	%	Language	%
Chinese	21%	Farsi	1%
Cantonese	20%	Gujarati	2%
Panjabi	16%	Hindi	2%
Vietnamese	6%	Korean	2%
Italian	3%	Croatian	1%
Mandarin	3%	Russian	1%
Polish	3%	Serbian	1%
Portuguese	3%	Tagalog	1%

Spanish	3%	Ukrainian	1%
Arabic	2%	Urdu	1%

### 3.2.3. Parent and grandparent Super Visas

There is no data on the numbers of IRS currently visiting Edmonton on Super Visas. We do know that Canada wide, approximately 1200 Super Visas are issued every month and over 50,000 Super Visas have been issued since the inception of the program in December 2011 (Government of Canada, 2015).

## 3.3. Observations

While it is important to continue to gather qualitative data to develop narratives about the lives of immigrant and refugee seniors, the lack of reliable and current quantitative data has resulted in a considerable gap in our knowledge about extent of the issues faced by IRS in Edmonton. We do know that both the number of seniors as well as the number of immigrants to Canada is growing, making it necessary to ensure that service providers pay adequate attention to the needs of immigrant seniors.

## 4. Environmental Scan of Services/Programs for IRS

---

### 4.1. Objective

The objective of the environmental scan was to identify organizations that offer programs and services for IRS in Edmonton. The scan included a review of three types of organizations:

- Senior serving organizations
- Organizations that serve specific ethnocultural, linguistic or faith based communities
- Immigrant and refugee serving organizations

### 4.2. Method

The scan was conducted using the following process:

1. A list of all organizations that might offer programs and services for IRS was compiled. This list excluded organizations that offered very specific services, for example services related to housing and health care, and focused on those organizations that provided a range of recreational and educational programs and services.
2. Organizational websites and printed program guides from the organizations (when available) were reviewed for listings of programs and services for IRS.
3. The findings of the environmental scan were later augmented with information collected in focus groups and interviews.

The results of the scan were used as a starting point to connect with potential participants for both the seniors and the service provider focus groups.

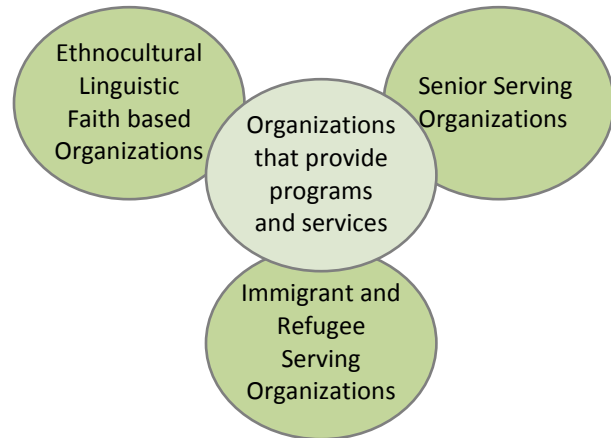
The complete list of organizations surveyed and the organizations provide information about specific programs and services for IRS is included in Appendix II.

### 4.3. Findings

#### 4.3.1. Number of organizations

Website/directories for approximately 77 organizations were scanned for information about programs and services for IRS. 42 of these organizations serve specific ethnocultural, linguistic or faith based communities (including 8 that specifically serve seniors), 24 are senior serving organizations, and 11 serve immigrants and refugees.

From this scan, we found 18 organizations that provide programs and services for IRS. Of these 18, 9 are organizations that serve ethnocultural, linguistic or faith based communities, 6 are immigrant and refugee serving organizations, and only 3 are specifically senior serving organizations. As previously mentioned, the resulting list of programs and services is by no means exhaustive, but has been used to paint an initial picture of the types of programs and services that are available to and accessed by IRS. The development of a complete and accurate list of all organizations that provide programs and services for IRS in Edmonton was beyond the scope of this project.



#### 4.3.2. Types of programs and services

#### Types of organizations that provide programs and services to IRS

The information on programs and services for IRS was augmented with data collected from focus groups and interviews with seniors and service providers.

#### Educational, social and recreational programs

The largest number of programs fall into this category and include both structured recreational programs such as classes on crafts and hobbies, book clubs and gardening programs, as well as unstructured programs that offer seniors an opportunity to gather, socialize, play cards and games and share information. Educational programs provide information on topics such as parenting in two cultures, conflict management and budgeting.

#### Language

Language related programs include English language classes for newly arrived immigrants, as well as specialized language classes for seniors. Classes are usually organized by levels of familiarity with English and/or literacy levels. Programs such as conversation circles provide IRS with the opportunity to practice their speaking skills and meet both language related and social needs.

#### Health and wellness

This category of programs includes classes to promote health and well-being, including exercise classes designed for older adults, yoga and tai chi, as well as health clinics and health related information sessions on topics of interest to seniors.



### Assistance with navigating systems

This category of programs provides help filling out forms (e.g. income assistance, health benefits, tax returns, citizenship applications etc.) as well as assistance with navigating complex systems such as immigration, health, transportation and justice.

### Elder abuse

There are a few programs that provide intervention, support, and referral services to older adults who are experiencing abuse, as well as assistance finding affordable housing for seniors at risk due to family disputes and possible abuse.

### Community Support/Cultural Broker programs

Community support/cultural broker programs serve isolated, at-risk immigrant and refugee seniors, and the goal of these programs is to provide one-on-one support to the most vulnerable seniors. Community support workers and cultural brokers who are familiar with the contexts and challenges faced by seniors help IRS access resources, broaden their social networks, access and attend ESL classes, and participate in community development projects.

## **4.4. Observations**

### **4.4.1. Accuracy of information**

The environmental scan was conducted at the beginning of the project and was based on information available at the time from the sources consulted. However, it became clear from data collected in the interviews and focus groups that this information is dynamic and constantly shifting as organizations continuously tailor their programs and services to meet the needs of their members and target groups. Lists of current programs found on websites or in printed directories are frequently incomplete, as maintaining updated information can be resource intensive.

Some organizations offer programs that are designed to attract specific groups of IRS (for example, tai chi classes for Chinese seniors). However, the target group is usually not explicitly stated in program guides as these programs are technically available to all seniors.

In addition, there is very little information available about programs offered by small, informal community-based organizations. These programs frequently have limited resources to offer programs and to market them. The target groups for these programs are typically small ethnocultural communities, and program information is often disseminated by word of mouth rather than online or through printed program guides.

#### **4.4.2. No consolidated information source**

There is no single consolidated source of information about programs and services that target or serve the needs of IRS. This makes it challenging for IRS themselves, as well as for families, caregivers and community support/outreach workers who work with IRS to identify programs that would be of interest to or meet the needs of IRS. However, because of the continuously changing nature of this information, a consolidated and accurate information source would be challenging to create as well as to maintain.

## 5. Literature Review

---

### 5.1. Objective

The objective of the literature review was to review and summarize current knowledge about the needs of IRS and the ways in which these needs are being met or might be met. We approached the literature with three guiding questions:

1. What gaps in services and supports for IRS are noted in the literature?
2. What are the barriers that prevent IRS from accessing existing programs and services including, but not limited to, the areas of:
  - a. Health
  - b. Municipal and provincial services and programs
  - c. Housing
  - d. Transportation
  - e. Language education
3. What practices are working well and/or are considered promising practices?

### 5.2. Method

Our method for identifying relevant literature involved a systematic search of academic research, grey literature (government publications, policy documents etc), and organizational websites.

The following search terms were used:

- (immigrant and refugee\* OR immigrant\* OR refugee\* OR newcomer\*)
- AND (senior\* OR older adult\* OR elderly\*)
- AND (barriers\* OR obstacles\* OR problems with access\*) OR (best practices\* OR promising practices\* or effective practices\* OR evaluation\*)
- AND (Edmonton\* OR capital region\* OR Alberta)

The following databases were searched: Medline (OVID), Ebsco (St. Michael's Hospital network; University of Toronto network), Proquest, Canada Thesis Portal, Bibliography of Native North Americans, First Nations Periodical Index, UNM Native Health Database, and Indigenous Studies Portal (iPortal) databases, for the time period 1970-2015.

Our initial systematic search identified very few resources on barriers and promising practices for IRS accessing services in Edmonton. The search was expanded to include barriers and promising practices for IRS accessing services in Alberta and Canada. Again, we noted few

research studies addressing this topic. The search was expanded again to look at more generalized publications on immigrants and refugees that might contain embedded information on seniors accessing programs and services and more generalized information on seniors programs that might contain embedded information specific to the IRS population. We note that the literature on seniors only or immigrant and refugee populations only was quite plentiful, and thus it was important to limit the number of these studies reviewed to the most relevant ones.

Publications were selected for review if they:

1. Involved/reflected and/or examined either IRS populations specifically OR involved/reflected and/or examined specific ethnocultural/or linguistic communities but drew conclusions relevant to IRS, OR involved/reflected and/or examined seniors populations with a breakdown of information to reflect IRS as a sub-set of this group, AND
2. Involved general or specific information related to barriers and enablers of access to program and services and/or promising practices, AND
3. Included information relevant to IRS in Edmonton (either directly, with Edmonton as the site of research, or indirectly, for example as part of a provincial research project), AND
4. Were published between 2004-2015 AND
5. Were accessible in English.

We quickly discovered that many of the barriers to programs and services for IRS were closely linked to life challenges facing this population. However, a full review of literature on life challenges for IRS was not possible given the scope of this project. We have captured here the most salient findings relevant to the objectives of this Needs Assessment.

The complete list of references and works consulted is included in Appendix I.

## **5.3. Observations**

### **5.3.1. Very little research on IRS**

Our review of the literature on IRS revealed a lack of robust research about this target population. While research exists on immigrants and refugees, and on seniors, there is very little research that looks at IRS specifically. Not surprisingly, there is a corresponding lack of recognition of the unique barriers facing IRS (Calgary, 2009; Ng et al., 2004). Yet IRS, particularly those who experience isolation, have emerged as an important target group needing services (FCSS Calgary 2009), including in the Edmonton area (Chui et al., 2009). Given the service needs of IRS and the impetus for evidence-based policy development in Alberta, this research gap is problematic. It is also problematic that few research studies involved formal evaluations of the effectiveness of individual and systemic interventions. In many cases, when promising practices

were identified, the criteria by which they were assessed was difficult to find and/or more anecdotal than systematic.

### **5.3.2. Prominent topics in IRS research**

While there is not a lot of literature on IRS, existing sources revealed current research interests in a number of areas including elder abuse and safety, social isolation and its impacts, and complex health issues.

#### **Elder abuse and safety**

Elder abuse is a topic of some interest, and research on elder abuse and IRS centres on the interactions of culture and perspectives/behaviors relating to disclosure. Service providers report that IRS are unlikely to report instances of abuse, though IRS did share information about family relationships that generate conflict, particularly related to expectations of caregiving and control over their financial resources (Stewart et al., 2011). Lai (2010) pointed to research on cultural factors affecting elder abuse, and discussed/speculated how this issue may be affecting IRS.

#### **Social isolation**

Social isolation is a significant issue for many seniors, but is magnified for IRS (Bernhard et al., 2010; Luhtanen, 2009; National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005; Stewart et al., 2011). IRS face language, cultural and transportation issues that contribute to the risk of social isolation (FCSS Calgary, 2014), along with depleted social networks as a result of their migration that, despite family and other supports, also puts them at increased risk (Stewart et al., 2011). As the National Seniors Council (2014) indicated, seniors who are newcomers to Canada or immigrant persons who become seniors in Canada are at greater risk of social isolation due in part to such factors as lack of language proficiency, separation from family, financial dependence on children, low levels of inter-ethnic contacts, and racial or ethnic discrimination. In addition, family responsibilities can increase the risk of social isolation, particularly for women caring for grandchildren (National Seniors Council, 2014).

#### **Complex health issues**

Health research on IRS received much attention in the literature we uncovered. Although health issues may affect all seniors, IRS' health concerns are more complex due to barriers that make it difficult for them to use health services (Stewart et al., 2011). According to Hansson et al. (2010), immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural and racialized groups are more exposed to the social determinants of health that contribute to mental health problems and face additional determinants such as migration, discrimination and language difficulties. Ng (2012) noted that across Canada, immigrant seniors, particularly recent arrivals, are "more prone to ill health in

the long run than Canadian-born seniors because of limited social networks, inadequate knowledge of official languages, and relatively low income, particularly if they live alone” (p. 2). That said, Beiser (2005) cautions against understanding immigrants as a homogenous group when asking questions about health. Research findings on immigrant health are often unexpected and paradoxical, pointing to the need to take heterogeneity into account when studying the health effects of immigration and resettlement (Beiser, 2005). For example, Lai (2010) pointed out that there are significant gender differences in IRS health, with women reporting poorer health and more health-based limitations than men.

### **5.3.3. Lack of differentiation between immigrant and refugee seniors**

As another example of the heterogeneity within the IRS population, although many services target immigrants and refugees together, refugees are more likely to require special interventions such as counselling and mental health services due to traumatic events, victimization in war zones (particularly in the case of women and children), and torture (Yu et al., 2007). Past trauma experienced by refugees may manifest in later life, resulting in unique mental health needs (Bernhard et al., 2010). That said, few research studies we reviewed explicitly differentiated the experiences and needs of refugee seniors from those of immigrant seniors.

### **5.3.4. Intersecting barriers**

Immigrant seniors face many of the risks and barriers faced by mainstream seniors. However, language/literacy barriers and cultural disruption magnify these risks and barriers, leaving immigrant seniors to deal with the barriers associated with aging as well as those of adapting to a new society (Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, 2008). Additionally, many of the barriers facing IRS are inter-related and mutually reinforce one another, creating a momentum that can be difficult to interrupt. For example, poverty and income insecurity influence access to housing and transportation, which might influence feelings of social isolation, which might make it more difficult to access programs and services that might help mitigate the effects of all of these factors. As Lai and Surood (2013) documented, the more barriers to service access an immigrant/refugee senior reported, the less favourable was their physical and mental health. IRS’ access to programs and services may also be influenced by racism and other forms of discrimination (National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005; Lai, 2009; Stewart et al., 2011).

## **5.4. Findings**

### **5.4.1. Barriers to accessing programs and services**

In a discussion of barriers to accessing services and programs meant to assist IRS, it is important to be mindful that IRS make significant economic and social contributions to their families, communities and society (Calgary, 2009; Luhtanen, 2009). That IRS have service and program

needs is only one part of a bi-directional dynamic of seeking and giving, accessing and contributing. With this bi-directional relationship in mind, throughout our literature review we identified a number of general observations and specific factors that act as barriers to service access for IRS. These include: language barriers, lack of information about programs and services, cultural barriers to seeking support, fear of being a burden, transportation issues, lack of culturally appropriate programs and services, and systemic barriers.

### Language barriers

The most common barrier discussed in the literature on IRS relates to language abilities. Language barriers faced by IRS cut across all of the other issues facing this group, limiting access to information and service supports (Chow, 2010; Lai, 2008; Lai, 2011; Luhtanen, 2009; National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005; Stewart et al., 2011). IRS who do not have knowledge of English or French have difficulty accessing public sources of information about programs and services (such as newspapers and television), leading to a lack of knowledge about community resources, and thus increased social isolation (Bernhard et al., 2010). This is made more complex by seniors' reported difficulty learning a new language at an advanced age, and the focus of most English as a Second Language (ESL) classes on younger immigrants (Luhtanen, 2009). Despite these language challenges, few service providers have multilingual staff (Stewart et al., 2011). To assist immigrant seniors who do not speak English, service providers may try to reach seniors through family members, particularly their children. However, this results in information not always being conveyed accurately (Stewart et al., 2011).

### Lack of information about services

Lack of information about available programs and services is a significant barrier to access (Bernhard et al., 2010; Canada, 2014; Stewart et al., 2011). Further, as Bernhard et al. (2010) noted, access to many programs and services requires navigating complex delivery systems and an understanding of the delivery process. Many IRS lack or have insufficient knowledge and skills to navigate these systems and experience this complexity as a barrier (National Seniors Council, 2014).

### Cultural barriers to seeking support

For some IRS, cultural norms around asking for help, as well as beliefs and attitudes about government that are shaped by past experience, can present barriers to seeking supports and services (Stewart et al., 2011). For example, Walsh (2007) suggested that cultural reluctance to openly address issues of violence in the family has an effect on an IRS' disclosure of elder abuse. Lai and Surood's (2013) research revealed the link between IRS' beliefs about using services, many of which were linked to cultural beliefs and values, with less favourable mental and physical health outcomes. A willingness/reluctance to ask for help is likewise affected by

past experiences of services and programs, particularly if those experiences have been negative.

### Fear of being a burden

IRS, particularly those without French or English language skills, must often rely on family members to access supports. However, reliance on family members to translate and negotiate complex systems, particularly government and health systems, can prevent IRS from accessing programs and services (Bernhard et al., 2010; Stewart et al., 2011), as seniors may be reluctant to ask for assistance or share private information with family members.

### Transportation issues

The lack of access to appropriate and affordable transportation and unfamiliarity with transportation systems are barriers to accessing programs and services for IRS (Bernhard et al., 2010; Luhtanen, 2009; Stewart et al., 2011).

### Lack of culturally appropriate and respectful programs and services

IRS experience a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and services (Bernhard et al., 2010; Stewart et al., 2011). For example, medical services are not always available in multiple languages. Further, healthcare providers do not often understand issues specific to ethnocultural groups such as culturally specific beliefs about illness and health, the use of non-Western medicines, and attitudes about privacy and dependency (Luhtanen, 2009). Additionally, negative or discriminatory attitudes from service providers can act as a barrier to accessing programs and services, particularly in terms of cultural attitudes and sensitivity (Bernhard et al., 2010; Chow, 2010; Stewart et al., 2011).

## **5.4.2. Systemic issues affecting access to programs and services**

### Government policies

While a fulsome analysis of the intersecting policies that shape IRS' experiences is beyond the scope of this report, it is important to note that IRS' lives are affected by a web of policies at the federal, provincial and municipal levels that can constrain and inhibit their ability to access services and supports. As Elgersma (2010) reports, some immigrant advocacy groups have pointed out that policies affecting income support, the federal old age security program specifically, exclude the most vulnerable immigrant seniors, those who may have had inadequate state protection in their countries of origin.

Since 2012, there have been important policy changes by the federal government that have impacted seniors who are immigrants or refugees to Canada. In May 2013, the federal government introduced new qualifying criteria for family sponsorships for parents and grandparents. Individuals who sponsor their parents and grandparents now accept financial



responsibility for 20 years (up from ten years). The impact of this is not known in Edmonton. Additionally, on June 19, 2014 the Governor General of Canada gave royal assent to Bill C-31 which changed the eligibility for low-income seniors' benefits to coincide with the 20-year residency requirement.

As people age, their average income decreases (Statistics Canada, 2006). Edmontonians aged 55 to 64 have an average annual income of \$57,000, those aged 65 to 74 have an average income of \$40,000, and those aged 75 plus have an average income of \$37,000. Prior to passing Bill C-31, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, Spousal Allowance, and Survivor Allowance under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* were available to people who have lived in Canada legally for a total of ten years, regardless of the length of their undertaking with the family sponsorship program. Bill C-31 now excludes anyone within an undertaking period (twenty years for parents and grandparents) from receiving those benefits. The impact of this will start to be felt by local IRS.

The Government of Alberta changed the eligibility requirements for the Alberta Seniors Benefit in June 2013. Some sources of income that were previously not counted in calculating the benefit are now included, and there is a minimum residency requirement of 10 years in Canada. This has resulted in an estimated 6000 low income senior Albertans now being ineligible for the benefit.

A number of policies were referenced in the literature as having a significant impact on the lives of IRS: policies relating to employment and who can work (Stewart et al., 2011); citizenship status and the rights accrued as a result (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, 2014); pension supports and policies (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014); and foreign credential recognition (Luhtanen, 2009) are some of the important policies that warrant further study.

### Poverty and economic insecurity

Poverty and income insecurity affect IRS' ability to access the programs and services required to successfully integrate into Canadian life (Bernhard et al., 2010; Chui et al., 2009; Elgersma, 2010; Luhtanen, 2009; Stewart et al., 2011) as well as their health status (Lai, 2010). Income security is complex and for immigrant seniors is influenced by factors such as age at immigration, ethno-racial status and country of origin (Luhtanen, 2009). Elgersma (2010) reported that immigrant seniors are overrepresented in those experiencing poverty, with a much larger proportion of recent immigrant seniors living on low incomes than longer-term immigrants or Canadian born seniors. Likewise, the National Advisory Council on Aging (2005) reported that the older one is at the time of immigration, the more likely one is to live in poverty.

While some evidence indicates that the longer immigrant seniors live in Canada, the more their economic situation converges with overall population trends, it is important to note that economic issues facing this population may go undetected as IRS tend to live with extended family, act as parent/grandparent caregivers or rely on informal support networks (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014). IRS may not have access to the economic and social benefit supports that other Canadian seniors access, since many of these require having been previously employed in Canada and having made long-term contributions to earnings and pension plans (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014). Further, ageism, discrimination, limited work opportunities for those who lack English language skills, and lack of recognition of foreign credentials make it difficult for IRS to secure employment (Luhtanen, 2009).

General research on immigrants and refugees in Edmonton reveals that this group is disproportionately experiencing poverty (Chui et al., 2009). Existing programs and services do not reflect the need for specialized and comprehensive services to support social and economic integration, and supports for resettlement are too time-limited or are not always provided at the right time (Chui et al., 2009). Likewise, Cook (2009) notes that in Calgary, recent immigrants and visible minority persons face significantly greater economic challenges than the rest of the population and are therefore more likely to be concerned about not having enough money to cover the costs of food or housing. While these local studies do not separate IRS out as a group, these research findings can be expected to be similar for this population.

### Housing

Housing is critical for the health and well-being of IRS. In 2006, approximately 20% of immigrant households and over 40% of new immigrant households (those arriving within the last five years) in Canada reported being in “core housing need,” which means that their housing did not meet one or more of the core criteria of adequacy suitability and affordability (defined as housing that requires less than 30% of before-tax income) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014). New immigrant households represent the highest housing need of all groups surveyed.

In his 2007 Edmonton-based research, Enns (as cited in Gurnett, 2010) gathered information from nearly 200 immigrants and found that over 70% were spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing and more than 30% were paying over 50% of their total family income on housing. Murdie and Logan (2011) found that affordability remains the most significant housing barrier for most immigrants and refugees, especially in high-cost cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary. While neither of these research studies address IRS housing separately, we can speculate that many of these findings would be similar, if not more problematic, for IRS.

Looking more specifically at IRS, Luhtanen (2009) pointed out that affordable and accessible housing for this group is difficult to secure, that subsidized housing is difficult to access as a result of citizenship policies, and that there are few retirement homes geared to ethnocultural groups. Ng et al. (2007) found that discrimination played a role in housing difficulties for South Asian immigrant seniors in Edmonton. In addition, as Gurnett (2010) noted, those coming from refugee-like backgrounds, and by implication refugee seniors, who have spent extended times in situations that have contributed to trauma, have unique housing needs.

#### Marginalization: Few avenues to influence policy

IRS experience a lack of equitable representation at decision-making tables, in senior government positions, and in the policy and planning process (Bernhard et al., 2010; Calgary, 2009; Luhtanen, 2009; Stewart et al., 2011). In a summary of the forum *Calgary Immigrant and Refugee Seniors "Speak Out,"* the City of Calgary (2009) reported that the most significant barrier facing IRS is that they have no voice in policy and planning. In addition, they do not always fully understand the complex functioning of Canada's political system, do not have the social networks to influence that system, nor do they possess the system navigational skills to present their concerns to the appropriate government representatives (Luhtanen, 2009).

#### **5.4.3. Promising and suggested practices for access improvement**

The following section summarizes practices mentioned in the literature that are thought to be promising in that they might improve the provision of programs and services for IRS. As stated earlier, few of these practices have been formally evaluated to assess their impact on IRS and most are only recommendations based on an understanding of the IRS population and their needs.

It is worth restating the inter-relatedness of the risks and barriers facing IRS, which necessitates multiple intervention points to improve their lives. Intervention strategies targeting individual IRS are important and we have included information on recommendations for practice in this regard. What is more challenging, however, is to develop a coordinated, multi-pronged approach to interventions in a way that addresses systemic issues and significantly improves the lived experience of IRS. While daunting, larger scale systemic and policy interventions are crucial for longer-term change and significant impact on the lives of IRS.

#### Provision of linguistically appropriate and culturally sensitive programs

It is vital that policies, programs and services for an aging Canadian society take into account ethnic and cultural diversity (National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005). Hansson et al. (2010) recommend two approaches to improve programs and services for immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural and racialized populations. First, improve the service response of mainstream service providers such as government services, and second, increase the range and type of

services and service providers targeting this group. Others recommend that service providers offer programs and services that are both linguistically appropriate and culturally sensitive (Chow, 2010; FCSS Calgary, 2009; Hansson et al., 2010; Stewart et al., 2011), including providing services and information in multiple languages (Bernhard et al., 2010).

### Promoting of programs for IRS

Service providers may find it challenging to communicate their programs and services to IRS, especially those who are newer to Canada. While there is a dearth of research relating to better or promising practices in this regard, there is some research on information and communication practices that can inform the promotion of programs and services to IRS. Stewart et al. (2011) and Everingham et al. (2009) show that cultivating connections with formal and informal leaders within community spaces such as places of worship and cultural gathering places are important for communicating with seniors. Seniors in general, and IRS, in particular, value and are more likely to act on information received from trusted sources. Trusted sources may be found within the senior's social network which includes "environments such as places of worship, workplaces or bus stops—in fact, information transfer can occur as a secondary activity anywhere that social interaction takes place" (Stewart et al, 2011, p. 82).

Furthermore seniors, including IRS, prefer information that is relevant to their current context rather than future needs. According to Everingham et al. (2009), they prefer "more of a 'just in time' provision of information (but not at the time of crises)" (p. 89). Program and service providers seeking to promote their programs to IRS might cultivate connections with community workers, community leaders, and others working with IRS and work with them to develop the means of ensuring information transfer. These trusted connections are more likely to be aware of the relevance of program information and can facilitate the 'just in time' delivery of it to IRS.

### Intersectional understanding of the issues

An intersectional understanding refers to the need to take into account economic status, health issues, gender and sexuality, and other factors that shape the well-being of IRS. Sensitivity to this intra-group differences are important for those developing or promoting programs and services.

Cultural and religious beliefs and values influence how immigrant seniors experience integration (Bernhard et al., 2010). Examining these factors, as well as universal, migration-specific and ethno-specific factors related to the aging process is important when identifying issues faced by immigrant seniors (Bernhard et al., 2010).

In his study of elderly Chinese immigrants, Chow (2010) highlighted the need for healthcare professionals, service providers and policy makers to understand the significant impacts of different socio-demographic and background variables on physical well-being. He emphasized the need to recognize that the elderly Chinese are not a homogenous group; rather they have different cultural beliefs, practices, linguistic diversity, social status, immigration experiences, support networks and health-seeking behaviors.

### Coordinated approaches amongst service providers

Community and service providers involved in research emphasize a lack of funding support for services and programs, particularly for ongoing services related to language training and social support (Stewart et al., 2011). This lack of funding also affects the ability of organizations to work collaboratively, yet collaboration between service providers is important both in service provision and in creating a collective voice to advocate for increased funding to address service gaps (Bernhard et al., 2010; Chui et al., 2009).

### Improving government policies on immigrant seniors

Better coordination of policies specifically aimed at improving the lives and mental health of IRS is important. Policy barriers could be identified and addressed, in part, through the inclusion of communities, families and people with lived experience of these issues in policy development (Hansson et al., 2010); research that addresses the specific cultural barriers and experiences of vulnerable seniors, including IRS (National Seniors Council, 2014); and through coordinated advocacy on the part of service organizations (Bernhard et al., 2010; Chui et al., 2009).

### Education and training

In his study of elderly Chinese immigrants, Chow (2010) noted the importance of incorporating the needs of immigrant seniors into training and orientation programs in healthcare institutions, eldercare facilities, and community organizations. Additionally, he recommended that educational programs be developed to empower minority ethnic seniors to learn more about health, health promoting behavior and coping strategies (Chow, 2010).

### Building social/political community

Opportunities for IRS to meet is important to combat social isolation and support the development of spaces for collective advocacy on their own behalf. Stewart et al. (2011) recommended the provision of social and cultural opportunities for seniors to connect with one another. Chiu et al. (2009) suggested that it is important to develop spaces where immigrant community members can advocate for change through political involvement. Likewise, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in their 2009 research report on improving service provision to immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural and racialized population groups, noted that the involvement of communities, families, and people with lived experience is key. Including service

target groups in the planning process helps to develop more appropriate services, allows for linkage to community based services, supports community engagement and knowledge exchange functions that build capacity and networks, and improves awareness of and access to care.

### Additional research

More research aimed specifically at IRS is needed in order to understand their universal, migration-specific, and ethno-specific preferences for such things as: programs, services, community supports, and long term care (Bernhard et al., 2010; Edmonton Community Services, 2006). The National Seniors Council (2014) noted that additional research is needed to understand the cultural challenges and barriers to the social engagement of seniors, particularly for immigrant seniors, Aboriginal seniors, and seniors living in official language minority communities. Lai (2010) supported these views and pointed out that even though the research community and policy sectors have expressed interest in better understanding health related issues facing IRS, there are few empirical research findings on this group.

## 6. Data Collection

---

### 6.1. Questions and Methods

All aspects of the data collection phase were planned in collaboration with the Project Advisory Group for the Project. Project Consultants worked closely with members of the Advisory Group to develop key research areas, review interview and focus group questions and select participants.

The following research questions were used as a guide for data collection:

1. What are the experiences of IRS? What challenges do they face and what kinds of programs and services do they need?
2. What kinds of programs and services are currently available?
3. What are the barriers to access and provision of programs and services and how can these be addressed?
4. What are the strengths of current programs and services and what are some recommendations for enhancing services?

The specific interview and focus group questions are included in Appendix III.

Data was collected using the following methods:

- 3 Focus groups with a total of 45 IRS from diverse communities, including one focus group primarily with refugee seniors
- 2 Focus groups with a total of 20 people from organizations that provide services to IRS
- 4 Interviews with key stakeholders

### 6.2. Focus Groups with IRS

#### 6.2.1. Participant selection

Participants for the IRS' focus groups were selected to represent diverse ethnocultural and linguistic communities and to reflect other differences within this population such as immigration status, country of origin, length of time in Canada and first language. Rather than select seniors from communities with large numbers of immigrant seniors or communities that have a greater capacity to support seniors, an effort was made to select seniors with higher levels of vulnerability due to factors such as low income levels, lack of English language skills or

mobility issues. The objective of the study was to ensure that the voices of marginalized seniors who have difficulty accessing services were included.

The following process was used to select participants:

- The list of organizations generated in the environmental scan was used to connect with service providers and to identify ethnocultural/linguistic communities in Edmonton.
- A community profile was created for each community based on information from service providers and members of the Advisory Group. The community profiles included information such as the geographical area in Edmonton in which the communities tend to live, the capacity within the community to support IRS, seniors’ ability to communicate in English, distribution of seniors’ immigrant vs. refugee status and length of stay in Canada. Although these profiles were based on informal knowledge about specific communities, they were a useful starting point to ensure that vulnerable seniors were included in the study. The community profiles are included in Appendix III.

**6.2.2. Focus group process**

To minimize transportation challenges, two focus groups were held at sites that provide services to IRS and that are accessible by public transportation. The focus groups were facilitated in English with the help of interpreters when necessary and in some cases, participants interpreted for each other. All conversations were recorded.

The third focus group included participants who arrived in Canada as refugees or as immigrants who were fleeing from unsafe situations in their home countries. Three language groups were represented, and community health workers and brokers who work with vulnerable seniors provided transportation and interpretation services.

**6.2.3. Profile of senior participants**

At the start of the focus group, participants completed a demographic data form to collect information that would help contextualize the findings. 44 participants completed the demographic form. The demographic form and the data from the forms are included in Appendix III.

The following table provides a brief summary of the demographic data.

Gender and Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 27 participants are female and 17 are male</li><li>• The majority of participants are between the ages of 55 and 65</li></ul>
Country of birth, Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants were born in 13 different countries and speak 21 different languages.</li></ul>



Arrival in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants arrived in Canada between 1963 and 2014, from 18 different countries. Half the participants arrived in the last 10 years. 23 arrived as immigrants, and the rest as refugees or on visas and work permits.</li> </ul>
Current status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About two thirds of the participants currently have citizenship status. 9 are permanent residents and 4 have visitor or Super Visas.</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About half the participants live with their families, and the rest either with their spouse or on their own.</li> </ul>

## 6.3. Focus Groups with Service Providers

### 6.3.1. Participant selection and focus group process

The list of organizations generated in the environmental scan was used to select participants for the first organizational focus group. Invitations were sent to approximately 30 organizations, and 12 participants attended on behalf of their organizations.

A second focus group was conducted with community support workers/cultural brokers who assist IRS, and with representatives from organizations that support this community-based work.

All focus group participants are currently involved with planning and providing services and programs to IRS.

## 6.4. Interviews

Data was also collected through 4 semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in the provision of services for high-need immigrant senior populations. These included:

- A teacher of an ESL program for seniors
- A community developer from an immigrant serving organization that has long-standing connections with ethnocultural communities in Edmonton
- An executive director of an organization that provides programs and services for IRS
- An academic researcher whose work focuses on policies and practices related to immigrants, health and aging

## 6.5. Data Analysis and Findings Development

Data from the interviews and focus groups was coded for key themes relating to:

- Challenges faced by IRS
- Barriers and enablers to accessing services (for IRS) and providing services (for service providers)

- Recommendations for strategies and promising practices to enhance services and supports

The results of the data analysis were used to develop a summary of the key findings, which is presented in the next section.

## 6.6. Data Collection Challenges

The data collection phase of this project posed a few challenges. It was somewhat difficult and time consuming to identify and select IRS who could provide a range of perspectives on the different issues that IRS face, and to find appropriate and accessible locations for the focus groups. The lack of data on IRS in Edmonton contributed to this issue, and we were not able to reach IRS from some communities, especially smaller communities with recent newcomers to Edmonton. However, members of the Project Advisory Group as well as other service providers helped as best they could to identify potential locations for focus groups, ensure that the locations were accessible and appropriate for participants and assist with scheduling.

Language barriers posed another challenge. Interview questions had to be short and simple to facilitate communication. In one focus group, staff from the service provider site helped to interpret, and in another, participants interpreted for each other when needed. In one focus group, there were three interpreters for three different language groups. This affected the process used to capture data as well as the time available for the focus group. However, we do not believe that these challenges significantly affected the quality of data, as the key themes that emerged from the focus groups and the interviews were similar to or overlapped with each other.

Overall, the data collection challenges were manageable and did not significantly impact the data collection process or the data quality.

## 7. Discussion of Findings

---

This section provides a summary and discussion of the findings of the Needs Assessment. The findings have been categorized into two areas: experiences of IRS and barriers to service access and provision.

### 7.1. Experiences of IRS

While many seniors, regardless of their histories or life trajectories, face similar issues relating to health, income and housing, the experience of being an immigrant or refugee adds another layer of challenges to those faced by the aging. In this section, we paint an overall picture of the experiences of IRS as they navigate the waters of aging in their adopted country.

#### 7.1.1. Key challenges faced by IRS

The needs of immigrant and refugee seniors are complex, with multiple needs that often compound one another. In this section, we discuss the three main challenges that IRS deal with in their daily lives, as identified by IRS and service provider participants: language, income, and housing.

##### Language

Seniors viewed facility with English as key to their ability to interact with the community around them. Comments from two seniors were reflective of many others:

*Most difficulty is the language. If you don't know it, you are afraid to go out. You have to depend on others so need to learn English so you can depend on yourself.*

*....always have to look for someone to translate for you.*

The ability to speak English and have some confidence to speak it was viewed by many seniors as being important to their general well-being, in that it contributes to a sense of independence and empowerment. Without capacity in English, seniors expressed a diminished ability to fully participate in society, including a limited ability to access services and programs that would enhance their well-being, such as health and recreational programs.

Limited English skills are not only found in recently immigrated seniors, as even seniors who have lived in Canada for a very long time have often been deprived of the opportunity to improve their skills. One senior recounted that having to work two full time jobs to make ends meet to support his family had denied him the time to become comfortable in English. The

absence of English language skills and/or the confidence to speak it compounds other needs/gaps in seniors' lived experiences, making the remediation of this issue a pivotal issue for the well-being of IRS.

## Housing

Like many seniors, IRS face a myriad of housing issues. However, perhaps unique to immigrant seniors is a dependency on their families for housing and a lack of any real economic resources that would enable them to access housing on their own or contribute to a shared housing situation in which all family members have the space they require. Safe, affordable housing is essential to a sense of security and overall well-being. For IRS, three factors make housing of key concern: inappropriate housing, a lack of affordable housing, and precarious housing. These three elements are often present at the same time, each compounding the negative effects of the others.

### *Inappropriate housing*

Ali's story (see text box) is a good example of the kinds of challenges some IRS face with regard to access to appropriate housing. Children who are anxious to bring their elderly parents to Canada may not have the financial means to move into larger apartments, resulting in parents and their children (who may also be financially precarious) finding themselves living in very cramped quarters with few other options.

### *Lack of affordable housing*

Like many other seniors, the absence of income or a reduced income makes having access to good housing almost impossible. IRS who are here on visitor visas or Super Visas, or who are refugees, have little or no access to government programs that might enable them to get some assistance with income or subsidized housing. This issue is compounding by the precariousness of income due to a lack of citizenship status as well

#### ***Ali's Story***

*Ali's son and daughter-in-law helped him come to Canada to spend his senior years with them. Ali's son and his wife (who is pregnant) live in a one bedroom apartment, where Ali sleeps on the sofa bed in the living room. His family is so happy he is there with them and while Ali loves being with his son and daughter-in-law he is acutely aware that his presence makes it difficult for his daughter-in-law to have any privacy. Faced with being 'in her way' all day, Ali leaves the house in the morning and tries to stay away all day. It is exhausting for him, but he puts on a brave face by telling his daughter-in-law that he likes to explore the city. In reality, he finds it very hard to have to spend the day in the mall. He has no money to shop or buy food. Because Ali has no income from Old Age Security nor will he qualify for a long time, he cannot contribute to the rent to enable the family to move into a 2 bedroom apartment. He worries all the time about when the baby comes, when he feels he will be even more in the way.*

as by limited English skills. Both of these issues make it more difficult for them to explore their options or to advocate for better housing on their own behalf.

### *Precarious housing*

Because many IRS live with their children, their housing situation involves another layer of precariousness, in that they are dependent upon the good will of and good relations with their children for secure housing. Differing values can lead to strained relations, and living in cramped quarters can contribute to seniors feeling unsafe or unwanted. However, limited or no income coupled with high rent makes it impossible for them to leave.

### Income

Income insecurity that results in low or unpredictable income is at the root of many issues faced by IRS. Seniors spoke about a lot about income related issues (benefits, income supplements, wages etc.) including financial concerns related to the cost of living, and the cost of accessing programs services that would be helpful to them.

Of course, these issues are not universal; we did talk to seniors who immigrated to Canada when they were young, had careers here, and have retired with pensions and savings. However, this is not the reality of the majority of immigrant and refugee seniors we spoke to/in Edmonton.

### **7.1.2. Impacts on IRS**

IRS spoke evocatively about how the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives impact them. These included a sense of dependence, feeling like a burden on their families, isolation, a diminished agency, lack of self-worth, and being overwhelmed with family responsibilities.

### Dependence and feeling like a burden

For seniors living with their families, who themselves are often struggling financially, not being able to contribute financially and having to depend on their families for financial support engendered a feeling of being a drain on the family's finances. Seniors, who in their country of origin would have had at least social if not financial capital to leverage in aid of their families, find themselves stripped of both in their new country. Instead of helping their children have a better life, in the face of limited family resources, they feel that they are a burden on their children. While most attempt to compensate by child minding, cooking and cleaning, their age and health status sometimes preclude these forms of contribution.

### Isolation

A number of factors limit IRS' capacity to interact with the broader community, including living with children who are at work all day, the inability to navigate the public transportation system, a lack of language skills, a lack of funds to access activities outside of the home and/or a lack of appropriate activities for IRS.

### Lack of agency and lack of self worth

Being in a dependent position after a lifetime of providing for others was identified by many seniors as contributing to a loss of confidence and pride. IRS find their own and their children's social roles reversed in Canada. Often their children are not aware of the social and emotional needs of their aging parents and as one senior articulated, *"children feel parents have food; roof over their heads; they don't need anything else."*

### Overwhelming family responsibilities

IRS are often an integral part of helping families to survive by providing free child care and help with household chores. This deep integration with the family, while having some positive aspects, also makes IRS vulnerable when family circumstances change (divorce, job loss, etc.). In addition, these demands often preclude seniors from accessing English language classes, which exacerbates isolation.

In this section we outlined key issues of concern raised by the seniors and service providers with whom we met. Additionally, we reported on the degree to which these needs intersect and intertwine to exacerbate the challenges faced by IRS.

## **7.2. Barriers to Service Access and Provision**

This section presents research findings on the barriers that IRS face in *accessing* programs and services and the challenges that service providers face in *providing* programs and services that meet the specific needs of IRS.

### **7.2.1. Economic insecurity**

#### Program fees

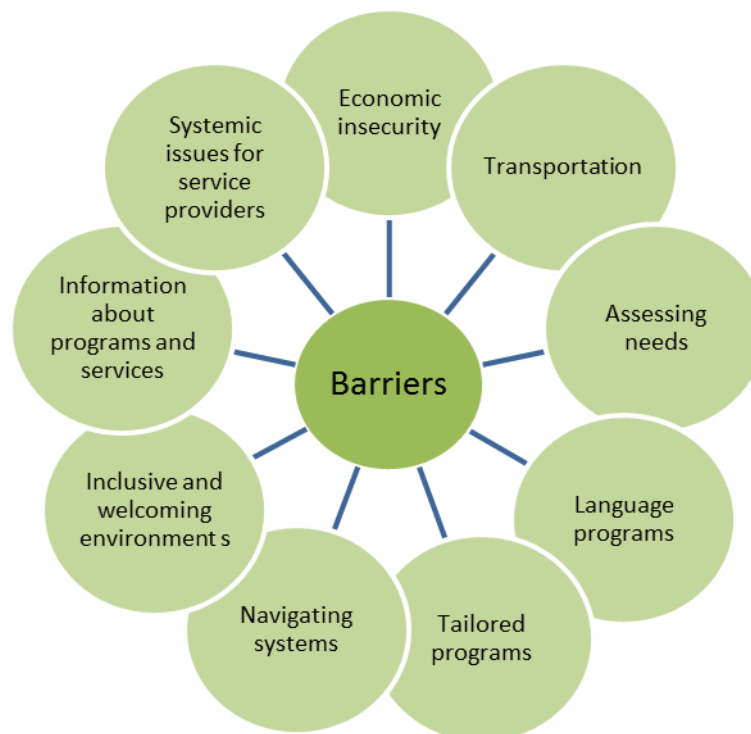
The economic insecurity and poverty experienced by IRS result in financial barriers to accessing programs and services if user fees are required. This is particularly true for the most economically vulnerable IRS. Even when receiving family support, program fees present a barrier, as seniors don't want to be a burden to their children by asking for money to cover the fees. One participant explained, *"We are so dependent on our children, are not comfortable to ask... Even if we want it, we don't go because don't want to ask our children."* IRS who are newer to Canada and came later in life are particularly affected. One service provider explained: *"Their financial situation is not as good as the old comers. Many rely on their children*

*so if you tell them there is bus fare or admission fare, they'll rarely come."* If programs are free, seniors can attend them without having to worry about asking for money from family members or taking money away from other necessities. If programs charge a fee, even a nominal one, seniors' access may be affected; *"The seniors are so fond of going out. They want to see different things – but only if they don't have to pay for it."* Policies shaping economic support systems for IRS and funding programs for service providers lead to situations where IRS find it difficult to pay fees and service providers find it difficult to offer programs for free.

### Inequitable systems

Systems and policies impacting IRS income security and the resulting experiences of poverty are at play in the expressed need for free programming. As one IRS explained, *"Insecurity of the income causes real problem."* Some IRS are more vulnerable than others. IRS who are not citizens and who are here as visitors, on Super Visas, or who are refugees have very limited access to financial support. Program fees present an even bigger hurdle for this group. Refugees are differently impacted due to wait times for qualifying for benefits. As one respondent put it, *"many seniors will die before qualifying for benefits."* Even small amounts of economic support can make the difference for seniors. Participants referenced the recent changes in eligibility criteria of Alberta's seniors benefit as one example

Barriers to Service Access and Provision



of economic support that impacted their ability to participate in programs. One participant

noted that even though it was only a little bit, it made a big difference and allowed for some careful spending to participate in programs.

### Lack of funding to deliver free programs

Many service providers recognize the income related challenges of IRS, noting that the *“financial benefit issue is huge.”* Service providers expressed a desire to respond to the needs of IRS by providing as many free programs as they can, but providing free services is a challenge for them. One service provider explained, *“it’s hard for us because we don’t have funding to cover it. We are trying to stretch a tiny budget and at some point it does not just stretch.”*

Almost all service providers who participated in the Needs Assessment talked about a scarcity of funding that restricted their ability to respond to IRS’ needs. Funding policies that result in a lack of funding for programs that target IRS mean that this group is underserved. Lack of funding affected service providers’ ability to hire staff who spoke specific languages, secure space for certain kinds of programming, provide free programs, and sustain programs that work well. Few service providers will submit funding applications outside the declared priorities of funders and there are *“no dollars [specifically] for IRS programs.”*

Service providers did describe a few free programs and services by grassroots community groups or informally through ethnocultural and religious organizations. These programs are important supports and demonstrate the ways in which immigrant and refugee community members work to build their capacity to support each other. However, the programs tend to be sporadic, smaller scale and un/under funded. While community supports are important and valuable, some issues, for example those relating to language, health care, and housing, cannot be fully ameliorated by community-based informal systems; these continue to be serious issues affecting IRS.

### Funding policies restrict services to IRS on visitor visas

Some service providers talked about the particular challenges of providing services to seniors on visitor visas. The super visa policies presume that families will look after their parents, and they do. However, seniors also have needs for recreation and social activity that families cannot entirely meet. One service provider noted that while they recognize the need for programs for seniors on visitor visas, they are already stretched to the limit in providing services: *“our organization does not have capacity to address the needs.”* Another service provider noted that there is also sometimes a lack of clarity from a funding perspective about what services can be provided to seniors on visitor visas. When resources are scarce, which they often are, resources go to other seniors who more readily meet funders’ requirements.



### 7.2.2. Access to transportation

Access to programs and services is closely related to IRS mobility and, therefore, is impacted by their access to public transportation. The cost of transportation, the location of programs relative to public transportation stops, and weather concerns were all raised as important factors.

#### Cost of transportation

IRS who have access to income, and who are relatively healthy and physically mobile, spoke highly of Edmonton's public transportation system, noting that *"drivers are very good and helpful."* Those who struggle financially or who are hampered by health concerns have a hard time finding affordable alternatives to public transportation (see Leila's story below). One participant pointed out that *"Some can't afford the bus pass, if pension, should be able to afford."* Given the difficulty many IRS have accessing economic supports, participation in programs is often dependent upon flexible low-cost/subsidized transportation systems. Service providers noted the importance of transportation subsidies to enable IRS participation. In some cases, service providers facilitated transportation access by providing a small amount of funding to cover the cost of a bus pass or by arranging for rides for IRS. One service provider explained, *"the ones who really must have help with transportation, we'll get a sponsor to buy them a bus pass for the year. Then they are free."* Individual IRS may benefit from this kind of support, but it is not a long-term solution to systemic transportation barriers.

#### Difficulty of transportation

Even when costs are supported, transportation is still challenging. It can be difficult for IRS to understand the transportation system and

#### **Leila's Story**

*Leila is a 72 year old woman originally from Iraq. She and her family fled from war and were located in a refugee camp awaiting acceptance to emigrate to Canada. Her son and his family came first and later they were able to secure a visitor visa for Leila. When the family became refugees, they lost all of their assets and Leila is completely dependent upon her son and daughter-in-law. Years of facing threats in a war zone, plus physical hardship in the refugee camps have taken their toll on Leila's health and she suffers with arthritis and Type II diabetes. Although Leila knows she has so much to be grateful for, including that she and her son were able to flee to Canada, lately, she feels sad most days.*

*Leila would like to be able to visit with other Arabic speaking seniors or maybe take a walk when the weather is fine. She knows that exercise would be good for her diabetes and socializing would help with her sadness. The trouble is there is no money for outings or bus fare and most days she is home taking care of her young grandchildren and cooking meals so that her son and his wife can go to work.*

therefore planning new trips or routes can be overwhelming. Likewise, trying to navigate the city once they are off the bus is a challenge. For example, one participant explained, “[I] would like to go to library but need a bus that would drop me right in front of the library.” Many IRS in this study noted that ideally, programs and services should be located at facilities where the bus stops right at the door, to make it easier for them and to ensure they do not get lost: “bus comes here so it’s easy to get to.” Programs and services that are not located on a bus route and/or close to a bus stop present a barrier to participation. For this reason, the location of programs and services is an important consideration for enabling participation. Service providers recognize that even when IRS like programs, transportation is key to their access: “they like it and if transportation, they will come.”

### Weather in an unfamiliar climate

Winter adds another barrier to using public transit. Some IRS expressed concerns about being injured in the winter, noting that it is “slippery in snow. It’s hard.” For IRS who did not grow up with cold weather, there is a very real risk of not being prepared for the cold and getting injured if a bus is missed or they have to wait too long. It is important to remember that going out safely in a winter climate is dependent on a set of skills and knowledge that IRS may not have had the opportunity to attain. Some IRS noted that it is “hard to visit people; especially in winter.” Without easy and accessible public transportation, IRS may become particularly socially isolated in the winter months.

### **7.2.3. Difficulty assessing needs of IRS**

While many IRS noted that they would prefer programs that are not generic but that meet their particular needs and are offered in ethnoculturally and linguistically congruent ways, the specifics of these needs are not well understood by service providers. Almost all service providers included in this study talked about their efforts to determine the needs of IRS. They emphasized their desire to respond to IRS’ unique needs, to not just “cut and paste” programming. However, they also expressed their difficulty assessing the needs of immigrant and refugee clients in general and further difficulty capturing the specific needs of IRS.

### No systematic research on IRS needs

Service providers have developed some strategies for determining IRS needs, but these strategies are not systematic and can be very time consuming. One service provider explained, “we ask group leaders, Executive Directors, ask women, men; ask them what they want. It takes time to understand and develop services...” Other service providers shared that staff will try to get a sense of IRS needs by chatting with seniors informally during drop-in times or before and after they participate in programs. Many programs conduct evaluations and surveys relating to that specific program offering but do not have the resources for wider engagement. A limited number of service providers hold periodic focus groups or conduct member/user surveys.

Further, a number of service providers explained that they assess the quality of their programs by IRS interest. If IRS come to the program, it must be good and/or meet their needs in some way. Attendance is an important indicator of interest, but service providers pointed out that they are unable to assess whether these programs meet the most important needs of IRS, if they are attended because IRS want that particular program, or if they are attended because that is all that is being offered.

In addition, this information strategy only captures the needs of those who are already accessing programs. It is much more difficult to understand who service providers are not reaching and why. As one service provider asked, “*Who do you go to when you need information? And how do you connect with very recently arrived immigrant communities? This is much harder for larger service providers.*” Informal evaluation and research strategies are

#### **Ahmad’s Story**

*Ahmad, a gentle, soft-spoken senior, described feeling helpless about his current situation. Ahmad came to Canada from Pakistan three years ago at the age of 68 (and after the death of his wife) to be with his daughter who had emigrated 10 years earlier.*

*Ahmad’s daughter came to Canada for a good paying job in the IT industry. However, after four years in Canada, her company downsized and she was out of work. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies at the University and working part-time and is the main support for her dad, who is here on a visitor’s visa. They have applied for Ahmad to get a Super Visa to end some of the precariousness associated with being on a visitor visa, but the process is lengthy and complicated.*

*Although he is in good health, Ahmad worries that he is a burden on his daughter’s resources. In addition, because she works and studies for such long hours, Ahmad often feels lonely. Sometimes he wonders if he should return to Pakistan, but despite their struggles Leila does not want her dad return to Pakistan.*

*The two of them face a seven year wait till Ahmad qualifies for Old Age Security, and in the meantime the only resources that Ahmad can call his own are a small pension he receives from the years he was a veterinary doctor in Pakistan.*

*Ahmad takes solace from similar stories he hears when he goes to the local seniors’ centre where he can socialize with people his own age and from the same part of the world. However, even the small amount of money it costs to get to the centre by bus feels like an unnecessary luxury when he sees how hard his daughter works to pay the rent on their apartment and put food on the table.*

*Coming to Canada was supposed to be a godsend for Ahmad and his daughter, but instead they both feel stretched, exhausted and fearful about their future.*

more effective for small, community-based service providers and those who have strong and long-term ties to immigrant and refugee communities. However, even these service providers noted that without systematic research on IRS needs, developing and securing funding for programs is very difficult.

### Inconsistent data collection

When service providers do gather information, in some cases it is because they are required to for funding purposes (e.g., FCSS funding), and in other cases because they want research to inform their own work. However, the kind of data collected varies. Some service providers track how many people come through the door regardless of demographic characteristics, others track contact with seniors specifically, while still others track program usage. In many cases, the goal tends to be documenting and providing services to large numbers of seniors. No service providers included in this study were tracking the level of vulnerability of their program users or the extent to which their services and programs are meeting the needs of the most vulnerable IRS. This trend most probably reflects the requirement to collect data for accountability purposes: for reporting to funders. Few service providers have the resources to develop and sustain data collection strategies beyond this.

Service providers noted that data on IRS would be helpful in better meeting their needs but also that information gathering efforts could help the IRS serving sector to better collaborate. One service provider who shared that the seniors who use their centre speak 16 different languages asked, *“I wonder if there is a way to capture which languages we [service providers collectively] have and use them as volunteers or develop some kind of database so that we can draw on each other's clients.”* Information such as this could be a springboard for improving programs.

### Complex needs of IRS

An additional difficulty in meeting the needs of IRS that was raised by service providers relates to how they express their needs. For example, a senior might ask for help in a particular area, but may need something quite different. Community support workers and cultural brokers trained to ask probing questions can help to determine the underlying issues that need to be addressed and refer seniors to the most appropriate resource. However, many service providers do not have enough funding to support community workers/ brokers so staff must try to get underneath presenting issues to determine IRS needs without the training or support to do so.

#### **7.2.4. Lack of appropriate language programs**

As previously stated, English language skills are seen as a linchpin for ensuring that IRS feel capable, can be independent, and have access to programs and services. However, seniors pointed out that English language courses are often not offered in ways that support their

learning. Service providers agreed and are struggling to find ways to meet the needs of individual seniors while respecting the constraints imposed by funders on language programs and the lack of support for non-employment related language learning.

### English language training not designed for IRS

Seniors noted that the limited English language training available to eligible seniors that is free of cost is not sufficient for them gain proficiency: *“it is not enough to learn English.”* IRS learners may require different forms of curriculum and pedagogy, and a different learning pace, than younger learners. Learning a language is hard for older people; learning can take longer and require more repetition than for younger learners. Many language programs are not designed around the needs of older language learners, those who may not have literacy skills in their first language, or people whose desire to learn a language is not necessarily shaped by employment interests. IRS expressed a desire for more senior-friendly language programs and noted that accessible programs would be those that are free, offered at locations on a bus route, and scheduled with an eye to IRS availability (noting that some IRS are busy caring for grandchildren during the day).

Language learning may also be available to IRS through private vendors. However, privately offered English language classes were seen by the IRS in this study as too expensive. Classes taught by volunteers in a community-based or seniors centre facility were appreciated by seniors and seen as more accessible in that they are no/low-cost. However, IRS voiced concern that even though these classes were good practice spaces, they are not always effective for more formal language learning; *“volunteer teachers are a frustration because some good, some not.”*

### Lack of funding for language training to meet IRS needs

Service providers recognize the limitations of English language training for IRS and some talked about their attempts to support individual IRS despite the constraints of program policy. Strategies to enable IRS to participate in formal language programs for free and host informal language learning spaces were all employed by service providers seeking to do their best in the context of limited funding and clear funder restrictions/parameters on English language funding. While these attempts are admirable, they were accompanied by recognition of the inadequacy of current English language programs for IRS. For example, many noted that language programs for IRS are required long after the initial period when Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes are available to new immigrants. Service providers noted that access to English language programs for IRS is shaped by larger dynamics surrounding immigration policy. Though not stated directly, many of their comments also highlighted the intersection of English language training with systemic issues such as racism, classism and ageism.

### 7.2.5. Lack of programs and services tailored for IRS

The design of programs and services can be a significant barrier or enabler for IRS. Study participants noted that many seniors' programs are not designed with IRS in mind and as a result IRS are often reluctant to access these programs. Study participants expressed their preference for a number of programs that are interesting and relevant to their lives and also noted their desire for unstructured spaces for IRS to gather.

#### Programming is unfamiliar to IRS

Few senior serving organizations offer programs activities that are designed for IRS. Many mainstream service providers offer seniors' programs that are not immediately relevant for IRS, nor are IRS familiar with these types of programs. The challenge for service providers is to be nimble enough to determine the needs of heterogeneous IRS, and then find a way to fund and provide them.

When programs, including recreational or educational programs, are unfamiliar to IRS, they are reluctant to join in, and therefore, programs that are not familiar to IRS are rarely the way they initially connect with an organization. Service providers observed that IRS may eventually join unfamiliar activities once they have gained familiarity with the centre hosting them. Sometimes this occurs through IRS first attending a program more directly relevant to them, such as an English language class. Being recruited by a trusted friend is another way that IRS may first encounter a program they are unfamiliar with.

#### Programming based on IRS' immediate needs and interests enables participation

Study participants noted that service providers might make their programs more accessible by offering newly arrived and/or refugee seniors support with their immediate needs. These include helping navigate government systems (see next section for more detail) and providing basic information about life in their new city (transportation, shopping, finding a doctor, etc.). In addition, study participants identified a number of programs that are relevant and interesting to IRS including:

- Language programs
- Computer classes
- Field trips that allow them to become familiar with the city; without these they may never have the opportunity to see certain parts of Edmonton.
- Programs that provide opportunities for exercise or socializing, where language is not a barrier.
- Assistance filling out forms was repeatedly identified as an area that IRS require assistance with. Whether they are legal forms or applications for financial support, subsidies or programs, IRS expressed a need for support in completing these forms.

### IRS desire unstructured time together

Finally, in addition to tailored programs and services, IRS appreciate spaces where they can gather for informal conversation and companionship. A comfortable space where they can have a coffee and sit and chat with others is a huge draw and may bring IRS into a space where they can begin to develop relationships with service providers.

### **7.2.6. Lack of programs that provide help with navigating systems**

IRS encounter a variety of systems and structures in Canada that they may be unfamiliar with, yet there is a lack of programs that help IRS navigate complex systems. Assistance navigating health systems was of particular importance to IRS.

### Complex systems make access difficult

Many IRS expressed a need for assistance in navigating complex systems. Without an understanding of how systems in Canada function (i.e. health, citizenship, social programs, political systems), IRS have difficulty navigating the complex application and qualification processes required to access those programs. For example, if IRS have someone who will show them how to navigate and use the public transportation system (help them apply for a subsidized pass, accompany them on trips, teach wayfinding skills, etc.) they are better able to make use of that system. IRS need support to know the kinds of questions they should be asking within systems, who to direct their inquiries to, and how decisions are made, in order to have full access.

### Navigating health systems requires support

Health care is one of the systems specifically mentioned by the IRS we spoke to. A number of IRS expressed their appreciation for Canada's high quality health system and noted that with the assistance of interpreters and/or brokers, this system is made more accessible. With financial assistance, IRS can pay their share of the cost of medications. However, the hierarchy of immigration statuses has a devastating effect on the health and lives of seniors. Access to health services is not universal in these contexts. A refugee senior has much less access to health care compared to an immigrant senior who has been here for 25 years, for example. Additionally, reduced opportunities for senior immigrants to apply for full citizenship (e.g. seniors here on Super Visas) means that IRS may need to purchase health insurance, which is beyond the means of most IRS we spoke to.

Additional barriers include a lack of interpreter services to allow seniors to access services without having to find a friend or family member to interpret for them (which also negatively affects confidentiality for seniors) and the challenges of applying for and receiving special



supports such as AISH. As one service provider put it, *“it’s impossible for ‘mainstream’ seniors. IRS, forget it.”*

Finally, diagnosis and support for mental health issues is lacking, especially for refugee seniors who are fleeing war. One service provider commented, *“Seriously, we have to talk about mental health; in the Iraqi community almost 100% of seniors have PTSD.”* Again, a lack of funding for appropriate programs, insufficient health coverage for refugee seniors and a lack of interpreters exacerbate the struggles of this already vulnerable population.

### **7.2.7. Need for an inclusive and welcoming environment**

An inclusive and welcoming environment emerged in this study as one of the most important factors that enabled IRS participation in programs.

#### **Respectful and caring environment enables access**

The absence of an environment that feels inclusive and welcoming to IRS is a large barrier to accessing services and participating in programs. The IRS we spoke to described an ideal environment as one where people are respectful, where IRS feel like family and are cared for as a person. For example, one participant captured this environment when describing a particular neighbourhood seniors’ centre: *“[the] ...social climate is welcoming; very considerate about senior citizens... this is the main thing; the respect you get.”* Another participant noted that this same exemplary center *“Feels like home and not clinical... food is also very essential....”*

#### **Familiar language enables access**

A further component of a welcoming environment for IRS is the presence of someone who speaks their language. One service provider explained, *“Why do the seniors come? If you have a worker who speaks Spanish, you end up with Spanish speaking seniors there. They will use the service. They come if you speak their language.”*

#### **Trusted personal contacts enable access**

Seniors find it easier to access programs when they know someone who has already attended and who encourages them to come along, or when they know someone who is working in that program or service. One participant shared, *“I wouldn’t be able to do it [come here] without two personal contacts.”* However, once IRS attend a program, they become familiar and therefore comfortable with that program and service site and will begin to look at participating in other programs. If seniors do not find a program they are comfortable with, they may become socially isolated. One IRS explained:

*First two years in new country don’t have language – so hard. Depends what happened at the refugee camp. Those are hard years. If you get people attached to something –*



*they'll be okay. It's the people who stay isolated. i.e. Somalians who are Canadians after 15 years no English. Not literate in first language, not educated in own language. Really isolated group. Huge isolation issues.*

### Need for staff training

The staff involved in providing programs and services to IRS can provide the much needed encouragement, safety, and welcoming environment. While highly trained and competent in their professions, they may not have the language skills or knowledge of immigrant and refugee issues that might help them meet the needs of IRS. While service providers are generally very satisfied with the way their staff perform, they note that it can be difficult to find and hire people with the right combination of skills. They also noted that staff “*need access to more training.*” Service providers noted that settlement work can be “*emotionally draining for everyone*” and that staff burnout is on the rise. They emphasised that staff burnout might be mitigated by providing specific training on meeting the needs of IRS. Having paid staff or well trained volunteers who have the skills and knowledge to connect with IRS will help to ensure the creation of a comfortable, accepting, and welcoming environment.

### **7.2.8. Access to information about programs and services**

Having information about programs and services is an important first step for access. Through this study we learned that IRS seek and verify information through trusted contacts or family members. Those contacts and family members, however, may be gathering their information from the print and web-based resources many service providers distribute. Promoting programs is not always a goal of service providers, as some programs are in high demand and would not be able to handle the additional requests if they were advertised.

### Information sought through word of mouth

The majority of IRS in this study accessed information about services and programs by word of mouth. As one service provider noted, “*They [seniors] focus on the people they know. They will call that person to find out what is available or for help navigating a system... So personal contact is important.*” Even when print or digital information is shared with them, IRS do not seem to rely on it to any great extent. Rather, they verify that information with a trusted friend or family member. It is interesting to note that these materials are the primary way in which many organizations publicize their activities or promote their services. These information sources might be important for family members and service providers to inform themselves in order to share information with IRS.

### Contradictory information causes confusion

Service providers can play an important role in providing information to seniors and those who care for and help them. However, information about services and programs is not always

readily available. Furthermore, sometimes contradictory information circulates, which can be particularly confusing to those for whom English is not their first language or who do not speak English. It was noted that a consolidated information guide for IRS (like the consolidated guides for the general seniors population) would help to rectify this barrier to accessing information.

#### Programs are over capacity so they are not promoted

The data also shows that some IRS serving organizations (especially the more community-based organizations) have more demand for their programs and services than they can meet. One organizational leader noted, *“We have enough people coming – would love to do more, but if [we] advertise and get even more, things might suffer a bit. Everyone works long hours. Don’t really need to advertise.”* In the absence of robust funding, these organizations do not have the resources to support additional demand. For this reason, sharing information about these programs can lead to IRS disappointment and unnecessary pressure on staff.

That said, we uncovered many instances where staff enabled IRS access to their programs in innovative ways, often motivated by compassion, and sometimes utilizing funds that come from staffs’ own pocket.

### **7.2.9. Additional systemic issues for service providers**

In addition to the specific challenges of providing appropriate programs and services that meet the needs of IRS, service providers are faced with broader systemic issues that constrain their ongoing efforts to both identify the needs of IRS and to meet these needs in any significant way. Some of these issues have been mentioned in the previous discussion on barriers to access and service provision, but are worth highlighting here to emphasize their degree of impact on the lives of IRS.

#### Lack of ongoing and sustained funding for IRS

The issue of lack of funding came up in almost every conversation with service providers. Many of the barriers previously mentioned were either attributed to or linked with a lack of sufficient funding for service provision. Issues of insufficient funding affect organizations that provide services to all seniors, but are magnified when service providers try to assess and meet the specific needs of IRS. Offering free programs, assessing the needs of specific groups of IRS, providing more language and other targeted programs, and hiring appropriate staff to design and deliver programs for IRS are all much more difficult when organizations do not have sufficient resources. For immigrant and refugee serving organizations, service delivery reflects funders’ priorities and emphasis is generally placed on programs that focus on settlement and

employment for newcomers. Seniors' programs are delivered sporadically and with very little funding, often by "squeezing in" IRS into existing programs for non-senior immigrants.

#### Lack of funder/funding targets for service provision for IRS

Linked to the issue of insufficient funding is a lack of targets for identifying and addressing the needs of IRS. For example, a major funder of many seniors' programs, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), does not have any targets for meeting diverse needs, whether IRS or other vulnerable groups. Services are generally targeted to all seniors and more vulnerable groups do not necessarily receive the level of service that meets their more complex needs. There is a dire need for a greater degree of shared organizational commitment to meeting the needs of IRS, either through new funding models or other innovative strategies that would address priorities and establish targets that respond to actual needs.

#### Lack of data that reflects need, not population size

The demographic review, environmental scan and literature review phases of this project, as well as feedback from project participants, all revealed gaps in existing quantitative and qualitative data on the numbers and needs of IRS in Edmonton. For example, the number of IRS in Edmonton could be extrapolated from data on the number of seniors and immigrants, but may not be accurate. As we well know, IRS are by no means a homogenous group, and their needs and challenges vary by age of arrival in Canada, ability to speak English, etc. Community support workers and cultural brokers who work closely with IRS communities have some of this information based on their caseloads, but the information is limited and not easily accessible to others. Service providers grapple with understanding the extent of the needs of specific groups, and planning appropriate interventions.

#### Lack of mechanisms to advocate for the needs of IRS

Currently, there are no formal mechanisms in place for seniors themselves or for service providers to advocate for adequate resources to meet the needs of IRS. In 2008, the Multicultural Health Broker Co-operative sponsored an immigrant seniors' forum, organized by a group of 70 IRS from various communities. The objective of the forum was to enhance policy makers' and service providers' awareness of IRS' realities, and to begin a dialogue about how to improve their quality of life and well-being. This forum was well attended, but ongoing advocacy requires a sustainable mechanism to build capacity for advocacy and to include the voices of IRS and service providers at policy tables.

### **7.2.10. Conclusion**

In many ways, the findings of research study are consistent with the issues and concerns raised in the limited literature on IRS. This study provides important contextual understanding specific

to the Edmonton area, and to the ethnocultural and linguistic communities engaged in this research. We have learned that government policies intersect to position IRS and service providers in particular ways. IRS have not been a priority for funders, and thus there is inadequate support for research, development and delivery of programs and services that meet their particular needs. At the same time, policy changes in the areas of citizenship and financial support programs create an environment where IRS' needs are increasing. Programs and services that do exist are not always accessible to IRS. This study uncovered a number of barriers and enablers for IRS access to existing programs and services, along with some promising practices that could improve the lives of IRS. It is our sincere hope that the voices of the IRS who so generously participated in this study, and the views of service providers committed to supporting this population, will engender changes to improve the lives of IRS.

## 8. Considerations for Future Action

---

One of the main objectives of this Needs Assessment was to consult with IRS, service providers and stakeholders to determine how well existing programs and services meet the needs of IRS, identify any gaps and provide suggestions for addressing the gaps.

Based on the findings, we have developed some considerations for future action. These fall within three areas: guidelines for the provision of programs and services, promising practices for the provision of programs and services, and organizational/policy recommendations.

### 8.1. Guidelines for Program/Service Design and Delivery

The following guidelines emerged from data provided by project participants, and can be used to develop programs and services that better respond to the barriers IRS face in accessing services.

The guidelines can be used both by mainstream seniors' organizations and by organizations that specifically target IRS.

1. Increase the availability of free programs for IRS whenever possible. For low-income seniors, even a small fee to participate in a program can be prohibitive, and more free programs would ensure equitable access for all IRS.
2. Ensure that facilities housing programs and services for IRS are easily accessible and on a transit route, preferably very close to a transit stop.
3. Establish guidelines for collecting demographic information on member and participant profiles (e.g. country of birth, language spoken, ethnicity) as well as information about program needs and interests. Consistent data across service provider organizations can be used to assess specific needs and to determine how these needs might be met.
4. Within each facility, create a welcoming, respectful and inclusive culture. This can be created by:
  - Hiring staff and volunteers who can speak languages other than English, depending on the profile of the membership.
  - Ensuring that staff have the skills to create a respectful and inviting environment.
  - Requesting and encouraging non-immigrant seniors to be inclusive and respectful, and to help create a welcoming environment.

5. Support the provision of more senior-friendly English language programs that are appropriate for seniors' learning pace, recognize literacy challenges in the seniors' first language, and include an opportunity to socialize and engage in conversational English.
6. Focus on providing recreational and other programs that do not require English language skills and that will minimize language barriers to participation (e.g. fitness and dance classes).
7. Offer more programs targeted to specific IRS' ethnocultural/linguistic communities. IRS are most likely to attend programs that mitigate language barriers and provide a means of connecting with others in their own community.
  - Start by offering a program that is targeted to a specific cultural and/or linguistic group to draw them to a facility they are not familiar with.
  - Consider the specific needs and challenges faced by the target group in both the delivery approach and program content.
  - Engage community support workers and cultural brokers who are connected to and have relationships with IRS to assist with program design.
8. Provide more educational programs that address the day-to-day challenges of IRS (e.g. financial literacy, how to use transportation systems, information on seniors' benefits, housing etc.) These needs may shift and change as new communities of IRS arrive in Edmonton, and ongoing formal and informal needs assessments could be used to determine the most current and significant challenges faced by IRS. Consider offering a series of short-term programs that meet the immediate needs of IRS in addition to long term program offerings to ensure that emergent needs are being met.
9. Offer a mix of structured and unstructured programs to respond to IRS' varying interests and abilities. Food and the opportunity for social time should be available as a separate activity and also as a part of structured programs. Purposefully incorporate relationship-building activities into programs to facilitate the building of social networks between seniors and to help to reduce social isolation.
10. To promote and market programs, allocate resources to cultivate and maintain connections with formal and informal leaders within community spaces such as places of worship and cultural gathering spaces. IRS (like other seniors) value and are more likely to act upon information received from trusted sources.
11. Review promotional materials such as newsletters and program guides for appropriate language. Avoid terminology that might be confusing for those with limited English language skills and use images and pictures to supplement written text. When possible, translate promotional material into the language of the target community.

## 8.2. Promising Practices for Provision of Services and Programs

The following are promising practices that respond to the needs and challenges identified in this project. Some of these practices currently are, or have been, successfully used by service providers in Edmonton. Others are drawn from the literature review on promising practices for provision of programs and services for IRS, based on their relevance to the findings.

1. Expand the current community support worker/cultural broker programs for IRS within specific ethnocultural communities. Programs based on these models have proven very effective in reaching out to seniors from specific communities. Community support workers/cultural brokers are especially effective at connecting with the most marginalized seniors (e.g. refugees, seniors living in poverty, seniors with health/mobility issues, etc.) They carry deep knowledge of the life circumstances of the seniors and the communities that these seniors are part of, from being part of these communities over a period of time. These workers/brokers have to be trusted members of the community with the language and interpersonal skills to connect with marginalized IRS, link them to programs and services and help them navigate complex systems, mediate cultural differences/conflict that may emerge and support relevant community development. The support they provide to seniors is culturally honoring, holistic and long-term. See Appendix IV for a description of the competencies generally shared by these workers.
2. Design and implement ambassador programs that use the seniors-helping-seniors model and are targeted at specific ethnocultural/linguistic communities. Similar programs have been successfully implemented in some Canadian municipalities, where ambassadors from different communities are recruited to provide a point of contact for information and referrals to existing programs and services. A short summary of existing programs has been included in an Appendix IV.
3. Develop a compendium or listing of programs and services for IRS that is accessible to IRS caregivers/service providers. IRS access information about programs primarily by word of mouth; however, families of IRS, caregivers and service providers would benefit from a consolidated source of information.
4. Create a network of organizations that could share promising practices, successes and challenges and that would contribute to a more streamlined and effective approach to providing services to IRS in Edmonton. There is currently very little collaboration between organizations that provide services for IRS, both mainstream and ethnocultural-specific.

## 8.3. Organizational/Policy Recommendations

The following are recommendations for organizational and policy level changes for funders and service providers that would benefit IRS and address the findings that emerged in this project.

### 8.3.1. Recommendations for service providers

#### Income

- Advocate for the Alberta Seniors Benefit not to be linked to federal Old Age Security benefits so that IRS can benefit from this program.

#### Transportation

- Advocate for subsidies for low-cost transportation options for IRS.

#### Language

- Support the creation of translated materials that provide information to seniors, based on the major non-English languages spoken in Edmonton.
- Support and Increase availability of interpreters that service providers can access at low/no cost.

#### Housing

- Advocate for an increase in affordable housing that meets the needs of IRS. Ensure that housing options are linked to services for social support that facilitate independent and dignified living.

#### Research

- Implement a collaborative baseline study that provides demographic data to determine the scope of issues faced by IRS in Edmonton. Baseline data would facilitate future evaluation processes to assess the effectiveness of programs and services for IRS.

#### Recruitment and education

- Consider developing staff recruitment and hiring strategies to reach out to different ethnocultural and immigrant communities.
- Strengthen staff capacity to work with IRS with ongoing training for staff and service providers to better understand the needs and challenges faced by IRS and promising practices for addressing these needs.



- Develop a repository of resources (e.g. toolkits, education modules) for service providers that include guidelines for design and delivery of programs and services for IRS.

### Seniors' advocacy

- Support the development of an IRS advocacy group and other mechanisms that IRS can participate in, to empower and equip them to advocate for policy change and more effective service provision.
- Consult with and include the voices of IRS in policy-making processes that affect them.

## **8.3.2. Recommendations for funders**

### Funding for IRS

- Increase the availability of funding for programs and services specifically for IRS.

### Funding models

- Advocate and fund research and action to develop new and sustainable funding models. Allocate more funding for organizations that provide services for specific ethnocultural and linguistic communities.

### Mandated targets

- Include mandated targets for service provision to IRS as a condition of funding to drive organizational commitment.

### Housing

- Fund development of affordable housing that meets the needs of IRS.

### Research

- Support projects that build on current research and provide further insight into the specific needs of IRS. Ensure that marginalized and vulnerable seniors are included, rather than only communities that have a large population of IRS. Focus on key challenges such as income, housing, and transportation, and the systemic changes required to address issues in these sectors.

## Appendix I - References

---

- Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies. (2014). Strengthening Canadian citizenship act. *Research Brief*, 1, 1-6.
- Beiser, M. (2005). The health of immigrants and refugees in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96, 30-44.
- Bernhard J., Hyman, I. & Tate, E. (2010). *Meeting the needs of immigrants throughout the lifecycle: Region of Peel immigration discussion paper*. <http://www.peelregion.ca/social-services/pdfs/discussion-paper-2.pdf>
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2009). *Improving mental health services for immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural and racialized groups: Issues and options for service improvement*. [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/Diversity\\_Issues\\_Options\\_Report\\_ENG\\_0.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/Diversity_Issues_Options_Report_ENG_0.pdf)
- Chiu Y., Ortiz L., & Wolfe, R. (2009). Beyond settlement: Strengthening immigrant families, communities and Canadian society through cultural brokering. *Our Diverse Cities*, 6(1), 170-175. [http://canada.metropolis.net/publications/odc09\\_pdfs/YvonneChiu\\_ODC09.pdf](http://canada.metropolis.net/publications/odc09_pdfs/YvonneChiu_ODC09.pdf)
- Chow, H. P. H. (2010). Growing old in Canada: Physical and psychological well-being among elderly Chinese immigrants. *Ethnicity and Health*, 1, 61-72.
- City of Calgary. (2009). *Listening to Calgary's immigrant seniors: Forum proceedings Calgary immigrant and refugee seniors "speak out"*. [https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/listening\\_to\\_immigrant\\_seniors.pdf?noredirect=1](https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/listening_to_immigrant_seniors.pdf?noredirect=1)
- City of Edmonton, Community Services (2007). Aging in Place Study. [http://www.edmonton.ca/programs\\_services/documents/PDF/Aging-in-Place-Study-October-2-08-revised.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/documents/PDF/Aging-in-Place-Study-October-2-08-revised.pdf)
- City of Edmonton, Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) (2010). Edmonton Seniors: A Portrait. <https://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Seniors%20Portrait.pdf>
- Cook, D. (2009). The Face of the new West: An emerging identity crisis in stampede city. *Our Diverse Cities*, 6(1), 71-75.
- D'Elia, L.A. & Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC). (2008). Mobilizing for action: A report to help create culturally responsive pathways for isolated immigrant seniors. [http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing\\_Action\\_Report/Mobilizing%20for%20Action%202008%20Report.pdf](http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/Mobilizing%20for%20Action%202008%20Report.pdf)

- Edmonton Community Services. (2006). *New Canadians and visible minorities*.  
<http://www.edmonton.ca/assets/citygov/immigrants.pdf>
- Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC). (2008). *Mobilizing for action: A report to help create culturally responsive pathways for isolated immigrant seniors*.  
[https://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing\\_Action\\_Report/Mobilizing%20for%20Action%202008%20Report.pdf](https://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/Mobilizing%20for%20Action%202008%20Report.pdf)
- Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC). (2011). *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton Action Plan*.
- Elgersma, S. (2010). *Immigrant seniors: Their Economic security and factors affecting their access to benefits*. Ottawa: Library of Parliament.  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/07-45-e.pdf>
- Everingham J., Petriwskyj A., Warburton, j., Cuthill M., and Bartlett, H. (2009). Information provision for an age-friendly community. In *Ageing International*. 34(1/2), 79-98.
- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Calgary. (2009). *Outcome: Positives social ties and vulnerable populations*. FCSS Research brief No. 4, 1-23. <http://aaisa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Outcome-Positive-Social-Ties-and-Vulnerable-Populations2.pdf>
- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Calgary. (2014). *Positive social ties and vulnerable populations*. FCSS Research brief No. 4, 1-20.  
[https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/fcss/fcss\\_brief4\\_positivesocialties.pdf?noredirect=1](https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/fcss/fcss_brief4_positivesocialties.pdf?noredirect=1)
- Government of Canada News Releases (2015). *Super Visa hits super milestone*.  
<http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=976509>
- Gurnett, J. (2010). *Finding a Place to Call Home: The Challenge of Housing Security for Immigrants in Alberta*. Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens (Newcomer's Experiences of Housing and Homelessness in Canada). *Montréal: Association for Canadian Studies, Fall 2010*: 100-103.
- Hansson E, Tuck A, Lurie S, & McKenzie K. (2010). *Improving mental health services for immigrant, refugee, and racialized groups: Issues and options for service improvement*.  
[http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Key\\_Documents/en/2010/Issues\\_Options\\_FINAL\\_English%2012Nov09.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Key_Documents/en/2010/Issues_Options_FINAL_English%2012Nov09.pdf)
- Lai, D. (2008). Predictors of use of senior centres by elderly Chinese immigrants in Canada. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 15(1/2), 97-121.
- Lai, D. (2010). *Health status and social determinants of health of immigrant seniors in Canada*.  
[http://canada.metropolis.net/mediacentre/daniel\\_lai\\_6dec2010\\_PHAC\\_e.pptx](http://canada.metropolis.net/mediacentre/daniel_lai_6dec2010_PHAC_e.pptx)
- Lai, D. (2011). *Voices of Canadian Chinese older adults: Implications for policy and practice in a culturally diverse aging society*. 9<sup>th</sup> annual Ellen M. Gee memorial lecture. Simon Fraser University, Canada.  
[http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/grc/pdfs/elleng/EGML2011\\_PPTs.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/grc/pdfs/elleng/EGML2011_PPTs.pdf)

- Lai, D. & Huffey, N. (2009) Experience of discrimination by visible minorities in small communities. *Our Diverse Cities*, 6(1), 124-129.
- Lai, D. & Surood, S. (2013). *Effect of service barriers on health status of aging South Asian immigrants in Calgary, Canada*. *Health & Social Work*, 48(1), 41-50.
- Luhtanen, E. (2009). *Including immigrant and refugee seniors in public policy: A discussion paper for the Calgary Immigrant Seniors "Speak Out" Forum April 2, 2009*. City of Calgary. [https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/including\\_immigrant\\_refugee\\_seniors\\_public\\_policy.pdf?noredirect=1](https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Documents/including_immigrant_refugee_seniors_public_policy.pdf?noredirect=1)
- Murdie, R. & Logan, J. (2011). *Precarious housing & hidden homelessness among refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants: Bibliography and review of Canadian literature from 2005-2010*. CERIS working paper no. 84.
- National Advisory Council on Aging. (2005). *Seniors on the margins: Seniors from ethnocultural minorities*. <http://seniorspolicylens.ca/Root/Materials/Seniors%20From%20Ethnocultural%20Minorities%20NACA%202005.pdf>
- National Seniors Council (2014). *Report on the social isolation of seniors 2013-2014*. Government of Canada. [http://www.seniorscouncil.gc.ca/eng/research\\_publications/social\\_isolation/page00.shtml](http://www.seniorscouncil.gc.ca/eng/research_publications/social_isolation/page00.shtml)
- Ng, C.F., Northcott, H. & McIrvine Abu-Laban, S. (2004). *The experiences of South Asian immigrant seniors living in Edmonton, Alberta: Report to the community*. <http://www.ualberta.ca/~aging/SouthAsianImmigrantSeniors.pdf>
- Ng, C.F., Northcott, H. & McIrvine Abu-Laban, S. (2007). Housing and Living Arrangements of South Asian Immigrant Seniors in Edmonton, Alberta. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 26(3), 185-194.
- Ng, E., Lai, D.W., Rudner, A.T., & Orpana, H. (2012). What do we know about immigrant seniors aging in Canada? A demographic, socio-economic and health profile. In Mehrunnisa A. Ali (Ed.) Working Paper Series. Pp. 88-90. <http://www.elderabuseontario.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/What-do-we-know-about-immigrant-seniors-aging-in-Canada.pdf>
- Public Health Agency of Canada. (2014). *The chief of the public health officer's report on the state of public health in Canada 2014*. Government of Canada. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cphorsphc-respcacsp/2014/assets/pdf/2014-eng.pdf>
- Statistics Canada (2006). Dataset 97-557-XCB2006018. 2006 Census. Place of Birth (33), Period of Immigration (9), Sex (3) and Age Groups (10) for the Immigrant Population of Census Metropolitan Areas, Tracted Census Agglomerations and Census Tracts.
- Statistics Canada (2011). Dataset 98-314-XCB2011033. 2011 Census. Detailed Mother Tongue (232), Knowledge of Official Languages (5), Age Groups (17A) and Sex (3) for the Population Excluding Institutional Residents of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Divisions and Census Subdivisions.

- Stewart, M., Shizha, E., Makwarimba, E., Spitzer, D., Khalema, E. & Nsaliwa, C. (2011). Challenges and barriers to services for immigrant seniors in Canada: “You are among others but you feel alone”. *International Journal of Migration Health and Social Care*, 7(1), 16-32.
- Walsh, C. A., Ploeg, J., Lohfeld, L., Horne, J., MacMillan, H., & Lai, D. (2007). Violence across the lifespan: Interconnections among forms of abuse as described by marginalized Canadian elders and their care-givers. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(3), 491-514.
- Yu, S., Oueleet, S. & Warmington, A. (2007). Refugee integration in Canada: A survey of empirical evidence and existing services. *Informing Integration*, 24(2), 17-34.

## Appendix II - Environmental Scan

---

### Sources consulted

The following sources were consulted for the environmental scan of programs and services for IRS:

- Online sites that provide information on programs and services for seniors
- Printed directories of programs for seniors and program guides from seniors’ centres
- Social Atlases from Mapping and Planning Support (M.A.P.S.) Alberta Capital Region  
[http://mapsab.ca/gallery.html#social\\_atlases](http://mapsab.ca/gallery.html#social_atlases)
- InformAlberta, a province-wide online directory with information about community, health, social, and government services  
<http://www.informalberta.ca/public/common/viewSublist.do?cartId=1012801>
- 211 Resource list for Seniors and Older Adults  
[http://www.211edmonton.com/upload/2015-05\\_211ResourceList\\_Seniors.pdf](http://www.211edmonton.com/upload/2015-05_211ResourceList_Seniors.pdf)
- City of Edmonton Open data Catalogue <https://data.edmonton.ca/>
- Various lists of organizations provided by members of the Project Advisory Group

### Programs and Services for IRS

This section presents the findings of the environmental scan of programs and services for IRS developed by scanning organizational websites and/or directories.

The organizations that were surveyed were categorized as follows:

1. Organizations that have information about programs and services specifically for IRS listed on their websites and directories.

2. Organizations that do not have information about programs and services specifically for IRS listed on their websites and directories.

The following is a list of organizations that provide programs and services for IRS. As previously mentioned, the resulting list of programs and services is by no means exhaustive, but has been used to paint an initial picture of the types of programs and services that are available to and accessed by IRS.

Types of Organizations:

IRO - Immigrant and refugee serving organizations

SSO - Senior serving organizations

ECO - Ethnocultural/Linguistic/Faith based organizations

Organization	Type of Org.	Contact Information/ Contact person for Seniors programs	Programs and Services for IRS (as listed on the organization's website and/or program directory)
1. Africa Centre	ECO	www.africacentre.ca Tesfaye Ayalew Executive Director tesfaye@africacentre.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up new programs for IRS with a seniors centre</li> </ul>
2. Assist Community Services Centre	IRO	www.assistcsc.org  Eliza Wong 780-429-3111	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seniors Wellness Program</li> <li>• Senior's Craft Course</li> <li>• ISP Senior's Program: EPL Book Club</li> <li>• Immigration Settlement Program (ISP) Senior's Program: "Visual Problems in Old Age" Workshop</li> <li>• ISP Senior's Program: Senior's Yoga</li> <li>• Golden Lily Seniors' Club</li> <li>• ISP Senior's Program: An Overview of Old Age Security Pension</li> </ul>
3. Catholic Social Services	IRO	www.catholicsocialservices.ab.ca  Florim Tafilaj Florim.tafilaj@catholicsocialservices.ab.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning And Community Enrichment - English Conversation Circles</li> <li>• Seniors Protection Partnership (SPP) provides intervention, education, support, and referral services to older adults who are experiencing abuse.</li> <li>• Elder Abuse Resource and Supports (EARS)</li> <li>• Conversation circle, computer classes, knitting and crafts classes,</li> </ul>

Organization	Type of Org.	Contact Information/ Contact person for Seniors programs	Programs and Services for IRS (as listed on the organization's website and/or program directory)
			gardening program.
4. Changing Together - A Centre for Immigrant Women	IRO	www.changingtogether.com  Josephine Pallard Executive Director Josephine@changingtogether.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seniors Support Program</li> </ul>
5. Edmonton Japanese Community Association	ECO	www.ejca.org  office@ejca.org Board President: David Mitsui	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matsu no Kai Club. Seniors meet each month for socializing, a wonderful Japanese lunch and a little conversation or some friendly card game competition.</li> </ul>
6. Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN)	IRO	emcn.ab.ca  Heidi Veluw, Community Development Coordinator hveluw@emcn.ab.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESL for Seniors</li> </ul>
7. Filipino Society for Growth and Change	ECO	11030 - 127 Street (St. Albert Trail), Edmonton Mobile (780) 903.1943  FSGC Call Center: (780) 406.0828  Note: as of April 8, 2015, no programs are being offered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior advocacy group</li> <li>• Assists you in the preparation of income tax returns</li> <li>• Provides information relative to benefits</li> <li>• Rights and personal directory of seniors</li> <li>• Provides an alternative activity for seniors such as reading and writing,</li> <li>• Publishing the senior's perspective</li> <li>• Provides assistance in finding affordable housing for seniors-at-risk due to family disputes and possible abuse</li> </ul>
8. Indo Canadian Women's Association	ECO	icwaedmonton.org  Miriam Thomas, Board President miriamicwa@gmail.com Rajbir Singh Kharod, Outreach Worker rskharod@gmail.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seniors Conversation and Resiliency Skills</li> <li>• Seniors Conversational English</li> <li>• New Horizons for Seniors- Inclusion &amp; Support for Seniors</li> <li>• Outreach worker serves the new senior immigrants to Canada</li> </ul>

Organization	Type of Org.	Contact Information/ Contact person for Seniors programs	Programs and Services for IRS (as listed on the organization's website and/or program directory)
9. Ismaili Council for Edmonton	ECO		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly drop in centre, Wednesdays</li> <li>• Large hall for festivities, rented offices and an accommodating recreation area.</li> </ul>
10. Jamaica Association of Northern Alberta	ECO	jamaicaassociation.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seniors Christmas party</li> <li>• Seniors bowling</li> </ul>
11. Mill Woods Seniors Activity Centre	IRO	www.mwsac.ca  Pearl Bennet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly program for immigrant seniors</li> <li>• Multicultural connection events during senior's week.</li> <li>• 'Let's Talk English' - English classes meet once a week</li> <li>• Translation Services: Hindi, Urdu &amp; Bengali, Gujarati</li> </ul>
12. Multicultural Health Broker Co-op (MCHB)	ECO	mchb.org  Yvonne Chiu, Executive Director yvonnechiu@shaw.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multicultural Seniors Outreach Program (with SAGE)</li> <li>• Becoming intercultural: inclusive organizational practices and inter-agency collaboration</li> </ul>
13. Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association	ECO	www.mwssa.org  Sofia Yaqub, Executive Director sofia.yaqub@gmail.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing crafts &amp; hobbies</li> <li>• Exercise classes</li> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• One on one support</li> <li>• Social events</li> <li>• English classes for seniors</li> </ul>
14. Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)	SSO	www.mysage.ca Theresa Goba, Multi-cultural Liaison Coordinator TGoba@mysage.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English as Another Language (with EMCN)</li> <li>• Multicultural Seniors Outreach Program (with MCHB)</li> <li>• Seniors' Safe House</li> </ul>
15. Southwest Edmonton Seniors Association (SWESA)	SSO	swedmontonseniors.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mah Jong</li> <li>• Chinese New Year Celebration</li> </ul>
16. Ukrainian Canadian Social Services	ECO	Iwanna Shevchuk, Office Manager ucss@shaw.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing assistance to senior citizens and new immigrants including accompaniment to</li> </ul>



Organization	Type of Org.	Contact Information/ Contact person for Seniors programs	Programs and Services for IRS (as listed on the organization's website and/or program directory)
			appointments; in - home visitations
17. Welcome Centre for Immigrants	IRO	Farah Fatima ffatima@wciedmonton.ca Rajbir Kharod, Outreach Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programs for seniors are run by the Indo Canadian Women's Association</li> </ul>
18. Westend Seniors Activity Centre (WSAC)	SSO	Dr. Haidong Liang Project Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnering with the Africa Centre and other immigrant organizations to offer programs for seniors</li> </ul>

## Organizations with no information about programs and services for IRS

The following organizations do not have information about programs and services specifically for IRS listed on their websites and program directories.

Immigrant and refugee serving organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Action for Healthy Communities Society of Edmonton</li><li>• Canadian International Immigrant &amp; Refugee Support Association Cultural Connections Institute - The Learning Exchange</li><li>• Edmonton Immigrant Services Association</li><li>• Immigrant Access Fund</li></ul>
Senior serving organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Around 60 Club</li><li>• Beverly Active Seniors Society</li><li>• Central Lions Seniors Association (CLSA)</li><li>• City of Edmonton - Seniors Services &amp; Programs</li><li>• Edmonton Chinese Seniors Recreation Group</li><li>• Edmonton Seniors Activity Centre (ESC)</li><li>• Heritage Senior Stop-In Centre</li><li>• Ital Canadian Seniors Association</li><li>• Jewish Seniors Citizens' Centre (Jewish Drop-In Centre)North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA)</li><li>• North West Edmonton Seniors Society (NWESS), formerly Calder Seniors Drop In Society</li><li>• Northgate Lions Senior Citizens Centre</li><li>• Operation Friendship Seniors Society (OFSS)</li><li>• Senior Citizen Opportunity Neighborhood Association (SCONA)</li><li>• Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta</li><li>• Seniors Outreach Network Society (SONS)</li><li>• Society of Seniors Caring About Seniors (SSCAS)</li><li>• South East Edmonton Seniors Association (SEESA)</li><li>• SouthWest Edmonton Seniors Association (SWESA)</li><li>• Southwest Seniors Outreach Society</li><li>• Strathcona Place 55+Centre</li></ul>
Ethnocultural/Linguistic/Faith based organizations (specifically for seniors)

- Edmonton Korean Seniors College Society
- Filipino Retiree Association
- Korean Senior Citizen Society
- Latin American Senior Citizens Cultural Association of Edmonton (LASCA)
- Mill Woods Cultural Society for Retired and Semi-Retired
- Pakistan Canada Association of Edmonton (PCAE) Handicraft Women's Seniors Program
- Shanti Niketan Society for Seniors & Semi-retired
- Vietnam Chinese Senior Citizens Club of Edmonton

#### **Ethnocultural/Linguistic/Faith based organizations (not specifically for seniors)**

- Al Rashid Mosque/Canadian Islamic Centre
- Alberta Hindi Parishad
- Alberta Kaiping District Association Canadian Arab Friendship Association of Edmonton (CAFA)
- Canadian Kerala Cultural Association
- Canadian Kurdish Friendship Association
- Canadian Lithuanian Society of Edmonton
- Council of Canadians of African and Caribbean Heritage (COACH)
- Edmonton Chinatown Multicultural Centre Foundation
- Edmonton Goan Association
- Edmonton Korean Community Centre Foundation
- Edmonton Multicultural Society
- Edmonton Taiwanese Association
- Edmonton Viets Association (EVA)
- Gudwara Mill Woods (Sikh)
- Hellenic (Greek) Golden Age Association
- Islamic Centre Mill Woods (Markaz-ul-Islam)
- Islamic Family & Social Services Association
- Italian Community Services
- Mill Woods Pentecostal Assembly Primetimers
- Multicultural Alliance Church/New Life
- Sikh Women's Group (Informal group)
- South Asian Humanitarian Aid & Resettlement Association (SAHAARA)
- South Edmonton Alliance Church (Chinese)
- Shangri-La Seniors Club

## Appendix III Data Collection

### Community Profiles

The following community profiles were developed to provide a starting point for selecting participants from various ethnocultural/linguistic communities, and to ensure inclusion of seniors from communities that were more vulnerable. Three factors were selected to assess vulnerability: community capacity for support, ability to communicate in English and the number of refugees in the community.

Note: Since there is very little data available on specific immigrant and refugee communities, these profiles are based on information provided by members of the Project Advisory Group and community health workers, based on their knowledge of these communities.

Community	Notes	Large numbers in this quadrant	Community capacity for support	Ability to communicate in English	No. of refugees in community
Afghani	Many refugees but not recent arrivals	NW/NE	low	low	high
Arabic speaking	Could be from many different countries; may speak French; community capacity high but pockets of highly vulnerable e.g. Iraqi (listed separately)	NW	high	low/med	low
Bhutanese	Small community; mainly in Duggan and Blue Quill	SW	low	low	high
Caribbean			high	high	none
Chinese (Cantonese speaking)		NW/NE	high	med	low
Chinese (Mandarin speaking)		SW/NE	med	low	low
Eastern European (incl. formerly Yugoslavia)	Refugees from the 90s	NW/SE	med	med	low
Eritrea/Ethiopia	1st generation	NW/NE	med	low/med	high

Community	Notes	Large numbers in this quadrant	Community capacity for support	Ability to communicate in English	No. of refugees in community
	arrived in early 80's				
Filipino	High number of TFWs so community is burdened	NW/SE	high	high	none
French African (Congo, Rwanda)	Probably not many seniors	NE/SE	med/high	low	high
Iranian		SE	med	med	low
Iraqi		NE	med	low	high
Karen people from Burma	Previously in Duggan-spreading out now; almost all refugees	NE	low	low	high
Korean		SE	high	med	low
Kurdish	Almost all refugees	NE	high	med	high
Latino (Spanish speaking)	Much diversity; beginning to get organized; burdened with helping TFWs within the community	NE/SE	med	med	high
Somali		NE	med/high	med	high
South Asian (Indian, Pakistani)		NE/SE	med	med	low
Sudanese	Not many seniors in the community Capacity is increasing	NW/NE	med	(med) high	high
Turkish		NW	med	med	low
Ukrainian		NW/SE	high	med	low
Vietnamese	Seniors probably were refugees	NW/NE	med	med	high

## Interview Questions

The following interview questions were used as a guide, and adapted for specific interviews.

### Programs and Services Offered

1. What services do you offer specifically to immigrant seniors? Refugee seniors? Please describe the type of service and generally speaking the 'sector' (Health, housing, recreation, finance, food/nutrition, other).

2. Do you collect demographic information that would detail the nationalities/immigration/citizenship status etc. of participants?
3. How do you communicate these programs/services to immigrant and refugee seniors?

#### **User satisfaction**

4. What attracts them to an agency or program/service?
5. What prevents them from accessing services?
6. How do you know this? Do you collect evaluative information from seniors accessing services (either formally or informally)?

#### **Needs of Immigrant/Refugee seniors**

7. Based on your knowledge of the needs of immigrant and refugee seniors, what are their most pressing needs?
8. How effective are current programs and services in meeting these needs? To what extent are these needs being met?
9. What needs are not being met by current programming? How do you know this?
10. Are there gaps in information that you think would enable you/others to better serve I & R seniors?
11. In your organization, what information, support or resources would allow you to better meet the needs of I & R seniors?
9. In your organization, what would better allow you to meet these needs?
12. Are there any promising practices that have emerged for meeting the needs of this group?

#### **Policies**

13. From your perspective, are there particular policies that pose barriers for I & R seniors' access to services and programs? Can you give an example of a policy and the impact it has had on a particular senior?

#### **Resources**

14. Are you aware of any resources/papers that have looked at barriers faced by immigrant and refugee seniors across ethnocultural communities in accessing services and programs?

## **Seniors' Focus Groups**

### **Demographic Form**

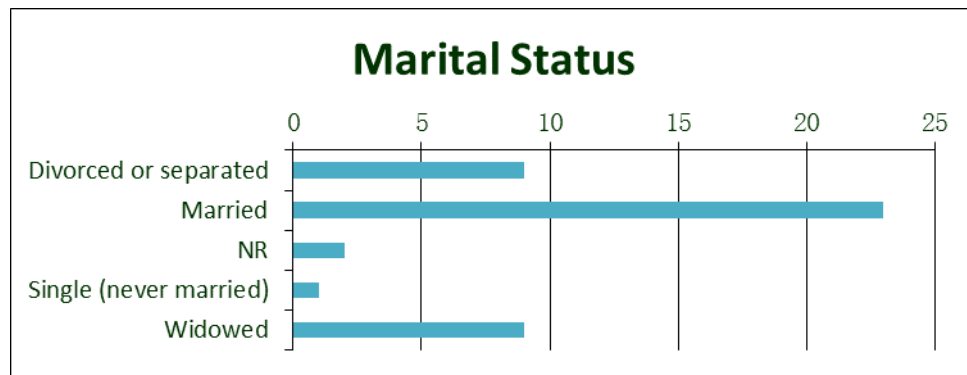
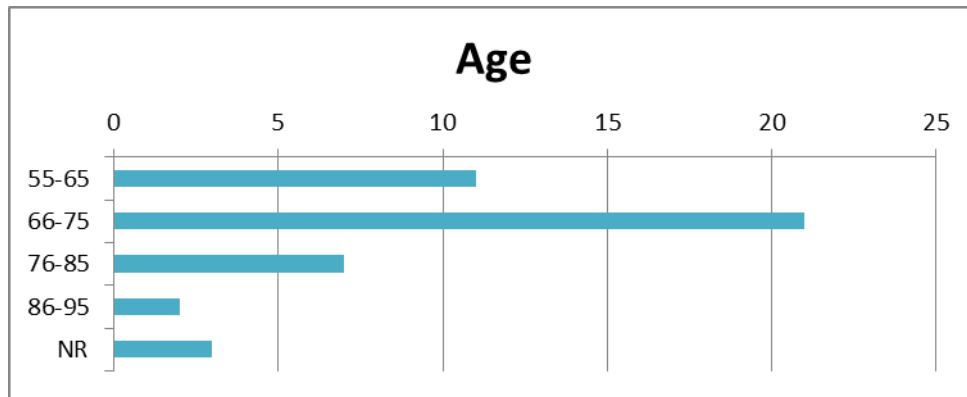
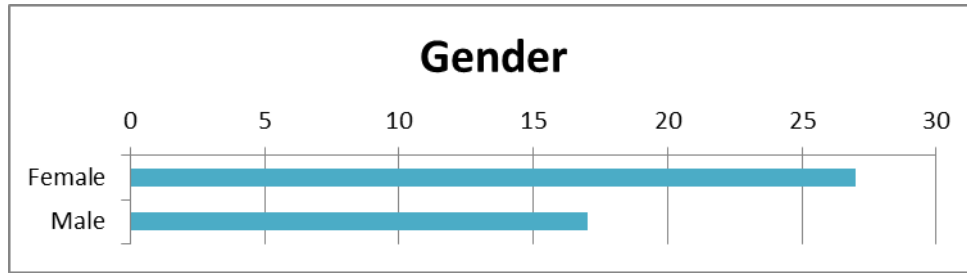
Name and Phone #				
Gender	a. Female		b. Male	
Age	a. 55-65	b. 66-75	c. 76-85	d. 86-95

Country of Birth		Country: _____
Country you lived in before coming to Canada		Country: _____
When did you come to Canada?		Year: _____
Did you first come to Canada as a:		
a. Visitor	b. Immigrant	c. Refugee
Current Status in Canada:		
a. Canadian Citizen b. Permanent Resident c. Visitor Visa g. Other _____		d. Super Visa e. Refugee Status f. Not Sure
Current Marital Status		
Single (never married) Married		Divorced or separated Widowed
Which language(s) do you <u>speak</u> ?		
a. Language 1: _____ b. Language 2: _____		c. Language 3: _____ d. Language 4: _____
What type of residence do you live in?		
a. Owned house, apartment or condo b. Rented house, apartment or condo e. Other		c. Seniors subsidized housing d. Supportive living
Who do you live with?		
On my own With only my spouse/partner		With my family Other _____

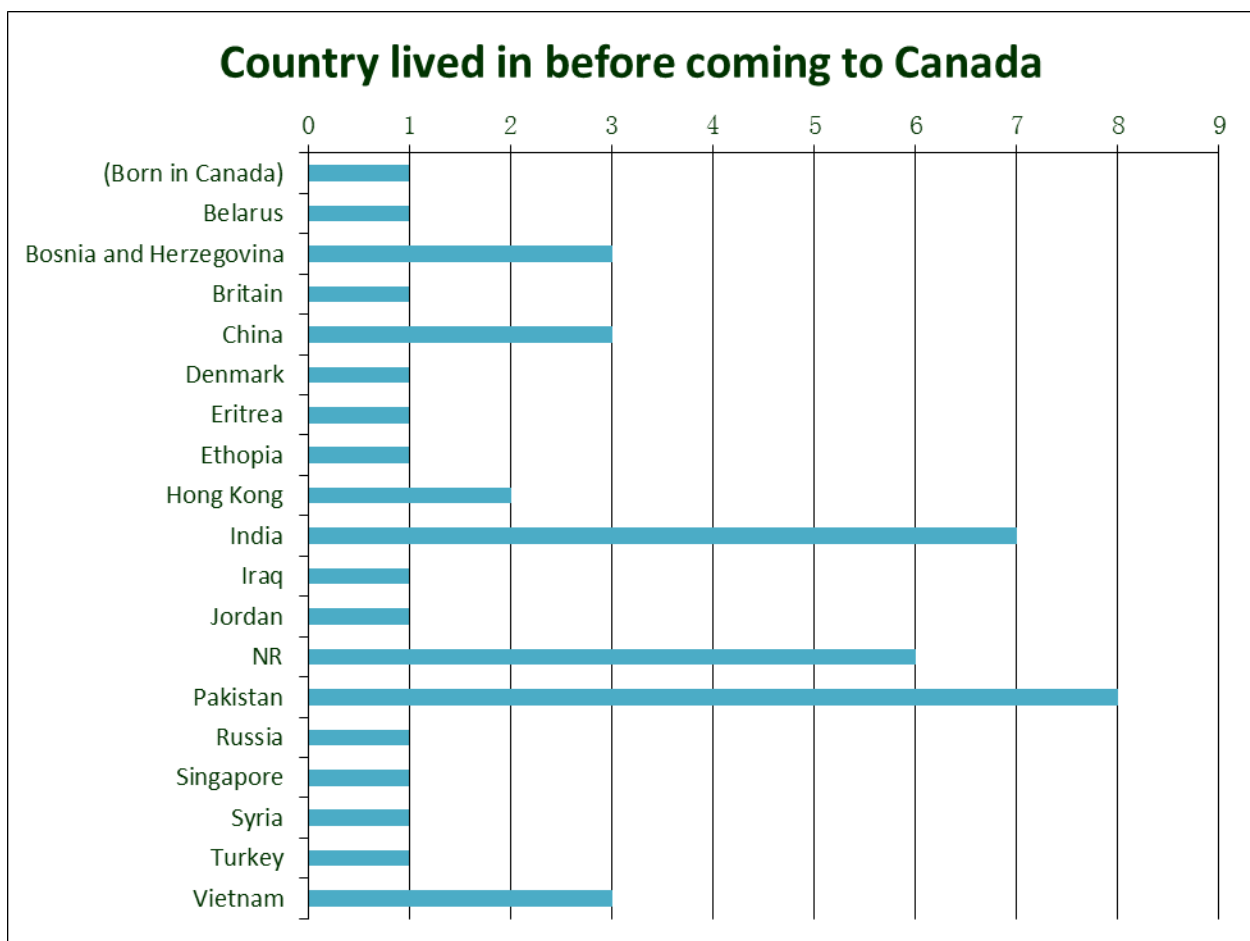
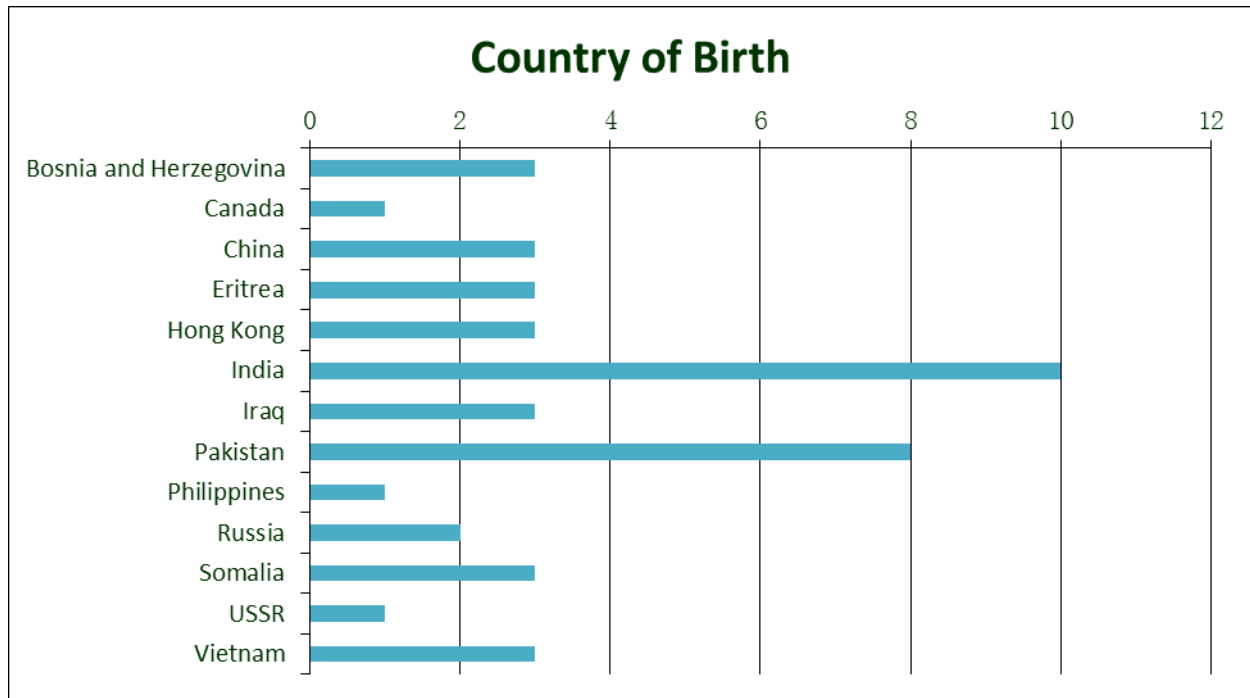
### Summary of Data from Demographic Forms

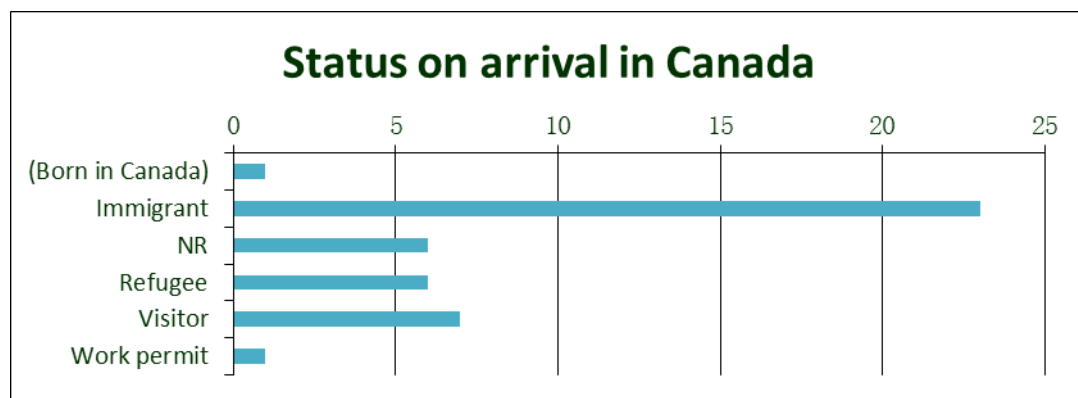
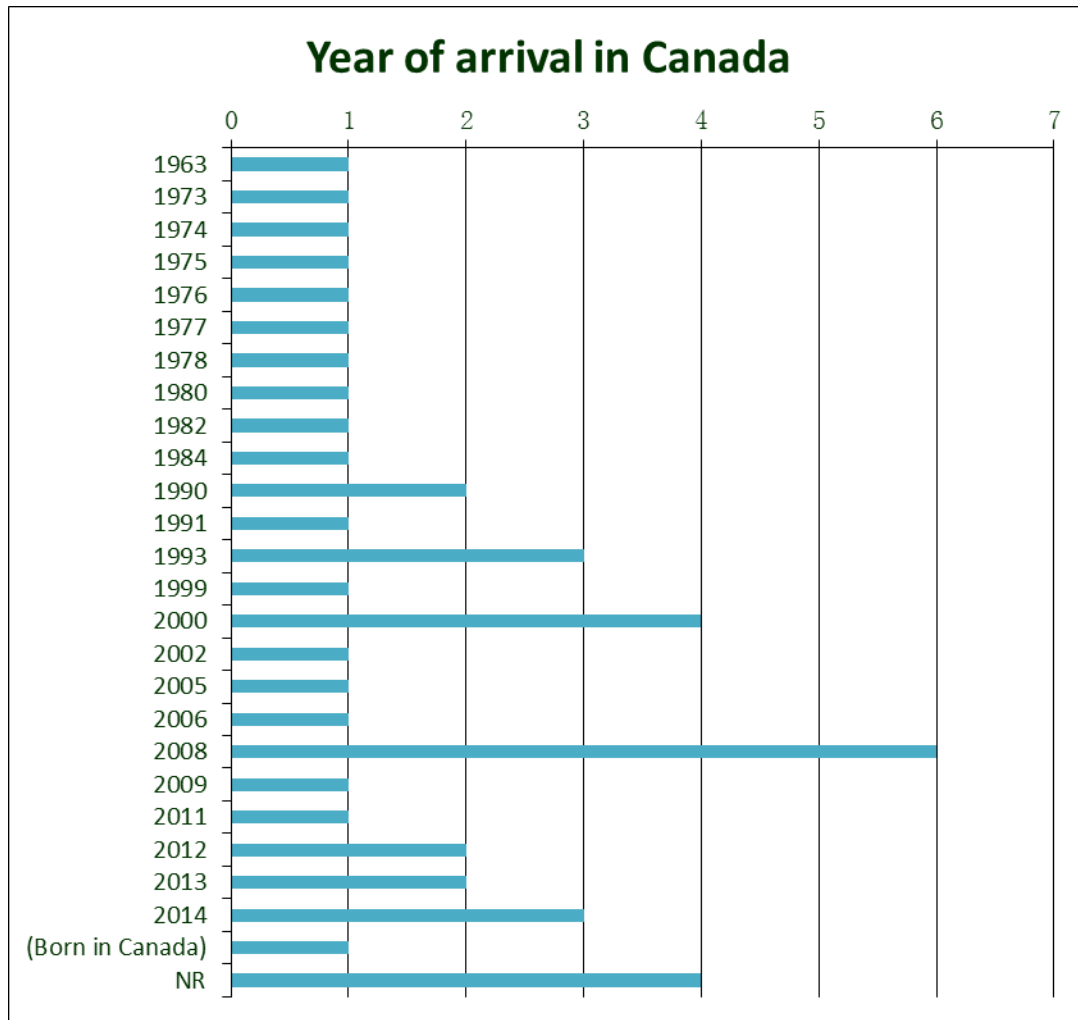
The following is a summary of data from the demographic forms completed by seniors who participated in the focus groups. Information is based on data from 43 forms.

NR indicates No Response

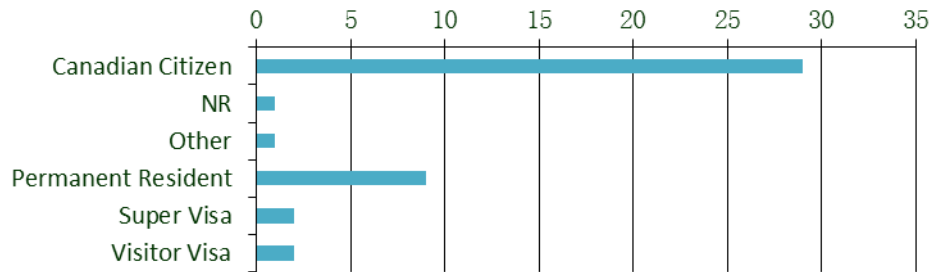




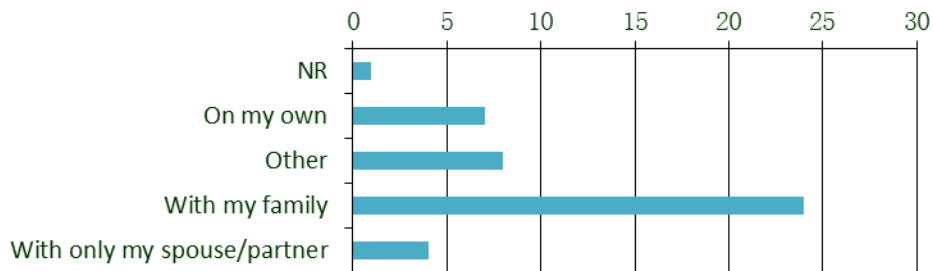




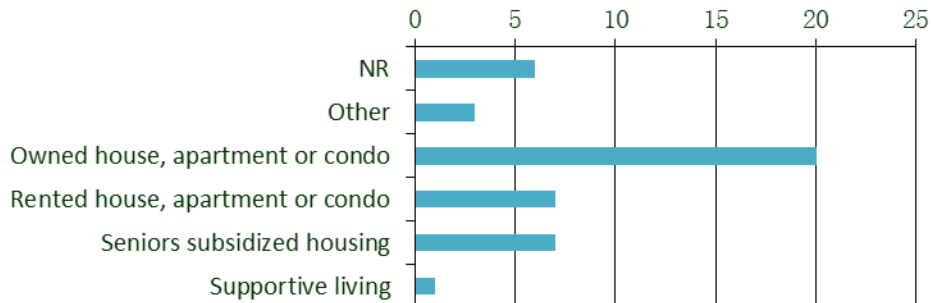
### Current status in Canada



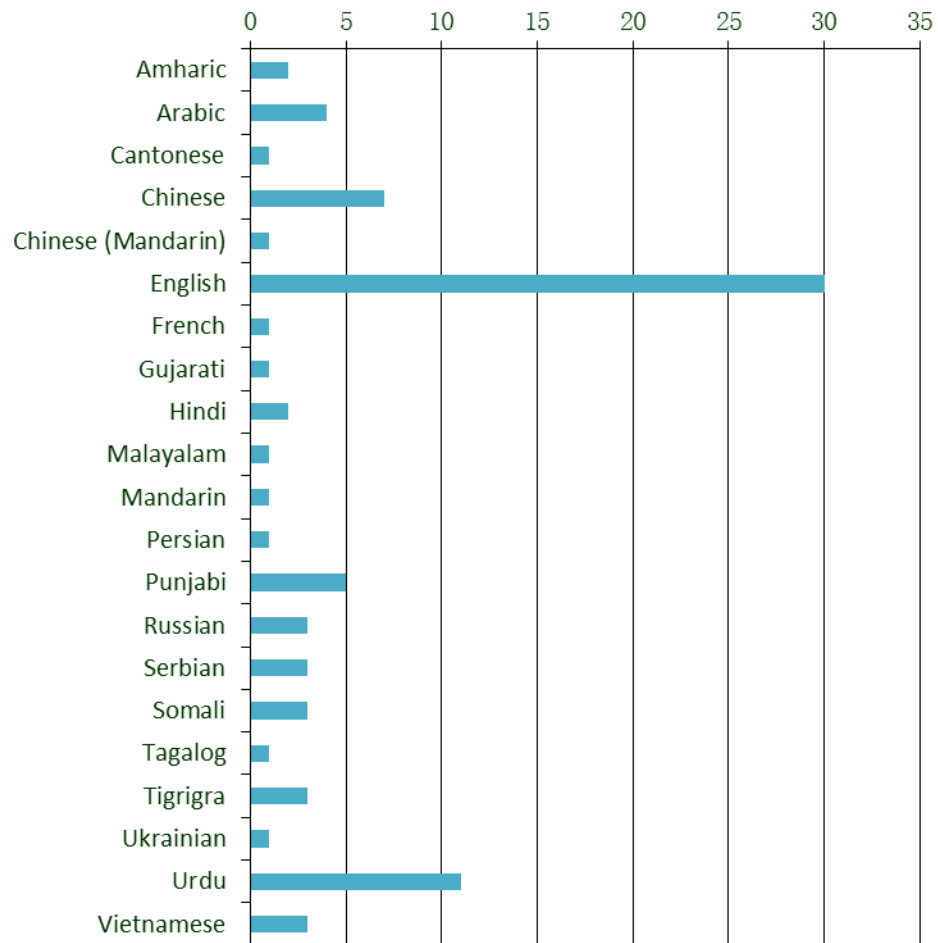
### Lives With



### Type of Residence



## Number of People who spoke these Languages



## Script and Questions for Focus Groups with Seniors

Our company is working on a project with Age Friendly Edmonton. What we learn from you will help us to make recommendations about the needs and likes of immigrant and refugee seniors. We will not reveal your identity in any of our recommendations, but will only use the information, so what you say here today will be kept confidential.

This project is trying to find out what services would be helpful for immigrant and refugee seniors. We are also trying to learn, from talking to seniors such as yourself, what kinds of places and services you go to and what you find helpful or enjoyable about them.

We are also hoping to learn what keeps you from going to certain programs or agencies.

Finally we are interested in learning from you where and how you get information – information about programs and services, but also information about issues relating to your health and happiness.

### Questions

#### 1. Demographics (individual and family information)

- What is your name?
- How long have you been in Canada?
- Do you have family here in Canada? Where is the rest of your family?
- Where do you live? Who do you live with?
- Who do you see every day, or frequently?

#### 2. Challenges of migration

- If they have aged in Canada:
  - What are some difficulties that you have faced as you age/get older? Physical? Financial? Social? Other?
- If they came as a senior:
  - What was hard about coming here as an older person?
- Has being a senior become easier or harder over the years? Can you describe the change?

#### 3. Use of services and programs, barriers and enablers to access

- Given these challenges you have shared with us (such as health, financial, housing, family relations, loneliness)
  - What types of support and/or services do you most need to address these challenges?
  - Are you aware of agencies and programs that provide these support/services?
  - Where did you find out about this service/agency?
  - Have you accessed these support and services? If yes, what have been your experience with such support & services? If not, why not?

- Who or/and where) else do you go for support?
- You come to this centre/service where we are meeting today,
  - How did you hear about this centre?
  - Can you share with us what you like about coming here?
- Are you aware of other centre/services that offer help to seniors? Have you ever gone to them?
  - If no, what keeps you from going there?
  - If yes, are you happy with the services there? The people? What do you like about going there?

#### **4. Barriers/Enablers**

- What makes it easy for you to get to places that offer programs for seniors? What makes it hard? (Cost, transportation, health, language barriers, etc.)
- Do you know people who go to other places that have programs or provide help to seniors? Why don't you go there?

#### **5. Seniors' Strengths**

- What has been the most positive change or experience for you since coming to Canada? What has made that possible?
- Given the knowledge, skills and life experience that you have as a senior, what do you most wish to share with others? With whom and how would you like to do that?

#### **6. Overall challenges**

- When you experience:
  - Health problems – where do you go? Who helps you?
  - Financial problems – where do you go? Who helps you?
  - If you want to be with other people, like your friends or other family where do you go? Who helps you?

## Organizational Focus Groups

### Invitation to organizations

Sheila Hallett  
Executive Director

Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC)  
Age Friendly Edmonton, Community Supports Working Group

April 28th, 2015

Dear colleague,

We are writing to invite you to participate in a focus group about the needs of immigrant and refugee seniors in Edmonton.

The focus group will provide an opportunity for you to share your important perspective on the programs and services that immigrant and refugee seniors need, and barriers that hinder access.

The focus group will be held at the following date, time and location:

Date: Friday May 22nd, 2015

Time: 1:30pm to 3:30pm

Location: Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, #255 Bonnie Doon Shopping Centre, 8330 82 Avenue; Phone 780-423-5635 Room Number #258

The focus group is part of a research project being conducted by Zenev and Associates on behalf of the *Age Friendly Edmonton Community Supports Working Group*. The objectives of the research project are to:

- Identify what services and supports currently exist for immigrant and refugee seniors in Edmonton, and the strengths and gaps in these services
- To develop an understanding of immigrant and refugee seniors' needs for services and supports
- To facilitate connections and information sharing in the senior sector

We will also be conducting focus groups with immigrant and refugee seniors from various communities. The information gathered in all the focus groups will be used by the *Age Friendly Edmonton Community Supports Working Group* to better support immigrant and refugee seniors in Edmonton. The privacy of participants will be respected and all comments will be combined so that no individual can be associated with specific comments. The research findings will be shared with interested study participants, organizations, and others in a presentation at the end of the project.

We look forward to your participation and would appreciate it if you could confirm your attendance by Monday May 11, 2015 by emailing [zenobia@zenev.ca](mailto:zenobia@zenev.ca).

Sincerely,  
Zenev & Associates ([www.zenev.ca](http://www.zenev.ca))

## Organizational Focus Group Questions

### Programs and Services Offered

1. What services do you offer specifically to immigrant seniors? Refugee seniors? Please describe the type of service and generally speaking the 'sector' (Health, housing, recreation, finance, food/nutrition, other).
  - Do you collect demographic information that would detail the nationalities/immigration/citizenship status etc. of participants?
  - If you don't, what prevents you from providing services?

### User satisfaction

2. In your experience working with immigrant and refugee seniors, what do they tell you about what attracts them to an agency or program/service?
3. Do you collect evaluative information from seniors accessing services (either formally or informally)?
  - What do they appreciate about the service?
  - What do they not like?
4. In your experience, working with immigrant and refugee seniors, what do they tell you keeps them from accessing or continuing with a program or service?

### Needs of Immigrant/Refugee seniors

5. What do you currently do, or have you done in the past, to learn about the needs of immigrant and refugee seniors?
  - Consultations? With seniors? Describe.
  - Consultations with other agencies/professionals who serve I and R seniors? Describe?
  - Research? Describe?
6. What have you learned from these consultations?
7. What information is missing, that you think would enable you/others to better serve I and R seniors?
8. What information, support or resources would allow you to better meet the needs of I & R seniors?

### Information dissemination

9. How do you communicate the presence and nature of your service to immigrant and refugee seniors?
  - Do you have different strategies for different populations?
  - Can you describe these?
  - Which strategies have been most/least successful?



- Why do you think that is?

### **Policies**

10. From your perspective, are there particular policies that pose barriers for I & R seniors' access to services and programs? Can you give an example of a policy and the impact it has had on a particular senior?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?

## **Appendix IV Considerations for Future Action**

---

### **Community Support Workers and Cultural Broker's Competencies and Knowledge**

#### **Community Support Workers and Cultural Broker's Competencies and Knowledge**

- Cultural knowledge, including deep understanding of pre-migration experiences, post-migration realities and cultural orientation and practices and gender differences related to aging and seniors' relationship with their families.
- Intercultural competence or the ability work with power dynamics (including awareness of one's power in relation to others), deeply understand differences, and foster understanding and relationship between people from a minority culture as well as people from the majority culture.
- Community knowledge and connections (natural leadership), trust and respect from one's ethnocultural community members alongside a rich understanding of the networks, past history and dynamics within and among local ethno-cultural communities.

(Provided by Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative, 2015)

### **Scan of Community Ambassadors Programs**

The following section presents information on existing ambassador programs that could be used as a model to develop similar programs in Edmonton, as suggested in the Recommendations. The information is based on a web search using the following terms: seniors ambassador program, seniors outreach culture program. This list does not include outreach programs that employ trained and paid social workers or community health workers.

#### **Programs that target ethnically diverse, isolated and other vulnerable seniors**

##### **Community Ambassador Program for Seniors (CAPS), City of Fremont Human Services Department (Fremont, CA)**

Started in 2007. Builds capacity to serve seniors in their own communities, in their own language, within their own cultural norms, and does so where seniors live, worship, socialize, and learn. The Ambassadors serve as a bridge between the formal network of social services

and faith based and cultural communities. <http://capseniors.org/>

### **Community Action Ambassadors, Volunteer Richmond (Richmond, Surrey, Vancouver, BC)**

Trained senior volunteers offer peer-to-peer support to other seniors, facilitate public education forums and workshops, act as mentors for isolated seniors from all cultures, connecting them to community services and education.

<http://www.volunteerrichmond.ca/programs/seniorsprograms/communityactionambassadors.aspx>

### **Yarra Senior Ambassadors Program, City of Yarra (Yarra, Australia)**

Seeks to support older residents from non-English speaking backgrounds, assist in bridging cultural and language barriers that can cause social isolation.

<http://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/services/Older-persons-services/yarra-senior-ambassadors-program/>

### **Seniors Outreach Program, Burnaby Neighbourhood House (Burnaby, BC)**

Trained group of senior volunteers reach out to isolated seniors to help them connect with community programs and services that can improve their lives. Ambassadors assist in supporting vulnerable, low-income, at-risk isolated seniors to access resources and make connections. <http://burnabynh.ca/programs/seniors/>

### **Seniors Outreach Ambassador Resource Project (Scarborough, ON)**

Diverse seniors as volunteer ambassadors to engage seniors from diverse ethnocultural communities in southwest Scarborough who are isolated from community life.

<http://www.bbnc.ca/older-adult.php>

### **West End Senior Ambassadors, Gordon Neighbourhood House (Vancouver, BC)**

Trained senior volunteers offer support to other seniors, in addition to facilitating public education and workshops in the community and act as connectors for local isolated seniors. Ambassadors are culturally aware and knowledgeable of community resources.

<http://gordonhouse.org/programs/seniors/>

### **Seniors Peer Support, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (Vancouver, BC)**

Volunteers for homebound seniors living in South East Vancouver.

<http://www.southvan.org/seniors/seniors-peer-support/>

### **The Neighbourhood Helpers Project - Chinese Outreach Project, Vancouver Second Mile Society (Vancouver, BC)**

Seniors trained as volunteer peer support workers to reach out to Chinese seniors, providing them with the services they need and also at the same time the warmth and care to spice up their life. [http://www.vsms.ca/programs/neighbourhood-outreach\\_COP.html](http://www.vsms.ca/programs/neighbourhood-outreach_COP.html)

## **Programs that target all seniors**

### **Senior Goodwill Ambassador Program (NB)**

Seniors who travel within their community to speak with individuals and groups about living a healthy active life and staying engaged in their community.

[http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services\\_renderer.201327.Senior\\_Goodwill\\_Ambassador\\_Program.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.201327.Senior_Goodwill_Ambassador_Program.html)

**Tournament Capital Ambassador Program, City of Kamloops (Kamloops, BC)**

Volunteers who assist in promoting health and wellness in our city.

<http://www.kamloops.ca/volunteer/ambassadorprogram.shtml#.VUtjaWaARFk>

**Community Ambassador Program, Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging & Commission on Aging (Loudoun County, VA)**

Ambassadors solicit feedback and disseminate educational information in senior living communities or groups. <http://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/107516>

**Santa Clarita Transit Ambassador Program, Santa Clarita Transit (Santa Clarita, CA)**

Provides local seniors an opportunity to learn about the benefits and convenience of Santa Clarita's local fixed-route transit system. <http://www.santaclaritatransit.com/services/senior-transit-ambassador/>

**Senior Ambassador Program, Volunteer Halton (Burlington, ON)**

Volunteer ambassadors, who provide outreach to the senior community, engaging older adults within the Halton community. <http://volunteerhalton.ca/dbase/seniors-volunteering>

**Mobility Ambassador Program, SamTrans (San Mateo County, CA)**

Trains volunteers and stations them at senior centers throughout the county to provide assistance to seniors and people with disabilities with many transportation-related issues. <http://www.seniormobility.org/ambassadors.html>